

## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary New Testament scholarship reflects the current trend in literary criticism to see works as 'integrated wholes', and the body of a writer's work as 'a totality proceeding from a single mind'.<sup>1</sup> Redaction-critical studies in particular have therefore focused attention as never before on the theological perspectives of the New Testament writers themselves, in an attempt to understand how these may have shaped their writings. As a result, there is a growing appreciation of the importance of understanding the individual writers' thought, and a renewed interest in comparing their viewpoints.

The writings of Matthew<sup>2</sup> and Paul are of special interest in this regard, because of the different positions they seem to take with respect to the Jewish law – a matter that would appear to have far-reaching implications not only for their own views of the Christian life (and those of the communities they represent), but also for Christian theology and ethics more generally. These two writers therefore provide a useful point of focus for the larger question of unity and diversity in the New Testament as a whole.

This particular study is an attempt to compare the two writers' views on ethics. Its concern is not so much with the specific content of their moral teachings (though that inevitably enters in), as with the overall structure of their ethical thought. The aim is to analyse the most important factors underlying their ethics, to see how these basic elements relate to one another and to their theological views more generally, and then to compare their perspectives.

Special attention is given to the motivation of ethics, for here we expect to find important clues to their understanding of the relationship between theology and ethics. Though rarely exploited, motivational considerations represent a crucial point of interaction between belief and behaviour, and thus provide a useful point of entry into the writers' thinking.

The chapters are therefore structured around five topics of major importance to the motivation of ethics in their writings: law, reward and punishment, relationship to Christ and the role of grace, love, and inner

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forces. Under each of these heads we examine first Matthew, then Paul, and then essay a comparison of their thought. A brief concluding chapter attempts to synthesize the results, highlight the chief conclusions, and identify the key factors underlying their differences.

The study centres on an analysis of the text itself. Accordingly, and to avoid interruption in the flow of the argument, most of the critical interaction with New Testament scholarship is relegated to the notes. In addition, it should be noted that the investigation covers the whole of the text, and not merely the so-called 'ethical sections';<sup>3</sup> implicit as well as explicit elements must be taken into account if one is to gain a truly comprehensive understanding of the writers' thought.

### *Presuppositions*

The following are major assumptions and critical judgements underlying this study.

#### 1. Matthew

(1) Concerning Matthew's written sources, Mark is regarded as the only identifiable source upon which we may safely rely. In spite of its traditional acceptance, no assumptions are made about the author's use of a hypothetical Q document;<sup>4</sup> accordingly, consideration of Luke is left largely to the side.<sup>5</sup> Matthew's attitude toward Mark appears to be one of respect generally, though he clearly regards it as inadequate in certain respects, and feels the freedom to alter it according to his own understanding.

(2) The analysis is to a certain extent not dependent on any particular view of sources; for I assume that, by and large, the final form of the Gospel, as interpreted tradition – irrespective of its derivation – reflects the understanding of Matthew himself. Though there are some difficulties in maintaining this view consistently for every detail of the Gospel, it is taken as a working assumption – and a reasonable one, in view of the freedom the evangelist displays at so many points in adjusting the Marcan tradition to his own viewpoint. (What applies to Mark presumably holds for any other source as well.) We expect the author's own perspective to be most clearly revealed, of course, at those points that diverge most sharply from the Marcan account; and here a redaction-critical approach (employed judiciously<sup>6</sup>) proves to be useful. But unlike Windisch,<sup>7</sup> we need not take these to be the *only* points that manifest Matthew's perspective. One can learn both from what he adjusts and from what he retains in the tradition.<sup>8</sup> In other words, following Houlden,<sup>9</sup> I make the simple assumption

that, from whatever source he derives it, Matthew subscribes to what he writes – just as Paul does. Whatever else it is, then – and I certainly do not wish to belittle the importance of the underlying tradition or to over-emphasize the evangelist's own creativity – the Gospel may be viewed as representative of the thought of Matthew himself (but not necessarily the totality of his thought).

