

PAUL'S GOSPEL, THE LAW, AND GOD'S UNIVERSAL REIGN IN ROMANS 3:31

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I. INTRODUCTION

Paul's claim that his teaching upholds rather than nullifies the law in Rom 3:31 seems to surface quickly and then recede just as quickly. This relatively fleeting mention of the law's compatibility with Paul's gospel has sparked a number of defensible interpretations. To support the various views, scholars appeal to other material within the letter, both before and after the verse in question. It comes as quite a surprise then that scholars rarely turn to the material in closest proximity to Rom 3:31 to explain the verse.¹ Romans 3:29–30 presents compact but compelling reasoning for the superiority of Paul's theological position over that of his sparring partner. Paul's assertion about upholding the law through his gospel draws upon what was arguably the central tenet of Jewish faith during Paul's lifetime. The fact that Paul's gospel does justice to the *Shema*, which is recognized as an organizing framework or launching point for the entirety of the Jewish law, provides Paul's basis for proclaiming that his gospel establishes rather than nullifies the law.² This article will show the viability of this interpretation and examine potential objections that could be raised against it.

II. SUMMARY OF THREE POPULAR VIEWS

There are three other common answers to the question of what Paul has in mind as support for his insistence that his gospel in no way abolishes the law but rather establishes it.³ The first possibility is that Paul's insistence that his gospel upholds the law refers to the argument, summarized in Rom 3:20, that the Jewish

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¹ For instance, in his summary of different views of Rom 3:31, Rhyne mentions how scholars have understood Rom 3:31 in connection with "Rom 3:19–20, 24–25, 27; Rom 5; 6; 7; 8:4; 9–11; 12–15," which covers a lot of ground in Romans without ever including the immediately preceding Rom 3:29–30 (C. Thomas Rhyne, *Faith Establishes the Law* [SBLDS 55; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981] 15).

² In this article, the term *Shema* is used to refer to the content of Deut 6:4, especially the first line, and not the other Scriptures that became grouped with the *Shema* in the Jews' liturgical practices.

³ See Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 253–55; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 207–8; Grant R. Osborne, *Romans* (IVPNTC; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004) 103–4; Everett F. Harrison and Donald A. Hagner, *Romans* (EBC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008) 76. Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (trans. Scott J. Hafemann; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994) 67–68 seems to hold a combination of these views.

law reveals the depths of an individual's sin and thus leads him or her to Christ.⁴ The second proposed solution is that "law" in Rom 3:31 denotes the OT Scriptures as a whole, as it does in Rom 3:21 with the reference to the Law and the Prophets.⁵ In other words, Paul's teaching is faithful to the Hebrew Scriptures as a whole, since Christ completes the story begun by the Law and Prophets.⁶ As a corollary to this view, Paul turns to this law (the Scriptures) in chapter four to demonstrate from the story of Abraham that the law does indeed validate Paul's gospel.⁷ The third view adopted is that Paul unfolds how his gospel fulfills the law later in the letter in places such as Rom 8:2–4 and 13:8–10.⁸ According to this view, Christ's

⁴ Calvin advanced this understanding as part of his explanation of the verse (*Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* [trans. John Owen; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947] 152). See also R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1936) 277; James R. Edwards, *Romans* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992) 108; John Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007) 199–200; Solomon Andria, *Romans* (Africa Bible Commentary Series; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011) 73.

⁵ See C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975–1979) 1.223; Anders Nygren, *A Commentary on Romans* (trans. Carl C. Rasmussen; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1949) 166–67; Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (trans. John Richard de Witt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 342; Rhyne, *Faith Establishes the Law* 92–93, 117–18; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (AB 33; New York: Doubleday, 1993) 367; Donald A. Carson, "Why Trust a Cross: Reflections on Romans 3:21–26," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 28 (2004) 362; J. R. Daniel Kirk, *Unlocking Romans: Resurrection and the Justification of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) 58–59.

