

Luke, Paul, and the Law

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Abstract

Luke's conservative approach to the law is generally seen to be incompatible with that of the apostle Paul. But an analysis of how Luke develops his theology of the law through the characters in his story shows that he saw an antithesis between pursuing righteousness by the law and being accepted by God through faith. By focusing on Luke's explicit statements regarding the law, previous studies have missed the significant points of overlap between Luke and Paul in their understanding of the law.

Keywords

Luke and the law – Luke and Paul – justification – birth narratives

The emphasis on continuity between the early church and Israel's traditions is very characteristic of Luke. He portrays Jesus and his followers as faithful keepers of the Mosaic law. In this respect, Luke's Gospel contrasts with several statements in the Pauline corpus, where the law and the gospel are seen to be in tension (e.g., 2 Cor 3:4-18). This is one of the reasons why many scholars doubt the reliability of the tradition that identifies the author of Luke's Gospel as a companion of the apostle Paul.¹

1 P. Vielhauer, "On the 'Paulinism' of Acts," in *Studies in Luke-Acts* (eds. L.E. Keck and J.L. Martyn; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 37-43. Vielhauer's verdict has been accepted by many scholars, e.g., E. Haenchen, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (KEK 3; 16th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977) 61; G. Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte 1* (HTKNT; Freiburg: Herder, 1980) 114; U. Schnelle, *The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings* (trans. M.E. Boring; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) 241-242.

The purpose of this article is to reopen the question of Luke and the law. In particular, I intend to argue that Luke's understanding of the law is compatible with that of Paul. Whereas previous studies have tended to focus on direct statements about the law, I will cast the net wider and examine the function of the law in Luke's narrative. Luke uses explicit and implicit references to the law as he develops his characters. Attention to this narrative strategy reveals a tension between law and faith in Luke. Unlike Paul, however, this tension is not between faith and the law as such. Instead, Luke consistently draws a contrast between characters that are defined by obedience to the law and characters that are defined by faith. People are not accepted by God through obedience of the law, but through faith.

Discussions regarding Luke and the law have often focused on the Book of Acts, but for an assessment of Luke's theology, his Gospel is equally important. Luke's Gospel sets up the contrast between law-defined and faith-defined characters. The contrast between faith and pursuit of legal righteousness is developed further in the Book of Acts in connection with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Due to space limitations, however, this study must be restricted to Luke's first volume.²

This article consists of four parts. The first part traces the Lukan characters that are defined in whole or in part by their attention to the law, as well as their counterparts, who typically are defined in whole or in part by their faith. As a test of my results, I then direct attention to the direct statements about the law in Luke's Gospel (Luke 16:6-18). After a concluding section regarding Luke and the law, in the final section I draw the implications for a comparison of Luke and Paul.

Faith and Attention to the Law in Luke's Characters

Zechariah and Mary

The contrast between believers and the law-abiding is introduced in Luke's infancy stories. Scholars frequently note that the subsequent introductions of John the Baptist and Jesus form a crescendo. Luke's description of Jesus contains many links to his previous portrait of John the Baptist and shows Jesus to

2 My findings are compatible with those of Daniel Marguerat, whose study of Acts concludes that Luke follows Paul in excluding any soteriological function of the law ("Paul and the Torah in the Acts of the Apostles," in *Torah in the New Testament: Papers Delivered at the Manchester-Lausanne Seminar of June 2008* [Library of New Testament Studies 401; eds. M. Tait and P. Oakes; London: T & T Clark, 2010] 102-105).

be the more exalted character of the two.³ Less appreciated is the more subtle contrast between the parents of John and the parents of Jesus, specifically between Zechariah and Mary, to whom most of Luke's attention is devoted.⁴

Zechariah and Elizabeth are portrayed as pious Jews, faithfully complying with the Mosaic law. They are characterized as "righteous (δίκαιοι) before God" (1:6). Luke's use of terminology follows the pattern of the Scriptures of Israel and the Jewish tradition, where the pious may be called righteous, indicating that they have lived their lives in obedience to God (cf. Gen 6:9 LXX; Sus 3; Sir 44:17). As he does elsewhere (1:17; 2:25; 23:47; Acts 10:22), Luke also uses the word to describe a life that is lived righteously. The measure of Elizabeth and Zechariah's righteousness is the Mosaic law, as the following descriptions show: they were "living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord" (1:6b). The expression "to live according to the commandments and regulations" (πορευόμενοι ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἐντολαῖς καὶ δικαιομασίῃ) echoes the phraseology of 2 Chron 17:4 MT and 1 Kgs 8:61 MT. In the Septuagint, the combination of "commandments" (ἐντολαί) and "regulations" (δικαιώματα) is also used frequently, denoting the Mosaic commandments that prescribe specific deeds for the people to do.⁵ When Luke adds that Elizabeth and Zechariah were blameless (ἀμέμπτοι) in this regard, he is ranking them with the great men of Israel's past, Abraham (Gen 17:1; Wis 10:5) and Job (Job 1:1, 8; 2:3).⁶

As soon as Zechariah and Elizabeth are painted in this flattering light, Luke's story takes a surprising twist. True to the pattern of Abraham, the angel Gabriel announces the birth of a son for the aging Zechariah and his barren wife (1:13). Zechariah responds to this news with disbelief (1:18), for which he is censured by the angel and punished with dumbness until the birth of John (1:19-20). Luke's own evaluation of Zechariah can safely be assumed to coincide with that of the angel, as angels must be counted among the most authoritative

3 Compare 1:15a and 1:32a; 1:15c and 1:35b; 1:17e and 1:33; 1:15b and 1:35b. Cf. K.A. Kuhn, "The Point of the Step-Parallelism in Luke 1-2," *NTS* 47 (2001) 39.

4 Fitzmyer observes that "John's parents are 'upright in God's sight' (1:6), but Mary is the favored one (1:28)" (*The Gospel According to Luke [I-IX]: Introduction, Translation and Notes* [AB 28; New York: Doubleday, 1981] 315).

5 Exod 15:26; Num 36:13; Deut 4:40; 5:31; 6:1, 2, 17; 7:11; 8:11; 10:13; 17:19; 27:10; 28:45; 30:10, 16; 3 Kgdms 2:3; 4 Kgdms 17:13, 19, 37; 23:3; Bar 4:13; 1 Esdras 8:7.

6 Paul uses the same word when he refers to his former righteousness, the one he now vehemently rejects in light of the revelation of Christ. He was blameless according to the righteousness in the law (Phil 3:6). The word ἀμέμπτος in itself was a very positive word for Paul too, however, as his use elsewhere shows (Phil 2:15; 1 Thess 2:10; 3:13; 5:23).

voices in Luke's story.⁷ The appropriateness of the angel's unfavorable judgment is immediately confirmed when his words come true and Zechariah loses his capacity for speech (1:22).

Not without a certain irony, Luke locates Zechariah's grim failure in the Jerusalem sanctuary (1:9). The angel addresses him at the presumed climax of his life, when he is selected to approach God in his temple, when he performs his priestly duty in presenting the sacrifice prescribed by the Mosaic law. Closer to God than anyone else (save the high priest once a year), and closer than he would ever get in his lifetime, he is still not attuned to God's revelation.⁸ Performing the God-ordained task of representing his people before God, he still does not please his Lord. He is blameless according to the law, yet punished by God.

