

LAW, SIN, AND DEATH: AN EDENIC TRIAD?
AN EXAMINATION WITH REFERENCE
TO 1 CORINTHIANS 15:56

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It is understandable that Friedrich Horn in his examination of 1 Cor 15:56 would entitle his article, “1 Korinther 15,56—ein exegetischer Stachel” and that Ulrich Wilckens in his study of Paul and the law expressed the now classic statement regarding the passage, “Im dortigen Kontext ist dieser Satz in seiner gedrängten, sentenzhaften Kürze rätselhaft.”¹ The verse appears at the end of Paul’s lengthy apologetic for the resurrection of the believer. After two quotations triumphantly describing the eschatological defeat of death (vv. 54–55) and before an outburst of gratitude for this victory (v. 57), Paul makes an unexpected and unexplained statement regarding the relation between law, sin, and death: τὸ δὲ κέντρον τοῦ θανάτου ἢ ἁμαρτία, ἢ δὲ δύναμις τῆς ἁμαρτίας ὁ νόμος (v. 56). The verse appears abrupt and seems to be oddly situated. Its omission would seem to give a far smoother and more logical reading with the thanksgiving in verse 57 following immediately after the declaration of victory in verses 54–55.² As it appears, verse 56 “bulges awkwardly out of its context and is uncomfortably anticlimactic.”³ Compared to the lyrical expressions of verses 54–55 and the exuberant doxology of verse 57, the verse seems wooden, and since Paul to this point had expressed no connection in the letter between law, sin, and death, his statement here might appear to have been spontaneously generated.⁴

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¹ F. W. Horn, “1 Kor 15,56—ein exegetischer Stachel,” *ZNW* 82 (1991) 88; Ulrich Wilckens, “Zur Entwicklung des paulinischen Gesetzesverständnisses,” *NTS* 28 (1982) 161.

² Conzelmann senses that the verse “interrupts the chain of thought” (H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1975] 293).

³ Frank Thielman, “The Coherence of Paul’s View of the Law: The Evidence of First Corinthians,” *NTS* 38 (1992) 249. The verse appears to Orr and Walther as an “amazing anticlimax” (William F. Orr and James Arthur Walther, *1 Corinthians: A New Translation. Introduction with a Study of the Life of Paul, Notes, and Commentary* [AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976] 352). Hays observes that the verse “looks like a non-sequitur” (Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* [Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 1997] 277). Fee aptly notes what many ministers have observed: “Anyone who has heard this paragraph read at a Christian funeral senses the dissonance these words seem to bring to the argument” (Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987] 805).

⁴ Though 1 Cor 15:21–22 might prepare for the connection of sin and death, there does not appear to be a precursor to sin and law in the context preceding 1 Cor 15:56.

1 Cor 15:56 thus is puzzling, or, to use Horn's pun, it is like a scorpion that rises to sting the approaching exegete. The difficulty is not only in understanding the verse, though the interpreter can turn to Romans 5–7, where the triad of law-sin-death recurs, and interpret the passage with the help of the parallels found there. The challenge lies in explaining its appearance and significance in 1 Corinthians 15.⁵ How do these words relate to a chapter on resurrection in which sin had barely figured and law not at all? Would the words have been intelligible to the Corinthians, who, unlike us, would have been unable to turn back a few pages to Romans where the relationship between law, sin, and death is explicated in full? And what possible biblical and theological significance could this enigmatic verse have had for Paul's readers? Indeed, what significance can it have today, especially in light of the current discussions of Paul and the law?

The puzzling nature of 1 Cor 15:56 has given rise to an assortment of explanations. The most radical is the assumption of an interpolation, either by Paul himself or by a redactor.⁶ Others suggest that the verse resonates with Hellenistic or Jewish ideas with which Paul presumed his readers would have been familiar.⁷ Some assume Paul's notion regarding law and sin, though unrelated to the argument of the epistle, was an essential dictum of his theology that he could not help but express,⁸ while others endeavor to locate a direct link between the verse and the letter itself.⁹ Finally, some feel forced to conclude that Paul's notion would have likely been incomprehensible to the Corinthians.¹⁰

In the following, we will carefully examine 1 Cor 15:56, weigh the various attempts to explain its presence in the epistle, and suggest an alterna-

⁵ Söding remarks, "Dass die gesetzeskritische Sentenz in 1 Kor 15 überraschend kommt, lässt sich nicht leugen" (Thomas Söding, "Die Kraft der Sünde ist das Gesetz [1 Kor 15,56]: Anmerkungen zum Hintergrund und zur Pointe einer gesetzeskritischen Sentenz des Apostels Paulus," *ZNW* 83 [1992] 76).

⁶ See J. W. Straatman, *Kritische Studiën over den Ien Brief van Paulus aan de Korintiërs II* (Groningen: Van Giffen, 1865) 284; Horn, "Stachel" 88–105; James Moffatt, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (MNTC; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1947) 265, 268; Johannes Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910) 380; T. L. Carter, *Paul and the Power of Sin: Redefining "Beyond the Pale"* (SNTSMS 115; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 75.

⁷ H. W. Hollander and J. Holleman suggest a Hellenistic backdrop ("The Relationship of Death, Sin, and the Law in 1 Cor 15:56," *NovT* 35 [1993] 270–91); Walter Grundmann argues for a rabbinic background ("Gesetz, Rechtfertigung, und Mystik bei Paulus. Zum Problem der Einheitlichkeit der paulinischen Verkündigung," *ZNW* 32 [1933] 52–65) as does Kümmel (Hans Lietzmann, *An die Korinther I/II* [rev. W. G. Kümmel; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1949] 196). Sandelin finds the verse understandable in light of Jewish wisdom traditions (Karl-Gustav Sandelin, *Die Auseinandersetzung mit der Weisheit in 1. Korinther 15* [Meddelanden från Stiftelsens för Åbo akademi forskningsinstitut; Åbo akademi, 1976] 72).

⁸ See Heikki Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 143; Frank Thielman, *Paul and the Law: A Contextual Approach* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994) 108; C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (BNTC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1968) 383; Hays, *First Corinthians* 277.

⁹ See Söding, "Kraft" 74–84.

¹⁰ See Carter, *Power* 75. He assumes Paul's thought strayed in from earlier Judaistic controversies with which the Corinthians had no acquaintance.

tive theory. This study will propose that 1 Cor 15:56 contains in epigrammatic form an essential dogma likely known to Paul's churches and that the theological soil from which Paul molded this epigram was the garden of Eden. This conclusion will be drawn from the relationship that verse 56 appears to share with the edenic context of 1 Corinthians 15, as well as by comparing 1 Cor 15:56 and the law-sin-death triad found there with the edenic contexts of Romans 5 and 7 and the same triad found there. The study will conclude with some significant applications that 1 Cor 15:56 may have to current studies of Paul and the law.

Before examining the various attempts to explain the appearance of 1 Cor 15:56 in the chapter, some initial observations regarding the verse and its immediate context will be made in order to set the stage for the investigation. By way of step parallelism, the sequence of thought moves from a quotation of Isa 25:8 in verse 54, to a quotation in verse 55 of Hos 13:14, and then to a statement in verse 56 regarding death, sin, and law. The final term in each line becomes the key word that leads to the phrase found on the next rung. Though the step parallelism could have continued with the final term νόμος leading to a further clause, the passage ends on the reverberating note of "law." After reaching the furthest step with νόμος, verse 57 returns to the theme of victory that was sounded in verse 54.¹¹ The progression of thought in 1 Cor 15:54–57 can be observed in the following layout:

54	Κατεπόθη ὁ θάνατος εἰς <i>νίκος</i> .
	/
55	ποῦ σου, θάνατε, τὸ <i>νίκος</i> ; ποῦ σου, θάνατε, τὸ <i>κέντρον</i> ;
	/
	56a τὸ δὲ <i>κέντρον</i> τοῦ θανάτου ἢ <i>ἁμαρτία</i> ,
	/
	56b ἢ δὲ δύναμις τῆς <i>ἁμαρτίας</i> ὁ νόμος.
57	τῷ δὲ θεῷ χάρις τῷ διδόντι ἡμῖν τὸ <i>νίκος</i> διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

The two clauses in verse 56 stand in parallel. The syntactical structure of each clause is mirrored in the other. Each contains the pattern, article-conjunction-nominative-article-genitive-article-nominative. Though prosaic,

¹¹ The term *νίκος* does not appear in Isa 25:8 nor in Hos 13:14, the verses that Paul quotes in verses 54–55. The LXX of Isa 25:8 reads κατέπιεν ὁ θάνατος ἰσχύσας (for *כָּצַף לְהַחַיֵּת עֲלֵב*). Paul's reference seems to be a free rendering of the Hebrew comparable to the Greek versions of Aquila and Theodotion, which read εἰς *νίκος* at Isa 25:8, or the occasional LXX idiom of substituting the phrase εἰς *νίκον* for *כָּצַף* (2 Sam 2:26) and *νίκος* for *כָּצַף* (Job 36:7; Amos 1:11; 8:7). Paul links Hos 13:14 (ποῦ ἡ δίκη σου, θάνατε; ποῦ τὸ κέντρον σου, ἄδη) to Isa 25:8 by changing the LXX δίκη (*דִּכָּה* in the MT) to *νίκος*. In addition, he replaces θάνατε . . . ἄδη (*לִישׁ . . . לְהַחַיֵּת* in the MT) with the double vocative θάνατε, thereby heightening the object of his taunt. As his preface to these quotes indicates (τότε γενήσεται ὁ λόγος ὁ γεγραμμένος), Paul is likely alluding explicitly to these passages rather than "writing freely, in scriptural language, of the ultimate victory over death" (Barrett, *First Corinthians* 383).

there is a distinct rhythm. In addition, the impact of the thought is delivered by the nouns; there is no copulative verb linking each subject to its predicate. Like Rom 6:23a (τὰ γὰρ ὀψώνια τῆς ἁμαρτίας θάνατος); Rom 3:20b (διὰ γὰρ νόμου ἐπίγνωσις ἁμαρτίας); and Rom 7:8b (χωρὶς γὰρ νόμου ἁμαρτία νεκρά), which contain similar thoughts and syntax, the omission of the verb in both clauses of 1 Cor 15:56 accents the *axiomatic* nature of each statement.¹²

