

Christ, the Termination of the Law (Romans 9:30-10:8)

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The interpretation of Paul's statement that Christ is the τέλος of the Law in Rom 10:4 remains one of the more controversial in NT exegesis.¹ Is Paul saying that Christ is the "termination" or "goal" of the Mosaic Law, or both? In what follows we shall present a new argument for the interpretation that Christ is the termination rather than the goal, purpose, climax, or culmination of the Law as the way to righteousness before God. After examining Paul's statement in Rom 10:4 in itself, we shall consider the antecedent context in 9:30-10:3 and then the subsequent context in 10:5-8. In addition to keeping in mind the overall rhetorical tone and thrust of Paul's statements in 9:30-10:8, a more detailed consideration of Paul's very creative and clever use of OT texts from the Law in 10:5-8 provides the key to our new argument.

I. Romans 10:4

We translate Rom 10:4 as follows: "For Christ is the termination (τέλος) of the Law so that righteousness is for all who believe." The key Greek word here is τέλος, which possesses an ambiguity similar to its English equivalent, "end." Does it mean "end" in the sense of termination or cessation, or "end" in the sense of goal, purpose, fulfillment, or result?² Lexically, either or perhaps both are possible, so that as always the context is decisive. Even if, as some maintain, τέλος normally means goal in Paul, the context must finally determine what it means in each case.³

As we hope to demonstrate, the context demands that in 10:4 τέλος means "termination" only without any connotation of "goal," "purpose," "fulfillment," "completion," "climax," "consummation," or "culmination."⁴ Any such connotations would actually defeat Paul's rhetorical purpose. The context allows us to fill in what is implied in the above translation as follows: "For Christ is the termination of the Law (as Israel's way of seeking to attain righteousness before God by doing its works) so that

righteousness is (now) for all who believe (in the Christ whom God has raised from the dead and established as Lord).”

That Christ is the termination of the Law is a limited and ultimately positive statement with regard to the Law. It means that God has brought an end to the futile attempt to attain righteousness with God by doing the works of the Law (cf. 2:13; 3:19-20; 7:7-12). It does not mean that the Law has been abrogated or rendered totally useless. The Law is still valid as a way for Christians to live an upright and moral life in accord with God’s Spirit. Indeed, as Paul insisted previously, we do not nullify the Law through faith, “on the contrary, we uphold the Law” (3:31). Those who have been made righteous by faith and have thus received the holy Spirit are now able to fulfill the requirements of the Law (8:4), and by loving one another Christians fulfill the Law (13:8-10).⁵ Thus, the law retains its role as a code of moral behavior, but loses its role as a way of attaining righteousness with God.

That Christ is the termination of the Law as the way of attaining righteousness before God by doing the works of the Law does not contradict Paul’s previous statement that the righteousness of God has been attested (μαρτυρουμένη) by the Law and the Prophets (3:21). Paul illustrates one of the ways the Law attests to or bears witness to the righteousness of God by citing from that part of scripture known as “the Law” the example of Abraham, who was made righteous not by works but by faith: “Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6 in Rom 4:3). And from “the Prophets” David in Ps 32:1-2 pronounces the blessing of forgiveness on the person to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works (Rom 4:6-8).⁶

That Christ is the termination of the Law, which contains the word of God, does not in any way thwart Paul’s thesis statement and superscription for his argument in Rom 9-11, namely, that “it is not as if the word of God has failed!” (9:6). Indeed, as we hope to demonstrate, Paul’s use of the scriptural word of God from the Law itself in

10:5-8 confirms that it is in accord with God's word in the Law that Christ is the termination of the Law as the way to righteousness.

II. Antecedent Context: Romans 9:30-10:3

Romans 10:4 occurs within the broader context of Rom 9-11, in which Paul focuses upon the problem that his fellow Israelites in general have not believed in what God has done in the Christ event. After sharing with his Roman audience his deep concern for his fellow unbelieving Israelites (9:1-5), Paul assures his audience that the word of God, the basis for their own faith and hope, has not failed with regard to Israel (9:6-29). Paul then shifts the vantage point of his rhetorical strategy. Whereas he previously invited his audience to consider the problem of unbelieving Israel primarily from the side of God (9:6-29), in 9:30-10:21 he bids them to ponder the same problem primarily from the side of Israel. Paul's rhetorical purpose in 9:30-10:21 is not just to document the fact of Israel's stubborn unbelief but to demonstrate that faith is still eminently available to Israel. Everything they need to turn and submit themselves in faith to the gospel about Christ is patiently awaiting them. Romans 10:4, then, is part of Paul's rhetorical strategy to impart to his audience the hope that all Israel will eventually believe and be saved (11:26).⁷

A. Romans 9:30-33

Paul begins this new section (9:30-10:21) by employing the metaphor of running in pursuit of a goal to place an ironic contrast before his audience: "What then shall we say? Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained righteousness, indeed the righteousness from faith; but Israel who pursued the Law of righteousness did not arrive at the Law!" (9:30-31).⁸ Surprisingly, Paul concludes the contrast not with an expected "Israel did not arrive at righteousness" but "Israel did not arrive at the Law."

