CHAPTER FOUR

FROM PLETHT TO SOLUTION
IN ROMANS

Introduction

Paul's attitude toward the law in Romans is frequently considered less harsh than that in Galatians. It is said that Paul's thinking has matured,1 is presented in a more systematic way,2 or has become more moderate under the disapproval of his Jewish-Christian peers.3 Nonetheless, Paul's thinking about the law in Romans continues to be considered something almost entirely new, something constructed not on Jewish presuppositions but on the basis of Paul's christology. Either Paul's thinking about the law and sin is so profound4 or, in the view of a few, it is so inconsistent and banal,5 that it could only have been developed on the basis of his pre-determined notion that Jesus was messiah and the way to salvation. Thus, it is only because Paul thinks backwards, from his conviction that Christ brings salvation to the idea that the law can no longer save, that he can make such statements as Jews no more than Gentiles can keep the law (1:18-3:20), the law effects wrath (4:15), multiplies sin (5:20), is used by sin (7:5, 1-13), cannot be obeyed (3:1-20; 7:14-25), and is the wrong way to righteousness (9:30-10:8).

In this chapter I hope to show that, with a few exceptions, Paul's comments about the law in Romans are not motivated solely by his christology but are built upon the plight-solution framework which we examined in chapter two and found

1 Drane, Paul, pp. 135-36. Drane believes that in Romans Paul achieves a sensible synthesis of his teaching in Galatians and 1 Corinthians, a synthesis which brings him close to the ethical teaching of Jesus. See also C. H. Dodd, "The Mind of Paul: I" and "The Mind of Paul: II," pp. 80-81 and 122-24.
3 Hübner, Law, pp. 60-65.
5 Sanders, Law, passim, but for his position in nuce see pp. 144-148; Räisänen, Law, again passim, but see especially pp. 199-202 and 264-69.
in Galatians in chapter three. My method will be similar to that followed in chapter three. I will attempt to show first that Paul reserves an important place for the law within the eschatological situation which the gospel has introduced, and second that his negative statements about the law are largely claims that outside of Christ the law is impossible to obey and brings upon the sinner the curse of disobedience.

Paul's Positive References to the Law (8:4 and 13:8-10)

Rom. 8:4 and 13:8-10 have typically posed a problem for interpreters because they seem to stand in tension with the negative statements which Paul makes about the law elsewhere in the letter. On a simple reading of the text, the meaning of these passages is clear: those who walk in the Spirit rather than in the flesh fulfill the law (8:4), and believers should fulfill the decalogue (quotations from Exod. 20:13-17) by loving their neighbors (quotation from Lev. 19:18). Despite these lucid statements of the positive place of the law in the believer's existence, scholars have been quick to explain them away. Hans Hübner reads them as directives to fulfill the law in a different way from Judaism, to fulfill it, that is, without making it into an opportunity of boasting before God in one's achievements.6 C. E. B. Cranfield believes that Rom. 13:8-10, in view of its statement that the debt of love is never repaid, means that even the believer never fulfills the law.7 And Reimer Grönenmeyer argues the curious position that 8:4 refers to Christ's fulfillment of the just requirement of the law while 13:8 should read "he who loves has ended the law."8

It should be observed, however, that the subject under discussion when 8:4 appears in the text is not legalism or Christ's fulfillment of the law, but ethics. Thus, beginning with 6:1, Paul has been defending himself against charges of antinomianism and insisting on righteous behavior within the believing community. "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" he asks (6:1). "Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?" (6:15). His answer up to 8:4 is that by dying with Christ in baptism we have also died to sin (6:1-14), that as slaves of righteousness we are obedient to a certain "standard of teaching" (6:15-23, esp. v. 17),9 and that as those who have "died," we have been

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6 Law, pp. 113-124, 135.
7 Romans, 2:676. Rom. 8:4, according to Cranfield, 1:384, echoes Jer. 31:31-34 and Ezek. 11:19-20 and thus has in view the eschatological situation in which believers will fulfill the law.
9 Many scholars have questioned the authenticity of this verse. For a full bibliography see Käsemann, Romans, pp. 180-181. The classical statement of the case against the verse in German is found in Bulthmann, "Glossen im Römerbrief" in Exegetica: Aufsätze für Erforschung des Neuen Testaments, ed. Erich Dinkler (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1967), p. 283. The phrase