

A Biblical and Contextual Examination of Rom.9:30-10:13

By
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The system of Bible interpretation that advances the belief that Law and Gospel are antithetical [opposed to each other (this is antinomianism)] is called Dispensationalism. This belief puts the nation Israel and the Church under two distinct and separate divine administrations, even to necessitating two means of salvation. It teaches that the Church is justified by faith (belief in the Gospel) and Israel is justified by a legal system of obedience to the Law under a ‘covenant of works’. A valid consideration of biblical evidence will show this theology to be in error.

Dispensationalism grew out of the Reformation, it appears, as a by-product of Lutheranism and Covenant Theology. The basic idea of salvation by grace only through faith was true enough and rightly was in opposition to the Roman Catholic works salvation false doctrine. However, Grace Theology rebounded so far from Catholicism that even repentance was seen by some as a work of the flesh, and obedience to God’s law constituted works to the adherents of this belief system.

Another branch similar to Lutheranism is Covenant Theology, which is represented by Presbyterianism and the Westminster Confession. Covenant Theology also includes a covenant of works for Israel, but agrees that salvation is by grace for everyone, yet it remains unclear how faith can operate under works.

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Dispensationalism, formulated by J.N. Darby of the Plymouth Brethren [and perhaps, others], teaches that God has two distinct purposes with regard to election. One purpose is to create a heavenly people through the Church. The other is to have an earthly people, Israel, to serve Him. About a century after Darby, C.I. Scofield of the Scofield Reference Bible fame, and L.S. Chafer with his multivolume “*Systematic Theology*” advanced the spread of Dispensationalism by getting the Scofield Ref. Bible into the hands of many thousands of Fundamentalists who were Bible believing Christians. This effort was aided by A.C. Gaebelien, a theologian/publisher who assisted Scofield with his 1909 first edition of the Scofield Bible. Chafer founded Dallas Theological Seminary, which has been training Dispensationalists ever since 3/

My own early biblical training was influenced by some dispensational thought, especially concerning premillennialism. However, only in recent years have I become aware of what I shall term The Israel vs. Church Dual Purpose Theory regarding God’s redemptive purpose. I am convinced from my intensive Bible studies of recent years that God has only one plan of redemption for all nationalities for all ages or dispensations. In other words, God is doing one thing regarding salvation, not two things 2/. I have reviewed the yet unpublished literary research results from John B. Finch (a former dispensationalist) based on his many years of study relating to Dispensationalism 1/ and have studied an excellent book by Daniel P. Fuller titled *Gospel and Law* 2/, and also John MacArthur’s *The Gospel According to Jesus* 5/ and Daniel Fuller’s *The Unity of the Bible* 4/. I found these resources very helpful.

Discussion of Rom.9:30—10:13

Paul poses a question in 9:30 & 31 “What shall we say then?” This question is pertaining to the fact that Israel failed to attain righteousness by works *as it were* of the Law (9:32), while the Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith (9:30). Israel failed because they did not seek righteousness by faith [i.e., by loving, fearing, and obeying God (9:32)]. Paul says Israel was zealous toward God, but not according to knowledge (10:2). They were ignorant of **God’s righteousness (10:3), which is the righteousness of faith (9:30)**. They sought *their own* righteousness, **not submitting to God** (See Deut. 9:6, 7 & 13 and Jer.7:24.).

The **“but as it were”** in 9:32 is a very important phrase, because it is indicative of Israel’s concept of God’s law. They saw the law only as a legal code and obligation (Deut.5:25-27—**we will hear and do**), not as spiritual and a guide to righteousness (See Rom. 7:14a—**“For we know that the Law is spiritual...” [by intent and purpose]**).

We now come to Rom.10:4 & 5, for these verses must be understood together as they properly relate. Many have taken 10:4 out of context to mean that the law was terminated by the cross of Christ (The Dispensationalists’ view). **This is not true.** I quote from the NKJV, “For Christ is the *telos* of the law for righteousness for everyone who believes.” And then Paul quotes Lev.18:5 in verse 5. I have inserted the Greek word *telos* in verse 4 without translation, because it is at the heart of the controversy. *Telos* can be translated ‘end’ or ‘goal’, goal meaning objective or completion. Goal is needed here because verse 5ff demand it. If I may be permitted a free translation of vv. 4 & 5, it would read **“For Christ is the ‘achieved objective’ of the law for righteousness for those, who in faith and obedience to God’s Covenant of Grace, have believed in the promise, for Moses wrote of the righteousness of the law [‘which if a man does, he shall live by them’] which is found in love for and obedience to God.**” This interpretive paraphrase takes into account the intent of Lev.18:5 and Deut.30:16 [which is a gracious intent] and Bible passages such as Jer.7:21-24 and Heb.9:15 pertinent to God’s purpose in the law and Paul’s present rationale in Rom.9:30-10:8. Bear with me with this understanding while we move ahead into 10:6-8. I will discuss the Jer.7 and Heb.9 passages later.

