

Christ as the Τέλος of the Law: An Exegetical Study of Romans 9:30—10:4

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Abstract

Pauline Epistles have positive and negative statements about the Old Testament law. In some instances, Paul discusses the limitations of the law in light of the work of Christ on the cross (Rom 3:20, 28; 4:14). At other times, he suggests that the law is operative for the church (Rom 3:31; 7:7, 12). Many believers in Christ and students of the Bible often have challenges in interpreting and applying the Mosaic law, especially in light of the cross. Hence, this study investigates the distinctions that Christ establishes in the New Testament and proposes biblical ethical guides for Christians, using the grammatical-historical hermeneutical method. It gives attention to the literary and cultural contexts of the chosen passage. The author examined Paul's assertion that Christ is the τέλος of the law in Romans 9:30—10:4, with references to relevant Romans passages and other New Testament Scriptures. The study shows that Gentiles obtained God's righteousness by faith while Israel pursued the law for righteousness but did not attain it because their pursuit was by works. Emphatically, the divine gift of salvation is through faith and submission to God's righteousness. Therefore, Christ, being the goal, not the termination of the law, does not abolish the old covenant laws but fulfills it. The new covenant through the cross changed the administration of the Mosaic law as it applies to the believers in the New Testament. Hence, this study reinforces the conviction of modern Bible students that there is no contradiction in the New Testament Christology about the law if related passages are considered within their contexts. Christ is the τέλος of the law in the sense that he is its goal and substance. The research also reiterates that Christ is the theological center and the interpretive grid of the Bible.

Key Words: Christ, the Law, Righteousness, Τέλος, Jews, Gentiles, Christians, Romans

Introduction

There has been a debate over what is old about the Old Testament and what is new about the New Testament, especially in light of Paul's interpretation of the former.¹ According to Wright, this has raised worries of contradictions, inconsistencies, or even antinomianism in the Pauline corpus.² This study examines Romans 9:30–10:4 to resolve issues that the present author considers theological and ethical.³ This passage raises diverse interpretive nuances that divide biblical scholars along different theological systems.⁴ However, this study attempts to depict how Paul wants the Old Testament or Mosaic law to be read, interpreted, and applied. He asserts in 10:4 that Christ is the 'τέλος' of the law. How is Christ the τέλος of the law, and what implications do the nuances of τέλος have for Christians? In response, this study gives the distinctions Christ establishes for the believers through the cross and argues that there is no contradiction in Paul's teaching about Christ and the Law. The author reiterates that the distinctiveness of how Christians use the Bible for their ethical guidance should not provoke a negative attitude toward the Old, which is its foundation. The paper submits that Paul and other New Testament writers understood Jesus as the theological center of the Bible or the interpretative guide of the Old and New Testament.

¹ The thrust of the argument is on the full implications of "newness" and "oldness." For instance, is the "old covenant" a pejorative term or merely a temporal one? Does "new covenant" mean something radically new or merely "renewed?" See, Jason C Meyer, *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology*. (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing, 2009), 37.

² N. T Wright, *The Climax of the Law: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 137.

³ Other important Pauline passages that speak of Christians' relationship with the Law and Christ include: Romans 7–8:11, Galatians 3:10–14, 2 Corinthians 31–11, etc.

⁴ Meyer gives categories of theological systems (Theonomy, Covenant Theology, Progressive Covenantalism, Classic, Revised, and Progressive Dispensationalism) that can sharpen believers' understanding of the whole counsel of God. Some systems emphasize the similarities between the Mosaic law and New Testament ethics, while others focus on the differences between the two. The systems' view as to how much carryover between Israelites living under the old covenant and Christians under the new covenant is his focus. Nevertheless, there is more that the theological systems contribute to theology at large. Jason C. Meyer, "The Mosaic Law, Theological Systems, and the Glory of Christ." Pages 32–56 in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* (Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker, eds. Nashville: B & H Academic, 2016), 34–37.

Background Information

Historical Context

A brief historical understanding of the book of Romans is essential. The majority of scholars accept the Pauline authorship of Romans.⁵ Moreover, the present author is not an exception. Paul identifies himself as the author by name (1:1) and claims to be of the tribe of Benjamin (11:1; cf. Phil 3:5). The Romans–Acts agreements also attest to his authorship (Rom 16:3 and Acts 18:2–3, 19; Rom. 15:25–27 and Acts 19:21; 20:1–5). Like many scholars, this author believes that the converted Roman Jews on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10) initiated the Christian movement in Rome through their synagogues.⁶ Thus, Jewish and Gentile Christians were in Rome in the first century AD.⁷ This paper agrees with Talbert that some Gentile Christians probably followed the Jewish laws within the Roman churches while others were impatient with Judaism.⁸ Nevertheless, both the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome were the recipients of the epistle (Rom 1:7).

