

## The law of Christ

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**Paul's phrase 'the law of Christ', used without explanation in Gal 6.2, means neither some form of words (such as Lev 19.18), nor a norm constituted by the example of Christ himself. It is rather a metaphor for what, in the life of those who belong to Christ, occupies the place that law had in the life of those who came before Christ: it means the Spirit, as described in Gal 5.16–25. Incidentally, the phrase serves to relativize 'law', implying that the Jewish law is just one form of law and not the highest.**

One of the many puzzles presented by Paul's treatment of law appears in Gal 6.2, where Paul supports his counsel to the Galatians that they should 'bear one another's burdens' by invoking 'the law of Christ'. How comes Paul, who elsewhere in this letter has only harsh words for law, and in the preceding chapter contrasts Christ and the law not only by implication but directly,<sup>1</sup> suddenly to place these terms together? What is this 'law of Christ'? Why does Paul appeal to it here, and never elsewhere?<sup>2</sup>

Various interpretations have been offered of 'the law of Christ'. C. H. Dodd thought it meant ordinances delivered by Christ.<sup>3</sup> R. B. Hays has proposed that it is 'Christ's example of burden-bearing', which 'establishes a normative pattern (*nomos*) which all who are in Christ are called to "fulfill" in their relationships with others'.<sup>4</sup> The most common view has been that it means (in substance) the com-

1 See 5.4: 'You are cut off from Christ, all of you who justify yourselves by law.' According to 5.1, Christ has freed 'us' from 'the yoke of slavery', evidently meaning the law (see 4.24, where the 'covenant . . . from Mt Sinai' delivers one 'into slavery'). There is an appeal to the law in 4.21b ('You who want to be under the law, do you not hear the law?'). But by itself this need not be an endorsement of the law; since his hearers accept the law he can use it to argue against them without necessarily accepting it himself.

2 There may be a passing reference in 1 Cor 9.21, where Paul says he is ἔννομος Χριστοῦ. See the appendix below.

3 C. H. Dodd "Ἐννομος Χριστοῦ", *More New Testament Studies* (Manchester: Manchester University, 1968) 96–110.

4 R. B. Hays, 'Christology and Ethics in Galatians: The Law of Christ', *CBQ* 49 (1987) 268–90, 287. See also F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 261, who interprets 'the law of Christ' as 'the whole of Jesus' ethical teaching, confirmed by his character and conduct'.

mandment of Lev 19.18 to love one's neighbour as oneself, quoted by Paul 14 verses earlier, in Gal 5.14.<sup>5</sup>

All of these theories are doubtful. Paul almost never explicitly invokes commands of Jesus; if they are central to his paraenesis, why is he so coy about referring to them?<sup>6</sup> Hays is nearer the mark, but he too relies on teasing out doubtful implications; for a reference to Christ's example of self-giving Hays must reach back all the way to 2.20 ('loved me and gave himself for me').<sup>7</sup> 5.14 is less remote, but the focus in this verse rests on too literal a conception of what a 'law' must be; and even if 'law' requires a form of words, other forms are closer to 6.2b than 5.14 – including 6.2a, 'Bear one another's burdens'.

In this paper I suggest an alternative view: that 'the law of Christ' is a way of referring to the practice which Paul believes should govern the community of believers, a practice which Paul deliberately refrains from reducing to any verbal formula. He thereby warns us that he neither invokes the old law nor replaces it with a new one, but calls instead on something wholly different in character, which is 'law' only in the loose sense that, in the new world brought by Christ, it has a function like that of law in the old world. Paul uses 'the law of Christ' as a name for a staple of his thought, implicit in all of his letters and explicit precisely at the end of Gal 5, in vv. 13–25. In short, this is a name for living by the Spirit.

We can start with a clue: since both 'law' and (especially) 'Christ' are terms of great importance to Paul, it seems likely that any 'law of Christ' will also be of great importance; if, nevertheless, the phrase is rare in Paul's letters, that may be because it stands for something which Paul usually refers to in another way.

