

GOSPEL UNTIL THE LAW: ROM 5:13-14 AND THE OLD COVENANT

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Romans 5 expounds the theology of justification as gift of grace by analyzing the analogous roles of Adam and Jesus Christ in the drama of history. In each case the divine government employs the principle of federal headship by which the probationary act of the one is imputed to the many, whether one act of sin unto death or of righteousness unto life. Such is the context of the cryptic parenthesis that appears in Rom 5:13-14, following the anacoluthon at the end of v. 12.¹ As a provisional rendering I suggest: "(13a) For sin was in the (whole) world until the law. (13b) Now sin is not imputed where law is not of force; (14a) but death reigned from Adam to Moses (14b) even over those who did not sin after the mode of the transgression of Adam, (14c) who was a type of the one to come."

I. ROM 5:13-14 AND CLASSIC COVENANT THEOLOGY

My immediate interest here is the intriguing exegetical puzzle posed by this parenthesis, but I am also using it as an entrance into the question of the nature of the old covenant, particularly as debated within the Reformed camp by proponents of classic covenant theology and the revisionist tradition represented by John Murray.² The basic question is obviously of wider evangelical and indeed ecumenical interest, as witnessed in the burgeoning literature on the Pauline view of the law.

As I see it, the customary interpretations of Rom 5:13-14, irrespective of theological perspective, are alike in one respect: their failure to account satisfactorily for the particular segment of history Paul selects to make his point. I hope to show that recognition of the law-gospel contrast and, more specifically, of the operation of the principle of works (as antithetical

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¹ Determination of the true intent of the parenthesis by analysis of its place in Paul's argument in Romans 5 and its wider context is appropriately the methodological emphasis of C. H. Giblin, "A Qualifying Parenthesis (Rom 5:13-14) and Its Context," in *To Touch the Text: Biblical and Related Studies in Honor of Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J.* (ed. M. P. Horgan and P. J. Kobelski; New York: Crossroad, 1989) 305-315. His conclusions, however, fall within the usual range of interpretations, which misconstrue that contextual relationship.

² Murray taught systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, and his approach to this subject is currently under vigorous promotion in *WTJ*.

to grace) in the old covenant is the indispensable key to a satisfactory explanation of this perplexing passage. If so, then Rom 5:13–14 proves to be decisive evidence in corroboration of the classic form of covenant theology, which is distinguished by these key elements.³

Before exploring the exegesis of Rom 5:13–14 it will be useful to clarify the aforementioned controversy among covenant theologians. Classic covenantalism recognizes that the old Mosaic order (at its foundation level—that is, as a program of individual salvation in Christ) was in continuity with previous and subsequent administrations of the overarching covenant of grace. But it also sees and takes at face value the massive Biblical evidence for a peculiar discontinuity present in the old covenant in the form of a principle of meritorious works, operating not as a way of eternal salvation but as the principle governing Israel's retention of its provisional, typological inheritance.⁴

Illustrative of the complexity is Rom 10:5–8, where Paul contrasts law and gospel by juxtaposed quotations, both from the Torah: Lev 18:5 as expressive of works, Deut 30:12–14 as proclaiming the way of faith in Christ. Classic covenantalism seeks to do full justice to this complexity by distinguishing two levels of the old covenant, as suggested above. Among other interpreters, some see the plain meaning of the contrasting strands in Paul's teaching, judge the apostle inconsistent and let it go at that. Most, with less respect for the plain meaning of the text but more for Paul's (or God's) consistency, try to explain away the apostle's identification of the law as a works arrangement.

One popular method of escaping the perceived tension has been to suppose that identification of the law as antithetical to faith does not represent Paul's own opinion but is a Judaizing misunderstanding that he is opposing.⁵ Others, perceiving the contrived nature of this misinterpretation solution, think to relieve the tension by qualifications that in effect eliminate the law principle from the situation. Thus, according to Moisés Silva, the law, though "leading to life," could not be and was not in the divine purpose intended to be a "source of righteousness and life."⁶ To this extent he agrees with classic covenantalism. But because the Murray position followed by Silva so minimizes the significance of the typological stratum as virtually to reduce the old covenant to the one level of its continuity with other administrations of grace, his suggestion leaves the

³ On the claim involved in the term "classic" see M. W. Karlberg, "Reformed Interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant," *WTJ* 43 (1980) 1–57, esp. 7–41; "Moses and Christ: The Place of Law in Seventeenth-Century Puritanism," *Trinity Journal* 10 (1989) 11–32.

⁴ See M. G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* (privately published, 1991) 68, 180, 196–199.

