



Three Reflections

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Reflection 1

The Good Samaritan: Luke 10:25–37 and 2 Chronicles 28:8–15

I have noticed now over many years that, if one mentions the prophet Oded even among those who are generally very well-informed about the Bible, one is liable to be met by blank looks and the puzzled admission by the person to whom one is speaking that he or she has no recollection of ever having heard of anyone called Oded. It is, of course, understandable that 1 and 2 Chronicles should be read less than 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings, though one may hope that, over time, H. G. M. Williamson's fine commentary on 1 and 2 Chronicles in the New Century Bible series (1982) will encourage more people to read them. In the meantime, the publication of *The Revised Common Lectionary* in 1992 has further encouraged neglect of Chronicles, since it includes no lection at all from either book.¹

Yet 2 Chr 28:8–15 is surely one of the most attractive stories in the whole of the Old Testament. It tells how when the kingdom of Israel has won a crushing victory over the kingdom of Judah (at the time ruled by Ahaz) and the victorious army has returned to Samaria, Israel's capital, with its wretched captives and much spoil, there sallies forth from the city the lonely but determined figure of Oded the prophet to meet the returning host. What he has to say to them is set out in verses 9–11: “Behold, because the LORD, the God of your fathers, was angry with Judah, he gave them into your hand, but you have slain them in a rage which has reached up to heaven. And now you intend to subjugate the people of Judah and Jerusalem, male and female, as your slaves. Have you not sins of your own against the LORD your God? Now, hear me, and send back the captives from your kinsfolk whom you have taken, for the fierce wrath of the LORD

is upon you.” Verses 12 and 13 then tell how certain chiefs of the men of Ephraim took Oded’s part, and joined themselves to him. The chronicler lists their names: ‘Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai’, and goes on to say that these men ‘stood up against those who came from the war, and said to them, “You shall not bring the captives in here, for you propose to bring upon us guilt against the LORD in addition to our present sins and guilt. For our guilt is already great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel.”’

Verses 14 and 15 go on to tell how the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the princes and the assembly, and how the men who have been named ‘took the captives, and with the spoil they clothed all that were naked among them; [...] gave them sandals, provided them with food and drink, and anointed them; and, carrying all the feeble among them on asses, they brought them to their kinsfolk at Jericho, the city of palm trees’, and then themselves returned to Samaria.

In a sermon preached more than twenty years ago on 2 Chr 28:1–15,² I drew attention to what seemed to me to be rather striking points of contact between that passage and Luke 10:25–37. Both passages show Jews in a bad light (2 Chr 28:1–7 and in Luke 10 the lawyer’s professing not to know who is his neighbour and in the parable the priest and the Levite who fail to help the man who had fallen among robbers); both passages show people, whom we may perhaps call ‘Samaritans’,³ or a Samaritan, in a good light, showing compassion and attending to the needs of Jews or a Jew in distress; both passages mention the use of oil as a healing agent; both mention the setting of the weak and helpless on asses or on an ass; and both mention Jericho. The points of contact seemed to me sufficiently striking to suggest that Jesus’s parable may well reflect his memory of the 2 Chronicles passage. If Jesus himself was attracted by this passage, as seems quite likely, that should surely encourage us to listen to it with special attentiveness. But, whether or not Jesus was actually influenced in his composing of his parable of the Good Samaritan by the Oded narrative, it is surely true that that narrative sheds a flood of light on Luke 10:25–37; for Oded’s challenge to his compatriots, ‘Have you

not sins of your own against the LORD your God?', which highlights human self-righteousness as the great effective obstacle in the way of human beings' having true faith in God and also in the way of their showing compassion to their fellow human beings, provides the clue to understanding the predicament of the lawyer of Luke 10:25–37.

His trouble is indeed his self-righteousness, which, though he can give a perfect theological answer to Jesus's question about the law (v. 26), quoting Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18b, renders him incapable of recognizing the identity of his neighbour. And, when, in response to the lawyer's self-excusing question 'And who is my neighbour?', Jesus tells his parable of the Good Samaritan, deliberately choosing a member of that people whom the Jews specially hated and despised to be the hero of his tale (itself a most eloquent though indirect reply to the lawyer's question, 'And who is my neighbour?'), Jesus then by the way in which he formulates his question at the end of his parable, 'Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?', skilfully forces the lawyer to admit that of the three it was the 'one who showed mercy on him' who proved neighbour to the victim of the robbers. But the lawyer's answer is grudging, and he still cannot bring himself to utter the hated name 'Samaritan'.

