

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Irish Biblical Studies* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ibs-01.php

Has the Old Testament Law a Place in the Christian Life? A Response to Professor Westerholm.

Rev. Prof. C. E. B. Cranfield

Stephen Westerholm's *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters*¹ has had an exceptionally enthusiastic welcome, and is undoubtedly a very important book. Not surprisingly it has already proved influential, and it seems likely that it will have a widespread influence for a good many years to come. Because this is so, it is especially desirable that its argumentation should be subjected to adequate scrutiny. The purpose of this article is to examine just one chapter in detail, the one entitled 'The Law and Christian Behaviour' (Chapter X). This chapter is selected for examination because the question, to which it seeks to give a definitive answer, namely, whether or not the Old Testament law has a place in the Christian life, is, I believe, a matter of vital importance for the health and integrity of the Church.

I

Westerholm's contention is that Paul saw no continuing role for the law in the life of Christians. At the beginning of the chapter he argues that Paul would hardly have been charged with encouraging sin, as Rom 3.8; 6.1,15 imply that he was, had his position been simply either 'that the law's curse has been removed, though its precepts must be followed, or that the moral law stands, though the ritual law has been done away with' (p.199). The fact that such a charge could be laid against him with some plausibility must mean, Westerholm suggests, that he went farther than this and denied the Mosaic law any place in the Christian's life. But this argument lacks cogency. Paul's teaching on justification by faith would surely have been likely to be misunderstood as encouragement to sin, however much it was accompanied by exhortation to obey the commands of the law.

Westerholm goes on to try to establish five positions. The first is: 'That the ethical behaviour which Paul expects of believers

¹ Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1988.

corresponds in content to the moral demands of the Mosaic code cannot be used to argue the abiding validity of the law'. With regard to this, it must, I think, be admitted that the overlap in content between Paul's moral teaching and the moral demands of the Mosaic law does not in itself prove that Paul regarded the law as still authoritative for Christians; but it is thoroughly consistent with the assumption that he did.

The second position which Westerholm seeks to establish is that 'Paul's statements that Christians "fulfil" the law are... an inadequate base for arguing that Christians are obligated to adhere to its precepts' (p.199). He maintains that, when Paul speaks of Christians' fulfilling the law (he refers to Rom 8.4; 13.8-10 and Gal 5.14), he 'is describing, not prescribing, Christian behaviour' (p.201). According to Westerholm, what Paul is doing is not indicating the duty of Christians to try to fulfil the law, not setting before them an imperative, but making the claim that Christians do as a matter of fact fulfil the law. When he was describing 'a life lived in conformity with Christian principles', it was 'for polemical reasons, important for him to say that Christian behaviour is condemned by no law (Gal.5:23), that the love which is the hallmark of Christian conduct in fact fulfils the law (Gal 5.14; Rom 13.8-10)' (pp.201-202). On p.219 Westerholm can actually speak of this claim which he thinks Paul is making as 'one-upmanship' on Paul's part.

But the ἵνα in Rom 8.4 is surely extremely significant. Paul is indicating that one purpose of God's saving deed in Christ was that the law's δικαίωμα (I take the word here to mean 'righteous requirement') might be fulfilled in us by our walking not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. In v.9a Paul uses the indicative. A process of sanctification is indeed going on in every Christian, but the διὰ ἁμαρτίαν in v.10 would seem to imply that Christians are still sinners. We take it that the fulfilment spoken of in v.4 is only begun, not something completed. That the implication of this passage is therefore that Christians must strive ever to move in the direction of the law's righteous requirement's being fulfilled in their lives seems to me clear enough.