Possibly, Paul wrote Romans during his three months in Greece (2 Cor 13:1), around AD 57.⁹ His writing intentions centered on both his situation and that of the Romans. He informs them of his visit plans (15:24, 30–32) and to have them anticipate his coming. So, “he sent them a threefold request—to pray that his service in Jerusalem would be acceptable, to help him on his way to Spain, and to receive him during his stopover in Rome.”¹⁰ About the situation of the Roman Christians, Paul wanted to impart some spiritual gift to strengthen them (1:11–12; 15:15–16). According to Talbert, the spiritual gift was the gospel, which offered a basis for the unity of Gentile and Jewish Christians in Rome.¹¹ Thus, the gospel has the motive of reconciliation– to

⁵John Walvoord F. and Roy B. Zuck, ed. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* (Colorado Springs, David C Cook, 1984). 435. For argument supporting this view see: Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), 2; John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans. The Bible Speaks Today Series*. (Leicester, England Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1; and William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (T & T Clark, Edinburg, 1902), XIV.

⁶Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans: The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 1.

⁷Charles H. Talbert, *Romans: Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary* (Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2002), 6-7.

⁸Ibid., 9.

⁹Moo, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 2-3.

¹⁰John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Romans. The Bible Speaks Today Series* (Leicester, England Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 13.

¹¹Talbert, *Romans. Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary*, 12.

bridge the theological divides between the Jewish and Gentile Christians in the churches in Rome.

Literary Context

The book of Romans is complex because of its numerous literary genres.¹² It displays clear evidence of its epistolary nature in its opening (1:1–15) and closing (15:14–16:27); then, the striking feature of the argument is in 1:16–11:36, where the author does much to avoid being misunderstood. The questions and objections that often interrupt reveal Paul's rhetorical device and brilliance.¹³ Hence, Romans has rhetoric and deliberative speech elements as Paul used his inner logic to present local, doctrinal, and practical issues with universal significance. Romans 1:16–5:13 is most likely an extended argument. Talbert highlights the thought units– the hortatory section runs from 12:1–15:13. The doctrinal section covers 1:18–11:36 and consists of three parts. Chapters 9–11 are a unit. Chapters 1–8 fall into two units. The primary issue is where the break comes between the two parts. Some argue for chapters 1–4 and 5–8 as the two units. Others prefer chapters 1–5 and 6–8 over 1–4 and 5–8. Still, some contend that the break comes at the end of 5:11, yielding 1:18–5:11 and 5:12–8:39.¹⁴ Romans 9:30–10:4, however, falls within the doctrinal unit of chapters 1 to 9, the immediate context.

Romans 9:30–10:4 in the Contexts of Chapters 9-11 and the Themes of Romans

Paul addresses several themes in Romans. Stott opines that the prominent theme is the justification of guilty sinners by God's grace alone, in Christ alone, through faith alone, irrespective of either status or works. In addition, the book discusses the redefinition of the people of God, not based on descent or circumcision but faith in Jesus.¹⁵ Moo concurs with Stott that the Christology in Romans is central enough to unify Paul's emphases, noting that the salvation history therein signifies a structure that outlines what has occurred in Christ.¹⁶

Romans 9–11 is an integral part of the theme stated in 1:16–17. The gospel, which is the subject of 1:16–17, is the one defined in 1:1–4, an indication that the gospel of Christ has an Old

¹² Ibid., 13. The key question is: Is it a letter, a memorandum, a letter essay (written to specific readers and yet also intended to be read by others), epideictic (a genre in which the author celebrates common values with the readers), or a protreptic (a genre that attempts to instruct and persuade the readers)?

¹³ Craig S. Keener, *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary* (Cambridge; TheLutterworth Press, 2009), 2-3.

¹⁴ Talbert, *Romans*, 14.

¹⁵ Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 15.

¹⁶ Moo, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 25.

Testament foundation. Cranfield observes that the title ‘Christ’ and the statement of his relationship to David in the definition “mean that the gospel cannot be understood except with Israel.”¹⁷ Roman believers were concerned with the question of the proper interpretation of the Old Testament. The connectedness of chapters 9 —11 is a testimony to how 9:30–10:4 cannot be interpreted in isolation. It is directly related to the two questions that Wright opines are dominant in 9—11: the question of unbelieving Israel and the faithfulness of God to his covenant promises.¹⁸

Romans 9:30—10:4 contains two paragraphs (9:30–33 and 10:1–4) within a discourse unit, 9:30–10:21. The discourse unit gives an understanding of Israel’s plight; about Christ, who is the climax of salvation history. Israel is confused by the mystery of the gospel of Christ’s salvation. Romans 9:30—10:4 summarizes the situation discussed from 9:6b–29 with a definitive conclusion about the significance of Jesus’ cross. Gentiles, who were not a people, are now God’s people (9: 24–26), while Israel, with so many privileges, fails to act on her privileges and experience salvation in Christ. Paul explains that the situation is due to the sovereign determination of God and how humankind responds to the righteousness of God in Christ. Therefore, the exegetical study below reveals the responses of both Jews and Gentiles to the revelation of God’s righteousness in Christ.

