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## The Law As God's Gracious Guidance for the Promotion of Holiness (Excerpt)

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The classic theme of all truly evangelical theology is the relationship of Law and Gospel. In fact, so critical is a proper statement of this relationship that depicts both a believer's standing in Christ and his or her acting and living, that it can become one of the best ways to test both the greatness and the effectiveness of a truly biblical or evangelical theology.

Indeed, the contrasts between the Law (which many seem to attribute solely to Moses) and the Gospel or grace and truth (which also at times is unfairly limited to the New Testament) seem to be legion. Some describe the relationship between Law and Gospel as one in which the law is no longer obligatory (2 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:14 are cited as sample proofs). Accordingly, we are delivered both from the law's usefulness, now that the promise has come (cf. Rom. 7:6; Gal. 3:19—25; 4:1—5), and from its dominion (cf. Rom. 6:14; 7:4), because Christ has fulfilled the righteousness of the law in us (Rom. 8:3—4; 10:4). These statements appear to be so definitive for many that there is no need for any further investigation of the issue.

However, such a presentation of the Law's relationship to the Gospel of grace is too absolute, antithetical, and one-sided for a great number of other Pauline passages, let alone the rest of the Bible. Simply ask the apostle Paul the question: "Has grace 'annulled' the law?" He will answer without qualification: "Never!" On the contrary, through faith "we uphold the law" (Rom. 3:31). In fact, "removed" was the very word Paul used in 2 Corinthians 3:11 and 14 to speak of the "fading away" of the glory of the "ministry" of Moses and the "removal" of the veil that still persists over the minds of Jews who read the old covenant, even up to the present day.<sup>1</sup> Thus, for Paul, the law (or to speak more accurately, the *tôrâ*) would not "fade away" or be "removed" (or "annulled") by the presence of grace, faith, or the promise. Paul asked the same question in the Galatian correspondence: "Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not!" (Gal. 3:21a). In other words, any solution that quickly runs the law out of town certainly cannot look to the Scriptures for any kind of comfort or support.

Neither can the law be made the scapegoat for our problem with sin, for the law itself is "holy," "righteous," "good," and "spiritual" (Rom. 7:7,12-14). The law was never intended as an alternative method of obtaining salvation or righteousness—not even hypothetically.<sup>2</sup> "For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law" (Gal. 3:21). Clearly, then, the law never was intended to be a means by which people could earn eternal life; thus, it never was viewed as being in opposition to the promises and grace of God.

Typical of the muddled thinking that exists on this topic is the atomistic approach that tends to select an array of biblical phrases as a systemic statement on the relationship of Law and Gospel. Such phrases are: "a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known" (Rom. 3:21), "So, my brothers, you also died to the law" (7:4), "by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit" (7:6a), "we serve ... not in the old way of the written code" (7:6b), and "Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died" (7:9).

The full intent of the apostle's own explanation does not lie more than a few verses away in the very context from which the phrase has been lifted. Thus, Paul's use of "apart from law" in Romans 3:21 is amplified in 3:28 as "apart from the works of the law" (NASB). In fact, even 3:21 itself had

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<sup>1</sup> For a more extensive argumentation of this point, see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. "the Weightier and Lighter Matters of the Law: Moses, Jesus and Paul," in *Current Issues in Biblical Interpretations: Studies in Honor of Merrill C. Tenney Presented by His Former Students*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 176—92.

<sup>2</sup> The text that usually is cited as being the basis for a hypothetical offer of salvation in the Old Testament is Leviticus 18:5. For a discussion of the impossibility of this argument, consider Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Leviticus 18:5 and Paul: 'Do This and You Shall Live' (Eternally?)," *JETS* 14 (1971), 19—28.

gone on to say that this very righteousness of God is witnessed to by the law and the prophets. Clearly, “apart from observing the law” had nothing to do with the Torah God had revealed to Moses.