⁶ The 4th-century theologian Ambrosiaster understands the establishing of the law in this way (see *Commentaries on Romans and 1–2 Corinthians: Ambrosiaster* [trans. and ed. Gerald L. Bray; Ancient Christian Texts; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009] 30–31). Cyril of Alexandria thought likewise (see *Romans* [ed. Gerald Bray; ACCS; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998] 109). Karl Barth takes a similar approach (Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* [trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns; London: Oxford University Press, 1968] 115–16).

⁷ See Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 105; Rhyne, *Faith Establishes the Law* 59–61; Richard B. Hays, "Three Dramatic Roles: The Law in Romans 3–4," in *Paul and the Mosaic Law* (ed. James D. G. Dunn; WUNT 89; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1996) 155; Udo Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology* (trans. M. Eugene Boring; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 322–23. See also Thielman, who identifies the law as the Pentateuch in 3:31 and notes the support drawn from the Pentateuch in Romans 4 (Frank Thielman, *Paul and the Law: A Contextual Approach* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994] 184–86; cf. William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* [5th ed.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902] 96).

⁸ John Chrysostom and Augustine (see *Romans* [ACCS] 107–8), along with Martin Luther (*Commentary on Romans* [trans. J. Theodore Mueller; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954] 80) and Philip Melancthon (*Commentary on Romans* [trans. Fred Kramer; St. Louis: Concordia, 1992] 104–5) advanced this understanding of the verse. This view is also preferred by John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959) 126, 283; George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the NT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 509; F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 19, 201; Klyne Snodgrass, "Spheres of Influence: A Possible Solution to the Problem of Paul and the Law," *JSNT* 32 (1988) 104; Jan Lambrecht and Richard W. Thompson, *Justification by Faith: The Implications of Romans 3:27–31* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989) 59–61, 70–71; Moo, *Romans* 254–55; Schreiner, *Romans* 208; Osborne, *Romans* 103–4; Douglas Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 735. See also N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 208–9, though in his Romans commentary, Wright detects Paul's interest in the *Shema* in 3:31, in addition to his broader focus on Spirit-driven obedience to the law in 2:25–29 and later sections of Romans (idem, *The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections* [NIB; Nashville: Abingdon, 2002] 483–84). Others adopt this view

death makes it possible for Spirit-empowered Christians to fulfill the law, particularly by loving one another. These three views are attractive because they use Paul's own perspective elsewhere in the letter to explain what Paul seemingly leaves unsaid in Rom 3:31. That is also the strength of the option preferred in this article, since in Rom 3:29–30, which immediately precedes Rom 3:31, Paul likewise provides a clear rationale for how his teachings uphold the law. This alternate way of interpreting the passage is sometimes overlooked altogether and rarely developed in detail.⁹ But this fourth option is arguably superior in the explanation it offers of Paul's overall argument in Rom 3:27–31.

III. HOW A FOURTH OPTION FITS INTO THE BROADER DISCOURSE

A brief exegetical overview of Rom 3:27–31 will help demonstrate the coherence that results in the section if the reading defended in this article is adopted.¹⁰ This section continues the dual emphasis that is prominent starting in Rom 3:19: that it is God's action and not humans' action that brings justification, and that this saving action applies to all people without distinction. This dual emphasis also continues after the section, in Romans 4. Romans 3:27–31 thus reinforces main points in the broader discourse while inserting the testimony of the *Shema* as a distinct contribution to the argument.

Paul begins in Rom 3:27 with the rhetorical question arising from the previous discourse: "Where then is the boasting? It is excluded" (Ποῦ οὖν ἡ καύχησις; ἐξεκλείσθη). Paul's focus on boasting, though anticipated by his discussion about how some Jews boast in their unique relationship with God (Rom 2:17) and their association with the Mosaic Law (2:23), is also reflective of a larger concern shown elsewhere about misplaced confidence or baseless claims of credit (Rom 4:2; 1 Cor 1:26–31; 3:21; 4:7; 5:6; 2 Cor 10:16–17; Gal 6:13–14; Eph 2:9).¹¹ This broader interest in boasting is shaped particularly by Jer 9:23–24.¹² Paul rules out misplaced

in combination with the second view (Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Römer* [KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963] 113; Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer* [2nd ed.; Zurich: Benziger, 1987] 249–50; Schnelle, *Apostle Paul* 322–23).

