CHAPTER FIVE

PAUL, TORAH, AND JUDAISM IN GALATIANS AND ROMANS

This study began by posing the problem of Paul's intelligibility against the background of his Jewish heritage. How could the same Paul who considered Israel's gifts and call to be irrevocable say what he did about the Torah? The first chapter sought to impose some order on the various answers given to that question during the last century, and indicated the value of exploring another answer. Chapter two laid the groundwork for that answer, and chapters three and four tested it on the proving ground of the two epistles in which Paul is most concerned with the relationship between the law and Judaism. It remains, however, to summarize the argument of these chapters and to draw some conclusions.

A Summary of the Argument

In chapter one we saw that basically four answers had been given to the question of how far Paul's Jewish background influenced his teaching about the Torah. Three of these answers gave Paul's Jewish background an important place in the origins and understanding of his view of the law. Some said that Paul's teaching had refuted the chief doctrine of Jewish soteriology: works-righteousness (Windisch, Grundmann, Bläser); others believed that Paul knew nothing of the gentle religion of the rabbis but formulated his doctrine against the forbidding religion of the Jewish diaspora (Montefiore, Parkes, Schoeps); still others claimed that Paul had applied to the coming of Christ the supposed Jewish teaching that the law would cease or would be radically modified in the messianic age (Schweitzer, Schoeps, Davies). In time, however, these views began to crumble and a fourth view gained the ascendency, reaching its climax in the work of E. P. Sanders. This view, presently in the majority, maintains that Paul's attitude toward the law cannot be explained within the context of Judaism. Instead, it can only be comprehended on the basis of Paul's experience with Christ. It was this unique experience rather than any rational critique or logical application of ideas from his Jewish heritage which led him to say what he did about the law.

Chapter one concluded, however, by noting signs of restlessness with the christological position. Its principal spokesman, E. P. Sanders, has been criticized from several directions. Heikki Räisänen disagreed with Sanders over whether Paul falsely attributed to Judaism the belief that salvation came by
works; Hans Weder claimed that the disparities between Paul and Judaism catalogued by Sanders were unimportant to an appreciation of Paul; and James D. G. Dunn claimed that Sanders had left us with an enigmatic Paul who was divorced from his historical and cultural environment. In light of these criticisms it seemed appropriate to attempt again to interpret Paul's view of the law against his Jewish heritage, and to look especially at how the law figured in the eschatological expectations of both Judaism and Paul.

Chapter two, therefore, examined the Old Testament and certain writings of the second temple period and discovered within them that eschatological hope was frequently expressed in terms of God's intervention to rescue his people from sin. We looked first at the law, the prophets, and the writings and found that humanity was said to be caught in the plight of sin, that sin was defined in terms of disobedience to the law, and that hope was extended that at some point in the future God would rescue his people by providing them with the ability to obey his law. We then turned to the literature of the second temple period and found that there too, especially in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the human plight was defined in terms of disobedience to God's word and that the eschaton would be a period of obedience to the law by means of God's Spirit. Chapter two concluded that the plight-solution pattern, articulated with reference to disobedience and obedience to God's law, was current and even widespread within Judaism during the era in which Paul wrote.

Chapter three explored Paul's view of the law in Galatians and found that, although it has been considered his most "unjewish" and "antinomian" epistle, it nonetheless operates within the plight-solution pattern so common in the Jewish literature discussed in chapter two. Paul, we discovered, reserves a place for the law among the eschatological community of believers and claims that the eschatological Spirit enables believers to fulfill the law of love. His negative attitude toward those parts of the law which separate Jews from Gentiles (circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath keeping) does not threaten the place which he gives to the ethical commands of the law in the eschatological age, for in shifting the emphasis off those specifically Jewish commands he follows a common tendency within the literature of Diaspora Judaism. Finally, his negative statements about the place of the law in salvation history describe the law as something which cannot be obeyed without the power of the Spirit, and therefore as something which pronounces a curse upon disobedience; but they do not imply that the law has been abrogated simpliciter. Only the law's effect of defining sin and enclosing the sinner under sin along with the subsequent curse of the law has been abolished, not the law itself. Thus despite Paul's negative attitude toward circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath keeping, and despite his belief that the curse of the law upon sin has ended with the eschatological age, his thinking about the law in Galatians is best understood as a development of the plight-solution pattern described in chapter two. Paul claimed that people are subject to the plight of the law's curse upon sin in the present evil age unless they enter the eschatological community where the power of the Spirit enables believers to keep the law.