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The Law in James

M. J. Evans

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For James, the law was not a major issue. He does refer to the law on three separate occasions (1:25; 2:8-13; 4:11-12), but in each of these instances he is not asking questions about the law itself but rather assuming its validity and using it to develop or illustrate the particular point he is making. It is perhaps because of this that most studies of the law in James seem to have some other issue as their primary interest, as for example Seitz, whose main purpose is to see how James's use of the law affects the authorship question.¹ It is interesting that the freedom with which James refers to the law accompanied by his lack of emphasis on it, illustrated by the fact that even in his discussion of the relation between faith and works in 2:14ff James does not mention the law, has led some to assume that James must have been written before Paul wrote and the question of the law became such a hot issue, whereas others are convinced by the same evidence that James is a much later document, written long after the controversy had died down.²

Given that the law is by no means the, or even a central theme in James's letter, certain questions are nevertheless raised by the way he uses the term and in this paper I would like to discuss three of these questions. First, what does James refer to when he speaks of the law? Secondly, what function does he ascribe to the law—can James in any sense be said to state that the law saves? And thirdly, what attitude or response does James call for from his readers towards the law?

It has been suggested that the meaning of the law in James is directly related to the question of date and authorship and that as we cannot be certain about these it is difficult to be clear about the law.³ However, although the meaning of law in James has often been a key factor in the discussion of authorship, in practice the reverse is not so. Thus, for example, while a comparison between the attitude to the law in James and that of James of Jerusalem as described in Acts has led to conclusions being drawn about the authorship of James, the Acts material is not normally used to elucidate James's terminology. There are many reasons arising out of the letter why we might find difficulty in ascertaining precisely what James does mean by law, but the authorship issue, as such, has not been shown to be particularly relevant and we will leave it aside here.⁴

One factor that is very relevant is the nature of James as a practical

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letter rather than as a theological treatise. This is not to suggest that James has no interest at all in doctrine⁵ but that, as Dibelius puts it, 'his religiosity is consistently orientated towards

¹ O. J. F. Seitz, 'James and the Law' *Studia Evangelica II* TU 87 472-486.

² J. Adamson, *The Epistle of James* NICNT (Grand Rapids 1976) takes the former view and M. Dibelius/H. Greeven, *James Hermeneia* (Philadelphia 1976) the latter.

³ W. Gutbrod, *νομος* TDNT IV 1080.

⁴ A full discussion of the authorship question can be found in Dibelius/Greeven, *James* 11-21 or D. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (London 1970) 736-758.

⁵ C. E. B. Cranfield in 'The Message of James' *SJT* 18 (1965) 184-186 discusses the interest James has in doctrine; cf E. Thurneysen, *Der Brief des Jakobus* 5.

the practical'.⁶ He is first and foremost concerned with the behaviour of Christians in specific situations. This means that while we can helpfully use the overall context of the letter to gain insight into the way James is using terms, it is unnecessary and illegitimate to assume that he is using them as technical or precise doctrinal formulations. His approach is intuitive rather than scientific and it would be wrong, therefore, necessarily to expect James to retain exactly the same connotations of meaning every time he uses a term—particularly a term like law—and wrong to describe him as inconsistent if he does not do so.

If James is to be seen as primarily a practitioner rather than a theologian—and Eckart suggests that this view has become universally accepted⁷—then it is at the least unlikely that a detailed study of the precise background of a term like 'law of liberty' and its use in, for example, Hellenistic literature—however interesting such a study might be—is going to be of much help in our investigation of James's understanding of law.⁸ It is much more likely that James has simply taken over the term and is using it in a non-technical way. In fact it is probably the lack of precision in James's use of words that has led to the multiplicity of suggestions as to exactly what he does mean by law.

Does this mean that we are prevented from coming to any conclusions about James's meaning? Not at all. As we shall see, there are certain clear indications as to the way he was thinking, and there is much we can say about his use of the law. However, it does mean that we must beware of searching for a technical definition, and be aware that certain questions which we might want to ask will not necessarily be answered by James, and accept that certain issues might therefore have to be left open.