To see how this works we need to step back from 'the law of Christ' as such, and look at 'law' more broadly. 'Law' is an undercurrent in Gal 5.13–25, found in vv. 14, 18 and 23, which present some interesting features. This passage begins with an invocation of freedom in v. 13, recalling the opposition of freedom and law featured in 5.1, which itself recalls the parable of 4.22–31, opposing slavery and Sinai to freedom and 'the Jerusalem above'; but now Paul advises the Galatians that freedom from law does not mean that all conduct is permissible. No, they must

5 For example, M. Luther, *Lectures on Galatians* (*Luther's Works*, 26–27; St Louis: Concordia, 1964) 27.113; E. D. Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920) 329; V. P. Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968) 64–5; H. D. Betz, *Galatians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 301; C. K. Barrett, *Freedom and Obligation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985) 83; J. L. Martyn, *Galatians* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1997) 558. I pass over many important nuances in these interpretations.

6 See H. Räisänen's detailed critique of Dodd's argument in *Paul and The Law* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1983) 77–81.

7 The other passages Hays cites, 3.13 and 4.4–5, refer to this concept obliquely if at all.

'through love, serve one another' (v. 13b), an instruction which Paul underscores in v. 14 by invoking Lev 19.18: 'For the whole law has been fulfilled in a single principle, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."' This verse presents some difficulties, although they do not obscure the central point that Paul accepts and endorses the biblical injunction, and that he acknowledges its connection with the law. But why does Paul, having up to this point strenuously attacked the law, now invoke it? And what does he mean by saying the law 'has been fulfilled' (πεπλήρωται) – or, as it is often translated, 'is summed up' (NRSV, REV)? The problem here is posed by 5.3, just 11 verses earlier, in which Paul solemnly testifies to his Gentile audience that anyone who submits to circumcision must submit to the whole law; here, in contrast, he seems to be saying that the single command to love one's neighbour is sufficient.

The difference between these treatments goes straight to the meaning of law – not religious law in particular, but law of any kind. A person subject to law cannot pick and choose among the law's provisions; one who is able to pick and choose is not subject at all.<sup>8</sup> But Paul does not treat love of neighbour in this way, for reasons that become clear in the course of this passage. For Paul, love is not a matter of command, it is an operation of the Spirit (5.22). The law may tell us to love, but only the Spirit will bring us to do so. Moreover, the command to love and the command to circumcise necessarily operate in different ways. Circumcision is a specific act, and carrying it out is generally a matter of routine; the practices involved in preparing food are similar. Love is more complicated. If we think of rules as statements which tell us with some clarity what we ought to do, then the command to love is not a rule. What precisely is entailed in loving one's neighbour? Perhaps one could write a series of rules detailing how to love, but – apart from the complexity of the task – I think most people would feel that rules on this subject would miss the point: if what you do is dictated by rules, it isn't love. Paul has much the same idea (and we may owe ours to him), which in v. 18 he expresses the other way round: if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. The inconsistency between the two is not in result but in process.

On the other hand, the distinction is pressed too far if we think that following the Spirit means some automatic process, not open to discussion. That is not Paul's idea; he has a lot to say, here and in his other letters, about what one ought to do. Moreover, he does invoke the command to love one's neighbour, which, though not a rule, is (as Paul says) a λόγος: a term defying precise translation but

8 The point is found in Jas 2.10–11: 'For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. . . . So if you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a violator of the law.' For parallels, see M. Dibelius, *James* (rev. H. Greeven; Philidelphia: Fortress, 1976) 144–6.