⁵ Paul does repeatedly oppose a Judaistic misinterpretation of the law, but their error was not the assertion that there was a works principle operating in the old covenant. Rather, it was the application of that principle to eternal salvation instead of to the typological level of national Israel's history.

⁶ M. Silva, "Is the Law Against the Promises? The Significance of Galatians 3:21 for Covenant Continuity," in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* (ed. W. J. Barker and W. R. Godfrey; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) 153 ff., esp. 165.

law principle functioning merely as a hypothetical proposal of salvation by works and in no other way.⁷

The total covenantal experience of Israel with all its canonical documentation shouts out against such a reductionism. The law's principle of works was not just something hypothetical. It was actually applied—and with a vengeance. It was the judicial principle that governed the corporate life of Israel as recipient of the national election and controlled Israel's tenure in the typological kingdom of Canaan. Termination of that typological order and Israel's loss of the national election in the divine execution of the covenant curse in the Babylonian exile and again in A.D. 70, exactly as threatened in the Torah treaty, emphatically contradict the notion that the law's stipulations and sanctions were mere hypothetical formulations. A strange blindness with respect to Israel has in large part happened to Biblical scholarship.

On the classic covenantal understanding, the law that came 430 years later did not disannul the promise (Gal 3:17)—not because the old covenant did not really introduce an operative works principle, but because works and faith were operating on two different levels in the Mosaic economy. What is truly remarkable is that Paul sounds often enough as though he too were reducing the Mosaic economy to one level—not, however, to the grace level but to the typological works level. If the apostle expressed himself so unguardedly today he would risk being accused of dispensationalist leanings.

Rejection of the works principle in the old covenant tends to degenerate into a more general denial of the possibility of merit in the religious relationship⁸ and thus to a rejection of the principle of works in the original creation covenant with Adam.⁹ Such a development moves away from Reformation doctrine back into something akin to Roman Catholic theology. If the gravitation toward the denial of the original covenant of works is not due to the logical outworking of an antiforensic bias already present in opposition to the traditional law-gospel contrast, it may be explained in terms of exegetical linkage—that is, the exegete's encounter with the parallelism between the old covenant and the covenant of creation found in Biblical passages like Rom 5:13–14.

⁷ It will be argued below that such a view is incapable of interpreting Rom 5:13–14 satisfactorily.

⁸ Cf. D. P. Fuller, *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

⁹ This tendency is displayed in the more immediate sphere of Murray's influence. In the teaching of his successor, Norman Shepherd, pre-redemptive and redemptive covenants were flattened into a continuum of promise and demand. Continuation of the drift is evident in a recent article by David B. McWilliams, denying works in the Mosaic covenant and the possibility of meritorious obedience on the part of Adam ("The Covenant Theology of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and Recent Criticism," *WTJ* 53 [1991] 109–124). The basis is thereby removed for construction of the Reformed theology of imputation in connection with the two Adams, which Murray maintained in his studies of Romans 5 but undermined in his revision of the covenant concept. Cf. the perceptive comments of M. W. Karlberg, "The Original State of Adam: Tensions within Reformed Theology," *EvQ* 87 (1987) 291–309, esp. 297.

Indeed, Rom 5:13–14 speaks to this entire issue. We shall discover that it speaks decisively against both the extreme of rejecting the law-gospel contrast and the compromise of denying the law really was law, or, positively stated, that it summons us back to a new appreciation of classic federal theology.

II. UNTIL THE LAW

Romans 5:13a states the essential idea of the entire parenthesis, but in a dense way that needs the unpacking it is then given in vv. 13b–14. Interpretation best proceeds, therefore, from the latter clarification back to v. 13a. Requiring attention first, however, is the key (but generally slighted) element in the passage, present already in v. 13a and found again in v. 14a—namely, the particular boundaries Paul establishes for the situation cited in support of his larger thesis in this chapter.¹⁰

The limits set are “until the law” (v. 13a) and “from Adam to Moses” (v. 14a). These bounds are not simply temporal, as if Paul said “until the days of the Hittite empire” or “from the paleolithic to the late bronze age.” Both the *terminus ad quem*, “to Moses,” and the *terminus a quo*, “from Adam,” are epochal turning points in the history of divine-human relationships, or, in more Biblical terms, covenantal turning points.¹¹ Adam stands at the end of the original order, the covenant of creation, and at the inauguration of redemptive covenant. Moses marks the coming of the old covenant and the closing of the patriarchal epoch, which featured especially the Abrahamic covenant. Clearly then the apostle’s selection of Adam and Moses as boundary points has the effect of concentrating his discourse on the history of the covenant community. In particular, his use of the law as the *terminus ad quem* demands that the subject in this parenthesis is a group on whom the instituting of the old covenant had an immediate and direct impact.