⁹ Schlatter includes the gospel's fulfillment of the *Shema* as one component of how the gospel establishes the law, along with aspects of views one and three from above (Adolf Schlatter, *Romans: The Righteousness of God* [trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995] 105–6, 176). Dunn shows that Paul makes his assertion about establishing the law in Rom 3:31 in the wake of having clarified its "proper function" and application to all people in Rom 3:29–30 (James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* [WBC 38A; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988] 190–91). For Klumbies, Rom 3:31 relates to the preceding section (3:27–30) and reinforces the idea that one God brings salvation to all people in one way, through Christ (Paul-Gerhard Klumbies, "Der Eine Gott des Paulus: Röm 3,21–31 als Brennpunkt paulinischer Theologie," *ZNW* 85 [1994] 204–6.) Wright speaks of Paul "drawing out the significance of having the *Shema* itself as a pointer to the Jew-plus-Gentile quality of the new family" (Wright, *Romans* 483).

¹⁰ Contra Käsemann, who contends that verse 31 cannot be understood as the logical conclusion to the preceding discourse (*Romans* 104).

¹¹ Thus Paul's idea of boasting should not be linked exclusively to "ethnic pride," as Hays ("Three Dramatic Roles" 153) and Wright (*Romans* 480) contend.

¹² When Paul incorporates these passages into his discourse in 1 Cor 1:29–31, he summarizes it as "let him who boasts boast in the Lord," which complements his accentuation of God's initiative and action in salvation.

boasting in Rom 3:27 with his assertion that it is excluded. Using the inferential conjunction οὖν, Paul recalls his prior twofold emphasis on salvation as a work of God and the applicability of salvation to all people in order to show that human boasting is eliminated.

Paul then infers that the exclusion of boasting can emerge only from what is characterized as a law of faith (διὰ νόμου πίστεως), as opposed to a law of works (τῶν ἔργων). This contrast most likely reflects the contrast between faith (as human trust) and works seen elsewhere in Paul's writings.¹³ The νόμος that is qualified by this contrasting pair of genitives is more likely the Mosaic Law than a generic law or principle.¹⁴ Paul's portrayal of two opposing perceptions of the law sets the agenda for the rest of the section. As shown by his conclusion in Rom 3:31, one of Paul's concerns in the section is to demonstrate the compatibility of his gospel of faith with the law as God designed it. Paul associates faith and the law to begin clarifying what characterizes the law as God intended it all along.¹⁵

In Rom 3:28 Paul dismisses a law of works by reemphasizing the irrelevance of works of the law to God's saving plans.¹⁶ In a restatement of Rom 3:20, Paul removes works from the equation of justification, highlighting the importance of faith in contrast. In parallel with 3:21, Paul uses the preposition χωρίς to show that God accomplishes justification independently from the law (3:21) or works of the law (3:28). It should be noted here that by revisiting points about the law being superfluous in God's saving plans, Paul has not yet made an overt step towards his goal of reconciling his gospel with the law. He is simply reinforcing a paradigm in which faith rather than works is placed at the center of the law.

