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Covenant and commandment

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NEW STUDIES IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY 33

Series editor: D. A. Carson

Covenant and commandment

WORKS, OBEDIENCE AND
FAITHFULNESS IN THE
CHRISTIAN LIFE

Bradley G. Green



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*For my students at
Union University*

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Series preface

New Studies in Biblical Theology is a series of monographs that address key issues in the discipline of biblical theology. Contributions to the series focus on one or more of three areas: (1) the nature and status of biblical theology, including its relations with other disciplines (e.g. historical theology, exegesis, systematic theology, historical criticism, narrative theology); (2) the articulation and exposition of the structure of thought of a particular biblical writer or corpus; and (3) the delineation of a biblical theme across all or part of the biblical corpora.

Above all, these monographs are creative attempts to help thinking Christians understand their Bibles better. The series aims simultaneously to instruct and to edify, to interact with the current literature, and to point the way ahead. In God's universe, mind and heart should not be divorced: in this series we will try not to separate what God has joined together. While the notes interact with the best of scholarly literature, the text is uncluttered with untransliterated Greek and Hebrew, and tries to avoid too much technical jargon. The volumes are written within the framework of confessional evangelicalism, but there is always an attempt at thoughtful engagement with the sweep of the relevant literature.

This volume is a slightly unusual contribution to NSBT. It neither works out the particular theology of a biblical book or corpus, nor traces a narrow theme right through the Bible. Instead, it tracks through the Bible from Adam and Eve to the new heaven and new earth – a rather large and multilayered theme – the place of good works, obedience and faithfulness in the believer's life. For the Christian, to know Jesus, to confess him as Lord, entails obeying him. But how does this reality relate to a plethora of complementary themes? Dr Green addresses this question by soundings in an impressive diversity of topics: for example, the promises of a new covenant in Jeremiah and Ezekiel that anticipate a Spirit-empowered obedience, various relationships between the old and new covenants, and above all the centrality of union with Christ in addressing the relationship

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between justification and transformation. Along the way Dr Green interacts with various writers in the Reformed tradition, and with some contemporary thinkers (e.g. Henri Blocher, N. T. Wright). The canvas on which he paints is large enough to draw in a wide range of readers, all of whom will find themselves stimulated to think about these issues more precisely, even if they choose to demur from this or that element in his argument.

D. A. Carson
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Author's preface

The key issue in this book – the place of works, obedience and faithfulness in the Christian life – has been of keen interest to me for many years. I am thankful for the opportunity I have had to work through these issues, and to try to make sense of some very thorny issues. I am also thankful to a number of places and people for the completion of this book.

Union University, where I teach theology, has been consistently supportive of my scholarship. The administration (David Dockery, Carla Sanderson, Gene Fant, Jim Patterson), my colleagues, our two wonderful assistants in the School of Theology and Missions (Christy Young and Marianna Dusenberry), and the Board of Trustees have helped in numerous ways. Thank you all. My former Dean, Greg Thornbury, was always a big encourager. Thanks, Greg. A number of persons read portions of the book, and I benefited immensely from the feedback. I am indebted to Desmond Alexander, Henri Blocher, Richard Gaffin, Simon Gathercole, Dave Gobbett, Graeme Goldsworthy, Scott Hafemann, Paul Helm, Gregg Hodge, Tony Lane, Peter Leithart, Bob Letham, Andy McGowan, Nick Needham, Matt Perman, Robert Sloan, Carl Trueman, Ray Van Neste and Steve Wellum. Mike Garrett was of immense help. He read the entire manuscript thoroughly, and brought it into conformity with the NSBT style. Thanks, Mike. Numerous conversations with Jonny Gibson have helped stimulate and clarify my thinking about biblical theology. Thank you also to my student assistants Brad Boswell, Dwight Davis, Andy Fortner, Ryan Linkous, Kelly Mikhailiuk and Eric Smith.

Phil Duce at Inter-Varsity Press has been very supportive and patient, and is a great editor. Thanks, Phil. It is a joy to have worked with D. A. Carson, who has shaped my thinking about biblical theology from very early in my studies. Thank you, Professor Don Carson. The copy editor, Eldo Barkhuizen, was outstanding. Thanks, Eldo. Significant portions of this book were written while at Tyndale House, Cambridge, England. Thanks to Peter Williams and all of the folks at Tyndale House for supporting biblical scholarship. My family,

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as always, have been very supportive. My wife, Dianne, and our three children – Caleb, Daniel and Victoria – are a constant source of encouragement and joy. Many thanks to my family.

Finally, I want to thank my students at Union University. You have been the recipients of the ideas in this book for a long time. It has been a joy to teach you, and I am thankful for you. This book is dedicated to you.

Bradley G. Green

Abbreviations

4QMMT	Halakhic Letter / Sectarian Manifesto (Dead Sea Scrolls)
ACCS	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
<i>BRev</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>
CCC	Crossway Classic Commentaries
EBC	The Expositor's Bible Commentary
ESV	English Standard Version
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JTIS	Journal of Theological Interpretation Supplements
NACSBT	New American Commentary Studies in Bible and Theology
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
<i>NIDNTT</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> , ed. C. Brown, 3 vols., Exeter: Paternoster, 1975, 1976, 1978
NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplements
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
<i>ProEccl</i>	<i>Pro ecclesia</i>
RCS	Reformation Commentary on Scripture
<i>SBET</i>	<i>Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology</i>
<i>Them</i>	<i>Themelios</i>
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries

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tr.	translation, translated by
<i>TrinJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>TynB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WEC	Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