The law did not have such an impact on the nations of the Gentiles, strangers to the commonwealth of Israel (Eph 2:12; cf. Rom 2:14; 1 Cor 9:20–21). Their knowledge of God’s moral requirements and attending sanctions, their experience of sin and its consequences, were not affected by God’s special covenantal revelation through Moses. The introduction of the law had the requisite significance only within the bounds of redemptive covenant, represented in the days of Moses by Israel, the people for whom reception of the law was a peculiar, distinguishing privilege (Rom 3:2; 9:4). The descendants of Adam in general cannot be the subject of the parenthesis. Yet commentators of all schools try to interpret the passage as though it were descriptive of universal history. Even those who see in v. 14b (though not in vv. 13–14a) a reference to a limited portion of mankind

¹⁰ Murray faces more openly than most the question of why Paul selects this precise period. He does so, however, only at the end of his discussion, where it confronts him as something problematic for the approach he has adopted (*The Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968], 1. 190). See further below.

¹¹ See the reference to Isa 24:5 in the discussion of “Adam’s transgression” (v. 14b) below.

identify that as an intranational cross-section of humanity. All miss the ineluctable consequence of Paul's making the Mosaic law the *terminus ad quem*: The subject of the parenthesis must be the covenant community.¹²

The kind of covenantal-historical structuring of theological discourse found in Rom 5:13–14 is part of a Pauline pattern. For him to expound soteriology is to analyze the nature and interrelationships of the covenant of promise to Abraham, the law covenant mediated by Moses, and the new covenant with its gospel of justification by faith. Certainly use of the historical schema of the covenants as the framework of doctrinal teaching is characteristic of the book of Romans. And in Romans 5 this covenant pattern becomes panoramic, extending back beyond the Abrahamic covenant and its redemptive precursors in Genesis 3–11 to the preredemptive covenant of the Creator with Adam and reaching forward beyond the law to Christ (the new Adam) and the new covenant. This sweeping overview of covenantal history develops here as elsewhere in Paul's teaching out of his presentation of soteriology. Exposition of the achievement of righteousness and life for the many by the one man, Jesus Christ, called for an account of the situation of universally prevailing sin and death that had to be overcome. That in turn involved explaining how the sin/death reign entered the world through the one man Adam (vv. 12 ff.), who thus (as a federal representative) played a role parallel to that of the coming Christ (v. 14c).

The parenthesis in Rom 5:13–14 sits then in the middle of a chapter that as a whole surveys history from the covenant of creation to the new covenant in the fulness of time. As the parenthesis elaborates on the reign of sin/death mentioned in v. 12, it naturally continues this covenantal structuring. This is signaled, as we have noted, by the phrases "until the law" (v. 13a) and "from Adam to Moses" (v. 14a). By these allusions to the patriarchal/Abrahamic and law epochs the parenthesis fills in the history between the first and last covenants treated in the rest of Romans 5, so completing the cosmic mural of the four major covenant epochs.

What Paul says in Rom 5:14a about the covenant community—that death reigned over them from Adam to Moses—reveals that it is the story of the patriarchs as told in the book of Genesis that is before his mind. The inevitability of death even for God's people is a prominent theme running through the Genesis narratives of the covenant line. "And he died" is the epitaphic closure of each brief biography in the genealogy of the patriarchs from Adam to Noah in Genesis 5. Enoch's deathless transfer to heaven was a unique instance, a prophetic sign of the eschatological victory of the promised seed of the woman over death. In the genealogy of the patriarchs from Noah to Terah in Gen 11:10–26, their death is implicit in the references to the number of years they lived after begetting the next-named individual (or the line leading to him). Then in the narratives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob accounts of their death/burial and that of other

¹² Those in view are the actual beneficiaries of Christ's saving work. Identification of them with the covenant community is an historical generalization, for the historical community is broader than the election in Christ.

members of their families figure prominently to the very end of the Genesis history with the coffin of Joseph in Egypt. And the opening chapters of Exodus carry down to the era of Moses the tale of generation succeeding dying generation in the covenant line. It is this lugubrious narrative of God's mortal folk that is summarized in Rom 5:14a.