Paul's use of "Law" rather than "righteousness" as the unattained object of Israel's pursuit in 9:31 serves a double purpose in his rhetorical strategy: 1) It leaves open the possibility that Israel can still arrive at righteousness, like the Gentiles, from

faith. 2) It places the focus on the way of the Law as the problem in Israel's failure to attain righteousness. Not that the Law in itself is the problem, but the Law poisoned by the power of sin (7:7-12). Israel "did not arrive at the (righteousness that is the object of the) Law" because from the works of the Law no human being is made righteous before God, for through the Law comes consciousness of sin (3:20). That Israel did not arrive at the Law (νόμον, 9:31) in their pursuit of righteousness is thus already preparing for Paul's statement that what God has done in Christ is the termination of the Law (νόμου, 10:4) as the way to righteousness, so that righteousness is now available for all who believe rather than try in vain to do the works of the Law.⁹

In his diatribal style Paul continues with an elliptical statement: "Why? Because not from faith but as if from works" (9:32a). From the context the ellipsis is to be filled in as follows: "Why? Because (Israel sought to attain righteousness) not from faith (in Christ) but as if (righteousness could be attained) from (doing the) works (of the Law)." Righteousness rather than the Law is the implied topic here because righteousness is the main theme and ultimate object of the pursuit/non-pursuit in 9:30-31.¹⁰ Israel failed to attain righteousness because they did not pursue it from faith but pursued it as if they could attain it by doing the works of the Law.

In 9:32a Paul is not saying that Israel failed to arrive at the Law of righteousness because they tried to fulfill that Law from works rather than from faith.¹¹ Nowhere in Romans does Paul talk about fulfilling the Law from faith; rather, faith is always in contrast to doing the works of the Law.¹² This is most evident in 3:27-28: "What then becomes of boasting? It is excluded! Through what 'Law' (νόμου)? (The Law) of works? No, but through the 'Law' of faith (νόμου πίστεως). For we maintain that a person is made righteous by faith without works of Law." The "Law of faith" clearly does not refer to doing the Mosaic Law from faith. The word "Law" (νόμος) here, without losing its reference to the Torah, is used with the connotation of "principle," "system," or "dispensation" to contrast it with the Mosaic Law as a system of doing works.¹³ The

failure to realize that Paul is not referring to Israel's pursuit of the Law from faith in 9:32a often misleads to the interpretation that in 10:4 Christ is the goal or fulfillment of the Law Israel was pursuing from works rather than from faith.

There is a second and separate reason why Israel failed to attain the righteousness they pursued: "They stumbled over the stone of stumbling, as it is written, 'Behold, I place in Zion a stone of stumbling and rock of offense, but the one who believes in him will not be put to shame' (Isa 8:14; 28:16)" (9:32b-33). Since the relation between 9:32a and 9:32b is a grammatical asyndeton, it is best not to posit any causal relationship either way.¹⁴ That Israel failed to attain the righteousness that is the object of the Law (9:32a) is not necessarily the cause of nor is it necessarily caused by the fact that Israel stumbled over the stone of stumbling (9:32b). These are two different failures whose relationship Paul leaves open at this point by the asyndeton.¹⁵ That the stone and the failure to believe in it/him refers to Christ (rather than the Law) is confirmed by the repetition in 10:11 of "the one who believes in him will not be put to shame" in a context in which "in him" (ἐπ' αὐτῷ) can only refer to Christ.¹⁶ Israel's failure to believe in Christ, then, is a separate failure and mystery in itself for Paul (cf. 9:1-5).

Romans 9:32b-33 epitomizes Paul's rhetorical strategy in Rom 9-11. That Israel failed to believe in Christ accords with God's word (cf. 9:6) in scripture ("as it is written," 9:33a) and is part of God's plan ("I [God] place in Zion a stone of stumbling," 9:33a); the rhetorical thrust, however, lies in the final appeal contained in this scriptural quote, namely, "but (adversative rather than conjunctive καὶ) the one who believes in him will not be put to shame (by God, divine passive)" (9:33b). In other words, although the way to attain righteousness by doing the works of the Law is a dead end, the way of attaining righteousness by faith in Christ, even though Israel at this point has stumbled over him, is still available to Israel as it is to anyone who believes.¹⁷ This explicit appeal for Israel to believe (ὁ πιστεύων) in Christ in 9:33 thus prepares for and develops into

the implicit appeal in 10:4 for all to believe (παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι) in the Christ whom God has made the termination of the Law, so that righteousness is now for all who believe rather than do the works of the Law.

B. Romans 10:1-3

After expressing his deep and prayerful desire for Israel's salvation (10:1) and testifying that although Israel has zeal for God, it is not directed by knowledge (10:2), Paul, as he further expresses Israel's failure, develops his contrast and dichotomy between the two different ways to righteousness: "For, not recognizing the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own righteousness,¹⁸ they have not submitted to the righteousness of God" (10:3). "The righteousness of God" refers to "the righteousness from faith" that the Gentiles have attained without pursuing (9:30). It is the righteousness now available to Israel and to all by believing in Christ (9:33; 10:4). "Seeking to establish their own righteousness" refers to Israel's futile attempt to attain righteousness with God by doing the works of the Law (9:31-32). But Israel's way of trying to attain righteousness through the Law has now become "their own" way rather than God's way.¹⁹ Israel has failed to recognize that God has ended "their own" way, which was through doing the works of the Law, and brought about a new way of attaining righteousness, which is through believing, as Paul explains in 10:4--"For Christ is the termination of the Law (as Israel's way of seeking to attain righteousness before God by doing its works) so that righteousness is (now) for all who believe."