Introduction

Among the heirs of the Protestant Reformation there has been an emphasis on salvation by grace in general and *sola fide* (by faith alone) in particular. These were proper biblical recoveries during the Reformation era. It was important for the church to recover the central truth that we are justified by *God*, that this is an act of God's grace, and that faith – apart from works – is the means by which we are justified. It is striking that evangelicals have had to 'fight' the battle of justification many times, and this issue continues to divide Protestants and Catholics today in intriguing ways. Related to the question of justification is a key issue in biblical interpretation and evangelical church life: the nature of works, obedience or faithfulness in the Christian life. While evangelicals can generally agree that one enters into a covenant relationship with the God of the Bible by grace (even *solely* by grace) apart from works, there is often much more disagreement over how to construe the nature of works, or obedience, *inside* this covenantal relationship. My argument is that in the new covenant, works are a God-elicited and *necessary* part of the life of the converted person, a constant theme in the New Testament (John 14:15, 21, 23; 15:10; Rom. 2:13–14; 11:22; 1 Cor. 15:2; Phil. 2:12–13; Heb. 3:6; 3:14; 4:14; 1 John 2:3–6; 3:24; 5:3; Rev. 12:17; 14:12). In short, 'works' are 'necessary' for salvation because part of the 'newness' of the new covenant is actual, grace-induced and grace-elicited obedience by true members of the new covenant. When the New Testament documents are read against Old Testament texts such as Jeremiah 31:31–34 and Ezekiel 36:22–29 (cf. Ezek. 11:19; 18:31), this obedience is seen as a promised component of the new covenant.

The heirs of the Reformation have struggled at times to affirm the *necessity* of obedience conceptually while simultaneously affirming passionately *sola fide*. As Berkouwer wrote, 'One who has pondered the far-reaching significance of the "sola-fide" doctrine – justification by faith alone – is immediately faced with the question of whether this cardinal concept does not make all further discussion

superfluous.¹ My contention is that indeed there are resources within Scripture that affirm both *sola fide* and the necessity of works, obedience and faithfulness.

Berkouwer's note, perhaps, rings true with those of us in evangelical churches. We are rightly concerned to affirm a central truth like *sola fide*, but have not always articulated what it means to live obedience-filled lives, and to see practical faithfulness as a part of what it means to be a Christian. I suspect that some of our difficulty arises from simply saying that Jesus paid it *all*, while also saying that *we* must do something. This is understandable, but it is unwise not to address this issue. Indeed, there are solid biblical grounds for affirming a biblical theology of grace-filled and grace-elicited works, obedience and faithfulness as essential components of membership in the new covenant – that is, of being a Christian.

It is important to be clear what is being argued and what is not being argued. All throughout the New Testament documents there is the expectation of actual obedience. This obedience is generally linked to 'faith' or to loving Jesus truly. It might be possible to argue that some of these texts should be read as *commanding* obedience, without necessarily meaning that obedience is possible. We might call this a (hyper, although truncated) 'Lutheran' reading. But it is very unlikely that all of the New Testament commands or expectations of real obedience can be read that way. One is simply begging the question to read *all* of the New Testament texts calling for obedience in such a manner.

Also, I am *not* arguing that these 'works' or acts of obedience are somehow autonomous. I argue, following Philippians 2:12–13, that *we* truly do act, work and obey, and that at the same time it is God who is truly, efficaciously and actually eliciting and bringing about this obedience. I will also argue that this power for obedience is – ultimately – something that flows from the cross, from the gospel itself (cf. Heb. 10:10, 14), and is linked to our union with Christ.

The New Testament teaches that members of the new covenant are marked by an actual obedience, a real internal change and holiness.²

¹ Berkouwer 1952: 17.

² I am indebted to David Peterson and his excellent work *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness* (1995). He argues persuasively that NT teaching on sanctification emphasizes what is sometimes called definitive, or positional, sanctification. While I agree that definitive or positional sanctification is often in mind when the NT deals with sanctification, I argue that a real and transformative change occurs in the new covenant believer. The believer demonstrates actual obedience. This real obedience is rooted in and flows from definitive sanctification.

INTRODUCTION

‘Works’ or ‘obedience’ appears to be expected in the new covenant. As John Owen writes:

there is another kind of sanctification and holiness, wherein this separation to God is not the first thing done or intended, but a consequent and effect thereof. This is real and internal, by the communicating of a principle of holiness unto our natures, attended with its exercise in acts and duties of holy obedience unto God. This is that which, in the first place, we inquire after.³

Similarly, as J. C. Ryle wrote, ‘Saving faith and real converting grace will always produce some conformity to the image of Jesus (Col. 3:10).’⁴ Martin Luther could write of the one who trusts Christ, ‘It is therefore impossible that sin should remain in him. This righteousness is primary; it is the basis, the cause, the source of all our own actual righteousness.’⁵ Luther continues, ‘the second kind of righteousness [real growth in holiness] is our proper righteousness, not because we alone work it, but because we work with that first and alien righteousness.’⁶ Indeed, ‘this [second kind of] righteousness is the product of the righteousness of the first type, actually its fruit and consequence’.⁷

There is a real and meaningful and necessary obedience – a changed life that includes *my* obedience – in the here and now. This is not a perfect obedience or perfect law-keeping, but it is *real* obedience, an obedience that (1) flows from the cross, (2) is a partial fulfilment of the promised blessings of the new covenant (e.g. from Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:26–27), and (3) is sovereignly and graciously elicited by the God of holy Scripture (e.g. Phil. 2:12–13).⁸

³ Owen 1965, 3: 370.

⁴ Ryle 2002: 132.

⁵ Luther 1962: 88.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.* 89. Luther elsewhere writes, ‘If we believe in Christ, we are considered absolutely just for His sake, in faith. Later, after the death of His flesh, in the other life, we shall attain perfect righteousness and have within us the absolute righteousness which we now have only by imputation through the merit of Christ’ (quoted in Piper 2002: 13). Luther says that after physical death, believers obtain ‘absolute righteousness’. He does not clarify whether there is any *real* and *meaningful* and *necessary* obedience in the life of the believer whose sins have been imputed to Christ, and to whom Christ’s perfect righteousness has been imputed.