The terms κέντρον and θάνατος from verse 55 are combined in verse 56 to form the phrase τὸ κέντρον τοῦ θανάτου. The genitive τοῦ θανάτου, like the genitive τῆς ἁμαρτίας in verse 56b, is most likely subjective, since θάνατος in verse 55 appears as the subject of address. In 1 Cor 15:26 death is depicted in the abstract as a powerful entity: ἔσχατος ἐχθρὸς καταργεῖται ὁ θάνατος. Paul similarly views it as such in Romans. There it is pictured as a reigning tyrant (5:14, 17, 21).¹³ The term κέντρον can refer either to a “goad” (Acts 26:14; Prov 26:3) or to the sting of insects or scorpions (4 Macc 14:19; Rev 9:10). In light of the depiction in 1 Cor 15:26 of death as a combatant, the term is likely being used in 1 Cor 15:56 in the latter sense.¹⁴ Death does not prod one along but penetrates its victim with a fatal venom.¹⁵ In Rom 5:15–18 Paul understands this infliction of mortality in terms of punishment. This can be observed there by the manner in which he interchanges the terms θάνατος and κατάκριμα. For Paul, death and judgment coincide.¹⁶

¹² Findley calls 1 Cor 15:56 an “epigram” (G. G. Findley, “St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians,” in vol. 2 of *The Expositor’s Greek New Testament* [ed. W. R. Nicol; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970] 942). Horn calls it a “prägnante Formel” (“Stachel” 101). Wilckens describes the statement as “sentenzhaft” (“Entwicklung” 161). By identifying the verse as a “tremendous generalization,” Räisänen appears also to recognize its axiomatic nature (*Paul and the Law* 149). Turner notes that the absence of the verb can appear “when there is a striving after rhetoric in epigrammatic phrases and those which express general or abstract truths” (Nigel Turner, *Syntax*, vol. 3 of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* by J. H. Moulton [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963] 297). For discussion of the omission of the verb in proverbial statements see also BDF §127 (1); George Benedict Winer, *A Grammar of the Idiom of the New Testament* (London: Trübner, 1872) 584–88. For a helpful study of the use of aphorisms in ancient Greek, see Jonathan Barnes, “Aphorism and Argument,” in *Language and Thought in Early Greek Philosophy* (ed. Kevin Robb; LaSalle, IL: Hegeler, 1983) 91–109. Hippocrates’s *Aphorisms*, which presents more than 400 medical maxims, provides a virtual syntax of this rhetorical device. The opening line exhibits the non-copulative style that pervades the book: Ὁ βίος βραχύς, ἡ δὲ τέχνη μακρὴ, ὁ δὲ καιρὸς ὀξύς, ἡ δὲ πείρα σφαλερὴ, ἡ δὲ κρίσις χαλεπὴ (“Life is short, the Art is long, opportunity fleeting, experiment treacherous, judgment difficult”; 1.1 [Jones, LCL]). For examples in Paul of truisms being expressed without the verb, see Rom 2:13, 29; 3:20, 4:8; 6:23; 7:8; 9:6; 10:4, 15; 11:6, 16, 33; 13:10; 14:14, 21, 22; 1 Cor 3:19; 6:13; 10:26; 11:6, 11; 15:21, 39, 40, 41, 47; 2 Cor 3:17; 1 Tim 1:8; 4:4; 5:18; Titus 1:12, 15. See also note 25 below.

¹³ See E. Brandenburger, *Adam und Christus: Exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Röm. 5,12–21 (1 Kor 15)* (WMANT 7; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1962) 158–68.

¹⁴ By association with *vīkos* in the previous clause and *δύναμις* in the following, Wolf argues that the term κέντρον denotes here the power to rule (Christian Wolff, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther* [THKNT; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1982] 209–10; see also *TDNT* 3.664–65, 668; Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther: 1 Kor 15,1–16:24* [EKK 7/4; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2001] 381). This notion is certainly assumed; death does reign (see Rom 5:14, 17, 21). However, what is at issue in verses 54–56 is not so much its rule, but its “victory,” that is, the mortal blow that it inflicts at the end of one’s life.

¹⁵ On the use of κέντρον, see Horn, “Stachel” 94 n. 16.

¹⁶ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (trans. K. Grobel; New York: Scribner’s, 1951) 246–49.

1 Cor 15:56 merges into this context by identifying sin as the means by which death injects mortality into the human race: τὸ δὲ κέντρον τοῦ θανάτου ἡ ἁμαρτία. The term ἁμαρτία occurs earlier in 1 Cor 15:3, 17, but in the plural. The singular occurs in the epistle only here, and the articular singular form occurs elsewhere in Paul only in Romans 5–8.¹⁷ In many of these verses in Romans, Paul depicts sin as a personified power similar to *ἡ ἀπειρία* in Gen 4:7. This is especially the case in Rom 7:11, where sin, reminiscent of the edenic serpent, is the entity which rises from the shadows to beguile the individual into breaking the divine commandment: ἡ γὰρ ἁμαρτία ἀφορμὴν λαβοῦσα διὰ τῆς ἐντολῆς ἐξηπάτησέν με καὶ δι' αὐτῆς ἀπέκτεινεν.¹⁸

The second clause in 1 Cor 15:56, ἡ δὲ δύναμις τῆς ἁμαρτίας ὁ νόμος, receiving a boost from the first clause, repeats the word ἁμαρτία and introduces two terms that occurred previously in the epistle, δύναμις and νόμος. In general, δύναμις refers in the letter to the ability or potential to function in a particular way; i.e., power, might, force, or capability.¹⁹ This usage suggests that we understand the phrase, ἡ δύναμις τῆς ἁμαρτίας, as *the inherent strength of sin*.

What empowers sin, according to verse 56b, is ὁ νόμος. The term νόμος occurs earlier in 1 Cor 9:8, 9, 20; 14:21, 34. By way of the precedents set in the epistle, ὁ νόμος in verse 56 could refer to the Mosaic legislation, the Pentateuch, or the OT Scriptures.²⁰ The manner in which the term νόμος is

¹⁷ Rom 5:12, 12, 20, 21; 6:1, 2, 6, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23; 7:7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 13, 14, 23, 8:2, 3.

¹⁸ See also Rom 5:21; 6:12, 13, 17, 18, 20, 22 for examples of ἁμαρτία being personified.

¹⁹ See BDAG, s.v. δύναμις 1. The term δύναμις in the singular occurs in 1:18, 24 of Christ and the gospel being the power of God; in 2:4 of demonstrations of power in Paul's preaching; in 2:5; 5:4; 6:14 of the power of God or Jesus; in 4:19 of the alleged power of Paul's opponents; in 4:20 of the power in which the kingdom of God exists; in 15:24 of the worldly power that will be abolished in the eschaton; and in 15:43 of the power in which the body will be resurrected.

²⁰ In 1 Cor 9:9 the term is used of the Mosaic legislation: ἐν γὰρ τῷ Μωϋσέως νόμῳ γέγραπται, Οὐ κηρώσεις βοῦν ἀλοῶντα. Hollander understands 1 Cor 9:8 as a reference to "written legal codes that were in vogue in so many regions of the Roman empire" (Harm W. Hollander, "The Meaning of the Term 'Law' (ΝΟΜΟΣ) in 1 Corinthians," *NovT* 40 [1998] 122). It is almost certain, however, that Paul is alluding there to the OT Scriptures or to the Pentateuch, seeing that he explicitly identifies his referent to be of divine rather than human origin: Μὴ κατὰ ἄνθρωπον ταῦτα λαλῶ ἢ καὶ ὁ νόμος ταῦτα οὐ λέγει; In 1 Cor 9:20 Paul argues that while among fellow Jews, he adopts their customs, although in Christ he has the freedom not to do so: καὶ ἐγενόμην τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ὡς Ἰουδαῖος, ἵνα Ἰουδαίους κερδήσω· τοῖς ὑπὸ νόμον ὡς ὑπὸ νόμον, μὴ ὢν αὐτὸς ὑπὸ νόμον, ἵνα τοὺς ὑπὸ νόμον κερδήσω. Since τοῖς ὑπὸ νόμον here are Jews, the references in this verse to "the law" are to the Jewish law, i.e. the law of Moses. In 1 Cor 14:21, on the other hand, Paul introduces a quotation from Isa 28:11–12 by the phrase ἐν τῷ νόμῳ γέγραπται ὅτι. The term "law" in this case refers to the OT Scriptures even though, as Fee notes, Paul rarely appeals to the OT by this designation (*First Corinthians* 406; Fee points to 1 Cor 14:21; 9:8; 14:34 as the only possible examples in the extant letters). Finally, Paul's appeal in 1 Cor 14:34 to the law (καθὼς καὶ ὁ νόμος λέγει) in support of his admonition that the women should maintain silence in the churches is also a likely allusion to the OT Scriptures, or more precisely to the Pentateuch (see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [NICGNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000] 1153–54). Although no specific text is cited, Paul is probably appealing to the order of creation in Gen 2:20–22 as the basis for his admonition that the women are to submit in the church to the male leadership. This can be compared to 1 Tim 2:13, where the sequence of creation in Genesis 2 is cited in response to a similar situation regarding the women's silence and submission in the church. 1 Tim 2:13 appears to make explicit what is implicit in 1 Cor 14:34.

used in Romans in similar settings would seem to tip the scales toward the first of these options. In Rom 5:20, for example, after a discussion of Adam and Christ similar to that within 1 Corinthians 15, Paul clearly has the law of Moses in mind when he expresses the relationship of the law to the trespass: νόμος δὲ παρεισήληθεν, ἵνα πλεονάσῃ τὸ παράπτωμα.²¹ In the similar context of Rom 7:7–11, where the law-sin nexus is again the focus, ὁ νόμος is used in reference to the Mosaic law. In this case, a specific commandment of the Mosaic code is cited in verse 7, the tenth commandment: τὴν τε γὰρ ἐπιθυμίαν οὐκ ἤδειν εἰ μὴ ὁ νόμος ἔλεγεν· οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις.²²

In keeping with Paul's general usage of the term in 1 Corinthians and in similar contexts, then, a reasonable argument can be made that ὁ νόμος in 1 Cor 15:56 is the Mosaic law.²³ However, in spite of the normal use of the term, there are indications that ὁ νόμος is perhaps being used here in a generic sense.²⁴ This possibility is not merely suggested by the fact that the Jewish law had not been an issue in 1 Corinthians 15, but it finds support when this axiomatic statement is compared to the *law-sin nexus axioms* of Rom 3:20b; 4:15b; 5:13b; and 7:8b:

Rom 3:20 διότι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιοθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ,
διὰ γὰρ νόμου ἐπίγνωσις ἁμαρτίας.

Rom 4:15 ὁ γὰρ νόμος ὄργην κατεργάζεται·
οὗ δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν νόμος οὐδὲ παράβασις.

Rom 5:13 ἄχρι γὰρ νόμου ἁμαρτία ἦν ἐν κόσμῳ,
ἁμαρτία δὲ οὐκ ἔλλογεῖται μὴ ὄντος νόμου.

Rom 7:8 ἀφορμὴν δὲ λαβοῦσα ἡ ἁμαρτία διὰ τῆς ἐντολῆς κατεργάσατο ἐν ἐμοὶ
πᾶσαν ἐπιθυμίαν·
χωρὶς γὰρ νόμου ἁμαρτία νεκρά.

