

Interpretation of Romans 10:4

Paul has a great deal to say about the law in Romans, but the most puzzling perhaps is Romans 10:4. "Paul confronted as he was by his own Pharisaic past and by his Jewish and Jewish Christian opponents, developed a theology of the law that is connected with the promise and on a personal level with Christ. In doing so, however, he is far from regarding himself as a second teacher of Christianity either in addition to, or in place of Jesus. His teaching remains within the limits previously laid down by Jesus; he merely brings out the basic significance of Christ's work, now completed in the cross and resurrection." [*Law*, H-H. Essner, in *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol 2 , Colin Brown ed. (Zondervan, 1976, 444)]

Perhaps, the most relevant teaching of Jesus in relation to Romans 10:4 is found in Matt.5:17, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill". (*plerosai*) Thus, when Paul wrote "Christ is the end (*telos*) of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes", it may appear that he is repeating what Jesus had claimed. But "fulfill" and "end" are not saying exactly the same thing. Rather, fulfill is to carry out or keep what is commanded, while end (*telos*) has the sense; termination, cessation, or the last part, close, conclusion, or goal toward which a movement is being directed.

In order to resolve this uncertainty, I'd like to consider three questions:

- (1) *How does Charles C. Ryrie interpret Romans 10:4?*
- (2) *How does Zane C. Hodges interpret Romans 10:4?*
- (3) *What is the Pauline Theology of the Law?*

Ryrie's Interpretation of Romans 10:4

In his volume on theology, *Basic Theology*, he introduces his interpretation of *The End of the Law*. Ryrie introduces his discussion as another important benefit of the death of Christ:

First, "the faith-righteous principle was to replace the law-works principle".

This benefit is confusing. To replace assumes an equivalent sense. But the sense of the two are not equivalent in relation to justification. "Now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God by faith in Jesus Christ" (3:21,22a) He then quotes Gen 15:6 for Abraham and Ps. 32:1,3 for David and their justification by faith is in the promise of Messiah. These all are faith-righteousness found in the Old Testament. Even though law-works was practiced in Judaism, it is not considered a valid principle in relation to God.

Second, "Paul's statement in Romans 10:4 that Christ is the end of the Law might be understood as either signifying termination or purpose...Termination seems clearly to be the meaning in context because of the contrast (beginning in Romans 9:30) between the Law and God's righteousness... He terminated the Law and provided a new and living way to God". But hasn't Paul argued that a righteousness by faith has always been the way to God? (3:21-4:25) This point was made by Paul concerning Israel's "ignorance of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God" (10:3) So, the problem in the contrast has not been with the Law

doing the wrong thing and needing to be terminated, but with Israel who misused the Law. The Law may be terminated but this is not what Paul contends in this context. The support that Paul claims doesn't appear to support this interpretation.

So, while Ryrie's contention for termination of the law may support a Dispensational model, it doesn't seem to be supported by the context of Romans 9:1-10:4. Yet the same conclusion is asserted by a number of other interpreters without demonstrating support from Romans. The most common argument is that a New Covenant replaces the Old Covenant but that is not in this context nor is the New Covenant ratified with Israel.

Hodges Interpretation of Romans 10:4

Hodges has written a commentary, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath*, in which he understands this passage in the immediate context and in the context of the whole book. The message of the whole book:

The Gospel of Christ promises spiritual deliverance from wrath (sanctification-- 5:12-8:39) which arises from the righteousness God granted to faith. (Justification--1:18-5:11)

God's displeasure with humanity is manifest with His **wrath** in all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. (1:18) As a result, humanity faces God's impartial judgment. From this world, the unrighteous can obtain righteousness through Jesus Christ. (1:18-5:11) This overall message of the Gospel is then applied to Israel (9:1-11:36). His development of thought is outlined:

Paul introduces the section with "His grief for Israel's rejection of Christ" (9:1-5) Scripture then frames God's perspective on Israel's unbelief displayed in the crucifixion. (9:6-33)

First, God's grace is selectively channeled, not all Israel (nation) is Israel (remnant).

Second, God's **mercy** and **wrath** have been displayed in Israel's history.