Before we look in more detail at the various suggestions which have been made as to what James is referring to when he speaks of the law, let us consider briefly the context of the three occasions when he does so. The first is in 1:25, where James is illustrating and supporting his injunction given in vv 21-22 that his readers should 'receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word and not hearers only.' The non-doing hearer is compared to one looking at himself in the mirror and at once going away and forgetting—the implication being that this is not a situation to be emulated. The doer, on the other hand, apparently defined as the one who 'looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres', shall be blessed. There is no consensus as to the precise significance of the details of the illustration. What, for example, does the mirror symbolize, and do we have a quick glance in the mirror and a long consideration of the law, as most scholars would suppose,⁹ or a long and careful observation in the

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mirror and a quick glance at the law, as Laws suggests?¹⁰ However, the point of the illustration in backing up the command to be doers of the word is quite clear.

What clues, then, do we find in this passage as to James's understanding of the law and his attitude to it? First, he describes it as 'perfect', and as 'the law of liberty'. Even though we ought not to assume that these are technical terms, there is clearly some significance here. For James, the law is obviously something that is intrinsically good, and something which might

⁶ Dibelius/Greeven, *James* 25.

⁷ v K-G. Eckart, 'Zur Terminologie des Jakobusbriefes' *Th.LitZeit* 89 (1964) 522.

⁸ Dibelius has a full discussion of the background to this term. *James* 116-120.

⁹ e.g. Adamson, *James*; Dibelius/Greeven, *James*; C. L. Mitton, *The Epistle of James* (London 1966).

¹⁰ S. Laws, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James* (London 1980).

be expected to bring freedom rather than bondage. Secondly, James is calling for a response to this perfect law of liberty. It is something to be obeyed and followed rather than just looked at in the abstract. Thirdly, there is, if not an identification, certainly a close connection in James's mind between the gospel, 'the implanted word which is able to save your souls' and the law, so that to be a 'doer of the word', and a 'doer of the law' (James 4:11) is one and the same thing. Fourthly, though the content of the law is not restricted to this, vv 26-27 indicate that at least included in being a 'doer' is the bridling of the tongue, visiting orphans and widows, and keeping oneself unstained from the world.

The second passage with which we have to deal is 2:8-13. It is clear that the main point of discussion here is that of partiality. James is not interested in the issue of keeping the law as such, but, again, is simply using it to illustrate his main point. In vv 8-9 James takes for granted the fact that they will want to keep 'the royal law', and uses this as further support for his instructions regarding 'showing partiality'. To show partiality is to sin; apparently to sin against this law. Whether by βασιλικος James is intending to indicate that the law of which he speaks is the supreme law, or the law from the king, or the law of the kingdom, is not absolutely clear.¹¹ It is possible that in some senses he had all three ideas in mind—again it is unnecessary and perhaps unhelpful to look for precision in definition. In any case, though the use of this word does indicate the respect in which James held the law, it does not of itself give us any more information about the content of the law than we gain from the passage as a whole.

Verses 10-11 move away from the main point to a discussion of the unity of the law. Whatever the law consists of—and we learn here that the commandments against committing adultery and against killing are certainly included, otherwise the point of the illustration is lost—it must be seen as a whole. There is no question of one requirement being more important than another. To sin in any way is to be convicted by the law as a transgressor. (Note the 'in passing' reference to the function of the law in convicting of sin.) In context, perhaps, James simply wants to emphasize that showing partiality is as much sin as committing adultery or killing, offences which were probably chosen as being accepted without question as being 'out' for the Christian. It is possible that they are

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examples of laws known to have been endorsed by Jesus, but it seems more likely that they would be more immediately recognized as part of the Decalogue, and thus that James is including the whole of the Decalogue in his concept of the law.