Too often the church in its enthusiasm for interpreting a favourite parable, has failed to give to the figure of the lawyer the importance which he actually has in the pericope Luke 10:25–37. To allow 2 Chr 28:8–15 to shed light on the pericope is to see again what is being said in it about the lawyer. Moreover, the 2 Chronicles passage can help us to see that there is more to the parable than simply teaching on the relations between individuals – that it also throws light on relations between peoples and nations.

In conclusion, must we not acknowledge that neglect of 2 Chr 28:8–15 has meant a grievous loss for our churches? Is it not a sad reflection on them that the majority of children who have attended Sunday School or one of its equivalents for any length of time will almost certainly have heard about David and the violent death of Goliath, but very few, if any, will have heard about the prophet Oded and his courageous and compassionate action? I must confess to finding this ignorance of the story of Oded in the church not only

puzzling but also deeply dismaying. Can we be quite unaware of its relevance to today's tragically divided and suffering world?



Reflection 2

Francis Watson's *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*

Professor Francis Watson's *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*⁴ was very enthusiastically welcomed when it was published and has proved influential. It is undoubtedly a very impressive work of scholarship, immensely learned, containing much fascinating information and many suggestive insights. It deserves to be read carefully and critically. At the time a number of matters of detail struck me as questionable: but I still have two main concerns about this book, and in this brief reflection I shall concentrate attention on them.

My first concern has to do with the claim on p. 151 that Hab 2:4 is 'the origin and basis' of Paul's doctrine of righteousness by faith. It is the confident and uncompromising definite article here that troubles me, and it troubles me much. The great importance for Paul of that verse and of much else in the Old Testament scriptures has rightly been recognized down the centuries, and I have no wish to belittle it. But does not Professor Watson's definite article here represent a serious underestimation of the importance for Paul of the person and work of Christ?

If we can believe the account in Acts 9 as at any rate substantially reliable, something happened to Paul on the way to Damascus and in his meeting with Ananias which turned his whole life in the opposite direction to that in which it had been going. He had been intent on trying to destroy the infant church. Presumably he had already studied the scriptures and was convinced that they supported what he was attempting to do. But something happened which changed him from an ardent persecutor into a convinced and extraordinarily energetic proclaimer of the good news of Jesus Christ. Must we not recognize that 'something' as an important – indeed as the decisive – element in 'the origin and basis' of Paul's doctrine of righteousness by faith? After that 'something' did he not read the familiar scriptures with new eyes, and seek diligently in them for confirmation of his faith in Jesus

Christ? Not to recognize this is surely very seriously to underestimate the importance for Paul of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

If I remember rightly, I had read a large part of Francis Watson's book before I turned to his index of New Testament references (pp. 573 ff.). But, when I did so, I was amazed to discover that there was no reference at all to Acts 9. Then I also noticed that there were no references to a good many passages in Paul's epistles which seemed to me to be relevant to a discussion of Paul's doctrine of righteousness by faith. Perhaps the most striking omission is 1 Cor 2:2, in which Paul tells the Corinthian church that he has determined not to know anything among them save Jesus Christ and him crucified. There are no references at all to the first three chapters of 1 Corinthians, and 2 Cor 8:9; Gal 2:20 and 6:14, for example, are all absent from the index.

Notable also is the fact that there are so few references to the four Gospels. Might not reflection on the Fourth Evangelist's use of 'witness' (*marturein*, *marturia*) with reference to John the Baptist's witness to Jesus, though, of course, later, have shed some light on Paul's use of *marturein* in Rom 3:21, which is surely a key verse for understanding his view of the relation of the Old Testament scriptures to the righteousness by faith made available by Jesus Christ? And might it not also have discouraged Professor Watson from making use on a number of occasions (e.g., pp. 17, 529, 532) of the image of a matrix to indicate the Old Testament scriptures' relation to Paul's doctrine? Whereas the Fourth Evangelist's use of 'witness' allows for the possibility that the one bearing witness may be subordinate to the one to whom witness is borne, 'matrix' clearly suggests the dominant, controlling position of that to which it refers. My first concern then is that Professor Watson seems seriously to underestimate the importance for Paul of the person and work of Christ in comparison with the importance for him of the Old Testament scriptures.