In verse 6, the Greek word *de* (the first word of 10:6) ought to have been translated *and*. If a contrast had been intended, Paul [or his scribe] would have used *alla* instead of *de*, so the first word of verse 6, I read as *and*, understanding it simply as a particle of transition to the next related statement 2/ This is a critical point, for even in the post-exilic days of Nehemiah, Lev.18:5 (quoted by Paul in Rom.10:5b) was recognized as pertaining to the obedience of faith (see **Neh.9:28-29**). Thus, Paul linked **Lev.18:5** with **Deuteronomy 30:12-14** as both pertaining to living by faith.

Rom.10:6-8 is critical to a proper understanding of this entire passage, and Paul paraphrases here from Deut.30:12-14. Thus, he begins by identifying the Deut. passage as being on the subject of faith (grace), not works, when he writes “And the righteousness of faith speaks in this way...” Paul proceeds to state Deut.30:12 & 13 as negative commands, ‘do not say in your heart’..., indicating that human efforts to achieve righteousness are useless. Moses had already said in Deut.30:11 that ‘[God’s] commandment is not too mysterious for you, **‘that you should say’** (this phrase implying the Israelites’ propensity toward self will and self righteousness). And what was God’s commandment? (See Deut.30:16—**to love God and keep His commandments**). This, of course, is what faith is all about, O.T. and N.T.—Paul makes no distinction, for there is none to make. There is **no dichotomy [split or division] in God or His gracious purpose toward mankind**, but rather **unity and integrity**. God has no pleasure in the death of one who dies [in his sin], ‘therefore turn and live’. (Ezek.18:32). God does not love only some, but all. Grace does not discriminate.

“But what does it say?” ‘The word is near you, in your heart and in your mouth’, that is, the word of faith, which we preach...” (Rom.10:8). Without any doubt, **Paul was interpreting Moses’ words as an invitation from God to Israel to belong to Him by faith**, a Covenant of Grace, **not** a ‘covenant of works’, for Paul equates faith in God in the O.T. to faith in Christ in the N.T. (See and study Rom.10:9-13.).

God’s gracious intent toward Israel is clearly seen in Deut.5:29 and Jer.7:21-24. In Deut.5:29, God speaks a lamentation to Moses concerning Israel’s unwillingness to fear [love] Him and keep His commandments ‘that it might be well with them and their children **forever.**’ To Jeremiah, **God explains that His intent, when He brought them out of Egypt, was not a legal covenant, but a gracious relationship with them whereby they would love Him and keep His commandments, being His people, and He would bless them and be their God.** This is the same relationship that Christ requires of us as Christians (i.e., love and obedience). Therefore, Paul, with regard to salvation, makes no distinction between Jew and Greek.

The Jer.7 passage referenced above make it crystal clear to any reasonable mind that, in giving the law (including the Levitical sacrificial system), God had no intent to place His people under a legal government for their justification. The law was given for moral guidance and instruction in righteousness, and the sacrificial system was given to provide temporary atonement for Israelite persons of faith (for their transgressions committed in ignorance---Heb.9:7, 10) until the Promise [Christ] (Gal.3:19) should be revealed in the ‘Seed’ of Abraham. Thus, the writer of Hebrews states in 9:14 & 15 (and I paraphrase here for

brevity) that the justification of the O.T. faithful is accomplished in the blood of Christ under the New Covenant (9:15b), because the blood of Christ is completely efficacious (9:14), whereas the blood of the animal sacrifices was only a temporary covering for sins.

When the word ‘goal’ is used for *telos* in Rom.10:4 and keeping in mind our interpretation of 10:4 & 5, then the major purposes of God’s law come to light. Galatians 3:19-24 is instructive and we should examine it in some depth at this point.

