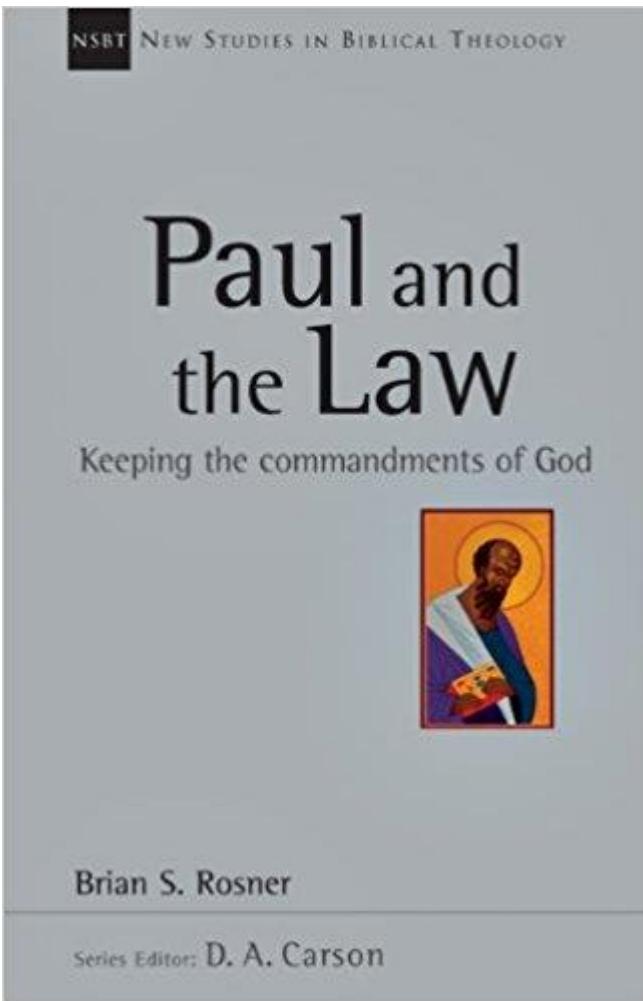


New Covenant Theology



Paul and the Law by Brian S. Rosner



How does Paul Talk about the Law?

We're going to find that there are 3 general ways that Paul talks about the Law:

- Repudiation of the Law
- Replacement of the Law
- Reappropriation of the Law



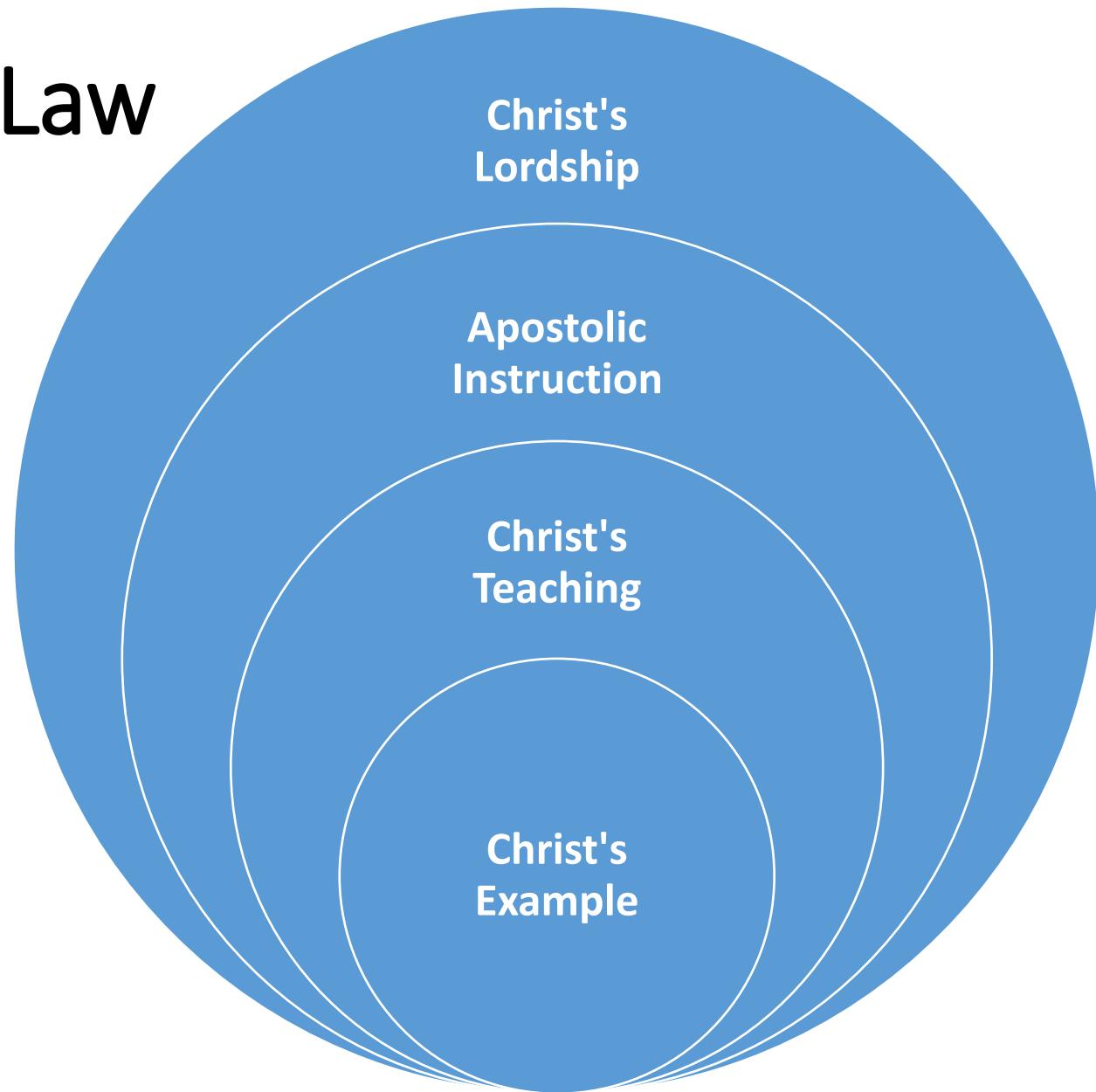
Repudiation of the Law

Paul teaches that:

- Believers are not under the Law.
- Believers have died to the Law.
- Believers have been set free from the Law.
- And that Christ has put an end to the Law.

Replacement of the Law

The Law of Christ



Reappropriation of the Law

So far we have seen Paul's negative stance toward the Law of Moses. However, Paul still has many positive things to say about the Law. In fact, he frequently uses the Law as the foundation for something he's saying about Christ or for instruction to believers.

There are two general ways in which Paul can be seen as using the Law:

- **He uses the Law as Prophecy.**
- **He uses the Law as Wisdom.**

Reappropriation of the Law as Prophecy

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.”

— Romans 3:21-22a

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”

— 2 Timothy 3:14-15

Reappropriation of the Law as Prophecy

Paul frequently talks about the Law as something that points us to Christ, the gospel, and the New Covenant. The main ways Paul demonstrates that the Law points us to Christ are:

- Showing how the main characters in the Law point us to the New Covenant.
- Emphasizing that the Law was not intended to be permanent.

Reappropriation of the Law as Prophecy

Paul Shows how the main characters in the Law point us to the New Covenant.

“How then was [Righteousness] counted to [Abraham]? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. **The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well**, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.” – Romans 4:10-12

Reappropriation of the Law as Prophecy

Paul Emphasizes that the Law was not intended to be permanent.

“...if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, **so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.**” – Galatians 3:21b-22

Reappropriation of the Law as Wisdom

How did the Law inform Paul in his teaching?

- Paul frequently used language from the Law in his teaching.
- Paul taught that Christians fulfill the Law by living out Christ's example.
- Paul used the Law as an example in his teaching.

Reappropriation of the Law as Wisdom

Paul frequently used language from the Law in his teaching.

In light of Paul's strong language of repudiation and replacement of the Law, we will be tempted to think that Paul's stance toward the Law's teaching was mostly negative. That isn't the case at all.

Aside from Christ, it is apparent that the Old Testament had the greatest influence on Paul's teaching. He quoted it frequently. But even more significant than that, his teaching is dripping with language straight from the Law.

Reappropriation of the Law as Wisdom

Paul frequently used language from the Law in his teaching.

A good example of this is found in Paul's teaching on sexuality.

At no point does Paul tell Christians that they must adhere to the Old Testament Laws regarding sexuality. However, when addressing sexual ethics, Paul is often repeating what is commanded in the Old Testament.

Reappropriation of the Law as Wisdom

Paul frequently used language from the Law in his teaching.

In 1 Corinthians 5, we find the infamous story of a man who had sexual relations with his father's wife (his step-mom).