Thus understood the parenthesis fits right into the immediately preceding context, for there too Paul not only draws upon the book of Genesis but does so in elucidation of the same theme of sin and death. In Romans 4, dealing with Abraham as father of believers, Paul exploits the way the Genesis account relates Abraham's faith to death as an obstacle to promise fulfillment, an obstacle at which, he says, the patriarch's faith did not stagger because it resided in God who quickens the dead (4:17-20). And in Romans 5 itself Paul utilizes the early chapters of Genesis for their record of Adam's breaking the death-sanctioned covenant of creation. As the obvious source behind 5:14a the Genesis history of the covenant people also provides another indication of the proper explanation of the subject of the parenthesis.

It was observed above that the *terminus formulae* are the main such index that the subject is not general world history but the history of the covenant community. A further inescapable implication of the Moses/law *terminus ad quem* is that the situation in this covenantal order before the law differed fundamentally from that after the law was instituted. With respect to the matters under consideration in Romans 5 a radical contrast must obtain between the patriarchal/Abrahamic order and the old (law) covenant.

Furthermore, the *terminus a quo* has similar significance. "From Adam" (Adam being viewed on this side of the fall) indicates a contrast between the patriarchal/Abrahamic order and the prelapsarian covenant of creation.¹³ Moreover, within these exegetical confines it will be the same contrast that obtains in both directions—that is, the two boundary epochs, the covenant of creation and the old covenant, will be alike in that respect where they differ from the covenant order from Adam to Moses.¹⁴

Once these exegetical parameters are established, the law-gospel contrast naturally suggests itself as the differentiating feature in the contrast posited in Rom 5:13-14. Indeed, it is our conclusion that the exegetical demands inherent in the *terminus* indicators in this passage cannot be satisfied except with the recognition that while grace was the principle of kingdom blessing in the Abrahamic covenant (and new covenant), in the covenant of creation and in the old covenant (at that typological level in terms of which Paul here and elsewhere identifies it) the operating principle was works.

III. GRACE FROM ADAM TO MOSES

The identification of the subject of the parenthesis as the covenant community, required by the *terminus formulae* in vv. 13a and 14a, opens

¹³ We will find this analysis confirmed by the contrast drawn in v. 14b between the sin phenomena in these two periods.

¹⁴ Cf. H. Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986 [1983]) 145 n. 87.

up the meaning of the obscure expressions in vv. 13b and 14b. They too refer to the people of God in the period from Adam to Moses. Moreover, they too contrast this patriarchal/Abrahamic order with both the subsequent law epoch (v. 13b) and the preceding covenant of creation (v. 14b), and they do so not just by implication but explicitly: "apart from the law" (v. 13b) and "not (like) Adam" (v. 14b). Further, the nature of that contrast as the works-grace antithesis now emerges even more clearly, for the whole point of the description of the covenantal order before the law in vv. 13b and 14b is that it was a grace arrangement. In their shared contrast to this, the covenants of creation and the law are identified as economies informed by the works principle.¹⁵

1. *Sin not like Adam's transgression.* A contrast is drawn in v. 14b between Adam's transgression and sins committed by certain persons located between Adam and Moses (cf. v. 14a).¹⁶ The *NIV* rendering (flagrantly over-interpretive) expresses the common explanation of the particular aspect of Adam's offense that is in view: "even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam." The true nature of the contrast mentioned in v. 14b will become apparent if we follow the lead provided by an OT source alluded to in this verse.

Along with Genesis 3, Isaiah 24 makes a notable contribution to Paul's teaching in Romans 5, particularly on the nexus between the universal reign of death and man's sin—more specifically, Adam's breaking of the primal covenant. The Isaiah 24–26 apocalypse is a celebration of the resurrection victory over death and Satan secured by God for his people. Paul draws upon this source repeatedly in his treatments of the same topic in Romans 5 and 8 and in 1 Corinthians 15.¹⁷ After the opening proclamation of God's ultimate triumphant emptying out of the netherworld (Isa 24:1–3), the present dismal situation is portrayed (vv. 4–13): Man and nature groan together, for the earth has become a graveyard, defiled by the dead. And the explanation for this sway of death is that "they broke the ancient covenant" (*b'rit 'olam*, v. 5d). No other covenant than the primal covenant with Adam provides a suitable point of reference. It is this prophetic doctrine of sin and death that the apostle takes up in Rom 5:12 ff.¹⁸ and 1 Cor 15:21 ff., the two passages where he develops the two-Adams theology.

The explicit reference to covenant in the Isaianic source behind Rom 5:12 ff. supports the interpretation of vv. 13–14 in terms of covenant

¹⁵ To maintain the traditional concept of the covenant of works with Adam while refusing to recognize the works principle in the old covenant is not an option allowed by the Biblical data.