with clear links to the reasoning process suggested by the verbal form λογίζομαι, 'reckon . . . calculate, consider . . .'.<sup>9</sup> In this way Paul invokes the law, but not, so to speak, as law. This is the distinction between v. 14 and Paul's warning in v. 3 against law-observance. Paul's distinctive treatment of the love commandment is reflected in the distinctive verb he uses here with law, πληρώω. Barclay has shown that this is an unusual term to use with law, to be contrasted with other verbs such as ποιέω and φυλάσσω, which mean to meet the law's requirements.<sup>10</sup> Equally important are Martyn's twin points that the key concept in πληρώω here is that of bringing to completion, and that 5.14 should be understood as referring to the completing of the law *by Christ* – thus recognizing the sense of the perfect form ('has been completed') and interpreting the passive as divine.<sup>11</sup>

But then what does it mean to bring the whole law to completion? While Paul does not spell this out, we can infer a rough answer from the development of his argument. In v. 15 he illustrates the absence of love with a grisly metaphor ('if you bite and devour each other'), which presumably reflects Paul's understanding of developments in Galatia, but also introduces the idea of the next verse: that the Galatians are threatened by fleshly desires, which can be defeated only if they walk by the Spirit. Thus Paul moves from the completing of the law to following the Spirit, telling the Galatians next (v. 18) that they cannot be both led by the Spirit and under law. The pieces begin to fall into place: love is good; love is the completion of the law; the law is not good, but the completion of the law is good; the Spirit is good, and is opposed to the law. Then is love linked to the Spirit? Yes, as we learn

9 LSJ s.v. I, II. For λόγος the first four main senses given by LSJ are 'computation, reckoning . . . relation, correspondence . . . explanation . . . debate . . .'. Weaker senses are possible, such as 'saying' (LSJ, s.v. VII), but I think that carries us too far from the idea that this λόγος is part of νόμος.

10 J. M. G. Barclay, *Obeying the Truth* (Edinburgh/Minneapolis: T. & T. Clark/Fortress, 1988) 138–41. The other Pauline passages with a form of this verb are Rom 8.4; 13.8 and Gal 6.2 (ἀναπληρώω), where we find 'the law of Christ'.

11 Martyn, *Galatians*, 486–91. Martyn paraphrases v. 14, 'Christ has brought the law to completion . . .' (489). It is a minor difficulty with Martyn's thesis that this precise interpretation does not fit Rom 13.8 or Gal 6.2, where the verb is in the active voice with a human subject (respectively, the one who loves his neighbour and the Galatians). Although Martyn translates the verbs in both 5.14 and 6.2 by 'bring to completion', the meaning is different: in the first case it involves changing the nature of the law and in the second, performing the law without changing it. But this is no real objection: a writer is always free to use a word in varying senses, needing only to give some indication of the variations as they occur.

S. Westerholm ('On Fulfilling the Whole Law [Gal 5:14]', *SEÅ* 51–52 [1986–7] 229–37, 235; emphasis in the original), interpreting 'fulfil' in a different way, arrives at a thesis somewhat similar to mine: "Doing" the law is what is required of those "under the law"; "fulfilling" the law is, for Paul, the result of Christian living *the norms of which are stated in quite different terms*. In my view, however, Paul does not think of 'stating' the 'norms' in any 'terms' at all.

in v. 22; love is a fruit of the Spirit. Thus, while Paul does not spell out his idea of completing the law, the trail leads away from the law itself. It is this which allows Paul to invoke the completion of the law in v. 14, even as he dismisses the law itself in vv. 1–4, and then again in v. 18.