Finally, Israel has stumbled over Christ and thus is experiencing God's **wrath**. Israel's deliverance requires faith and confession. (10:1-21)

Paul again prays for Israel's deliverance. But he witnesses Israel's zeal for God but not according to knowledge. For they are ignorant of God's righteousness since they are seeking their own righteousness, ---and not submitting to God's righteousness.

Their ignorance explains that Christ is the goal of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (10:4) The goal of the law is the provision of righteousness based on the cross to all who receive Him by faith. Thus, the goal toward which the law had been pointing sinful men is to Jesus' provision of righteousness but since the cross, He was ignored by the nation of Israel. Paul also made the same point in Galatians as "the law was the tutor to bring us to Christ" (Gal. 3:24)

Arndt and Gingrich then adds, "Perhaps this is the place for Romans 10:4, in the sense that Christ is the goal and the termination of the law at the same time, somewhat in the sense of Galatians 3:24f..."the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ... but after faith came, we are no longer under a tutor". [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago Ill., 1957) 818]

Paul's Theology of the Law

Essner has summarized Paul's extensive treatment of the law. He combined law, and promise, as related revelation and Christ as involved in both. The sense of the words law and promise are understood as *performatives*, in speech-act theory of language usage. Performatives are used to make commissive statements. In a promise, the speaker commits himself to act on behalf of the recipient. In law, the speaker demands that the recipient commits himself to obey. In a promise, the speaker must keep what he has committed to provide. The promise will be fulfilled when the speaker keeps his promise. In the law, the recipient must keep what has been demanded. The law is fulfilled when the recipient obeys all that has been expected in the law.

Based on these definitions and usage, the Biblical language for law is more clearly understood. We will use law in two senses: Covenant-law and Scripture-law. Covenant-law is Paul's common reference to the Mosaic law (Rom. 2:14a; 2:17; 3:28; 7:12; Gal.3:2etc.5:3) In the Mosaic Covenant, a formal historic conditional covenant framework introduces the narrative of YHWHs giving of the law. (Ex. 19:3-8) Israel agreed to be under the authority of the law since the covenant was a conditional covenant as a national arrangement with God. (20:1-24:8)

A Scripture-law is Paul's and our continuing use of the law present in Scripture, as Deut. 25:4 and 1Cor.9:9-19. The law's authority arises from its' truth as it is included in Scripture. We recognize that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable"... (2Tim. 3:16)

Paul's View of Law and Promise

Essner proposes that we look at the history of the law from the perspective of Romans 10:4. That view then raises the question of the meaning of the law in the context of reaching its GOAL. It seems that "the commandment... was to bring life" (Rom. 7:10a) In reading the law, that goal seemed to be, obey what has been demanded. That is what Israel was doing. (10:2,3) They reflected a zeal for God but not according to knowledge. But they were ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking their own righteousness, have not submitted to God's righteousness. That was what Paul had found, when he read "I found (it) to bring death" (7:10b). The actual goal of the law was "perfect righteousness". When Paul violated the law, he found death. Only Christ made that righteousness available to all by faith based on His substitutionary atonement accomplished on the cross and in His resurrection. (Rom. 4:25)

Paul further clarified this point in the history of promise and law:

Gal. 3:8,9---The Gospel was preached to Abraham beforehand, "In you all nations will be blessed. So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham".

Gal. 3:19,21,22---"The law was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made...Is the law then against the promises of God? Of course not, for if there had been a law given which could give life, then righteousness would have

been by the law. But Scripture confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe".

Covenant-Law in the History of Israel

The formal appearance of the law came in *Exodus* 19:5,6 where a conditional covenant was introduced. The people's response: "all that YHWH has spoken we will do" (19:8, 24:3,7) which bracketed the giving of The Ten commandments (20:1-17) and the occasional laws that followed (20:18-23:33).