When these four verses are examined, two inferences emerge. First, Paul consistently conveys his law-sin (or law-transgression) notion by way of axioms. The absence of the copulative verb in the second clause and/or the present tense there accents the epigrammatic nature of the expressions.²⁵

²¹ The arrival of the law in Rom 5:20 signals the end of the period from Adam until Moses mentioned by Paul in Rom 5:13–14. The Mosaic law is thus clearly in mind in Rom 5:20.

²² The prohibition that Paul cites in Rom 7:7 is reproduced exactly in Rom 13:9 with unquestionable reference to the Decalogue (see K. Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," in *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976] 92–94; W. G. Kümmel, *Römer 7 und das Bild des Menschen im Neuen Testament* [Munich: Kaiser, 1974] 86).

²³ M. Winger concludes that "the other uses of νόμος in this letter imply strongly that this ordinary, unspecified reference is to Jewish νόμος" (*By What Law? The Meaning of Νόμος in the Letters of Paul* [SBLDS; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992] 72). Virtually all exegetes agree.

²⁴ See Hollander, "NOMOS" 132; Hollander and Holleman, "Death, Sin, and Law" 279; Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, (SP; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999) 582–83.

²⁵ See note 12 above. On the aphoristic use of the present tense with νόμος, see Winger, *Νόμος* 83–84. Burton notes that the present tense may be used to express "general truths" (Ernest De Witt Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1898] 8; see also A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* [Nashville: Broadman, 1934] 866; Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar* [Cambridge:

Secondly, while the first clause makes an explicit reference to the Mosaic law, the term νόμος in the axiom appears to bear a general sense.²⁶ In each instance, a general proposition is presented in light of its implication for the particular case in view.²⁷ When 1 Cor 15:56b, itself an axiom, is thus viewed alongside of these four axioms, it becomes apparent that the term “law” may convey a general sense in the clause as it likely does in these others.²⁸ This possibility is strengthened by the fact that the terms ὁ θάνατος and ἡ ἁμαρτία, to which ὁ νόμος is intimately linked in 1 Cor 15:56, depict abstract entities.²⁹

With regard to the law being ἡ δύναμις τῆς ἁμαρτίας, some exegetes interpret this energizing capacity of the law in a cognitive sense, i.e. the law shows sin for what it is. Orr and Walther, for instance, contend that “the law is the agent that fills with guilt.”³⁰ Fee, on the other hand, suggests that the law functions nomistically as the agent of sin because “it leads to pride of achievement.”³¹ Schlatter, to the contrary, sees a reference to the judgment which the law brings upon the one who transgresses it. “Weil die Sünde Übertretung ist, ist sie Schuld, und weil das Gesetz als Gottes Gebot heilig ist, fällt auf den, der es übertritt, das Urteil des Tods.”³²

Harvard University Press, 1984] §1877). Additional examples of the aphoristic use of the present tense in regard to law are found in Rom 7:1 (ὁ νόμος κυριεύει τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐφ’ ὅσον χρόνον ζῆ); Gal 5:23 (κατὰ τῶν τοιούτων οὐκ ἔστιν νόμος), and Tim 1:9 (δικαίῳ νόμος οὐ κεῖται). The exact nature of the term νόμος in each of these particular verses is debatable, but the fact that the statements are axiomatic in nature may suggest that the word is being used in a generic sense. Though the tense in Rom 7:8b may be imperfect (TNIV), the precedent set in 3:20b; 4:15b; 5:13b makes a present sense here more likely.

²⁶ See Winger, *Nóμος* 83–84; J. C. Poirier, “Romans 5:13–14 and the Universality of Law,” *NouT* 38 (1996) 352–53; Hollander, “NOMOS” 133 n. 68; Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (trans. and ed. Geoffrey Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 121; Theodor Zahn, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer* (KNT; Leipzig: Deichertesche, 1910) 228. Most English versions render νόμος in 4:15b; 5:13b in a generic sense: AV, ESV, JB, NAB, NCV, NASB, NEB, NJB, NIV, NRSV, JB, REB, RSV, RV, TEV, TNIV, Barclay, Goodspeed, Moffatt. The word is likewise rendered in 7:8b: NEB, NIV, NJB, REB, TEV, Barclay, Goodspeed, Moffatt. A generic sense for 3:20b is found in JB, NEB, REB, Barclay.

²⁷ See Winger, *Nóμος* 83–84. An additional example of this is likely found in Gal 3:21b, though the proposition is stated hypothetically.

²⁸ Commenting on νόμος in 1 Cor 15:56, Hodge argues, “This must be the law of God in its widest sense; not the Mosaic law” (Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956] 358).

²⁹ See Hollander, “NOMOS” 131. In tune with the use of the article with the entities of θάνατος and ἁμαρτία, the article with νόμος here may serve a generic function and deemphasize specific identity. If 1 Cor 15:56 is indeed utilizing ὁ νόμος generically, this need not exclude the Mosaic law from being encompassed within the truism; the Mosaic law would be a specific form of law viewed generally.

³⁰ Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians* 353. See also Thiselton, *First Corinthians* 1302–3; Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 311 n. 73; F. Godet, *Commentary on St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians* (trans. A. Cusin; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1898) 446; Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986) 378–79.

³¹ *First Corinthians* 806. Fee, though, also entertains the possibility that Paul may have in mind here that “the law reveals the depth of one’s depravity and rebellion against God.”

³² A. Schlatter, *Paulus der Bote Jesu: Eine Deutung seiner Briefe an die Korinther* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1969) 446.

To be sure, Paul elsewhere attributes to the law the function of defining sin as transgression;³³ recognizes the possibility that it may lead to pride;³⁴ and argues that it will certainly visit the unbeliever with condemnation.³⁵ Nevertheless, it is unlikely that 1 Cor 15:56 portrays νόμος in any of these roles. That a cognitive sense is in view is improbable in light of the term δύναμις, which in Paul connotes *activity* rather than cognition.³⁶ Furthermore, when Paul expresses the cognitive function of the law (Rom 4:15b; Gal 3:19?), he links παράβασις with νόμος rather than linking ἁμαρτία with νόμος as in 1 Cor 15:56:³⁷

Rom 4:15b οὗ δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν νόμος οὐδὲ παράβασις.

Rom 3:19 Τί οὖν ὁ νόμος; τῶν παραβάσεων χάριν προσετέθη.

Nor is judgment likely to be the focus of verse 56b, since that was the focus of 56a: τὸ δὲ κέντρον τοῦ θανάτου ἢ ἁμαρτία. The step parallelism progresses the thought rather than repeating it. Nor is nomistic pride the likely theme. If it were, one might expect to find the term ἔργα, which in the Pauline epistles comports more with the notion of human activity.³⁸

It is improbable, then, that the focus of verse 56b is guilt, judgment, or pride. Rather, ὁ νόμος is likely being portrayed here in a *catalytic* role,³⁹ that is, the law is defined as the dynamo *that sets in motion the power of sin*.⁴⁰ This notion accords with the semantic domain that δύναμις shares with the ἐργ-verbs of Rom 7:5, 8, verses which, like 1 Cor 15:56, expound on the law-

³³ Rom 4:15, for example, and probably Gal 3:19.

³⁴ Rom 3:27.

³⁵ Rom 4:15a; 2 Cor 3:7, 9; Gal 3:10.

³⁶ See 1 Cor 2:4; 4:19–20. See also note 41 below.

³⁷ Note Rom 2:23: ἐν νόμῳ καυχᾶσαι, διὰ τῆς παραβάσεως τοῦ νόμου τὸν θεὸν ἀτιμάζεις. The two other occurrences of παραβάσις (Rom 5:14; 1 Tim 2:14) will be discussed below.

³⁸ See Rom 3:27 (Ποῦ οὖν ἡ καύχησις; ἐξεκλείσθη διὰ ποίου νόμου; τῶν ἔργων;); 4:2 (εἰ γὰρ Ἀβραὰμ ἐξ ἔργων ἐδικαιώθη, ἔχει καύχημα, ἀλλ' οὐ πρὸς θεόν); and Eph 2:9 (οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων, ἵνα μὴ τις καυχῆσῃται). In Rom 2:17, 23 νόμος and καυχῶμαι occur together, but the boasting there appears to be in regard to possession rather than activity. The assumption in Rom 2:23 is that Paul's Jewish debating partners, in fact, were *not* keeping the law.

³⁹ Although the phrase “the causative function of the law” is commonly used in reference to this relationship between law and sin, the term “catalytic” is used here, since the law is not the cause of sin but rather serves as a catalyst which exacerbates *existing* sin (see Jeffrey A. D. Weima, “The Function of the Law in Relation to Sin: An Evaluation of the View of H. Räisänen,” *NovT* 32 [1990] 231 n. 35).

⁴⁰ The thought does not appear to be that the law makes people realize they behave badly, but is part of the reason they behave badly (see Hollander, “NOMOS” 133). Weima contends that “sin gains power through its misuse of the law in provoking men to disobedience” (“The Function of the Law” 234). Barrett writes that the law is “the jumping-off ground from which sin operates” (C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans* [BNTC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991] 383). Napier refers to this as “sin's sneak attack” (D. Napier, “Paul's Analysis of Sin and Torah in Romans 7:7–25,” *ResQ* 44 [2002] 23). See also Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* 143; Schrage, *Korinther* 382. The dynamic at work between law and sin is important to explore. In light of the innate hostility toward God that resides in the flesh (Rom 8:7), divine law, which marks out the difference between creature and Creator, may pose a limitation which leads to resentment and a quest for autonomy and even divinity (see C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans: Introduction and Commentary on Romans I–VIII* [ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975] 350; Barrett, *Romans* 134).

sin-death nexus and, as most exegetes agree, disclose the sin-stimulating operation of the law:⁴¹

Rom 7:5 ὅτε γὰρ ἦμεν ἐν τῇ σαρκί, τὰ παθήματα τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν τὰ διὰ τοῦ νόμου ἐνηργεῖτο ἐν τοῖς μέλεσιν ἡμῶν, εἰς τὸ καρποφορῆσαι τῷ θανάτῳ:

Rom 7:8 ἀφορμὴν δὲ λαβοῦσα ἡ ἁμαρτία διὰ τῆς ἐντολῆς κατεργάσατο ἐν ἐμοὶ πᾶσαν ἐπιθυμίαν· χωρὶς γὰρ νόμου ἁμαρτία νεκρά.

In summary to this overview of 1 Cor 15:56, the examination revealed two maxims, the second being built upon the first. It is in the very nature of things, according to verse 56a, that sin leads to death and, according to verse 56b, that law empowers sin. Before taking a closer look at the contextual soil in 1 Corinthians 15 from which these axioms arise, we will now evaluate the various theories that attempt to explain its presence in the epistle, many of which contend that the thoughts contained there were transplanted and, in fact, are not indigenous to the context.