⁸ Turretin (1997, 2: 702–705) asks the question, in his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ‘Are good works necessary for salvation?’ His answer: ‘we affirm’. They are not required in a meritorious sense, but are nonetheless necessary for salvation. Turretin writes, ‘Are they required as the means and way for possessing salvation? This we hold’ (702). Indeed, ‘Although the proposition concerning the necessity of good works to salvation’

The summary of my argument in this monograph is as follows.

Chapter 1 briefly surveys a number of New Testament passages where we see the centrality of works, obedience and faithfulness in the life of the Christian. I summarize these in several categories, which of course cannot help being somewhat artificial and imperfect.

In chapter 2 I attempt to do two things. First, I look at key Old Testament passages where a new covenant is foreshadowed and/or obedience from the heart is pictured as a coming reality. In particular, I turn to a number of Old Testament texts, primarily texts in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. We see the promise of a new covenant, and one of the features of this new covenant is the reality of Spirit-induced, efficaciously wrought heart-obedience. Secondly, I look at key New Testament texts that in some way affirm the reality of the new covenant and pick up on the Old Testament promises of a new covenant and the kinds of promises of obedience from the heart portrayed in the Old Testament.

What we see is that the New Testament writers recognize these same new covenant themes – that is, there is certainly something very *new* about the new covenant. And clearly, they see the new covenant as an existing reality during the first century. Interestingly, we see a number of passages and themes from the Old Testament, particularly from Jeremiah and Ezekiel, surfacing time and again in the New Testament.

In chapter 3 I broach some of the key biblical-theological issues a study like this must face. First, I raise the hermeneutical question of continuity and discontinuity across the canon – a question that can be dealt with meaningfully only over the course of the entire book. Secondly, I raise the perennial issue (at least for Protestants) of the law–gospel relationship, as well as the question of the salvation of

can certainly be misunderstood and misapplied, ‘it can be retained without danger if properly explained’ (702–703). Again, ‘although works may be said to contribute nothing to the acquisition of salvation, still they should be considered necessary to the obtaining of it, so that no one can be saved without them . . .’. Turretin is clear: ‘Although God by his special grace wishes these duties of man to be his blessings (which he carries out in them), still the believer does not cease to be bound to observe it, if he wishes to be a partaker of the blessings of the covenant’ (703). For Turretin, Christ frees us to obey him: ‘Christ, by freeing us from the curse and rigor of the law, still did not free us from the obligation to obedience, which is indispensable from the creature. Grace demands the same thing’ (704). Works are necessary to the obtaining of glory, ‘For since good works have the relation of the means to the end (Jn. 3:5, 16; Matt. 5:8); of the “way” to the goal (Eph. 2:10; Phil. 3:14); of the “sowing” to the harvest (Gal. 6:7, 8); of the “first fruits” to the mass (Rom. 8:23); of labor to the reward (Matt. 20:1); of the “contest” to the crown (2 Tim. 2:4; 4:8), everyone sees that there is the highest and an indispensable necessity of good works for obtaining glory. It is so great that it cannot be reached without them (Heb. 12:14; Rev. 21:27)’ (705).

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Old Testament saints. Thirdly, I raise the issue of how best to think of grace existing across the entire canon.

Chapter 4 takes up the issue of the relationship of the atonement to works, obedience and faithfulness. While it is imperative to think through the relationship of the atonement to the initiation or beginning of salvation, we *also* must think through the relationship of the atonement to the ongoing life of the Christian – an ongoing life that by necessity includes works, obedience and faithfulness.

Chapter 5 explores union with Christ, and its relationship to works, obedience and faithfulness. In particular, we are united to Christ by faith alone, apart from works, and because of this union Christ is being formed in us. So we should expect to see works, obedience and faithfulness in the life of the Christian.

Chapter 6 engages the thorny issue of judgment according to works. While justification is a past-tense reality for the Christian, there is also a future judgment according to works.

Chapter 7, the final and summative chapter, introduces several issues that have virtually begged for treatment throughout the book. In particular, I turn to the nature of the covenant in Eden, the believer's relationship to Adam and his transgression, and the relationship between Christ's obedience and our obedience.

Chapter One

The New Testament and the reality and necessity of works, obedience and faithfulness

Turning to the New Testament, it is an inescapable fact that works, obedience and faithfulness are central in the life of the believer. Indeed, in page after page of the New Testament we see that God expects his children to obey him. While it is impossible to treat in detail all the New Testament texts that deal with obedience, works or the transformation of the Christian, I outline fourteen key groups (explicated under the subheads that follow):

- | | |
|---|---|
| (1) Loving or knowing God is linked with obedience | John 14:15, 21, 23; 15:10; 1 John 2:3–6; 3:22, 24; 5:3; 2 John 6; Rev. 12:17; 14:12 |
| (2) The ‘conditional’ nature of our future salvation | Rom. 11:22; 1 Cor. 15:2; Heb. 3:6, 14; 4:14 |
| (3) Christians must ‘overcome’ if they are ultimately to be saved | Heb. 10:38–39; Rev. 2:7, 11; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7 |
| (4) The necessity of a great righteousness | Matt. 5:20 |
| (5) The requirement of the law being met ‘in us’ | Rom. 8:3–4 |
| (6) God will efficaciously work ‘in’ us, moving us to obey him | Phil. 2:12–13 |
| (7) The necessity of putting to death the old man, by the power of the Spirit | Rom. 8:13–14 |
| (8) ‘Faith’ and ‘obedience/works’ used as virtual synonyms | 2 Thesss. 1:8; 1 Peter 4:17; Rev. 12:17; 14:12; cf. 6:9 |