In Rom 13.8-10 Paul speaks about the *debitum immortale*, the debt of love which we can never be finished with discharging. The point of v.8b could be to state a reason for loving one another: to do so is to fulfil the law. More probably, I think, it is to be understood as explaining why the debt of love can never be fully discharged: it cannot be fully discharged, for, if there were people who really and truly and in the fullest sense loved their neighbours, they would have done what Paul in Rom 1.18-3.31 has shown to be altogether beyond the reach of Jews and Gentiles alike - they would have fulfilled the law. Paul goes on to indicate that the particular commandments of the 'second table' of the Decalogue are all summed up in the commandment of Lev 19.18, 'thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself', and to state that love is the fulfilling of the law. But, since Paul was apparently well aware that Christians can very easily persuade themselves that they are loving when they are not (note that twice in his surviving letters he uses the word ἀνυπόκριτος with reference to love - in Rom 12.9 and 2 Cor 6.6), it seems most unlikely that he would have countenanced the idea that Christians should forget the particular commandments and rely on the commandment of love as a sufficient guide. Is it not more likely that he recognised that, while Christians certainly need the summary to save them from missing the wood for the trees and from understanding the particular commandments in a rigid, literalistic, unimaginative or loveless way, they also need the particular commandments to save them from resting content with vague and often hypocritical sentiments, which - in ourselves and quite often in other people - we are all prone to mistake for Christian love?²

What has just been said with reference to Rom 13.8-10 may also serve as a comment on the third passage (Gal 5.14). But the fact that 'thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself', contained in both Rom 13.9 and Gal 5.14, is not a novel Christian insight but the law's own summary of its requirements with regard to human relations must not be forgotten. To deny that this is clear evidence that Paul saw the law as having a continuing validity for Christians

² Cf. C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* 2, Edinburgh, T&T Clark (5th imp. 1989), p.679.

strikes me as exceedingly perverse. Paul no doubt did believe that 'Christian love inevitably meets the standards set by the law' (p.202) - if by 'Christian love' is meant *perfect* Christian love. But did he think that such perfect love was anywhere to be seen in the church on earth? I find it impossible to believe that the man who wrote Rom 1.18-3.31 had a 'retrospective' (p.202) view, when he quoted Lev 19.18 (or, for that matter, the specific commandments also quoted in Rom 13.9), and thought he was describing the actual conduct of Christians, not setting before them the goal towards which they have to strive lifelong.

Again I am puzzled by p.203, on which Westerholm seems to be suggesting that Paul thought (note the bold 'undoubtedly' at the top of the page!) that Christians are like the 'accomplished' or 'consummate' musician who has advanced beyond the stage of having to submit to the discipline of the elementary rules of music and now "fulfils" the intention of the rules without always observing them' (p.203). He claims that 'In a similar way, Paul can only believe that a life directed by God's Holy Spirit more than adequately "fulfils" the requirements of the law, even though specific demands have not been "done" and commands that are perceived to serve a purpose no longer have been ignored' (p.203), and on p.205 he actually states that 'For Paul it is important to say that Christians "fulfil" the whole law, and thus to claim that their conduct (and theirs alone) fully satisfies 'the "real" purport of the law in its entirety...'. But is it conceivable that Paul, who was familiar with the law's own summary of its requirements, 'thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might' (Deut 6.5) and 'thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' (Lev 19.18), could have thought that he himself or any of his fellow Christians was in a position to claim that he 'more than adequately' fulfilled the law's requirements (p.203), satisfied them 'completely' (p.204), fulfilled 'the whole law' (p.205), or that his conduct 'fully' satisfied 'the "real" purport of the law in its entirety' (p.205)?

In this section Westerholm makes a lot of the distinction in usage which he sees between *πληροῦν* and *ποιεῖν*. This should, I think, be viewed with a considerable amount of caution. Would it

not anyway have been more illuminating to have made the point that Paul can use πληροῦν with νόμον (or equivalent), both to denote the perfect obedience to the law which only Jesus has actually accomplished, and also to denote those beginnings of being turned in the direction of obedience which believers make in the freedom the Holy Spirit gives them?

II

In the third section of the chapter Westerholm attempts to establish the third position listed on p.199 ('Paul consistently argues and assumes that Christians are no longer bound by the Mosaic code'). He claims at the start that 'the evidence that he [that is, Paul] believed Christians are free from the law is both explicit and abundant' (p.205). It will be necessary first to look at the evidence he brings forward and then to look at some things which he does not mention, which seem to point to a different conclusion.

