

Appendix

Grace and law in Paul and Rabbinic Judaism

Recent scholarship has thrown a flood of new light on the subject of the relationship between grace and law in Paul and Tannaitic Judaism, highlighting the danger of reading back into Paul certain Western understandings of law and religious experience. Two articles in the Harvard Theological Review have been significant in this debate.

(1) The first is the now famous article of Krister Stendahl, entitled The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West (Vol 56 (1963) pp 199-215. His thesis is that Western theology has too often used the conversion experience of an Augustine or a Luther as a paradigm for interpreting Paul. We think of the early Luther's struggle with his conscience, in the framework of the mediaeval penitential system, desperately seeking peace by meritorious deeds and works righteousness, until he suddenly reads Paul's Romans and Galatians and discovers that grace is the answer to his guilt problem. But the mistake has been to universalise this experience and then read it back into Paul. The same mediaeval ordo salutis deeply influenced Puritan preaching and certain accompanying evangelical interpretations of conversion - the Puritan concept of "law work".

Coupled with this has been the tendency to lift the Apostle's words in Galatians 3:24 out of their context ("therefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ") and build our dogmatics and our preaching technique on it, so that the order is, first law and then grace, law giving us a guilty conscience, driving us to despair by its demands for works righteousness, until we find in grace the answer to our problem. This leads us not only to interpret Paul's conversion wrongly, but to lose sight of the priority of grace over law, for which Paul was so stoutly contending in that very chapter. God gave His promises of grace to Abraham; 430 years later at Sinai came the law not to annul the promises, not to impose subsequent conditions for grace, but to be the tutor to lead Israel to Christ.

(2) The other is an article by E. P. Sanders, also in the Harvard

2

Theological Review (Vol 66 (1973) pp 455-478) entitled Patterns of Religion in Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: a holistic method of comparison. He has more recently expanded the argument of this article in his authoritative book. Paul and Palestinian Judaism. His concern is not to examine individual concepts, but to compare and contrast the basic pattern of Judaism as a whole with the basic pattern of Paul's thought as a whole.

His thesis is that Rabbinic Judaism for all its variations, has a basic fivefold structure. (see diagram)

(1) First and foremost, Judaism is a religion of grace

Its starting point is the election of Israel, that the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, who brought Israel out of Egypt, had chosen Israel to be His people. Deep in the election consciousness of Israel is the conviction that salvation ultimately depended on God's covenant promises, that God chose Israel "for His own sake".

(2) God spells out the obligations of grace in giving Israel commandments which require unconditional obedience. But obedience in Judaism "is not the means of salvation, but man's proper response to God within the covenant." The commands are absolute, apodictic, categorical, spelling out the implications of grace. But this stress on Law is not legalism. Such fundamental law, enshrined in the covenant, is not the Western "law of contract". Rather, says Sanders, "The gift precedes the demand: but the demand comes in the form of commandments, which must be kept both in law and in spirit. Having redeemed Israel from Egypt, then God gave commandments, and the Israelites undertook to obey them."

(3) There are consequences of obedience and disobedience.

Because God is just, He punishes transgressions and rewards fulfilment. He gives each man his due. The covenant brings its obligations, promises and its warnings. It brings the promises of life and joy and blessedness, "if" Israel is obedient and faithful; it brings its curses and threats of death "if" they disobey - as in the long lists of blessings and curses in Deuteronomy chs. 27 and 28.