As Luke will later do repeatedly, he contrasts a high-status character with one of low social status. When the priest Zechariah and his Aaronite wife Elizabeth disappear from the stage, a young country-girl from Galilee enters, Mary, the mother of Jesus. Luke's crescendo as he proceeds from the annunciation of John to the annunciation of Jesus might cause the audience to expect a more exalted description of Jesus' parents than the one given to the parents of John. But in light of the strong words he used to describe Zechariah and Elizabeth's righteousness, Luke's silence regarding Mary's qualities is remarkable. She is introduced as a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, without any mention of her observance of the law. No statement comparable to Luke 1:6 is ever made regarding Joseph and Mary. But the reader soon realizes that Mary, rather than Zechariah, is the hero in Luke's book. In contrast to Zechariah, Mary believes what the angel tells her and willingly accepts what is about to happen (1:38). The angel gives no evaluation of Mary's behavior; this role instead falls to Elizabeth. Elizabeth's authoritative status in Luke's narrative is established by the fact that she is filled with the Holy Spirit (1:41) and therefore speaks prophetically. She proclaims: "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord" (1:45).⁹

7 Cf. Robert C. Tannehill, who points out that messages from angels should be taken as reliable interpretations of the meaning Luke finds in the events he reports (*The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation 1: The Gospel According to Luke* [Foundations and Facets; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986] 22).

8 No priest was likely to be selected to offer incense more than once in a lifetime. Cf. R.E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (ABRL; new updated ed.; New York: Doubleday, 1993) 259.

9 This reversal is later confirmed when Elizabeth, who is of higher status, takes the role of the one with lower status and blesses Mary (1:42-45; cf. J.T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary* [NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012] 46).

Contrasting each other, Zechariah and Mary stand as a negative and a positive example, respectively, and they personify several of Luke's favorite themes. On the one hand stands Zechariah, representing the high-status man, excelling in righteousness according to the law, but failing to meet with God's approval. On the other hand stands Mary, representing the low-status woman who is pleasing to God because of her faith. Zechariah and Mary stand as the first examples as the work of God that is praised in Mary's song: "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly" (Luke 1:52).

We will soon learn that Mary and Joseph raised Jesus in accordance with the requirements of the Mosaic law. He is circumcised on the eighth day (Luke 2:21), purification offerings are presented on his behalf (2:22-24), and they are regularly making pilgrimage to Jerusalem (2:41). Mary's example does not show that God justifies law-breakers, but that law-observance is unrelated to acceptance by God. In Luke's narrative, Mary's (and Joseph's) law-observance belongs to a later stage than her exaltation by God.¹⁰

10 Studies on Luke's attitude to the Mosaic law typically observe that the characters in the infancy narratives comply with the law, but fail to note the implicit critique of Zechariah's law-righteousness, e.g., H. Hübner, *Das Gesetz in der synoptischen Tradition: Studien zur These einer progressiven Qumranisierung und Judaisierung innerhalb der synoptischen Tradition* (2d ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973) 208; G. Sellin, "Lukas als Gleichniserzähler: Die Erzählung vom barmherzigen Samaritaner (Lk. 10:25-37)," *ZNW* 66 (1975) 52; S.G. Wilson, *Luke and the Law* (SNTSMS 50; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 20; C.L. Blomberg, "The Law in Luke-Acts," *JSNT* 22 (1984) 57; F. Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1-9:50* (Hermeneia; trans. C.M. Thomas; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002) 33; F.B. Craddock, *Luke* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 1990) 28; K. Syreeni, "Matthew, Luke, and the Law: A Study in Hermeneutical Exegesis," in *The Law in the Bible and in Its Environment* (Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society 51; ed. T. Veijola; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990) 138; K. Salo, *Luke's Treatment of the Law: A Redaction-Critical Investigation* (Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae. Dissertationes humanarum litterarum 57; Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1991) 48; Brown, *Birth*, 267-268; D.L. Bock, *Luke 1* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 77-78; W. Loader, *Jesus' Attitude towards the Law: A Study of the Gospels* (WUNT II/97; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997) 301. Josef Ernst comments that Paul's critique of Jewish nomism is lacking (*Das Evangelium nach Lukas* [RNT; Regensburg: Pustet, 1977] 58). On the other hand, some commentators note the implicit contrast between Zechariah and Mary (H. Schürmann, *Das Lukasevangelium 1* [HTKNT 3/1; Freiburg: Herder, 1969] 69; W. Radl, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas: Kommentar 1* [Freiburg: Herder, 2003] 51, 80; H. Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium* [KEK 1/3; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006] 57; M. Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium* [HNT 5; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008] 99; Carroll, *Luke*, 44). Philip Esler observes that the infancy narratives show that the law in itself is not capable of bringing

At the very outset of Luke's work, therefore, he provides an indication of the inadequacy of a righteousness that is blameless according to the commandments and regulations of the Mosaic law. Zechariah does not emerge as an imitable example in his impeccable righteousness, but stands as a warning example of how it is possible to be blameless by the standards of the law and yet lacking in the quality that is paramount in order to be pleasing to God: faith.

At this juncture, one must ask whether the relationship between the righteousness of the law and the blessedness that comes on the basis of faith is to be understood as complementary or antithetical. Luke clearly sees the righteousness of the law as inadequate and in need of completion by the message of the gospel, but does he go so far as the apostle Paul and see an antithesis between the two? Is the relationship between Mary and Zechariah truly antithetical? Or is it merely complementary, representing successive stages in salvation history? Does Zechariah exemplify the inadequate stage of the law and the prophets, whereas Mary embodies the superior stage of the kingdom of God (cf. Luke 16:16)?

In favor of the latter view, one notes that Zechariah ultimately plays a positive role in the annunciation narrative. His law-righteousness is inadequate, but he recognizes the work of God and becomes one of Luke's spokespersons when he regains the capacity for speech and praises God in Luke 1:68-79.¹¹ In favor of the former view, however, it must be observed that Zechariah is the negative foil for Luke's characterization of Mary. He is punished, whereas she is praised. Zechariah does not represent the first step towards the stage Mary represents; his response to the heavenly revelation is not only insufficient, but wrong.

The birth narratives alone are inconclusive in this respect. To determine if Luke understands faith as complementary or antithetical to the righteousness of the law, it is necessary to examine the development of this contrast in the rest of the Gospel.

Further Examples of the Law-Faith Contrast in Luke's Gospel

Having introduced the contrast between a law-defined and a faith-defined piety in the infancy narrative, Luke revisits this contrast repeatedly in his

salvation (*Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology* [SNTSMS 57; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987] 113).

11 The birth of John and Jesus both clearly function to bring the same divine design to fruition (Kuhn, "Step-Parallelism," 41-42).

Gospel.¹² In the healing of the paralytic (5:17-26), the paralytic and his friends are juxtaposed with the scribes and the Pharisees. When Jesus sees the paralytic and those carrying him, his recognition of their faith motivates him to offer forgiveness (5:20). They are thus implicitly commended for their faith.¹³ The Pharisees and the teachers of the law, on the other hand, stand out through their negative reaction to Jesus, responding to him with disbelief and accusing him of blasphemy (5:21). Whereas the positive characters are defined by their faith, the negative characters are defined by their rejection of Jesus and their association with the law. Luke calls them “Pharisees” and “teachers of the law” (νομοδιδάσκαλοι, v. 17).¹⁴ His word choice deviates from that of Mark and Matthew, who have γραμματεῖς. Luke thereby makes the scribes’ connection with the law more explicit.¹⁵ In Luke’s universe, the party of the Pharisees is also defined by their strict attitude to the law (Acts 26:5).¹⁶ The passage subtly

12 After Zechariah and Elizabeth, the next character whom Luke describes as righteous is Simeon (2:25). In contrast to the former two, however, Simeon’s righteousness is not seen in relation to the law. Although Simeon’s faith is not explicitly mentioned, his character is defined by his devotion to Jesus and his receptiveness to the Spirit, themes that are closely associated with faith. Inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit (2:25-26), Simeon is painted as an exclusively positive character in Luke’s Gospel. Luke defines him not with references to the law, but by explaining his all-consuming interest in the Messiah (2:26, 29-32). Tellingly, when Simeon enters the temple, it is not in order to fulfill some legal requirement, but because he is led by the Spirit (2:27).