Westerholm appeals first to Rom 6.14f and 1 Cor 9.20; but, as it should not be assumed that ὑπὸ νόμον is used in the same way in both passages, we may look first at the Romans passage together with Rom 7.1-6 to which Westerholm refers on pp.206-207. I have argued elsewhere³ that in Rom 6.14b ('for ye are not under law, but under grace') Paul is thinking not of the law generally but of the law as condemning sinners, so of the law's condemnation. There seem to me to be a number of grounds for thinking this. First, the contrast between 'under law' (or probably better 'under the law') and 'under grace' can be said to support this explanation, since 'under God's condemnation' is a natural opposite to 'under grace' (i.e., God's grace or undeserved favour). Secondly, an assurance that Christians have been freed from God's condemnation seems a more apposite support (note the 'for' at the beginning of v.14b) for the promise that sin shall no longer be lord over them than an assurance that they are altogether free from the law would be: confidence that one has been released from God's condemnation does indeed enable one to begin to resist sin's tyranny with courage and hopefulness. Thirdly, Rom 8.1 ('There is therefore now no condemnation to them

³ Op.cit. 1 (7th imp.1990), pp.319-20.

that are in Christ Jesus') is surely strong support for this interpretation of οὐ ... ὑπὸ νόμου in 6.14, since it indicates that the point of 7.1-6, the significance of which it draws out (ἄρα νῦν), 7.7-25 being parenthetic, is the Christian's freedom from the law's condemnation, not from the law generally, and 7.1-6 seems to be naturally understood as connecting with 6.14b.

With regard to 1 Cor 9.20, it seems to me that the context suggests that Paul is here indicating not that he is not under the law at all, that it no longer has any validity for him, but that he is not under it in the same way as he had once been and as the non-Christian Jews are under it. Paul certainly recognised that there are very significant differences between the relation of Christians to the law and the relations of non-Christian Jews to it. Some of these will be noticed in the course of this article. But one is particularly relevant here. Whereas for the non-Christian Jew the literal observance of the ceremonial law is still obligatory, the Christian who knows that the One, to whom all along the law was pointing, has come and has accomplished his saving work, no longer has to observe it literally. (The word 'literally' in the last sentence is important; for what is being suggested is not (*pace* Westerholm, eg. pp.200, 202, 203) that the ceremonial law has simply been abrogated and that the Christian should just ignore it, but that he should honour it by looking steadfastly in the direction in which it was all along pointing, and by believing in Christ as he and his work are witnessed to by it.) But not all Christians understood this, and there were painful tensions in the church. Some insisted that all Christians must, for example, be circumcised, and their demands Paul strongly opposed. But there were others, who, while not trying to compel their fellow Christians to follow their pattern, felt that, as far as they themselves were concerned, they could not with a clear conscience give up the observance of such requirements of the law as the distinction between clean and unclean foods, the avoidance of blood, the keeping of the Sabbath. Yet they were liable to give way to the social pressure of those of their fellow Christians, who were confident that they had this freedom, to the detriment of their own integrity. Paul recognised their vulnerability, and was sensitive to it, as can be seen in Rom 14.1-15.13. Paul seems also to have tried to avoid giving unnecessary offence to non-Christian

Jews, in connection with the ceremonial law. In view of what has just been said (perhaps also in view of the words $\mu\eta\ \acute{\omega}\nu\ \acute{\alpha}\nu\omicron\mu\omicron\varsigma\ \Theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon\ \acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\prime\ \acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\mu\omicron\varsigma\ \chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\upsilon$ in v.21), it would seem to be unwise to claim 1 Cor 9.20 as clear evidence that Paul thought the law as a whole was no longer valid for him.

On p.206 Westerholm claims that 'ye were made dead to the law through the body of Christ' in Rom 7.4 'clearly includes release from the law's demands'. But is this at all clear? Is it not more natural, in view of what Paul has said about Christians' dying with Christ in 6.1-11, and of what he had already said about the meaning of Christ's death in 3.21-26; 4.25; 5.6-11, 18-19, to take him to be referring to release from the law's condemnation through Christ's death for them?