Soon the covenant was broken (32:1-6) as the law was violated. Yet in Moses intercession (32:7-33:23) the covenant was renewed (34:1-28). The Covenant set a theological, cultural framework within which YHWH'S glory could settle among the people in the Tabernacle (25:1-31 and 35-40). Leviticus revealed that culture and Numbers revealed the beginning of their journey to the promised land only to be interrupted by the people's violation again. (Nu. 25:1-18) It demanded that the law be renewed.

Deuteronomy was the second revelation of the law, at the climax of Moses ministry. These five books are the Torah (Law) which provided for Israel the revelation upon which their subsequent history would be based.

The Temple David wanted to build was built by Solomon to replace the Tabernacle in which YHWH'S glory dwelt. (1 Kings 8:11-13) Due to peoples continuing sinful decline, the glory of God departed for the Temple (Ezekiel 10:1-19) This was combined with the Babylonian captivity (605 BC-586BC)

Under Cyrus of Persia's decree, Ezra returned to the land and rebuilt the Temple, but the glory of YHWH did not return to the Temple when it was completed. (Ezra 6:13-18) The captivity into Babylon introduced the "Times of the Gentiles" rule. The restored remnant became the community that would be ruled by Rome and from which Jesus was born. (Luke 1:5-2:52) It was early in His ministry that His glory returned to Herod's Temple in Jerusalem. (John 2:13-25 and 1:14) When His cleansing was challenged by the Jews, He testified; "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up"(2:19) It was a testimony that God's glory now resided in Him rather than in the Temple building. The GOAL of the law was reached when Jesus cleansed the Temple a final time (Matt.21:12-46) and the national leaders rejected His authority and crucified Him. (26:1-27:66) In His resurrection the Goal was reached. (28:1-20)

The Dispensation of Law

This history of the law demonstrated YHWH'S management over Israel's history. Paul developed this point of view in the use of the term, *oikonomia*. Ryrie has a comprehensive study of this term. [*Dispensationalism*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995) 23-41]. The verbal form means to manage, regulate, administer, plan. "In the papyri the officer (*okonomos*) who administered a dispensation was referred to as a steward or manager of an estate, or

as a treasurer."(25) Thus Ryrie concludes that the central idea in the word *dispensation* is that of managing or administering the affairs of a household, in this case, the affairs of the nation of Israel formed under law. In the discussion of the history of the Mosaic Law, it is YHWH'S administration over His people's history that progressively unfolded according to the people's response to the law.

Paul's use of *oikonomia* mentions at least three dispensations:

Ephesians 1:10---a dispensation suitable to the fulness of times or Millennial reign,
Ephesians 3:2,9---the dispensation of God's grace which was an administration
based on Messiah's first Advent completed ministry,

Colossians 1:25,26---"Paul became a minister according to the dispensation from
God to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has
been hidden from the ages...now has been revealed to His saints".

Paul's dispensation of grace was for the Gentiles, which implied a prior dispensation where the Gentiles equal opportunity to God's blessing had been hidden. What is implied as the dispensation of law over the house of Israel.

Conclusion

Several conclusions follow from the study of Romans 10:4:

First---The scope of God's dispensational management is limited to His people at a period in history rather than the management of the world. And Paul's Theology of the Law would be incorporated in a Dispensational Model of progressive revelation. In addition, God Providentially Rules over the prince of the power of the air influencing the course of the world of mankind. (Eph. 2:2-3)

Second---Christ is the goal of the law which involved a righteousness made available to all who believe. When it became available, it became evident that a prior dispensation of law was implied which had now been terminated.

Third--- The prior dispensation was introduced in the revelation of the Mosaic Covenant which consisted of the dispensation of law. God's glory resided on earth in the Tabernacle/Temple until it would be removed. It would appear again in Messiah's advent.

Fourth---Implied is a dispensation of promise which had existed with the patriarchs. It was while it continued to exist, that the law was added to Israel as descendants of Joseph, but the promise remained in God's commitment until Messiah came.

Fifth--- Justification by faith rested in God's promise to Abraham that he would have a Seed who would bring blessing to all nations. That remained until Jesus appeared at the first advent of Christ. After His death and resurrection, justification by faith would rest in Christ's finished work on the cross. That had been prophesied in the work of the Servant of the LORD. (Isa. 52:13-53:12)