Likewise, our death to the law and discharge from it in Romans 7:6a is to be linked with the death of Christ for all who believe. Accordingly, 8:1 announces that “there is now no condemnation [which was the curse of the law] for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Christ has ended that forever. Furthermore, while redeemed persons no longer served “in the old way of the written code,” (7:6b), yet “in [their] mind[s] [they were] slave[s] to God’s law” (7:25).

Few things have changed since the day of John Wesley when he gave his series of three sermons on “The Original [*sic*], Nature, Property, and Use of the Law.”<sup>3</sup> Wesley concluded, “Perhaps there are few subjects within the whole compass of religion so little understood as this.”<sup>4</sup> More recently, C.E.B. Cranfield came to the same conclusion about the state of modern biblical scholarship and its teaching on the law:

The need . . . exists today for a thorough re-examination of the place and significance of law in the Bible. . . . The possibility that . . . recent writings reflect a serious degree of muddled thinking and unexamined assumptions with regard to the attitudes of Jesus and St. Paul to the law ought to be reckoned with—and even the further possibility that, behind them, there may be some muddled thinking or, at the least, careless and imprecise statement in this connection in some of the works of serious New Testament scholarship [not to speak of OT scholarship also!] which have helped to mould the opinions of the present generation of ministers and teachers.<sup>5</sup>

## THE CHAIR TEACHING PASSAGE<sup>6</sup> ON A HOMEMADE LAW

One of the more helpful surveys on the various issues and positions held by recent interpreters on the question of Paul, Christ, and the law is Brice L. Martin’s *Christ and the Law in Paul*.<sup>7</sup> Martin conveniently summarizes the following views on Paul’s use of the law: those who saw contradictions in Paul’s view on the law (E.P. Sanders, Heikki Räisänen); those who saw development in his view (John W. Drane, Hans Hübner, Ulrich Wilchens, Heikki Räisänen, E.P. Sanders, W. D. Davies); those who argued that the law was no longer valid for believers (Albert Schweitzer, H.J. Schoeps, Ernest Käsemann, F.F. Bruce, Walter Gutbrod); and those who argued that the law was valid for believers (C.E. B. Cranfield, George E. Howard, C. Thomas Rhyne, Robert Badenas, Ragnar Bring, Hans Conzelmann, George Eldon Ladd, Richard Longenecker, and Hans Hübner). There is such a veritable Babel of voices and positions that one wonders what the waiting and watching church must think and make out of all this confusion on the part of her scholars!

In Paul’s thirteen books, he used *nomos* (“law”) in only six of them. But in two of those books, it is clear that this concept forms a central theme, for *nomos* occurs 33 times in Galatians and 74 times in Romans.<sup>8</sup> It is fair, then, to concentrate on these two books for our primary understanding of what it is that Paul is trying to get at with this term.

At the heart of Romans, Paul’s most systematic statement of Soteriology (for who would doubt that the book of Romans is just that?), is his important exposition in 9:30-10:13. If times had been different, we would have preferred to have begun our arguments on the law with the Pentateuch.<sup>9</sup> However, most

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<sup>3</sup> John Wesley, *Sermons: On Several Occasions*, First Series (London: Epworth, 1964), 381-415.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 381.

<sup>5</sup> C.E.B. Cranfield, “St. Paul and the Law,” *SJT* 17 (1964), 43-44.

<sup>6</sup> The importance of appealing to the *sedes doctrine*, or the so-called “chair passages,” for the development of theology, this author argued for in his *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 134-140, 161-62, and in his article, “Hermeneutics and the Theological Task,” *TJ* 12 n.s. (1990), 3-14.

<sup>7</sup> Brice L. Martin, *Christ and the Law in Paul* (Leiden: Brill, 1989). Note particularly his second chapter, 21-68.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>9</sup> See Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “Images for Today: The Torah Speaks Today,” in *The Old Testament and the World: Festschrift for David A. Hubbard*, eds. Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., Robert K. Johnston, and Robert P. Meye (Dallas: Word, forthcoming). Also see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “A Single Biblical Ethic in Business,” in *Biblical Principles and Business: The Foundations*, ed. Richard C. Chewning (Colorado Springs, Co.: NavPress, 1989), 76-88. Two more essays I have written can be consulted to see how I would have preferred to have begun this article: “The

contemporary Christians cannot overcome the impression that the apostle Paul taught that we were finished with the law; therefore, it is necessary that we begin with Paul's argument.