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- | | |
|---|---|
| (9) We are truly judged, or justified, by our works | Matt. 7:21, 25; Rom. 2:13; cf. Jas 1:22–25 |
| (10) The ‘obedience of faith’ | Rom. 1:5; 16:26; Acts 6:7 |
| (11) We were created and redeemed for good works | 2 Cor. 9:8; Eph. 2:10; Titus 2:14 (cf. 11–12) |
| (12) Faith working through love | Gal. 5:6 |
| (13) The law affirmed; the law of Christ | Rom. 13:9; 1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 5:14; 6:2 |
| (14) Persons do the works of their Father | John 8:39 |

Luther argues that the obedience of a Christian is ‘necessarily following’ justification.¹ Calvin can argue that faith alone unites us with Christ. Our good works or obedience as a Christian flows from this union. Calvin can also say, ‘Christ justifies no one whom he does not at the same time sanctify.’² Let us begin by looking at texts that appear to link loving or knowing God or Jesus with obedience. My goal in this first chapter is not to look in depth at all of these texts, but rather to illustrate that the importance of works, obedience and faithfulness runs throughout the New Testament. Certain key themes or passages will be treated in more detail in subsequent chapters.³

Loving or knowing God is linked with obedience

Loving or knowing God is linked (or synonymous with) obedience in a number of texts. Jesus says in John 14:15, ‘If you love me, you will keep my commandments.’ Likewise in John 14:21, 23:

‘Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him’ . . . Jesus answered him, ‘If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.’

¹ Luther, in public disputation with C. Cruciger, 1 June 1537; quoted in Rainbow 2005: 38.

² Calvin 1960: 3.3.1 (593); 3.6.3 (687); 3.16.1 (798); cf. 2.7.13 (361–362); 3.19.9 (840–842); 4.14.23 (1299–1300). All references from Rainbow 2005: 38.

³ In particular, the issue of a future judgment and the future aspect or component of justification will be treated in chapter 6.

John 15:10 speaks in similar terms of commandment-keeping as a *condition* for abiding in Christ's love: 'If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.' Similar teaching is found in 1 John 2:3–6:

And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

1 John 3:24 is similar: 'Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.' As is 1 John 5:3: 'For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome' (cf. 2 John 6).

A slightly different kind of text is found in Revelation 12:10–17. The 'accuser' has been 'conquered' by 'the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony'. In 12:17, this same dragon is enraged, and makes war against the woman's children, 'who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus'. Note that the keeping of commandments and holding to the testimony are spoken of, not necessarily as equals, but as in a symbiotic relationship. A similar usage is found in Revelation 14:12, which reads, 'Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.'⁴

In short, one common pattern in the New Testament is the link between loving or knowing Jesus and keeping his commands.

The 'conditional' nature of our future salvation

The New Testament texts that speak of *conditions* for retaining our salvation are of particular interest. A lot hinges on *how* one understands 'conditions'. We should not waltz into speaking of 'conditions', particularly in the light of the overarching story line of Scripture, and

⁴ Aune, commenting on the link between keeping the commandments and holding the testimony: 'This is in essence a definition of Christian faith, in which the traditional commands of God, understood from a Christian perspective, are seen as complementary rather than antithetical to the requirements of faith in (or faithfulness to) Jesus' (1998: 709).

how much depends on how one thinks about ‘conditions’ when speaking of salvation.

However, the apparent necessity of ‘conditions’ in the Christian life must be faced squarely. Jesus says in Matthew 10:22, ‘and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.’ In Romans 11:22, towards the end of Paul’s discussion of Israel and Gentiles in Romans 9 – 11, Paul writes, ‘Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.’ Because certain Jews were cut off through their disobedience, Paul warns his Gentile readers that they *too* must ‘continue in his kindness’. In short, continuing in the kindness of God is a condition for not being cut off.

Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 15:1–2, where Paul summarizes the nature of the gospel, he writes of ‘the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you – unless you believed in vain’. Here again, it is necessary for Christians to ‘hold fast to the word’ if they are truly to be saved.

Two key passages in Hebrews illustrate a similar reality. Hebrews 3:5–6 reads, ‘Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God’s house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.’ And Hebrews 3:14 reads, ‘For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.’

Both Hebrews passages seem to be getting at the same point: we must ‘hold fast’ (*kataschōmen*) our ‘confidence’ (3:6), or the ‘beginning of our assurance’ (3:14 NASB). This ‘holding fast’ is clearly a condition of remaining in the faith. It is something *necessary* and *essential* to the Christian life. Whatever it means to be saved by grace, to be justified by faith apart from works, we must include such passages in any sort of biblical understanding of salvation.

We should not miss a fascinating reality found in these passages in Hebrews. In both passages our present condition is (in some sense) contingent on a future reality. Thus, in Hebrews 3:6, we are indeed *now* God’s house *if* we hold fast our confidence and boasting in hope. In Hebrews 3:14 we *now* share in Christ *if* ‘indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end’. That is, we can be said to be God’s house (3:6) or to share in Christ (3:14) *in the present*, if *a future condition or reality comes to pass* – that is, if we hold fast our confidence and

boasting (3:6) or if we hold our confidence firm to the end (3:14). I will offer a more thorough explanation of how to think of such ‘conditions’ later in this book (particularly in chapter 4), but these two passages are intriguing, because our current status or relationship with God is *in some sense* bound up with future perseverance or faithfulness.⁵

In Hebrews 5:8–9 the author writes, ‘Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.’ We set aside for the present what it might mean for Jesus to have ‘learned obedience’ (5:8). However one makes sense of that, the author teaches that through his death (and resurrection?) Jesus was made ‘perfect’ (5:9). And this perfect priest is ‘the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him’. I draw attention to the obvious: Jesus is indeed the source of eternal salvation, but only *to those who obey him*. It is the burden of my argument to try to make sense of how best to construe the nature of such obedience.