My second concern has to do with his claim (p. 162) that 'there is a deep faultline within scripture itself', between two incompatible understandings of what is the core of the scriptural message, on the one hand, 'the prophetic proclamation of the infallible, unconditional certainty of God's eschatological saving action' and, on the other hand, 'a hermeneutic which binds God's future saving action to

a prior law observance'. But while the way in which the former understanding is expressed seems to me to be in danger of calling in question the freedom of God's grace, the way in which the latter is expressed seems to assume that the legalistic misunderstanding of the law is the only possible understanding of it. Rom 9:32a is surely an important clue to Paul's thinking, which recently has not received the serious consideration which it deserves, as evidence that he reckoned with the possibility of a pursuit of the law 'on the basis of faith' (cf. my ICC *Romans*,⁵ pp. 503–11). That the possibility of this legalistic misunderstanding has always been present, once the need to choose between obeying or disobeying God had been set before human beings, is clear enough, and it is clear that many both in ancient Israel and in the Christian church have fallen for it, being certain that, while others have disobeyed, they themselves have been obedient enough. But this does not mean that we are free to reject as a misunderstanding of 'the core of the scriptural message' those many passages which insist on the inescapability of the choice before human beings between obedience to God leading to life, and disobedience to him leading to death (e.g., Matt 7:13–44; Rom 8:13). Rather I think we have to accept that the whole Bible attests the fact that the choice between obedience to God and disobedience, between good and evil, matters and matters tremendously. But the verdict of scripture is not that some human beings have chosen obedience and some others disobedience, but that all of us – with but one exception – have chosen the wide gate and the broad way which leads to destruction, disobedience to God leading to death. But the good news, to which the whole of scripture seems to me to bear witness, is that God has taken upon himself in the human nature of his Son, who is inseparably one with the Father and the Holy Spirit, the fearful burden of the guilt and shame and grief of all our sin, in order to forgive us righteously, that is, without in any way condoning our evil (for him to have done that would have been cruelly to insult the dignity of his morally responsible creatures). It is surely in his having been made to begin to understand this mystery that we must recognize 'the origin and basis' of Paul's doctrine, though Hab 2:4 and other Old Testament passages have certainly contributed hugely to his expression and defence of it.

As to Lev 18:5, of which Professor Watson so strongly disapproves,

it is, I think, a pity that he has ignored Karl Barth's exegesis of Rom 10:5 in *Church Dogmatics* II/2 (Barth's exposition of Rom 9–11 in *CD* II/2, pp. 202–05, 213–33; 240–59; 267–305 [= *KD* II/2, pp. 222–26, 235–56, 264–85, 294–336] has not yet received from New Testament scholars the attention which it surely deserves).

Barth took Paul to be understanding the 'man' of Leviticus 18:5 as referring to Jesus Christ, and the more I reflect on the Epistle to the Romans, the more inclined I am to think that Barth was right. The 'For' at the beginning of Rom 10:5 surely does signal that Paul understands his quotation of Lev 18:5 as explanatory of his statement in Rom 10:4 that Christ is the *telos*, that is, the goal, the aim, the intention, the real meaning and substance of the law, so that a status of righteousness before God is available for everyone who believes in him. And the 'But' at the beginning of Rom 10:6 surely signals the contrast between the righteousness which believers have by faith (vv. 6–13) and the righteousness which Christ alone has by virtue of his perfect obedience. We may, I think, conclude from Paul's citation of Lev 18:5 that for him one of the chief 'uses' of the law was to point to the one human being who really has obeyed it, who has loved God with all his heart and soul and mind and strength and his fellow human beings to the length of enduring the cross for them.