III. Subsequent Context: Romans 10:5-8

In Rom 10:5-8 Paul further illustrates why Christ is the termination of the Law as the way to righteousness so that righteousness is now for all who believe (10:4). By citing texts from the Law, Paul continues his contrast between the way to righteousness through the Law (10:5), which is Israel's own righteousness (10:3) by doing the works of the Law (9:32), and the way to righteousness through faith (10:6-8), which is the righteousness of God (10:3).²⁰

A. Romans 10:5 and Leviticus 18:1-5

In Rom 10:5 Paul defines what, according to the Mosaic Law, is essentially involved in attaining righteousness through the works of the Law: “For Moses writes about the righteousness from the Law: ‘The person who does them will live by them’ (Lev 18:5b).” Paul presumes that his audience is familiar not only with the scriptural quote in itself but with its preceding context in Lev 18:1-5a.²¹ Paul thus leaves it to his audience to determine the referent for the pronoun “them” (αὐτὰ) in his citation of Lev 18:5b in Rom 10:5. The LXX of Lev 18:5 reads: “You shall observe all my commands and all my decrees and you shall do them (αὐτά), which, having done, a person will live by them.”²² From their recall of the preceding context of Lev 18:5b the audience knows that “doing them” refers to doing all the commands and all the decrees God has given to Moses. And from the preceding context in Romans the audience further links “doing them” with doing the “works” of the Law as a way to righteousness (Rom 9:32).

The key concept not only of Paul’s citation of Lev 18:5b but of its preceding context is that of doing/not doing laws and commandments. In the LXX of Lev 18:1-5 God authorizes Moses to reveal to the sons of Israel that “you shall not do” (οὐ ποιήσετε) according to the practices of the land of Egypt and “you shall not do” (οὐ ποιήσετε) according to the practices of the land of Canaan (18:3). Rather, “you shall do (ποιήσετε) my decrees” (18:4). Indeed, “you shall observe all my commands and all my decrees and you shall do (ποιήσετε) them, which, having done (ποιήσας), a person will live by them” (18:5). Noteworthy is that the LXX of Lev 18:5a has the clause, “and you shall do them,” which is lacking in the MT. Thus, the participle, “having done” (ποιήσας) is even more emphatic in the LXX text. It not only climaxes four previous occurrences of the verb “do” (ποιέω) in reference to doing laws and commandments, but emphatically reiterates the “doing” of the previous clause--“you shall do them, which, having done, a person will live by them” (Lev 18:5b).²³

According to the righteousness that is from the Law, a person must actually do all the commandments and decrees of God and thus live by them (Rom 10:5). “Doing” is the key word that provides a link not only to Israel’s pursuit of righteousness “from works” (9:32) but, as we shall now see, to Paul’s further citation of OT Law texts from Deuteronomy in Rom 10:6-8.

B. Romans 10:6-8 and Deuteronomy 8:17-18; 9:4-6; 30:11-14

In contrast to what Moses writes about the righteousness from the Law (10:5), the personified righteousness from faith says: “Do not say in your heart (Deut 8:17; 9:4), ‘Who will ascend into heaven?,’ that is, to bring Christ down; or, ‘Who will descend into the abyss?,’ that is, to bring Christ up from the dead. But what does it say?--‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (Deut 30:12-14), that is, the word of faith which we are preaching” (10:6-8).²⁴ The contrast here is not between scriptural citations per se--Paul is not trying to demonstrate a contradiction between texts of the Law. Rather, the contrast is between two ways of attaining righteousness--the righteousness from the Law and the righteousness from faith, God’s righteousness (10:3).²⁵ That the righteousness from faith inserts statements about Christ in quoting from the Law in 10:6-8 does not support the interpretation that Christ is the goal or culmination of the Law in 10:4. Rather, as we shall demonstrate, the statements about Christ indicate how God in the Christ event has brought an end to the “doing” that is required to attain righteousness from the Law, so that righteousness is now for all who believe.

1. Romans 10:6 and Deuteronomy 8:17-18; 9:4-6

That the warning, “Do not say in your heart,” which introduces the proclamation spoken by the righteousness of faith in Rom 10:6-8 occurs in the LXX only in Deut 8:17 and 9:4 enhances the audience’s recall not only of these two texts but of their closely associated contexts.²⁶ Taken together, Deut 8:17 and 9:4 and their contexts persuade the people of Israel to turn away from a focus on what they themselves have done and

their own righteousness to what God has done for them in establishing his covenantal righteousness.

The LXX of Deut 8:17-18 reads:

17 Do not say in your heart, “My strength and the power of my hand did for me this great mighty deed.” 18 But remember the Lord your God, that he gives you strength to do a mighty deed, in order that he may establish his covenant, which the Lord swore to your fathers, as today.

And the LXX of Deut 9:4-6 reads:

4 Do not say in your heart when the Lord your God destroys these nations from your face, “Because of my righteousness the Lord led me in to inherit this good land.” Rather because of the ungodliness of these nations the Lord will destroy them before your face. 5 Not because of your righteousness nor because of the holiness of your heart may you enter to inherit their land. Rather because of the ungodliness of these nations the Lord will destroy them from your face, in order that he may establish his covenant, which he swore to your fathers, to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob. 6 You should know today that not because of your righteousness the Lord your God is giving you this good land to inherit, for you are a stiff-necked people.

Through the Jewish exegetical procedure known as gezera shava, by which texts are linked for mutual interpretation through words they have in common, Deut 8:17-18 can be linked to 9:4-6 for mutual interpretation especially by the statements, “Do not say in your heart” (μὴ εἴπησιν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου in 8:17 and 9:4), and, “in order that he may establish his covenant” (καὶ ἵνα στήσῃ τὴν διαθήκην αὐτοῦ in 8:18 and 9:5), that they have in common.²⁷ The combination of Deut 8:17-18 and 9:4-6, both introduced with the same words of warning that introduce the scriptural proclamation by the personified righteousness from faith in Rom 10:6, express the same contrast between Israel’s own righteousness based on doing and the righteousness of God with which Paul is concerned in Rom 9:30-10:13.