Christians must ‘overcome’ if they are ultimately to be saved

Other New Testament passages speak of those who do, or must, ‘overcome’ (or ‘conquer’; the Greek is *nikaō*). This is a refrain seen repeatedly in Revelation. For example, in Revelation 2:7 we read, ‘To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.’ In Revelation 2:11 it reads, ‘The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.’ Revelation 2:17 reads, ‘To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna . . .’. Revelation 2:26 reads, ‘The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations . . .’. In Revelation 3:5 we read, ‘The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of

⁵ Bruce, commenting on Heb. 3:6: ‘The conditional sentences of this epistle are worthy of special attention’ (1997: 94). Chrysostom, Theodoret of Cyrus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, each commenting on Heb. 3:14, make reference – in slightly different ways – to union with Christ. According to Chrysostom, Christians have been made to ‘share in being’ (with the Son). Theodoret of Cyrus sees Christians as ‘joined to Christ the Lord’. Theodore of Mopsuestia speaks of how Christians have ‘become partakers in Christ’s “hypostasis” in that they have received a certain natural communion with him’ (quoted in Heen and Krey 2005: 57). The reality of union with Christ, or our unbreakable relationship with the Son, will feature significantly in the central thesis of my argument.

life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.’ Revelation 3:12 and 3:21 similarly speak of those who ‘conquer’. And Revelation 21:7 reads, ‘The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.’ All these texts witness to a key central truth: Christians must ‘overcome’. This is not optional, but is an essential component of new covenant life, the life of a Christian.⁶

It is worth noting in Revelation 2:7 that to the one who conquers, Jesus will ‘grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God’. The first couple were expelled from the garden, and hence from the freedom to eat of the tree of life (Gen. 3:23–24).⁷ But in the future, ‘the one who conquers’ will be given the freedom to eat of the tree of life. Commentators consistently link such ‘conquering’ with the cross of Christ. Hence Ladd, among others, writes that the victory being spoken of here ‘is a victory analogous to the victory won by Christ himself, even though it involved his death on the cross’.⁸ But it is *not* the case that the ‘one who conquers’ in Revelation 2:7 (and the ancillary passages) is simply Christ himself. Apparently, John has *Christians* in view, and it is necessary for such Christians to be ‘conquerors’. Such conquering is related to the gospel itself, and to the Christian’s relationship to Christ. That is, the Christian conquers by being bound up with Christ and what he has accomplished. Through faith alone the believer is united with Christ, and then a whole host of realities flow to the person who trusts Christ. It is only by seeing the believer’s close union with Christ that we can avoid seriously misconstruing what it means to be granted the freedom to eat of the tree of life (Rev. 2:7). ‘Our’ expulsion from the garden is rooted in the first Adam’s transgression, and ‘our’ future freedom to eat of the tree of life is bound up with the Second Adam’s obedience. Although those who ‘conquer’ are *themselves* given the freedom to eat of the tree of life, and although *they* must conquer, it is important to trace out – and affirm – the relationship that exists between Jesus’ conquering for us, and our eventual conquering. *The latter conquering*

⁶ Regarding John’s phrase ‘the one who conquers’, Caird says that the ‘Conqueror’ is ‘one who perseveres to the end in doing the will of Christ (ii. 26), whose victory is analogous to the victory of Christ (iii. 21) . . .’ (1966: 33). Similarly, Mounce writes that these ‘conquerors’ (Mounce: ‘overcomers’) are ‘those who have remained faithful to Christ to the very end. The victory they achieve is analogous to the victory of Christ on the cross’ (1977: 72).

⁷ Whether they were eating of the tree of life *before* the fall is a separate question, dealt with below.

⁸ Ladd 1972: 40–41. Cf. his footnote 21.

*occurs only because we are united to Christ through faith alone in an indissoluble union.*⁹ We will return to the key issue of union with Christ (in chapter 5).

The necessity of a great righteousness

I now briefly point to several scriptures that speak of Christians having a great righteousness, or verses that make our forgiveness of others a condition of future salvation. For example in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says he has not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it (Matt. 5:17). After affirming the importance of the law (however one squares this with other aspects of NT teaching), Jesus says, ‘For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven’ (Matt. 5:20). It is tempting to say, ‘We don’t *really* have to be righteous. It is speaking of *Christ’s* righteousness!’ But Jesus’ point may be much simpler – all those persons who claim the name of Christ must have a great righteousness. It is *not simply* Christ’s righteousness on our behalf that is in view (no matter how radically important Christ’s righteousness is!). At other points in this monograph it is argued that our growth in righteousness flows efficaciously from God’s grace, and is tied to our union with Christ. A simple appeal to ‘alien righteousness’ may cause us to gloss over an important component of the New Testament – *we must be righteous*. That is, when Jesus says that our righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, we have to do more than simply point to the righteousness of Christ. Leon Morris is certainly right: ‘those who have been touched by Jesus live on a new plane, a plane in which the keeping of God’s commandments is important’.¹⁰ Donald Hagner notes that ‘to belong to the kingdom means to follow Jesus’ teaching’.¹¹ This is certainly the case, and it is my burden to flesh out what this might look like. D. A. Carson contends that righteousness is indeed required, although Matthew does not attempt ‘to establish

⁹ Bauckham 1993: 212. Although Bauckham is making a somewhat different point, and does not speak of union with Christ, what I am arguing is not altogether different from his thesis. Following M. Black, he suggests that Revelation might be considered a type of ‘War Scroll’ of Christianity. While Black emphasized *Christ’s* role as the warrior, engaging in ‘holy war’ with ‘the sword of his mouth’, Bauckham wishes to emphasize *human participation* in this ‘holy war’. I would agree that the message of the ‘conquering’ texts suggests that *Christians themselves* are to conquer. Everything hinges on how we link the ‘conquering’ of Christians to the ‘conquering’ of their Lord.