Paul presents a restricted scope of God's rule as the implied alternative (suggested by ἢ) to his preferred position of righteousness apart from works in 3:29. The consequence of making works essential to the justification is that Jews only, and not the Gentiles, would be able to worship God. Paul quickly rejects this alter-

¹³ The genitive noun in the πίστεως Ἰησοῦ construction (in Rom 3:22, 26 and elsewhere) is best understood as objective. Though in Rom 3:22 Paul follows the construction with the prepositional phrase εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας, this is not redundant, since the focus shifts from the means of responding to God's grace to the availability of that response to all people. Of course, the subjective genitive view is supported by a number of interpreters. For considerations from both sides of the debate, see Richard B. Hays, "ΠΙΣΤΙΣ and Pauline Christology: What Is at Stake?" in *Pauline Theology*, vol. 4: *Looking Back, Pressing On* (ed. E. Elizabeth Johnson and David M. Hay; SBLSymS 4; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997) 35–60, and James D. G. Dunn, "Once More, ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ," in *Pauline Theology*, vol. 4: *Looking Back, Pressing On* 61–81; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the NT* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 114–16; Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle, eds., *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009).

¹⁴ Proponents of the Mosaic Law interpretation are Cranfield, *Romans* 1.119–20; Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer* 245; Dunn, *Romans 1–8* 185–86; Snodgrass, "Spheres of Influence" 101; Stuhlmacher, *Romans* 66; Hays, "Three Dramatic Roles" 153–54; Wright, *Romans* 480; Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011) 172. Opting for law as principle is Murray, *Romans* 122–23. Supporters of the view that Paul refers to the Mosaic Law in conjunction with works and "principle" in connection to faith include Moo, *Romans* 249–50; Osborne, *Romans* 101.

¹⁵ See Lambrecht and Thompson, *Justification by Faith* 57; James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 638–39; Campbell, *The Deliverance of God* 719.

¹⁶ A mild, explanatory γὰρ connects the two verses.

native. The Gentiles too may claim God as their God.¹⁷ The “all” of Rom 3:22–24 (εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας...πάντες γὰρ ἥμαρτον) becomes the Jews and Gentiles more specifically in 3:29.¹⁸ Paul is moving into more controversial territory now with the insinuation that Gentiles are justified without any expectation of practicing the works of the law, but he wants to draw out and defend the full implications of his gospel.

Paul's defense is punctuated by recourse to the *Shema*. Because of the *Shema* (introduced by εἶπερ, which is a marker for introducing the grounds for the preceding claim),¹⁹ Paul and his readers know that YHWH alone is the one true God, the God of both Jews and Gentiles. Paul thus establishes the incongruity of limiting God's reign to the Jews alone by appealing to the *Shema*, the central feature of the Jewish law. This is a new building block in Paul's argument, and it is an important one for three reasons. First and most immediately, it supports Paul's point that God is the God of both Jews and Gentiles, which in turn casts doubt on the necessity of works of the law for justification. If God has acted definitively through Christ to save sinners, then since he is God of all people, this provision applies equally to all (as indicated by the attached relative clause ὃς δικαιοῦσει περιτομὴν ἐκ πίστεως καὶ ἀκροβυστίαν διὰ τῆς πίστεως). Second, the reference to the *Shema* provides validation for Paul's faith-rooted vision of the law and a corresponding critique of a works-driven view of the law. The *Shema* reorients the reader's focus back to the purpose of the law—to foster wholehearted devotion to God among all people.²⁰ Paul believes that a “law of faith” opens the doorway for more groups of people to know and worship God. Third, Paul's appeal to the *Shema* increases the overall credibility of Paul's advocacy for faith by linking faith to the central command of the law. This last point leads to Paul's conclusion of the section in 3:31.

Once Paul has demonstrated that the *Shema*, the heart of the Mosaic Law, vindicates his gospel, he is able to reject the charge (μὴ γένοιτο) that his gospel of faith undermines God's law.²¹ Paul's gospel fulfills the purpose that the law was designed to fulfill by fostering devotion to God. Furthermore, Paul's gospel unleashes this possibility for Jews and Gentiles, in keeping with the universal vision of the *Shema*. Paul's allusion to the *Shema* thus emerges as the only explicit basis in this section for drawing the conclusion that his gospel establishes the law.²²

¹⁷ See Hays, “Three Dramatic Roles” 154.