What the people of Israel are not to say in their heart in Deut 8:17, “My strength and the power of my hand did for me this great mighty deed,” is paralleled by what they are not to say in their heart in 9:4, “Because of my righteousness the Lord led me in to inherit this good land.” Through the gezera shava Israel’s “doing” (ἐποίησέν, 8:17) of this great mighty deed that God enabled her “to do” (ποιῆσαι, 8:18) is further explained as Israel’s own “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνας in 9:4, 6; δικαιοσύνην in 9:5).²⁸ Thus, Israel’s righteousness is a righteousness based upon what they themselves have done.

But both Deut 8:17-18 and 9:4-6 are warning the people of Israel not to think that they have inherited their land because of their own righteousness through the doing of a mighty deed. Rather, the people of Israel have inherited their land because God has given it to them as a gift, in order to establish his covenant, which is synonymous with the establishment of his righteousness.²⁹ Thus, Israel is not to ignore God’s establishing (στήση, 8:18; 9:5) of his covenantal righteousness and rely upon their own righteousness (τὴν δικαιοσύνην σου, 9:5). But this is precisely what Israel has done according to Paul in Rom 10:3: “For, not recognizing the righteousness of God and seeking to establish (στήσαι) their own righteousness (τὴν ἰδίαν δικαιοσύνην), they have not submitted to the righteousness of God.”

Recalling both Deut 8:17-18 and 9:4-6, the warning, “Do not say in your heart,” spoken by the righteousness from faith in Rom 10:6 prepares Paul’s audience to expect assertions whose rhetorical strategy is to persuade Israel to turn away from a reliance upon their own righteousness based upon doing and to recognize what God has done for them in establishing his own righteousness. Furthermore, through a gezera shava based on the word “do,” the citation of Lev 18:5 in Rom 10:5, “the person who does (ποιήσας) them will live by them,” is linked to Deut 8:17-18, “my strength and the power of my hand did (ἐποίησέν) for me this great mighty deed...he [God] gives you strength to do (ποιῆσαι) a mighty deed.” Thus, the warning spoken by the righteousness from faith, “Do not say in your heart,” leads Paul’s audience to expect a scriptural

proclamation aimed at turning Israel away from the righteousness based on doing the works of the Law (Lev 18:5) and toward God's own righteousness based upon faith (Rom 10:4).

2. Romans 10:6-8 and Deuteronomy 30:11-14

The warning, "Do not say in your heart," in Rom 10:6 is followed by a scriptural exegesis of Deut 30:11-14, linked to Deut 8:17-18 and 9:4-6 by yet another gezera shava based on the phrase, "in your heart" (ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου in Deut 8:17, 9:4, and 30:14). Furthermore, Deut 30:11-14 is linked to both Deut 8:17-18 and Lev 18:5 through a gezera shava based on the word "do" (ἐποίησέν and ποιῆσαι in Deut 8:17-18; ποιήσας in Lev 18:5; ποιήσομεν, ποιήσει, and ποιεῖν in Deut 30:12-14). Thus, this whole complex of associated texts and contexts from the OT Law in Leviticus and Deuteronomy mutually interpret and further explain one another.

Although the warning from Deut 8:17 and 9:4 spoken by the righteousness from faith in Rom 10:6, "Do not say in your heart," is not followed by the remainder of either Deut 8:17-18 or 9:4-6, what does follow expresses the same basic rhetorical dynamic--to divert Israel away from their own accomplishments and "doing" (their own righteousness) to accept what God has done for them (the righteousness of God). The reason the warning continues with a scriptural exegesis of Deut 30:11-14 is that this text contains the same theme as Lev 18:1-5--doing the commandments of the Law. Deut 30:11-14 proclaims how close the commandment of the Law is to Israel so that they can easily do it. Noteworthy is the verse that precedes Deut 30:11-14: "...if you listen to the voice of the Lord your God to observe and do (ποιεῖν) all his commandments and his ordinances and his decisions written in the book of this Law..." (LXX Deut 30:10; cf. LXX Lev 18:5 and Rom 10:5).

The righteousness from faith warns Israel not to say in their heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" (Rom 10:6a). This question reminds the audience of Deut 30:11-12 (LXX): "For this commandment, which I command to you today, is not excessive nor

far from you. It is not in heaven above, (that you should be) saying, ‘Who will ascend for us into heaven and will receive it for us?--that on hearing it we might do (it).’³⁰ But the righteousness from faith supplants the statements about Israel receiving, hearing, and doing the commandment(s) of the Law with a statement of what God has done in the Christ event: “‘Who will ascend into heaven?,’ that is, to bring Christ down” (Rom 10:6).³¹

“Who will ascend (ἀναβήσεται) into heaven?” reminds the audience that Moses “ascended” (ἀνέβη) “to the mountain of God” in Exod 19:3 (LXX). In Exod 19:20 the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses “ascended” (ἀνέβη). The mountain refers to Mt. Sinai, often associated with heaven in the biblical tradition.³² In bringing Christ down from heaven, God has supplanted the commandment of the Law that Moses brought down from heaven so that Israel could do (ποιήσομεν) it (Deut 30:12)--in accord with what Moses wrote about the righteousness from the Law, namely, that the person who does (ποιήσας, Lev 18:5) these (commandments of the Law) will live by them (Rom 10:5). In supplanting the commandment(s) with Christ, God has thus brought an end to the need to do the works of the Law for righteousness.³³