¹⁰ Morris 1992: 111. While what Morris says is undoubtedly true, I wonder if he gets to the heart of the matter.

¹¹ Hagner 1993: 109.

how the righteousness is to be gained, developed, or empowered . . .'.¹² As has been argued, any righteousness that develops in the life of the Christian will always begin with the gospel – what has happened *outside* and *for* the believer. There is more to Matthew 5:20 than alien righteousness, as important as alien righteousness ultimately is.

Similarly, in Matthew 6:14–15 Jesus warns, 'For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.' Our future forgiveness is linked to our forgiveness of others. One might be tempted to gloss over such texts. Perhaps Jesus is using hyperbole to make a point, or he should be interpreted in a more straightforward manner: that part and parcel of the Christian life is to forgive others as Christ has forgiven us.

In short, both of these passages in Matthew appear to teach the necessity of obedience, or of righteousness. The second passage, Matthew 6:14–15, even seems to make our forgiveness of others a *condition* of our ultimate salvation – if we want the Father to forgive us, we must forgive others.

The requirement of the law being met 'in us'¹³

Romans 8:3–4 is treated in its own category due to its uniqueness. In Romans 8 Paul explains what it means to be under condemnation no longer (v. 1). In verses 3 and 4 he writes:

For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Now, in verse 4, we might want Paul to say that the requirement of the law has been met *for* us. But he does not say this. Paul says that God sent his son to die so that the requirement of the law might be met *in* us (*en hēmin*).¹⁴ As one looks across the New Testament, Jesus

¹² Carson 1984: 147.

¹³ Lloyd-Jones 1973: 303.

¹⁴ J. Murray, on Rom. 8:4: 'It is by the indwelling and direction of the Holy Spirit that the ordinance of the law comes to its fulfillment in the believer, and by the operations of grace there is no antinomy between the law as demanding and the Holy Spirit as energizing – "the law is spiritual" (7:14)' (1959: 284). Cf. Rosner 2013: 121–124.

has unquestionably done something *for* us, and one of those things is that Jesus has been obedient *for us*. In the context it seems clear that our actual obedience to God, our minds being set on the things of the Spirit (v. 5), our being subject to the law of God (v. 7), and so on, all flow from what Christ has done for us. In Romans 8:4, Paul clearly says that the requirements of God's law are met in us. It would appear that there is an *internal* and *transformational* change that takes place in the Christian – a change that flows from the gospel. And the crucial point is that the cross of Christ leads to an internal change in the Christian: the requirement of the law being met 'in' us.¹⁵

God will efficaciously work 'in' us, moving us to obey him

Philippians 2:12–13 serves as the linchpin for the argument of this book: 'Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.'

The key here is that God *commands* something. Without making the Pelagian or Erasmian error of assuming that 'ought' always implies 'can', it appears that there is no reason to assume that the imperative 'work out' is simply given in a hypothetical sense. Paul expects his listeners to 'work out' their salvation. While God expects his covenant people to 'work out' their salvation, this 'working out' is something that God 'wills and works' in us for his own good pleasure. That is, it is not that God gives a command and then sits back. Rather, he both gives the command and then efficaciously moves his new covenant people to keep the command – and this divine action in no way minimizes the importance of human action. This biblical teaching would ultimately inform Augustine's writing in *Confessions*: 'Lord, command what you will and grant what you command.'¹⁶ John Barclay is undoubtedly correct: 'Strikingly the divine work affects both the will and the action of believers: if even the will to act is attributed to God (whether as sole or as collaborative agent), the believers' agency is entangled with divine agency from the roots up.'¹⁷

A similar teaching is found in 1 Peter 1:5, which speaks of Christians 'who by God's power are being guarded through faith for

¹⁵ Cf. Schreiner 1998; Stuhlmacher 1994.

¹⁶ Augustine 1991: 202.

¹⁷ Barclay 2006: 140–157.

a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time', which leads to the 'salvation of your souls' (1 Peter 1:9).

The necessity of putting to death the old man, by the power of the Spirit

Romans 8:13–14, a particularly interesting passage, reads, 'For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.'

Notice the apparent *condition* of future salvation: if one is living according to the flesh, one will die (v. 13). However, if by the Spirit 'you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live'. This passage is central to John Owen's classic work *Mortification*. In the second half of verse 13 Paul's argument appears to be something like this:

1. Christians must put to death the deeds of the body.
2. This putting to death (which is a human action) is done *by* the Spirit.
3. If one *does* put to death the deeds of the body, one will live.

As J. I. Packer has argued, contra a 'let go and let God' attitude, Paul's position is that one must engage in 'putting to death' the deeds of the body.¹⁸ And whether we live or die appears predicated on whether or not we truly *do* put to death the deeds of the body. Now, we can either gloss over the imperative and conditional nature of this passage, if we are not sure how to square it with a theology of being saved by grace, or we might – as Owen does – argue that those in the new covenant truly *do* possess the Spirit, and hence *will* put to death the deeds of the body. Thus, if we are thinking canonically about the new covenant promises of Jeremiah and Ezekiel being inaugurated in the ministry of Jesus, then we should *expect* the Spirit-elicited and God-caused obedience, pictured in Romans 8:13 as 'putting to death the deeds of the body'.

'Faith' and 'obedience/works' used as virtual synonyms

Another set of passages are fascinating in that they seem to treat 'faith/belief' and 'obedience/works' as virtual synonyms. For example,

¹⁸ E.g. Packer 2003.

in Revelation 12:17: ‘Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.’

Note that to ‘keep the commandments of God’ and to ‘hold to the testimony of Jesus’ are treated as corollaries, if not outright equivalents. Similarly, in Revelation 14:12: ‘Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.’