Exegesis of Romans 9:30—10:4

Romans 9:30–33 in Greek

Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν; ὅτι ἔθνη τὰ μὴ διώκον τα δικαιосύνην κατέλαβεν δικαιосύνην, δικαιосύνην δὲ τὴν ἐκ πίστεως· **31** Ἰσραὴλ δὲ διώκων νόμον δικαιосύνης εἰς νόμον οὐκ ἔφθασεν. **32** διὰτί; ὅτι οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως ἀλλ’ ὡς ἐξ ἔργων· προσέκοψαν τῷ λίθῳ τοῦ προσκόμματος, **33** καθὼς γέγραπται, Ἰδοὺ τί θημι ἐν Σιών λίθον προσκόμματος καὶ πέτραν σκανδάλου, καὶ ὁ πιστεύων ἐπ’ αὐτῷ οὐ κατασχνθήσεται.¹⁹

Translation of Romans 9:30–33²⁰

What then shall we say? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained righteousness, that is, righteousness by faith; **31.** However, Israel, pursuing the law for

¹⁷C. E. B. Cranfield., *Romans: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids; MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985), 205.

¹⁸Wright, *The Letter to the Romans*, 265.

¹⁹Barbara Aland and Kurt Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th Edition, Stuttgart: Biblegesellschaft, 1993.

²⁰The English translation of Romans 9:30—10:4 is of the present author.

righteousness, has not attained it. **32.** Why? Because they pursue (the law) not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. **33.** As it is written, behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and the one who believes in him will not be ashamed.

Gentiles Obtained Righteousness By Faith (9:30)

The passage of study (Romans 9:30—10:4) shows the responses of both Jews and Gentiles to the revelation of God's righteousness. It leads us to Paul's definite conclusion about the significance of Jesus' cross. Paul introduces verse 30 with a rhetorical device, "what then shall we say?" (Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν;) to move to his following argument and the implication of his teaching in 9:6b–29. Verses 30b–32a deal with Gentile attainment of righteousness and the Israelites' stumbling. According to Westerholm, the ordinary meaning of δικαιοσύνη (righteousness) throughout the Scriptures "is what one ought to do" and "to declare" people "righteous." He cites the use of δικαιοσύνη in Matthew 5:6 to buttress the general use of the term—right conduct on the part of human beings.²¹ *The Concise Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament* corroborates this idea in describing δικαιοσύνη as "a state that is in accord with standards for acceptable or anticipated behavior."²² This general nuance of biblical righteousness is not the focus in 9:30—10:4 but the divine gift of justification. How, then, is righteousness the divine gift of justification?

The theme of "righteousness revealed" in the gospel (Rom 1:16–17) is explained in Romans 4:1–25. Paul illustrates God's righteousness through the gospel of God's justification by faith (3:21–26) and its Old Testament precedents (1:2; 3:21, 31). Likewise, Abraham's life and relationship with God illustrate justification by faith.²³ The emphasis on faith in Abraham's belief in God as the basis of his justification (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3) demonstrates that God's crediting of faith as righteousness is not a rewarding of merit but a free and undeserved decision of divine grace.²⁴ Since Abraham was saved by God's mercy and grace, not by his works, Paul shows in Romans 4 that justification by faith in God is the only way of salvation for all, from the

²¹ Stephen Westerholm, "The Righteousness of the Law and the Righteousness of Faith in Romans." *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible & Theology* 58 (3:2004): 253–64, Accessed on February 14, 2022. Doi:10.1177/002096430405800304, 254.

²² Frederick William Danker and Kathryn Krug, *The Concise Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament* (London: Oxford University of Press, 1996), 97.

²³ Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 69–70.

²⁴ Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary*, 213.

Old to the New Testament. Westerholm calls Romans 9:30—10:5 righteousness “extraordinary or righteousness by faith,” which means God offering salvation for the unrighteous as a grace gift (Rom 4:5, 5:6–10).²⁵ With this, Gentile Christians can access the rich spiritual heritage by faith in Jesus, just like the Old Testament people who, through faith, secured God’s righteousness.

Paul wants his readers to know that Gentiles’ attainment of a righteous status with God without having sought it is a profound example of the principle, he has enunciated in his previous argument. He teaches that to belong to God’s people “is not a matter of the person who wills or the person who runs, but of the God who shows mercy” (9:16). Stott opines that after the Gentiles heard the gospel of justification by faith, the Holy Spirit worked in them so much that they “laid hold” of God’s righteousness, almost with violence as the verb κατέλαβανω suggests.²⁶ So, the phrase δὲ τὴν ἐκ πίστεως points to the answer. It was by faith because ἐκ πίστεως (genitive of means). Human response is imperative to the call and revelation of God, but the leading source of such faith is in God’s merciful election (9:6). According to Paul, faith (1:16; 3:28–29; 10:11–13) is a response that any person, whether Jew or Gentile, to obtain God’s righteousness (Gal 2: 15–16).