¹⁶ Of those who regard vv. 13–14a as referring to mankind universally, some take the *kai* introducing v. 14b as explicative-ascensive, others as restrictive. On my view the focus is already restricted before the *kai*, which can then be taken as simply ascensive.

¹⁷ See M. G. Kline, "Death, Leviathan and the Martyrs: Isaiah 24:1–27:1," in *A Tribute to Gleason Archer* (ed. W. C. Kaiser, Jr., and R. F. Youngblood; Chicago: Moody, 1986) 229–249. Also, as noted there, Isaiah 27 is a major source informing Paul's discussion of God's covenant and Israel in Romans 9–11.

¹⁸ Isaiah's attribution of the breaking of the primal covenant to mankind in general (cf. "they broke") is of interest for the debate over Rom 5:12d.

epochs. Narrowing the focus to 5:14b, Paul's reference there to Adam's transgression is also clarified by that same covenantal framework in Isa 24:5. It indicates that what is meant is not the bare notion of violation of a precept but more specifically Adam's breaking of the death-sanctioned covenant of creation. In an even closer parallel to the language of Rom 5:14b Isaiah's contemporary, Hosea, also makes explicit the covenantal context of Adam's act: "They like Adam have transgressed the covenant."¹⁹

A covenantal order that can be terminated by being broken is clearly not one for which a consummation of blessing is secured by the sovereign grace of God. It is a probationary covenant of works. Jeremiah contrasted the old covenant with the coming new covenant by characterizing the former as breakable: "which covenant of mine they broke" (Jer 31:32). The new covenant would be different. It would not be breakable, for Christ would be surety of its perfection. It would be a covenant of grace: "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (31:34). Paul expounded the same contrast: "Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. And by him all who believe are justified from all things, from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38-39). And in Rom 5:14b the apostle similarly distinguishes between two other covenants: the creation covenant with Adam, and the covenant order from Adam to Moses. The covenant of creation was breakable and had no provision of forgiveness. Transgression of its probationary stipulations would result in its termination and the infliction of its threatened curse. By describing those from Adam to Moses as not sinning after the similitude of Adam's transgression, Paul signified that they were under a different kind of covenant. They were not under works but under grace/promise, in a covenant where sins are treated differently—where they are forgiven. Romans 5:14b describes the blessed experience of those in a covenant where not the transgression of Adam but the righteousness of the coming One is imputed (cf. v. 13b). This covenantal contrast drawn in v. 14b confirms the conclusion that the design of the *terminus a quo*, "from Adam" (v. 14a), was to demarcate the gospel order of grace that obtained in the patriarchal/Abrahamic epoch, separating it from a preceding law order, the original covenant of works.

2. *Sin not imputed.* Romans 5:13b and 14b balance each other formally, standing either side of the main statement in v. 14a, and they parallel each other topically, both identifying the patriarchal community as under a covenant of grace. In each case the provisions of grace are contrasted with the arrangements in a covenant of works—that is, the creation covenant in v. 14b and the old covenant in v. 13b. Just as Adam's transgression in v. 14b is not merely violation of a commandment but the breaking of a covenant, so the law mentioned in v. 13b refers to a particular covenant, not to a set of commandments (whether those revealed

¹⁹ Hos 6:7, as preferably though disputedly rendered. It is noteworthy that Hosea's accusation is against those under the law.

through Moses, or through natural revelation, or ordinances given at creation or through Noah in Gen 9:1-7).

Law in v. 13b must be understood in the sense of the terminus indicator, "until the law," in v. 13a. It refers to the old covenant, the covenant that was not of faith but of works and yet did not abrogate the earlier promise covenant given to Abraham (Gal 3:10 ff.). More precisely, it would appear that because of his identification of the Mosaic law as a works covenant Paul uses *nomos* in v. 13b in the specific sense of works principle. To affirm the absence of law in that sense (*mē ontos nomou*, "apart from law" or "where law is not of force") is to state negatively²⁰ the presence of the opposite principle, the gospel principle of grace.²¹ In Romans Paul has previously stated the matter in this same way more than once.

In Romans 3 Paul proclaims a righteousness of God that is manifested "without the law" (v. 21, *chōris nomou*). Law here, as in 5:13, is not just commandments but a (covenant governed by a) juridical principle antithetical to the grace operating in the gospel. Justification under grace is by faith "without the works of the law" (v. 28, *chōris ergōn nomou*). In Romans 4, again contrasting the law order to one of grace, Paul says that the covenant blessing of justification and kingdom inheritance promised to Abraham was given "not through the law (*ou gar dia nomou*) but through the righteousness of faith" (vv. 13-14). Then, strikingly anticipating Rom 5:13b, he adds: "Where the law does not obtain (*ou de ouk estin nomos*) there is no transgression" (4:15b). The absence of law (works) means the presence of grace/promise/faith.