Underlying this concept of completing the law may be the prophetic treatment of law found in Jer 31.33 (LXX 38.33): ‘I will put my laws into their mind, and write them on their hearts.’ Certainly Paul knew this verse; he does not directly invoke it in Galatians, but he does so in Rom 2.15 (‘work of the law written in their hearts’).<sup>12</sup> In Galatians, what God puts in the hearts of believers is the Spirit (4.6), and in 2 Cor 3.2–3, similarly, the Spirit writes on believers’ hearts.<sup>13</sup> These hints of a link between the Spirit and the eschatological, unwritten law would explain how Paul can speak as he does in Gal 5.13 of the completion of the law: he means the promised law written on the heart, which operates not through commands and rules, but through the Spirit.<sup>14</sup>

Paul’s argument makes another striking link in 5.18, where, having just declared the opposition between Spirit and flesh, he now declares an opposition between Spirit and law (‘If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law’). There is no difficulty with either half of this sentence, taken separately; Paul has already exhorted the Galatians to follow the Spirit (v. 16), and reminded them that they are free from the law (vv. 1, 13). The point of v. 18 is that it binds the two points together in a neat, logical form which asserts the incompatibility of Spirit and law. Logically, it is equivalent to the reverse formulation, ‘If you are under the law, you

12 The reference is denied by E. Käsemann (*Commentary on Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980] 64) on the ground that Jer 31 is eschatological but Rom 2 is not; cf. C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1957) 158; U. Wilkens, *Der Brief an die Römer* (Zurich/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger/Neukirchener, 1978) 1.134–5; H. Schlier, *Der Römerbrief* (Freiberg: Herder, 1977). *Contra*, see C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975) 158–9; J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans* (Dallas: Word, 1988) 100; J. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (New York: Doubleday, 1993) 311. I think the resemblance between Rom 2.15 and Jer 31 is too close for coincidence to be likely; the objections present issues in interpretation without refuting the underlying connection.

13 Martyn (*Galatians*, 391–2) notes the resemblance between Gal 4.6 and Jer 31.31–4, as well as Ezek 36.26–7 (which, like Gal 4.6, does not use the term ‘law’). M. Thrall (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994] 222) and V. P. Furnish (*II Corinthians* [New York: Doubleday, 1984] 181, 183) see an allusion to Jer 31 in 2 Cor 3. Wilkens’s chief reason for doubting an allusion in Rom 2.15 (see n. above) is that it would be inconsistent with Paul’s use of the Jeremiah passage in 2 Cor 3.3 – an argument which presses consistency much too far.

14 J. M. G. Barclay (private letter, 18 October 1999) points out that the future ἀγαπήσεις in 5.14 could be taken not as a command but as a promise, which Paul proclaims is ‘fulfilled’ (note BAGD s.v. πληρόω 4.a). If Paul’s readers are familiar with Lev 19.18 as a command they will probably not notice this ambiguity, but it could have influenced Paul’s thinking.

are not led by the Spirit.<sup>15</sup> Where does this opposition come from? Paul seems to take it for granted; neither the preceding verse nor the following one offer any explanation. I have already suggested what I believe to be the basis of the opposition – that because the Spirit and the law operate in different ways, one cannot turn to both for guidance. But this assumes an independence of operation which is not obvious. Why should they not collaborate?<sup>16</sup> When the law is ambiguous – and there will always be cases where any system of law is ambiguous – then we could turn to the Spirit for clarification.<sup>17</sup> Equally, when the Spirit is unclear one could turn to the law.<sup>18</sup> If both the Spirit and the law come from God, then why should one not be both led by the Spirit and under the law?<sup>19</sup>

Barclay escapes this difficulty by taking v. 18 in a weaker sense, asserting not that the law is unacceptable but that it is unnecessary.<sup>20</sup> But not only is this weaker than what Paul actually says in v. 18, it is weaker than what he says elsewhere in this letter – for instance, in 5.1–4; the stronger reading of v. 18 thus fits Paul's position well. Indeed, Martyn takes v. 18 to 'remind the Galatians that they are free of the tyranny of the Sinaitic law . . .'.<sup>21</sup> But if it is only a reminder, then why is it phrased conditionally?

