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## FOREWORD

Throughout the history of the Christian movement there has been an almost irreconcilable tension between law and grace. Even today this remains a fundamental issue for Christians. At a practical level the course between an austere legalism and a sentimentally cheap grace has too often been steered by correcting the one abuse with a measure of the other. Legalism and license, however, are both mutations of the faithful and responsible Christian life. The solution to this long-standing problem is not to be found in crowding the boundaries or reacting to the abuses. Rather, it is to be found in grasping the proper relationship between the Gift of God and the Divine Command.

These essays are presented in an attempt to encourage Christian reflection upon the shape of the faithful Christian life: to exhort those who have life in the Spirit and freedom in Christ to fulfill the “law of Christ.”

Michael R. Weed, Editor

## JESUS OF NAZARETH: A LIBERAL AND A LEGALIST

By Allan McNicol

Ernst Kasemann relates the following story that is supposed to have taken place in Holland during the period of disastrous flooding in 1952.<sup>1</sup> It appears that the dykes of a particular parish had become so vulnerable to the storms and high seas it was deemed necessary by the authorities that the entire populace spend a Sunday laboring to fortify the protective walls. This meant, of course, that the people could not carry on their regular church activities on this particular Sunday. The local minister was informed and he found himself in an unenviable position for a Dutch Calvinist. Should he ask the parishioners to attend services and risk the collapse of the dykes or should he violate the command to keep the Sabbath holy by neglecting the services and engaging in work. Unable to make the decision himself the minister called the church council together. Discussion went back and forth--pro and con. Finally, the minister, who leaned toward the view of abandoning services in favor of working, mentioned the scripture where Jesus said 'the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath' (Mark 2:27). At this point it is said that an old patriarch of the congregation struggled to his feet and announced, "I have

been troubled, pastor, by something I have not been able to say in public. Now the time has come to say it. I have always had the feeling our Lord Jesus was just a bit of a liberal.”

A sense of disease over the perception that Jesus may have been a bit liberal is not only disquieting news to conservative Dutchmen. As free church communities placing great emphasis on being faithful to God through careful obedience to the teachings and ordinances of the early church, the churches of Christ have emphasized repeatedly the need for Christians to be responsive and submissive to authority.<sup>2</sup> Practically speaking, as this concept has worked itself out in the local church it has meant that stress is placed on reading and interpreting biblical texts to determine what one should and should not do in all aspects of life as a Christian; and this ethos has become so pervasive amongst us that it has become clear that we are not far from what many observers of religion would call legalism.<sup>3</sup>

Mennonite John Yoder, in a very sympathetic treatment of the churches of Christ as a free church movement, has accurately put his finger on two theological tendencies in our fellowship that have made churches of Christ more susceptible to legalism than many other “restoration-type” churches which have broken with the church-state connection. First, Yoder points out the tendency on the part of churches of Christ (perhaps because many early nineteenth-century leaders had training in Scottish common sense philosophy) to follow a Calvinist rather than Anabaptist vision with reference to their interpretation of the New Testament as a complete pattern for church life--especially as it relates to polity.<sup>4</sup> Second, Yoder notes that in contrast to other

free church movements there is a demonstrated tendency in churches of Christ to emphasize restorationism to such an extent that some have painted themselves into a corner. The view that the New Testament church constituted a pure pattern for Christianity does have value in allowing a way around the difficult problem of historical contingency. But, if pressed to the extent some have forced this model, it has no clear way of dealing with the factors of cultural and philosophical change in any given contemporary era.<sup>5</sup> In these two areas Yoder has demonstrated that churches of Christ have a particular problem with legalism.

It is the easiest thing in the world for church leaders to enshrine their own particular opinions and interpretations of the New Testament as the touchstone or benchmark of apostolic authority. In some circles we have become so provincial that other theological discrimen used in the interpretation of texts in historic Christianity aside from our own are declared illegitimate. This is a serious problem which we can overcome only by becoming more conversant with the whole area of ecumenical biblical scholarship. Until that day arrives legalism poses an ever-present problem for us.

Furthermore, there is a cultural factor that compounds our struggle with legalism today. A considerable segment of the churches of Christ in America are people who find themselves alienated from the mainstream political, religious, lifestyle and philosophical models that are paraded regularly before them in their primary sources of information about the world, namely the media. These people are in the church precisely because it fortifies an

alternative set of personal values contrary to those which are operative in wider society. These Christians want clear authority. And the more legalistically their particular value system is implemented in the church, and even when possible in our wider pluralistic society, the better.