The righteousness from faith continues to alert Israel as to what they should not say in their heart: “Or, ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (Rom 10:7a). Within the scriptural exegesis this question corresponds to Deut 30:13 (LXX): “Nor is (the commandment) across the sea (that you should be) saying, ‘Who will cross for us to the other side of the sea and receive it for us?--so that he will cause it to be heard by us, that we may do (it).’” But the righteousness from faith again supplants the statements about Israel receiving, hearing, and doing the commandment(s) of the Law with another statement of what God has done in the Christ event: “‘Who will descend into the abyss?,’ that is, to bring Christ up from the dead” (Rom 10:7).

The reason crossing the sea (θαλάσσης, Deut 30:13) has been altered to descending into the abyss (ἄβυσσον, Rom 10:7) is to make it conform more closely to

the Christ event. There is a precedent for complementing an ascent into heaven (ἀναβήσεται εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, 10:6) with a descent into the abyss (καταβήσεται εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον, 10:7) in the LXX of Ps 106:26: “They ascended to the heavens and descended to the abyss” (ἀναβαίνουσιν ἕως τῶν οὐρανῶν καὶ καταβαίνουσιν ἕως τῶν ἀβύσσων).

Furthermore, a descent into the sea is associated with a descent into the abyss in the Jonah story. In the LXX of Jonah 2:4-7 Jonah says: “You have cast me into the depth of the heart of the sea (θαλάσσης)...the abyss (ἄβυσσος) has encircled me...I have descended (κατέβην) into the earth...” There is an exegetical tradition that relates Deut 30:13 to Jonah’s descent into the sea: “Nor is the Law beyond the Great Sea, that one should say: ‘Would that we had one like Jonah the prophet who would descend into the depths of the Great Sea and bring it up for us, and make us hear the commandments that we might do them!’”³⁴

Paul may or may not be depending upon his audience’s knowledge of such a Jonah tradition. But at any rate, Paul is asserting that in bringing Christ up from the dead, God has supplanted the commandment of the Law that Israel wanted to be brought across the sea or up from the abyss so that “we might do (ποιήσομεν) it” (Deut 30:13). In supplanting the commandment(s) with Christ, the righteousness from faith (Rom 10:6) has thus brought an end to “doing” as the way of attaining righteousness from the Law in accord with Lev 18:5--that the person who does (ποιήσας) these (commandments of the Law) will live by them (Rom 10:5).

After Paul has had the righteousness of faith warn Israel what not to say “in your heart” (ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου, 10:6), by way of his diatribal style of inquiry he indicates what the righteousness of faith says is already in their heart: “But what does it (the righteousness of faith) say?--‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου),’ that is, the word of faith which we are preaching” (10:8). Within the scriptural exegesis this reminds the audience of Deut 30:14 (LXX): “The word is very

near you, in your mouth and in your heart and in your hands to do (ποιεῖν) it.” Paul thus transforms the word (ῥῆμα) of the commandment (ἡ ἐντολὴ αὕτη in Deut 30:11) that Israel is “to do” into “the word of faith which we are preaching” (Rom 10:8).³⁵ Believing now eliminates and replaces the doing (ποιήσας) of the commandment(s) required by Lev 18:5 to attain righteousness with God.

There is no idea here of believing being the complement or goal of doing the commandment. In replacing the doing (ποιεῖν) of the commandment in Deut 30:14, Paul is at the same time replacing the doing (ποιήσας) of the commandment(s) in Lev 18:5 (linked to Deut 30:11-14 by a gezera shava based on the word “do”) with “the word of faith which we are preaching” (Rom 10:8). That is why what God has done in the Christ event terminates rather than fulfills or complements the Law, so that righteousness is now for all who believe rather than do the commandments of the Law (Rom 10:4).

III. Conclusion

A close consideration of the antecedent and subsequent context leads to the conclusion that in Rom 10:4 Paul is saying that Christ is the termination rather than the goal or fulfillment of the Law as the way of seeking to attain righteousness before God by doing its works, so that righteousness is now for all who believe in the Christ whom God has raised from the dead. In his skillful exegetical use of Lev 18:5 in combination with Deut 8:17, 9:4, and 30:12-14 in Rom 10:5-8 Paul has replaced the Law’s statements about doing its commandments with statements about what God has done in the Christ event, the content of the “word of faith” that replaces the word of the commandment.³⁶ Paul has thus illustrated how in the Christ event God has eliminated and supplanted the doing of the commandments required by the Law for righteousness with the word of faith, the believing in Christ, that is the content of the righteousness of faith. For Paul believing in Christ is not the goal or purpose but the alternative to the vain attempt to seek righteousness before God by doing the works of the Law.