13 The possessive pronoun αὐτῶν in “their faith” refers to both the paralytic and his friends, even though Luke does not specifically mention the paralytic’s faith. Cf. Bovon, *Luke 1*, 181.

14 Similarly, J.T. Sanders, *The Jews in Luke-Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 104; Salo, *Luke’s Treatment of the Law*, 124.

15 The word νομοδιδάσκαλος is first attested in the New Testament and is apparently a Christian coinage (cf. K.H. Rengstorf, “διδάσκω κτλ,” *TDNT* 2:159). It is used in Luke 5:17; Acts 5:34 (about Gamaliel); and 1 Tim 1:7. In 1 Tim 1:7 it refers to heretics that legalistically misuse the law.

16 Cf. Fitzmyer, *Luke (I-IX)*, 581. For the picture of the Pharisees that emerges through Luke’s narrative, see especially J. Darr, *On Character Building: The Reader and the Rhetoric of Characterization in Luke-Acts* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992) 85-126. It should be noted, however, that although the designation “Pharisee” holds negative connotations for Luke, he is capable of nuancing the picture of individual Pharisees. Cf. R.C. Tannehill, “Should We Love Simon the Pharisee? Hermeneutical Reflections on the Pharisees in Luke,” *CurTM* 21 (1994) 431-433. J.A. Ziesler has argued that Luke holds a positive view of the Pharisees (“Luke and the Pharisees,” *NTS* 25 [1979] 146-157), but he has overstated his case (see J.D. Kingsbury, “The Pharisees in Luke-Acts,” in *The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck 2* [BETL 100; eds. F. v. Segbroeck, C.M. Tuckett, G. v. Belle and J. Verheyden; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992] 1497-1512; cf. also J.T. Carroll, “Luke’s Portrayal of the Pharisees,” *CBQ* 50 [1988] 607-616). In any case, Ziesler is aware of the theological

contributes to the creation of Luke's narrative world, where characters defined by the law are negative characters, even though there is no direct critique of law-righteousness in this passage.

The contrast is developed further in the next pericope, where the tax-collector Levi appears opposite the Pharisees and their scribes (5:27-32).¹⁷ Levi demonstrates such trust in and devotion to Jesus that he leaves everything to follow him (5:28). In contrast, the Pharisees assume the roles as critics of Jesus' actions, complaining that he keeps company with tax collectors and sinners (5:30). As a sinner, Levi represents the target group of Jesus' ministry, whereas the Pharisees represent the righteous, for whom Jesus has not come (5:32). The Pharisees are not righteous in Jesus' estimation (cf. further below); the point must therefore be that they are righteous according to their own standard, that of the law.¹⁸ The faith motif (explicit in 5:20 and implicit in 5:28) is now associated with the theme of forgiveness and repentance for sinners (5:20, 32). At the same time, the contrast is developed further; the law-righteous are now seen in direct opposition to the believers.

The theme of forgiveness constitutes a link between the episode with the paralytic and the story of Simon the Pharisee and the sinful woman (7:36-50). In this passage, a contrast is once again clearly drawn, as Jesus compares Simon and the woman to each other (7:44-47).¹⁹ Although Luke does not mention Simon's law-observance, his identification of Simon as a Pharisee invokes the picture of a stickler with respect to the law. The sinful woman is a naturally contrasting character, notorious as she apparently was for breaking the law (7:39).²⁰

differences between Luke and the Pharisees, and he observes that these differences concern the law and Christology ("Pharisees," 151).

17 Similarly, Tannehill, *Luke*, 104.

18 Cf. M.A. Powell, "The Religious Leaders in Luke: A Literary-Critical Study," *JBL* 109 (1990) 95-96.

19 Similarly, Darr, *Character Building*, 101; Wolter, *Lukasevangelium*, 297.

20 Tannehill correctly notes that Simon is not portrayed in an exclusively negative light. Luke rather shows him as an open character, a person who responds somewhat positively to Jesus, and whose ultimate response to Jesus remains open ("Simon the Pharisee," 431-432; similarly, E.J. Christiansen, "Sinner According to Words of the Law, Righteous by Works of Love," in *Jesus and Paul: Global Perspectives in Honor of James D.G. Dunn for His 70th Birthday* [Library of New Testament Studies 414; eds. B.J. Oropeza, C.K. Robertson and D.C. Mohrmann; London: T & T Clark, 2009] 138-139, 143; but see J.J. Kilgallen, "Forgiveness of Sins [Luke 7:36-50]," *NovT* 40 [1998] 111-114). Insofar as he is characterized by his preoccupation with the law, however, he appears as a negative character.

In Jesus' comparison, however, the woman emerges as the example Simon should imitate. Her devotion to Jesus puts Simon to shame (7:44-47).²¹ The explanation for her superior behavior is that her sins are forgiven (7:47-48).²² Jesus also attributes her salvation to her faith (7:50). Law-defined piety once again proves inadequate, whereas the woman who comes to Jesus in faith and freely receives his gift is praised, regardless of her status vis-à-vis the law.

Another demonstration of the inadequacy of the law occurs when a lawyer approaches Jesus with a question about what one must do to inherit eternal life (10:25-37). Luke's purpose in including the story is different from Mark's, as is evidenced by the different introductions they provide. In Mark's Gospel, the lawyer asks: "Which commandment is the first of all?" (Mark 12:28), but in Luke's wording, the lawyer's question reads: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25). Whereas Mark frames the dialogue between Jesus and the lawyer as a theoretical question regarding the relative significance of the various commandments of the law (Mark 12:28; cf. Matt 22:36), Luke's focus is not on the law as such, but on its practical value for salvation. Consequently, Luke does not include Jesus' praise of the lawyer for his right understanding (Mark 12:34). For Luke, what matters is not understanding, but doing (Luke 10:28).²³

21 This point is valid regardless of whether Simon is seen to have neglected the customary duties of a host (cf. Bock, *Luke, Vol. 1*, 701). In Luke's story, he compares unfavorably, not to accepted customs, but to the sinful woman. Christiansen suggests that Simon's failure to show hospitality stems from his concern to keep the Sabbath laws ("Sinner," 44).

22 The subordinate clause ὅτι ἠγάπησεν πολὺ in Luke 7:47 is capable of different interpretations, depending on whether ὅτι is translated "because" or "as evidenced by" (cf. Matt 8:27; Heb 2:6; 1 John 3:14). In the former case, Jesus proclaims that the woman is forgiven because of her great love. In the latter case, Jesus explains that the woman's love demonstrates that she has been forgiven. This latter interpretation is to be preferred, as Jesus' parable in vv. 41-43 shows that acts of love result from forgiveness, not the other way around. Cf. I.H. Marshall, *Commentary on Luke* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 313; Fitzmyer, *Luke (I-IX)*, 692; C.F. Evans, *Saint Luke* (TPI New Testament commentaries; London: SCM, 1990) 364; Kilgallen, "Forgiveness," 105-114; Christiansen, "Sinner," 45; Carroll, *Luke*, 179-180. However, Schürmann argues that the expression must be read in light of Jesus' actual forgiveness, which follows the woman's act (7:48). He therefore opts for the translation "denn sie liebte viel" ("because she loved much") (*Lukasevangelium, vol. 1*, 430, 437; similarly, Wolter, *Lukasevangelium*, 296). Nevertheless, the context overall favors the translation "as evidenced by." In contrast to Mark 2:5; Matt 9:2, Luke does not use the present, but the perfect tense (ἀφέωνται) when Jesus proclaims his forgiveness. The perfect tense does not focus on the time of the action. Cf. Bovon, *Luke 1*, 297.