For these new authoritarians Jesus, the most potent figure and symbol in our civilization is, of course, thought to be the ideological foundation. Any idea that Jesus may have been a bit of a liberal, or sat loose in his attitude towards traditional authority, is a bitter pill that would be very hard for many to swallow. What is called for in these circles is a Jesus who under girds our views about authority; not one who questions them!

Since it is axiomatic that being a faithful Christian means to take the legacy of the life, deeds and teachings of Jesus seriously, it is important to raise the historical question as to what was Jesus' attitude toward the established authority structures of his time. Did he in conservative fashion demand strict adherence to the religious status quo in first-century Galilee? Or was he indifferent toward these structures? Or did he think that the established authorities were evil and should be overthrown? To ask these questions is really another way of raising the issue of Jesus' attitude towards the law of Moses: Torah. For the Torah was the established law under which a first century Jew in Palestine lived. By raising this issue, of course, it is not just our intention to go carefully through the primary and secondary sources of Jesus' life and give an historical answer to our question. Rather, we wish to pose the question in such a way that we intend to be able to separate the genuine earthly Jesus and his truthful claim over the church from the Jesus of our

modern ideological agendas.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, perhaps there is latent in this material a word whereby the community today who knows that its very existence is dependent upon remembrance of the revelation of God in Jesus' life can hear something that will allow it to stay clear of the entanglements of legalism. Thus, the purpose of this essay is to give an analysis of Jesus and his relationship to the law and suggest some implications this analysis has for the church today.

It will not be possible to cover all the relevant texts regarding Jesus and the law. In this essay we will concentrate on Jesus and the law in his Galilean ministry as recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke.<sup>7</sup>

Procedurally, in order to give force to this essay we will condense our analysis of Jesus' attitude toward Torah into a defense of two theses. After we have defended these theses we will conclude our essay with a summary of our findings and a statement concerning what implications this research has for the problem of legalism in the churches of Christ.

## Jesus and the Law

### Thesis One

Jesus respected and was observant of Torah the traditional inherited value system of the Jewish people of Galilee in the first century. To the degree that the Torah gave definition to all aspects of life, was written down in a book and was scrupulously observed, Jesus endorsed this practice and thus in this sense may be called a legalist.

It is customary for beginning students of the New Testament to be taught as foundational knowledge that there was considerable diversity and division in first-century Judaism. Such groups as the Pharisees, Zealots, Sadducees, Essenes, and Herodians competed for the allegiance of the people. Amidst this diversity we tend to forget that all these groups had some underlying views in common. Aside from accepting the fundamental confession that God is One, no concept was more firmly entrenched than the view that the Torah had come by revelation from God to Moses and represented God's normative claim over Israel. Every Jew had the responsibility to be observant of it.<sup>8</sup> This shared sense of a common communal existence under Torah was so strong that it is doubtful whether Jesus would have received any hearing among his people if his position were otherwise. In fact, the sources on Jesus' life indicate he observed Torah rigorously.

Throughout the gospel tradition we learn that Jesus faithfully attended the great festivals in Jerusalem. He paid the half shekel temple tax and wore the prescribed tassel on his outer garment.<sup>9</sup>

There is no clear evidence that Jesus made subtle distinctions (as in later Christian centuries) between the moral and ceremonial law or divided it into written demand and oral interpretation.<sup>10</sup> He seemed to hold the conventional view that the law in written form and the oral traditions came from Moses.<sup>11</sup> To be sure, on some occasions Jesus and his disciples clashed with certain interpretations of the law held by particular sectarian groups over such issues as the ritual need for the washing of hands before meals, what constituted work on the Sabbath, or whether the concession for divorce in Torah

constituted God's intention for Jewish practice in matters of marriage.<sup>12</sup> But with these and similar incidents that are noted in detail in the gospels, other groups within Judaism in the first century took positions which were similar to Jesus. All that this indicates was that Jesus was in the mainstream of Galilean Judaism. His attitude was in many ways typical of any devout follower who operates within a tradition.