(3) Behind the writing of such an ecclesiological Gospel is assumed the presence of a community with which the evangelist identifies, and whose understanding and traditions are mirrored in what he writes<sup>10</sup> – though this does not imply that the final result does not reflect Matthew's own shaping. Whether this 'community' consists of a single congregation or several remains an open question; in any event, it is assumed that the particular emphases arising out of the evangelist's selective reworking of the traditional material bear at least in part directly on the immediate needs and problems of this community<sup>11</sup> – though the intended audience for the Gospel may be of a much wider scope, of course. Thus, Matthew may be considered as much a 'pastor' as Paul.<sup>12</sup>

(4) Though a large degree of coherence is expected,<sup>13</sup> neither absolute consistency nor a totally systematized viewpoint is demanded.<sup>14</sup> It is considered more reasonable to allow for certain discrepancies on the part of a single redactor than to account for the apparent self-contradictions<sup>15</sup> by positing multiple redactors – the final one of whom at least must then be charged with inconsistency in any case.

## 2. Paul

(1) With regard to Paul, the following letters are accepted as authentic: Romans; 1, 2 Corinthians; Galatians; Philippians; Colossians; 1, 2 Thessalonians; Philemon.<sup>16</sup> Note that Colossians and 2 Thessalonians are retained as probably genuine<sup>17</sup> (their inclusion does little to change the essential picture in any case<sup>18</sup>); but Ephesians and the Pastorals are excluded as at least questionable. The portrait Luke paints of Paul in Acts differs sufficiently from Paul's own writings (at least with regard to ethics) to be likewise excluded from consideration;<sup>19</sup> occasional points of comparison, however, are noted.

(2) In general, questions concerning the integrity of the epistles have little bearing on the work, for virtually the whole of the accepted corpus may still be taken as Paul's own writing and therefore reflecting his own thought.<sup>20</sup>

(3) The fact that each of Paul's letters is historically and contextually conditioned, and must therefore be understood first of all in the light of

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its own *Sitz im Leben* (a point correctly emphasized in many recent Pauline studies<sup>21</sup>), in no way negates the validity of searching for an underlying ethical (or theological) structure – though it certainly complicates that task and raises a valid caution against generalizing without taking due consideration of all the possible factors shaping Paul's statements in context.<sup>22</sup> The motivation of ethics, for example, though certainly determined in part by his assessment of the specific problems and communities being addressed, may not unreasonably be assumed to reflect more basic elements in the overall structure of his thought also.

(4) Several recent works notwithstanding, within the span of the accepted corpus I see no conclusive evidence of any major development in Paul's thought,<sup>23</sup> in either theology or ethics – though there are clearly differences of emphasis and presentation reflecting the different situations being addressed in the various letters. Indeed, it is the failure to take these different issues sufficiently into account that underlies many of the recent (and unnecessary) postulations of a 'progression' in Paul's thinking.<sup>24</sup> Further, the very difficulty of dating Galatians and the prison epistles with any degree of certainty itself renders suspect most attempts to trace such a development.<sup>25</sup>

(5) As with Matthew, so for Paul neither absolute consistency nor a totally systematized viewpoint is demanded; but a large measure of overall coherence is expected.<sup>26</sup>

(6) In distinction from some other analyses, rather than attempting to define one primary starting-point or all-embracing 'centre' of Paul's thought (whether it be eschatology, anthropology, justification by faith, the question of Jews and gentiles, participation in Christ, etc.<sup>27</sup>) – a problematic approach that is fundamentally inadequate to deal with the full range of the apostle's thought and its complexities<sup>28</sup> – I prefer to adopt a more pluralistic approach, and to think in terms of a number of different strands, any one or more of which may be dominant and formative at any given point in his argumentation. Clearly, however, some are more central than others – e.g. the conviction of God's grace in Christ, which Paul brings to bear on a wide variety of issues.

(7) Finally, for both writers I recognize the importance of attempting to distinguish between those sanctions that are of primary importance and those that function in a secondary way, as reinforcement and support.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, however, even the secondary considerations reflect something of the writer's thought (though perhaps on a different level), and therefore also reveal aspects of the underlying ethical construct.