“What purpose does the law serve?” Paul asks in Gal.3:19. Then he answers his own question: “**It was added because of transgression, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made.**” Why was the law needed? This is answered in 3:23-24—to keep under guard and to instruct those under the Covenant of Law until the promise should be revealed. How was this accomplished? It is by the Levitical system of animal sacrifice and temporary atonement and by the Ten Commandments, of course! And what was the promise to Abraham and his Seed? The answer to this is the cross of Christ to be revealed in the fullness of time (Gal.4:4 & 5---“**to redeem those who were under the law**” **that they might receive the adoption as sons [of Abraham]** (See also Heb.9:15... “**for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.**”). Please take note that **only the called** who were under the Covenant of Law will receive the promise. What further proof of operative O.T. grace does one require than the Heb.9:15 passage? The called are those who were obedient to Lev.18:5. And take careful notice that it is the Covenant of Law, not ‘covenant of works’. There is a great difference between these two labels. **‘Of Law’** designates God’s perfect guide to faith and obedience, whereas **‘of works’** describes human effort of self justification without faith and obedience (see Rom.9:31-32). It was out of His mercy that God gave the Ceremonial Law to allow those Israelites who would believe and obey to inherit the promise of salvation. Recall my above paraphrase of Rom.10:4-5. Therefore the law is a facilitator of God’s grace, not an enemy of it. It points to sin and urges repentance even in the life of a believer. Every true and obedient child of God is the descendant of faithful Abraham (Gal.3:7-9 and Rom.4:13-16).

Because the law is holy and just and good, and because man is the opposite, the law condemns and brings a curse to the transgressor of the law (Deut.27:26). This is made abundantly clear in Gal.3:10-18. Verse 10 refers to human effort to be justified by the law, and that is not possible (3:11). The law [per se] is not of faith, but it teaches faith and brings us to Christ (3:12b & 24). Let no one denigrate the law of God. Only by faith and obedience can a person hope to fulfill the law’s intent. Yet there is no justification in the law, but only in faith. **The law is not against the promises of God (3:21)**, but all are confined under sin that the promises of God may be by faith to those who believe (3:22).

Discussion and Conclusions

Confining our discussion to the Gospel and Law, we should mention God’s covenants that pertain to these. I would call God’s Covenant with Abraham *the foundational* Covenant of Grace because **its intent and out-working are gracious**, realizing at the same time that there are temporal aspects of that covenant that pertain to Israel, exclusively. Nevertheless, the central theme of it is grace and not legalism. The spiritual blessing promised was to pertain to the whole world and has affected the whole world and is still doing so and will continue in the future. When the Lord Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper before His crucifixion, He called it the “New Covenant in My blood”. The Christ came to this earth through the line of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David. His sacrifice on the cross of Calvary fulfilled Gen.12:3b and Gen.22:18. Not only did Christ make possible the justification of N.T. believers, but also the O.T. persons of faith were justified (Gal.4:5 and Heb.9:15). Moreover, in my opinion, this New Covenant that Christ spoke of is in essence and in fact the same New Covenant spoken of in Jer.31:31-34 (See Heb.9:15 and 10:14-18.). Certainly, it is a covenant of grace and belongs to the Abrahamic Covenant. The writer of Hebrews declared in 10:14-18 that all persons of faith are justified by their faith in the sacrifice of Christ, those who are being sanctified, *here meaning called and set apart for God*, and those Jews [remnant] who will be saved under the New Covenant spoken of by the Prophet Jeremiah in 31:33. That covenant promises a new heart and mind in which God’s law is written. The Jews will

then love God and obey His commandments. They broke God's first covenant given at Sinai after promising to obey (Deut.5:27), but the New Covenant they will keep by faith. This New Covenant promise is reiterated in Ezek.36:24-27 and in Zech.12:10, 13:1-2.

The Covenant of Law given at Sinai and mediated by Moses (Gal.3:19, Exod.20:19) rightly also belongs under the Covenant of Grace given to Abraham.

In other words, ***the Abrahamic Covenant should be considered the "parent covenant" of all of God's redemptive covenants.*** Yes, the law is redemptive in that it brings us to faith in Christ, as a guardian and tutor. God is not divided against Himself, and, as essential as it is to salvation, there is more to salvation than justification. ***Considering justification the sole criterion for salvation is one of the chief errors of Dispensationalism.*** That is the essence of the non-lordship 'salvation' that it espouses. It is a spiritually fatal error to teach only belief without repentance and obedience. Furthermore, it can easily be shown from the Scriptures that ***all redemptive covenants [except the Davidic] are conditional, being conditioned upon faith (which is belief/obedience).*** Galatians 3:19-24 clearly places the law into a role as a facilitator (guardian and tutor) of faith of those called, and in that sense the law is integrally connected to grace. What is the function of a guardian but to care for and protect those in his charge? Who is a tutor except one who teaches and disciplines those in his care? Paul says that the law was responsible as both guardian and tutor for those called to faith under the Covenant of Law until the Promised One came to fulfill that covenant (Matt.5:17, Gal.3:24).