23 Wilson, *Luke and the Law*, 14-15.

In his response to the lawyer, Jesus directs him to the law, prompting the lawyer to quote the double love commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself” (10:27). Jesus approves of the answer, but the lawyer probes further, “wanting to justify himself” (10:29). It is not immediately clear why the lawyer feels the need to justify himself, but the best explanation may well be that he wants to justify asking a question, the answer to which he knew all along.²⁴ He therefore continues: “And who is my neighbor?” (10:29). Luke proceeds with Jesus’ parable of the good Samaritan, and concludes with a question: “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” (10:36). Jesus changes the whole focus of the lawyer’s question. The neighbor is no longer the object, but the subject. The question is no longer about whom he should love, but about how he can be a person that shows love. Rather than define his neighbor, the lawyer is challenged to define himself.²⁵ With this twist, Jesus interprets the love command in an unusually boundary-breaking way.²⁶

Theoretically, this kind of law fulfillment would result in eternal life, as the lawyer had already established (10:25-28).²⁷ But Luke’s narrative demonstrates a different point. The lawyer, whose quest for eternal life centered around the law, apparently fails to achieve his goal. Although Luke does not comment on the outcome of his conversation with Jesus, the lawyer is painted in a consistently negative light. Unlike Mark (12:34), Luke does not include any commendation of the man. When he first appears, he stands up to test (ἐκπειράζων)²⁸

24 Marshall, *Luke*, 447; Wolter, *Lukasevangelium*, 394.

25 Similarly, F. Bovon, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas 2* (EKK 3/2; Zurich: Benziger, 1996) 91-92.

26 The love commandment in Lev 19:18 was normally interpreted to apply to Jews and proselytes only, not to non-Israelites and Samaritans. Cf. M. Gourgues, “The Priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan Revisited: A Critical Note on Luke 10:31-35,” *JBL* 117 (1998) 709-713.

27 Syreeni maintains that there is no indication in 10:25-28 that such fulfillment is inadequate (“Matthew, Luke, and the Law,” 142). He fails to consider the narrative context. Bovon observes that in Luke 10:25-28 and 18:18, Jesus connects salvation with observance of the law. He adds that “this corrupt generation” has proven itself unable to gain salvation in this way. Salvation is instead offered through the work of Jesus (*Luke the Theologian: The Interpretation of Luke and Acts, 1950-2005* [2d ed.; Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2006] 303). Luke’s narrative develops in such a way that the theoretical possibility of salvation by law observance never materializes. Instead, those who appear interested in this avenue prove to be the ones that fail to receive the gift of Jesus.

28 With the sole exception of this verse, all the New Testament occurrences of the word ἐκπειράζω, an intensive variant of πειράζω, are in passages inspired by the Septuagint.

Jesus (10:25).²⁹ He also seems to be unsatisfied with the response he receives. Unwilling to enter the universe of Jesus' parable, he refuses to use Jesus' designation for the parable's protagonist, the Samaritan. Instead, he unenthusiastically answers: "the one who showed him mercy" (10:37). The lawyer receives no commendation by Jesus or by Luke as the story-teller. As a lawyer (νομικός), he is associated with the law and appears unable to reach the goal he craves: eternal life.

The parable itself, unique to Luke, may also contain an implicit critique of those whose lives were closely regulated by the law, the priest and the Levite. Neither of them helps the half dead traveler.³⁰ The hero in Jesus' parable was a Samaritan, a people who were considered by the Jews to be syncretistic and idolatrous lawbreakers (2 Kgs 17:3-41; Jos. *Ant.* 9.281-282, 288-291).

In the following pericope (10:38-42), another instance of unique Lukan material, Mary as the exemplary character is primarily compared to Martha, but there is also a link back to the question of the lawyer. Whereas Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan (10:30-37) elaborates on the commandment to love one's neighbor, the episode with Martha and Mary elaborates on the commandment to love God.³¹ Mary's fulfillment of the first commandment, however, is not achieved through her attention to the Mosaic law. Rather, she is

The strong negative connotations of the term in the New Testament can be seen by the fact that the Septuagintal background passages refer to human beings testing God (Matt 4:7; Luke 4:12 allude to Deut 6:16 LXX; 1 Cor 10:9 alludes to Ps 77:18 LXX). Amy-Jill Levine observes that the description classifies the lawyer as one of Jesus' opponents ("The Gospel According to Luke," *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* [eds. A.-J. Levine and M.Z. Brettler; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011] 123).

29 Mark, by contrast, introduces the man in a much more sympathetic way: "One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him" (Mark 12:28).

30 It has been suggested that their reason for failing to help was that they were careful to avoid ritual defilement through contact with corpses (Num 5:2; 19:2-13; cf. J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke [X-XXIV]: Introduction, Translation and Notes* [AB 28A; New York: Doubleday, 1985] 884, 887; Bovon, *Lukas*, vol. 2, 90). However, it is doubtful that such concerns came into play when they were on their way away from Jerusalem and the temple. In any case, the commandments to save life or provide a burial would take precedence (Levine, "Luke," 123). The Levite and the priest's connection to the law should therefore not be exaggerated. Their presence in the parable primarily serves to set the audience up for a surprise when the Samaritan is introduced in v. 33 (Gourgues, "The Priest," 710-713).

31 Bovon observes that the parable of the good Samaritan (10:30-37) and the story of Martha and Mary (10:38-42) together form a commentary on the double love commandment quoted in 10:27 (*Luke* 1, 3). Robert Wall argues that these two passages show that the law

single-mindedly focused on Jesus, and exemplifies the attitude of faith.³² In contrast to the lawyer, who was apparently unsuccessful in his law-defined quest for eternal life, Mary is praised for having chosen the only thing necessary.

In various ways, Luke thus shows that God is not pleased with those whose piety is defined by the law. But it is not until the parable of the Pharisees and the tax collector (18:11-14), a parable that is unique to Luke, that he makes this point more explicitly, with the use of righteousness terminology.³³

The Pharisee in the parable is not directly associated with the law, but in Luke's narrative world, scrupulousness with respect to the law is one of the characteristics of the Pharisees (Acts 26:5). In the parable, the Pharisee defines himself with reference to his works of supererogation, fasting and tithing (18:12).³⁴ These works are not specifically prescribed in the Mosaic law, but Luke makes no hard and fast distinction between the Mosaic law and Jewish customs. He equates the two concepts in Luke 2:27; Acts 6:11-14; 15:1, 5; 21:21.³⁵ In the narrative context of Luke's Gospel, the Pharisee can therefore be seen as another specimen of Pharisaic piety: pursuit of the law, with a focus on its outward fulfillment.

The parable also adds a new element to the Lukan picture of the Pharisee: he trusts that his law observance makes him pleasing to God. In his prayer, the Pharisee expresses his confidence that he is in a better position than

has been redefined in the messianic age ("Martha and Mary [Luke 10:38-42] in the Context of a Christian Deuteronomy," *JSNT* 35 [1989] 26-28).

32 Bovon, *Lukas*, vol. 2, 111-112.

33 Joachim Jeremias sees this parable as evidence that Paul's doctrine of justification had its roots in the teaching of Jesus (*The Parables of Jesus* [2d ed.; trans. S.H. Hooke; New York: Scribner's, 1972] 141).

