

## THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

The topic “The Law and the Gospel” is an issue which is at the heart of Christianity. While theology and Christology are central Christian teachings, humankind needs to know the gospel, the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ, and the way how to experience salvation. The question how the law relates to salvation is a natural and crucial question. In this paper we will concentrate especially on this second aspect.

In their “28 Fundamental Beliefs” Seventh-day Adventists have dealt with the issues of salvation and the law of God briefly. Here are two summary statements pointing out how they understand salvation and the law.

*10. Experience of Salvation.* In infinite love and mercy God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might be made the righteousness of God. Led by the Holy Spirit we sense our need, acknowledge our sinfulness, repent of our transgressions, and exercise faith in Jesus as Lord and Christ, as Substitute and Example. This faith which receives salvation comes through the divine power of the Word and is the gift of God’s grace. Through Christ we are justified, adopted as God’s sons and daughters, and delivered from the lordship of sin. Through the Spirit we are born again and sanctified; the Spirit renews our minds, writes God’s law of love in our hearts, and we are given the power to live a holy life. Abiding in Him we become partakers of the divine nature and have the assurance of salvation now and in the judgment. (2 Cor. 5:17-21; John 3:16; Gal. 1:4; 4:4-7; Titus 3:3-7; John 16:8; Gal. 3:13, 14; 1 Peter 2:21, 22; Rom. 10:17; Luke 17:5; Mark 9:23, 24; Eph. 2:5-10; Rom. 3:21-26; Col. 1:13, 14; Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 3:26; John 3:3-8; 1 Peter 1:23; Rom. 12:2; Heb. 8:7-12; Eze. 36:25-27; 2 Peter 1:3, 4; Rom. 8:1-4; 5:6-10.)

*19. Law of God.* The great principles of God’s law are embodied in the Ten Commandments and exemplified in the life of Christ. They express God’s love, will, and purposes concerning human conduct and relationships and are binding upon all people in every age. These precepts are the basis of God’s covenant with His people and the standard in God’s judgment. Through the agency of the Holy Spirit they point out sin and awaken a sense of need for a Saviour. Salvation is all of grace and not of works, but its fruitage is obedience to the Commandments. This obedience develops Christian character and results in a sense of well-being. It is an evidence of our love for the Lord and our concern for our fellow men. The obedience of faith demonstrates the power of Christ to transform lives, and therefore strengthens Christian witness. (Ex. 20:1-17; Ps. 40:7, 8; Matt. 22:36-40; Deut. 28:1-14; Matt. 5:17-20; Heb. 8:8-

10; John 15:7-10; Eph. 2:8-10; 1 John 5:3; Rom. 8:3, 4; Ps. 19:7-14.)<sup>1</sup>

Adventists have a high view of Scripture and try to take seriously its statements and claims without superimposing on them a special dogmatic focus or creating a canon within the canon. They follow proper exegetical procedures in interpreting biblical texts. They also attempt to see the larger picture presented in Scripture which could be called the great controversy theme or God's cosmic plan of salvation. When, for instance, discussing the law including its positive and negative aspects they keep in mind that this question also affects their understanding of the nature, character, and sovereignty of God and therefore must be approached carefully.

## **I. Old and New Testaments and the Gospel**

Mounce has summarized the gospel in the following way: "The gospel is the joyous proclamation of God's redemptive activity in Christ Jesus on behalf of man enslaved by sin."<sup>2</sup> As such it cannot be directly found in the OT. Nevertheless, the OT vocabulary, the messianic and typological predictions, the sanctuary system, God's redemptive acts of grace, etc. prepare the way for the realization of salvation from sin through Jesus Christ.

### **A. The Old Testament and the Gospel**

#### **1. Good News Vocabulary in the Old Testament**

The Greek root *euaggel-*, which oftentimes points to the gospel, is a translation of the Hebrew root *bšr*. The word family *bšr* comes as a noun ("good news;" six times), as a verb ("to bring or proclaim good news;" fifteen times), and as a substantival participle ("messenger of good news;" nine times).<sup>3</sup> It is often used in the secular sense, especially the noun. However, a strong theological

---

<sup>1</sup>*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, revised 2005, 17<sup>th</sup> edition (Silver Spring: Secretariat of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 12, 15-16.

<sup>2</sup>R. H. Mounce, "Gospel," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 472.

<sup>3</sup>There is some discussion whether *bšr* means "good news" or only "news." Peter Stuhlmacher, *Das paulinische Evangelium - I. Vorgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), 111-112, pleads for the latter use, whereas Gerhard Friedrich, "Euaggelizomai," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT), ed. by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982-83), 2:707; and

meaning is found with the verb and the participle. The good news that is proclaimed is the message of Yahweh's salvation (Ps 96:2), righteousness (Ps 40:9), peace (Isa 52:7), and freedom (Isa 61:1). In the NT many of the OT verses, in which *bšr* occurs, are used in connection with the Messiah.<sup>4</sup>

In post-biblical Judaism the root *bšr* has also theological meaning. The participle is especially important and almost never occurs in a secular context. The messenger of joy, of good news, is an eschatological figure bringing about the new age and the good news of salvation.<sup>5</sup>

In the LXX the noun *bēšrah* is translated as *euaggelia* and *euaggelion*. The terms do not have theological significance. Therefore, they do not correspond in content to the NT *euaggelion*. Apart from three exceptions, *euaggelizomai* is the translation of the Hebrew verb and participles of the root *bšr*. It is also employed in the theological sense.<sup>6</sup> So the LXX provides us with the root *euaggel-*, which will become an important term in the NT, and brings us nearer to the NT in connecting more often than the Hebrew text does the proclamation of the good news with salvation (e.g., in Isa 60:6). The NT will introduce Jesus as the messenger of the good news of salvation and as the personification and content of this good news, the gospel. When the early Christians started to proclaim the gospel of Jesus to the Gentiles and used the *bšr* tradition, they were depending on the LXX and its vocabulary for good news.

## 2. The Concept of Good News in the Old Testament

As just mentioned, salvation and liberation are connected with good news in the OT.

---

O. Schilling, "*bšr*," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (TDOT), ed. by Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 2:313-316, prefer the positive sense because in Semitic languages the sense of joy is contained in the stem.

<sup>4</sup>See Ps 40:6-9 in Heb 10:5-10; Isa 52:7 in Rom 10:15-16; Acts 10:36; Eph 2:17; 6:15. Ps 68:19 is quoted in Eph 4:8-10; see Isa 60:6 in Matt 2:11; Isa 61:1 in Luke 4:18-19; Matt 11:5; Luke 7:22. Ps.68:11 talks about messengers of good news, Eph 4:11 about evangelists; compare Nah 2:1 in Acts 10:36. See Friedrich, "Euaggelizomai," 709-710; Schilling, "*bšr*," 316.

<sup>5</sup>See Isa 52:7 where the messenger of good news of peace is (a) God himself (Dt.Rabba 5,15), (b) the Messiah (Lev.Rabba 9.9; Midr.Tanh.ṭwldwt, 14; Pirque Mashiaח; Derech Eres Suta), (c) the eschatological prophet (11 Q Melch.), (d) Elijah (Mids. Vajjosha; Pesikta Rabbathi 35), (e) a host of messengers (Midr. Tehillim on Ps 147:1); see also Stuhlmacher, 122-125, 141, 147-152; and Friedrich, "Euaggelizomai," 716-717.

<sup>6</sup>The Hebrew participles would normally correspond to the Greek *euaggelos* ("messenger of good news"), but the LXX prefers to employ the participle *euaggelizomenos*.