**Brief Survey of Previous Work**

Up till now, relatively little detailed comparative study has been done on the overall ethical perspectives of these two writers – or indeed, of any of the New Testament writers. Considerable research has been done, of course, on various aspects of their ethical thought individually, and much of this may be found summarized in recent major works on New Testament theology. Several major works on New Testament ethics are also available,<sup>30</sup> but on the whole they are rather disappointing, with few reflecting a sufficiently critical methodology to be of much use for comparative purposes. Of them all, J.L. Houlden's *Ethics and the New Testament*, though brief, is by far the most stimulating and fruitful – and has provided both the foundation and the approach for the present study itself.

Most of the earlier work on ethics in Matthew's Gospel centred on the Sermon on the Mount,<sup>31</sup> which was all too often treated independently of the rest of the Gospel. More recent investigations have dealt with characteristic themes of the Gospel as a whole – e.g. law, authority, righteousness, obedience and judgement.<sup>32</sup> In addition, since the Second World War numerous attempts have been made to identify the *Sitz im Leben* behind the Gospel,<sup>33</sup> and many of these include useful analyses of major ethical motifs. There is no single study, however, that provides a truly comprehensive account of Matthew's ethical viewpoint; perhaps the writings of G. Barth, Blair, and Strecker come closest to doing so.

Considerably more research, of course, has been done on Paul's thought than Matthew's. In addition to countless articles and volumes written on various aspects of Pauline theology and ethics, there is a large number of substantial works that set out to provide a comprehensive view of his thought as a whole, several of which are concerned primarily with his ethics.<sup>34</sup> There are also a number of Pauline studies devoted specifically to motivational considerations<sup>35</sup> – though many include analyses that, for one reason or another, are less than fully satisfactory. Overall, for depth of perception and analysis, the most significant major works are probably those of Bultmann, Furnish, Ridderbos, E.P. Sanders, and Beker.<sup>36</sup>

Though there have been few thorough comparative studies of Matthew and Paul, there have been numerous attempts to compare Jesus and Paul,<sup>37</sup> and to the extent that such works draw upon Matthean materials, they serve indirectly to illumine our understanding of the relation between Matthew and Paul. But, on the whole, they are of limited value.

Comparative work on the two writers themselves has blossomed only since the advent of redaction criticism; unfortunately, much of it has been done largely in passing. For the most part, attention has focused on some

aspect of the question of law and grace (often centred on the concept of righteousness), the most obvious and significant point of comparison.<sup>38</sup> A few writers have devoted major sections to Matthew and Paul individually and/or to a comparison of their perspectives, or certain aspects of them. Of these, the most illuminating and useful analyses are those of Windisch, McArthur, Hill, Campenhausen, Wendland, Houlden, and Furnish;<sup>39</sup> the most provocative, those of W.D. Davies and Goulder.<sup>40</sup>

Though many of these comparative studies yield fruitful insights, none provides a really comprehensive comparison of the two writers' ethical thought; most are of much more limited scope. In addition, a good number lack either balance or precision and accuracy, and consequently present a somewhat distorted picture – with some emphasizing their similarities, others their differences. The resulting impression is quite confused: while some see Matthew and Paul in intimate accord, others see them in profound disagreement; on this issue scholarly opinion is widely divergent. What is required, then, if a clearer, more accurate understanding of their relative ethical perspectives is to be gained, is a more thorough analysis of the structures of thought underlying their ethics,<sup>41</sup> and a closer, more careful comparison of the patterns that emerge – with a more precise description of the exact points of similarity and difference than has heretofore been achieved. This study is devoted to that end.

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## LAW

For religious Jews in the early Christian era, the Mosaic law was the authoritative expression of God's will and absolutely central to all of life. As such, it functioned both as the basis of ethical obligation and as the definitive proclamation of what constituted morally upright behaviour. Ethical living was accordingly understood largely in terms of compliance with the law. As in any moral system based on legal considerations, authority, obedience and judgement were key concepts in the overall structure, and heavily coloured the Jewish view of life.