In Romans 9:30-10:13 we have one of the clearest expositions of what Paul meant as he used *nomos*. Unfortunately, this text has also been a favorite battleground, for its pivotal text, "Christ is the *telos* of the law" (Rom. 10:4), has become a slogan for the two contrasting ways of regarding how the law is to be viewed. One side concludes that Christ's first coming marked the "termination" of the law, while the other side contends just as vigorously that his coming was the "goal" toward which the whole law was aimed. Only a careful exegesis of the passage can answer which position is correct.

Paul customarily signaled the next stage in his argument in the book of Romans with the repeated phrase, "What then shall we say?" (Rom. 9:30). And the problem he proposed to deal with in 9:30-10:13 was this: How did it happen that the Gentiles attained "righteousness" . . . by faith" (*ek pisteōs*) while the Jewish people failed to attain the same righteousness even though they pursued it 'by works' (*ek ergōn*)?

Surprisingly enough, the failure of Israel to attain the righteousness of God can be traced to five specific indictments that the apostle charges against his own fellow Jews. They are:

1. Instead of receiving this righteousness of God by faith, Israel "[made] a law [out] of righteousness" (*nomon dikaiosynēs*) (9:31).
2. They pursued righteousness not by faith, "but as if it were by works" (9:32).
3. In contrast to many of the Gentiles, they refused to believe in Christ, the "stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall" (9:33; quoted from Isa. 8:14 and 28:16).
4. Even though Paul's fellow Jews were extremely zealous for God, "their zeal [was] not based on knowledge" (10:2).
5. Finally, in place of the righteousness that came from God, all too many Jews had decided "to establish their own" righteousness (10:3).

How could Paul have warned us any more clearly than he did here that not everyone who follows the law, no matter how zealously his or her efforts mount up, is talking about or obeying the same law that God had given to Moses?

One of the most critical decisions to make in this central passage is the meaning of *nomon dikaiosynēs*. Even though most exegetes understand *nomos* in this phrase to refer to the Old Testament law,<sup>10</sup> neither the context nor the special word order of the Greek phrase will permit such a facile equation. This is only the beginning of troubles in this text—indeed, in the whole problem of relating Law and Gospel. Notice that Paul puts the word *nomon* first in the phrase and then the genitive *dikaosynēs*. This cannot mean "a law that promises righteousness" or "a law that results [either truly or falsely] in righteousness."<sup>11</sup>

The most serious flaw with most exegetical discussions of this passage, however, is the false connection of *nomon dikaiosynēs* with "the righteousness that is by law" (*tēn dikaiosynēn tēn ek [tou] nomou*) in Romans 10:5. Not only is the order of the two phrases reversed, but everything that is said about the one type of law (referred to in 9:30) stands over against what is said about the type of law that Moses is commending in two passages from the Pentateuch (Lev. 18:5 and Deut. 30:10-14, both quoted in Rom. 10:5-8).

The context of Romans 9:30-10:13 is clearly contrasting two ways of obtaining righteousness—one that the Gentiles adopted, the way of faith; the other, a works method, that many Israelites adopted—all to no avail! The problem with the righteousness that Israel was advocating was that it was attainable by works and not by faith, without Christ as its object, driven by a zeal that was not backed up by knowledge. It was homemade in every sense of the word and turned in on itself in such a way that

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Place of Law and Good Works in Evangelical Christianity," in *A Time to Speak: The Evangelical-Jewish Encounter*, eds. A. James Rudin and Marvin R. Wilson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 120-33; and "James' View of the Law," *Mishkan* 8/9 (1988), 9-12.

<sup>10</sup> Martin, *Christ and the Law*, 135.

<sup>11</sup> See the extensive bibliography on these and several other ways of interpreting this phrase in *ibid.*, 135-38 (nn. 36-57).

righteousness was made into a law rather than the Israelites finding the righteousness that God had intended to come from the law of Moses.