According to Ps 40:9-10 David proclaims the good news of God's righteousness, faithfulness, salvation, truth, and lovingkindness.

In the OT God takes the initiative and intervenes with his saving acts. This is good news, even if the respective language is not always used. After the fall God does not instantaneously kill Adam and Eve but starts a dialogue and provides them with a wonderful promise. He rescues Noah and his family from the flood. He saves Lot from the destruction of the cities of the plain. God's lovingkindness (*hesed*)<sup>7</sup> allows him to forgive sins (Exod 34:6-7; Num 14:18). It was his lovingkindness that brought about redemption (Exod 15:13), namely liberation from the Egyptian slavery. Vos points out that this liberation was "a deliverance from an objective realm of sin and evil" and that the "Hebrews were delivered not merely from outside foreign bondage, they were likewise rescued from inward spiritual degradation and sin."<sup>8</sup> According to Ezra 9:8-9 divine grace allowed a remnant to survive, and God's lovingkindness brought about restoration.

Although the law plays a prominent role in the OT, it is specifically stressed only after God has intervened mightily in providing salvation and restoration.

## **B. The NT and the Gospel**

### **1. Good News Vocabulary in the New Testament**

In the NT the word family *euaggel-* is used frequently and points to the gospel and the proclamation of the good news. Three forms of the root *euaggel-* are used: the noun *euaggelion*, the noun *euaggelistēs*, and the verb *euaggelizomai*.

The gospel emphasizes God's initiative: It is the gospel of God (Mark 1:14) and of Jesus Christ (Rom 15:19), of the glory of God (1 Tim 1:11) and of the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph 3:8). It is also the gospel of the kingdom of God (Matt 24:14) and the gospel of the grace of God

---

<sup>7</sup>For a discussion of the term see H.-J. Zobel, "hesed," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. by Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 5:54-64.

<sup>8</sup>Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), 110, 112.

(Acts 20:24).<sup>9</sup> Benefits of the gospel are peace (Eph 6:15), salvation (Eph 1:13), rest (Heb 4) and hope (Col 1:23). In Luke 4 “the content of this good news is . . . associated with proclaiming ‘liberty’ (*aphesis*), ‘recovery of sight’ and the ‘favorable year of the Lord.’”<sup>10</sup> The recipients of Jesus’ message who proclaims good news are especially the poor, afflicted, and oppressed.

Usage of *euaggel-* in the New Testament

	<i>euaggelion</i>	<i>euaggelizomai</i>	<i>euaggelistēs</i>	Total
Matthew	4	1	-	5
Mark	8	-	-	8
Luke	2 (Acts)	25	1	28
John	1 (Rev)	2 (Rev)	-	3
Paul	60	23	2	85
Peter	1	3	-	4
Totals	76	54	3	133

Paul uses the terms most frequently. *Euaggelion* and *euaggelizomai* are distinct features of Pauline theology. For him the gospel represents the grace of God to which humans respond by faith. However, the danger existed that this wonderful gospel would be distorted and become a different gospel (Gal 1:6-7) by accepting circumcision and therefore returning to the law as a way of salvation. Therefore, Paul contrasts the “different gospel” with the gospel preached by him (Gal 1:11), which was Christ’s gospel (Gal 1:7). According to Paul the gospel has past, present, and future aspects. “While the benefits of this gospel begin in the here and now of receiving the gospel, they are also the believer’s eternal destiny.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Anthony Casarella, “Gospel,” *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, edited by Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 431, reminds of the fact that “where they occur in the later NT and the writings of the apostolic fathers, the words belonging to this group refer to the grace of God in Christ rather than to a written gospel . . .”.

<sup>10</sup>Craig C. Broyles, “Gospel (Good News),” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, edited by Joel Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 284.

<sup>11</sup>A. Boyd Luter, Jr. *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 371.

## 2. The Concept of Good News in the New Testament

In Galatians Paul uses the term *euaggelion* as well as the term *euaggelizomai* seven times each.<sup>12</sup> After having criticized the false gospel he continues to talk about being in Christ (Gal 1:22), justification by faith and not by works (Gal 2:16; 3:11),<sup>13</sup> redemption (Gal 3:13; 4:5), being clothed with Christ (Gal 3:27), adoption (Gal 4:5), liberation (Gal 5:1), and divine grace (Gal 2:21; 5:4). It can be assumed that these terms which describe the reality of salvation from various perspectives, complementing each other, are part of the gospel of Christ that Paul proclaims. Luter notes: “At least ten other passages in the Pauline literature also find ‘gospel’ and ‘grace’ employed in the same immediate context, strongly implying that the only salvific channel of divine grace is the pure ‘truth of the gospel’ (Gal 2:5, 14).”<sup>14</sup>

Because the gospel proclaims God’s redemptive activity through Christ’s substitutionary death on the cross, providing forgiveness of sins and liberation from sin, from eternal death, and the law as a way to salvation, salvation should not be limited to one aspect such as justification by faith only. Although it is true that sinners are “justified as a gift by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24), “justified by faith apart from works of the law”—*sola gratia and sola fide*—justification does not fully describe all aspects of salvation. Consequently,

Paul should not be made exclusively into a theologian of justification. . . The oldest Pauline letter (1 Thessalonians) manifests no awareness of the doctrine of justification. . . The decisive motivating factor in the development of the Pauline doctrine of justification is the confrontation with his opponents. . . . it is only against the background of the doctrine of liberation that the Pauline concept of justification can be interpreted aright. It is much more than merely a legal doctrine about punishment and grace; its forensic, juridical character has an ontological foundation.<sup>15</sup>

As in the OT so also in the NT the concept of the good news of God’s redemptive activity

---

<sup>12</sup>The gospel is found in Gal 1:6,7,11; 2:2,5,7,14 and the proclamation of the good news in Gal 1:8,8,9,11,16,23; 4:13.

<sup>13</sup>Peter Stuhlmacher, *Revisiting Paul’s Doctrine of Justification*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 65, declares: “Therefore justification by faith alone is justification by virtue of the grace of God alone, which opens to people the saving way of faith and gives them the power to live this way by the Holy Spirit.”

<sup>14</sup>Luter, 371. He points specifically to 2Cor 9:13-14 where both “the confession of the gospel of Christ” and “the surpassing grace of God” are mentioned.

<sup>15</sup>Georg Strecker, *Theology of the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 139, 140.

cannot be limited to one word family. In the NT the root *euaggel-* is always a theological and never a secular term. With only one exception,<sup>16</sup> it describes the content or preaching of the gospel, the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. Salvation achieved by Christ's incarnation, life, death, and resurrection was foreshadowed in the OT, came about "when the time had fully come" (Gal 4:4), and is proclaimed from then until the end of historic time. Jesus himself is proclaimer and content of the gospel. "If we were to sum up the content of the Gospel in a single word, it would be Jesus the Christ."<sup>17</sup> There are various synonyms of *euaggel-*. These are mainly the roots *aggel-* and *keryk-*.<sup>18</sup> These synonyms underline the importance of the proclamation of the gospel. There are other concepts that describe what God through Christ has done for us. They all must be heard.

## II. Old and New Testaments and the Law

God has not only provided salvation. He has also given his law. What is the role of the law and how does it relate to salvation?

### A. The Old Testament and the Law

#### 1. The Law in General

The question dealing with the role of the law in salvation should not be addressed from a NT perspective only. Since Jesus was rooted in the OT his disciples need to consider both OT and NT when discussing important biblical concepts, because there is both continuity and discontinuity when it comes to the relation between both testaments.