Notes

¹ For the state of the research, in addition to the commentaries on Romans, see R. Badenas, Christ The End of the Law: Romans 10.4 in Pauline Perspective (JSNTSup 10; Sheffield: JSOT, 1985); C. T. Rhyne, “Nomos Dikaiosynes and the Meaning of Romans 10:4,” CBQ 47 (1985) 486-99; W. C. Linss, “Exegesis of Telos in Romans 10.4,” BR 33 (1988) 5-12; B. L. Martin, Christ and the Law in Paul (NovTSup 62; Leiden: Brill, 1989) 129-41; S. R. Bechtler, “Christ, the Τέλος of the Law: The Goal of Romans 10:4,” CBQ 56 (1994) 288-308; A. Gignac, “Le Christ, τέλος de la Loi (Rm 10,4), continuité et discontinuité face à l’élection,” ScEs 46 (1994) 55-81; L. Kundert, “Christus als Inkorporation der Tora: τέλος γὰρ νόμου χριστός Röm 10,4 vor dem Hintergrund einer erstaunlichen rabbinischen Argumentation,” TZ 55 (1999) 76-89.

² A third meaning of “last part, conclusion, last act (of a drama)” is mentioned but dismissed as irrelevant by J. A. Fitzmyer, Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (AB 33; New York: Doubleday, 1993) 584. He also points out the contradiction of maintaining that τέλος can mean both termination and goal in 10:4; he opts, however, for the meaning of goal. A unique combination of both senses--termination and goal--is offered by B. Byrne, Romans (SP 6; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996) 315. He translates, “For Christ is the (true) goal of the law,” but states: “The translation attempts to bring out the sense that the law had no other purpose than to lead to Christ and the righteousness of God available to believers in him...If, as argued here, the telos of the law is Christ in the sense that the law’s purpose has been to ‘concentrate’ sin to the point where God can deal with it in Christ [cf. 7:13], then, of course, the sense of ‘termination’ is implicit. The ‘purpose’ in question is a thoroughly negative one.” But this interprets 10:4 too much in terms of 7:13 rather than from the immediate context.

³ E.g., in addition to 10:4 τέλος occurs in only two other places in Romans with quite different meanings in accord with the context. In 6:21-22 it is best translated as “final result”: “But what benefit did you gain from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the final result (τέλος) of them is death. But now that you have been freed from sin and have been

enslaved to God, you have the fruit which leads to your sanctification, whose final result (τέλος) is eternal life.” And in 13:7 it has the technical sense of “toll”: “Pay to all their dues...the toll (τέλος) to whom the toll (τέλος) is due.” See J. P. Heil, Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Reader-Response Commentary (New York: Paulist, 1987) 72, 143.

⁴ For these last three suggestions, see D. J. Moo, The Epistle to the Romans (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 641-42.

⁵ Romans 10:4 is a limited statement in a different sense according to T. R. Schreiner, Romans (BECNT 6; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 547-48. He understands εις in 10:4 not as a preposition of result or purpose, as we and others understand it, but “as an adverbial preposition of general reference” in which εις δικαιοσύνην means “with reference to righteousness” for those who believe (p. 547). Consequently, he states that “Christ is not the end of using the law for righteousness for all people” (p. 548), but only for those who believe. For Schreiner the statement is limited in the sense that it applies only to those who believe. For us the statement is limited in the sense that it applies to the Law only as a means of attaining righteousness by doing its works. Hence, in contrast to Schreiner we maintain that according to Paul Christ is the end of using the Law for righteousness for all people, because righteousness is now available not to those who futilely try to do the works of the Law but to anyone who believes in what God has done in the Christ event.

⁶ The Psalms were considered to be authored by David and to belong to that part of scripture known as “the Prophets;” cf. Matt 13:35.

⁷ Heil, Paul’s Letter to the Romans, 99-135; idem, Romans--Paul’s Letter of Hope (AnBib 112; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1987) 63-82.

⁸ After discussing but dismissing all the other possibilities for the genitive construction, “Law of righteousness” (νόμον δικαιοσύνης) in 9:31, Moo (Romans, 622-25) convincingly argues for the meaning of “Law whose object is righteousness.” See also Schreiner, Romans, 537; Martin, Christ and the Law, 135-38.

⁹ That righteousness rather than the Law is the ultimate object of Israel’s pursuit in 9:31 is

affirmed by D. J. Williams, Paul's Metaphors: Their Context and Character (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999) 291 n. 141: "But clearly they [Israel] were not seeking a law. They would say that they had a law already by which to live--the law of Moses. What they were seeking was the righteousness that came from obedience to that law...The righteousness that they were seeking is simply understood." See also Martin, Christ and the Law, 137.

¹⁰ In 9:30-31 "righteousness" (δικαιοσύνη) occurs a striking four times but "Law" (νόμος) only twice.

¹¹ Contra Moo, Romans, 626: "Paul therefore explains in v. 32a why Israel's pursuit of this 'law for righteousness' failed: because she sought to 'fulfill' that law by works rather than by faith." Contra Schreiner (Romans, 539) Paul is not implying here that "those who pursued the law in faith would, therefore, believe in Christ, for they would perceive that the law pointed to him."

¹² As 3:31 indicates, this does not mean that the Law is nullified through faith.

¹³ J. Lambrecht, "Why Is Boasting Excluded? A Note on Rom 3,27 and 4,2," ETL 61 (1985) 365; Moo, Romans, 247-50.

¹⁴ Contra Schreiner, Romans, 540: "...there is probably an implicit 'therefore' joining verses 32a and 32b."

¹⁵ That Rom 9:32a should not be regarded as an ellipsis but taken as a parenthesis with the verb "stumbled" in 9:32b--"Why? Because they (not from faith [in Christ] but engrossed in works) stumbled"--is argued by W. Reinbold, "Paulus und das Gesetz: Zur Exegese von Röm 9,30-33," BZ 38 (1994) 253-64. But the asyndeton separating 9:32a and 9:32b rules this out; see Schreiner, Romans, 540 n. 18; J. Lambrecht, "The Caesura Between Romans 9.30-3 and 10.1-4," NTS 45 (1999) 146 n. 22. According to Lambrecht (p. 146), "In 9.30-3 Paul seems to deplore two 'failures' with regard to Israel: 'working', i.e., concretely speaking, striving to do the works of the law, and not accepting Jesus. The two failures are related, but not identical."