God's righteousness could never have been attained by works. Paul concluded that in Galatians 3:21—"For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law." Therefore, whatever Israel thought they were doing by trying to attain righteousness by working for it, it certainly did not originate with God and his law as described by God's revelation to Moses. A further indication that Israel was off on the wrong footing could be seen in their refusal to believe in the Messiah. If they would only have trusted in the One promised to Eve, the patriarchs, and David, they would not have been put to shame, stumbled, or been made to fall—just as the prophet Isaiah had predicted in 8:14 and 28:16.

It is alarming to witness how many contemporary evangelical believers have likewise misunderstood the fact that the *object* of faith in the Old Testament was basically the same as that of the New Testament! While it is generally agreed that the apostle Paul taught in Romans 4 that Abraham and David were justified by faith, there is little understanding about who or what, if anything, the Old Testament saints thought was the *object* of that saving faith. The only sign that something might be out of line has come as modern evangelicals answer the question as to whether the "hidden peoples" of the earth will be saved if they do not believe in Jesus as their personal Savior. All acknowledge that Acts 4:12 teaches that "there is no other name [than the name of the Jesus] under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." However, in spite of the general acquiescence that most will give to this principle, many will go on immediately to say that for those who have never heard of this name, they may cast themselves on the mercy of God and probably experience salvation just as the Old Testament saints did by merely believing in God, even though they did not call upon the name, person, and work of Jesus Christ. Such a conclusion is unwarranted from the text of Scripture.

Even the use of the most famous of all texts that is generally appealed to, Genesis 15:6 ("Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness"), is appealed to incorrectly to sustain this particular argument since most forget to notice that God has just promised to give the Seed to Abram,<sup>12</sup> which Seed was the line of the Messiah. That was the object, substance, and focal point of Abram's faith; it was not a faith in faith nor the fact that Abram became a theist for the first time as he merely believed in God in general. Thus to argue that remote peoples today may be converted under a more minimalistic set of beliefs—and especially without having Jesus as the definite object of their salvation—is to compound the earlier error of a poor exegesis of Genesis and the Old Testament. No, the Jews must not stumble or trip over the divinely-placed "Stone" or "Rock" that was laid in Zion for them to believe in.

Israel had another fault: they insisted on establishing their own righteousness rather than using the righteousness that had already been described by Moses under God in the Torah. If this contrast does not speak of two "laws" that are about as antithetical to each other as laws can be, then language has no more normative qualities to it, and we are left without any valid way of communicating with each other, much less having a way for God to address us.

It is serious enough to miss the point that a homemade law of righteousness is not equivalent to the righteousness that is from the law of God. But when a sharp antithesis is placed between Romans 10:5 and 10:6-8, it is clear that the exegete must either opt for the fact that Moses (and consequently God, the revealer of the word) contradicted himself, or that the Torah actually described the righteousness that comes from the law in two ways that stand at odds with each other. However, this sharp antithesis cannot be sustained either from the grammatical *gar . . . de* construction or from the Old Testament contexts from which both of these texts originate.

"Moses describes" (Rom. 10:5) does not introduce a contrasting set of citations (as if the translation should be: "for . . . but"), but a coordinating set of citations: "for . . . and." The fact is, as George E.

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<sup>12</sup> For a detailed argument and exegesis of this point, see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 121-28. Also see his *The Communicator's Commentary: Micah to Malachi* (Dallas: Word, 1992), in the section on Habakkuk 2:4c; and "Salvation and Atonement: Forgiveness and Saving Faith in the Tenak," in *To the Jew First: The Place of Jewish Evangelism in the On-going Mission of the Church*, ed. James I. Packer (Grand Rapids: Baker, forthcoming).

Howard so clearly pointed out,<sup>13</sup> that *gar . . . de* does not mean “for . . . but,” but as Romans 7:8-9; 10:10; 11:15-16, and Wisdom of Solomon 6:17ff show, it means “for . . . and.” For example, “believing” in Romans 10:10 does not involve placing believing with the heart against believing with the mouth; instead, it is “*and* with the mouth.” In the same way, verse 5 is connected with verses 6-8.