Originally *tôrāh* meant instruction.<sup>19</sup> Not just in the NT but even in the OT the term *tôrāh* was used to designate the Pentateuch. Joshua talked about "the book of the law of Moses" (Jos 8:31).

---

<sup>16</sup>1Thess 3:6.

<sup>17</sup>Friedrich, "Euaggelizomai," 2:731.

<sup>18</sup>E.g., to *euaggelion kataggellein*—1Cor 9:14. However, *prokataggellō*--Acts 3:18; 7:52--is only slightly similar to *euaggeliosomai*, and *kataggeleus*--Acts 17:18--is the messenger of foreign gods.

<sup>19</sup>Erwin Buck, "The Role of the Law in the New Testament: An Exegetical Paper," in *Lutherans & Adventists in Conversation: Report and Papers Presented 1994-1998*. (Silver Spring: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2000), 134. On the same page he notes that the "instruction can have ethical, cultic, legal, political or other content, but invariably it is understood that Torah is trustworthy instruction, in fact, it carries divine authority."

Selman points out that within the Pentateuch the *tôrāh* was understood in five different ways. “It can refer to: (1) an individual pronouncement, (2) a group of laws on a single subject, (3) a particular collection of laws, (4) a general description of God’s laws and (5) a combination of narrative and law.”<sup>20</sup> *Tôrāh* “involves (1) teaching of instruction to be learned, (2) commands to be obeyed and (3) guidance about how to live in specific situations.”<sup>21</sup>

It is crucial to remember that *tôrāh* comes from God and reflects and reveals his will. As such it is authoritative. It was also a gracious gift to his people, not intended to be a burden, but to enhance their well-being and be “a clear sign of divine favour.”<sup>22</sup> The written code was given after the people’s liberation.<sup>23</sup> Because God loved them (Deut 7:7-8), he gave them his commandments. Societies and nations created and still establish laws which are supposed to organize and regulate them and provide protection for their citizens. Although some of these state laws may be too restrictive or even superfluous, many are also beneficial. God’s law was given to establish a loving relationship and genuine communication between humans and their God and between humans themselves and to transform “historical Israel into the people of God.”<sup>24</sup>

God’s law reveals his character<sup>25</sup> and points to his holiness which should be emulated by his people. “The close connection between God’s character and his law is also indicated by the fact that the Bible finds the attributes of God in His law. Like God the law is righteous (Ps 119:172; Ezra 9:15), perfect (Ps 19:7; Matt 5:48), holy (Rom 7:12; Lev 19:2), good (Rom 7:12; Ps 34:8), and truth

---

<sup>20</sup>Marin J. Selman, “Law,” *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, edited by Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 498.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 57; cf. Selman, 509.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Selman, 509.

<sup>24</sup>Childs, 56.

<sup>25</sup>In *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*, annotated edition (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2003), 105, the statement is found: “Correctly viewed, the moral law is much more than a legal code; it is a transcript of the character of God.”

(Ps 119:142; Deut 32:4).”<sup>26</sup> In spite of the negative side of the *tôrāh*, namely when it is not observed and curses are coming, the Psalmist rejoices in the law and professes that he loves it (Ps 119).

## 2. The Decalogue

OT laws have been categorized in various ways. Yet a strict distinction between them may not have been intended and may not be possible. Nevertheless, one finds ceremonial laws, civil laws, health laws, and moral laws or various law collections.<sup>27</sup> Among all these laws the Ten Commandments stand out. This is recognized by a number of scholars. Selman writes: “. . . they clearly enjoyed a special role within ancient Israel. . . they occupy key positions at the head of the laws in Exodus and Deuteronomy, their repetitive stylised language makes them particularly suitable for memorizing, and they are quoted directly elsewhere in the OT (Jer 7:9; Hos 4:2; Ps 50; 81).”<sup>28</sup>

Childs holds: “. . . the Decalogue has been assigned a special place within th Old Testament tradition, which is apparent by its form, terminology and position within the narrative.”<sup>29</sup>

Rodriguez lists eight points that emphasize the uniqueness of the Decalogue and elaborates on them: “(1) They are located in a prominent place in the Pentateuch. . . (2) They were spoken by God to the people . . . (3) They were addressed to every Israelite . . . (4) They were engraved on stone tablets by Yahweh . . . (5) Their general nature: They are basically imperatives to be obeyed under any circumstance, not limited to any specific period or by external circumstances in the life of the Israelites. . . (6) They form the foundation of other law codes . . . (7) They have a specific name . . . (8) They were placed inside the ark of the covenant . . .”<sup>30</sup> One should add that the phrase “and

---

<sup>26</sup>Angel Manuel Rodriguez, “The Adventist Understanding of the Law and the Sabbath,” (Silver Spring; unpublished paper, n. d.), 1-2.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. Walter Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 44-48; Selman, 500; Roy Gane “The Role of God’s Moral Law, Including Sabbath, in the ‘New Covenant,’” unpublished paper (Andrews University, 2003), 7. This paper is made available by the Biblical Research Institute (<http://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/documents/Gane%20Gods%20moral%20law.pdf>).

<sup>28</sup>Selman, 501. Vos, 129, states that the Decalogue did not contain ceremonial commandments.

<sup>29</sup>Childs, 53-54.

<sup>30</sup>Rodriguez, 2-4. Moses distinguished between the moral law of the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:1-17; Deut 5:6-21), which was written by God on two tables of stone (Exod 31:18; Deut 5:22) and was placed into the ark of the covenant (Exod 40:20-21), and laws for Israel as a nation or ceremonial laws that ultimately pointed to the work and

he added no more” following the Ten Commandments (Deut 5:22) stresses that the Decalogue was limited in content. No other commandments were part of it. It “highlights the special ‘canonical’ authority of the Decalogue.”<sup>31</sup>

However, the Decalogue was not limited in time. Although it was presented in written form to Israel at Mt. Sinai, the commandments were already known before. Abraham kept God’s laws (Gen 26:5).<sup>32</sup> Not only do OT prophetic and wisdom books refer back to the Ten Commandments, the NT does too. Jesus confirmed them and did not indicate that they had come to an end. He applied them to his generation and pointed out their deeper meaning and importance for his followers.

Child makes another important observation: “The prologue makes clear from the outset that the imperatives which now follow are understood as the will of God who had already delivered Israel from bondage. . . Israel does not become the people of God by doing the commandments, but because she has been chosen and redeemed, she receives the divine law as the proper response to God’s grace.”<sup>33</sup> The repetition of the Decalogue in Deut 5 in a sermon preached by Moses provides another reason for keeping the Sabbath commandment. It is the more or less the same as provided in the prologue. Whereas in Exodus the remembrance of the Sabbath is associated with creation, in Deuteronomy God’s people is called to keep Sabbath as they remember their liberation.<sup>34</sup> This would imply that in the OT salvation is not completely different from salvation in the NT. In both cases the law is excluded as a way to salvation. People are saved because of God’s grace, not because of keeping the commandments. The OT does not support a legalistic approach to salvation versus a grace-faith approach in the NT.

---

life of the Messiah and found their fulfillment in Jesus. The latter were written into a book and placed beside the ark of the covenant (Deut 31:24-26).

<sup>31</sup>Richard D. Nelson, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 84.

<sup>32</sup>Rodriguez, 5, lists the ten commandments and texts that show that the Decalogue was known before Sinai.