In light of the apparent dissonance of 1 Cor 15:56, it is understandable that some would consider it to be a gloss. The critical apparatus of the NA²⁷ refers to the nineteenth-century Dutch proponent of *Konjekturalkritik*, J. W. Straatman, who was likely the first to suggest the theory. Since then many have accepted his conjecture.⁴² Among these, Moffatt asserts that 1 Cor 15:56 “is a prose comment which could not have occurred to him [Paul] in the passionate rush of triumphal conviction.”⁴³ Carter finds the marked change in style to be “intrusive” and evidence of “an insertion made by a follower of Paul on the basis of the apostle’s letter to Rome.”⁴⁴ Indeed, Horn puts the burden of proof on those who would defend its authenticity.⁴⁵ He contends that the verse is not only contextually out of place, but the authenticity of such a “prägnante Formel” in 1 Corinthians would necessitate what he considers to be the improbable scenario that the law-sin nexus was at this early date already a fixed notion for Paul.⁴⁶

Though many scholars, almost by default, argue against the authenticity of 1 Cor 15:56, the theory must overcome the virtually insurmountable fact

⁴¹ Note the linking of δύναμις with ἐνεργέω/κατεργάζομαι in Rom 15:18–19; 2 Cor 12:12; Eph 1:19–20; 3:20; Col 1:29. The relationship between the noun and the verbs strongly suggests that Rom 7:5–6 is depicting the sin-empowering operation of the law that is alluded to in 1 Cor 15:56. Lietzmann is likely correct to identify 1 Cor 15:56 as a brief exegetical excursus on what Paul later expands on in Rom 7:7–11 (Hans Lietzmann, *An die Korinther I–II* [rev. Werner G. Kümmel; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1949] 88; see also Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* 143; Weima, “The Function of the Law” 233–34).

⁴² See note 6 above.

⁴³ Moffatt, *First Corinthians* 268. See also Weiss, who senses that the verse is “eine völlig aus dem begeisterten Ton fallende theologische Glosse” (*Korintherbrief* 380).

⁴⁴ Carter, *Power* 75.

⁴⁵ Horn, “Stachel” 88–105.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 101–3. The earlier part of AD 54 is widely accepted as the most likely date for the writing of 1 Corinthians (see Wolff, *Korinther* 12–13; Collins, *First Corinthians* 24; Fee, *First Corinthians* 4–5; Witherington, *Conflict and Community* 73; Barrett, *First Corinthians* 5). Schrage notes that one of the main arguments posed in favor of a gloss here is not that the verse is un-Pauline, but that current theories regarding the development of Paul’s doctrine of justification consider it *too* Pauline for that time period (see *Korinther* 365–66).

that there is no textual evidence to support it.⁴⁷ In Horn's own words, the thesis "bleibt freilich eine subjektive Überlegung des Exegeten *ohne jegliche textgeschichtlichen Anhalt*."⁴⁸ To maintain his assumption, Horn is forced to conjecture that the gloss was placed in the original letter by Paul or was inserted by a student of Paul in "all!" of the early copies.⁴⁹ The latter scenario is highly unlikely. Not only is it nearly unthinkable that one could have retrieved and emended *all* the early copies once they had been scattered to the wind nor is it evident what motivation could have possibly accounted for such an emendation, but the verse itself shows intricate evidence of authenticity. The previous examination revealed the verse to be intricately woven into the fabric of the step parallelism that preceded it.⁵⁰ In addition, Rom 5:20, which also "abruptly" introduces the catalytic function of the law, follows a discussion of Adam's sin and universal death, precisely as does 1 Cor 15:56.⁵¹ The latter verse should no more be considered out of context than the former.⁵²

As to Horn's assumption that the text may have been later emended by Paul, the conjecture is both unlikely and immaterial. Not only does 1 Cor 1:16 show that Paul "was not concerned to check and revise what he had dictated,"⁵³ but even if the statement were later inserted by Paul, it should not be treated as an interpolation any more than the phrase "under God" in the Gettysburg Address is, even though the words are missing from Lincoln's earliest drafts and perhaps even from his delivery text.⁵⁴ Nor is 1 Cor 15:56 out of keeping with its rhetorical surroundings; the verse was shown to be more than bare prose. It contains two rhythmic epigrams that fit well within the lyrical strain of the context.⁵⁵ And finally, it is true that an epi-

⁴⁷ P⁴⁶, the oldest extant manuscript containing 1 Cor 15:56, exhibits no variations from the NA²⁷ (see Frederic G. Kenyon, *The Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri Descriptions and Texts of Twelve Manuscripts on Papyrus of the Greek Bible: Fasciculus III Supplement Pauline Epistles* [London: Emery Walker, 1936] 91).

⁴⁸ Horn, "Stachel" 104, italics mine.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 90, exclamation mark his.

⁵⁰ Even if the verse appears disjointed, this would not be the only time in the chapter that Paul made such an excursion (see vv. 9–11; 23–28; 32–34). Nor is the manner in which the verse remains unexplained without precedent. In Romans, Paul at various points inserts a comment about the law, which he does not explain until later (Rom 4:15; 7:5), and in Galatians phrases regarding the law occur that are never explained (διὰ νόμου, Gal 2:19; τῶν παραβάσεων χάριν προσετέθη, 3:19).

⁵¹ The multiplication of sins is likely in view in Rom 5:20, since Paul parallels the increase of "sin" with the superabundant increase of "grace." Weima correctly notes: "Since the latter refers to an increase in quantity (not an increase in knowledge or intensity), the same is likely to be true of the former" ("The Function of the Law" 232; see also Brandenburger, *Adam und Christus* 252–53; A. J. Bandstra, *The Law and the Elements of the World* [Kampen: Kok, 1964] 127–28; Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* 144; Käsemann, *Romans* 158).

⁵² Thielman argues that the similarity between 1 Cor 15:56 and Romans 5 "should serve as a warning that Paul can make compressed statements about the law which have underneath them a coherent—albeit unexpressed—foundation" (Thielman, "Coherence" 249; see also Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* 293).

⁵³ Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* 143 n. 78.

⁵⁴ See Garry Willis, *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992) 192.

⁵⁵ Bachmann notes that the verse is "in Wirklichkeit keine trockene dogmatische Glosse" (P. Bachmann, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther* [KNT; Leipzig: Deichertsche, 1921] 472);

gram in 1 Corinthians regarding the catalytic function of the law would necessitate the conclusion that the notion was already fixed in Paul's mind and preaching, perhaps long before the Judaizing controversy erupted in Galatia.⁵⁶ However, the fact that the strong textual witness for the verse requires that a gloss would need to have been made by Paul or a student of Paul while the ink was virtually still wet would necessitate the same conclusion.⁵⁷

Assuming the integrity of 1 Cor 15:56, but being unable to discern a connection to the chapter, other scholars argue that the verse can *only* be fully understood against the backdrop of Hellenistic philosophy or Jewish thought. According to Hollander and Holleman, for instance, Paul subscribed to the negative view of law that was current among the Cynics and Stoics, who regarded laws as evidence of humanity's inborn wickedness.⁵⁸ As such, laws were ineffective and, in fact, were a hindrance to righteousness, since they were in conflict with the unwritten law of nature. Many philosophers, therefore, attempted to live what they considered to be a life in harmony with natural wisdom, free from human restraints and conventions.⁵⁹ Believing that the Corinthian Christians were thoroughly Hellenistic in their way of thinking, Hollander and Holleman conclude that the church would have (correctly) understood 1 Cor 15:56 from this perspective.⁶⁰

This Greek notion, however, is most certainly not Paul's referent in 1 Cor 15:56. Even if it were likely that the Corinthians were acquainted with a Hellenistic philosophy that denigrated human laws as ineffective means of curbing wickedness, this notion goes farther than 1 Cor 15:56, and yet not far enough. It goes beyond Paul's statement by disparaging the law. Paul does not do so; sin is the foe that inflicts death, not the law. And yet the Hellenistic notion falls well short of Paul's thought. It is not that the law is an *ineffective* means of *inhibiting* human wickedness; rather, the law is an

Findley remarks that the ideas are delivered "in a rhythmical, imaginative turn of expression harmonizing with the context" (Findley, *Corinthians* 943); see also Barrett, *Corinthians* 384.

⁵⁶ See Fee, *First Corinthians* 806; Söding, "Kraft" 74–76. Among those assuming that 1 Corinthians predates Galatians are Wilckens, "Zur Entwicklung" 154; Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* 8; Thielman, *Paul and the Law* 247 n. 10; Gerd Lüdemann, *Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles: Studies in Chronology* (trans. F. Stanley Jones; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 108–9; Alfred Suhl, *Paulus und seine Briefe. Ein Beitrag zur Paulinischen Chronologie* (SNT; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1975) 343.

⁵⁷ Weiss acknowledges that the gloss assumes an exact knowledge of Pauline theology (*Korintherbrief* 380; see also Wolff, who considers the verse to be "durchaus paulinisch formuliert," *Korinther* 209).

⁵⁸ Hollander and Holleman, "Relationship" 280–89; see also Collins, *1 Corinthians* 582–83.

⁵⁹ In his life of Aristotle, Diogenes Laertius notes Aristotle's response when asked what advantage he had gained from his pursuit of philosophy: "This, that I do without being ordered what some are constrained to do by their fear of the law" (*Lives* 2.20 [Hicks, LCL]). Cicero ascribes a similar reply to Xenocrates when asked what his disciples learned, "To do of their own accord what they are compelled to do by law" (*On the Republic* 1.3 [Keyes, LCL]).

⁶⁰ Hollander and Holleman point to the Corinthians' emphasis on wisdom, spiritual gifts, freedom, the power to live as one pleases, and the denial of the bodily resurrection as "clear" proofs of their Hellenistic mindset ("Relationship" 290).

effective means of *empowering* human wickedness.⁶¹ But more importantly, $\acute{\omicron}$ νόμος in 1 Cor 15:56 appears to refer to something other than mere human laws and institutions. The fact that the verse links $\acute{\omicron}$ νόμος to the primordial entities of $\acute{\eta}$ ἁμαρτία and $\acute{\omicron}$ θανάτος suggests that an equally ancient entity is in view.