With regard to Gal 2.17-19, the exegetical problems involved are complicated, and there is far from being agreement about the thread of Paul's argument. If one sees a close connection between vv.15-21 and vv.11-14, in which Paul has related his public dispute with Peter in Antioch, one might well be inclined to think that the death of the law referred to in v.19 has simply to do with observation of the ceremonial part of the law. The second and third clauses of vv.19 and 20 might perhaps suggest that it is rather death to the law's condemnation. That Paul means death to the law generally is maintained by many; but it seems to me that this passage, taken by itself, provides a very insecure basis for holding that Paul saw the law as having no longer any validity for him.

Westerholm goes on to appeal to Gal 3.19-4.5 as showing 'the temporal limitations on the law's validity' (p.207). That Paul did indeed believe that there is a sense in which 'the epoch of the law has passed' may be readily agreed. We can speak of 'Old Testament times' or 'the Old Testament epoch' as of a period that is over and past, without implying that the Old Testament is no longer authoritative scripture for the Christian church. With the accomplishment of Jesus Christ's work the epoch of the law's unique authority had indeed come to an end; but it does not follow that the law had ceased to have validity for those who believe in him. Commandments like 'thou shalt have none other gods before

me', 'thou shalt do no murder', 'thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour', 'thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself', did not cease to point the way to freedom and community and fulfilment, though they could now be more clearly recognised as God's fatherly guidance for his children. But Paul certainly thought that the relation of Christians to the law was very significantly different from that of non-Christian Jews to it.

Westerholm seems to say (p.208) that, if Paul accepts that observance of the ritual law was no longer binding on Christians, he cannot have regarded any part of the law as binding on them, because, if he had, he would have felt the need to 'provide his churches with detailed instructions as to which commands they were obligated to observe and which they were not' and 'there is no evidence that he made any such distinctions. On the contrary, it is clear that, for Paul, Torah was a unit' (p.208). But must not the distinction between ritual and moral have been clear for Paul? Is not Rom 7.7-25 illuminating in this connection? And Westerholm's argument from silence, from the absence of such detailed instructions as he refers to in the Pauline letters we possess, is surely precarious.

The further argument from 1 Cor 6.12ff. and 10.23ff that 'Both the slogan itself [$\pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\alpha$ (μοι) ἔξεστιν] and Paul's non-legal way of qualifying it clearly indicate that the Christian is not thought to be obligated to observe the demands of the law' (p.208) is scarcely cogent. Paul's quotation of the Corinthian libertines' slogan is not an unqualified endorsement of it, and the conclusion which Westerholm draws from the fact that Paul does not here appeal to any of the law's commands is by no means necessary. The specific commandments of the law are a guide for the gratitude of those who already know their indebtedness to God (cf. Exod 20.2; Deut 5.6); they are not themselves the ground of the believer's desire to obey them. The fact that Paul does not here adduce any commandments (in 1 Cor 6.20 - 'ye were bought with a price' - he appeals to what is more basic than God's commands), does not at all prove that he did not think that the law still had validity for Christians.

Westerholm's final argument in this section is that Paul sees Christians as having to 'discover' the will of God 'for themselves as their mind is "renewed" and they grow in insight' (he appeals to Rom 6.22; 12.2; Phil 1.9-10), instead of relying on the guidance of the law, and that this 'shows clearly that the will of God is no longer defined as an obligation to observe the law's statutes' (p.209). But, in answer to this, it may be said that use of the renewed mind and acceptance of the law's continuing validity are in no way incompatible; that Westerholm has already distorted the evidence by his treatment of the 'fulfilment' passages, Rom 8.4; 13.8-10; Gal 5.14; and that such language as he has used in the last-quoted sentence is liable to give a very false impression of the position of those Christians who do think that the law has a continuing validity for them, suggesting, as it does, a wooden observance of the law's letter rather than a free and joyful aiming at its intention.