In the gospel context denoted by "apart from the law" in Rom 5:13b, the nonimputation (or accounting) of sin (*hamartia de ouk ellogētai*) surely means what it does elsewhere in Paul's teaching on the forgiveness aspect of justification.²² Romans 4 provides a parallel in the form of a quotation from the Psalms: "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (vv. 7-8; cf. Ps 32:1-2a).²³ Both the elements in Rom 5:13b, the denoting of grace as the absence of law and forgiveness as the nonimputation of sin, are thus explained by the immediately preceding chapter. Similarly in 2 Cor 5:19 Paul declares "that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." To be in Christ under

²⁰ This is a further point of parallelism between vv. 13b and 14b.

²¹ This absence of law cannot be explained as an absence of commandments given by special revelation in the patriarchal era. Genesis records stipulations in God's covenant revelation to Abraham (cf. 12:1; 17:1). Indeed, Abraham's obedience is described in Gen 26:5 as a keeping of God's charge, commandments, statutes, and laws, terms characteristic of the legislation revealed through Moses.

²² The fundamental conceptual correspondence is clear in spite of the distinctive verb, *ellogēō*, used in Rom 5:13b (elsewhere only in Phlm 18). The obvious ring of the Pauline doctrine of justification is caught by Murray, but he throws away the key with the curt comment that the provisions of justifying grace "are not in view in this verse" (*Romans*, 1. 189).

²³ The fact that Paul draws this beatitude of gospel forgiveness out of the religious heart of the revelation of the law illustrates again the two-level complexity of the old covenant mirrored in the Pauline theology.

the new covenant of the Spirit, life, and righteousness and not under the old covenant of the letter, death, and condemnation (cf. 2 Corinthians 3) is to be in the juridical sphere where law is not of force and sins are not charged to the account because Christ who knew no sin has been made to be sin for us and we have been made the righteousness of God in him (cf. 2 Cor 5:21).

Interpreted according to the analogy of Pauline expression, Rom 5:13b is found to parallel v. 14b in depicting the redemptive community in pre-Mosaic times as under grace, not under the principle of works that operated in the creation covenant with Adam and afterwards in the law covenant.

3. *Contrast, not continuum.* The prevalent interpretations understand the law referred to directly and indirectly in Rom 5:13–14 as commandments, not as a covenant governed by the works principle, and they define the sin mentioned in vv. 13b and 14b (if not in v. 13a) as individual violation of a particular known precept (or in some similarly qualified manner). Then v. 13b (if not a general axiom covering a situation where commandments are absent) means that judicial account was not taken of sin before the law of Moses. And to much the same effect is the statement in v. 14b about sin not being committed from Adam to Moses (with possible restriction of the predication to a certain part of mankind). But no combination of the options proves satisfactory. For one thing, almost all the proposals bring the passage into contradiction with Paul's teaching elsewhere or even make it inconsistent within itself.

Some, interpreting v. 12d as a declaration that all have individually sinned, take v. 13a as a specific application of that fact to the period up to the law (cf. also v. 14a) and vv. 13b and 14b as a denial of individual sin in that same period. Blatant contradiction is then apparent within the parenthesis itself between the assertion of individual sin in v. 13a (cf. v. 14a) and its denial in vv. 13b and 14b.

Others see another dimension of sin than individual transgression in v. 13a (or already in v. 12d). This different kind of sin may be defined in terms of the distinction between the imputed sin of Adam and individual sinning or of some dialectical pairing, whether nature/grace in traditional Catholic exegesis or fate/freedom in Kantian Protestant commentary. Since v. 13a affirms the presence of sin in one sense and v. 13b and/or v. 14b its absence in a different sense, contradiction is avoided at this point.

Both views involve another contradiction as well. The idea that judicial account was not taken of sins from Adam to the law (so vv. 13b and 14b on both views) conflicts not only with the statement in v. 14a that death reigned in this period²⁴ but also with Biblical teaching elsewhere that God does hold guilty and deal accordingly with those who sin individually apart from knowledge of the revelation of his commandments in the Mosaic law.²⁵ Paul himself earlier in this epistle insists that the Gentiles not

²⁴ On the second view this statement of v. 14a might be related not to individual sin but to sin in the sense of v. 13a, and then v. 14a would not be inconsistent with vv. 13b and 14b.