What, then, is the relationship between the 'royal law' of v 8 and the 'whole law' in v 10? Is James deliberately contrasting the two so that there is an abrupt change of meaning from the single royal commandment, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' to the whole law consisting of all the commandments, or is there an identification between the two terms? As we have pointed out it would be quite possible in this kind of writing for James to use the term 'law' in different ways, but it does seem unlikely that he would do so in the context of a single short passage. Does this mean, then, that both terms refer to the single commandment which is seen as a summing up of the whole law, or that both terms refer to the law as a whole with the single commandment simply a chosen example from it? Mainly because ἐντολη rather than the νομος we find here would normally be the term used to refer to a single commandment, Ropes takes the latter view seeing the 'royal law' as describing 'the law as a

¹¹ Adamson, *James* 114-115, discusses fully the various options relating to the meaning of 'royal law'.

whole of which the following precept is a part',¹² so that all the way through James is speaking of the whole law. However it is also possible to argue, as Gutbrod and Laws do, that the 'whole law' in v 10 still refers to the commandment to love one's neighbour; the point being that to keep this law of love does involve keeping the whole law, including the commandments mentioned in v 11 and the commandment against partiality.¹³ The use of *νομος* in this instance would be justified by the breadth of the commandment involved.

In fact, there is not a lot of difference in the end between these two positions. Ropes goes on to state that it is implied that the perfect observance of the precept to love one's neighbour would in fact cover the observance of the whole law,¹⁴ and Laws notes that 'certainly Leviticus 19:18 is not for James everything that he means by law'.¹⁵ Clearly, James is aware, as v 11 shows, of individual commandments, but he does seem to indicate that these can be subsumed under the single commandment to love one's neighbour. In any case, James is expecting obedience to the individual commandments, whether these are seen as part of or in addition to the law of love.

In v 12 James again uses the phrase 'the law of liberty'. 'So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.' Whether or not this also refers to the law of love is not absolutely clear, although there does seem to be a link with the law which convicts, described in v 9. However, it certainly seems as if James is deliberately using the term 'law of liberty' here to distinguish it from any other kind of law, suggesting that he was aware of another law than the one of which he was writing.

The third passage in which James mentions the law is 4:11-12, this time in the context of providing support for the injunction not to speak

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evil against one another. To slander or to judge a brother is in effect to do so against the law and this involves changing one's role from being a doer of the law to being a judge, thus usurping a position that rightly belongs only to God. It is taken for granted here, as previously, that there will be immediate recognition on the part of James's readers that the law is to be obeyed, and that to speak evil against the law is obviously to be considered as very wrong. Thus on each of the three occasions where James mentions law, his attitude to the law of which he speaks is positive: the law for James is something good. The main clue in this passage as to the content of the law is the question at the end of v 12, 'Who are you that you judge your neighbour?'. This does, as Laws points out, indicate that a reference to the previously mentioned law of love from Leviticus 19:18 is intended here. To harshly criticize or to slander one's brother is to break the law which commands the love of one's neighbour. 'This in turn must be seen as implicitly taking up a critical attitude towards the law itself, for not to keep it is to judge it to be invalid or unnecessary.'¹⁶

Having considered briefly the passages where James brings the law into his argument, it is helpful also for our purposes to note what is not there. We have already mentioned the fact that James does not introduce the law into his discussion of the relationship between faith and works. It should also be pointed out that there is no reference at all in James to ritual or

¹² J. H. Ropes, *Epistle of St. James* ICC (Edinburgh 1916) 198; cf Cranfield, *art. cit.* 192.

¹³ Gutbrod, *TDNT* IV 1081: Laws, *James* 108.

¹⁴ Ropes, *James* 198.

¹⁵ Laws, *James* 108.

¹⁶ *ibid* 187.

ceremonial law. This of course tells us nothing of James's attitude towards ceremonial, but it does indicate that such concepts were certainly not at the forefront of James's mind when he thought of the 'perfect law of liberty'.

We are now in a position to discuss the various suggestions that have been put forward regarding the content that should be assigned to the law as described by James.