In Gal.3:22 and 23, Paul seems to use 'faith' as the fruition of belief in the promise to be revealed [in Christ], but still a mystery to O.T. saints (See also Eph.1:7-10.). Of Abraham, Heb.11:8-10 says "he dwelt in the Promised Land as in a foreign country and waited for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." ***This is precisely the kind of belief called for in the demands of the Covenant of Law at Sinai and expressed in such Scripture verses as Lev.18:5 which Paul referred to in Rom.10:5. Persons under the Law were to keep the faith with faithful Abraham to whom the promises were given.*** [One must never lose sight of the origin of the Israelites (Abraham) and the covenant that God made with him (and subsequently with Moses and David) that affected the whole of humanity. Some have committed such error, and their error has caused the generation of much false doctrine to the detriment of God's kingdom. Sadly, the formers and adherents of dispensationalism are among such persons. ***A correct understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant is crucial to the proper interpretation of the entire Bible.***]

But this same portion in Gal.3 makes the law the standard of righteousness and a condemner of transgressions, and this explains why Paul said that the law is not of faith (Gal.3:12a), though it leads one to justification by faith. Paul said that through the law we have knowledge of sin [transgression of the Law]—Rom.3:20, 7:7, 13. We see our failure to obey God's Law perfectly as sin. By recognizing our transgressions and turning in faith to God for mercy (Ezek.18:31-32, I Thes.1:9-10, and others) we do not make the law void, but, on the contrary, we establish the law (Rom.3:31) [that it is holy and just and good (Rom.7:12)], because it is written in our hearts.

The central purpose of the Law is that of sanctification. It was never given for justification (except through the obedience of faith). Sanctification is *the setting apart for holiness to God.* The sign for God's covenant with Abraham and his progeny is physical circumcision. In a similar sense, ***the sign of the sanctification of the spiritual descendants of Abraham is circumcision of the heart (Deut.30:6, Rom.2:28-29).***

Many have mistakenly assigned circumcision as the sign only of a 'covenant of works'. It is not that, but rather distinguishes the Covenant of Grace (See Rom.4:9-12, especially vv.11 & 12.). Persons of faith are made ***legally acceptable*** to the Father through the perfect sacrifice of Christ Jesus and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to them through their faith (justification). The sacrifice of Christ satisfied God's justice (propitiation). Thus, faith (belief and obedience) gives one access to salvation, as one repents and confesses Christ as Lord and is regenerated by God's Spirit.

The law will stand forever, and all children of God are obligated to keep it for holiness to God (Deut.30:16, John 14:15), but its function as a guardian and tutor for O.T. persons of faith has been fulfilled by Christ just as for N.T. believers (Gal.3:25). ***Hence, persons who have obeyed God in faith are no longer under law for condemnation, but are under grace because of justification (Rom.6:14) and we honor and***

fulfill the law for sanctification (Rom. 8:4,14, 6:19b, John 14:21). Nevertheless, the ‘doers of the law’ are justified [by their faith](Rom.2:13).

Food for Thought

Ask yourself the following questions: 1) “What is the difference between Old Testament faith in God and New Testament Faith in Christ?” The Scriptures witness to the fact that faith is accounted as righteousness for Abraham and for you or me. 2) “Is there any difference in how persons of faith from O.T. and N.T. times are made just before Holy God?” Paul says in Rom.3:30 that both the circumcised and the uncircumcised are justified by faith. It is the all-sufficient sacrifice of the Christ that satisfies the righteous judgment of God against sin for all persons of all dispensations of time (we have previously discussed Heb.10:14, Gal.4:4-5, and Heb.9:14-15.). 3) God must be able to remain just and at the same time be the justifier of sinners who have believed in the promise of salvation (See Rom.3:25-26.). God must have a way to be propitiated (made favorably disposed toward those who have believed in the Promise). That way is the blood of Christ Jesus and His perfect righteousness (which He gives to all who believe the Promise, both O.T. & N. T. saints). Hence, He is called “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” in Jer.23:6.

Those who would force God into a divided position regarding His redemptive work or any other aspect of His mind and character should believe the admonition found in Isa.55:6-11, concerning God, His thoughts, His ways, and His purposes. God said through Malachi in 3:16-18 that He has “a ‘book of remembrance’ before Him of those who fear the Lord and who meditate on his name.

I praise God for His love and mercy and for the unity and integrity of His redemptive purpose and plan! I thank Him for the simplicity of salvation through faith (remembering that faith is belief that obeys—James2:26, John 14:21-24). “Whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.” Amen.

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- 1/ Finch, John B.: Unpublished Research Papers.
 - 2/ Fuller, Daniel P., *Gospel & Law*, Jan. 1982 printing.
 - 3/ Finch, John B. , Personal Communications via telephone.
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 - 5/ MacArthur, John, *The Gospel According to Jesus*