<sup>33</sup>Childs, 64-65; cf. Selman, 509.

<sup>34</sup>Cf. Ekkehardt Mueller, “The Sabbath Commandment in Deuteronomy 5:12-17,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 14/2 (2003): 144, 145. Due to minor changes in the text of the Decalogue the Sabbath commandment of Deut 5 takes the center position among the commandments (cf., 149).

## **B. The New Testament and the Law**

Directly or indirectly the law occurs repeatedly in the NT. The Greek term *nomos* designates the law as *tôrāh* did for the OT, while the term *entolē* specifies commandments. *Nomos* has different shades of meaning. Like *tôrāh* it can designate the Pentateuch (Luke 16:29) or the OT. It also can refer to various laws.

### **1. Jesus and the Law**

The majority of Jesus' Pentateuch quotations<sup>35</sup> relate to the law. Six are found in the Sermon on the Mount and about six more in other places in the gospels.

#### **a. The Sermon on the Mount**

An important part of the Sermon on the Mount focuses on the law. The term "law" is already introduced in Matt 5:17 and the last time found in Matt 7:12. The reference to "the Law or/and the Prophets" points to the entire OT. The first part of the material contained in this inclusion puts a special focus on its legal aspects--Matt 5:17-48. In this major section Jesus discussed the law in six antitheses. They include the Decalogue as well as other commandments. Jesus did not abolish the law (Matt 5:17-19) but pointed out its real meaning and its far-reaching implications.<sup>36</sup> Thus, he developed his kingdom ethics.

The first two antitheses deal with two of the Ten Commandments, namely murder and adultery. "Jesus deepens these commandments by internalizing them, i.e., by emphasizing the underlying thoughts, which themselves condemn a person."<sup>37</sup> The following four antitheses do not directly relate to the Decalogue but are taken from other parts of the Pentateuch. Obviously, some

---

<sup>35</sup>Jesus quoted the following text from the Pentateuch: Gen 1:27; 2:24; Exod 3:6; 20:12-16,12,13,14; 21:17,24; 23:20; Lev 19:12,18,18,18; Deut 6:4,5,13,16; 8:3; 24:1.

<sup>36</sup>Donald A. Hagner, *Matthews 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary 33A (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1993), 106, writes: "Far from destroying the law Jesus' teachings—despite their occasionally strange sound—penetrate to the divinely intended (i.e., teleological) meaning of the law. Because the law and the prophets pointed to him and he is their goal, he is able now to reveal their true meaning . . ." R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 114, states: "Jesus is bringing that to which the Old Testament looked forward; his teaching will transcend the Old Testament revelation, but, far from abolishing it, is itself its intended culmination."

<sup>37</sup>Hagner, *Matthews 1-13*, 112.

OT laws were merely temporary concessions to the hardness of hearts of the Israelites, but did not reflect God's ideal, for instance, the regulations on divorce in Deut 24:1-4. This may to some degree also apply to oaths and the *lex talionis*. Therefore, in Matt 5:31-32 Jesus stressed the indissolubility of marriage, and later in Matt 19:1-12 and Mark 10:1-12 he argued with God's ideal as presented in Gen 1-2 and pointed back to it. The concession was replaced by God's original will.

The main section on the law ends with and culminates in the love commandment taken from Lev 19:18 (Matt 5:43) and in the call "to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" in his love even to his enemies (Matt 5:48). This is certainly no accident. "For Matthew, to be τέλειος means to fulfill the law through the manifestation of an unrestricted love (including even enemies) that is the reflection of God's love."<sup>38</sup> Jesus' interpretation of the commandments dealing with murder, adultery, divorce, taking oaths, and the *lex talionis* is summarized in the commandment to love one's neighbor and even one's enemy. Jesus did not only point out how the Decalogue and other moral laws had to be understood, he also stressed a comprehensive understanding of the love commandment in which God's law culminates.

#### **b. God's Law and the Tradition of the Elders**

According to Matt 15 and Mark 7 Jesus was challenged by the Pharisees and scribes because his disciples did not observe the tradition of the elders and ate without having washed their hands. Jesus quoted the fifth commandment of the Decalogue and added Exod 21:17 showing that keeping the traditions of the elders violated God's law.<sup>39</sup> This incident supports Jesus' claim made in the Sermon on the Mount that he did not come "to abolish the Law or the Prophets." Jesus used the Ten Commandments to reject unbiblical traditions. In Matt 15:4 the phrase "for God said" introducing the fifth commandment is a strong antithetical statement criticizing the behavior of the pious in Israel.

In Mark 7:19 the phrase *katharizōn panta ta brōmata* is added, which is normally rendered:

---

<sup>38</sup>Hagner, *Matthews 1-13*, 134.

<sup>39</sup>The Markan report is more extensive than the Matthean. In Matthew Ex 20:12 and 21:17 are quoted first before Jesus moves on to a quotation found in Isa 29:13. In Mark this order is reversed. The Exodus texts are used as examples showing how the law of God is transgressed while performing a "pious" deed. Both Gospels discuss what goes into the mouth and what comes out of the mouth and the heart.

“Thus he declared all foods clean,” and it is claimed that Jesus abolished the OT food laws.<sup>40</sup> However, the question must be raised, if Jesus in a context, in which he deals with Jewish traditions which at times even violate God’s law and in which he supports the validity of God’s commandments, would himself alter a law found in the Pentateuch. Such an approach seems to be counterproductive.<sup>41</sup> Gagnon wrestling with the issue of homosexuality which is indirectly found in Mark 7:21, namely in the term *porneia*, states: “The saying in Mark 7:15-19 about what defiles a person is often cited as proof that Jesus abolished the food laws. It is more likely that Jesus intended a hyperbolic contrast: what counts most is not what goes into a person but what comes out . . . If Jesus did not abrogate even such things as food laws and meticulous tithing, then it is impossible that he would have overturned a proscription of sexual immorality as serious as that of male-male intercourse.” Jesus claimed that God’s law must not be overturned by any religious practice or tradition.<sup>42</sup>

### c. God’s Law and the Rich Young Ruler

According to Matt 19; Mark 10; and Luke 18 Jesus had a conversation with a rich young ruler in which after the issue of personal salvation has been raised, Jesus turned to the law. He quoted five of the Ten Commandments, all taken from the second part of the Decalogue: murder, adultery, theft, false witness, and honoring father and mother. They follow the order of the MT with the exception of the fifth commandment which comes at the end, possibly because it is the only commandment of the five stated positively and containing the promise of a long life and “so ends on the note with which

---

<sup>40</sup>E.g., France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 278-279, 291-292; William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 255-256.

<sup>41</sup>The issue in this passage is not clean versus unclean food. It is eating with unwashed, that is, unclean hands. Jesus is not discussing the *kind* of food that can be eaten, but only the *way* it is eaten. Jesus is not addressing a biblical issue but a tradition of the elders. The parallel text in Mt 15:1-20 is even clearer. It starts out with the problem of eating food with unclean hands and refers to it again at the end of the passage (Mt 15:20). Furthermore, the text does not talk about meat, but about food (*bromata*). To restrict it to meat only is to ignore the Greek meaning of the word. The context talks about the bread that the disciples ate (verses 2, 5). “Purifying all food” (verse 19) is a comment by Mark which refers to Jesus. It is not the digestive process which purifies the food, but Jesus declares food clean even if consumed without the washing of hands.

