

- e. Verse 10:4 represents the summary centerpiece of Paul's argumentation in 9:30-10:13, and is therefore fundamental to this larger passage. For by it Paul clarified his prior insistence that the Gentiles – who did not have the Law of Moses – found righteousness when Israel did not, and why it is that faith is the sole basis of true righteousness. The reason for these things is that Christ is the *end* of the law. He has not abrogated it, but has *fulfilled* it: in His person and work, Christ is the reality of which it spoke and to which it pointed. The Law prophesied until John (Matthew 11:13), and now that the One it anticipated and whose work it served has come, it has yielded itself up in a new covenant administering a new creation in the power of the Spirit (8:1-27; Galatians 4:21-5:6; etc.).

And precisely because Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law, He is the focal point in the matter of human righteousness, whether Jew or Gentile. Righteousness is not to be found in that which has been fulfilled, but in the One who is Himself its fulfillment. Righteousness is gained only by faith in Christ; it is for “everyone who believes.” And having spotlighted the contrast between faith and works in 9:30-32, Paul then developed it further by introducing to his discussion two other contrasting pairs.

- The *knowledge* of God's righteousness in Christ expresses itself in *faith*, resulting in the *attaining* of His righteousness through union with the Lord Jesus.
- Conversely, *ignorance* of God's righteousness is expressive of, and expresses itself in, the pursuit of self-righteousness through *works*, resulting in the *failure* to obtain righteousness.

In verses 10:5-13 Paul goes on to demonstrate biblically the above contrasting dynamics by showing that the Scripture has recognized and affirmed them all along. This is important, first for a Jewish audience, because it reveals that righteousness before God has, from the beginning, been a matter of faith rather than works (ref. 4:1-25; cf. also Hebrews 11:1-40). Israel's insistence upon establishing its own righteousness through the Law of Moses is thus an issue of unbelief, not insufficient revelation. The Jews' own scriptures indicted them. But they equally indict the Gentiles who themselves are committed to the principle of self-righteousness, though apart from the Law.

- 1) In the first instance, Paul drew upon a text that substantiates his contention regarding *righteousness based on law* (10:5). Interestingly, his citation represents God's instruction to Israel as relayed to the people by Moses, the man most associated with Israel's Law. The statement is taken from Leviticus 18:5, which is part of a larger context spanning verses 1-30. In it God was instructing Moses and directing him to command Israel according to His word. Specifically, he was to call them to be fastidious in following Yahweh's statutes and judgments when they entered and took possession of the land promised to them. In so doing, they were to reject the patterns and practices of the peoples they would be driving out (vv. 1-23). God wanted Israel to understand that His forthcoming action in driving those nations from their lands reflected His indignation at their abominable deeds. Therefore, if the sons of Israel gave themselves to the same abominations, God would deal them as He had the Canaanites (vv. 24-30).

This is the contextual backdrop for Paul's citation, but it leaves unanswered the question as to how exactly he was employing it in his present argument. In context, Israel was called to "perform God's judgments" and "keep His statutes," with the promise that those who did so would "live." For his part, Paul took this instruction as establishing a general maxim, namely that *"the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness."* This raises several important questions:

- The first question that must be answered is the *relation* verse 5 has to its predecessor. It is clear that Paul intended 10:5 (as well as verses 6-13) to provide explanation and clarification of his statement in 10:4, but in what sense was this the case? As a first option, did he intend his citation from Leviticus to positively complement his assertion about righteousness coming by faith? Douglas Moo well sums up this viewpoint:

*"The 'righteousness of the law' is nothing but the righteousness of faith, for, rightly understood, the law itself calls for faith: 'the person who does the law,' mentioned in the quotation from Lev. 18:5, is the person who submits to the law's deepest demands, 'circumcises his heart,' and trusts in the Lord. Advocates of this view generally think that **telos** [end] in v. 4a means 'inner meaning' or 'goal' and that vv. 5-8 provide a practical demonstration of that truth."*

Conversely, did Paul intend his citation to negatively complement his assertion? In this view, Paul used the Leviticus citation – which addresses the gaining of life through obedience to God's law - to prove that righteousness *cannot* come by works of law. If this was his intention, then Paul was using this Old Testament quotation to affirm his overarching contention that faith is the sole basis of human righteousness.

In all fairness, other matters must be resolved before this question can be answered conclusively. And yet it is not inappropriate to note that the larger context points toward the second view as being the correct one.

- The second question pertains to Paul's *hermeneutic*. That is to say, what interpretive framework enabled him to take a theocratic promise to Old Testament Israel and apply it to Israel's current situation in light of the coming of Christ? Was Paul saying that God's instruction to Old Covenant Israel, "Do this and live," is His instruction to Israel in the age of the New Covenant? If so, was he also indicating that the New Covenant is essentially a reiteration and reaffirmation of the Old Covenant? Beyond that, was Paul limiting this maxim to the Jews, or did he view it as a universal truth that applies to Gentiles as well? Can a Gentile own for himself the divinely-declared truth that the "man who practices the righteousness based on law shall live by that righteousness"? Was Paul indeed affirming for all men *life* through the *law*?