Again, note how John, speaking of ‘the perseverance of the saints’, correlates those ‘who keep the commandments of God’ with those who keep ‘their faith in Jesus’. Again, keeping the commandments of God and keeping faith in Jesus are treated as corollaries, if not equivalents.

Similarly, in Revelation 6:9 John opens the fifth seal, and sees the souls of those who had been slain because of God’s word, ‘and for the witness [testimony] they had borne’. The witness/testimony is something *maintained* or *borne*.

In 2 Thessalonians 1:8 Paul speaks of God ‘inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus’. Again, to ‘know God’ and to ‘obey the gospel’ appear to be tight corollaries, if not equivalents.

Finally, it is worth noting that 1 Peter 4:17 does not simply speak of ‘believing’ the gospel – it is also something we must ‘obey’.

We are truly judged, or justified, by our works¹⁹

It seems clear that at least in *some* sense our destiny is linked to what we do in this life. While the devil may be in the details, I am unable to see how we can avoid such a simple thesis. It is clearly taught in the New Testament and cannot be glossed over. Paul teaches in Romans 2:13, ‘For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified [*dikaiōthēsontai*].’ Rather than a brief digression by Paul, or a picture of a hypothetical opponent, Paul is teaching that there will be a judgment, or a future aspect of justification, in which works play some part. As Tom Schreiner has written, ‘The need for good works to avert judgment is an integral part of Paul’s gospel.’²⁰

¹⁹ See Schreiner 1993a.

²⁰ Schreiner 2001: 470.

The questions of future judgment according to works and whether/how works relate to justification in some way are examined in chapter 6.

The ‘obedience of faith’

Another group of texts speak of the ‘obedience of faith’. The key passages are Romans 1:5 and 16:26. Romans 1:5 reads, ‘through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations’. Romans 16:26 reads, ‘but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith . . .’. The key exegetical issue is whether ‘obedience of faith’ (*hypakoēn pisteōs*) refers to an obedience that has its *source* in faith, or *is* faith. A similar wording is found in Acts 6:7, where Luke speaks of the spread of the gospel, and how many priests were becoming ‘obedient to the faith’ (*hypēkouon tē pistei*).

Douglas Moo has recently argued that the ‘obedience of faith’ should ultimately be seen in a twofold non-reductionist manner. The ‘obedience of faith’ is both the obedience that is faith, and the obedience that flows from faith.²¹ The meaning of ‘obedience of faith’ in Romans, then, may well provide a basis for seeing obedience in the new covenant as ‘obedience that flows from faith’.

We were created and redeemed for good works

A number of texts teach that God’s purpose in creating and/or redeeming us was that we might do good works. Thus Ephesians 2:10 says, ‘For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works [*ergois agathois*], which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.’

Similarly, Titus 2:14 speaks of Jesus, ‘who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works [*kalōn ergōn*]’.

In both of these passages good works/deeds are a part of God’s plan or purposes – we are created for good works in Ephesians 2:10, and are redeemed that we might be zealous for good works/deeds in Titus 2:14. Titus 2:11 is especially interesting because of the explicit

²¹ Moo 2007.

linking of the ‘grace of God’ to a changed life. Hence Paul writes that ‘the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people’; assuredly, this includes the atoning work of Christ, particularly given the mention of this in 2:13–14 (‘Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us’). And this grace has appeared, ‘bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age’ (v. 12). In short, as Paul sees it, ‘the grace of God’ (manifested in the atoning work of Christ – 2:14) trains us to live different lives than we lived before we were the beneficiaries of Christ’s atoning work.

Faith working through love

Galatians 5:6 is a key text that has resurfaced often in Protestant–Catholic polemics. Paul writes, ‘For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.’ This text is a staple of Roman Catholic polemics that articulate an understanding of ‘working faith’, often portrayed in contradistinction to Protestant understandings of the nature of faith. But evangelicals have no reason to be squeamish about Galatians 5:6. Throughout his writings Paul makes the point that in the new covenant what matters is having a circumcised heart, and that heart-obedience flows from a circumcised heart. In Romans 2:25–29, Paul can be understood to say that it is the true Jew (not quite, but almost Paul’s phraseology!) who obeys God’s commands, for the true Jew has a circumcised heart. When Paul in Galatians 5:6 speaks of faith working through love, he is simply stating what is common across the entire canon: biblical faith is a working faith.

The law affirmed; the law of Christ

Another general type of text in the New Testament affirms the law (even if transposed into a NT key). For example, Paul in Romans 13 makes recourse to the Ten Commandments in explicating the nature of Christian love. He refers to four of the Commandments *explicitly* (‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet’, v. 9), but then refers to ‘any other commandment’ and surmises that all such commandments are ‘summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself”’ (v. 9).

In writing to the troubled church at Corinth, Paul makes a rather stunning statement. He is encouraging the recipients to ‘lead the life

that the Lord has assigned' to them (1 Cor. 7:17). That is the key issue, for circumcision is simply not important in the new covenant era. Paul writes, 'For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commands of God' (1 Cor. 7:19).²² If we practice a certain kind of Protestant polemic, we may find it striking that Paul does not contrast physical circumcision and spiritual circumcision (which of course he does elsewhere), or contrast something *simply* found in the Old Testament and *particularly* found in the New Testament. But he does not do that. Rather, he here makes the point that what is *truly* important is keeping the commandments of God. So, however one construes the newness of the new covenant, and however one ultimately makes sense of the advance in the history of redemption in moving from old covenant to new covenant, it is clearly the case that keeping the commands of God is central across the entire canon.

Finally, among a number of similar passages, attention should be drawn to a couple of passages in Galatians and a related passage in Matthew. Paul, in speaking of true Christian freedom, tells the Galatians that freedom must be used in accord with Christian love. So, he writes, 'through love serve one another' (Gal. 5:13). He continues, 'For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself"' (Gal. 5:14). Paul of course is saying something remarkably similar to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 22. When Jesus is asked about the greatest command in the law, he answers that one must love God and neighbour (Matt. 22:36–39). Indeed, 'On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets' (Matt. 22:40).