Gutbrod argues that, particularly in 4:11-12, νόμος is the will of God valid only for the individual. Another cannot know this offhand, for this will of God will not let itself be enclosed in specific unequivocal forms and actions.¹⁷ That is, the law requires love, but this is not a matter of absolute, external commands of any kind; it is, rather, dependent on man's individual and internal response. Thus, no one can judge whether or not another has obeyed the law because one cannot say in advance what obedience to the Law might entail for another individual. This view is taken up by Via, and to some extent by Goguel,¹⁸ but there are certain points which render it inadequate as an explanation of James's understanding of law. First, in 4:11 James seems to be speaking primarily against any who would harshly criticize or falsely accuse their brothers, rather than categorically stating that it is impossible ever to make any assessment as to whether or not a particular brother has kept a particular law, and wrong to attempt such an assessment. Secondly, and more importantly, James does call for obedience to specific commandments,

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as in chap. 2 where partiality is prohibited. To state that this simply means that certain things, such as adultery, or murder, or partiality are always going to be against the law of love is in effect to reintroduce the concept of external, specific demands.

At the other extreme from this position are those who see James's understanding of the law as based totally on the Old Testament, or at least as reflecting the views of Jewish scholars of his time: νόμος for James is then equivalent to Torah. So Ammassari, who says, 'It is evident that the content of the "law of liberty" is still the traditional content of the Torah as understood at the time of the Second Temple'—that is, the law of the Old Testament with perhaps some modifications.¹⁹ The problem, here, is that James does seem (particularly in 2:12), to be introducing some idea of contrast between the law of which he speaks and the law as it might be understood elsewhere. It is surely also significant that, when he speaks of the law, James always includes some adjective so that we have the perfect law, or the royal law, or the law of liberty. Gutbrod certainly sees these adjectives as 'designed to protect the term against the misunderstanding that the commandment of the Old Testament law is meant',²⁰ and Via goes further, suggesting that James seems to 'insist that he does not mean the law of Moses'.²¹ It may be that the references to the law in James are of the kind that make the word 'insist' perhaps a little strong, but nevertheless one would want to agree that the law for James is something other than the Old Testament law as a whole.

Having rejected the view that the law for James has no specific or identifiable content, and the view that it is the law of the Old Testament as it stands, where do we go next? There appear to

¹⁷ Gutbrod, *TDNT* IV 1082.

¹⁸ D. O. Via, 'The Right Strawy Epistle Reconsidered: A Study in Biblical Ethics and Hermeneutic' *J of R* 49 (1969) 253-267; M. Goguel, *The Primitive Church* (London 1964) 490-493.

¹⁹ A. Ammassari, 'Towards a Law of Liberty: The Epistle of James' *SIDIC* 10 (1977) 24.

²⁰ Gutbrod, *TDNT* IV 1081.

²¹ Via, *op.cit.* 260; cf Goguel *op.cit.* 490, 492.

be at least five distinct possibilities related to a greater or lesser extent to either the Old Testament, or the teaching of Jesus, or a combination of the two.

The first possibility is that by law James means not the Old Testament law as a whole but simply certain sections of it, in particular the Decalogue plus some or all of the other ethical precepts. This position is put forward by both Seitz and Laws.²² The main argument is that in calling for right behaviour from his readers James concentrates entirely on ethical demands to the total exclusion of ritual and ceremonial and that these ethical demands are drawn from the Old Testament law. Certainly James quotes from the Decalogue and indicates that he expects it to be obeyed; he also quotes Leviticus 19:18 and almost certainly refers to the injunction against partiality in Leviticus 19:15. Laws notes that both the Decalogue and the 'holiness code' of which Leviticus 19 is a part are sanctioned by Jesus and also affirmed by Paul who, as she says, 'of course rejected the imposing of the whole law upon all Christians'.²³ It is perhaps debatable whether James refers to these verses as part of Old Testament scripture or because they also form part of the teaching of Jesus but it does seem clear that adherence to at least this section of the

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Old Testament law was something that James expected from his readers, and that, whatever else is involved, when James mentions law he does have in mind some of the Old Testament commandments. Law, for James, is not to be identified with the Old Testament law; nor is it to be totally separated from it.