¹⁸ See also Paul's prior summarization of the common sinfulness of Jews and Gentiles in 3:9.

¹⁹ BDAG, “εἶπερ” 279; Dunn, *Romans 1–8* 189; Lambrecht and Thompson, *Justification by Faith* 38; Robert Jewett, *Romans* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) 300.

²⁰ See Klumbies, “Der Eine Gott des Paulus” 205.

²¹ Paul's dismissal of the objection draws its force from the connection between the *Shema* and the Jewish Law as a whole (contra Jewett [Romans 303], who suspects that Paul speaks about a more general idea of law here).

²² Though the material that follows in chapter 4 is related in a general way to the topic of the law and Paul's gospel, it does not function to support Paul's contention that his gospel fulfills the law. More directly, 4:1ff. revisits the topic of boasting that was examined in Rom 3:27 (see especially 4:2, with its mention of boasting).

IV. STRENGTHS OF THE READING

As mentioned earlier, the view that Paul's gospel fulfills the law by fulfilling the design of the *Shema* allows the reader to find the key to Paul's point within the nearest literary context. This view submits that Paul draws his conclusion of Rom 3:31 from the new information introduced in the section. Paul has already emphasized faith and the offer of salvation to both Jews and Gentiles. His new point in the section is that the *Shema* supports a faith-driven approach to God for all people. This new argument strengthens Paul's case and his contention that his gospel is faithful to the OT story. In fact, the conclusion Paul delivers in Rom 3:31 loses much of its force apart from the appeal to the *Shema* a verse earlier. Without the prior assertion of faith's superior alliance with the *Shema* there is a weaker basis for the strong denunciation (μὴ γένοιτο) of the misguided claim that Paul's gospel of faith overthrows the law.

Expanding the view to the letter as a whole, the preferred reading augments Paul's concern throughout the letter to promote unity among Jews and Gentiles in Christ. This option creates an even stronger platform for Paul's arguments in Rom 4 that Abraham is "the father of us all" (4:16), since God's promises to Abraham are more readily recognized as universal given the confession that there is one God over all people.²³ Paul picks up this line of thought again in Rom 15:8, when he connects the fulfillment of patriarchal promises to the Gentiles' recognition of the "truth of God" in Christ. The Gentiles' affirmation of YHWH as the one true God allows praise to resound among all peoples, Jews and Gentiles, throughout all the earth (Rom 15:9–12).²⁴

This position also captures Paul's indebtedness to his Jewish context as a devoted student of Scripture before encountering Christ. His monotheism would have been the first among many affirmations he held in common with opponents, and he would have been aware of the broader application of God's oneness to all nations within the Jewish Scriptures themselves (seen especially in Zech 14:9).

Finally, despite Paul's specific focus on the *Shema* in Rom 3:31 the themes enlisted by the three more common views mentioned at the beginning of this article are still compatible with this reading of Rom 3:27–31, so this view does not detract from the relevance of those truths to Paul's argument in Romans as a whole. Paul's appeal to the *Shema* fits in as a crucial part of a broader story that still has plenty of room for the universal sinfulness of humanity revealed by the law, the many other instances in which the Law and Prophets point forward to God's saving work for all people, and the fulfillment of the law of love through Spirit-enabled believers.

²³ See Kim Huat Tan, "The *Shema* and Early Christianity," *TynBul* 59 (2008) 197.

²⁴ For Paul's use of a collection of OT passages in this section, see Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale, 1989) 70–73; Mark A. Seifrid, "Romans," in *Commentary on the NT Use of the OT* (ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 687–91; Steve Moyise, *Paul and Scripture: Studying the NT Use of the OT* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010) 98–99.