<sup>42</sup>The list of vices in verses 21 and 22 includes three terms that refer to sexual sins and that remind us of the seventh commandment. It also covers the third, sixth, eighth, probably the ninth, and the tenth of the Ten Commandments.

the man's question began."<sup>43</sup> The enumeration of the second table of the Ten Commandments remind us of the Sermon on the Mount in which murder, adultery, and false oaths were stressed.

Mark adds one more, namely defraud (Mark 10:19). A number of commentators suggest that this addition is either an indirect reference to the tenth commandment,<sup>44</sup> a substitution of the tenth commandment,<sup>45</sup> or a special warning by Jesus to the rich man.<sup>46</sup> France holds that the tenth commandment may be missing because it focuses on thought rather than on behavior, and he goes on to propose that the commandment not to defraud "is better seen simply as an attempt to draw out in more behavioural terms the implications of the tenth commandment: appropriating someone else's possessions is likely to be a practical result of coveting."<sup>47</sup>

However, another unique addition is found in Matt 19:19 only. It is the commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself." By employing this commandment Jesus summarizes all the previous commandments without, however, annulling them. As in the Sermon on the Mount the preceding commandments find their climax and their deepest meaning in the love commandment. Thus, by employing the love commandment and stressing to be perfect—as in Matt 5:48--the present paragraph must be understood in the light of the discussion of the law in the Sermon on the Mount.

When reading the passage dealing with the rich young ruler one may get the mistaken idea that salvation is achieved by keeping the law. The ruler seemed to believe in a kind of righteousness by works, because he asked, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" (Matt 19:16). Since Jesus pointed to the commandments one may hastily conclude that Jesus supported such an approach. The issue at hand is indeed eternal life, salvation, entering the kingdom of heaven (Matt 19:16,17,23-25). However, the end of the passage makes it clear that "for human

---

<sup>43</sup>Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, Word Biblical Commentary 34B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 96.

<sup>44</sup>See, e.g., Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Luke*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1964), 239; Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament 2 (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1980), 282.

<sup>45</sup>See, e.g., Evans, 96.

<sup>46</sup>See, e.g., Plummer, 239.

<sup>47</sup>France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 402.

beings [it] is impossible” to be saved,<sup>48</sup> “but with God all things are possible” (Matt 19:26). Humans are not saved by keeping the commandments and are completely dependent on God for their salvation.<sup>49</sup> However, discipleship leads to obedience. Jesus makes it clear by quoting from the Pentateuch that the law is important for his followers, but it must culminate in love. Complete commitment to the Lord is necessary.<sup>50</sup>

#### **d. The Greatest Commandment**

According to Matt 22 and Mark 12 a scribe approached Jesus and asked him, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?” As in the beginning of his public ministry Jesus encountered a threefold test so also shortly before the end of his earthly ministry. First, Jesus was asked whether or not it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar (Mark 12:13-17). Then he was confronted with the denial of the future resurrection of the dead (Mark 12:18:27). Finally, the question about the law came up (Mark 12:28-34). Jesus answered with Deut 6:5, the commandment to love God, and with Lev 19:18, the commandment to love one’s neighbor as oneself.

In Mark the scribe who raised the question, fares better than in Matthew. The section is more elaborate, and the scribes repeats to a large extent Jesus’ answer adding an insightful commentary, namely “to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices” (Mark 12:33).

In Mark 12:29 Jesus quotes Deut 6:4 in addition to Deut 6:5: “Hear, o Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord.” This text is one of the most important texts for Jews, the so-called *Shema*. The commandment to love God is rooted in the *Shema*,<sup>51</sup> in monotheism. Whereas Jesus previously had

---

<sup>48</sup>The interpretation of the eye of a needle as the small city gate through which a camel might go with great difficulty is unwarranted and does not fit the context.

<sup>49</sup>Cf., France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 287.

<sup>50</sup>Donald A. Hagner, *Matthews 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary 33B (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1995), 558, remarks: “The discipleship of the kingdom is not simply a matter of obeying commandments; it requires an absolute commitment . . . And this perfection is not simply a challenge offered to a special class of people in the kingdom . . .; it is the call given to all who would enter the kingdom . . .”

<sup>51</sup>“There is One who is good” (Matt 19:17)--part of our previous section under discussion--may be an allusion to the *Shema*. Cf., Hagner, *Matthews 14-28*, 557.

only stressed love toward the neighbor, he now presents the ultimate commandment, the commandment to love God. The discussion of the law in the Gospel of Matthew—initiated in the Sermon on the Mount and carried on throughout the First Gospel—as well as the much more limited discussion in Mark is brought to its climax by stating the greatest commandment, the commandment to love the Lord God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. From such a love towards God derives the love toward fellow humans. What Christianity is all about is first to love God, which includes “reverence, commitment, and obedience,”<sup>52</sup> and secondly to love others. The priority is clearly established. By focusing on love toward God in addition to love toward humans Jesus now indirectly presents the first and the second table of the Decalogue.

Commenting on this passage Moo states:

Never does he [Jesus] suggest that he or his followers are free on the basis of love to disobey an authoritative commandment of Scripture. Nor does he dismiss the validity of commandments according to whether or not they are loving. . . Jesus is not here teaching that love replaces the Law or that love shows how we are to obey the Law. Rather, as the greatest commandments within the Law, they are the touchstone by which the intention and meaning of all the other commandments must be understood.<sup>53</sup>

He also confirms that Jesus never attacks the law, but “asserts its enduring validity.”<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, it is not by obedience to the law that the Israelites attained their covenant relationship with God. Obedience was “their response to the gracious initiative of God . . .”<sup>55</sup>

## 2. Paul and the Law

Paul discusses the law extensively in various letters. In these we find positive and negative statements about the law. This paper does not allow for a study of all Pauline texts dealing with the law. Its limit does not even allow to treat all difficult statements. However, in an exemplary way Paul’s position is portrayed.

---

<sup>52</sup>Hagner, *Matthews 14-28*, 648.

<sup>53</sup>Douglas J. Moo, “Law,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, edited by Joel Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 452.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid. 450.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid. 451.

**a. Paul's Use of *nomos***

Although the Letters to the Romans and Galatians discusses to a large extent justification by faith and other topics, Paul also addresses the issue of the law. The term “law” is used in different ways by the same author and within the same document. In Romans the law refers to the Pentateuch (Rom 3:21), the entire OT (Rom 3:19), a principle (Rom 7:23), and the Decalogue (Rom 7:7). In 1 Corinthians 9:8-9 Paul talks about Mosaic commandments, which may not include the moral law, and in Galatians 5:3 about the law in its entirety.<sup>56</sup> The literary context must help to decide what is meant. Strecker points out that Paul also uses the term *entolē* “which mostly denotes an individual commandment (e.g. Rom 13:9; 1 Cor 7:19) but also can be equated with νόμος (Rom 7:8ff).”<sup>57</sup>

It seems to be a fact that some biblical laws are valid at all times of human history while others have been superseded by new realities. Although all biblical laws ultimately came from God, they may differ in scope and duration. For instance, the disappearance of the theocracy has made obsolete certain theocratic laws. The formation of a new covenant people consisting of both Jews and Gentiles, who accept Jesus as their Savior and Lord and who are dispersed all over planet earth, does not allow for ownership of ancestral land as it was practiced in Israel. It also militates against a continuous practice of the levirate marriage. New ethical demands which would return to God's ideal plan were called for by Jesus. Ceremonial laws that ultimately pointed to the work, life, and death of the Messiah found their typological fulfillment in Jesus. Knight even suggests: “The main purpose of the ceremonial law did not end at Calvary. Rather, the ministration it pointed to was transferred to Christ, who now ministers as our high priest in the heavenly sanctuary. The ministration of the ceremonial law functioned as a type that pointed to the work of Christ as antitype.”<sup>58</sup> Gane states: “Ritual laws dependent on the sanctuary/temple can no longer be applied, so obviously they are no longer required . . . Some laws, such as circumcision, could be kept today but are not applicable because the NT has removed the reason for them (Acts 15).”<sup>59</sup> Access to the community of believers in the NT is through

---

<sup>56</sup>Cf. Strecker, 141.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>George Knight in *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*, 112.