A better treatment of Paul's argument is to take him at his word, that the law and the Spirit are incompatible. The possibility that in particular cases they might lead to the same result does not interest Paul, for it does not apply to the cases Paul is interested in. The law leads one to circumcision, to *kashrut* and to the

15 The equivalence of 'If p, then not-q' and 'If q, then not-p' is elementary in logic since Aristotle (see W. Kneale and M. Kneale, *The Development of Logic* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1962] 41). A simple demonstration is as follows: assume one is under the law, and suppose that one is also led by the Spirit; but we already know that if one is led by the Spirit, one is not under the law; since this contradicts the initial assumption, it follows that if one is under the law one is not led by the Spirit. The point is an elementary one not dependent on formal logical training, and moreover it is congenial to Paul's thought.

16 We can illustrate the problem out of Paul's own mouth: 'We know that the law is spiritual', he tells the Romans (7.14).

17 Ambiguity is obvious in a principle like 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. But even explicit rules leave hard cases, such as whether to save life on the Sabbath. Thus the Torah generates the Mishnah, the Mishnah the Talmud, the Talmud the commentaries on the Talmud, and so on. Exactly the same process fills modern law libraries.

18 So far as we can tell from Paul's letters, the Spirit is not a source of explicit instruction in concrete cases. When Paul does invoke the Spirit as a guide to action, he does so with diffidence, in connection with other arguments; see 1 Cor 7.39–40 ('and I think I have the Spirit of God').

19 It is possible that Paul thinks the law does not come from God. In Gal 3.19 he seems to attribute it to a collaboration of angels and a mediator, which hints that it is not from God; but if in chapter 3 Paul will only hint at this radical conclusion, it seems unlikely that he would take it for granted in chapter 5. (See also n. 31 below.)

20 Barclay, *Obedying the Truth*, 116; similarly, Betz, *Galatians*, 281.

21 Martyn, *Galatians*, 495.

observation of days and months and seasons (4.10); the Spirit does not. The law (according to Paul) does not lead to love of one another, but the Spirit does.

This last point Paul develops in vv. 19–23, contrasting the works of flesh with the fruit of the Spirit, and then invoking law once again: ‘The law is not against such things.’<sup>22</sup> This is a surprising remark, amounting to an endorsement (however muted) of the law. Why does Paul volunteer such an endorsement at this point? Will anyone have thought that the law *is* against love, joy, peace and the rest?<sup>23</sup> Possibly Paul is concerned lest the opposition between the Spirit and the law which he has set up in v. 18 be taken to that length, but he is more concerned with the contrast he introduces in v. 24:<sup>24</sup> while the law is not against the fruit of the Spirit, it is those who belong to Christ, not those under the law, who have actually crucified the flesh and its passions and desires. The concession Paul makes to the law serves only to highlight the law’s inadequacy. The thought of v. 24 is then pursued in v. 25, where the ‘we’ of the premise (‘if we live by the Spirit’) are the same as ‘those who belong to Christ’, and their ‘living by the Spirit’ likewise is another way of referring to their – ‘our’ – crucifixion of the flesh.<sup>25</sup>

Now, as we approach Paul’s invocation of ‘the law of Christ’ in 6.2, we can take stock of where we are with respect to law. In 5.14 Paul has made an apparent break from his highly critical treatment of law earlier in this letter, acknowledging that law is related – although this relation is not clearly defined – to a principle (λόγος) with which Paul implies agreement: you shall love your neighbour as yourself. Nevertheless, in 5.18 Paul treats law as opposed to the Spirit, and while in 5.23–4 he concedes that the law and the Spirit are not actually opposed, he maintains that the law is without practical effect. The apparent concession to law in 5.14 must be read in light of these later verses. The value Paul places in 5.14 on the command to love one’s neighbour does not mean that Paul values this principle *as law*, and indeed, the command is so vague in its concrete meaning as to be legally

22 The usual translation is ‘There is no law against such things’ (e.g., NRSV, REV, NAB, NJB, Betz, Burton). But ‘no law’ includes Jewish law, and that is the point; it is the only law under consideration.