Limitations of the Law in Attaining Righteousness (31–33)

Did Israel pursue the law while Gentiles pursued righteousness? Verse 31a states that Israel pursues νόμον δικαιοσύνης (the law for righteousness) instead of δικαιοσύνην, as stated in verse 30. Winston provides four common referents for νόμος: (1) law in general or as a principle, (2) Old Testament revelation, (3) legalism, and (4) the Mosaic law.²⁷ He agrees with Moo that νόμος in 9:30—10:4 is not referring to legalism. For νόμος as a ‘principle,’ it is considered a possibility that is not the most likely because to see δικαιοσύνης as an epexegetic genitive is to make righteousness bear the whole weight of the phrase. Paul earlier used νόμος followed by a definitive genitive (Rom 3:27; 7:23; 8:2), but only through a rhetorical contrast with the law of Moses, which is not the case here.²⁸ To see νόμος in the sense of the revelation of God’s will in

²⁵Westerholm, *The Righteousness of the Law and the Righteousness of Faith in Romans*, 262.

²⁶Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 194.

²⁷Richard Winston, “Christ the End of the Law: The Interpretation of Romans 10:4.” *Puritan Reformed Journal* , 7 (2:2015):18–41, Accessed on November 16, 2021, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db-a9h&AN=108526670&site=ehost-live>, 21.

²⁸Moo, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 622.

Romans 9:30—10:4 may not be plausible because, Moo rightly reasons, the language of “pursuing” and “attaining” is not suitable to describe Israel’s approach toward the revelatory aspects of the Old Testament.²⁹

This study concurs with the majority of scholars and, more importantly, the contextual evidence that νόμος in 9:30—10:4, as usually in Paul, refers to the Mosaic law. The referent νόμος does not change between 9:31 and 10:4. Winston continues that within the two occurrences, Paul discusses Israel’s attempt to obtain a right standing with God by the works of the law. He does not indicate any shift to other possible nuances of the law.³⁰ Therefore, there is a connection between the ‘law’ of 3:19-20, which is the Mosaic law, and that of 10:1–4. Both establish how the observance of the works of the Mosaic law cannot secure God’s righteousness. In this regard, all other general laws are subordinate to the Mosaic law. So, what was the purpose and relevance of the Mosaic law within Israel’s salvation history?

Lawton rightly points out that the law was not to be a hypothetical offer of salvation or perfection of life. However, God’s standard provided the scope within which Israel should operate after their redemption from Egypt.³¹ Given within the context of grace as the properties of God’s covenant with Israel, the law defined the nature of their services and relationship to the Lord (Ex 19, 20; Deut 7:12)³² as they developed into a community of God’s covenant people. The Mosaic covenant, therefore, connects God’s earlier covenant with Abraham. These covenants informed Israel’s identity, relationship, and privileges (Rom 3:1–2; 9:4–5). Wright argues that the blessings of the covenant have an all-inclusive goal but particular means Israel.³³ The Christological dimension of the blessing is multinational (Gen 12:3), but Israel did not understand the missional implication and the ethical responsibility of the covenants and law (Rom 10:2–3). Israel should not have been motivated to obey the law for justification but by love for God and themselves (Mat 22:43–40).

How, then, should the genitive δικαιοσύνης be understood? Given that righteousness is a right relationship with God, νόμον δικαιοσύνης would mean the law whose object is

²⁹ Ibid., 623.

³⁰ Winston, “Christ the End of the Law: The Interpretation of Romans 10:4,” 21.

³¹ Anne Lawton, “Christ, the End of the Law: A study of Romans 10:4-8” *Trinity Journal*, 3 (1974):14-30, Accessed on November 16, 2021,

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATKA0001275690&site=ehost-live>, 16.

³² Ibid., 16.

³³ Ibid., 22.

righteousness. Thus, an objective genitive “for righteousness” is fitting.³⁴ Romans 2:13 and 10:4 suggest that the law of Moses “promises” righteousness when its demands are fulfilled. Therefore, the Jews were not wrong in the object of their pursuit, which is righteousness, the same that the Gentiles obtained without having to pursue. Schreiner also asserts that “Israel was seeking the law for righteousness and a right relationship with God.”³⁵ Verses 32–33 show that Israel’s pursuit of the law by works instead of faith (εἰς νόμον οὐκ ἔφθασεν) is the reason for their nonattainment of God’s righteousness. It made them stumble on him, who is the righteousness of God, according to Paul’s quotation of the message of the prophet Isaiah (8:14–15 and 28:16), in verse 33.

Keener summarizes the background of the two passages as he explains how Isaiah 8:14 is referring to the Lord Almighty, whom Israel should fear (8:13). The context shows God himself would become their sanctuary, but Israel would stumble over this rock (8:14–15). In Isaiah 28:16, God decrees judgment on Israel (1–29), but lays in Zion a precious cornerstone, so that whoever trusted in him would not be ashamed (28:16)—i.e., would be kept through the judgment.³⁶ Moo suggests that since these same passages are quoted together in 1 Peter 2:6–8, likely, Christians had already combined them in a “stone testimonium” but he believes that the conflation is Paul’s work.³⁷ Elsewhere, Paul calls the proclamation of Christ crucified “a stumbling-block to Jews” (1 Cor 1:23) and an ‘offense of the cross’ (Gal 5:11). So, by replacing the middle of Isaiah 28:16 with a phrase from 8:14, Paul brings out the negative point about Israel’s fall to his main point in this context. At the same time, by including the reference to Isaiah 28:16, he lays the foundation for the positive exposition of Christ as a “stone” that he will develop in chapter 10.³⁸ So, Jesus is the λίθος; he applies to himself the prophecy of the stone that the builders rejected that has become the capstone (Psalm 118:22–23) in Mark 12:1–11. Christ, who they are supposed to trust but failed to, now is their stone of stumbling.