Others, who similarly contend that Paul's notion in 1 Cor 15:56 did not originate from and cannot be explained by its immediate context, argue that the verse reflects Jewish ideas with which Paul assumed his readers would have been familiar. The most common of such theories is that argued by Grundmann. He contends that Paul was acquainted with the rabbinic maxim, "The power of Yahweh is the Torah," and in 1 Cor 15:56 turns it on its head, "the power of *sin* is the law."⁶² The evidence that Grundmann cites, however, is unconvincing. His primary witness is *Mek. Shirata* 9:43–48: "Thou hast guided them in thy strength.' For the sake of the Torah which they were destined to receive, for 'Thy strength' here is but a designation for the Torah, as in the passage: 'The Lord will give strength unto His people.'⁶³ Not only is it difficult to assume that the Corinthians would have been familiar with this particular Jewish midrash,⁶⁴ but even if they were, Grundmann turns a mere expression, "thy strength," into the maxim, "The power of Yahweh is the Torah." It is hardly imaginable that Paul would have done the same and then expected his readers to understand his maxim with the other in mind.⁶⁵

⁶¹ See Carter, *Power* 75 n. 86. In a later essay, Hollander admits that this sin-engendering function of the law was underestimated in his previous article ("NOMOS" 133 n. 67). An idea that may seem to go as far as 1 Cor 15:56 does in linking law to the outworking of wrongdoing is the concept of contra-suggestibility, an insight that is well attested in Greco-Roman antiquity. Räsänen, for example, claims that Paul here is taking up this everyday experience that prohibitions often incite people to transgress them (*Paul and the Law* 149). Theissen, who also contends that Paul alludes to this psychological phenomenon, quotes Euripides, "Love reprov'd more urgent grows" (Plutarch, *Moralia* 71A) and Ovid, "We ever strive for what is forbid, and ever covet what is denied;" "What one may not do pricks more keenly on" (*Amores* 3.4.17; 2.19.3) (G. Theissen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology* [trans. John P. Galvin; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987] 224); note also the similar statements by Ovid, "He is all the more eager for their warnings . . . and their very efforts at control make him worse" (*Metamorphoses* 3.566 [Miller, LCL]) and Livy, who describes the person who is "like a wild beast first rendered angry by its fetter" (*Livy* 34.4.20 [Sage, LCL]). Though Greek readers may well have identified 1 Cor 15:56 with the forbidden desire scenario, greater powers are at work, and matters of far greater consequence are at issue. The concern of the verse is not the mundane struggle between pleasures and prohibitions, but the role law plays in the outworking of *sin*. And the relationship between law and sin to which the verse alludes is not analyzed psychologically, but eschatologically; the law-sin connection for Paul is a nexus that inevitably leads to death.

⁶² Grundmann, "Gesetz" 54–55. Kümmel, who supports Grundmann's theory, contends that this scenario argues for the authenticity of the verse (*Korinther* 196).

⁶³ Jacob Z. Lauterbach, trans., *Mekilta De-Rabbi Ishmael* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1933) 2.70.

⁶⁴ Although Grundmann presents the *Mekilta* as the earliest of the Midrashim, it can only with difficulty be dated in the mid-second century and, as Wacholder has shown, can possibly be dated as late as the early ninth century (Ben Zion Wacholder, "The Date of the Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael," *HUCA* 39 [1968] 117–44).

⁶⁵ In a later essay, Grundmann appears to be more cautious: "Paulus . . . nimmt den jüdischen Ausdruck für die Tora עוֹן יְהוָה auf" (*TWNT* 2.309). Two less common theories that suggest a Jewish backdrop to 1 Cor 15:56 are those proposed by Sandelin and Carter. Sandelin finds 1 Cor 15:56

While the previous interpretations sought connections with 1 Cor 15:56 outside of the letter, some exegetes assume that the referent is Paul himself. Rather than having an immediate relationship to the context, Paul, as Räsänen asserts, “just could not help spelling out this connection, although it was of no relevance for his present purpose.”⁶⁶ Thielman similarly notes, “[L]ike a runner unable to stop at the finish line, Paul goes beyond the fitting climax to his argument to reveal an important conviction about the law which has not emerged in the rest of the letter.”⁶⁷ The manner in which 1 Cor 15:56b emerges from 1 Cor 15:56a, however, argues against this notion. The clauses were seen to be intimately linked to one another. Nevertheless, though these writers see no explicit connection between verse 56b and its context, their assumption that Paul could not refrain from mentioning the law once he had mentioned sin and death reveals just how closely Paul at this time had come to associate the law with sin and death; it had already become for him “a systematically established relationship.”⁶⁸

Finally, other exegetes seek to bring the context of 1 Corinthians explicitly into the discussion. The most notable and sustained attempt is that of Söding, who argues that Paul’s statement regarding the law in 1 Cor 15:56 harkens back to 1 Corinthians 1–4. Although the word νόμος does not appear in these chapters, Paul, according to Söding, portrays the γραμματεὺς in 1:20 as a legalistic prototype and assigns to the law partial responsibility for causing the Jews to stumble.⁶⁹ Paul blames the law because it serves sin “wenn die Orientierung an ihm den Blick dafür versperrt, dass Gott sich entschlossen hat, die Menschen durch den auferweckten Gekreuzigten zu retten.”⁷⁰ Therefore, Paul emphasizes at the end of his exposition in 1 Corinthians 15 that victory over death and sin must be gained through Christ alone (15:57).⁷¹

to be understandable when viewed against the background of the Jewish wisdom traditions of Philo and the Wisdom of Solomon, which assigned redeeming power to the law. Paul, it is argued, was contending against this notion in his statement, ἡ δὲ δύναμις τῆς ἁμαρτίας ὁ νόμος (Sandelin, *Weisheit in 1. Korinther 15* 72). This scenario, however, appears no more likely to be the backdrop to Paul’s thought than the previous one. Not only is it doubtful that the Corinthians would have associated the law with these wisdom traditions (see Schrage, *Korinther* 382), but, as Räsänen quips, if Paul in verse 56b were engaged in a polemic against such a nomistic front, “so indirect a comment would be an unintelligibly mild reply” (*Paul and the Law* 143 n. 77). Carter, on the other hand (in reference to the law-sin nexus of Rom 7:7–11, though applicable to 1 Cor 15:56), suggests that Jews would have been able to identify with such a struggle between sin and the commandment. As evidence he cites the story of R. Mena’s visit to R. Haggai, who was ill. R. Haggai said, “I am thirsty.” R. Mena responded, “Drink,” and then left him. Upon returning, R. Mena asked R. Haggai about his thirst, to which R. Haggai replied, “No sooner had you permitted me to drink than the thirst left me” (Carter, *Power* 186–87). This alleged episode occurred, however, in the fourth century and would thus be an uncertain indication of what Jews believed two centuries earlier.

⁶⁶ Räsänen, *Paul and the Law* 143; see also Hays, *1 Corinthians* 277.

⁶⁷ Thielman, *Paul and the Law* 108. Barrett similarly notes, “Once embarked upon the theme, Paul though he does not develop it, cannot refrain from mentioning the third factor in the complex in which sin and death are two members” (*First Corinthians* 383).

⁶⁸ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* 293.

⁶⁹ Söding, “Kraft” 83.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 84.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Whether or not Söding is correct to discern allusions to legalism in the argumentation of 1 Corinthians 1–4, the main weakness in his argument is that he assigns a nomistic sense to 1 Cor 15:56; the law empowers sin by blocking one's relationship with God's grace.⁷² But as argued above, Paul is likely depicting here a scenario where the law is functioning catalytically, rather than being approached legalistically. In addition, Söding fails to give weight to the step parallelism, which links each clause intimately to its preceding clause. 1 Cor 15:56 more likely bears a relation to the immediate, rather than remote, context.

But though Söding may not have succeeded in identifying the connection that the axioms bear to the epistle, his initial premise is nonetheless valid. Over against Räisänen, who sees 1 Cor 15:56 as having “no connection with the main thrust of the section,”⁷³ or Carter, who argues that for the Corinthian congregation “the verse would have been virtually incomprehensible,”⁷⁴ and Thielman, who contends that Paul “goes beyond the fitting climax to his argument,”⁷⁵ Söding is correct to affirm that there is “für Paulus durchaus einen plausiblen Grund, sie [die gesetzes-kritische Sentenz] in 1 Korinther 15 zu zitieren—und für die Korinther durchaus die Möglichkeit, ihre Pointe zu begreifen.”⁷⁶

Having examined the verse and the various approaches to the text, we will now suggest what Paul was perhaps intending to convey to his readers when he wrote: τὸ δὲ κέντρον τοῦ θανάτου ἡ ἁμαρτία, ἡ δὲ δύναμις τῆς ἁμαρτίας ὁ νόμος. Looking again at the step parallelism in 1 Corinthians 15 that led up to verse 56, it is clear that ὁ θάνατος in verse 56a is linked to the occurrences of the term in verse 55, which in turn are linked back to the statement, Κατεπόθη ὁ θάνατος εἰς νίκος in verse 54.⁷⁷ The mention of death in verse 56, then, comes as no surprise; the reference there is an overflow of the climactic statements regarding its defeat in verses 54–55.⁷⁸ Yet, the line of thought may be traced back further to the epigrammatic statement in verse 21, where Paul succinctly identifies Adam as the origin of death: δι' ἀνθρώπου θάνατος. The same can be said of ἡ ἁμαρτία. As noted earlier, the term in the singular occurs in 1 Corinthians only in 15:56.⁷⁹ However, sin is likely implicit in Paul's reference to Adam and the origin of death in 15:21–22. In Romans 5, by way of similar statements, Paul identifies Adam as the source of sin and mortality in the world: δι' ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἡ ἁμαρτία εἰς τὸν κόσμον εἰσῆλθεν καὶ διὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας ὁ θάνατος (v. 12); τῷ τοῦ ἑνὸς παραπ-

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* 143.

⁷⁴ Carter, *Power* 75.

⁷⁵ Thielman, *Paul and the Law* 108.

⁷⁶ Söding, “Kraft” 76.

⁷⁷ Schrage likens the sequence of thought in verses 54–56 to “chain links” (*Korinther* 381).

⁷⁸ See Thielmann, *Paul and the Law* 107; Barrett, *First Corinthians* 383.

⁷⁹ The plural in 15:3, 17 could have prepared for its appearance in verse 56 (see Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* 293). This is unlikely, however, since 1 Cor 15:56 is addressing universal powers or entities.

τώματι οἱ πολλοὶ ἀπέθανον (v. 15); τῷ τοῦ ἐνός παραπτώματι ὁ θάνατος ἐβασίλευσεν διὰ τοῦ ἐνός (v. 17).⁸⁰ In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul is likely making this same identification, though in a more abbreviated, axiomatic manner: δι' ἀνθρώπου θάνατος (v. 21); ἐν τῷ Ἀδὰμ πάντες ἀποθνήσκουσιν (v. 22).