Associated with this error is a similar one that views Romans 10:5 and its citation of Leviticus 18:5 as urging perfection and the obtaining of eternal life by means of some type of deeds or works. But this view fails to consider the following:

1. The translation of Romans 10:5 that understands “the man who does these things will live *by them*” (italics ours) is an instrumental mode should be replaced by a locative concept that says, “the man who does these things shall live *in the sphere of them*.”<sup>14</sup>
2. The context from which this passage comes in Leviticus 18 begins and ends (vv. 1, 30) with the theological affirmation, “I am the LORD your God.” Thus, this citation in verse 5 does not address the matter of how one might earn his or her salvation; instead, it deals with Israel’s sanctification—the grand evidence that the Lord they claimed as their Lord was indeed just that.
3. In the context of Leviticus 18, the customs of the pagans were contrasted with the happy privilege that Israel had of perpetuating a life already begun by their continuing to do the law. This is similar, then, to John 10:10—“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”<sup>15</sup>

In what sense, then, is Christ the *telos* of the law (Rom. 10:4)? Paul uses *telos* thirteen times in his letters. In general, the medieval and Reformation church understood Greek *telos* (and Latin *finis*) either in a perfective/completive sense or a teleological sense, but it did not choose to give the meaning of Romans 10:4 a temporal/terminal sense. “Erasmus, Calvin, and Bucer took it in a perfective sense, while Luther, Melanchthon, and Beza took it in a teleological sense.”<sup>16</sup> However, the Anabaptists (who tended to see the New Testament as superseding the Old Testament), later Lutherans (who applied some of Luther’s negative views on the law from other contexts than Rom. 10:4), eighteenth-century interpreters (with their lower views on Scripture), and nineteenth-century liberals all tended to view *telos* in Romans 10:4 as an abrogation and termination of the law for the Christian.

The debate here cannot, and should not, be settled by an appeal to a word study of the thirteen uses of *telos* in Paul. Much greater significance should be placed on the context with its affirmation that “Christ is the *telos* of the law for everyone who believes [*eis dikaiosynēn panti tō pisteuonti*].” That phrase is extremely close to the ones in Romans 10:6, *dikaiosynē de tēn ek pisteōs* (lit. “and the righteousness that is by faith”), and Romans 10:10, *pisteuetai eis dikaiosynēn* (you believe unto righteousness”). Clearly, the righteousness being talked about in these contexts is appealing to homemade righteousness and of using works to establish it!

That former type of righteousness is what the Jewish people have been missing all along: Christ was the single object of focus for those who were believing. The Gentiles seized on this method of obtaining righteousness even while Israel continued to miss the point. Meanwhile, Paul asserts explicitly, the identical point about this very same righteousness was made by Moses in the torah: “Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law” (Rom. 10:5). But Martin is most insistent that “it is fallacious to argue that since ‘righteousness by faith’ in 10:6-8 is actually taken from the law itself (Deut. [30:12-14]) then Christ must be the fulfillment of the torah in 10:4. Räisänen points out that for

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<sup>13</sup> George E. Howard, “Christ the End of the Law: The Meaning of Romans 10:4ff,” *JBL* 88 (1969), 331-32.

<sup>14</sup> See J. Oliver Buswell, *A Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963), 1:313. Buswell summarized his study of this word by saying, “The words, *en autē*, [Rom. 10:5] and the corresponding words in Galatians 3:13, *en autois*, where the same Old Testament passage [Lev 18:5] is quoted, should not be construed as instrumental, but locative, indicating the sphere or horizon of the life of a godly man. . . . Moses is obviously describing not the means of attaining eternal life, but the horizon within which an earthly godly life ought to be lived.”

<sup>15</sup> For a more extensive set of arguments, see Kaiser’s “Leviticus 18:5 and Paul.”