“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife...Let him who has done this be removed from among you...you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” – 1 Corinthians 5:1-5

“...Purge the evil person from among you.” 1 Corinthians 5:13b

Reappropriation of the Law as Wisdom

Paul frequently used language from the Law in his teaching.

The words Paul chose to describe the situation and his response to it are rich with reference to the Law:

“You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife...” - Leviticus 18:8

“Cursed be anyone who lies with his father's wife...” - Deuteronomy 27:20

“If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman. **So you shall purge the evil from Israel.**” – Deuteronomy 22:22

Reappropriation of the Law as Wisdom

Paul frequently used language from the Law in his teaching.

Another example can be found in Paul's teaching on homosexuality.

The laws regarding homosexuality in Leviticus say:

“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.”

“If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.”

- Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

Reappropriation of the Law as Wisdom

Paul frequently used language from the Law in his teaching.

Another example can be found in Paul's teaching on homosexuality.

Two of the words that are repeated in the Greek version of these texts are:

- “arsen” (man)
- and “koite” (lit: bed)

Paul combines these into one word (arsenokoites) which English translations often translate: “homosexual” (1 Cor 6:9, 1 Tim 1:10).

Paul's use of language straight from the Mosaic Law demonstrate continuity in teaching on the immorality of this behavior.

Reappropriation of the Law as Wisdom

Paul taught that Christians fulfill the Law by living out Christ's example.

“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. **For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'** But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.” - Galatians 5:13-15

“Owe no one anything, except to love each other, **for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.** For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,’ and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ **Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.**” – Romans 13:8-10

Reappropriation of the Law as Wisdom

Paul taught that Christians fulfill the Law by living out Christ's example.

These two texts show us how our relationship with the Law as Christians, while complicated, is very friendly.

Though we are no longer under the Mosaic Law, Paul quotes Leviticus 19:18 ("You shall love your neighbor as yourself...") to show that the whole Law can be boiled down to one command. So while the commandments against murder, theft, and covetousness were once specific commandments for the people of Israel, they are now examples of things that we should not do out of love for God and allegiance to Christ.

Reappropriation of the Law as Wisdom

Paul used the Law as an example in his teaching.

“Do we not have the right to eat and drink? Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?

Do I say these things on human authority? **Does not the Law say the same? For it is written in the Law of Moses, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.’** Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?” – 1 Corinthians 9:4-12

Reappropriation of the Law as Wisdom

Paul used the Law as an example in his teaching.

In this passage, Paul defends his rights as an apostle (rights that he actually sets aside).

First, he argues from everyday life that nobody works for free.

But then he doesn't want it to seem as if he only sees this right in life. He demonstrates from the Law that the Lord is concerned about these rights. In showing that the Lord prohibited the muzzling of oxen as they tread the grain, he finds a general principle of God's concern that the laborer be provided for from his work.

Reappropriation of the Law as Wisdom

Paul used the Law as an example in his teaching.

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’ (this is the first commandment with a promise), ‘that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.’ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” – Ephesians 6:1-4

This passage includes a straightforward command. However, it also includes a reference to the 5th commandment. Why is this?

- Paul sees significance in the fact that there is a promise attached to this commandment in the OT Law.
- Paul reaffirms this promise, giving it a broader application, under the New Covenant.

Reappropriation of the Law as Wisdom

Paul used the Law as an example in his teaching.

“Just as in the Old Testament children who honoured or obeyed their parents were blessed with the promise of a full life, so, too, in the age of the New Covenant this general principle holds true for obedient Christian children.”

– Peter O’ Brien

Reappropriation of the Law as Wisdom

Paul used the Law as an example in his teaching.

This should help us see what Paul is doing when he uses the Old Testament, but what about us? Should we use the Old Testament (and even the Mosaic Law) to help us in our daily lives?

Yes!

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” - 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Reappropriation of the Law as Wisdom

Paul used the Law as an example in his teaching.

Based on what we've seen, here are some ways that we can imitate Paul's use of the Law as we live under the New Covenant:

- Read of wise people in the faith and see their example for how to follow God (e.g. Hebrews 11).
- As you read the specific Old Testament Laws, consider the general principle that could be helpful to you in your life (e.g. Sabbath).
- Look for passages that emphasize things that may be a blind spot of yours (e.g. Ox treading the grain, treatment of immigrants).
- Consider where the passage is located in history and how it is fulfilled in Christ (and in us) through the New Covenant.