In light of the allusions in 1 Cor 15:21–22 to the Fall,⁸¹ it may be natural, then, for the nexus of sin and death to appear in 56a. This nexus finds its origin for Paul in Eden.⁸² It is also significant and appropriate that these two entities of sin and death are woven into an axiomatic expression. It is significant, as Fee notes, because “its appearance here in this fashion is the sure indication that this essential dictum of Pauline theology had long been in place.”⁸³ It is in turn appropriate since an adage is a suitable and effective mode of expressing such a fundamental reality.⁸⁴

Although the nexus of sin and death in 1 Cor 15:56 may have been prepared for by 15:21–22, the appearance of the “law-sin” nexus in such a setting may seem inexplicable, especially since the law does not appear to have been a serious issue in the church and was certainly not an issue in the chapter.⁸⁵ However, the catalytic function of the law and the Fall may not have been concepts unassociated in Paul’s mind. As noted earlier, Rom 5:20, which also introduces this function of the law, closely follows after a discussion of Adam’s sin, as does 1 Cor 15:56. But more importantly, Eden appears to be close at hand in Rom 7:7–11, the passage that contains the most sustained exposition of the law-sin scenario.⁸⁶ Interpreters of the passage have long

⁸⁰ Similarly, ἡ ἁμαρτία and ἡ θάνατος recur in Rom 5:21, the verse which serves as a book end at the conclusion of Paul’s excursus on Adam.

⁸¹ Note also the references to Adam in 15:45–49. The possible relevance of these verses to 1 Cor 15:56 needs to be explored. The mere presence of these verses, however, along with verses 21–22, may at least serve the present study by highlighting the *primordial* context from which 1 Cor 15:56 arises.

⁸² See Schlatter, *Paulus* 445; Brandenburger, *Adam und Christus* 15–64; J. R. Levinson, *Portraits of Adam in Early Judaism: From Sirach to 2 Baruch* (JSPSup 1; Sheffield: JSOT, 1988); T. H. Tobin, “The Jewish Context of Rom 5:12–14,” *SPhilo* 13 (2001) 173. By associating mortality with Adam’s transgression, Paul’s thought parallels Jewish Adam traditions. *4 Ezra* and *2 Apoc Baruch*, for instance, attributed physical death to Adam’s transgression of the divine command (Gen 2:17): “And you laid upon him one commandment of yours; but he transgressed it, and immediately you appointed death for him and for his descendants” (*4 Ezra* 3:7; cf. 3:21; 7:118); “For what did it profit Adam that he lived nine hundred and thirty years and transgressed that which he was commanded? Therefore, the multitude of time that he lived did not profit him, but brought death and cut off the years of those who were born of him” (*2 Apoc. Bar.* 17:2–3; cf. 48:42; 554:15). See also *Apoc. Mos.* 14:2; *Bib. Ant.* 13:8; Philo (*Creation* 134–39; *Questions on Genesis* 1.51).

⁸³ See Fee, *First Corinthians* 806. The Corinthians, then, would have likely been familiar with it through their prior contact with Paul.

⁸⁴ Regarding the use of aphorisms, Barnes notes, “They catch the attention and capture the mind” (“Aphorism” 91).

⁸⁵ Wilckens sees nothing in the chapter that prepares for 1 Cor 15:56b: “Zwar ist der Zusammenhang von Sünde und Tod vorbereitet (1 Cor 15:21f.) keineswegs jedoch der von Sünde und Gesetz” (“Entwicklung” 161).

⁸⁶ An edenic referent might also be present in Rom 3:20b, one of the law-sin axioms examined above. The phrase there, ἐπίγνωσις ἁμαρτίας, may allude to the knowledge of good and evil, since the phrase stitches 3:20b to Rom 7:7–11 (via τὴν ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ ἔγνων in 7:7) and thus to the edenic context likely depicted there.

perceived echoes of Genesis 2–3 there.⁸⁷ Of particular note are the various motifs present in both Rom 7:7–11 and the Genesis Fall account: (1) life; (2) law/commandment; (3) deceit; (4) sin; (5) death; and (6) knowledge.⁸⁸ A further indication that Paul may be linking ὁ νόμος in 1 Cor 15:56 back to the Fall is the close manner in which the law is intricately linked to the ancient entities of ὁ θάνατος and ἡ ἁμαρτία, which are in turn likely linked back to the Fall in 1 Cor 15:21–22. In addition, the possibility that ὁ νόμος is assuming a generic sense in 1 Cor 15:56 would accord with what might be a primordial prototype as would the presence of the term together with ἡ ἁμαρτία in what appears to be a timeless adage: ἡ δὲ δύναμις τῆς ἁμαρτίας ὁ νόμος.

It seems possible, then, that 1 Cor 15:56b, rather than originating from an issue in the Corinthian church, is linked to the previous clauses and to the preceding edenic context as a theological construct.⁸⁹ Such a link would imply that Paul not only recognized Adam's sin as the origin of death but envisioned law as a *fundamental factor* in the outworking of the edenic sin. But is it likely that Paul considered the catalytic function of the law to have

⁸⁷ Gruppe claims that edenic allusions in Rom 7:7–11 are “omnipresent” (Christian Gruppe, “Qui me délivrera de ce corps de mort? L'Esprit de vie! *Romains* 7,24 et 8,2 comme éléments de typologie adamique,” *Bib* 83 [2002] 488). Dodd concludes that Paul's narrative “fits like a glove” when compared to Genesis 2–3 (C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* [MNTC; London: Fontana, 1959] 124). Käsemann asserts that “there is nothing in the passage that does not fit Adam” (*Romans* 196). Cranfield states, “Paul no doubt has the narrative of Genesis 3 in mind. In fact, these verses are best understood as exposition of the Genesis narrative” (Cranfield, *Romans* 350). See also S. Lyonnet, “L'histoire de salut selon le chapitre VII de l'épître aux Romains,” *Bib* 43 (1962) 117–51; Hans Hübner, *Law in Paul's Thought* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1984) 72–76; R. N. Longenecker, *Paul, Apostle of Liberty: The Origin and Nature of Paul's Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976) 92–95; D. B. Garlington, “Romans 7:14–25 and the Creation Theology of Paul,” *TJ* 11 (1990) 207–10; François Bussini, *L'Homme Pêcheur Devant Dieu: Théologie et Anthropologie* (Paris: Cerf, 1978) 115–31; Theissen, *Aspects* 202–11. For objections to an Adamic interpretation in Rom 7:7–11, see Michael Paul Middendorf, *The “I” in the Storm* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1997) 21, 140–43; Kümmel, *Römer* 7 86–87. For a detailed response to these objections see S. Lyonnet, “Tu ne convoiteras pas’ (Rom vii, 7)” in *Neotestamentica et Patristica: Eine Freundesgabe. Herrn Professor Dr. Oscar Cullmann zu seinem 60. Geburtstag überreicht* (ed. W. C. van Unnik; NovTSup 6; Leiden: Brill, 1962) 157–65. Even if the reference to Eden in Rom 7:7–11 is not direct, it is hard to deny that the situation depicted by Paul there at least parallels Adam's.

⁸⁸ These motifs may be specifically observed in the following reminiscences of the Genesis Fall narrative in Rom 7:7–11: (1) ἐντολή (vv. 8, 9, 10, 11) recalls ἐντέλλομαι in LXX Gen 2:16; 3:11, 17; (2) the commandment οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις in verse 7 recollects Eve's desiring after the forbidden fruit; (3) the depiction of ἁμαρτία as a personal power is reminiscent of the serpent; (4) the manner in which ἁμαρτία lies dormant and then springs to life at the coming of the law recalls the snake's sudden appearance in Genesis 3 immediately following the giving of the commandment; (5) ἡ ἁμαρτία . . . ἐξηπάτησέν με (v. 11) echoes LXX Gen 3:14, ὁ ὄφις ἠπάτησέν με; (6) δι' αὐτῆς ἀπέκτεινεν (vv. 10–11) recalls LXX Gen 2:17, ἡ δ' ἄν ἡμέρα φάγητε ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, θανάτω ἀποθανεῖσθε; (7) ἡ ἐντολή ἡ εἰς ζωὴν in verse 10 is reminiscent of the command given to Adam in Gen 2:16–17, which was intended as a life-preserving safeguard; (8) sin “seizing” (λαβοῦσα) the opportunity in verses 8 and 11 recalls the woman “seizing” (λαβοῦσα) the fruit in LXX Gen 3:6; (9) the sequence in verses 7–11 of “life-commandment-sin-death” parallels the same sequence of events in Gen 3:6; (10) Paul's use of γινώσκω and οἶδα in verse 7 (see also ἐπίγνωσις ἁμαρτίας in Rom 3:20b) is reminiscent of τὸ ζῆλον τοῦ εἰδέναι γνωστὸν καλοῦ καὶ πονηροῦ in LXX Gen 2:9.

⁸⁹ See Fee, *First Corinthians* 806.

been operative in Eden? Two factors suggest that he, in fact, did. First, Paul's designation of the edenic sin as παράβασις assumes for him that ὁ νόμος was present in the garden. The term is used of the primal sin in Rom 5:14 (τοὺς μὴ ἁμαρτήσαντας ἐπὶ τῷ ὁμοιώματι τῆς παραβάσεως Ἀδὰμ) and 1 Tim 2:14 (ἡ δὲ γυνὴ ἐξαπατηθεῖσα ἐν παραβάσει γέγονεν). Though the term νόμος does not appear in these verses, the presence of law is presupposed in the Lord's command to Adam (Gen 2:16)⁹⁰ and by the fact that transgression (παραβάσις) by definition requires a law to be transgressed (Rom 4:15).⁹¹ Furthermore, the logic of Rom 5:13–14 argues that Adam transgressed "law." In Rom 5:14 Paul says, ἀλλὰ ἐβασίλευσεν ὁ θάνατος ἀπὸ Ἀδὰμ μέχρι Μωϋσέως καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς μὴ ἁμαρτήσαντας ἐπὶ τῷ ὁμοιώματι τῆς παραβάσεως Ἀδὰμ ὅς ἐστιν τύπος τοῦ μέλλοντος. The phrase here, μέχρι Μωϋσέως, parallels ἄχρι γὰρ νόμου in verse 13. Since the period between Adam and Moses was "lawless," it follows that Adam's sin, in contrast to the sins committed during this interim, was related to law.⁹² Paul seems to acknowledge, then, two law traditions linked to Adam and Moses respectively.⁹³ It may not be surprising, therefore, if in

⁹⁰ Commenting on the phrase, "and the Lord God commanded him," Calvin notes, "A law is imposed upon him [Adam] in token of his subjection" (*Commentaries on the First Book of Moses called Genesis* [trans. John King; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948] 125).

⁹¹ Paul consistently uses the term παράβασις to connote the transgression of a revealed law or commandment for which one has been formally made responsible (see Rom 2:23; 4:15; 5:14; Gal 3:19; 1 Tim 2:14).