23 Many commentators take Paul to be making another point. ‘Paul does not simply mean that the nine virtues which make up the fruit of the Spirit are not forbidden by law; he means that when those qualities are in view we are in a sphere with which the law has nothing to do’ (Bruce, *Galatians*, 255; cf. Betz, *Galatians*, 289; F. Mussner, *Der Galaterbrief* [HTKNT; Freiburg: Herder, 1974] 389). This is sound, except that it is not the idea expressed by v. 23, where, in fact, the word ‘against’ is emphasized by its placement at the beginning. The law is not *against* the Spirit, but the next two verses show how little this amounts to.

24 Notwithstanding the punctuation in Nestle-Aland<sup>27</sup> and UBS<sup>4</sup>, v. 23b is more closely bound to v. 24 than to v. 23a; the asyndeton in 23b indicates a new beginning, while the δέ in 24 links it to 23b.

25 Elsewhere in Galatians Paul refers to the new identity of believers as those who have been baptized into Christ (3.27), and those in whom Christ is formed (4.19).



worthless without detailed commentary – which Paul makes no effort to supply. If law may now be regarded as in some sense reduced to this principle (and this sense depends, as we have seen, on solving the riddle of Paul's use of πληρώω), still this does not seem to have much effect on Paul's treatment of law. If neighbour-love stands in some way for law, still love's effectiveness, according to the argument of 5.16–25, depends on the Spirit, and, according to 5.18, *only* on the Spirit.

This forms the background for Paul's invocation of 'the law of Christ' in 6.2. Now, if we take 'law' in this phrase to imply the existence of some form of words constituting this law, we will have departed from Paul's thought in this passage. It is of the utmost importance that Paul gives us no such form of words; while the passage abounds in expressions that could be taken to express binding rules or principles, from 'through love serve one another' (5.13), through 'love your neighbour as yourself' (5.14), two exhortations to follow the Spirit (5.16, 25), and a pair of more specific (yet hardly legal) instructions (5.26; 6.1), to 'bear one another's burdens' (6.2), the wealth of candidates demonstrates that none is 'the law of Christ'. We miss the point if we look for a verbal formula; Paul obviously does not want to give us any such thing. This is especially emphasized by examining the most obvious candidate for such a formula, the one appearing in the same sentence as 'the law of Christ': 'Bear one another's burdens'. How shall we interpret this, as a rule of law? Every term requires exegesis, and if we nevertheless thought the whole was clear, Paul confounds us by presenting, just three verses later (6.5), the exact opposite formula: 'Each one must bear his own burdens'.<sup>26</sup>

We must therefore take Paul's use of 'law' in Gal 6.2 in a somewhat looser sense, not as identifying any specific, legal instruction, but as referring to the way Christ exercises his lordship over those called by him.<sup>27</sup> And what way is that? According to Gal 5.16–25, it is necessary for those who are 'of Christ' (5.24) to live in a way that is organized by the Spirit (πνεύματι στοιχεῖν, 5.25); according to 5.18 that is sufficient as well. A necessary and sufficient condition for life in the community of the called: what else could there be to 'the law of Christ'? Those who live according to the Spirit follow the law of Christ – or better, as Paul says, they bring it to realization.

<sup>26</sup> Like any pair of apparently conflicting principles, these can be distinguished by careful interpretation of each within its context; see the various commentaries. But then neither stands as the sort of fundamental principle that one would expect to wear the title 'the law of Christ'.

<sup>27</sup> On broader uses of 'law' (νόμος), see (besides the lexicons) M. Winger, *By What Law? The Meaning of Νόμος in the Letters of Paul* (SBLDS 128; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992); H. Räisänen, 'Paul's Word-Play on νόμος: A Linguistic Study', *Jesus, Paul and Torah* (JSNTSup 43; Sheffield: JSOT, 1992) 69–94; H. Hollander, 'The Meaning of the Term "Law" (ΝΟΜΟΣ) in 1 Corinthians', *NovT* 50 (1998) 118–35.