V. POTENTIAL OBJECTIONS

For this fourth view to gain wider acceptance, two specific issues must be resolved. First, it must be demonstrated how a reinforcement of the oneness of God in the *Shema* would translate into a reinforcement of the Jewish law as a whole, from Paul's perspective. Second, the protest in Rom 3:31a must be shown to both arise naturally from Paul's preceding argument *and* be subject to quick dismissal by Paul without further discussion.

1. *Fulfilling the Shema fulfills the law as a whole.* Would Paul believe that fidelity to the *Shema* could be equated with fidelity to the Mosaic Law in its entirety? If so, he would not be the first to do so. Over time, the Jews had granted the *Shema* a special place in their worship practices, stemming from the instructions about frequent repetition of this teaching (Deut 6:7–9).²⁵ Structural indicators in Deuteronomy point to the centrality of the *Shema* in that work.²⁶ It has even been suggested that the *Shema* in its literary context is meant to epitomize the Ten Commandments, which in turn summarize the over 600 specific laws that are put forward in Deuteronomy.²⁷ A tendency to identify the heart of the Jewish law is detected in several other places in the OT.²⁸ In noncanonical Jewish writings (some before and some after Paul's time) the heart of the law is often linked to the *Shema*.²⁹ This interest in epitomizing the law also continues to surface in the lifetime of Christ, as evidenced by Jesus' interaction with the scribe in Mark 12:28–34 (cf. Matt 22:34–40, Luke 10:25–28).³⁰ The breadth and complexity of the Mosaic Law encouraged a careful distinction between the central and the peripheral, using the central to make better sense of the peripheral. For the Jews of the OT and NT era, this center was often located in the *Shema*, though Jesus, James, and Paul also summarize the law by appealing to the so-called royal law of Leviticus (Mark 12:31; Matt 22:39; Jas 2:8; Gal

²⁵ See discussion of development of the Jewish practice of reciting the *Shema* in Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996) 440–41. Evidence for the importance of this practice is found in *m. Ber.* 1.1–4; *m. Tamid* 4.3; 5.1; and the Nash papyrus. Fragments of *tefillin* from the Dead Sea region further testify to the importance of the *Shema* in the religious practice of some Jews in the Second Temple era (see Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, "Tefillin," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* [2nd ed.; New York: Macmillan, 2006] 19.579–80).

²⁶ Patrick D. Miller, Jr., "The Most Important Word: The Yoke of the Kingdom," *Illif Review* 41 (1984) 17–19. Others identifying Deut 6:4–5 as the centerpiece of Deuteronomy are Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1–11* (WBC 6A; Dallas: Word, 1991) 143; Walter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy* (AOTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 2001) 82–83.

²⁷ See Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy* (NAC 4; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994) 164–65; idem, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the OT* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006) 330. See also William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the OT* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) 58–59; Wright, *Romans* 482. Rabbinic support for this idea is found from Rabbi Levi in *y. Ber.* 1.4.2c, though there Deuteronomy 11 and Numbers 15 are included as part of the *Shema*. I am grateful to Gordon H. Johnston for first introducing me to the idea and language of the "epitomization" of the law.

²⁸ See, e.g., Ps 15:1–5 as well as uses of the $\square\aleph \text{ } \beth$ construction in Mic 6:8 and Deut 10:12–13.

²⁹ *Let. Aris.* 132; *m. Ber.* 2.2. In *Decalogue* 65, Philo calls the *Shema* "the first and most sacred of commandments."

³⁰ See Tan, "The *Shema* and Early Christianity" 186–91.

5:14; Rom 13:8–10). Thus, it is widely recognized that the *Shema* enjoys an unparalleled role in shaping Israel's faith and practice.³¹

Though some Jews understood the *Shema* as functioning to differentiate Israel from the other nations, there was also precedent for a universalizing interpretation of the passage, especially when understood in conjunction with Zech 14:9 (“And the LORD will become king over all the earth; on that day the LORD will be one and his name one” [NRSV]).³² God's law serves the greater purpose of promoting the acknowledgment of his righteous reign over all the earth. It is this tradition that Paul affirms in his appeal to the *Shema* in Rom 3:29–31. Paul shows a proclivity to viewing the *Shema* this way in Gal 3:20, 1 Cor 8:6, Rom 1:12, and 1 Tim 2:5–6.³³ In these passages the one true God's reign is brought to all people (without distinction) through Jesus Christ.

