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Paul and the Law

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effort to maintain the priority of the biblical text, but the reader may be forgiven the suspicion that he sometimes allows the influence to run in the opposite direction. Nevertheless, the book has three outstanding values. It is a penetrating exploration of what the book of Exodus has to say to oppressed peoples, struggling to free themselves from the grip of tyranny. In addressing this question it makes a solid contribution to liberation theology, and provides a novel and stimulating exegesis of the biblical text. It is well worth a careful reading.

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Paul and the Law

Heikki Räisänen

Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1987

In 1983 two books were published which caused biblical scholars to rethink commonly held views about Paul's thoughts about the Jewish law. The book by Heikki Räisänen *Paul and the Law* was published in Germany while E.P. Sanders' *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* was released in the United States and Canada. In 1986 Räisänen's book was available for the English speaking world, and it is now available in a second edition. Räisänen has drawn our attention to the number of inconsistent statements in Paul's thought. Further, Räisänen has attempted to understand these inconsistencies without artificial harmonization. The response to his work has been both positive and negative.

On the positive side his work has led scholars to investigate the diversity of views about the law within Judaism and the early Christian movement in the first century. The diversity of views has led to new questions about the situations which gave rise to Paul's contradictory statements, situations which involved debate around his role as apostle to the Gentiles.

Not all are convinced by Räisänen's view that there is no development in Paul's thought. Many suggest that Räisänen should have tried harder to find a synthesis of Paul's statements about the law.

In the preface to the second edition Räisänen clarifies some of the issues and adds some insights gained from the debates. He has given further thought to his view that there is no development in Paul's thought about the Jewish law. Rather than development, Räisänen proposes the term *movement*. There is movement in Paul's treatment of an issue from one letter to another and sometimes even within the same letter (i.e., Paul's wrestling in Romans 9-11 with the question of the place of the Jewish people in God's plan) but Räisänen still maintains that there is no apparent development in Paul's thought about the Jewish law and the Jewish people

from Galatians to Romans, letters which contain both positive and negative statements on these topics.

In response to the charge that he did not try hard enough to probe into the synthesis which underlines Paul's statements, Räsänen responds by pointing out that more exegetical study would point only to the fact of Paul's wrestling with difficult topics like the Jewish people in Romans 9–11 but would not yield a consistent thread in Paul's thought. Paul's argument in Romans 9 is clear and consistent as is his argument in Romans 11 and yet the two arguments are at variance, and this variance can also be traced in Galatians. Räsänen points out that Paul tries different ways to solve the problem but the variance remains the same.

Räsänen's work calls into question the standard views that Paul's arguments stem from theoretical cohesiveness obtained at the time of his conversion or from strategic cohesiveness oriented toward a successful mission. The view which Räsänen found to be more convincing was a view held by William Wrede, namely, that Paul's view of the law was hammered out of the conflict he had with more conservative Christians (xxi).

Räsänen finds that Paul's gospel itself implies a "grave problem" (xxiii). He agrees with Sanders that Paul has conflicting convictions (Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983, 198). Räsänen has expanded this view. He notes, "Paul was struggling with the problem that a *divine* institution has been *abolished* through what God has done in Christ" (264f). Räsänen considers this *divine* institution to include consideration of Israel's *election* and God's *covenant* with the patriarchs and the people. This observation uncovers an unsolvable dilemma found in Paul's thought which has often been ignored by scholars: the implication that on the one hand God's salvific acts of old are insufficient and on the other that there is continuity between God's salvific acts of old and those in the present. Räsänen supports the view put forth by Sanders that Paul broke with the biblical covenant and held that a Jew must give up basic tenets of Judaism (torah observance) in order to be a new creation. When Paul "tries to establish continuity [by using Abraham as the prototype of the person justified by faith], he thwarts his exclusive Christ-centred soteriology... If salvific faith was accessible to Abraham... why was the sending of Christ necessary at all?" (xxiv–xxv). Here we see Paul's struggle between continuity and discontinuity at its best.

Räsänen challenges standard attempts to achieve theological harmonization of Paul's thought on the law as if he was a systematic theologian. We are given a different picture of Paul—not as systematic theologian nor as one whose mind was "muddled" but as one who possessed the "bold *will-
ingness to wrestle with the basic issues*" (xxv). Räsänen's book deserves to be on the reading list of everyone involved in the study of Paul's theology, Paul's apostleship, and the early Christian movement.