One of the strongest pieces of evidence in favor of our thesis can be found in the belief system of the Aramaic-speaking disciples of Jesus who reformed to carry on his message after his death and resurrection. They remained observant of Torah (Acts 2:46; 21:20).<sup>13</sup> Even Paul the great bête noire of all Jews who accepted the proposition that Torah-keeping was essential for salvation viewed himself as observant of the law; only he demanded that believers in Jesus not see the law as the means of inheriting the promises given to Abraham and thus binding on both gentile and Jew (Acts 21:23-26; Rom. 4:9-13).<sup>14</sup> If followers of Jesus, including the Twelve, after the resurrection both claimed to be loyal to Jesus' cause and were observant of Torah, it is hardly likely that their recollection of Jesus was of one who advocated the freedom to disregard it during his earthly ministry. Thus, upon historical analysis of the Galilean ministry, we are drawn to the conclusion that throughout his ministry Jesus maintained a strong allegiance to the traditions of his people, the centerpiece of which was the Torah. In this sense he could be called a "legalist."

## Thesis Two

Jesus' utopian perspective that he lived at the beginning of the Messianic time caused him to assert that the normal routine of Torah-keeping in his era was an inadequate response to the crisis of his times. He alienated himself from his fellow Jews when upon the creation of a new family who were to serve as the prototype of the people in the new creation he urged such rigorous practices that in the view of some, the validity of traditional observance of Torah was repudiated. In this sense Jesus was an innovator or a liberal.

Jesus' close association with John the Baptist was indicative of his deep belief that Israel was at the edge of the Messianic Age and was about to enter its most crucial period of history. A fundamental theme of John's preaching was that the business-as-usual attitude on the part of Israel toward Torah observance was not good enough in these critical times. Israel should retreat to the wilderness apart from all false enticements of the age and there she could, in a place of quiet solitude, be purified in a special relationship with God in preparation for the critical events to come (cf. Hosea 2:14).<sup>15</sup> As the old Israel began in the wilderness so the new Israel would have its origins there as well. John announced that a failure to heed his radical call would lead to dire circumstances in Israel. The axe lay at the root of the trees (Matt. 3:10). Israel could no longer attain collective security before God by relying merely on its election as the chosen people and the promises of the covenant (Matt. 3:9). Israel must show a new moral seriousness towards Torah that went beyond mere perfunctory observance. This included sharing coats and food with the poor and being content with one's wages (Lk. 3:10-14; Matt. 3:8).

Although Jesus did not advocate retreat into the wilderness the message

of a stern call for Israel to go beyond being mere observers of Torah was carried on by Jesus after John's death. In view of the coming decisive events which were shortly to occur in the very near future, it was Jesus' view that the most critical thing to do was to repent and show the fruits of this change of heart in a reformed life (Lk. 13:3; Mk. 1:15; Matt. 7:16-20; 11:20-24).

In order to give focus to his vision of the people of God who would be prepared for the coming decisive events of history, Jesus formed a nucleus of the future restored Israel by selecting the Twelve.<sup>16</sup> It is important for our purposes to determine what Jesus was seeking to embody with his choice of the Twelve; especially how his activities with them were intended to transcend the lifestyle common to Torah observance of the day. To follow Jesus the disciples had to leave their vocations (Mk. 1:16-20; Matt. 9:9). They also were to leave their possessions (Lk. 12:33; 14:33; Mk. 10:21; Matt. 10:5-9). To accentuate the fact that this small community constituted a new fellowship distinctly different from anything they were used to in the past, Jesus demanded that his disciples be aware of the radical disjunction between the past and present life as his followers even in respect to leaving their own families (cf. Matt. 10:37; Lk. 14:26). This call for a radical break with their past lifestyles, including the breaking of close family ties, had grave implications vis-à-vis the common observance of Torah with its stress on the responsibility of men to provide for their families both by their presence with them and their financial means.

We can gain an insight into how revolutionary and upsetting Jesus' mission must have been to the Galileans by looking closely at one of his familiar sayings in Matthew 8:21-22 (see Lk. 9:59-60). Here the call to follow Jesus takes priority over preparation and implementation of the burial of a potential disciple's dead father. No parallel to this saying has been found in the known literature of the Greco-Roman world.<sup>17</sup> This kind of demand by the teacher upon his disciple is without precedent. The call to give up the most sacred filial duty of burying a parent would certainly be perceived by observant Jews of Jesus' time not only as disrespectful to the memory of one's family; but also as a claim that Torah with its call to honor father and mother should be relegated to "second fiddle" in favor of Jesus' call to discipleship. There is strong unbroken tradition in Judaism (as in most societies) in that minimal respect one can show to a parent is to give them a decent burial. Under Pharisaic influence in Palestine the rites for the dead, especially one's parents, had gained primacy among all good works. In the Rabbinic materials the following saying with reference to care for one's family is found.