Israel stumbled over the stumbling stone (προσέκοψαν τῷ λίθῳ τοῦ προσκόμματος), which links their disbelief in Christ to pursuing the law by works. It indicates the inward meaning of Israel’s failure to come to grips with the law. It is not wrong to pursue the law, but it has to be by faith, for “those who pursued the law in faith would, therefore, believe in

³⁴ Holamn Christian Standard Bible also translates νόμον δικαιοσύνης as an objective genitive, “for righteousness.”

³⁵ Lawton, “Christ, the End of the Law: A Study of Romans 10:4–8”, 472.

³⁶ Keener, *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary*, 119.

³⁷ Moo, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 629–630.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 630.

Christ.”³⁹ The law pointed to Christ, and Israel should have responded to the claim of faith that God makes through the law. Those who put their trust in Christ (καὶ ὁ πιστεύων ἐπ’ αὐτῷ) will not be ashamed (οὐ καταισχυνθήσεται). No one can disregard Christ and attain righteousness by observing the law. That would be a misunderstanding of the purpose of the law. Faith in Christ is the basis of a believer’s righteousness.

Christ is the Righteousness of God (10:1–4)

Romans 10:1–4

Ἀδελφοί, ἡ μένε ὑδοκία τῆς ἐμῆς καρδίας καὶ ἡ δέησις πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν εἰς σωτηρίαν. 2 μαρτυρῶ γὰρ αὐτοῖς ὅτι ζήλον θεοῦ χουσιν, ἀλλ’ οὐ κατ’ ἐπίγνωσιν· 3 ἀγνοοῦντες γὰρ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην, καὶ τὴν ἰδίαν ζητοῦντες στήσαι, τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐχ ὑπετάγησαν· 4 τέλος γὰρ νόμου Χριστὸς εἰς δικαιοσύνην παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι.

Translation of Romans 10:1-4

Brethren, the desire of my heart and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. **2.** For, I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge. **3** For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to the righteousness of God **4.** For Christ is the goal of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Paul directs his desire and prayer to God (πρὸς τὸν θεὸν) for Israel’s salvation (10:1). In the Greek sentence, they (αὐτῶ) are not specified, but the NIV, KJV, NKJV, and NLT rightly insert the ‘Israelites’ to clarify who αὐτῶ references from the previous section. It brings to mind the similarities between 9:1–3 and 10:1. In both, Paul mentions his heart’s sorrow and anguish because of unbelieving Israel. The issue is about the salvation of Israel. Paul would not miss the opportunity to pray, for he knew that God had ordained prayer as a means to accomplish his purposes. Schreiner suggests that this prayer is based on the irrevocable promise that God would ultimately save Israel (11:26).⁴⁰ In verse 2, he acknowledges their continued zeal for God without knowledge (ζήλον θεοῦ ἔχουσιν, ἀλλ’ οὐκατ’ ἐπίγνωσιν). A zeal for God among the Israelites was an honorable tradition (Num 25:6–13; cf. Jub 30:4–20); however, it should be accompanied by knowledge (Prov 9:2).

³⁹Schreiner, *Romans Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 474.

⁴⁰Ibid., 476.

While commenting on Israel's κατ' ἐπίγνωσιν, Sanday and Headlam explain that the Jews were destitute, not of γνῶσις but of the higher disciplined knowledge of the true moral discernment by which they might learn the right way. They explain that ἐπίγνωσις means a higher and more perfect knowledge; that is, the knowledge of God.⁴¹ This suggests that the Jews knew God without full knowledge or discernment, for they would not have stumbled over Christ by seeking to gain righteousness based on works. They did not perceive true righteousness because they did not have faith.

In verse 3, Paul uses two participles to explain their imperfect The conjunction γὰρ introduces the two parallel participles ἀγνοοῦντες (being ignorant of) and ζητοῦντες (seeking) that can be read as causal participial verbs to the finite verb υπετάγησαν.⁴² Their ignorant of the righteousness of God and the seeking of their righteousness caused them not to submit to God's righteousness (τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐχ υπετάγησαν). So, the participles ἀγνοοῦντες and ζητοῦντες are simultaneous to the aorist passive indicative main verb, υπετάγησαν. The verb υπετάγησαν (submit) shows that the righteousness of God is an active force to which one must unpretentiously subject oneself.⁴³ The phrase τὴν ἰδίαν δικαιοσύνῃ (their righteousness) could mean "each of their" or self-righteousness, which would mean an attempt to establish an individual relationship with God based on merit – obedience to the law (9:32 and 10:5). It could also mean Israel's own or corporate righteousness.⁴⁴ The latter is not a creation of new righteousness but the preservation of their covenant membership and righteousness.⁴⁵ It suggests Israel's attempt to confine its relationship with God to the detriment of all other nations. This study considers Israel's corporate righteousness as a concern because of its misguided sense of national superiority. Paul reiterates the universal dimensions of God's righteousness (δικαιοσύνην θεοῦ) as against Israel's attempt to keep righteousness to themselves (10: 3–4b and 9–13). He declares that righteousness is available through the gospel to anyone who believes in Christ, first to the Jew, then to the Gentiles (1:16–17). Hence, neither a corporate nor an individual effort of obedience to the law for righteousness could obtain salvation for Israel. It is a gift of God's grace.