<sup>16</sup> Brice L. Martin, *Christ and the Law in Paul*, 129, citing Robert Badenas, “Christ the End of the Law: Romans 10:4,” in *Pauline Perspective*, JSNTSup (Sheffield: JSNT, 1985), 6-38.

the author of Hebrews the old covenant is superseded, yet he bases his argument on the OT.”<sup>17</sup> But this type of argumentation allows us to see just what is being confused here. The writer to the Hebrews clearly shows that what he saw as being abrogated from the first covenant were the ceremonies and rituals—the very items that had a built-in warning from God to Moses from the first day they were revealed to him. Had not God warned Moses that what he gave him in Exodus 25-40 and Leviticus 1-27 was according to the “pattern” he had shown him on the mountain (e.g., Ex. 25:40)? This meant that the real remained somewhere else (presumably in heaven) while Moses instituted a “model,” “shadow,” or “imitation” of what is real until that reality came!

The net result cannot be that for the writer of the Hebrews, the whole old covenant or the whole torah had been superseded. Thus, it is persuasive that the very righteousness being debated can be substantiated in the Torah of Moses—and it was this Moses and this law that described the righteousness that Paul was urging that his Jewish compatriots now adopt. It was the same righteousness that found its purposeful completion and perfection in the Messiah, who was the object of faith offered to sinners during the days of the old covenant.

Nor will it help interpreters to dodge this Torah source for the kind of faith-righteousness that is being advocated here by concluding, as Martin did, that “in Rom 10:6-8 Paul gives a pesher-like Christian interpretation to Deut 30:11-14, an interpretation facilitated by the association of this passage with wisdom in ancient Judaism.”<sup>18</sup> The parenthetical material in Romans 10:6-8 was not meant to add an altogether new form of theology to the passage in Deuteronomy, as if Paul were attempting to bring new relevancies into the text that were not part of the ancient meaning. Instead, both Moses and Paul are in basic agreement that the life being offered to Israel, both in those olden days and now in the Christian era, was available and close at hand; in fact, it was so near them that it was in their mouth and in their heart. There is no use trying to make a search of heaven or crossing over the oceans in order to obtain it. Why not confess with their mouths and believe in their hearts in the Messiah?

What is more, note that in Deuteronomy 30:16 there are two command that must not be confused or reversed in sequence: first, the command to love God, and then the command to keep all his commandments! Thus, in the very context that Paul appeals to, a carefully enunciated line of demarcation is set forth between choosing death and destruction by turning away in their hearts from God (Deut. 30:6, 15, 17). Paul only makes it more explicit what Moses had affirmed and implied.

The main point should not be overlooked: The word that had been as near as the mouth and heart of every Israelite in Moses’ day was “the word of faith [Paul was] proclaiming” (Rom 10:8b). How could the connection have been any more clearly indicated? What will it take for modern Christians to see that Moses, in the same way that the apostle Paul advocated, wanted Israel to “believe unto righteousness” (Rom. 10:10; cf. Deut. 30:14). The fact that Moses uses the word “obey” in Deuteronomy 30:14 when he urged: “No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it” is no more damaging to our case than is the fact that John 3:36 uses the same word “obey” in parallelism with “believe.”

The term *telos* in Romans 10:4 means “goal” or purposeful conclusion. The law cannot be properly understood unless it moves toward the grand goal of pointing the believer toward the Messiah, Christ. The law remains God’s law, not Moses’ law (Rom. 7:22; 8:7). It still is holy, just, good, and spiritual (Rom. 7:12,14) for the Israelite as well for the believing Gentile.

**Excerpted from the article “The Law as God’s Gracious Guidance for the Promotion of Holiness”, pp 177-188  
as found in 5 Views on Law and Gospel, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 177-199.**

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<sup>17</sup> Brice L. Martin, *Christ and the Law*, 139. Martin is using the argument of Heikki Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1983), 55.

<sup>18</sup> Brice L. Martin, *Christ and the Law*, 140. This view is featured in M. Jack Suggs, “The Word Is Near You: Romans 10:6-10 within the Purpose of the Letter,” in *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox*, eds. W. R. Farmer, C.F.D. Moule, and R. R. Neibuhr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 289-319.