Some things which seem to me to be positive support for the view that Paul believed that the law still has a place in the life of the Christian must now be mentioned. There is first the fact that he calls it God's law (Rom 7.22, 25; 8.7: cf. *pace* Westerholm, p.201, n.11) 1 Cor 7.19): this is surely important. Must we not assume, unless there is quite conclusive evidence to the contrary, that Paul, if he recognised that the law was God's, is likely to have seen it as still valid for Christians? Secondly, there is the striking affirmation in Rom 7.12 'So that the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and righteous, and good', to which Westerholm fails to pay the attention it deserves. I take it that Paul is affirming that both the law as a whole and its individual commandments are God's, that they are righteous both as directing human beings to try to act righteously and as manifesting God's own righteousness, and that they are intended to be beneficial to human beings. Is not this verse a very serious difficulty for those who maintain that Paul thought that the law no longer had any validity for Christians? Thirdly, his statement in Rom 7.14 that the law is 'spiritual' must be mentioned. It is surely an affirmation of its divine origin and by implication of its divine authority. Fourthly, Rom 7.14-25 as a whole must be mentioned; for, if those verses refer to the Christian life, as I am

still convinced that they do⁴, they would seem to be strong support for the view that Paul saw a continuing role for the law in the church. For in this passage the law is depicted as guiding the obedience of the new ego which God is creating (note especially v.25b). Fifthly, Rom 8.7 should be noted, since it seems to imply that those 'that are after the Spirit' should strive to be - and in some measure can be - 'subject to the law of God', in contrast with those whose life is characterised by 'the mind of the flesh'.

Sixthly, Paul's assertion in 1 Cor 7.19 that it is not circumcision or uncircumcision that matters 'but the keeping of the commandments of God' seems highly significant. Westerholm's contention (p.201, n.11) that by 'the commandments of God' Paul does not mean the commandments of the law, since 'the Mosaic law is not... in view in this chapter (the only "commandments" mentioned are Pauline and dominical; cf vv. 10, 17, 25, and the frequent Pauline imperatives)', is unconvincing. Would Paul really be likely to refer to his own or indeed dominical commandments as ἐντολαὶ θεοῦ? And, if the commandments of the law are meant, the use of the word τήρησις is significant. Does it not indicate that Paul was not under the illusion that Christians no longer need to try to obey the law? But a comparison of the parallel statements in Gal 5.6 and 6.15 is illuminating. For the πίστις δι' ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη of the former indicates something of what Paul understood to be involved in keeping the commandments of God, while the καινὴ κτίσις of the latter is a reminder that it is only as the Holy Spirit creates a new self in a human being that he or she is freed to begin to obey God's law.

Seventhly, there is the fact that the legislative elements of the Pentateuch were an integral part of what Paul knew and revered as Scripture. Westerholm, while accepting that Paul can use νόμος of the Pentateuch as a whole (e.g. in the phrase 'the law and the prophets' in Rom 3.21) and also of the Old Testament as a whole (e.g., in Rom 3.19; 1 Cor 14.21), insists that νόμος 'in Paul's writings frequently (indeed, most frequently) refers to the sum of

⁴ *pace* N.T.Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the law in Pauline theology*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1991, pp.196-225.

specific divine requirements given to Israel through Moses' (p.108). But while a verse like Gal 3.17, which refers to the four hundred and thirty years between the making of the covenant and the giving of the law, makes it clear that Paul was aware of the different senses νόμος could have, have we really any justification for supposing that he thought of the law in this narrowest sense as something which could now be separated from its context in Scripture and assigned a value inferior to that of the rest of the Pentateuch? But, if he did regard it as an integral part of Scripture, we shall not arrive at a genuine solution to the problem of Paul's view of the law (in Westerholm's narrowest sense of the term) until we try to understand it within, rather than outwith, the framework of his view of the nature and authority of the Old Testament scriptures as a whole.

What has been said above seems to me to suggest strongly that Westerholm was much too quick to conclude that, for Paul, the law no longer has validity for Christians.