He who is confronted by a dead relative is freed from recitation of the Shema, from the Eighteen Benedictions and from all the commandments stated in the Torah (Ber. 3:1; cf. M. Exodus 18:20).<sup>18</sup>

Clearly Jesus' saying cut against the grain in the established Judaism of his day. This saying (incident) is so shocking that it cannot be perceived merely as a metaphor for the urgency or mutual exclusiveness of his call to discipleship.<sup>19</sup> But neither should it be viewed as a sweeping statement on

Jesus' part where he apparently declares null and void one of the sacred ten words; namely to honor father and mother.<sup>20</sup> Rather, it seems to be the case here that Jesus is stressing the great difference between the business-as-usual attitude toward observance of Torah in his day and entrance into life in the new family of the kingdom. This required such a radical break between past and present that Jesus was quite prepared to upset and offend traditional sensibilities. Yet even here, Jesus did not view himself as being in violation of Torah. The kingdom was in the process of coming. The call to life by sheer grace entailed the belief that God, the loving heavenly father who was in the process of bringing a new creation, could certainly find support for the disciples' families and even create a situation under which the potential disciple's father would receive a decent burial. The important thing was to trust in the care of this gracious father and he family should live in total dependence on his care--to such an extent that no man in the new family should be called 'father' (Matt. 23:9; cf. Matt. 6:9, 32).<sup>21</sup> The disciples no longer had an earthly father (in the traditional patriarchal sense of that era) who could carefully plan their future careers and destiny; even the funeral arrangements for their families. From now on God was their father.

It is no wonder that this outlook came as shocking news to the normal observant Jew of Jesus' day; and it is understandable that even Jesus' own earthly family questioned the validity of this outlook (Mk. 3:21). Jesus was clear in the importance he gave to this family (Mk. 3:31-35; Matt. 10:34-37). But those who discounted this dimension in his thought could only see dispossessed families and disrespectful disciples. This was the source of the

distress many thoughtful observant Jews felt toward Jesus and the implications of his teaching for normal perceptions of Torah. Jesus' view of God's demands for the preparation of the Kingdom was taking them to the outer limits of regular Torah observance. And it certainly didn't alleviate matters when he freely invited the sinners and tax gatherers (others who had gone beyond the pale of regular Torah observance) to come to his table on the basis of sheer grace rather than demanding the customary period of probation as did the Pharisaic teachers (cf. Mk. 2:15-16).<sup>22</sup> Thus Jesus was considered by many conscientious Jews as dangerous.<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, he was disposed of outside the city gate in Jerusalem (Heb. 13:12).

The contrast between being a common observer of Torah and Jesus' call to live in absolute dependence upon the gracious care of the father in Jesus' new family is brought out clearly in the famous 'light burden' passage of Matthew 11:28-30. This is a crucial text for understanding both the vision of Jesus for his new family and its connection with Torah. The text appears to be a redefinition of some sayings in the Apocryphal book of Sirach written about 200-190 B.C. In Sirach 51:26, 27 we read:

Put your neck under the yoke and let your soul receive instruction  
it is to be found close by.

See with your eyes that I have labored little  
and found for myself much rest (R.S.V.).

The subject of this poem is the wisdom of God. Here the hearers of this poem are exhorted to follow God's wisdom. They are to put their necks under

the yoke and to receive its instruction. For the observant Jew the yoke of wisdom and the yoke of the commandments of God as given in the Torah were the same (Sirach 24:23-29).<sup>24</sup> The Torah was God's concrete expression in the form of instruction designed to show his people how they should live in all areas of life. But in Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus, speaking to the disciples, adds to the demands of the common observance of Torah the call to his way of discipleship (cf. Matt. 5:20).<sup>25</sup> Concretely, this meant they were to go with him in his mission of teaching, preaching, and healing (Matt. 4:19-25; 10:16).<sup>26</sup> Being yoked with Jesus and carrying the burden of learning from him gave every indication of creating great difficulties (Matt. 10:24-39; cf. 5:20). Yet here Jesus is said to tell his disciples that his yoke is easy and his burden is light! Indeed, as individuals who would try to meet these demanding standards on their own resources this was impossible.<sup>27</sup> But because Jesus, the teacher of God's wisdom, had promised to be with his disciples in one family under God's gracious care until the end of the age, what was once impossible for the individual was now possible in the context of the new family existence (Matt. 28:16-20; cf. Gal. 6:2).<sup>28</sup>