²⁵ This difficulty might be avoided by one who interpreted v. 14b in the restrictive sense.

only had a natural revelation of moral-spiritual requirements but knew the judgment of God that they were worthy of death for violation of those divinely sanctioned standards (Rom 1:32). He describes these Gentiles who have not the law (2:14) as sinning and perishing in that sin (2:12). Contrary to the interpretation of Rom 5:13, 14 being controverted here, Paul teaches emphatically in Romans itself that in the world at large before the law, as always, sins were registered in God's account books against the day of wrath.

Most commentators try to soften the contradictions entailed in their exegesis but can do so only by arbitrarily relativizing what vv. 13b and 14b affirm. Cranfield's treatment is fairly typical. He says v. 13b "must be understood in a relative sense. . . . In comparison with the state of affairs which has obtained since the advent of the law, sin may be said to have been, in the law's absence, 'not registered,' since it was not the fully apparent, sharply defined thing, which it became in its presence."²⁶ Such relativizing is in fact rewriting. Paul says that an age in which sin was not imputed and Adam-like transgressions were not committed gave way to the law era, in which sin definitely was imputed and Adam-like transgressions were committed. The relativizers change that into a statement that sin was imputed before the law and that Adam-like transgressions were committed, only not as much so as was the case under the law.

Moreover, the coming of the law actually did not effect the relative change suggested, certainly not for the world at large, which is the supposed subject in the parenthesis. For most of mankind sin was no more sharply defined after the law was given to Israel than before, since they had no knowledge of that revelation. The Gentiles continued to sin and perish "without the law," as Paul still describes them long after the law's advent (Rom 2:12-14). The relativizers subtly shift the contrast stated in the text between an earlier and later phase in the history of one group into a comparison of the situations of two (in part contemporary) groups: Gentiles before and after the law, and Israel under the law.²⁷ Had this been Paul's intention, would he not speak of the world "without the law" rather than "until the law" or "from Adam to Moses"? We thus are brought back to the key exegetical point mentioned at the outset: Prevalent views of the parenthesis fail to account for the limits Paul sets on his proof case. The Moses/law terminus establishes a radical contrast between the law order and the one that preceded it. The commentators change the apostle's contrast into a continuum.

The tradition of Reformed exegesis represented by Murray incurs the same criticisms. Murray does avoid the contradictions that embarrass the others.²⁸ His interpretation of v. 14 is that death reigned until Moses even

²⁶ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1980), 1. 282.

²⁷ Cf. the comment of J. D. G. Dunn on v. 14b: "The inference here . . . is that 'transgression' is something of which Israel in particular is guilty, since Israel in particular has the law." *Romans 1-8* (WBC 38A; Dallas: Word, 1988) 276.

²⁸ Two contributing exegetical factors are his interpretation of v. 13b as a general axiom, not an empirical situation, and his view of v. 14b as restrictive.

over the likes of infants and imbeciles²⁹ who could not be held liable for violating expressly revealed, known law, as did Adam. This interpretation, however, is no more successful than the others in accounting for the particular segment of history selected, for the death of infants and imbeciles is not peculiar to the period before the law. Aware of the problem, Murray can only suggest that the Adam-to-Moses period furnishes a "better example," while the period after Moses, with its abundant revelation of law, did not provide "as suitable an example."³⁰ Like the others he slips into the errors of relativizing the contrast and not taking its sequential nature seriously.

Necessary to make sense of Rom 5:13-14 (and thus taught there by clear implication) is the presence of the works principle in the law covenant in contrast to the covenants that preceded and followed it. The rather bizarre explanation of v. 14b that the Murray tradition finds itself forced into should trigger reappraisals of its rejection of this view of the law and prompt a return to the classic covenantal analysis of the law-gospel contrast mandated by Rom 5:13-14.

Corroborating that classic position and brightly illuminating 5:13-14 is the remarkably similar passage in 7:7-12. Here once more there is redemptive-historical structuring, and again the specific sequence is pre-law and law covenants. Echoing and explaining 5:13b is the narrative³¹ description given in 7:8b, 9a of the patriarchal/Abrahamic covenantal epoch: "For apart from the law sin was dead. And I was alive apart from the law once." And the change effected by the Mosaic law, which is implicit in the terminus formulae in 5:13a and 14a, is powerfully reasserted in 7:9b, now explicitly: "When the commandment came, sin revived and I died." According to Rom 7:8-9 the difference between the Abrahamic covenant and the law is emphatically not relative but radical. It is the difference between life and death.³² Together, Rom 5:13-14 and 7:7-12 spotlight the Scriptures' insistence that between the law and the covenants on either side of it there is contrast, not continuum.