⁹² Theissen argues, "If, first, people in the interim period between Adam and Moses did not sin like Adam and if, second, they sinned without law, then the sin of Adam and the sin under the law must be comparable" (*Aspects* 203; see also Poirier, "Universality of Law" 354; Winger, *Νόμος* 149 n. 105). Though Bruckner argues that natural law existed before Sinai in such forms as judicial, commercial, and contractual procedures, he notes that the pre-Sinaitic narratives are not ostensibly "about" law, and they do not contain law codes "nor are specific statutes and ordinances presented as such" (James K. Bruckner, "The Creational Context of Law Before Sinai: Law and Liberty in Pre-Sinai Narratives and Romans 7," *ExAud* 11 [1995] 97).

⁹³ Longenecker suggests that Paul thought that "God's Torah in a pre-Mosaic prototype was from the beginning: a prototype of basic instruction minus the particular national and ceremonial features" (*Paul* 95; see also S. Pedersen, "Paul's Understanding of the Biblical Law," *NovT* 44 [2002] 17). Käsemann contends that Paul "made Adam the prototypical recipient of the law" (*Romans* 196). Paul may have been thinking of "the law," in accordance with at least some Jewish thought, as that body of instruction which was given in Eden and later reiterated and amplified through Moses. The one commandment given to Adam and Eve was understood in some traditions of Judaism to be the embodiment of the entire Law. In *Tg. Neof.* Gen 2:15 it states, "And the Lord God took Adam and had him dwell in the garden of Eden to toil in the Law and to observe its commandments" (McNamara, *ArBib*). In the same targum with reference to Gen 3:23 it postulates, "If he [Adam] had observed the precept of the Law and fulfilled its commandment he would live and endure forever like the tree of Life" (*ibid.*). Note also *Tg. Yer. I* Gen 2:15; 3:9, 22, 24; *Gen. Rab.* 16:5–6; 24:5; *Deut. Rab.* 2:25; *b. Sanh.* 56b; *4 Ezra* 3:7; 7:11; Josephus, *Ant.* 1:41–47; Philo, *Leg.* 1.90–97. Moore argues that "the Jews could no more conceive a world in the past without a revelation of God's will for man's life than in the present or the future. Accordingly, they believed that certain laws for all mankind were given to Adam" (G. F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of Tannaim*, vol. 1 [New York: Schocken, 1927] 274). Lyonnet observes that for Jews "all precepts given by God to man in order that men in observing them would obtain justification merited equally the name law" (Lyonnet, "Tu ne convoiteras" 163; see also Longenecker, *Paul* 121). Whether or not Paul held to such views, he did appear to conceive of "law" in some sense being present in Eden.

1 Corinthians 15, a chapter in which thoughts of Eden likely evoked the notions of sin and death in verse 56a, such thoughts would also prompt in verse 56b a mention of a primordial law that was also present.⁹⁴

Secondly, that Paul not only viewed ὁ νόμος to be present in Eden but saw it serving in a catalytic role as well seems to be implicit in the story depicted in Rom 7:7–11. There, as in Rom 5:12–14, Paul appears to present the Fall as a prototype for sins under the Mosaic law.⁹⁵ In dramatic manner, Paul casts a story of life and death where shadows emerge from behind the actors: behind ἐγώ is Adam/Eve,⁹⁶ behind Sinaitic ὁ νόμος lies the edenic commandment,⁹⁷ behind ἐπιθυμήσεις lies the commandment's prohibition against partaking of the forbidden fruit,⁹⁸ behind ἡ ἁμαρτία lurks the serpent,⁹⁹ and

⁹⁴ If ὁ νόμος in 1 Cor 15:56 were indeed alluding back to the Fall, Paul would likely be using the term in a prototypical sense. The Edenic commandment and the Mosaic code would thus be regarded as an embodiment of the prototype. Commenting on 1 Cor 15:56, W. Kay places in the mouth of "the law" the edenic command, "The law said, 'In the day thou eatest, thou shalt die'" (W. Kay, *A Commentary on the Two Epistles of St. Paul to the Corinthians* [London: Macmillan, 1887] 83 n. 4).

⁹⁵ See John Espy, "Paul's Robust Conscience Re-Examined," *NTS* 31 (1985) 169. Although the scene in Rom 7:7–12 is cast in terms of Genesis 3, there may also be allusions there to the coming of the law to Israel (see Douglas J. Moo, "Israel and Paul in Romans 7:7–12," *NTS* 32 [1986] 122–35; Mark W. Karlberg, "Israel's History Personified: Romans 7:7–13 in Relation to Paul's Teaching on the 'Old Man'," *TJ* 7/1 [1986] 65–74; G. Strelan, "A Note on the Old Testament Background of Romans 7:7," *LTJ* 15 [1981] 23–25). Just as sin immediately followed the giving of the commandment in the garden, so the coming of the law to Israel resulted in the increase of sin (Rom 5:20). Napier notes, "Instead of recapitulating Adam's creation as distinct from the beasts, the arrival of the Torah [at Sinai] effected the recapitulation of Adam's fall" ("Analysis" 21). One need not think of how quickly the wilderness rebellion followed upon the arrival of the Torah (see N. T. Wright, *Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992] 227).

⁹⁶ Barrett argues that "it is impossible to mistake the figure of Adam" (*Romans* 135). Bornkamm quips, "In dem *egō* von Röm 7:7ff. bekommt Adam von Röm 5:12ff. seinen Mund" (Günther Bornkamm, *Das Ende des Gesetzes: Paulusstudien* [BEVT; München: Kaiser, 1952] 59). Theissen argues that "Adam is not the *subject* of the conflict in Rom 7:7ff. but rather its *model*" (*Aspects* 203). Theodore of Mopsuestia understood Paul in Rom 7:8 to be using Adam as an ὑπόδειγμα (*In Epistolam ad Romanos*, PG 66.809c).

⁹⁷ Theissen ponders whether it is coincidental that Paul, "in a place where one thinks most readily of Adam's fall, uses the term *entole*" (*Aspects* 204). Theodoret finds in Rom 7:11–12 a direct allusion to the edenic commandment, Νόμον τὸν Μωσαϊκὸν καλεῖ, ἐντολὴν δὲ τὴν τῷ Ἀδὰμ δεδομένην (*Interpretatio ad Epistolae ad Romanos*, PG 82.120a; see also Pedersen, "Biblical Law" 16–19; Reinhard Weber, "Die Geschichte des Gesetzes und des Ich in Römer 7,7–8,4: Einige Überlegungen zum Zusammenhang von Heilgeschichte und Anthropologie im Blick auf die theologische Grundstellung des paulinischen Denkens," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 29 [1987] 156–59).

⁹⁸ At Gen 3:6 the verb קָנַח occurs, which is the verb used in Exod 20:17: לֹא תַקְנֹחַ; although not the case in Gen 3:6, in the LXX the verb is usually translated by ἐπιθυμέω. Although Mosaic Law is the primary subject of Rom 7:7–11, the garden commandment can well be regarded as anticipatory of the tenth commandment. Bruce writes, "It could be argued that covetousness (ἐπιθυμία) is the quintessential sin" (F. F. Bruce, "Paul and the Law of Moses," *BJRL* 57 [1974–1975] 269). This may be why Paul chose the tenth commandment; no other command can be so naturally fused to the Paradise command. Lyonnet contends that Paul quotes only the verb because he meant to speak of the essence of covetousness, i.e. the exaltation and substitution of self over God, which was the sin of Adam ("Tu ne convoiteras pas" 159; see also Barrett, *Romans* 132). If Paul wanted to cite a prohibition that encompassed all the others and that of Eden, he could hardly have chosen a more suitable precept.

behind the verbs γινώσκω and οἶδα is the “knowledge of good and evil”.¹⁰⁰ In this “once upon a time” depiction of the law’s role in the outworking of sin,¹⁰¹ an individual encounters the tenth commandment, which, if kept, promises life. However, upon hearing the commandment’s “thou shalt not,” sin is stirred and, once awakened, beguiles its victim’s into doing the contrary. As a result, the individual transgresses the commandment and suffers the loss of life in the process. In the end, the law, which was to bring life, became the means by which sin brought death:

Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν; ὁ νόμος ἁμαρτία; μὴ γένοιτο· ἀλλὰ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ ἔγνων εἰ μὴ διὰ νόμου· τὴν τε γὰρ ἐπιθυμίαν οὐκ ᾔδειν εἰ μὴ ὁ νόμος ἔλεγεν. Οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις· ἀφορμὴν δὲ λαβοῦσα ἡ ἁμαρτία διὰ τῆς ἐντολῆς κατειργάσατο ἐν ἐμοὶ πᾶσαν ἐπιθυμίαν· χωρὶς γὰρ νόμου ἁμαρτία νεκρά. ἐγὼ δὲ ἔζων χωρὶς νόμου ποτέ· ἐλθούσης δὲ τῆς ἐντολῆς ἡ ἁμαρτία ἀνέζησεν, ἐγὼ δὲ ἀπέθανον καὶ εὗρέθη μοι ἡ ἐντολή ἡ εἰς ζώην, αὐτὴ εἰς θάνατον· ἡ γὰρ ἁμαρτία ἀφορμὴν λαβοῦσα διὰ τῆς ἐντολῆς ἐξηπάτησέν με καὶ δι’ αὐτῆς ἀπέκτεινεν.

Looking behind the scenes of this narrative, it appears that Paul found the triad of law, sin, and death to be present in Eden. It is improbable that

⁹⁹ The term *ἐξαπατάω*, which Paul uses in Rom 7:11 (ἡ γὰρ ἁμαρτία . . . ἐξηπάτησέν με), occurs in 2 Cor 11:3 and 1 Tim 2:24, where Paul describes the role of the serpent in the Fall: ὁ ὄφις ἐξηπάτησεν Εὐάν (2 Cor 11:3) ἡ δὲ γυνὴ ἐξαπατηθεῖσα ἐν παραβάσει γέγονεν (1 Tim 2:24). See also the use of the term in Theodotus on Gen 3:13 (in John William Wevers, *Text History of the Greek Genesis* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974] 92); Josephus, *Ant.* 1:48, 49; Philo, *Alleg. Interp.* 3.109. Dunn sees a clear reference in Rom 7:9 to the sequence in Genesis 2–3, where following the giving of the commandment sin (the serpent) comes on the scene “with the commandment on its tongue” (James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* [WBC; Waco, TX: Word, 1988] 383). The personification of sin in Gen 4:7 may also be in Paul’s mind. Sin (ἁμαρτία) is depicted there as a wild animal lurking (צִרְיָן) at one’s door ready to strike. The verb צִרְיָן is used in Ezek 29:3 of a sea serpent (יָרֵחַ, δράκων LXX) lying in the river. Some commentators lying see an allusion in Gen 4:7 to the Mesopotamian demon *rābiṣu* that was thought to lie in wait near the threshold to ambush its victim (see K. van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* [Leiden: Brill, 1999] 682–83). A possible link between Gen 3:1–5 and 4:7 needs further examination.