34 Fasting was only required once a year, on the day of atonement (Lev 16:31; 23:27-32; Num 29:7). The Pharisees went further and fasted twice a week (*Did.* 8:1; *b. Ta'an.* 12a). Deut 14:22-23 regulated the tithing of "all the yield of your seed" (cf. Lev 27:30-32). The Pharisee once again went beyond the call of duty by extending tithing to everything he acquired (πάντα ὅσα κτῶμαι). The phrase refers not only to his income, but to everything he brought into his house, presumably to make up for possible failures to tithe by those who had handled the goods before him. Cf. Fitzmyer, *Luke (X-XXIV)*, 1187; A.J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 123. Timothy A. Friedrichsen speculates that the Pharisee would have been motivated by his concern for those of lesser means, unable to fulfill the duties of tithing, and that he understood his works as having vicarious benefits ("The Temple, a Pharisee, a Tax Collector, and the Kingdom of God: Rereading a Jesus Parable [Luke 18:10-14a]," *JBL* 124 [2005] 111). However, Jesus' parable contains no hints of anything other than contempt for others on the part of the Pharisee.

35 Wilson, *Luke and the Law*, 4.

“other people.” Luke’s point is not that he takes credit for his superior standing; the Pharisee directs his thanks to God. Nevertheless, even though he expresses his dependence upon God, the Pharisee is condemned by Jesus as a man who exalts himself (18:14). Apparently preoccupied with excelling at observable legal requirements (cf. 11:42; 16:15), his problem is not that he ignores the gift of God, but that he thinks of God’s gift as something that makes him superior to others.³⁶ He trusts that what he deems to be a superior fulfillment of the law places him in a superior position.³⁷ But Jesus reverses the Pharisee’s own verdict and unequivocally condemns him as a man that fails to be justified by God (18:14).³⁸

Just as the Pharisee is not explicitly characterized with reference to the law, so is the tax collector not directly defined with reference to his faith. Instead, he stands as a repentant sinner, completely dependent on forgiveness. As Luke has previously established a link between forgiveness and faith in Jesus, the tax collector can be understood as a character that embodies what Luke means by faith. He has an acute awareness of his sinfulness (cf. 7:41-47) and places his trust exclusively in the mercy of God.³⁹

36 The Pharisee’s self-righteousness is related to his false view of God and a failure to appreciate God’s love for sinners. Cf. H. Merklein, “Dieser ging als Gerechter nach Hause . . . : Das Gottesbild Jesu und die Haltung der Menschen nach Lk 18,9-14,” *BiKi* 32 (1977) 19-41.

37 Many recent studies discuss the historical accuracy of the picture of the Pharisee in 18:9-14. It is generally concluded that the portrait is a caricature, and that the character would have been objectionable to Jews in general as well as to most Pharisees (L. Schottroff, “Die Erzählung vom Pharisäer und Zöllner als Beispiel für die theologische Kunst des Überredens,” in *Neues Testament und christliche Existenz: Festschrift für Herbert Braun z. 70. Geburtstag am 4. Mai 1973* [eds. H. Braun, H.D. Betz and L. Schottroff; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1973] 448-452; F.G. Downing, “The Ambiguity of ‘the Pharisee and the Toll-Collector’ [Luke 18:9-14] in the Greco-Roman World of Late Antiquity,” *CBQ* 54 [1992] 87-95; R. Doran, “The Pharisee and the Tax Collector: An Agonistic Story,” *CBQ* 69 [2007] 266-267). For the purpose of the present article, I focus on Luke’s narrative universe, not on its correspondence with historical reality.

38 Robert Doran argues that Luke 18:14a should be translated literally, “more upright than that one.” According to Doran, the parable compares the two characters and prefers the tax collector above the Pharisee, without stating that the Pharisee is not justified (“The Pharisee,” 265). This interpretation runs counter to the elaboration in v. 14b, which implies that the Pharisee is someone who exalts himself and therefore will be humbled. The same problem attaches to Levine’s interpretation: that the merits of the Pharisee brought justification to the tax collector (“Luke,” 138).

39 Similarly, F.F. Bruce, “Justification by Faith in the Non-Pauline Writings of the New Testament,” *EQ* 24 (1952) 68. To Downing, however, the tax collector’s preoccupation

Following this parable, Luke includes two stories in which the chief characters recall the Pharisee and the tax collector, respectively: the account of the rich ruler (18:18-25) and the story of Zacchaeus (19:1-10).⁴⁰ The rich ruler also reminds the audience of the lawyer of 10:25-37, as he addresses Jesus with the exact same question: “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (18:18). Once again Jesus refers to the commandments; this time he quotes them himself (18:20). In his answer, the rich ruler reveals himself as a spiritual kin of the Pharisee of the parable, as he self-confidently claims: “I have kept all these since my youth” (18:21).

Jesus then adds a commandment of his own: “Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me” (18:22). Hearing this, the rich man responds with sadness, revealing that he suffers from the same vice that characterizes the Pharisees: greed (cf. 16:14).

Once again, it turns out that the prospect of gaining eternal life through the law remains theoretical. Luke sees the rich ruler in a negative light. In contrast to Mark (10:21), Luke does not mention that Jesus loved the man (18:22). Most significantly, the ruler does not end up following Jesus.⁴¹ His fate also prompts Jesus to address the difficulty of the rich to be saved (18:24-25).

This rich man naturally contrasts with Zacchaeus (19:1-10), another man of wealth, who did give his money away (19:8). As a tax collector, Zacchaeus also recalls the positive character of Jesus’ parable in 18:9-14.⁴² Zacchaeus’ encounter

with his own sin betrays his self-absorption (“The Pharisee,” 98). Fredrick C. Holmgren maintains that the tax collector may also serve as a warning against cheap grace, celebration of God’s grace without the concomitant action (“The Pharisee and the Tax Collector: Luke 18:9-14 and Deuteronomy 26:1-15,” *Int* 48 [1994] 259). Luke’s Gospel certainly contains harsh warnings to those who are not ready to accept the cost of following Jesus (e.g., 9:23-26; 14:26-33; 16:13), but there is no indication that the tax collector in 18:9-14 is intended as such a warning. He stands as a positive character, although the parable does not highlight all the virtues that Luke values.

40 Cf. Nolland’s observation: “The parables do not provide the structure, but they do set up landmarks and have the potential to become growth points in relation to which Luke has added thematically similar material” (*Luke 9:21-18:34* [WBC 35B; Dallas: Word, 1993] 531).

41 Fitzmyer maintains that there is a certain ambiguity as to the man’s status, since Luke does not include Mark’s note about him walking away (Mark 10:22). Fitzmyer also notes that the rich man did not follow Jesus in the way Jesus required (*Luke* [X-XXIV], 1197, 1200). Jesus’ subsequent lament (18:24-25) suggests that the man failed to enter the kingdom of God (similarly, F. Bovon, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* 3 [EKK 3/3; Zurich: Benziger, 2001] 235; A.P. Stanley, “The Rich Young Ruler and Salvation,” *BSac* 163 [2006] 46; Wolter, *Lukasevangelium*, 600).

42 Similarly, J. Marcus, “The Pharisee and the Tax Collector,” *PSB* 11/2 (1990) 142.

with Jesus differs from that of the rich ruler in several ways. His interest in Jesus was not for the purpose of asking a question, but was focused on Jesus' person; he wanted to see him (19:3). He was unable to approach Jesus, so Jesus was the one who initiated the conversation (19:5). No question regarding the law came up, but Jesus' act of entering the house of the sinful Zacchaeus (19:7) inspired him to change his life (19:8).⁴³ As a result, he demonstrated the kinds of virtues that characterize the kingdom of God, the virtues that surpass the law. Though rich, Zacchaeus no longer suffered from greed, but gave away half of his possessions (19:8a). Not only that, but whoever he had defrauded in the past, he would repay fourfold (19:8b). In so doing, he went beyond the requirements of the Mosaic law, which demanded restoration with the addition of one-fifth (Lev 6:5; Num 5:6-7).⁴⁴ The story of Zacchaeus, which is unique to Luke, demonstrates once again that fellowship with Jesus and acceptance of his forgiveness lead to salvation (19:9-10). In contrast, the rich ruler shows that attention to the law fails to lead to the same goal.