Paul draws the conclusion he does in Rom 3:31 by assuming that the *Shema* gives faithful expression to the Mosaic Law as a whole. Based on this implied premise, if the law of faith is superior in fulfilling the universal claims that God has on humanity as proclaimed in the *Shema*, it therefore does justice to the law as a whole.

2. *Paul's quick dismissal of the charge.* The rhetoric reflected in Rom 3:31, best characterized as belonging to the diatribe style, employs the pattern of a question posed by an interlocutor followed by Paul's rejection of the implications of the question using μή γένοιτο.³⁴ In such a construction, the imaginary debate partner's question is designed to unveil a potential weakness in the author's position. In this case, Paul's advocacy of justification by faith appears to render the Mosaic Law irrelevant. But Paul rejects this conclusion with his oft-used retort μή γένοιτο. Though elsewhere in his letters Paul often follows this emphatic reply with an extended explanation as to why the conclusion drawn is false, in this instance he simply insists on the opposite conclusion, that his teaching upholds the law. Though this difference in Rom 3:31 has prompted some to see Romans 4 as an extension of Paul's rebuttal, the discourse pattern of Rom 3:31 is better understood

³¹ For a sampling of this recognition, see Louis Jacobs, “*Shema*, Reading of,” *Encyclopedia Judaica* 18:453–56; Wright, *Climax of the Covenant* 95; Tigay, *Deuteronomy* 76; Norman Lamm, *The Shema: Spirituality and Law in Judaism* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1998) 9–11.

³² See Tigay, *Deuteronomy* 76; Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy* (NIBC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996) 97; Lamm, *Shema* 31–32. More broadly, the tension in rabbinic texts between God's universal claim over humanity and his particular care for Israel is surveyed in Nils Alstrup Dahl, *Studies in Paul: Theology for the Early Christian Mission* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977) 182–88; Dunn, *Romans 1–8* 188. On the contribution of the Noahic covenant to an expectation of universal salvation in Jewish texts, see Alan Segal, “Universalism in Judaism and Christianity,” in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context* (ed. Troels Engberg-Pederson; New York: T&T Clark, 1994) 5–12. A number of other passages in the OT indicate God's intent to have all nations worship him (Ps 66:8; 96; 117; Isa 2:2; 56:7; 66:18–20; Zech 2:11; 8:22–23; 14:16; Mal 1:11).

³³ See Wright, *Climax of the Covenant* 2, 154–55, 170–71; Tan, “The *Shema* and Early Christianity” 191–95.

³⁴ For an overview of the specific characteristics of the diatribe seen in this passage, see Stanley Kent Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul's Letter to the Romans* (SBLDS 57; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981) 119, 133–36, 148, 150, 164–67.

as an exception to Paul's standard practice.³⁵ There are some strong grammatical and thematic reasons to view Rom 4:1 as the resumption of the discussion of believers' grounds for boasting before God and the means by which they are justified by God (from Rom 3:27–28).³⁶

Paul's rationale for his quick dismissal of the objection raised may arise from a combination of two factors. First, though Paul's appeal to the *Shema* is useful for his immediate argument, it is still a sub-argument within the broader discourse that advances the thesis of Rom 1:16–17. After insisting that his gospel fulfills the law in a general way (via the *Shema*), Paul returns to his main agenda of advancing justification by faith in chapter 4, as signaled by the rhetorical question posed in 4:1. Second, it is plausible that Paul is satisfied that his refutation of the charge of a lawless gospel has already been answered sufficiently in 3:28–30. From Paul's perspective, the objection that his gospel nullifies the law arises from a limited vantage point. The objector has latched onto Paul's contrast between faith and law but has overlooked the more fundamental compatibility between faith and law in Paul's teaching. Faith in Christ allows the law to reach its highest vision: to enable people from all nations to worship the God of Israel. The objector's misunderstanding and Paul's solution to the misunderstanding emerge from the same section (Rom 3:28–30), though Paul believes that his solution stands out as being more central, since God's oneness is the starting point for a correct view of God and his saving work. As a result, Paul does not find it necessary to respond further to the common misconception that his gospel denigrates the law. His words from a verse earlier already stand as a rebuttal to that concern.