III

I turn now to the fourth section of chapter X (headed 'The Letter and the Spirit')⁵. The position it seeks to maintain was indicated on p.199 thus: 'The mark of Christian ethics is life in the Spirit, an ethic which Paul explicitly contrasts with obligation to the law'. About the decisive importance of the Holy Spirit's part in the Christian life as Paul understood it there can, of course, be no doubt. It is the Holy Spirit who brings about the sanctification of believers. But it does not follow from this that Paul must have regarded 'walking in the Spirit' (so Westerholm, p.214) or walking by the Spirit (cf. Gal 5.16) as 'an ethical norm *replacing* the law' (p.214). Paul knew the painful truth that Christians, though indeed indwelt by God's Spirit, do not always walk by the Spirit but often resist him and walk according to their own fallen human nature. He knew that they can be poor judges of the relative values of the various spiritual gifts, esteeming the showy and exciting ones above

⁵ See also Westerholm's article "'Letter" and "Spirit": the foundation of Pauline *Ethics*', in *NTS* 30(1984), pp.229-48.

the more precious. He knew too that Christians are liable to be complacent, confident that they are rich, already reigning (1 Cor 4.8). In view of this I should need a lot of convincing that Paul could have thought of walking by the Spirit as an ethical norm replacing the law. Is not the Christian's experience of the Spirit something too individual, too liable to be mixed with the Christian's subjective thoughts, feelings and desires, to be a satisfactory ethical norm? The fact that Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians to learn 'not to go beyond the things which are written' (1 Cor 4.6) and the fact that he has left us clear evidence of his own deep and constant engagement with the Old Testament scriptures lead me to think it much more likely that he regarded the law and, along with it, the rest of the Old Testament and also the tradition of the ministry and teaching of Jesus as the proper norm and standard of Christian conduct, a standard open and common to all believers, something objective, and that he thought of the Holy Spirit as the one who enables Christians rightly to understand the scriptures and the Jesus tradition and sets them free to begin to obey.

In his discussion of the letter-Spirit antithesis (pp.209-213) he deals with Rom 2.27 (strangely, he ignores, apart from a footnote, 2.29, though it is in that verse and not in v.27 that γράμμα and πνεῦμα actually occur together); Rom 7.6 and 2 Cor 3.6. Throughout this discussion he persists in attributing to those scholars, who believe that the Old Testament law still has a validity for Christians, an inclination to take γράμμα in these passages to mean a misunderstanding or a perversion of the law. There is an element of truth in this, and yet it is misleading and has the effect of setting up a straw man which can then be demolished without trouble. For a simple equation, γράμμα = 'a misunderstanding or a perversion of the law' clearly will not do. Had Westerholm read the passage⁶ he quotes as representative of the view he is attacking and also its context more carefully, he might have recognised that its author was not suggesting quite so simplistic and unthought-through a solution as he supposes. Its author was, in fact, trying - however inadequately - to do justice both to the fact that οἶδαμεν .. ὅτι ὁ νόμος πνευματικός ἐστίν (Rom 7.14) makes it extremely

⁶ C.E.B.Cranfield, *op.cit.* 1, pp.339-40.

unlikely that Paul could intend a simple opposition between the Spirit and the law (so that a straight identification of γράμμα with the law is unsatisfactory) and also to the fact that γράμμα must indeed refer to the law itself. He therefore tried to suggest that, while γράμμα certainly refers to the law itself, it denotes the law itself as it is apart from that full and true effectiveness which it only possesses, when the Holy Spirit enables those who hear it truly to understand it in the light of Jesus Christ, and frees them to make a beginning of obeying it.

Westerholm, by contrast, understands Paul to use γράμμα to indicate the obligation on those under the law to obey it. So with reference to Rom 7.6 he says: 'serving God by the "letter" must refer to the *obligation* of those subject to the old covenant to carry out the concrete commands of the law of God' (p.212); and, with reference to those three texts, Rom 2.27; 7.6; and 2 Cor 3.6 he says: 'Paul means seriously that those who lived under the law were obligated to fulfil the "letter"; indeed, the purpose of the law could only be achieved if those who were under its yoke were bound to observe its terms... Now, however, the way of the "letter" (i.e., obedience to the law) has become, for believers, a thing of the past; service is now rendered "in the new life of the Spirit" (Rom 7.6)'(p.213).