Finally, this vision of life together in the new family of God where God's demands are fulfilled is at the heart of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1-7, 29) or the Sermon on the Plain (Lk. 6:17-49). Of course Matthew and Luke have been careful to place these significant statements of the nature of life in Jesus' new community into the context of concrete expressions indicating what was taking place in the life of Jesus' family under the direct rule of God (Matt. 4:23-25; Lk. 6:17-20; cf. Matt. 11:2-6).<sup>29</sup> In Matthew 5:21-

48 the ethical demands of Jesus are set out vis-à-vis the law. But again we should not rush to the conclusion that when Jesus used the formula ‘you have heard, but I say to you,’ that he is giving his statements on the life of a disciple as something operative in place of the Torah. The grammatical construction here could just as well be read as either ‘and I (in agreement with Torah) say to you,’ or as I think is more likely, ‘I (in addition to Torah) say to you.’<sup>30</sup> According to Matthew 5:17-20 the last thing Jesus wanted to do was replace the demands of Torah.<sup>31</sup> Since that passage sets forth the themes which are developed in Matthew 5:21-48 it is hardly likely that the so-called antitheses should be read as Jesus’ alternative to Torah. Jesus called his Jewish disciples to be observant of Torah within the mainstream of the tradition (Matt. 23:3). But in addition he called for a greater righteousness (Matt. 5:20-48). Thus he was both a legalist and a liberal.

### Summary of Findings

It seems abundantly clear that Jesus could in no way be described as being indifferent to observance of Torah. Nor did he consider that the normal procedure of interpreting the law as carried on by the scribes was inherently evil (Matt. 23:2, 3). The problem with the scribes and Pharisees was that they did not live up to the law or were over zealous in devising ways to make its demands easier (Matt. 24 :4-39; Mk. 7:1-13). In his general disposition toward the givenness of Torah as authoritative tradition (both in written and oral form) Jesus was quite conservative.

But, at the same time, there was a major element in his outlook where he

differed from the typical contemporary Torah observer. Taking up where John the Baptist left off, Jesus saw himself as called by God to create a new family of restored Israel who would live in total dependence upon God as a prototype of citizenship in the new creation. What seemed to Jesus to be a way of life lived by sheer grace (e.g., calling disciples to leave their earthly livelihoods) appeared to other Jews as irresponsible and contrary to Torah. Thus many became hostile and ultimately Jesus was rejected by the status quo. In this sense Jesus did not accept the status quo and as the old Dutchman correctly perceived was a “bit liberal.”

### Our Battle with Legalism

In conclusion we would raise the question about the applicability of these findings to contemporary church life. We believe there is a word here that if heeded may help churches of Christ be more faithful to the intent of Jesus of Nazareth and at the same time avoid a distorted legalism. We will attempt to state this word in the form of several observations.

1. Jesus himself held in deep respect a form of traditional authority: the Torah and observance of it. Likewise the church should do the same today both with respect to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles and of our historic free church restorationist theological perspective.
2. There is evidence to indicate that Jesus did not allow himself to stop with being the faithful conservator of his inherited tradition. He did not use allegiance to tradition as a means of avoiding the historical contingencies he faced in his era. He was no obscurantist. Churches of Christ today should be aware of

over zealous attempts on the part of some who would seek to imprison them with a total theological outlook solely operative within a very restrictive set of formulas worked out by past leaders but which are no longer relevant today. This legalism, in the name of Jesus, should not be tolerated in the family of God today.

3. Jesus risked alienation and accepted hostility because of his conviction that in his new community something more significant was taking place there than in the wider general society of his time. We should see today that the local congregation (our family) can still be a place where the Lordship of Christ challenges us to risk alienation either from “the do your own thing culture” of the left or those of the new right who would make their ideological use of Jesus the basis for a new unity between church and state. We must remember that as a sectarian fellowship we are as Jesus’ family, set apart under God’s word to model among ourselves the ultimate triumph of the kingship of the heavenly father. This strategy brings freedom not bondage.

Earlier in this paper we referred to the excellent analytical work John Yoder has done on the churches of Christ and their battle with legalism. We now close with a further observation he has made.