A second possibility, put forward by Knowling, is that not only in 2:8-13 but every time he mentions law, James is thinking simply of the law of love from Leviticus 19:18 which he identifies as the law of liberty. 'This Law is "perfect", not only because it may be contrasted with the burden and yoke of the Law in its Pharisaic observance, but because it completes and realises the object and meaning of the Mosaic law... because it sums up all the commandments in the one command and principle of love.'²⁴ It is quite possible that all that James means by 'law', whether it is based on the Old Testament or on the teaching of Jesus, can be, as Davies puts it, 'subsumed under a single principle, the law of love'. But in one sense this only moves the problem one stage back. It is apparent that, for James, love of one's neighbour is something very concrete, bringing with it very practical obligations, and one is left with the question of what, for James, is actually involved in keeping the law of love. However it is true that to take this approach would explain why the ritual and ceremonial obligations of the Old Testament law seem to be of no interest to James, since they can be seen as unrelated to the principle of loving one's neighbour.

The third possibility, already hinted at, is that law for James consists entirely of the teachings laid down by Jesus. Two distinct approaches can be found here. There are those who would concentrate on the fact that there were Christian communities from the second century on, communities which originated from within Diaspora Judaism and for whom Christianity seems to have been primarily accepted as a new law (cf Barnabas 2:6 'the new law of our Lord Jesus Christ which is without the yoke of necessity'). Dibelius, for example, assumes that James originated in this kind of community and states, 'this type of literature is only pos-

²² Seitz, 'James and the Law'; Laws, *James* 23.

²³ Laws, *James* 114.

²⁴ R. J. Knowling, *The Epistle of James* Westminster Commentaries (London 1904) 33.

sible if in these circles, Christianity is understood as a new law'.²⁵ Similarly, Davies states that for Hellenistic Jews, 'The acceptance of Jesus as Messiah would have involved no rejection of law, but merely the substitution of the New Law of the Messiah for the old.'²⁶ James, in speaking of the law, would then be simply reflecting the well-understood ideas of his community and his readers would take it for granted that it was the new law of Christianity specified in the teachings of Jesus, of which he spoke. The problem here is that there is, as Seitz points out, no sign in the epistle that James is speaking of the 'new law of our Lord Jesus Christ' in the way that Barnabas does. However, it is possible, without making assumptions about the background of James, to note the way in which James does reflect the teaching of Jesus.

Dauids lists the many parallels with the Sermon on the Mount in

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Matthew and the Sermon on the Plain in Luke and concludes that, 'The lack of verbal parallels and the combined similarity to both Matthew and Luke point to James having used the unwritten Jesus tradition freely.' He suggests that, therefore, James may well, in itself, be evidence for Jesus' words being accepted as law. 'For James it is... the words of Jesus himself which form the new law and whose persuasive influence underlies the whole of his teaching.'²⁷ Certainly the examples and illustrations which James gives to show the application of the law can almost without exception, be traced back to the teaching of Jesus as recorded in the gospels.

Related to the above position, but slightly different from it, is Adamson's suggestion that what James is referring to is in fact the fulfilled law as personified by Jesus. The Jews, while holding to the Torah as unchangeable, had looked for a new interpretation of the law. Adamson states that 'Jesus in his life and death had realized the ideal to which the law had long looked forward—an ideal of righteousness and love—and had established the meaning of the perfect law. Clearly that is what James had in mind when he speaks of the "perfect law of liberty" ...Jesus is the promised Messiah, the giver of the promised perfect law to Israel, and his teaching is the ethic to match that law.'²⁸ One would have to agree that 'our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory', is for James the ideal, the perfect keeper of the law, and the link we find in chap. 1 between the perfect law which is to be 'looked into', and the 'implanted word which is able to save your souls' makes it a possibility that James viewed the law as a kind of 'Messianic Torah' personified by Jesus. But while this may be the background to James's understanding of the law, the very practical approach that we find within the epistle itself, linking obedience to the law with certain specific injunctions, is an indication that this kind of theological understanding of law was not the immediate application that James had in mind.

The fifth possible understanding of law in James is that put forward by Ropes, who sees the law as a combination of the Old Testament and the gospel. He identifies the 'perfect law' with the 'implanted word' and describes it as the sum of the present knowledge of God's will. He states, 'It is inwrought into a man's nature and speaks from within, but this does not exclude

²⁵ Dibelius/Greeven, *James* 119; cf R. M. Grant, 'The Decalogue in Early Christianity' *Harv Th Rev* 40 (1947) 7-8.