It is important to notice that, in this way, the word "IF", which abounds in these chapters in Deuteronomy and the Rabbinic comments on them, come (as in the diagram) in column (3), not in column (2). It

PAUL AND RABBINIC JUDAISM

<p>(1) <u>Election of Grace</u> (History-Covenant) Israel</p>	<p>(2) <u>Commandments</u> (Apodictic unconditional) * means of salvation * conditions of grace = Response</p>	<p>(3) <u>Consequences</u> (of obedience v disobedience) Promises Curses (life-death) "IF"</p>	<p>(4) <u>Repentance + Acts of Atonement</u> (<u>"TIP"</u>)</p>	<p>(5) <u>Forgiveness</u></p>
			<p><u>PAUL</u></p> <p>(4) <u>Jesus Christ</u> — } fulfils requirements (dikaiomata) submits to condemnation } for us (katakrimata) ("promises ... in Him" ("curse for us" atonement forgiveness fulfilment by life, death, resurrection (Baptised for us by Holy Spirit = <u>Christus pro nobis</u></p>	<p>(5) <u>"we"</u> faith repentance dying and rising with Christ (mortificatio + vivificatio) "no condemnation" "ingrafting into Israel" baptises us by Holy Spirit = <u>Christus in nobis</u></p>
			<p>→ <u>Holy Spirit</u> — union with Christ participation</p>	<p>→</p>
			<p> <u>Christus pro nobis</u></p>	<p> <u>Christus in nobis</u></p>
			<p> <u>PROPHET</u> (<u>"LAW"</u>)</p>	<p> <u>FULFILMENT</u> for us in us ("GOSPEL")</p>

is a "descriptive IF" - describing the consequences which follow from obedience and disobedience, not a "prescriptive IF," a prescription for grace. If the "IF" language was in column (2), then the covenant and grace would be conditional upon the fulfilling of law. But this would turn the covenant into a contract, confuse "law" with "legalism", and annul the promises (which is Paul's argument against the Judaisers in Galations ch.3). As Immanuel Kant saw, hypothetical imperatives are weaker than categorical imperatives. "Do I weaken the law" says Paul - by seeing it as spelling out the obligations of grace? "No, I strengthen it." Legalism weakens law, and legalism rises at the point where "descriptive IFs" are treated as prescriptions for grace.

Up to this point, in the interpretation of (1), (2) and (3), Paul and Judaism are at one, and Paul takes his stand squarely on Judaism and is proud to be a Jew (Rom. 3, 1-4; 9, 1-5; Phil 3, 4 ff.)

The point of division where Paul parts company with Judaism comes at (4) and (5). The fact is that we do all transgress the commandments of God and sin against God's grace and are "under the curse". But where do we go from there?

The Answer of Judaism

(4) The answer in Judaism, was that those who intended and desired to remain within the covenant, could do so, and find forgiveness (5), "if" (another "if") they performed acts of repentance and certain acts of atonement. "The Temple Sacrifices - especially the Day of Atonement - coupled with repentance were effective means by which the repentant sinner --- could find atonement with God. God always forgives the penitent."

This is what Sanders calls "covenantal nomism" - or what Paul calls "confidence in the flesh", that the penitent Jew could fulfil the requirements of the law and win forgiveness. It is analagous to what later Reformed theology would call "legal repentance". (Calvin Institutio III ch.3

(Unconditional Imperatives (love) : Descriptive IFs : Prescriptive IFs)

(1) Election of Grace (History-Covenant) Israel

(2) Commandments NOT means of salvation NOT conditions of Grace = Response Unconditional

(3) Consequences (of obedience + disobedience) Promises Curses "IF" = Descriptive IF

(4) Repentance + Acts of Atonement ("IF")

(5) Forgiveness

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Pharisees (conditional acceptance?)

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Jesus Christ fulfills law submits to condemnation: us (propitiation) Agape Love=fulfilment of law

Holy Spirit union with Christ participation koinonia abiding in Christ Agape

(5) P "no" Believe! Repent! love one another! Walk in light! Agape (Unconditional)

(6) P Consequences (of faith, (repentance, obedience, etc.) + of rejection) forgiveness } peace } life } fellowship, etc. } Agape } salvation }

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CASES - PROBLEMS (Jesus and how? question) e.g. Sarnan on Mount e.g. Woman taken in adultery e.g. How often forgive? "IF someone sin, - then give ..." "IF ..., then turn other cheek"