VI. EXEGETICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BENEFITS

What are the exegetical and theological implications from this reading of Paul's statement in Rom 3:31? Exegetically, this interpretation keeps the focus a bit longer on Paul's argument about how his teaching highlights the truth of God's universal sovereignty and concern. Seeing Rom 3:29–31 as a self-contained unit that stresses the continuity between Paul's gospel and the Jewish law, in addition to supporting the logic of justification by faith, allows Paul's reflections on the *Shema* to receive the attention they deserve in the discourse. The other exegetical options listed earlier in this article, with the possible exception of the second one, divert the

³⁵ Malherbe notes that Epictetus often rejects false conclusions with μή γένοιτο without further elaboration (Abraham J. Malherbe, "ΜΗ ΓΕΝΟΙΤΟ in the Diatribe and Paul," *HTR* 73 (1980) 232, 237). See also Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul's Letter to the Romans* 148. The opposing view is presented quite carefully in Rhyne, *Faith Establishes the Law* 33–61.

³⁶ Cranfield observes that the presence of the conjunction οὖν in 4:1 does not support the idea that the purpose of chapter 4 is to provide additional support for Paul's insistence that faith upholds the law. Instead, Paul is revisiting the discussion of boasting from Rom 3:27 (Cranfield, *Romans* 1.223). This view is strengthened by the explicit mention of boasting in 4:2 and the extended examination of justification by faith rather than by works in 4:2–8. Others who doubt that 3:31 serves as a transition to chapter 4 are Murray, *Romans* 124–25; Lambrecht and Thompson, *Justification by Faith* 45–50; Fitzmyer, *Romans* 359–60).

reader's focus from the immediate discourse in search of explicit elaboration elsewhere.

Theologically, acknowledging that Paul has the *Shema* in mind when he says that his teaching fulfills the law adds an additional layer to how Paul views the law in his writings. His view on the law would correspond more closely to that of Jesus, who recognized the relevance of the *Shema* for how the law should be rightly understood (Mark 12:28–34; Matt 22:34–40; Luke 10:25–28). Jesus and Paul would then both follow the precedent of certain OT passages in which similar questions were addressed. The so-called “relativization”³⁷ of the Jewish Law that results from making the *Shema* determinative for the interpretation of the law also fits naturally with Paul's emphasis on the law of Christ elsewhere (Gal 6:2; 1 Cor 9:21). More broadly, this reading reflects Paul's expansive understanding of God's redemptive work throughout history. In that history the law recedes from the spotlight but points, according to its original intent, to the fulfillment of God's plans for all people in Christ.

VII. SUMMARY

In the early decades of the church many Christians were trying to discern how God was at work among the Jews and Gentiles, in the light of the game-changing crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. In Rom 3:27–31, Paul appeals to the *Shema* in support of his conviction that God is justifying both Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ and by faith. Because Paul believes that the *Shema* faithfully represents the law in its entirety, he rejects the notion that his gospel diminishes the law. Instead, the *Shema* clarifies the role of the law in God's saving plans. The law, properly understood, envisions the comprehensive reign of God through Christ over all peoples in the new creation, in which people from all nations can enjoy life and the promises of the God of Abraham, through his Son, and by his Spirit.

³⁷ Wright, *Climax of the Covenant* 170; Tan, “*Shema* and Early Christianity” 195.