The answer is that Paul embraced a *redemptive-historical* hermeneutic - he recognized the typological and preparatory role played by Old Testament Israel in the upward movement of salvation history. He understood that both Israel and its covenant served prophetic roles as they anticipated and prepared for God's redemption in Jesus Christ. Because Christ is the fulfillment of *Israel* (Isaiah 49:1ff), He is also the fulfillment of Israel's *law* by which the nation was defined and given insight into its unique identity as Yahweh's elect, beloved covenant "son," "servant," and "disciple" (Matthew 5:17-20, 11:13; also Luke 24:25-27; John 5:37-47).

Paul recognized that Israel and the Mosaic Law had both found their pre-ordained fulfillment in Christ, *and one's conclusion regarding his use of Leviticus 18:5 must take this truth into account*. As Paul considered this passage, he understood that the principle it sets forth served a specific purpose in the theocratic life of Old Covenant Israel. At the same time, he also realized that this maxim of "life" as the reward for righteousness based on law had an ultimacy beyond theocratic Israel. He fully understood that it served a prophetic and preparatory role in God's purposes that would culminate in His redemptive work in Christ.

- Having considered Paul's overall hermeneutic, a third question can now be addressed. That question pertains to God's declaration to Moses that righteousness under the Law results in *life*. First of all, in what sense was this true of Old Covenant Israel; how did Israel's obedience yield life for the nation? More importantly, how was Paul employing this idea in his present argument? Was his meaning the same as that presented in the context in Leviticus, or did he have something else in mind? In answering this, the first thing to recognize is that, in the Leviticus context, the concept of eternal (salvific) life is not in view.

Israel's covenant status was national and temporal, and so also was its relationship with God. Yahweh was preeminently Israel's *redeemer*, as the preamble to the Sinai covenant makes clear (Exodus 20:1-2). And yet His work of redemption on Israel's behalf was physical rather than spiritual. So also was God's ongoing activity as Israel's deliverer and savior; throughout their history God repeatedly "saved" His people by delivering them from their national enemies and physical difficulties.

In the same way, "life" for Israel was defined by the nation's *covenantal communion* with God in Canaan. As the "seed of Abraham," the sons of Israel had been granted the inheritance God promised to Abraham, and the blessing and favor attached to their unique status as a "kingdom of priests" constituted Israel's life. Conversely, "death" amounted to the forfeiture of that communion and the blessing that attended it. *Thus the concepts of life and death as they applied to theocratic Israel hearkened back to the communion and dominion principles introduced in Eden.*

Thus, in the context of Leviticus 18 God's promise of life through obedience to His statutes is the promise of covenant blessing and continuity for the nation. As they prepared to enter the land promised to the patriarchs (and to them), the sons of Israel were to know that their continuance in God's favor as His people depended upon their obedience. Disregard for Yahweh and His covenant directives would bring upon them the same judgment and destruction that had come upon the inhabitants of Canaan (ref. again 18:24-30; cf. also 26:1ff and Deuteronomy 28:1ff). Life – covenant communion with Yahweh – depended upon righteousness, and Israel's covenant (the Law) provided that definition.

This was the promise to Israel through Moses, but was Paul simply speaking of life in terms of theocratic blessing? In context he was clearly concerned with the "life" that is the new birth and its fruit of salvation (eternal life), but this does not argue against the appropriateness of his citation. For Leviticus 18:5 finds its focal point in the maxim that *righteousness and its attendant spiritual blessing come through perfect conformity to the covenant terms God has imposed*. For God establishes and orders His relationships with His creatures through covenants, and the specific terms of any given covenant define what constitutes the righteousness or "rightness" of the covenanting parties. Communion with God thus depends upon covenant *righteousness*; if a person would commune with God he must fully conform to the criteria that justly define that relationship. *Two cannot walk together except they be in agreement*. In the Bible's vernacular, human righteousness is not moral and ethical rectitude per se; it is covenant integrity.

In the case of Israel, the Law of Moses – Israel's covenant – governed every aspect of the life of the nation and the individuals who comprised it. *The Law defined for Israel what it meant to be Israel*. Israel was a beloved son, a chosen race, a kingdom of priests, and a people for God's own possession, and the Law articulated and elucidated what that meant and how it was to be lived out. This being so, it ought to be obvious why Israel's righteousness and "life" depended upon its conformity to the Law. Failure to keep the Law amounted to Israel's failure to be Israel. Thus God's requirement of His covenant people was neither empty nor disingenuous; *the man who practices these things shall live by them*.

The nature of the Law also explains why God's demand upon Israel could never be met. The covenant described for the sons of Israel, and required of them, that they live in perfect, harmonious communion with their Creator and covenant God. The great commandment that embodied the rest was supreme, unqualified love for Him. But sin is *self-love*, with the result that Israel could not help but break the covenant as Yahweh's "unfaithful wife." Most importantly, it explains why another covenant son, servant, and disciple – another Israel – had to come if God's promise that began with Eve was to ever find its fulfillment. Christ is the Seed of the Woman and the Seed of Abraham, and so also the true Israel. As such He is the One prophesied and portrayed by Israel's covenant: He is the faithful covenant-keeping Son of Yahweh. Israel's downfall was not the righteousness of the Law, but her failure to obtain its righteousness by faith in the Righteous One.