↑ ?
"Internal repentance" "IF" (penance) "merit" = Descriptive IF OR Penitition

= Prescriptive IF "IF" = Prescriptive IF

Prescription = Love! Forgive! Unconditionally

contritio } then forgiveness } confessio } (absolution) } satisfactio } "Merita" Sacrament of Penance (reconciliation)

CASE LAW - PROBLEMS Church discipline (Tertullian + How? question - Roman law) Problems of guilt and administration of forgiveness First and Second Repentance IF repentance

= Prescriptive IF (conditional acceptance?)

This is where Paul parts company with Tannaitic Judaism, and this is the significance of his conversion on the road to Damascus, for he finds in Christ at once a more radical understanding of grace, and at the same time a more radical understanding of sin, and consequently a distinctive soteriology.

The Answer of the Gospel

(4) Therefore, according to Paul, the road to fulfilment and the solution to human sin is not in anything we must do, but in what God has done for us in Christ.

Prior to his conversion, Paul (as Saul of Tarsus) put his confidence in the law, and was confident that by the appropriate acts of prescribed repentance and atonement, he could fulfil the requirements of grace as a true Son of Abraham. Indeed, in terms of this confidence ("in the flesh") he persecuted the Church of Jesus Christ. But his encounter with Christ puts a very radical question, not only over his own life, but over his whole understanding of Judaism - and he retires to the desert to think his way through it all. Likewise it raises for him the whole question of the relation of Gentile believers to Judaism and the law. He comes to see the inclusion of Gentile believers in the Christian Church, not as the negation of Judaism but as part of the authentic fulfilment of Judaism. Gentiles by faith in Christ are ingrafted into the stock of Israel to be with believing Jews the Israel of God.

What does he discover in Jesus Christ?

(a) That all are under the curse, be we Jews or Gentiles, and there is no way back which we can make, but in the love of God, Christ has been made a curse for us. (Gal. 3, 13 ff). The Gospel reveals that we are all under the judgments of God and the power of sin, and no one can achieve righteousness, fulfil God's requirements and escape the condemnation (katakrimata) of the law. But now Christ has borne that condemnation for us, and made expiation for us (Rom. 3,21 ff).

(b) In Christ, God's righteous purposes for Israel and all mankind have been fulfilled. If negatively, Christ has borne vicariously the condemnation of the law for us, positively by His life of perfect obedience, he has fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law (dikaionata) for us. (Rom. 8, 3; Gal. 4, 4; 1 Cor. 1. 30ff)

That is, sonship - fulfilment of God's purposes for Israel and all humankind - has been realised for us in the humanity of Christ. It is achieved, not by our act of keeping the law, not by our acts of repentance and atonement ("covenantal nomism" - "life in the flesh") but by Christ vicariously fulfilling the purposes of the law for us in our humanity. Christ is now our righteousness.

(c) "All the promises of God are Yes in Christ" (1 Cor 1, 20) We are complete in Christ. All Gods purposes for us are realised for us in Christ, and brought to fulfilment in Him, and we cannot add to it as though it was incomplete. All is sola gratia in Christo.

(5) What then do we have to do to find salvation? Fulfil conditions in order to receive grace? Add to it? Complete it? Do acts of repentance in order to win forgiveness? NO. We are summoned to believe in Christ, to participate through the Spirit in that sonship and communion with the Father which has been realised for us in the humanity of Christ. Salvation is sola fide. By faith alone we receive the spirit of sonship.

In the light of Christ Paul:-

(1) radicalises the concept of grace, seeing the election of Israel as fulfilled in Christ and through union with Christ by the Spirit, so that salvation and sonship are by grace alone.

(2) He radicalises the concept of sin, by seeing all mankind under the curse, under the judgment of the Cross.