¹⁶ That the stone refers to the Law is argued by, among others, P. W. Meyer, "Romans 10:4 and the 'End' of the Law," The Divine Helmsman: Studies on God's Control of Human Events,

Presented to Lou H. Silberman (eds. J. L. Crenshaw and S. Sandmel; New York: KTAV, 1980)

64. For the refutation, see Moo, Romans, 628 n. 50. Although there is a minor break between 9:33 and 10:1, the repetition of 9:33b in 10:11 is evidence against Lambrecht's ("Caesura," 141-47) contention that 9:30-33 is separate from Paul's argument in Rom 10.

¹⁷ The combination of Isa 8:14 and 28:16 in Rom 9:33 is discussed by J. G. Lodge, Romans 9-11: A Reader-Response Analysis (University of South Florida International Studies in Formative Christianity and Judaism 6; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996) 110. He concludes: "Paul thus makes the stone that causes stumbling that in which one is to believe!...The idea of the stone having both a negative and positive role with regard to Israel can be understood as intended by God and in line with the original contexts of both citations."

¹⁸ The word "righteousness" (δικαιοσύνην) is omitted at this point in some manuscripts. But whether it is omitted or not, the meaning is the same; see Fitzmyer, Romans, 583. Moo (Romans, 630 n. 2) prefers to omit it.

¹⁹ Some argue that "their own" (ιδίων) refers to Israel's preoccupation with their own righteousness rather than that of the Gentiles. They assert that Paul here is criticizing Israel's nationalism and ethnocentrism in exclusion of the Gentiles. But in the context "their own" righteousness refers to Israel's attempt to establish righteousness by doing works and is contrasted not with the righteousness of the Gentiles but with the righteousness of God that is for all (Jews and Gentiles) who believe. For a list of those who hold this argument and a refutation of it, see Schreiner, Romans, 543-44. Cf. Phil 3:9 where Paul says, "not having my own (ἐμὴν) righteousness from the Law but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based upon faith."

²⁰ Some maintain that there is no contrast here between the righteousness from the Law (10:5) and the righteousness from faith (10:6-8). Rather, 10:5 portrays the obedience to the Law that comes from faith, and the δέ in 10:6 is conjunctive ("and") not adversative ("but"). Hence, Paul is using quotes from the Law in 10:5-8 to show that keeping the Law is based upon faith. For those holding this view and for a compelling refutation of it, including "the antithesis

between doing and believing that permeates Rom. 9:30-10:13,” see Schreiner, Romans, 551-54; Moo, Romans, 650 n. 23.

²¹ That Paul’s audience is generally quite familiar with the original context of his scriptural citations is key to our argument. Paul’s OT quotes are “allusive echoes” and examples of the rhetorical figure known as metalepsis, “a device that requires the reader to interpret a citation or allusion by recalling aspects of the original context that are not explicitly quoted,” according to R. B. Hays, “Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul: Abstract,” Paul and the Scriptures of Israel (JSNTSup 83; eds. C. A. Evans and J. A. Sanders; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993) 43. See also R. B. Hays, Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 20: “Allusive echo functions to suggest to the reader that text B should be understood in light of a broad interplay with text A, encompassing aspects of A beyond those explicitly echoed.” Although we are subscribing in general to this principle as described by Hays, we do not necessarily agree with the way that he applies it in every case nor with the conclusions he reaches on particular Pauline citations.

²² Paul has subtly altered Lev 18:5b to suit his purpose:

LXX Lev 18:5b: καὶ ποιήσετε αὐτά, ἃ ποιήσας ἄνθρωπος ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς

Rom 10:5b: ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὰ ἄνθρωπος ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς

Noteworthy is how Paul has converted the neuter plural relative pronoun ἃ to the masculine singular relative pronoun ὁ, and how he has transposed from the preceding clause the neuter plural pronoun αὐτά, referring to “all my commands and all my decrees,” into his citation. For fuller discussions, see D.-A. Koch, Die Schrift als Zeuge des Evangeliums: Untersuchungen zur Verwendung und zum Verständnis der Schrift bei Paulus (BHT 69; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986) 294; C. D. Stanley, Paul and the Language of Scripture: Citation Technique in the Pauline Epistles and Contemporary Literature (SNTSMS 69; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 126-28.

²³ J. W. Wevers, Notes on the Greek Text of Leviticus (SBLSCS 44; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997) 274-75: “LXX subordinates the verb ποιῶν to a participle, ποιήσας, thereby placing

the stress on ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς.” But Wevers neglects the way the participle, ποιήσας, climaxes the previous uses of the verbs, “you shall do/not do,” in Lev 18:3-5 and emphatically reiterates the immediately preceding ποιήσετε in 18:5. Indeed, forms of the verb “to do,” occurring five times, contribute to the dominant theme of “doing,” “going in,” “observing,” and “living in” laws and commandments in Lev 18:1-5.

²⁴ Although we do not want to overinterpret the contrast between what Moses “writes” (γράφει) and what the righteousness from faith “says” (λέγει), since Paul states in 10:19 that Moses “says” (λέγει), the use of the two different verbs in this particular context does seem to subtly enhance the contrast. Whereas the righteousness from the Law involves a “doing” that is codified in writing, the righteousness from faith appropriately “speaks,” since faith involves confessing a “word” that is both in the heart and in the mouth (10:8-10).