The pattern that emerges from Luke's narrative is that of an antithesis between pursuing righteousness by the law and being accepted by God through

43 Some commentators do not see the story of Zacchaeus as a story of repentance, forgiveness, and change, but a story of vindication. The straightforward reading of the present tenses δίδωμι ("I give") and ἀποδίδωμι ("I repay") indicate a habitual action on Zacchaeus' part. The effect of Jesus' response (vv. 9-10) would then be to recognize the righteousness of Zacchaeus, as someone who is already a son of Abraham (Fitzmyer, *Luke* [X-XXIV], 1220-1222, 1225; L.T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* [SP 3; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991] 285-286).

However, the present tense may also be understood in a futuristic sense, as a statement of intent. On this reading, Zacchaeus' statement signals a change in his life. Several observations favor this interpretation: 1) the term ὑπάρχοντα (v. 8) refers to possessions (as opposed to income) and Zacchaeus would hardly claim habitually to give away half of his possessions; 2) it is equally unlikely that he would habitually repay fourfold when he defrauded someone; 3) Jesus not only affirms that Zacchaeus is saved, but that salvation has come to his house "today" (v. 9); 4) Jesus' purpose statement in v. 10 implies that Zacchaeus was lost, not only in popular opinion, but in the sense that he was in need of the salvation that Jesus could give; 5) though unique in its form, the passage shares important characteristics with other salvation stories (Zacchaeus seeking Jesus in vv. 3-4, Zacchaeus welcoming him in his house in v. 7, and the outsiders' comment that Jesus visited a sinner in v. 7). Similarly, J. Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53* (WBC 35C; Dallas: Word, 1993) 906; D.L. Bock, *Luke 2* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) 1249-1250; Bovon, *Lukas, vol. 3, 275*; Klein, *Lukasevangelium*, 601-602; Wolter, *Lukasevangelium*, 613-614; L. Tichy, "Was hat Zachäus geantwortet? (Lk 19,8)," *Bib* 92 (2011) 21-38; Carroll, *Luke*, 372.

44 In the case of stolen oxen or sheep, Exod 21:37 demanded fivefold or fourfold restoration, respectively.

faith. Piety defined by the law is not only inadequate; it is downright detrimental. Time and again, we observe that those whose piety is defined by the law are either explicitly punished, like Zechariah and the Pharisee of the parable, or seen as losing out on the gift, like the Pharisees, the lawyer, and the rich ruler.⁴⁵

The Unshakable Law (Luke 16:16-18)

The picture that has emerged through Luke's narrative must now be filled in by examining Luke's explicit statements regarding the law. Only one passage in Luke's Gospel addresses the significance of the law directly, the compilation of sayings in Luke 16:16-18. This passage occurs in a context in which Jesus teaches about the right use of money (the parables of the dishonest manager [16:1-13] and of the rich man and Lazarus [16:19-31]). According to Luke, Jesus' teaching on money is not well-received by the Pharisees, who were lovers of money (16:14). Luke includes Jesus' teaching on the law as a commentary on the Pharisees' greed. They justify themselves in the sight of others, but fail to understand what is prized by God (16:15).

In this context, Luke has included three quite disparate sayings about the law (Luke 16:16-18). These sayings are also included in Matthew, but in very different contexts (Luke 16:16 = Matt 11:12-13; Luke 16:17 = Matt 5:18; Luke 16:18 = Matt 5:32). Luke's versions of the sayings are also drastically different from their Matthean counterparts, to the point that the meaning is remarkably different. Whereas Matthew refers to violent attacks on the kingdom (Matt 11:12), the saying most likely has a positive twist in Luke: it either means that people are eager to enter the kingdom or that they are urged to do so (Luke 16:16). The thrust of the saying about the inviolability of the law is similar in both Luke (16:17) and Matthew (5:18), but in the saying about divorce, Luke has not included the concessional clause about adultery (Matt 5:32). Whatever the original version of these sayings may be, it seems clear that they have been the object of relatively extensive editing on Luke's part, both with respect to context and content.⁴⁶ It should therefore be safe to assume that Luke has intended these sayings as important commentary in the context in which he has included them.⁴⁷

45 Sanders observes that Luke consistently draws a contrast between "[r]eliance on the Law of Moses for salvation" and "contrition and repentance" (*The Jews in Luke-Acts*, 110).

46 Cf. M. Klinghardt, *Gesetz und Volk Gottes: Das lukanische Verständnis des Gesetzes nach Herkunft, Funktion und seinem Ort in der Geschichte des Urchristentums* (WUNT II/32; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988) 15-23.

47 Similarly, Esler, *Community and Gospel*, 121.

In this commentary, the Lukan Jesus affirms that the law and the prophets are associated with a bygone era; they “were in effect until John came; since then the kingdom of God is proclaimed” (16:16).⁴⁸ These two eras, the era of the law and the prophets and the era of the kingdom of God, should not be understood in an antithetical relationship, as the following parable of the rich man and Lazarus shows. If the brothers of the rich man “do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone goes to them from the dead” (16:31). In other words, failure to accept the law and failure to respond to the realities of the resurrection age are related. The kingdom of God must therefore be understood in continuity with the law; the kingdom represents the next and superior step in a development where the law represents the former step.

Into this kingdom, people are now forcing their way (16:16c), or, if the verb βιάζεται is taken in the passive voice, “everyone is strongly urged to enter it” (HCSB).⁴⁹ Either way, the subject is πᾶς, and the point of the expression is the inclusive nature of the kingdom. The expression is likely an oblique reference to the tax collectors and sinners that were eagerly accepting the gospel proclaimed by Jesus (15:1; cf. 5:27-32; 7:34, 36-50; 19:1-10).

Consequently, the law is not passing away; it is rather confirmed, as the hyperbolic v. 17 expresses: “But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one stroke of a letter in the law to be dropped.” Luke’s use of the term “law” sometimes accentuates the prescriptive (2:22, 23, 24, 27, 39; 10:26), sometimes the predictive function (24:44; Acts 24:14; 28:23) of the law.⁵⁰ The context

48 Much scholarly attention has been devoted to discussing Hans Conzelmann’s thesis, that John the Baptist did not belong to the period of Jesus, the era of the proclamation of the kingdom (*The Theology of St. Luke* [trans. G. Buswell; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982] 20). For my present purposes, this question is irrelevant.

49 For the former view, see A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1896) 389; Marshall, *Luke*, 629-630; Evans, *Luke*, 607; Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 821; Bovon, *Lukas*, vol. 3, 100; for the latter, Fitzmyer, *Luke (X-XXIV)*, 1117; J.B. Cortés and F.M. Gatti, “On the Meaning of Luke 16:16,” *JBL* 106 (1987) 248-259; Bock, *Luke*, Vol. 2, 1353; Klein, *Lukasevangelium*, 548; I. Ramelli, “Luke 16:16: The Good News of God’s Kingdom is Proclaimed and Everyone is Forced Into It,” *JBL* 127 (2008) 738-757; Wolter, *Lukasevangelium*, 556; Carroll, *Luke*, 330. It is possible that βιάζεται should be understood negatively and that the meaning of the phrase is “everyone subjects it to violence” or “everyone forces their way into it.” However, although this interpretation is probable for the Matthean parallel (Matt 11:12), it does not fit the Lukan context (cf. Bock, *Luke*, Vol. 2, 1352-1353).