²⁶ W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge 1964) 405.

²⁷ P. H. Davids, *The Epistle of James*, New International Greek Testament Commentary, (Exeter, Grand Rapids 1982) 47-50.

²⁸ Adamson, *James* 34.

that it should also exist for man's use in written or traditional form whether in the law of Moses or in the precepts of Jesus.' He goes on to say, 'To a Christian the "perfect law of liberty" would include both the Old Testament (parts of it being spiritually interpreted) and the precepts and truths of the gospel.'²⁹ It is difficult to understand exactly what he means by 'spiritually interpreted' in terms of law, and equally difficult to see where in James he finds evidence for that, but the overall thesis is clear. The law consists of a combination of the teaching of Jesus with parts of the Old Testament law.

It is a distinct possibility that the very variety of suggestions made is a

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reflection of the fact that James's approach is practical and intuitive rather than theologically precise. It is apparent that James does see the law as involving certain specific requirements—notably obedience to the Decalogue and a practical expression of social concern—but though the central core of those requirements is quite clear, maybe their exact extent was not fully defined even in James's mind. James's approach seems to have much in common with that of the average keen Christian in the church today who has an instinctive, Spirit-given feel for what behaviour is required of him—in other words, that which is in accordance with the law for Christians and that which is not—but yet would not be able to express this in a well-defined way.

To suggest that the law in James is not well-defined is by no means to assume that he has nothing to say. We should, perhaps, be satisfied to accept the intuitive approach and simply note that James picks up both Old Testament ideas and the teaching of Jesus. Ropes's description of the law as 'the sum of the present knowledge of God's will', or Dibelius' phrase, 'the norm of Christian piety',³⁰ are probably enough for us to appreciate the uses James makes of the law.

If, then, the law for James is basically the delineation of behaviour expected or required from Christians, what function does James envisage the law as having? We should again stress here that we do not have in James a theological exposition of what exactly the law does or is in relation to the individual believer, or of why it should do or be so. Nowhere in James is the law the central focus of James's argument. It is simply part of the background of ideas which he takes for granted. Thus, references to the function of the law are also only 'in passing' and are certainly not formulated with precision. Nevertheless, taking that into account, what hints do we have as to the way in which James understood the law to work?

In 1:25 we find that the law, if it is both 'looked into' and 'acted upon' brings blessing, though clearly the blessing is related in this instance as much if not more to the actions of the doer than to the law itself. In 2:9 the law is described as convicting as a transgressor the one who commits sin, and it is just possible that in 2:12, where we have 'so speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty', the law is seen as in some sense the instrument of judgment, though 4:12 with 'there is one lawgiver and one judge', makes it abundantly clear that James is well aware that it is God and not the law itself that does the judging. Similarly in the 2:9 reference it is unnecessary to assume that James is envisaging the

²⁹ Ropes, *James* 173, 178.

³⁰ Dibelius/Greeven, *James* 116.

law itself as the judge, but, rather, as Mitton suggests, the law is being spoken of as a witness, 'exposing the guilt of the accused'.³¹

The law, then, stands as a list of commandments to which obedience is expected and as a witness against those who break these commandments and thus come under God's judgment. But does the fact that obedience to the law is expected mean that James is envisaging the law itself as

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salvific? Is there any indication that James sees obedience to the law—being a 'doer'—as a prerequisite for salvation? Goguel considers that there is, that James is in fact the first explicit evidence for the gospel itself being seen as a new law, a law through which men can be saved. He takes the identification which James seems to present between the word that saves (1:21) and the perfect law of liberty, and assumes that this means that the law enables man to obtain salvation; though he does acknowledge that built into this concept of the engrafted word is the idea of man also being given the strength to carry through the necessary programme of obedience. 'James's thought is therefore that man is saved by a law, which reveals to him what he must do and makes him fit to accomplish it.'³² However, Via considers that in adding this rider, Goguel is simply softening the blow. 'However much the law may empower man to perform it, in this kind of position, man's works are still a condition for salvation.'³³