In Galatians 6:2 Paul speaks of the 'law of Christ' (*ton nomon tou Christou*). This teaching is most assuredly along the lines of the passages in Galatians 5 and Matthew 22 just discussed. Paul commands the Galatians to 'bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ' (Gal. 6:2). Surely, such bearing of burdens is simply one way of loving one's neighbour? And it is in bearing another person's burdens that one is fulfilling the law of Christ. We find similar echoes in John 13:34, where Jesus gives a 'new commandment', which is 'that you love another'. Likewise, we read in 1 John 4:21, 'And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.'

²² Rosner 2013 (his book takes this verse as its subtitle).

Persons do the works of their Father

This passage could arguably be in one of the other categories, but it is so striking that it deserves separate mention here. I draw attention to a pattern seen in John 8. In a lengthy exchange with certain Jews, Jesus makes claims about the nature of works (sometimes directly, and sometimes indirectly). In John 8:31–32 Jesus teaches, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’ In the light of other passages in John (14:15–24 and 15:1–17, where abiding in Jesus, bearing fruit and keeping Jesus’ commandments are closely linked), abiding in Jesus’ words implies the necessity of works, obedience and faithfulness.

But things get particularly interesting in John 8:39–44. Jesus has just claimed that these Jews *do* what they have heard from their father (John 8:38). These Jews answer that *Abraham* is their father (John 8:39). Jesus responds, and this is the key, ‘If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did’ (John 8:39). Jesus’ continued indictment in John 8:41 is that these Jews ‘are doing the works your father did’. And then Jesus continues in John 8:42, ‘If God were your Father, you would love me.’ And then in John 8:44, ‘your will is to do your father’s desires’.

From Jesus’ cutting criticism of these Jews, at least two clear truths emerge. First, it appears that, as Jesus sees it, *persons do the works of their Father*, whoever that Father is. These Jews do the work of *their* father, whom Jesus claims is the Devil (John 8:44). According to Jesus, works are simply part and parcel of life. People will *always* do the works of their father. The *key* question is, who is our father? Secondly, we find here an allusion (at least) to a truth very clearly taught elsewhere in John. In John 8:42 Jesus teaches, ‘If God were your Father, you would love me.’ So, if (1) to have God as Father means one will do the works of God, and if (2) to have God as Father means one will love Jesus (taught in John 8:44), then it follows that to love Jesus is to do the works of the Father.

Excursus: works of the law

For some time, one of the most contested issues in Pauline studies has been how to understand the phrase ‘works of the law’ (*ergōn nomou*). This phrase occurs eight times in the New Testament:

COVENANT AND COMMANDMENT

Rom. 3:20: 'For by *works of the law* no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.'

Rom. 3:28: 'For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from *works of the law*.'

Gal. 2:15–16: 'We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by *works of the law* but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by *works of the law*, because by *works of the law* no one will be justified.'

Gal. 3:2: 'Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by *works of the law* or by hearing with faith?'

Gal. 3:5: 'Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by *works of the law*, or by hearing with faith?'

Gal. 3:10: 'For all who rely on *works of the law* are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."'

Tom Schreiner has outlined five ways scholars have interpreted this phrase.²³

²³ These five general positions as Schreiner (1993b: 975–976) lists them:

(1) *Nomistic Service*: identified with scholars such as E. Lohmeyer, where the emphasis is on 'the religious context in which the Law is kept'. J. B. Tyson emphasizes 'the condition of life under Torah, particularly the demand to observe food laws and to be circumcised'. Here, the reason the 'works of the law' are criticized is not because such works are too difficult, but because with the coming of Christ in the new covenant, we live in a different era in which such Jew–Gentile distinctions are no longer valid.

(2) *Jewish Nationalism*: J. D. G. Dunn sees the 'works of the law' as 'identity markers', such as circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath-keeping – for these separated Jews and Gentiles. The 'problem was with Jewish *nationalism* and *particularism*, not with *legalism* or *activism*' (emphases original).

(3) *Legalism*: D. Fuller contends that Paul does not argue that no one can obey the law, for the law is a 'law of faith'. Paul's polemic is against a distortion of the law, not against the law itself.

(4) *Subjective Genitive*: L. Gaston suggests that 'works of the law' is a subjective genitive, and hence denotes 'works which the law does'. What the law does – ultimately – is to produce sin and unrighteousness, which cannot justify someone.

(5) *Human Inability*: S. Westerholm says that legalism per se is not the issue, but rather human inability to obey the law.

The thesis of this monograph is not dependent on these or any other interpretations of ‘works of the law’. It seems most natural to understand ‘works of the law’ to refer to something like ‘works the law requires, or calls for’; that is, works done in service to God. However, the burden here is to explore why works are central to the Christian life, and how works relate to such truths as justification and to what Jesus has done for us.

Conclusion

I chose in this chapter to look briefly at a large number of scriptures, to make a basic point: works, obedience and faithfulness are central to the life of the new covenant believer. I have not attempted to work out all of the details of how works, obedience and faithfulness relate to a biblical understanding of salvation in general, and to biblical understandings of justification, sanctification and glorification in particular. To make sense of such key New Testament passages, we must understand them against a certain biblical-theological matrix: the burden of the next chapter.

Schreiner’s own position is that Paul spoke against ‘works of the law’ for three reasons: (1) No one can obey the law perfectly, (2) any attempt to obey the law to gain righteousness is legalistic and contrary to the principle of faith, and (3) there is a salvation-historical shift that took effect with the death and resurrection of Christ.

Cf. more recently Schreiner 2008: 526–527.