With regard to my second concern, then, while I fully agree with Professor Watson that Paul's doctrine of righteousness by faith means that there can be no question of our being able to earn a righteous status before God by our obedience, I am also convinced that there can be no question of its being feasible to seek to dismiss as a misunderstanding of 'the core of the scriptural message' all those passages which insist that human beings have again and again to choose between obeying God and disobeying him, between good and evil, between life and death, even though it is clear that those passages do necessarily carry with them the possibility of their being misunderstood as implying that human beings are able to earn justification by their works. In this connection is it not significant that Professor Watson seems to have had very little to say about Paul's insistence in Rom 6 that those who know that they are righteous by faith must strive earnestly to lay hold on sanctification and indeed seems to be not particularly interested in Paul's ethical concerns (his index includes only two references to Rom

6, no reference at all to the first ten verses of Rom 8 and remarkably few references to Rom 12:1–15:6)?



Reflection 3

Revisiting ‘the works of the law’ in Romans 3:20

The purpose of this short note is threefold.

I

In the first place it is to urge abandonment of the widespread and very understandable notion that, because the Epistle to the Galatians is not only undoubtedly Pauline but also by a considerable margin the shortest of the Pauline *Hauptbriefe*, it must therefore be the natural way into a serious study of Paul’s theology.

The fact that there are so many features of Galatians which suggest that its author was experiencing very severe emotional stress when he was writing it [we may list the following: the omission of any thanks for those whom he is addressing (contrast e.g. Rom 1:8, 2 Cor 1:4ff, Phil 1:3ff, 1 Thess 1:2ff); the fact that he launches immediately into a complaint about them (‘I marvel that you are so quickly removing from him who called you in the grace of Christ unto a different gospel [...])’); the very emphatic double anathema of 1:8 and 9; the reference, surely very painful to him, to the fact of his having persecuted and wreaked havoc on the church (1:13); the reference to the false brethren privily brought in to spy on our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage (2:4); the emphatic denial that ‘those [...] who were of repute’ had imparted anything to him (2:6); the whole paragraph 2:11–21, which has to do with a situation surely fraught with emotional stress, in which he refers to his resisting Cephas to his face; his appeals to the Galatians in 3:1 (‘O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you [...]?’), in 4:9–11 (‘now that you have come to know God [...] how do you turn back to the weak and beggarly rudiments, to which you desire to be in bondage again?’), in 4:19 (‘My little children of whom I am again in travail [...]’), and 4:20 (‘I am at a loss regarding you’); and – most startling of all – ‘Would that those who are unsettling you would castrate themselves’ (5:12)]

should surely suggest caution.

Professor J. D. G. Dunn has done us a most valuable service by bringing home to us so clearly and so forcefully in his 1993 commentary⁶ the extraordinary pressure Paul was under when he was writing Galatians, his resentment and exasperation at what clearly seemed to him a flagrant going back on an agreement freely entered into, by those who should have been loyally supporting his apostolic mission, and – what he saw as a very serious threat to the success of his efforts – their siding with those who were so aggressively trying to compel his Gentile converts to conform to those requirements of the law which distinguished Jews from Gentiles – such as circumcision, the food laws, keeping the Sabbath – which Paul had come to regard as unnecessary for those who believed in Christ.

If a friend or colleague shows signs of being under special stress, the courteous and generous reaction is to allow that person space. It can scarcely be said that Paul has received this sympathetic courtesy.

We are not suggesting that Galatians is not in itself full of interest or that it is less important than other epistles as a part of the whole scriptural witness, but simply that it is vitally important that we should approach Galatians by way of the other three *Hauptbriefe* rather than approach them by way of Galatians. Romans, in particular, as having been written specifically to introduce Paul to the Roman church in preparation for his visit to them, would seem to have a much stronger claim to be regarded as the most promising way into the study of Paul's writings – in spite of its length and undoubted difficulty.

II

In the second place it is to suggest that, if the assumption that Galatians is the natural way into the study of Paul's theology is at last abandoned, the way is opened for a reconsideration of Professor Dunn's confident assertion in his 1988 commentary on Romans⁷ that by 'the works of the law' in Rom 3:20a Paul meant, not obedience to the scriptural law generally, as earlier commentators tended to assume, but only conformity with those requirements of the law, such as circumcision, the food laws and keeping the Sabbath, which served as 'identity-markers' distinguishing Jews from Gentiles.