If Jesus Christ is Lord, obedience to his rule cannot be dysfunctional. Principled or virtuous behavior cannot be imprudent generally, though it may well appear so punctually. Torah is grace, not a burden. The (new) covenant is liberation, not servitude.<sup>32</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> E. Kasemann, Jesus Means Freedom (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970) 16.
- <sup>2</sup> See my article “Apostolicity and Holiness: The Basis for Christian Fellowship,” Mission 1985 (forthcoming). Here I stress that the churches of Christ are a legitimate fellowship based on the traditional marks of the church being one, catholic, holy, and apostolic. They claim to be a legitimate holy fellowship both on the grounds of claiming to follow a transcendent moral purpose revealed in Scripture and through the regular exercise of discipline by ecclesiastical authorities.
- <sup>3</sup> Cf. John H. Yoder, The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics of the Gospel (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 1934) 198.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid., 131-133.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid., 198.
- <sup>6</sup> The case for the historian’s Jesus to supplant the Jesus of the ideologues is well stated by Leander Keck, A Future for the Historical Jesus (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 103-106.
- <sup>7</sup> Although we do not have room to discuss the material in this paper my own analysis of the clash between Jesus and the temple authorities in Jerusalem as well as the Johannine materials is congruent with the picture of Jesus’ attitudes toward the law which we find in the earlier stages of his ministry.
- <sup>8</sup> Ed P. Sanders, “Jesus, Paul, and Judaism,” Aufstieg und Niedergang der

Romischen Welt II, 25.1 (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1982) 393 makes this observation: “Various groups may have disagreed among themselves as to the right interpretation of Torah, and who had the right to interpret it, but they agreed they should live according to it.”

- <sup>9</sup> Douglas J. Moo, “Jesus and the Authority of the Mosaic Law,” Journal for the Study of the New Testament 20 (1984) 5.
- <sup>10</sup> D. Flusser, Jesus (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969) 46.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Cf. Matt. 15:20/Mk. 7:1-4; Mk. 2:23-3:6/Lk. 6:1-12/Matt. 12:9-17; Matt. 5:31-32/19:1-12 et parr.
- <sup>13</sup> Sanders, 429.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., 432.
- <sup>15</sup> Gerhard Lohfink, Jesus and Community (Philadelphia : Fortress, 1984) 8.
- <sup>16</sup> Lohfink, 31-32 points out that there were two groups of people who heard Jesus’ message with favor. There were those who accepted it but remained in the villages to await the reign of God (cf. Mk. 5:19, 20). On the other hand there were the disciples (mathetai) who were called by Jesus to be his students. These appeared to constitute what the later Pharisees would call a haberim ( a conventicle of students gathered around a teacher to study and live by Torah). Jesus’ demands for this latter group were stricter than for the former perhaps because he saw them as the real proto-types of life in the kingdom.
- <sup>17</sup> M. Hengel, The Charismatic Leader and His Followers (Philadelphia : Fortress, 1968) 8-15.
- <sup>18</sup> Hengel, 9.

- <sup>19</sup> Contra R. Banks, Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Gospels in Society of New Testament Studies Monographic Series 28 (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1975) 97.
- <sup>20</sup> Contra Sanders, 415.
- <sup>21</sup> Lohfink, 48.
- <sup>22</sup> W. R. Farmer, Jesus and the Gospel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) 36-40.
- <sup>23</sup> A similar observation may be made with reference to Jesus' purported declaration against traditional distinctions between clean and unclean foods (Matt. 15:10; Mk. 7:15-20). The earthly Jesus did stress the point that defilement was not confined to touching material things so much as it was a matter of inner or moral defilement. There is no evidence that Jesus was non-observant of the food laws of Torah or taught others to be so. His close disciple Peter much later was strictly observant on this matter (Acts 10:9-46).
- <sup>24</sup> Lohfink, 61.
- <sup>25</sup> G. Stanton, "Matthew 11:28-30: Comfortable Words?" The Expository Times 94 (Oct. 1982) 3-8.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> Lohfink, 62-63; R. Riesner, Jesus als Lehrer WUNT 2.7 (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1984) 330-344 develops the theme of Jesus as teacher of wisdom.
- <sup>28</sup> Lohfink, 62-63.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> Moo, 18.

<sup>31</sup> It is not possible in this essay to give a complete analysis of Matthew 5:17-19. The passage has many exegetical problems. A primary problem is to determine the meaning of pleroo (to complete, fulfill) in 5:17. Moo, 23-28 has an adequate survey of the interpretations of this passage. Three, in particular, he notes as the important ones: (1) to read pleroo as “fills up” or “brings to complete obedience” in the sense that Jesus’ demands for his community brought to expression the full intended force of Torah; (2) or extended its demands; (3) or to read pleroo as “fulfills” in the sense that Jesus brought in his ministry the Messianic era towards which the law and the prophets traditionally pointed. The present writer tends think that a combination of option one and two best expresses the meaning of the text. (Cf. Matt. 3:15 where the active infinitive, as in 5:17, is used in this way).

<sup>32</sup> Yoder, 37.

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