But in reply to Westerholm it must be said that the contrast Paul has in mind is not a contrast between a life lived under the obligation to try to obey the law and a life in which that obligation has been replaced by the guidance of the Spirit, but rather a contrast between the life of those, who, though possessing the law, have not yet been enabled by the Holy Spirit rightly to understand it in the light of Christ, and the life of those whom the Holy Spirit has both enabled to understand the law aright in the light of Jesus Christ and also set free to make a beginning of trying to obey it with humble joy.

With regard to the last section of Chapter X (v. The Origin of Paul's View), it seems to me that the sentence, 'Furthermore, since the law's demands cannot be detached from its sanctions, deliverance from the law's curse inevitably means freedom from its

demands as well' (p.217f) is plainly fallacious. By what logic is it claimed that the law's demands cannot be detached from its sanctions? By what logic is it asserted that deliverance from the law's curse inevitably means freedom from its commands as well?

IV

In conclusion three brief observations may be made.

1. Westerholm seems inclined to assume that Paul must either have regarded the law as having no place in the Christian life or else have continued to find the will of God in it 'in the way he did as a Pharisee' (p.214). But surely *tertium datur!* We may conclude that he continued to find the will of God in it, but did so now in a new and distinctive Christian way. It is of the utmost importance that we do not underestimate the newness of the Christian's understanding of, and relation to, the law. He understands it in the light of Christ, in the light of his perfect obedience to it and of his clarification of its intention by his life and work and teaching. He has been freed from the illusion that he is able so well to fulfil it as to put God in his debt. He knows that, while it shows him the depth of his sinfulness, it no longer pronounces God's condemnation of him, since Christ has borne that condemnation for him. He no longer feels its commands simply as an obligation imposed on him from without, but is being set free by the Holy Spirit to desire wholeheartedly to try to obey and thereby to express his gratitude to God for his mercy and generosity. So he receives the law's commands as God's fatherly guidance for his children - not as a burden or an infringement of his liberty, but as the pointing out of the way to true freedom.

2. Westerholm seems to me to have failed to make any serious effort to understand the view of the law, which has been characteristic of, but by no means confined to, the Reformed churches and Reformed theology. It is noticeable that in his book Calvin gets not a single mention and Barth, I think, but half a line. The importance attached to the Decalogue in Christian education by such Reformed catechisms as the Geneva of 1541, the Heidelberg of 1563, the Westminster Larger and Shorter of 1648, is well

known⁷. And in this matter of the place of the law in the life of Christians the Church of England has stood alongside the Reformed churches, as may be seen from the fact that in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer (as also in the 1552 Prayer Book) the rehearsing of the Ten Commandments has its place in the order of the Lord's Supper (note the repeated response, 'Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law'), while both in Rite A and in Rite B of the Alternative Service Book of 1980 provision is made for either the Summary of the Law (itself, of course, including two quotations from the law) or the Ten Commandments to be read. The view that Paul saw the law as having a continuing role in the life of Christians deserves a more sympathetic and careful consideration than Westerholm has given it.

3. It is perhaps wise to add - though it should surely go without saying - that to argue that the Old Testament law has a continuing validity in the Christian church does not at all mean that one ignores the great diversity of the materials which make it up (to treat them as a homogeneous code would, of course, be absurd) or denies the need for properly rigorous critical and historical study of it. It is possible to recognise that the law, like every other part of the Old Testament and also of the New, is from beginning to end the words of men and at the same time to take it seriously as God's law⁸

C. E. B. Cranfield

⁷ An interesting recent example is J.M. Lochman, *Signposts to Freedom: The Ten Commandments and Christian ethics*, Belfast, Dublin, Ottawa, Christian Journals Ltd., 1981 (English translation by David Lewis of *Wegweisung der Freiheit: Abriss der Ethik in der Perspektive des Dekalogs*, Gütersloh, Gerd Mohn, 1979).

⁸ I tried to say something on the subject touched on in this paragraph in 'St. Paul and the Law', in *SJT* 17(1964) p.67: but this was omitted for the sake of brevity in my *ICC Romans 2* (cited above), p.861.