That is why Paul drops the phrase as quickly as he takes it up, and does not employ it elsewhere.<sup>28</sup> On the whole, it is a phrase more likely to mislead than to instruct. Why then did Paul use it? He probably thought it clearer than it has turned out to be; every writer has had that experience. It is also possible, however, that he had in mind a nice point which the phrase makes by implication. If, as seems likely, the genitive 'of Christ' serves here to identify the particular law referred to, then the expression 'the law of Christ' (even if one does not know just what it refers to) relativizes 'law', and undercuts 'the law', which turns out to be just one such law.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, since 'the law', Jewish law, is now distinguished from 'the law of Christ', it is plainly an inferior one. In effect, Paul says: We who belong to Christ live in and according to the Spirit; *that* is our law – the true law.

#### Appendix: 1 Cor 9.21

In 1 Cor 9.21 Paul uses the phrase ἔννομος Χριστοῦ, which is generally translated using 'the law of Christ'.<sup>30</sup> But the parallel to Gal 6.2 is doubtful. In 1 Cor 9.20–1 Paul asserts that to those ὑπὸ νόμον he is ὡς ὑπὸ νόμον, yet not αὐτὸς ὑπὸ νόμον, while to those ἄνομοι he is ὡς ἄνομος, yet not ἄνομος θεοῦ, rather ἔννομος Χριστοῦ. The phrases are intriguing, but their implications are not developed or explored. If ἔννομος Χριστοῦ suggests a law of Christ, then μὴ ἄνομος θεοῦ suggests a law of God; what might be the relation between these? They can hardly be in conflict; are they then the same? Why then change the name, without elaboration, in the space of six words? And νόμος θεοῦ, invoked without any further explanation, is likely to be understood as Jewish law.<sup>31</sup>

The normal sense of the adjectives ἄνομος and ἔννομος is 'lawless' and 'lawful' (LSJ, BAGD); consistent with these meanings, the genitives in 1 Cor 9.21 are likely to suggest the general qualification 'concerning' or 'with respect to ...'.<sup>32</sup> In this context the idea may be simply: God does not regard me as lawless; in fact, Christ

28 On ἔννομος Χριστοῦ in 1 Cor 9.21, see the Appendix below.

29 On the meaning of genitive phrases with 'law' in Paul, see M. Winger, 'Meaning and Law', *JBL* 117 (1998) 105–10.

30 For example, 'under Christ's law' (NRSV, NJB, Moffatt and the commentaries of Robinson and Patman and Fee); 'subject to the law of Christ' (REB); 'within the law of Christ' (NAB, Lattimore, and the commentary of Conzelmann). Contrast 'under a law as concerning Christ' (Tyndale), and 'under legal obligation to Christ' (Barrett's commentary).

31 As I have observed (n. 19 above), the two can be distinguished, and Paul may hint at such a distinction in Gal 3.19–20, where his argument can be read to imply the conclusion 'the mediator [through whose hand the law was given] is not of God'. But there is no such hint here.

32 Rom 1.25, τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῦ θεοῦ ('the truth about God'), may be a parallel. Note the genitive of connection in H. W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (rev. G. M. Messing; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1956) ¶¶ 1380–81.

regards me as lawful. There is not much thought here of some particular law, however named.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Many of the commentaries conclude that if 'a law of Christ' is meant, it is 'in an improper sense (cf. Rom 8.2): Christ is the norm' (H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975] 161). C. K. Barrett (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [New York: Harper & Row, 1968] 214) suggests that the genitives are governed by the subject, which is Paul, so that the expressions mean that Paul, as one belonging to God and to Christ, is not lawless but obedient. This seems to me to be a great deal to read into these obscure phrases. In *Freedom and Obligation*, 80, Barrett observes that in 1 Cor 9.21 'Paul is careful to avoid using [the term "law"], thinking perhaps that it might be misunderstood'.