IV. THE POINT OF THE PARENTHESIS

We may now address the opening statement in the parenthesis. Dealing with the pre-law situation, Rom 5:13a says the reign of sin (and death, cf. v. 14a) extended to all. The phrase *en kosmō* indicates the universal extent

²⁹ Though uncertainly considering the inclusion of those in general "outside the pale of special revelation," he apparently falls in with the strained but customary suggestion of those in his tradition.

³⁰ Murray, *Romans*, 1. 190-191.

³¹ Distinctive in Rom 7:7-12 is the personification of the covenant community in autobiographical style. S. Westerholm (*Israel's Law and the Church's Faith* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988] 181, cf. 58 ff.) is not successful in refuting the essential case made for this exegesis by D. J. Moo ("Israel and Paul in Romans 7:7-12," *NTS* 32 [1986] 122-135). His criticism is effective, however, against Moo's relativizing of the radical life-death antithesis expressed in this passage, an error that results from his failure to do full justice to the works principle in the law.

³² This same absolute contrast confronted Israel in the dual sanctions of the law covenant: "See, I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil" (Deut 30:15).

of sin, not merely its location. "In the world" resumes "all sinned" in v. 12d and is equivalent to "in all the world."³³ At the same time the terminus formula, "until the law," in v. 13a anticipates the special focus on the covenant people found in vv. 13b–14. Far from excluding the community of redemptive covenant, the declaration of the sway of sin/death has it especially in mind.

What v. 13a affirms (and v. 14a essentially repeats) is that the reign of sin/death (attributable to the transgression of the one man Adam, v. 12d) was experienced in the temporal existence even of those in the covenant community from Adam to Moses who by faith had promise of the eschatological triumph of righteousness and life, secured through the obedience of the one man, Christ Jesus (vv. 18–19). The purpose of the parenthesis is to underscore that point.

This is missed in the prevalent views inasmuch as they perceive the subject as the world in general rather than the covenant community. Reformed exegetes who (properly) interpret v. 12d in terms of Adam's federal headship tend to see the parenthesis as designed to prove that the involvement of all in sin and death was indeed via original sin. Allegedly Paul argues that since (relatively speaking) sins were not of the individual kind until the law, the sin that was in the world before that (v. 13a) and accounted for death's universal sway (v. 14a) must be the original sin mentioned in v. 12d.³⁴ Those who think v. 12d refers to individual sinning and see vv. 13–14 as stressing the fact that all sin and die are formally closer to the truth on the point of the parenthesis, for in vv. 13–14 Paul is not trying to prove what he said in v. 12d about the mode of the entrance of sin/death into the world. Rather, assuming the validity of that, he simply reaffirms the fact that sin/death was present—with a particular concern, however, to insist that this was the case in the experience of those in the covenant of redemptive grace. The pre-law period is selected as representative of them because covenant administration in that epoch clearly exemplified the principle of justifying grace (vv. 13b and 14b), whereas with the coming of the law the situation was complicated by the introduction of the principle of works into the covenant at the level of the typological kingdom, as reflected in Paul's identification of law as antithetical to grace/promise/faith.

The point made in the parenthesis serves the ultimate purpose of Romans 5: the exalting of the accomplishment of Jesus Christ. The reign of sin/death over the people Christ comes to redeem is an index of the magnitude of the Savior's task and the victory of grace that he won.

By the identification of Adam as a figure of the coming Messiah in v. 14c, what the parenthesis has said about the bondage of the covenant people to sin/death is related to the soteric mission of Jesus (vv. 15–21).³⁵ In this transition (v. 14c) Paul returns to where he was at the end of v. 12:

³³ Cf. e.g. 1 Cor 4:9; 1 Tim 3:16; Rom 11:12.

³⁴ This is the approach, *mutatis mutandis*, of others who see v. 12d as presenting a corporate or noumenal concept of sin/death.

³⁵ As noted by my colleague, T. David Gordon, the identification of Adam as a federal representative like Christ in v. 14c confirms the interpretation of Adam's transgression in v. 14b as his failure in that capacity in the primal probationary covenant.

to the federal headship of Adam and the judgment of condemnation and death brought by his probationary failure upon all, including those who would come to know the redemption of God. Then the apostle proceeds to expound the federal headship of the second Adam and the abounding of the grace of Christ to his perishing people in the gift of righteousness and life.