⁴¹ William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburg:T & T Clark, 1902), 283.

⁴² Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary*, 505.

⁴³ Moo, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 633.

⁴⁴ Schreiner, *Romans Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 477.

⁴⁵ E. Sanders, Dunn, B. Longenecker, Boers, Bechtler and , E Johnson are proponents of corporate righteousness.

Christ as the Τέλος (Goal) of the Law

The meaning of τέλος is a subject of debate because of its Christological implication. Primarily, it can be rendered as either “goal” or “end.”⁴⁶ It is found 41 times in the New Testament, out of which 13 occurrences are Pauline. Among these Pauline usages, τέλος is featured four times in Romans.⁴⁷ Based on contextual reasons, this study submits that τέλος in 10:4 is more of teleological nuance than temporal. In 10:4 it suggests “goal,” “purpose,” “aim,” or “object,” and it expresses continuity between the Old Testament and Christ. On the contrary, temporal use is related to time; and conveys the idea of “termination,” “cessation,” or “abrogation.” If applied to Romans 10:4, it expresses the idea of discontinuity between the law and Christ.⁴⁸

At the peak of Paul’s argument in verse 4, the noun τέλος is a predicate nominative, and it is used as a subject complement to Χριστός in a decisive way of stating the relation of Christ and the law. The phrase εἰς δικαιοσύνην is an adverbial accusative with a goal as the focus. The contextual and grammatical coherence of translating τέλος as a goal is thus supported by the New Testament uses of εἰς to introduce what becomes, in effect, purpose or result clauses about 25 times in the New Testament⁴⁹ and the illustration in 9:30–33⁵⁰ of why Israel failed to obtain righteousness. With this position, Paul would say that Christ is the goal, he fulfills or culminates the law, and thus there is righteousness for all who believe. Arguments for the temporal nuance of τέλος discourage any consideration of the larger Pauline context that submits that Paul makes a theological statement about the relationship between the gospel of Christ and law.⁵¹ Bechtler rightly posits that most occurrences of “τέλος in Pauline corpus never simply mean “termination,” and where termination is in view, it should be understood as a function of the primary sense of reaching the goal.⁵² Thus, this study concurs with Cranfield that Christ is the τέλος of the law in the sense that he is its goal and substance.⁵³

In essence, Paul argues that Israel misunderstood the law because it failed to recognize the actual meaning of the law. Christ fulfills the law; thus, the law should be understood in light of Christ. Had Israel known Christ was the goal of the law they were earnestly pursuing and the

⁴⁶ Danker and Kathryn, *The Concise Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 350.

⁴⁷ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/telos.html> . KJV Strong's Number, 5056.

⁴⁸ Moo, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 638-639.

⁴⁹ Moo, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 638.

⁵⁰ Schreiner, *Romans Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 478.

⁵¹ Winston, *Christ the End of the Law: The Interpretation of Romans 10:4*, 21, 4-5.

⁵² Bechtler, “Christ, the Τέλος of the Law: The Goal of Romans 10:4,” 301.

⁵³ Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary*, 261.

righteousness to which the law was calling them, they might have submitted to the righteousness through faith. In Mathew 5:17–19, Jesus’ mission was not to declare the laws and the prophets invalid but to fulfill it. Here, to fulfill is not simply about Jesus’ action in keeping the law. Rather, he fulfills the Old Testament in that they point to him, and he is their goal. Matthew records Jesus as saying, “For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John” (11:13), meaning that the Old Testament looked forward to a time of fulfillment that had dawned. The law is not God’s last word to his people (Heb 1:1–2), but it is provisional, looking forward to its goal– a time of fulfillment through Christ.⁵⁴

Application

It is important to note that Romans chapter 9, which begins with God’s purpose of election (6–29), concludes by attributing Israel’s failure to obtain God’s righteousness to their pride (30–33). Verses 6 to 29 discuss the sovereign election of God, while verses 30–33 explain Israel’s unbelief. The unsuccessful attempt of the people of Israel to merit God’s righteousness is contrasted with the Gentiles who obtained God’s righteousness by faith. Israel’s inability to comprehend God’s purpose in giving them the law distorted their zeal for God. Christ is the goal of the law.

Israel should not have been motivated to obey the law for justification. It was wrong of them to try to come to terms with the law based on works– establishing a claim on God as their creditor. Obedience to the law should have been motivated by love for God and themselves (Matt 22:43–40). The law should have been understood as God’s standard that provides them the scope within which they should operate after their redemption. Israel should have accepted the righteous status God offered them as a free and undeserved gift. However, they failed to respond by faith. Cranfield puts this idea succinctly when he writes that “the law can never be properly understood and followed based on faith where there is an unwillingness to recognize and receive him who is the law’s inmost meaning.”