²⁵ The failure to realize this has led some to interpret the δέ in 10:6 as conjunctive rather than adversative, reasoning that Paul would not be contradicting scripture with scripture. Not only are the scriptural quotes themselves not being contrasted here, but they are being used differently. In 10:5 the quote from Lev 18:5 simply defines what is involved in attaining righteousness from the Law--doing its works; while in 10:6-8 a personified righteousness from faith combines and reinterprets texts from Deuteronomy in light of the Christ event to demonstrate how God in Christ has terminated the Law as a way of attaining righteousness by doing its works.

²⁶ On the introductory clause, “Do not say in your heart,” Moo (Romans, 650-51) remarks: “Paul’s quotation of this clause is not haphazard; he wants his readers to associate these words with the context from which they are drawn.” See also p. 651 n. 26.

²⁷ C. K. Stockhausen, “2 Corinthians 3 and the Principles of Pauline Exegesis,” Paul and the Scriptures of Israel (JSNTSup 83; eds. C. A. Evans and J. A. Sanders; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993) 156: “In Jewish exegetical texts the verbal linkage between two or more texts is often performed for the sake of interpretation. What one text lacks in detail, or in clarity, is supplied from the other, or others, with which it shares specific verbal affinity...The texts, now

related through specific verbal links, may be further related through any of their themes. They become mutually explanatory as a whole.” For more on gezera shava, see C. K. Stockhausen, Moses’ Veil and the Glory of the New Covenant: The Exegetical Substructure of II Cor. 3,1-4,6 (AnBib 116; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1989) 26-27.

²⁸ On the “righteousness” of Israel in 9:6, see J. W. Wevers, Notes on the Greek Text of Deuteronomy (SBLSCS 39; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995) 160. Wevers points out: “That it was not because of your righteousness that the Lord is giving you the land is stated a third time. It should be noted that both here and in v.4 the majority of witnesses have the plural τας δικαιοσυνας, whereas at v.5 the plural has no support except in some Sahidic mss. The singular must then be original throughout.” Note that the three occurrences of Israel’s “righteousness” in the MT of Deut 9:4-6 are all in the singular.

²⁹ K. Kertelge, “δικαιοσύνη,” EDNT 1.328: “In OT writings the ‘righteousness of Yahweh’ is Yahweh’s conduct with respect to the covenant. In the ‘covenant’ Israel experiences the righteousness of Yahweh as a condition of its existence, as Yahweh’s initiative in giving himself to his people, whom he continually confirms through his ‘demonstration of his righteousness’.”

³⁰ For differences with the MT and the translation of the last clause, see Wevers, Deuteronomy, 483-84.

³¹ On the question of Rom 10:6-8 and peshet interpretation, see M. A. Seifrid, “Paul’s Approach to the Old Testament in Rom 10:6-8,” TJ 6 (1985) 27-34. Seifrid concludes: “The insertion of τοῦτ’ ἔστιν is best regarded as an explanatory idiom, unrelated to the peshet technique of Qumran” (p. 34). This is confirmed by Moo, Romans, 654: “But the phrase ‘that is’ does not clearly signal the Qumran ‘peshet’ technique; nor is it evident that Paul views his explanations of Deuteronomy as an exegesis of the ‘real’ meaning of the text.” Although some think that “bringing Christ down from heaven” alludes to his exaltation, it refers rather to God’s sending of his Son to earth at his incarnation (cf. Rom 8:3); see Moo, Romans, 655; Schreiner, Romans, 558.

³² With regard to Mt. Sinai, E. Lohse (“Σινᾶ,” TDNT 7.283-84) states: “Here He declared His ordinances to Moses (Jub. 50:1), and gave him His Law from heaven (Or. Sib., 3, 256)...This mountain reaches up to heaven and down into the depths to hell. It links heaven and earth.” Jewish exegetical tradition relates Deut 30:12 to Moses: “The law is not in the heavens, that one should say: ‘Would that we had one like Moses the prophet who would go up to heaven and fetch it for us, and make us hear the commandments that we might do them!’” See M. McNamara, Targum Neofiti I: Deuteronomy: Translated, with Apparatus and Notes (Aramaic Bible 5A; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997) 141.

³³ That God is the subject and Christ the object of the bringing down from heaven does not support the interpretation either that Christ came down from heaven or that God brought him down to be the fulfillment, goal, or culmination of the commandment of the Law. Rather, in bringing Christ down from heaven, God has replaced and thus eliminated rather than fulfilled the doing of the commandments of the Law for righteousness.

³⁴ McNamara, Targum Neofiti I: Deuteronomy, 141.

³⁵ Wevers, Deuteronomy, 485: “The ῥῆμα must refer to the initial ἐντολὴ αὕτη with which the section began.”

³⁶ That Paul’s audience would recognize, understand, and appreciate his scriptural exegesis here is indicated by his presumption that they are following his extensive use of the OT throughout Rom 9-11. In addition, since Paul has already explicitly employed gezera shava in 4:7-9, his audience would presumably appreciate its implicit use in 10:5-8. Finally, we should not underestimate the unique scriptural learning provided by the synagogues not only for Jews but also for interested Gentiles. See D. D. Binder, Into the Temple Courts: The Place of the Synagogues in the Second Temple Period (SBLDS 169; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999).