It still seems to me that, if we read Romans without reference to Galatians, it is natural to assume that Paul's point in Rom 3:20a is that no-one so fully obeys the scriptural law as to *earn* God's justification thereby. And 3:20b still seems to me to be support for this interpretation of the first half of the verse – it is surely very difficult to see it as supporting Professor Dunn's interpretation. And the immediate context of 3:20a, the Old Testament catena in 3:10–19, which clearly refers to human violations of the divine moral law, is surely also support for the older view of 3:20a.

Moreover, it should be noted that the word *nomos* (law) has already occurred twenty-one times in Romans before it is used in 3:20. In one of these occurrences, that in 2:15, the phrase 'the work [in the singular] of the law' has been used, and surely denotes conduct agreeable with the law's moral requirements. None of the twenty-one occurrences of *nomos* in Romans before 3:20 seems to me to give any support to Professor Dunn's claim about 3:20a.

It seems also to be significant that in 2:25–27 circumcision is actually contrasted with 'doing the law'.

And, in view of the fact that in Rom 14:1–15:13 Paul is so much more relaxed than in Galatians, and refers to those who still feel themselves bound by the food-laws, etc., as 'the weak in faith' (he clearly does not regard them as presenting the same sort of serious threat to his apostolic mission as the Galatian Judaizers did, but is actually concerned to protect them against possible social pressure by 'the strong', which might make them act against their own consciences),⁸ it is surely very much less likely that Paul would go out of his way at this point in his letter to warn against the inability of the observation of the food-laws, etc. to earn God's justification than that he should make the point that no human being will be able to earn God's justification by his obedience to the law generally.

III

In the third place, it is to argue that Rom 3:20a is saying something of fundamental importance not only for Paul's theology but for all Christian theology, namely, that no human being (Jesus Christ alone excepted) can so fully obey God's law which Jesus summarized

(according to Mark 12:29–31, in the words of Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18) as ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength’ and ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself’ (with its four times repeated ‘all’ and its uncompromising ‘as thyself’) as to have a claim to be justified by God. Rom 3:20a while it indicates the direction in which believers have to try to advance lifelong, is also a summons to repentance, again and again repeated, for their again and again falling short. While perpetual penitence is not a popular idea even in the church, it is nonetheless of vital importance for the Christian life. It is that which the *Book of Common Prayer* seeks to inculcate in those who use its orders of morning and evening prayer by means of the General Confession ‘to be said by the whole Congregation after the Minister, all kneeling’ every day of the year. It is not at all surprising that Paul should seek to drive home this truth at this point in his letter, just before his statement in 3:21–26 of what is the heart of the gospel, God’s gracious justification of sinners through faith in Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

The foregoing note has argued, first, that we should give up the idea that Galatians is the natural way into an understanding of Paul; secondly, that to do so opens the way for a reconsideration of the contention that by ‘the works of the law’ in Rom 3:20 Paul meant simply fulfilment of those requirements that served as identity-markers, distinguishing Jews from Gentiles, and for a return to the earlier view of Paul’s meaning; and, thirdly, that Rom 3:20a as earlier understood, is a fundamental insight for all Christian theology and of vital importance for the living of the Christian life.

Notes

- ¹ The *Four Year Lectionary* of the Joint Liturgical Group (1990) did include some lections from 1 and 2 Chronicles, but nothing from 2 Chronicles 28. The 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, however, did

- include lections from both 1 and 2 Chronicles, in “The Calendar with the Table of Lessons”, and did include 2 Chronicles 28.
- ² A shorter form of it was published in *The Expository Times* 100 (1988–89), pp. 383–84.
 - ³ There was of course both some continuity and also much discontinuity between the people of the kingdom of Israel and the Samaritans of the time of Jesus.
 - ⁴ Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004).
 - ⁵ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; 2 vols.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975–79).
 - ⁶ James D. G. Dunn, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (Black’s New Testament Commentary v. 9; London: A. C. Black, 1993).
 - ⁷ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* (Word Biblical Commentary v. 38A; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1988), 152–56, 158–60.
 - ⁸ Cf. my ICC *Romans* II, pp. 690–748.