Further, the natural consequence of Christ being the goal and substance of the Old Testament law is that righteousness before God is available to everyone who believes in

⁵⁴ Frank E Geabelein, Ed. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Vol. 8: Mathew, Luke, and Mark*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 141.

Christ.⁵⁵ Therefore, even though the leading source of faith is in God's merciful election (9:6), human response is imperative to the call and revelation of God. Whether Jew or Gentile, even today, the obtainment of God's righteousness is attainable by anyone when faith is applied in hearing the gospel of Christ (Gal 2: 15–16).

The Implication of the Study on God's Character

Though not very explicit, there is a defense of God's goodness, wisdom, justice, and faithfulness in the history of salvation that Paul brings to the fore. The attainment of righteousness by Gentiles, through faith, is part of God's purposeful redemptive plan. This divine plan became evident in the Scriptures through Abraham (Gen 12), whereby God declares to bless all nations through his seed (Gen 3:15). Jesus, the seed of Abraham, is the one through whom the promise became a reality (Rom 5:18–19). Mathew also starts his gospel, affirming Jesus the Messiah as the son of Abraham (1:1) and ends it with the missional command that would encompass all nations (28:19–20). The universal dimensions of God's righteousness in Christ against Israel's attempt to keep righteousness to themselves are thus reiterated in Romans 10: 1–4 and 9–13. Paul notes in verse 12 that “there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles– the same Lord is the Lord of all who richly blesses all who call on him.” In the gospel proclamation (Rom 3:21–31), God's just nature is displayed – he saves both groups based on faith.

That truth brings God's justice to the fore that the choice of the Jews does not suggest the rejection of the Gentiles. Paul's prayer in Romans 10:1 is quite exemplary for Christians in light of God's faithfulness to his promises, justice for all, and desire for the salvation of humanity (1 Tim. 2:4). The prayer demonstrates faith in God's power to save, Paul's responsibility to unbelieving Israel; and an instruction for the Gentiles to have the right attitude towards Israel. God is and will be faithful to his promises to them (Rom 11:26). Therefore, the church, too, should not miss the opportunity to grow in the knowledge of God and to pray always because prayer is a means through which God accomplishes his purposes.

Biblical Implications of the Study

There is a need for a balanced biblical theology of the law and Christ as the basis for believers' faith and practice. Deficient knowledge of God is not healthy for believers in Christ. For Christians, this includes not just an understanding of the New Testament but also the Old.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 72.

Goldingay and Chinworth are in line, opining that the way to walk according to the Spirit is to understand the Old Testament, without which we miss God's ideals and expectations for behavior.⁵⁶ Such a holistic view of biblical theology reinforces the progressive nature of the biblical revelation and the fact that there is no contradiction but distinctions in Pauline theology of the law and Christ. Thus, the authority of the Old Testament and the Mosaic law was not nullified, as some believers often carelessly comment. They remain the authoritative word of God, as Jesus and Paul confirm in Mathew 5:17–19 and 2 Timothy 3:16, respectively.

The era of fulfillment is in Christ, who the Old Testament Scriptures talk about, and who establishes the new covenant through his blood. What changes did the new covenant bring to the administration of the Mosaic law, especially its interpretation? The proper application of the Old Testament laws should see Christ as the interpretive framework of the Bible. Duvall and Hays echo this position when they assert that Bible interpreters must reinterpret the meaning of the law in light of Jesus' coming and the profound changes that the new covenant has brought.⁵⁷ So, in interpreting the Scriptures today, Bible students will do well to ask what has changed about every subject of the law, with Jesus being the goal of it. This will avoid an imbalanced understanding of God's redemptive plan and enhance a deeper understanding of God's will, which is essential for faith and practice.

Eschatological and Ethical Implication

Does Paul preach lawlessness if faith in Christ is the basis of believers' righteousness? The study submits that, having become righteous by the source of our righteousness— Christ, we should not neglect the *doing* of righteousness. Some emphasize being righteous but neglect *perfecting their righteousness*. It often leads to false security and loose living. Christians who eagerly await Christ's return are not lawless. Just as the Israelites should have understood the law as God's standard that provides them the scope within which they should operate, we also should know that the law of Christ provides Christians with God's standard for living.⁵⁸ However, there is a

⁵⁶ John Goldingay and Matt Chinworth, "De We Love God's Law? How the Old Testament Actually Clarifies the New Testament Ethics." *Christianity Today* 64 (4:2020): 64-69, Accessed on 9 March, 2022,

http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db-a9h&AN=ATLAi5I200522_60001156&site=ehost-live, 66.

⁵⁷ Scott J. Duvall and J. Daniel Hays. *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-on Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*. Third Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 450.