(3) He radicalises repentance (though seldom using the word) by seeing it in terms of mortificatio and vivificatio - reckoning the old man dead that we might live to Christ, who is our life.

Repentance is a response to grace, not a condition of grace - what Calvin later calls "evangelical repentance" - the life of sanctification.

Clearly in all this we see the priority of grace over law, and that both grace and law (and the tertius usus legis) must be understood in terms of the Gospel (of promise and fulfilment)- in terms of the twin doctrines (a) that all is complete in Christ (Christus pro nobis) and (b) of union with Christ by the Spirit (Christus in nobis). The righteous requirements of the law and are fulfilled for us in Christ, and in us as we walk in the Spirit (Rom. 8, 3ff).

Also, law is not legalism. It spells out the unconditional obligations of grace. Legalism arises when two things happen, (a) when we assert the priority of law over grace and make grace conditional upon keeping the law, and (b) when we confuse apodictic law with case law, "descriptive IFs" with the "prescriptive IFs" of case law, and use case law as a paradigm for interpreting the unconditional obligations of grace. Our Lord refused to use the prescriptions of case law ("the Book of the Covenant" - e.f. "stone to death") in dealing with cases. Love is the fulfilling of the law.

The danger for us is that we too often read the concepts of Western case-law and jurisprudence into the Bible. Torah is translated by nomos in the New Testament, and by lex in Latin. But Torah and nomos are not the same as lex or ius - ius civile, ius gentium, ius naturale. Here we see the weakness of "federal theology" - the combination of ius naturale with foedus naturale in the concept of a foedus operum in Scholastic Calvinism. Biblical covenant is not Western contract. Law is not "law of contract".

Likewise in Paul, the real dialectic is not between law and grace, which are so often polarised in Western thought, but rather between two different roads to fulfilment - either by "life in the flesh" ("covenantal nomism"), or by "life in the spirit". This is important for a proper evaluation of the tertius usus legis, and our exegesis of Romans ch. 7.

The Grammar of love - not the grammar of contract

The significance of the above approach to the relation between Paul and Judaism, in seeing their common understanding of the pattern of

7

"grace, law, consequences" is seen when we consider the "grammar" of any loving relation, for example between husband and wife, father and child, brother and sister.

For example (1) I have made a covenant with my wife where we have bound ourselves unconditionally to one another in love. That is first and foremost. (2) Secondly, that covenant lays us unconditionally under the obligation to be faithful and loving and loyal, not to commit adultery, etc. (3) Thirdly, we can then go on to make certain statements about the consequences of being faithful or unfaithful. If we are loving faithful and dutiful to one another, we shall enter into all the promises and joys and blessings of a happy home but if I am unfaithful, etc., I shall wreck my home, trample underfoot my covenant, bring misery to my children and cut myself off from my wife. These are "descriptive" not "prescriptive IFs".

That three fold pattern is the grammar of ALL loving relationships, and that is the grammar of both the Old and the New Covenants. Indeed it is the grammar of all God's relationships with humankind in Creation and Redemption. Here again we see the fallacy of the concept of a "covenant of works" (foedus operum) as the major premiss of federal Calvinism, as well as the fallacy of any doctrine of "legal repentance" - in Roman or Protestant Theology. The God of the Bible is a Covenant God, not a contract God.

The Gospel is the Good News that God has made a Covenant of Grace for the world in Christ (sola gratia). This covenant summons us unconditionally to faith and repentance and a life of sonship and communion (sola fide). But there are consequences of believing or not believing, repenting or not repenting, confessing or not confessing. The "IFs" of Romans 10, 9 and 1 John 1,9 are "descriptive IFs" not "prescriptive IFs". That is the central insight of the Reformation in rejecting mediaeval notions of merit and penance - the merita poenitentiae.

But have we been adequately true to this in subsequent Reformed theology? How far are we still operating with Western notions of law - the Western ordo salutis? Is our God the Triune God of holy love, or is He the Stoic Lawgiver?