¹⁰⁰ That the two verbs γινώσκω and οἶδα in Rom 7:7 point to an acquaintance with sin learned by experience is evident from verse 8, which specifies what the knowledge of sin entailed there: lust (see J. Lambrecht, “Man Before and Without Christ: Rom. 7 and Pauline Anthropology,” *LS 5* [January 1974] 23; Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* [trans. Edwyn Hoskyns; Oxford: University Press, 1968] 242). Based on the meaning of γινώσκω in Rom 7:7, an experiential sense should likely be read back into Rom 3:20b. In the only other occurrence in Paul of the phrase γινώσκειν ἁμαρτίαν (2 Cor 5:21), it denotes the experience of sin. Theissen considers a possible allusion in the verbs to the edenic knowledge of good and evil: “That Rom 7:7–13 contains so many reminiscences of the story of the Fall leads one to ask if . . . the motif of knowledge, does not also become intelligible on the basis of Genesis 2–3” (Theissen, *Aspects* 207). He suggests the possibility that the “knowledge of good and evil” in the story of the Fall is modified into “knowledge of sin” (Rom 7:7) to adapt to Paul’s mode of thought in Rom 3:20. He tentatively concludes, though, that this is uncertain since the terms *καλόν* and *πονηρόν* are missing in Paul (ibid. 208). However, the unexpected (and unnecessary?) appearance of the verbs γινώσκω and οἶδα in this context may be more significant than the absence of *καλόν* and *πονηρόν*.

¹⁰¹ The use of ποτέ in Rom 7:9 appears to evoke the idea of story-telling (see LSJ, ποτέ III. I; Dunn, *Romans* 382). The time of “paradisiacal innocence” naturally comes to mind (Hans Lietzmann, *Die Briefe Des Apostels Paulus. I. An die Römer Erklärt* [HNT; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1906] 73). Brandenburger views Paul’s narrative as an “Urgeschichte” and the statement in verse 9a to be “freilich mythologisch geprägt” (*Adam und Christus* 206, 211).

he would have sounded so many edenic echoes otherwise. Paul likely wanted his readers to perceive that in the beginning, the garden commandment (and hence “law”) paradoxically was the means by which sin and death gained its entrance into humanity.¹⁰² Carter notes, “Paul casts the ἐγώ in the role of Adam here in order to make the point that, far from effectively serving as a boundary keeping sin at bay, the law in fact proved to be the loophole through which sin entered the system.”¹⁰³ It would appear, therefore, that Paul perceived the catalytic function of the law to have been active not only at Sinai (Rom 5:20) but in Eden, where the prohibition triggered lurking evil into action.¹⁰⁴ If so, an excursus in 1 Cor 15:56 regarding law and sin following after a reference to the Fall in 1 Cor 15:21–22 would not be as puzzling as it first appeared. When the puzzle piece is inserted into an edenic scenario, the exegete discovers a possible fit.

Assuming that 1 Cor 15:56 may express an edenic axiom regarding law and sin, it remains briefly to consider the possible biblical and theological significance this would have had for Paul’s readers and also would have for the current discussion of Paul and the law. At the outset, such an axiom would certainly reveal the seminal position that Eden occupied within Paul’s biblical-theological universe.¹⁰⁵ The nature of the arguments in 1 Cor 15:21–22 (45–49) and Rom 5:12–21 indicates that the paradisiacal events were, for Paul, not merely illustrative, but foundational.

¹⁰² It might be objected that Paul could not have had Eden in mind, since his narrative would then depict Adam and Eve in a world where sin had already found entrance. This would appear to contradict Rom 5:12: Διὰ τοῦτο ὡσπερ δι’ ἐνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἡ ἁμαρτία εἰς τὸν κόσμον εἰσῆλθεν (see Bornkamm, *Gesetzes* 58–59). The Genesis account, however, assumes the presence of dormant evil prior to the Fall, although it had not yet penetrated the human race. Longenecker aptly notes, “the Devil was not invented to test the commandment, but the commandment was given in the presence of lurking evil” (*Paul* 95; see also Hübner’s discussion, *Law* 73).

¹⁰³ Carter, *Power* 187.

¹⁰⁴ Barrett notes, “Sin—the serpent . . . had no opportunity of attacking the man until the command ‘Thou shalt not eat of it’ had been given (Gen 2:17). It was precisely by means of this command, the prototype of all law and religion, that the serpent tempted man” (*Romans* 143). Cranfield similarly observes that “the serpent found in God’s explicit prohibition (Gen 2:17) the very opportunity he wanted and was able to use the commandment as a means of deceiving and ruining Adam” (C. E. B. Cranfield, “St. Paul and the Law,” *SJT* 17 [1964] 46). Ancient Jewish thought has yet to be fully combed for evidence of notions of contra-suggestibility in Eden. Such a notion, however, appears evident in at least one work, the *Apocalypse of Moses*. There Eve narrates the snake’s attempts to seduce her by way of a contra-suggestive ploy of holding back the promised fruit, “After we had walked a little, he turned and said to me ‘I have changed my mind and will not allow you to eat.’ He said these things, wishing in the end to entice and ruin me” (*Apoc. Mos.* 19.1 [Johnson, *OTP*]). Commenting on the inevitable operation of both the adamic commandment and the Mosaic law to stir up illicit desire, Weber writes: “Wesen und faktische Funktion des adamitischen Paradiesgebotes und der Mosestora sind ja auch im Zentrum völlig parallel: Begierdeverbot und eben dadurch Provokation derselben” (“Die Geschichte des Gesetzes” 158).

¹⁰⁵ See Pedersen, “Biblical Law” 17; D. J. W. Milne, “Genesis 3 in the Letter to the Romans,” *RTR* 39 (1980) 12–16; D. M. Stanley, “Paul’s Interest in the Early Chapters of Genesis,” in *Studiorum Paulinorum Congressus Internationalis Catholicus, 1961* (AnBib 17–18; Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1963) 248–49; Morna D. Hooker, “Adam in Romans 1,” *NTS* 6 (1959–1960) 297–306; idem, “A Further Note on Romans 1,” *NTS* 13 (1966–1967) 181–83.

If, in addition, 1 Cor 15:56 expresses edenic history in the form of a truism, then it would also establish the prototypical nature of what took place there. Paul would see the edenic commandment-sin scenario as archetypal,¹⁰⁶ this syndrome occurs whenever the law encounters adamic flesh.¹⁰⁷ Such an outworking of sin would cast fresh light on Romans 6–7, where deliverance from the law occupies a central role in Paul's discussion of sanctification.¹⁰⁸ If it were law that drew the serpent out of the bush, then it would be freedom from law that *necessarily* and *inevitably* de-fangs sin and leads to good works.¹⁰⁹

Finally, with regard to the current discussion of Paul and the law, if Paul in 1 Cor 15:56 depicted the law-sin nexus as being active in Eden, then he would be relegating ὁ νόμος along with ὁ θάνατος and ἡ ἁμαρτία “to the era of man's fall and its consequent ills.”¹¹⁰ The fundamental problem with the law, then, would not be its “legalistic misuse”;¹¹¹ Eve was seduced to transgress the law, not fulfill it. Nor would it be its misuse as a Jewish “identity marker”,¹¹² the law problematic would predate the patriarchs.¹¹³ Rather, if

¹⁰⁶ Regarding Romans 7 and the edenic parallels there, Hübner notes, “Gen 3 is used in such a way that it illuminates every man's situation under the law” (*Law* 76). Käsemann asserts that “every person after Adam is entangled in the fate of the protoplast. . . . Before Christ Adam is continually repeated” (*Romans* 197). Weber draws an anthropological application from the “mythological” language of Rom 7:7–11: “Die mythologische Sprache dient hier dazu, auf einen *generellen* anthropologischen Sachverhalt hinzuweisen” (“Die Geschichte des Gesetzes” 158). As the garden commandment stimulated external evil, so the Mosaic law incites indwelling sin.

¹⁰⁷ Indeed, this is what Paul seems to convey in Rom 7:5: ὅτε γὰρ ἦμεν ἐν τῇ σαρκί, τὰ παθήματα τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν τὰ διὰ τοῦ νόμου ἐνηργεῖτο ἐν τοῖς μέλεσιν ἡμῶν, εἰς τὸ καρποφορῆσαι τῷ θανάτῳ. Romans 7:4–5 indicates that this scenario plays out in the life of a person who is bound to the powers of the old age and the law. In addition, Rom 7:10 seems to depict a context where the law is functioning in a “do or die” capacity (see also Rom 10:5; Gal 3:10, 12). These facts likely answer Räisänen's question of why it is only the commandment of the law that incites sin. “Why,” he asks “does not, say, the apostolic paraenesis—or paraclesis, if you like—lead to the same result?” (*Paul and the Law* 148–49). In response, it would appear that the law-sin syndrome has been disengaged in the lives of believers, who are no longer in bondage to the workings of the old age (see Rom 7:6).

¹⁰⁸ See Rom 6:14; 7:1–6. The manner in which references to the law-sin scenario bracket Paul's discussion of sanctification indicates the key role that the catalytic operation of the law assumes in the argument of Romans 6–7. Paul's statement in Rom 5:20 (νόμος δὲ παρεῖσηλθεν, ἵνα πλεονάσῃ τὸ παράπτωμα· οὐ δὲ ἐπλεόνασεν ἡ ἁμαρτία, ὑπερεπερίσσευσεν ἡ χάρις) provoked the question of Rom 6:1 (Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν; ἐπιμένωμεν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ, ἵνα ἡ χάρις πλεονάσῃ;), and the exposition of the law-sin scenario in Rom 7:7–24 closes the argument.

¹⁰⁹ Paradoxically, sin spawns in a “legal” climate (Rom 7:5), whereas righteousness flourishes in a “lawless” environment (Rom 7:6). See also the references to “law” in Gal 5:18–23.

¹¹⁰ Garlington, “Creation Theology of Paul” 208–9, italics mine.

¹¹¹ Cranfield, “Law” 56.

¹¹² James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990) 92.

¹¹³ While Paul in Romans 4 cites the examples of David and Abraham as evidence that the law does not justify, in 1 Cor 15:56 he would be establishing his argument by moving further back in time. With the exception of moving even further back to the foreknowledge of God (Rom 9:10–13; Gal 1:15–16; Eph 1:4), Paul would reach his ultimate salvation-historical argument against the law in Eden.

the law-sin syndrome dates to the childhood period of humanity, then something more fundamental would be at work, something that could not be discovered by merely examining Second Temple Jewish writings from within and around Jerusalem. If 1 Cor 15:56 indeed places the law-sin scenario in the Garden, then the interaction between law and sin will only be fully understood by taking a closer look with Paul at the seminal event that transpired in Eden—where the prohibition against partaking of the knowledge of good and evil led to the knowledge of sin.