⁵⁸ Olufemi I Adeyemi. "The New Covenant Law and the Law of Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163 (Oct-Dec 2006): 438-52, Accessed on October 25, 2021. http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/its_fac_pubs/273, 452. In the new covenant, walking in the Spirit (Gal 16–26; 2 Cor. 3:6, 17) is the way of the justified. By obeying God's will in

need to take caution because if we emphasize *doing righteousness* at the expense of being righteous, it could also lead to self-righteousness, make believers judgmental, and become fault-finding.

Concerning righteousness, Anderson and Reitman assert that Romans 12—16 is Paul's template for how God's righteousness should "look" in how Christians treat each other.⁵⁹ Earlier, this paper has described the broad meaning of righteousness throughout the Scriptures as what one ought to do. The meaning of righteousness is essential since Jesus also used it in Matthew 5:6 to mean proper conduct on the part of human beings.⁶⁰ It is critical to note that God, having justified Abraham by faith, expected this righteousness from him when He commanded him to do righteousness and justice (Gen 18:17–19) as God's agent of blessing to the world. Therefore, Abraham's spiritual seed needs to be a blessing to the world through the gift of God's great righteousness in Christ. Abraham's commission "to do righteousness and justice" passes down to the Christians in the first century and beyond. Wright collaborates this when he describes God's instruction to Abraham in Genesis 18 as "a missional ethics and moral agenda."⁶¹

After the indicatives concerning believers' status in Christ in Romans chapters 1—11, chapters 12—16 instruct on the right relationships. God wants Christians to live righteously: to live right among and to other believers (12:3–16), to enemies (12:17–21), and the government (13:1–14). Paul stresses that love motivates believers to live righteously (14—15). Hence, the righteousness of God in Christians is the basis for their ability to obey God's commands. Believers are not just defined by what they are (righteous in Christ) but also by what they do. It is high time believers lived in the consciousness of this truth so that they can be blessings to their world.

Christological and Soteriological Implication of the Study

The New Testament writers understood Jesus as the theological center of the Old and New Testament. In Luke 24:25–27, Jesus explains how Moses and the Prophets wrote about in the

Christ's teaching and the New Testament imperatives, the church fulfills the law of Christ (Gal 6:2) as those under his covenant.

⁵⁹ David R. Anderson and James S. Reitman. *Portraits of Righteousness: Free Grace Sanctification in Romans 5–8* (Lynchburg, Liberty University Press, 2013), 392.

⁶⁰ Stephen Westerholm, 2004. "The Righteousness of the Law and the Righteousness of Faith in Romans." *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible & Theology*, 58 (3): 253-64. Accessed on February 14, 2022. Doi:10.1177/002096430405800304, 254.

⁶¹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's grand narrative* (Nottingham: Inter-varsity Press, 2006), 358.

Scriptures. While commenting on Luke 24:45–47, Van Pelt rightly remarks that Jesus sees himself as the “unifying principle”⁶² of the Old Testament, the climax, in whom all things hold together (Col 1:17). Jesus guarantees and mediates the new and greater covenant (Heb 7:22; 8:1–6).⁶³ Unlike the new covenant, the old covenant required animal sacrifices for sins and a high priest to offer the sacrifice to God. The animal sacrifices and the Old Testament levitical priesthood system were still insufficient to cleanse human iniquities. However, in the new covenant, Jesus Christ became the perfect and eternal sacrifice and the high priest from heaven (Rom 8: 34).

Jesus’ supremacy over all things involves every fact in the universe. In Colossians 1:19–20, the blessedness of Jesus cuts across all things in the universe. All things find and owe their existence, purpose, and significance to him: humanity, the world, history– no matter how disjointed it seems, can find meaning in Christ Jesus. Thus, to avoid the purpose of God’s plan through Christ in history is to prevent the possibility of letting Christ reign over all. It is, therefore, imperative for the ministers of the gospel in Africa to preach Christ as sufficient for believers’ righteousness and livelihood.

Conclusion

The study addressed issues concerning God’s righteousness and justification by faith to Jews and Gentiles. In 9:30–10:4, Paul states that Israel did not attain righteousness because they pursued it not by faith but by works. Although they were not utterly wrong to obey the Mosaic law, they should have responded by faith to the mercy of God like the Gentiles. Israel failed to comprehend God’s purpose in giving them the law. It was not to be an offer of salvation but God’s standard that taught them how to relate with God, themselves, and other nations after their redemption from Egypt. The proper way to have a relationship with God is by faith– to accept the righteous status which God gives through submission to God’s righteousness in Christ, who is the τέλος of the law. However, Israel’s zeal lacked God’s perfect knowledge, for they attempted to merit instead of submitting to God’s righteousness. The study argues that Christ is the τέλος of the law in the sense that he is its goal. Being its goal, Christ fulfills the law in that it

⁶² Miles V. Van Pelt, “Introduction.” Pages 23–42 in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised*. (M. V. Van Pelt, ed. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 26.

⁶³ Peter O’Brien, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids; MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), 255.

points to him. The law is not God's last word to his people (Heb 1:1–2) but is provisional; looking forward to fulfillment in Christ. Therefore, while Christ does not abolish the Mosaic law, he inaugurates a superior covenant through his blood and establishes certain discontinuities between the two covenants for the believers of the church–age.

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