<sup>59</sup>Gane, 10.

baptism, not through circumcision. The question which law should still be kept has to be decided on a one to one basis, as the decision by the Jerusalem council may indicate (Acts 15:20). Gane proposes as a rule of thumb: “A biblical law should be kept to the extent that its principle can be applied unless the New Testament removes the reason for its application.”<sup>60</sup>

Although early Christianity including Paul had to wrestle with the question which laws Gentile believers had to keep, the major issue especially in Paul’s writings to the Galatians and the Romans seems to have been the misuse of the law and the attempt to gain salvation by means of observing the law. This situation may explain Pauline statements which at times sound almost contradictory. Paul had to defend the gospel, and statements made under circumstances when the gospel is attacked will be different from those made at times when it is possible to explain biblical doctrine without being threatened by heresy.<sup>61</sup> If this was the major problem for Paul, it did not matter which law was affected. Paul had to show clearly that keeping the law, including the Decalogue, does not bring about salvation.<sup>62</sup> “He rejected the law as a method of salvation but upheld it as a standard for Christian conduct.”<sup>63</sup>

In 1Cor 9:20-21 when discussing his mission strategy of adaptation Paul carefully balanced what he said. To those under the law he became like one under the law without actually being under the law. To those without law, he became like a lawless person and yet was not free from the law. He was not a legalist, neither was he an antinomian. This is also what he tried to do in the letter to the Romans.

### **b. Paul and the Rejection of the Law**

There are a number of statements which can be understood as negative, some even as a rejection of the law. In Rom 3:20-21 Paul stresses that God’s righteousness, which aims at our

---

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Cf. Rodriguez, 11.

<sup>62</sup>Strecker affirms: “When it is realized that the law cannot and should not have a soteriological meaning, then the will of God in the Old Testament law can be discussed . . . In faith Jews and Gentiles acknowledge that the law, in whatever manner they may have encountered it, is no means of salvation” (144).“ See also page 156.

<sup>63</sup>Rodriguez, 11.

salvation, was revealed apart from the law. And indeed “by the works of the law no flesh will be justified.” But through the law comes knowledge of sin. A similar statement occurs in Rom 3:28. According to Rom 4:15 the law produces wrath. Christ is the end of the law (Rom 10:4). The law could not give life (Gal 3:21). We were imprisoned under the law (Gal 3:23). The law which was a barrier was abolished (Eph 2:15).

These statements make sense when understood as revealing the right functions of the law. They point out the law’s limitations and the problems when the law was abused. The law reveals sins, but it cannot save. The ceremonial ordinances which kept Jews and Gentiles apart were done away with through Jesus’ death.<sup>64</sup> According to Rom 7:9,10 Paul even admitted that instead of bringing life the commandments caused sin to become alive and brought death. Marshall commenting on Romans 7 writes: “There was nothing sinful about the law, but it did stimulate evil desires into action and place Paul under condemnation. And yet, it was not really the law that ‘killed’ Paul. On the contrary, it was the sinful nature in him, which the law exposed for what it really was. Paul, therefore, upholds the law very positively in 7:12.”<sup>65</sup>

### **c. Paul and the Validity of the Law**

Paul’s negative statements concerning the law must be understood on the background of Paul’s positive attitude to the law, especially the Ten Commandments. In the Letter to the Romans one finds indirect statements pointing to the validity of a law:

- (1) Bringing about “the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles” is a purpose statement found right at the beginning and the end of the letter (Rom 1,5; 15,18; 16,26). Paul wants Gentiles to be obedient. However, obedience requires the existence of a law, otherwise one cannot be obedient.
- (2) This is also true when it comes to obedience toward God (e.g., Rom 6:16). How to be obedient to God, if his will is not revealed? However, if it is revealed, God’s will is also his command.

---

<sup>64</sup>Cf. Rodriguez, 14.

<sup>65</sup>I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 319.

- (3) Paul makes it clear that knowledge of sin comes through the law. Without law no recognition of sin (Rom 3:20; 7:7). Paul does not deny the existence of sin. Why would he otherwise talk about justification. Yet, if sinners are being justified they need to be identified as sinners first. This requires a law.
- (4) The necessity to exhort believers to live a moral life (e.g., Rom 12:17.19.21; 13) presupposes the existence of a valid law. Therefore, Paul can state that the law is not nullified but established (Rom 3:31).

The Decalogue is mentioned directly in several places in Romans. In Romans 2:21-23 Paul refers to the Decalogue which the Jews had but did not keep. He does not talk about the “Ten Words” but the “law.” However by mentioning the seventh and eight commandments it becomes clear that this law is the Decalogue.

According to Romans 7:7,12 the law shows what sin is. The reference to the tenth commandment in verse 7b indicates that Paul has in mind the Ten Commandments. They are holy, righteous, and good.

In Romans 13:8-10 Paul summarizes the law in the commandment of love. He mentions the sixth, seventh, ninth, and tenth commandments of the Decalogue. Therefore, the law of Rom 13 must be the Decalogue. Schreiner dealing with Galatians and Romans discusses the commandment of love:

Is the ‘law of Christ’ for believers limited to the law of love? Yes and no. Love is the heartbeat and center of the Pauline ethic. And yet even in Galatians Paul unfolds the true nature of love by delineating what is not loving (Gal 5:15, 19-21, 26) and what is (Gal 5:22-23; 6:1-2, 6-10). A comparison of Galatians 5:14 with Romans 13:8-10 shows that for Paul the moral norms of the OT Law must be included when one is defining love. Otherwise love collapses into sentimentality and vagueness.<sup>66</sup>

An interesting statement is found in 1 Corinthians 7:19 where Paul distinguishes between different laws and maintains that it is important to keep the commandments of God: “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.” “Clearly, for Paul, ‘the Law’ was valid in some form for members of the new covenant.”<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup>Thomas, R. Schreiner, “Law of Christ,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 544.

<sup>67</sup>Frank Thielman, “Law,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 536. Cf. page 539.

### 3. Other NT Authors and the Law

#### a. The Letter to the Hebrews

What about the law in the setting of the new covenant? On one hand, the author stresses the necessity of a change of the law (Heb 7:12), namely the Mosaic law, which was only a shadow of the things to come (Heb 10:1,28).<sup>68</sup> That specific system of law was fulfilled in Jesus. The many sacrifices offered year after year were not able to make perfect those who offered them, but the sacrifice of Jesus is all-sufficient. On the other hand, in the old covenant as well as in the new covenant another particular law is included and is valid. Under the new covenant the law is now written on the hearts, is thus internalized, and is not abolished (Heb 8:10).