50 Wilson, *Luke and the Law*, 1.

here draws attention to the former; Jesus addresses the question of divorce (16:18), the right use of money (16:1-13) and concern for the poor (16:19-31).⁵¹

The way in which the law is preserved is expressed in the following verse: “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and whoever marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery” (16:18). This prohibition against divorce is indeed a strange way of upholding the law, as the law of Moses contains no comparable prohibition. In contrast, Deut 24:1-4 gives instructions regarding the process of divorce. However, this passage does not even hint that divorce in itself is undesired or that it should be limited.⁵² Commentators have suggested that Jesus’ words should be understood in light of the stricter requirements for the priests (Lev 21:7; Ezek 44:22; cf. Jos. *Ant.* 3.276; Philo, *Somn.* 2.185) or the prohibition of remarriage in the Qumran community (CD 4:20-5:1; 11Q19 57:17-19).⁵³ But the regulations for priests do not contain any prohibitions against divorce or remarriage. The point is rather that priests must avoid defilement by marrying someone who has previously been married and therefore is not a virgin. Neither is there any evidence that Luke understands Jesus in light of the laws of the Qumran community.⁵⁴ Luke’s context is that of the Pharisees, whose attitude to divorce was lax by comparison. The predominant approach was to allow divorce for any reason (Philo, *Spec.* 3.30; Jos. *Life* 426-427; *Ant.* 4.253).⁵⁵

The example regarding divorce can therefore only serve to show that the kingdom of God introduces a higher standard than that of the law and

51 Wilson, *Luke and the Law*, 51.

52 The closest Scriptural antecedent to Jesus’ attitude to divorce is found in Mal 2:16: “For I hate divorce, says the Lord.”

53 Cf. Fitzmyer, *Luke (X-XXIV)*, 1121. However, the Damascus Document probably prohibits polygamy, not remarriage, and the Temple Scroll only concerns the king. See D. Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 61-72. Several scholars conclude that Luke in 16:18 understood Jesus to uphold and interpret the law (J. Jervell, “The Law in Luke-Acts,” *HTR* 64 [1971] 28; Klinghardt, *Gesetz und Volk Gottes*, 88-89; W. Wiefel, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* [ТНΚΝТ 3; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1988] 296; Loader, *Jesus’ Attitude*, 338; J. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997] 603-604; Bovon, *Lukas*, vol. 3, 102-103; Wolter, *Lukasevangelium*, 556; Carroll, *Luke*, 334). Esler thinks Luke saw v. 18 as an intensification of the law (*Community and Gospel*, 120-121). Salo maintains that Luke’s composition is intended to hide the fact that Jesus’ teaching differed from the law (*Luke’s Treatment of the Law*, 146-149). Sanders finds the prohibition against divorce to be a regulation of the law that applied to both Jews and Gentiles (*The Jews in Luke-Acts*, 201).

54 Wilson, *Luke and the Law*, 45-51.

55 See Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage*, 110-117.

the prophets.⁵⁶ The Pharisees fall short of this standard, however. Their standard is what is seen by others, but Jesus' standard is what is seen by God, who knows the heart (16:15). In their zeal to comply with the law, the Pharisees focus on the detailed kind of fulfillment that can be observed by human beings, such as meticulous tithing. But they fail to focus on inward attitudes, such as justice and the love of God (11:42), and are characterized by greed instead (16:14).⁵⁷ If they do not meet the ethical and religious ideal that the law truly demands, small wonder that they are unable to meet the more perfect ideal of the kingdom, with its higher standard regarding divorce, for example. Consequently, they refused to accept the radical message of John the Baptist and thereby "rejected God's purpose for themselves" (7:30). The ultimate expression of their failure to please God is their rejection of and hostility to Jesus (6:7; 11:53).

The failure of the Pharisaic approach is also illustrated in the parable of the prodigal son and his brother (15:11-32). Jesus' use of this parable is prompted by the Pharisees and the scribes' discontent with Jesus' acceptance of the tax collectors and sinners (15:1-2). The older brother in the parable displays a similar disgruntlement when he sees his father welcome his delinquent son, and the older son must be understood as representing the scribes and Pharisees described in 15:1-2.

Although this brother claims never to have disobeyed his father's command (15:29), it is clear that he has no genuine fellowship with his father. He does not share his father's joy in the younger son's return, he keeps his own separate company, and he refuses to participate in his father's party (15:28-30).⁵⁸

56 Similarly, Plummer, *Luke*, 388-389; R.J. Banks, *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition* (SNTSMS 28; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) 218; Marshall, *Luke*, 630-631; M. Turner, "The Sabbath, Sunday, and the Law in Luke/Acts," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (ed. D.A. Carson; Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock, 1999) 110; Fitzmyer, *Luke (X-XXIV)*, 116; Bock, *Luke, Vol. 2*, 1355-1356; F. Thielman, *The Law and the New Testament: The Question of Continuity* (New York: Crossroad, 1999) 151-152; Klein, *Lukasevangelium*, 548. Hans Hübner thinks that Luke has preserved conflicting material and sees 16:17-18 as an example. According to him, 16:18 amounts to an abrogation of the law (*Gesetz in der synoptischen Tradition*, 207; cf. Wilson, *Luke and the Law*, 51). Hübner is correct that there is a tension between Luke 16:18 and Deut 24:1-4. However, it is now widely recognized that Luke wrote as a theologian in his own right. Rather than assume that Luke is self-contradictory, it is better to try to understand after the logic that Luke may have seen in the disparate sayings he includes.

57 Similarly, J.D. Kingsbury, *Conflict in Luke: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 23-24; Darr, *Character Building*, 104; Klein, *Lukasevangelium*, 549.

58 Kenneth Bailey lists seven indications of the older son's poor relationship to his father: he speaks to his father without the use of a title; his attitude to his father is like that of a slave;

The implication is that the scribes and the Pharisees, while purporting to obey the law of God, fail to enjoy genuine fellowship with God and to be attuned to his will.

In sum, Luke makes it clear that the Pharisees' attention to the details of the law has not brought them closer to pleasing God. On the contrary, by seeking to be justified in the sight of others and by focusing on outward fulfillment of the law, they fail to be justified in the eyes of God and they fail to meet both the standard at which the law aims as well as the ethical and religious standard of the kingdom.

Luke and the Law

Most studies on Luke and the law focus on his direct statements and often discuss whether or to what extent Luke considers the law's commandments to be of continuing validity.⁵⁹ However, these discussions miss an important element of Luke's theology of the law. To Luke, the question of the validity of the law appears to be of secondary importance. His interest is not in showing the value or lack of value of the law, but in how to gain eternal life, as his redaction of the story of the scribe shows (Luke 10:25). Consequently, he is concerned to show that human beings who seek God in the way prescribed by the law are doomed to failure. What cannot be achieved through the law is instead offered through faith in Jesus Christ. In the course of Luke's narrative, an antithesis emerges between the piety that is defined by the law and that which is defined by faith in Jesus Christ.

But this antithesis does not extend to an antithesis between the law and faith as such. Luke has nothing negative to say about the law, only about those whose righteousness is defined by it. Luke's Jesus repeatedly affirms that the way to eternal life is to be found in the law of Moses (10:25-28; 18:18-20). As Luke's direct statements about the law show, he understood the law to be in continuity with the message of the kingdom (16:16-18). The law is an expression of the will and plan of God, but now this will and this plan are revealed more perfectly through Jesus Christ and the gospel of the kingdom.

he insults his father publicly by refusing to enter the party, yet spitefully claims never to have disobeyed him; he accuses the father of favoritism; he proclaims that he does not belong to the family; he has a different idea of joy; and he attacks his brother (*Poet and Peasant* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976] 196-199).