Via himself has no doubt that James thinks of salvation as coming through the law. James affirms the law as a guide to Christian living and in doing so he demonstrates that it is not possible to do this and escape legalism. James's law is not the law of Moses, but it is still law and the works which James presents as being necessary for salvation (2:14-17, 21, 24-25) are works performed in obedience to the law. So Via states, 'The law, then, for James, demands works as a condition for salvation and offers itself as a means of self-salvation, a means of securing oneself.' The conclusion that works of the law are a prerequisite of, a condition for, salvation is reached from an examination of the works-faith argument in 2:14ff where we are told that Abraham was justified by works, that 'faith was active along with his works and faith was completed by works', and that 'a man is justified by works and not by faith alone'.

However, if justification is being seen here, not in the forensic sense at all, but in the sense of enabling salvation to be recognized and demonstrated, then the argument falls down. Works of the law would then be seen as following on from, rather than causing salvation. It is interesting that the argument from 1:21-25 is not introduced, where the word is explicitly stated to save, and the law is identified with this saving word. On the contrary, it is fully recognized that a word which is said to be 'implanted', cannot be spoken of as a means of self-salvation. Via in fact sees an irreconcilable contrast between 1:18-24 where 'doing' the word is clearly in response to what God has already done in man, and 2:14ff. He therefore presupposes a different author. So 'James himself sees grace to be less fully realized than does 1:18-24 and that text understands grace to be radical and unconditional in a way that James does not. And James in his failure to break through with legalism does not grasp the wholeness of man which we find in Paul and which was retained in James 1:18-24.'

³¹ Mitton, op.cit. 92.

³² Goguel, *Primitive Church* 493.

³³ Via, art.cit. 266.

However, as it is unnecessary to see 2:14ff as suggesting works of the law as a condition for salvation, it is equally unnecessary to see a contrast

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between this passage and 1:18-24. Rather, one can use these verses to elucidate James's whole understanding of the law in relation to salvation. That is, throughout the epistle he is assuming that obedience to the law must follow on from salvation but does not give rise to that salvation, which is God's gracious gift.

James does assume the validity and the value of the law. He is arguing against antinomianism and for the recognition that right behaviour, which he expresses in terms of obedience to the law, is an essential part of Christian life and experience; but he is not a legalist. There is a full recognition of man's dependence on God; salvation and regeneration come not through the law, but through God's action and his implanted word (1:18, 21), and, as 4:6 makes clear, it is by God's grace that man is enabled to keep the law.³⁴

The attitude which James expects from his readers towards the law is one of respect and obedience. However, one should note that this obedience is not so much in response to the law itself ('the law is here, the law is good, therefore you must obey it') but rather in response to their salvation. If you have received the implanted word, if your souls have been saved (1:21), if you are religious (1:26), if you have faith (2:14) then you will behave in a way pleasing to God, that is, keep the law. As pleasing God is precisely what, as a Christian, you will want to do, the law is rightly described as a 'law of liberty'.

In summary, then, the law in James is not undefined or abstract; it consists of specific and identifiable requirements. Some of these requirements and their implications in terms of behaviour in different situations are found as examples within the epistle. It is also true to say that the law in James is not well-defined. That is, though we can see that law for James is something other than the Mosaic law as such, that it nevertheless does have certain links with the Old Testament, and that it is also related to the teaching of Jesus, we are not given enough information to ascertain its exact limits. However, a certain amount of unclarity in terms of limits should not be allowed to detract from the clarity of the central core of the content of the law, or the emphasis placed by James on the necessity for the law to be kept.

The law itself does not bring salvation, nor is obedience to the law a condition of salvation; rather it is an accompaniment of and a response to salvation. James then, is neither a legalist nor an antinomian. Perhaps one could say that he presents in his epistle just the right balance between a concern for right behaviour and a dependence on God for salvation that one would want to see reflected in the teaching of the churches today.

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Prepared for the Web in October 2007 by Robert I. Bradshaw.

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³⁴ Davids, *op.cit.* 50.