Hasel suggests: “The giving of the law is as much an act of grace as God’s gift of election. The giving of the law is as much an act of mercy as the deliverance from Egyptian slavery. The gift of the law is just as much an act of God’s love as the making of the covenant to which the law belongs . . . God does not speak of a new law, but of a new covenant.”<sup>69</sup> Pfitzner talks about believers doing “the will of God not by external compulsion, but from willingness that arises from the heart.”<sup>70</sup> He mentions inner obedience and states: “That he has done God’s will in offering himself makes it possible for the people of the new covenant to do God’s will (10:7, 9, 16).”<sup>71</sup>

In Hebrews we find evidence for the existence of a law which is still valid: (1) The reality of sin requires a law which can judge what is sin and what is not sin (Heb 8:12; 12:1). (2) The author repeatedly mentions a good conscience. To have a good conscience is dependent on the existence of some kind of standard or yardstick. This is not only an inner feeling but an external law. It is possible to have a good conscience, when an existing law is being obeyed (Heb 9:9,14; 10:2; 13:18). (3) Disobedience (Heb 3:18; 4:6,11) and obedience (Heb 5:9) as well as doing God’s will (Heb 10:7;

---

<sup>68</sup>The term *entolē* is found four times in Hebrews and seems to refer to the law of Moses—Heb 7:5,10,18; 9:19. The term *nomos* occurs fourteen times in the epistle—Heb 7:5,12,16,19,28,28; 8:4,10; 9:19,22; 10:1,8,16,28). Quite frequently it also points to the Mosaic law. However, the central part of the letter contains two references to the law being written in the hearts of the believers.

<sup>69</sup>Gerhard F. Hasel, *Covenant in Blood* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1982), 77, 106.

<sup>70</sup>Victor C. Pfitzner, *Hebrews*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 139.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 140.

13:21) presuppose the existence of a law that should be kept. (4) Since lawlessness is criticized (Heb 10:17), God wants his law to be observed.

This is generally recognized. “Placing his ‘laws’ within people, God overcomes human ‘lawlessness’ (Heb 10:17; cf. 1:9) by bringing about complete trust in and obedience to his will . . .”<sup>72</sup> “The quality of newness intrinsic to the new covenant consists in the new manner of presenting God’s law and not in newness of content. The people of God will be inwardly established in the law and knowledge of the Lord.”<sup>73</sup> Finally DeSilva observes that this verse (Heb 8:10)

clearly resonates with his interest throughout the sermon in the believers’ living so as to ‘please’ God and to avoid what he hates (12:16-17, 28; 13:15-16, 21), fixing their hearts on God and his favor in loyal trust (3:12-13; 13:9), obeying God’s commands to them (4:11), and living out the love of neighbor that is at the heart of God’s law (6:9-12; 10:24-25, 32-36; 12:14; 13:1-3).<sup>74</sup>

This law cannot be the law of Moses, since the author indicated that it was just a shadow and was insufficient. However, the author of Hebrews recognizes that the saved will keep God’s law and he alludes to commands that are still valid. It seems that he had in mind at least the Decalogue and its summary in the commandments to love God and the neighbor:

- (1) Falling away from God and godlessness (Heb 3:12; 6:6; 12:16) may indirectly point to a violation of the first and maybe even the second commandments which call the audience not to have any other god beside the Almighty (Exod 20:2-3) and not to create any image of God (Exod 20:4-6).
- (2) In Heb 4:4 the Sabbath is indirectly mentioned. The verse contains a quotation from Gen 2:2 which in turn is taken up again in Exod 20:11. God rested on the seventh day, the Sabbath. Heb 4:9 introduces the word *sabbatismos* rendered as “Sabbath rest,”<sup>75</sup> “sabbath

---

<sup>72</sup>Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews*, The Anchor Bible 36 (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 391.

<sup>73</sup>William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary 47A (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1991), 209, 209, 209.

<sup>74</sup>David A. DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Social-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle “to the Hebrews”* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 285.

<sup>75</sup>Cf. Robert H. Smith, *Hebrews*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 65.

observance”<sup>76</sup> or “sabbath-keeping.”<sup>77</sup> The paragraph talks about Sabbath rest for God’s people which certainly is more than resting on the seventh day,<sup>78</sup> but does not exclude it. Although the rest and the Sabbath-keeping of Heb 4, if accepted by faith, means eschatological salvation and a life in peace with God, it does not follow that the seventh day Sabbath is a temporary institution under the old covenant done away with under the new covenant. Heb 4 links the Sabbath to creation. However, the Fall had not happened and sin was not present at that time and the Sabbath was not instituted in Paradise as a symbol of rest in the sense of removal of sin and salvation. Furthermore, as Gane shows, “Because the life of rest was available in Old Testament times, at the same time when the weekly Sabbath was in operation for the Israelites, the weekly Sabbath cannot be a historical type of the life of rest. Rather, it is an eternal memorial of Creation.”<sup>79</sup> Hebrews 4 reminds us of the Sabbath commandment (Exod 20:8-1; Deut 5:12-15).

---

<sup>76</sup>DeSilva, 166. He writes: “The sabbath had been regarded as a type of the eschatological ‘rest,’ which would come after God’s rule was established on earth but before the new creation. It was a symbol of the resurrection at the end of time (*Adam and Eve* 51.2-3) and also the millennial kingdom (*Barn.* 15.3-8).” See also Koester, 272, who points to Isa 58:13-14; 66:23 as well as to Rabbinical and deuterocanonical sources when dealing with Sabbath observance and rest. Lane, 101-102, states that in its only non-Christian appearance *sabbatismos* means Sabbath observance. “In four other documents from the patristic period that are independent of Heb 4:9, the term denotes the celebration or festivity of the Sabbath (Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 23.3; Epiphanius, *Against All Heresies* 30.2.2; *The Martyrdom of Peter and Paul*, chapt. 1; *Apost. Const.* 2.36.2; discussed by Hofius, *Katapausis*, 103-6). The term received its particular nuance from the Sabbath instruction that developed in Judaism on the basis of Exod 20:8-10, where it was emphasized that rest and praise belong together . . .” Pfitzner, 80-81, suggests “that God’s own resting from the work of creation is an archetype for the final rest promised to Christians (see vv. 9-10). The two texts, linked through the common word ‘rest,’ were already associated in the sabbath liturgy of the Greek-speaking synagogue; Ps 95:1-11 and Gen 2:1-3 were readings on the sabbath eve . . . Jewish tradition saw the sabbath as a symbol of eschatological salvation. . . .”

<sup>77</sup>Cf. Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 255; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, revised edition, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 109.

<sup>78</sup>Opinions differ if (1) the rest is a present reality for believers pointing to salvation, (2) the eschatological rest in the future kingdom of God, or (3) both. For an extensive discussion see DeSilva, 153-169. Harald Hegemann, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament 16 (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1988), 102, seems to favor the first option. De Silva obviously opts for the second. Lane, 99, 102, Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness: A Theological Study of the Good News of the Sabbath for Today* (Berrien Springs: published by author, 1980) 137-138, and Roy E. Graham, “A Note on Hebrews 4:4-9” in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, edited by Kenneth A. Strand (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982), 343-345, may support (3).

<sup>79</sup>Gane, 15. See also page 14.