59 For a survey of research, see Loader, *Jesus' Attitude*, 273-300; Thielman, *The Law*, 136, 161-162.

Luke's positive view of the law is also seen in the fact that he includes no absolute statement to the effect that Jesus' has abrogated the regulations of the law, such as Mark 7:15 (cf. Mark 7:19). Instead, Luke signals the abrogation of kosher laws in connection with Peter's visit to Cornelius (Acts 10:1-11:18).⁶⁰ Again, Luke's priorities shine through. He is not concerned with the law as such, but with its relative value in connection with the spread of the gospel. When the gospel spreads to the Gentiles, the law is liable to stand in the way, and its abrogation must therefore be established.⁶¹

In light of these observations, it is not surprising that Luke can describe Jesus and his people as law-observant (2:22-24, 27, 39). But their status before God is not derived from the law. As the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (18:11-14) explains, the law is not the object of their trust. Instead of being defined by the law, Jesus' followers are defined by faith, which is characterized by acceptance of the divine word and dependence upon Jesus. Their faith comes to expression through devotion to Jesus (7:36-50; 10:38-42) and through works of restoration (19:1-10).

Luke and Paul

Vielhauer found big differences between the Lukan and the Pauline writings, and he concluded that Luke could not have been a companion of Paul. To Luke, the Jewish hope and the Christian hope were basically one and the same (cf. Acts 23:6; 26:5), and this hope had been fulfilled in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. Justification by faith was not an alternative, but rather an addendum to justification by the law. Freedom from the law applied only to the Gentiles. As opposed to the Pauline letters (cf. 2 Cor 3:4-18), Luke saw no antithesis between the law and the gospel. Paul's conviction that the law was a secondary addition to the promise to Abraham (Rom 5:20) was totally foreign to Luke's thinking, and he had no understanding of Paul's insistence that the law was useless

60 Michael Pettem argues that Luke omitted Mark 6:45-8:26 specifically because he did not see kosher laws abrogated in Jesus' ministry, but in the context of the evangelization of the Gentiles ("Luke's Great Omission and His View of the Law," *NTS* 42 [1996] 46-53).

61 Cf. Syreeni, who concludes that Luke's interest in the law is purely practical, focusing on the actual situation of the Gentiles ("Matthew, Luke, and the Law," 140-143; similarly, Salo, *Luke's Treatment of the Law*, 301).

for salvation. Paul's question "is the law sin?" (Rom 7:7) was inconceivable in Luke's thought world.⁶²

If the argument of this essay is broadly correct, however, Vielhauer has overstated the differences.⁶³ Even though this study is restricted to the Gospel of Luke, it suffices to show significant points of overlap with Paul's theology. Luke does indeed conceive of an antithesis that involves law and gospel, an antithesis that in the Gospel is applied to Jews. Characters who pursue righteousness by the law do not find it, whereas those who seek forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ do. Luke has none of the quotable soundbites so characteristic of Paul's polemical form, but his narrative can very aptly be summarized in Paul's own words: "For if a law had been given that was able to make alive, then righteousness would really be from the law. But Scripture has shut everything up under sin, so that the promise through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to the believers" (Gal 3:21b-22). Both Luke and Paul are convinced that no one is justified through the performance of the law. They also agree that the pursuit of such righteousness is detrimental and brings a person under God's punishment (Luke 1:20; 18:14; Rom 10:3; Gal 5:4).

But this critique does not concern the law itself (Luke 16:17; Rom 7:7); only the people whose righteousness is defined by it, or in Paul's terms, sin (Rom 7:13). Both Luke and Paul see the gospel as the fulfillment and perfection of what the law described (Luke 16:17; 24:44; Rom 3:31). They also hold similar views regarding the relative value of the law. Keeping the law is good, but its observance must be subordinated to the righteousness that comes through Christ. Paul can therefore refer the Corinthians to the law for ethical guidance (1 Cor 9:8-9; 14:34).⁶⁴ He also mentions his own law observance, an observance that in turn is subordinated to the higher goal: that of spreading the gospel

62 Vielhauer, " 'Paulinism' of Acts," 37-43. The conclusion that Luke understands the gospel as an addition to the law has been repeated by many scholars, e.g., Sellin, "Gleichniserzähler," 53; Ernst, *Lukas*, 471; J.A. Fitzmyer, *Luke the Theologian: Aspects of His Teaching* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 1989) 175-202; F. Vouga, *Jésus et la loi selon la tradition synoptique* (Le monde de la Bible 17; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1988) 132, 151; Syreeni, "Matthew, Luke, and the Law," 148-150; Salo, *Luke's Treatment of the Law*, 110.

63 Several scholars have argued that Vielhauer has exaggerated the differences between Paul and Luke, e.g., P. Borgen, "From Paul to Luke: Observations toward Clarification of the Theology of Luke-Acts," *CBQ* 31 (1969) 168-182; J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 31; New York: Doubleday, 1998) 147.

64 For an excellent survey of how Paul's exhortations in 1 Corinthians 5-7 are based on the Mosaic law, see B.S. Rosner, *Paul, Scripture and Ethics: A Study of 1 Cor 5-7* (AGJU 22; Leiden: Brill, 1994).

(1 Cor 9:20, 23). But law observance is no longer desirable when it serves to define one's righteousness. Paul therefore has a stern warning to the Galatians, who are tempted to see the law as the means to justification (Gal 5:4).

Luke and Paul also agree that the believer is characterized by virtues that truly fulfill the law and that may go beyond its literal requirements (Luke 16:18; Rom 2:26-27; 8:4; 13:8-10; Gal 5:22-23; 6:2). They are both aware that these virtues are no precondition, but rather a consequence, of God's gracious gift. This gift they can both describe with righteousness language (Luke 18:14; Rom 3:24; 4:5; 5:1; Gal 3:6-14) as well as with the language of forgiveness (Luke 7:47-48; Rom 4:7).

True, Paul's apparent law critique is harsher than Luke's. It is hard to imagine Luke making statements like "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor 3:6), although he also sees law-righteousness resulting in condemnation (Luke 18:14). Even more unthinkable from Luke's pen are Paul's famous words: "But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead" (Rom 7:8). But Luke also knows that those who excel in pursuing the law tend to excel in vanity (Luke 11:43; 14:7) and greed (Luke 16:14) as well.

Conclusion

The role of the law in Luke's theology is different from its role in Paul's writings, but the differences are not incompatible, and there are significant points of overlap. This conclusion correlates with a view of Luke as a companion, but not necessarily a disciple, of Paul. As an educated writer and a theologian in his own right, Luke is apparently not content to repeat Pauline expressions, but develops his own theology in a way that is compatible with, though not derivative of, the theology of Paul.⁶⁵

65 Similarly, Marguerat, "Paul and the Torah," 104; S.E. Porter, "Luke: Companion or Disciple of Paul?" in *Paul and the Gospels: Christologies, Conflicts, and Convergences* (Library of New Testament Studies 411; eds. M.F. Bird and J. Willitts; London: T & T Clark, 2011) 149. Richard Hays finds that Luke represents "an intelligible trajectory from within a Pauline symbolic world" ("The Paulinism of Acts, Intertextually Reconsidered," in *Paul and the Heritage of Israel: Paul's Claim upon Israel's Legacy in Luke and Acts in the Light of the Pauline Letters* [Library of New Testament Studies 452; eds. D.P. Moessner, D. Marguerat, M.C. Parsons and M. Wolter; London: T & T Clark, 2012] 147). Jens Schröter concludes that Luke gives "a creative treatment of Paul's heritage in a new situation" ("The Pauline Figure of Acts within the Pauline Legacy: Paul the Founder of the Church: Reflections on

As for the more general question of Luke's possible adherence to Paul's theology, however, other issues are equally important, such as his understanding of the effects of the cross, the degree of human sinfulness, and natural theology. These questions fall outside the scope of this article.

the Reception of Paul in the Acts of the Apostles and the Pastoral Epistles," in *Paul and the Heritage of Israel: Paul's Claim upon Israel's Legacy in Luke and Acts in the Light of the Pauline Letters* [Library of New Testament Studies 452; eds. D.P. Moessner, D. Marguerat, M.C. Parsons and M. Wolter; London: T & T Clark, 2012] 213).