- (3) The respect that we give to our fathers may hint at the fifth commandment which calls us to honor father and mother (Heb 12:9; Exod 20:12).
- (4) Adulterers are mentioned in Heb 13:4. The issue of adultery reminds us of the seventh commandment (Exod 20:14): “You shall not commit adultery.” The same Greek word family is used for “adulterers” in Hebrews 13:4.
- (5) To be content with what one has and not to covet money (Heb 13:5) may point to the tenth commandment which warns against coveting (Exod 20:17).
- (6) Believers have shown love toward God’s name (Heb 6:10) which points to the command to love God (Deut 6:5; Matt 22:37).
- (7) Believers need also to love the Christian brothers (Heb 13:1) which alludes to the command to love each other (John 13:34-35) and by extension one’s neighbor (Lev 19:18; Matt 22:39). What that means is clarified within the following verses: hospitality, care for prisoners, respect for marriage and no adultery, no coveting but contentedness. Some of these commandments have just been mentioned. This arrangement in Hebrews 13 suggests that the commandment to love summarizes other commandments including the Decalogue but does not abolish it.

Such a result is not surprising, because it is in agreement with what we find in other NT writings. The covenant is also mentioned in the Letter to the Romans. According to Romans 9:4 Israel had the covenants and the law. Rom 11:26-27 states that all Israel, Gentile and Jewish Christians, will be saved on the basis of the new covenant (Jer 31:33-34).<sup>80</sup> The law in Romans has already been discussed above, especially the Decalogue. The Ten Commandments are the law of liberty and the standard in the judgment process being observed by the new covenant community (Jam 2:10-13).

In sum, the new covenant assumes the validity of a law which, however, is written in the heart of the recipients of the covenant. This law cannot be the Mosaic law, because it did not accommodate

---

<sup>80</sup>Cf. Hans K. LaRondelle, “Israel in Biblical Prophecy,” *Ministry*, January 2007:20-21. He also stresses the continuity of the covenants by stating: “Gentiles have no other covenant with God than God’s covenant with Israel. Jesus made His new covenant with twelve Jewish believers. He based it on His self-sacrifice as the fulfillment of the sacrifices of the old covenant. Thus ‘Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant’ (Heb. 7:22, NIV). In Romans 11 Paul portrays the continuity of God’s covenants by a single olive tree for both Israel and the church” (20). He also stresses that “the decisive issue in God’s covenant with Israel is faith in Jesus as the righteous Messiah and representative of all humanity” (20).

the new sacrifice and priesthood although pointing to it. Allusions to the Ten Commandments as well as to the law to love God and neighbor with all one's heart, soul, and mind suggest that the author of Hebrews had in mind at least the Decalogue and its summary in the double commandment to love God and humanity when he referred to the law that is interiorized in the new covenant believers. This is in agreement with the picture that emerges in other NT writings. The new covenant does not make obsolete the Ten Commandments.

### **b. The Johannine Literature**

The term *nomos* is found in John's Gospel only, not in the letters, and not in Revelation. On the other hand, *entolē* occurs in the entire Johannine body. A thorough investigation of all terms has to wait for another study. What is remarkable is that the phrase "to keep the commandments" is found in the Gospel of John, the first letter, and the Apocalypse.<sup>81</sup> Schreiner observes:

R. E. Brown has remarked that there is a close connection between 'word' (*logos*) and 'commandment' (*entolē*) in Johannine writings. This is borne out by 1 John 2:3-6 where knowing God is described in terms of keeping 'his commandments' (1 Jn 2:3-4) and also as 'keeping his word' (1 Jn 2:5; cf. 2:7). The 'commandments' and the 'word' probably harken back to the 'ten words' (Ex 34:28) Moses inscribed upon the stone tablets.<sup>82</sup>

In Revelation the remnant/saints keep the commandments (Rev 12:17;14:12). The context seems to suggest that these are the Ten Commandments. The short introductory scene (Rev 11:19) to the central vision of Revelation (Rev 12-14) mentions the ark of the covenant, which among other things reminds of the Decalogue contained in it. The issue of true and false worship running through chapter 13 refers to the first two of the Ten Commandments (Rev 13:4,8,12,14,15; 14:7). Blasphemy points to the third commandment (Rev 13:6). The messages of the three angels in Rev 14 concludes with the saints who have the faith of/in Jesus and keep the commandments. They begin with an

---

<sup>81</sup>John 14:15; 15:10,10; 1John 2:3,4; 3:22; 5:3,3; Rev 12:17, 14:12.

<sup>82</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, "Law," *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, edited by Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 646.

allusion to the fourth commandment.<sup>83</sup> The sixth commandment may be referred to in Rev 12:4,15. The faithful believers depend on the blood of Jesus (Rev 12:11), cling to him by faith (Rev 13:10; 14:12), and keep God's commandments. Salvation as a gift from God which is accepted by the individual (Rev 5:9; 7:14; 22:14,17) and keeping God's law is not seen as something incompatible by John or the other authors of the NT. On the contrary, the two belong together, although obedience does not save.

### III. The Relation Between Gospel and Law

Strecker is undoubtedly correct in his observation that

The distinction between law and gospel that became prominent in Reformation theology was unknown to the apostle Paul. When the apostle speaks of the εὐαγγέλιον, he thinks of the proclamation of the Christ event but not the juxtaposition of law/gospel or gospel/law. So also for Paul the concept of νόμος is not made more precise by making it an alternative to gospel.<sup>84</sup>

“What is commonly overlooked and little understood in this present conflict between law and grace is that the issue is not between these two principles, as such, but between the abuse of the law, on the one hand and grace on the other.”<sup>85</sup> What then is the function of the law?<sup>86</sup>

- (1) The nature of God's law is love. It is designed to guide humanity the right way, foster good relationships with God and each other, and allow for a harmonious and fulfilled life. It is the law of liberty keeping humans from demonic enslavement. Christians keep it, because they love God.
- (2) In the case sin occurs a secondary function of the law becomes evident. Now the law points out human's sinfulness, brokenness, and alienation from God. It condemns the sinner. Like a mirror it shows humans their ugliness in view of a holy God. But the law cannot help or save. It creates the longing and desire for something better. Yet even this second function has

---

<sup>83</sup>Heaven, earth, and sea is the language of the Sabbath commandment. Either Rev 14:7 refers back to Exod 20:11 directly or via Acts 4:24.

<sup>84</sup>Strecker, 140.

<sup>85</sup>*Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*, 123.

<sup>86</sup>Rodriguez, 19, talks about a theological function of the law, a political function, and a didactic function.

positive aspects, because sinners may realize that they are dependent on help by a power greater than they are and that they need salvation.

- (3) Thus, the law leads sinners to Jesus, who saves them. It has been said that “Mount Calvary is only for those who have been to Mount Sinai.”<sup>87</sup> Those who are willing to face reality and be shocked by the abysses in their life, will quite likely desire salvation.
- (4) Finally, those who are by the law led to Jesus as their Savior and Lord, will be led by Jesus to a life of obedience. This life of love and obedience is a sign of gratitude for salvation already received (Ps 119:70; Jer 31:33; Heb 10:16,17).

Rightly understood law and gospel belong together. Matthew Simpson has said: “The law without Gospel is dark and hopeless; the Gospel without the law is inefficient and powerless.”<sup>88</sup> And John Mackay observed: “Apart from the Law, the Gospel cannot be understood or be more than mere sentimentalism. Apart from the Gospel the Law cannot escape becoming pure moralism.”<sup>89</sup> Law and Gospel should not be treated as contrasts. The problem is not God’s law. The problem is the abuse of God’s gifts by sinful humanity.

---

<sup>87</sup>Peter H. Eldersveld, *Of Law and Love* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954), 83–85.

<sup>88</sup>Matthew Simpson, *Lectures on Preaching* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1906), Lecture 4, 129.

<sup>89</sup>John A. Mackay, *The Presbyterian Way of Life*, (Englewood Cliffs Prentice-Hall, 1960) 153.