In view of the fact that both Matthew and Paul appear to reflect Jewish backgrounds,<sup>1</sup> it is appropriate to begin our study by investigating the extent to which traditional legal concepts have shaped their ethics. To what extent do the two writers view the Christian life within the framework of the law, and to what degree do they think of ethical behaviour as motivated by a sense of 'law'? How has their understanding of Christ modified their conception of the law and its role in the Christian's life? As this whole question is of fundamental importance for our understanding of their moral perspectives, especial attention will be devoted to it.

### 1. *Matthew*

The importance in Matthew's thinking of the whole question of the law<sup>2</sup> and its place in the Christian community is clear from the prominent place he gives to Jesus' discussion of the issue in 5.17–48. But when we inquire more specifically into Matthew's understanding of the law, we find ourselves confronted by a problem of considerable complexity. For side by side lie statements that appear to assert both the continuing validity of the law and its abrogation, that express both rigorously conservative and radically progressive interpretations. How do we reconcile such seemingly disparate statements?<sup>3</sup>

## 1.1 The Law Affirmed

We look first at the evidence in the text that suggests Matthew views the law as still valid for the Christian community.

*5.17–19: the law*

Apart from the evangelist's tendency to think in terms of legal concepts,<sup>4</sup> the primary evidence for this belief is the programmatic passage 5.17–19. The passage is of crucial importance for the understanding of law in the Gospel, but notoriously difficult to interpret. As it has already been discussed in detail numerous times,<sup>5</sup> I shall simply highlight some of the key issues.

Much of the discussion centres on the meaning of *πληρῶσαι* in 5.17: in what way does Matthew view Jesus as 'fulfilling' the law? On this point, there is considerable divergence of opinion and no consensus at all.<sup>6</sup> At least four distinct senses have been proposed for the term in this context, with regard to the law: (1) to obey or carry out the demands of the law;<sup>7</sup> (2) to affirm or validate the law;<sup>8</sup> (3) to explicate or live out the deeper meaning and intent of the law;<sup>9</sup> (4) to complete or bring to pass the ultimate goal of the law<sup>10</sup> – an interpretation that is sometimes taken to imply that some or all of the precepts of the law are now set aside as no longer applicable.<sup>11</sup> The latter interpretation would give *πληρῶσαι* the same meaning in relation to both 'the law' and 'the prophets' (which, however, are probably not to be treated separately<sup>12</sup>), but from other considerations is the one least likely to represent the writer's intention. Matthew uses the term *πληρῶσαι* elsewhere<sup>13</sup> in both this sense<sup>14</sup> and the first sense (3.15);<sup>15</sup> but the larger context of 5.21–48 and those passages that emphasize the priority of love (7.12; 9.13; 12.7; 22.40) suggest the third sense, while the antithesis of *πληρῶσαι* to *καταλύσαι* in the immediate context argues for the second. In the light of the various possibilities, some understandably opt for a broader, more comprehensive interpretation of the term.<sup>16</sup> In any case, with such lack of consensus, it is certain that our understanding of Matthew's view of the law cannot be based on a clear and agreed exegesis of *πληρῶσαι* in 5.17.

The interpretation of 5.17–19 is further complicated by confusion regarding the history of the tradition lying behind it, and the extent to which these *logia* do or do not represent Matthew's own understanding.<sup>17</sup> The wide divergence of opinion on this matter points up the extreme difficulty of attempting to distinguish tradition and redaction in non-paralleled passages such as these, and supports the conviction that it is preferable to treat such passages as wholes, as interpreted tradition reflecting



in its entirety the writer's own understanding and viewpoint.<sup>18</sup> And with regard to 5.17–19, no matter what the precise nuance of *πληρῶσαι* or the exact details of the tradition-history lying behind the text, the point of the passage as a whole, as it now stands in the Gospel, can only be that *the entire law remains valid* and demands strict obedience from the Christian community.<sup>19</sup> This in turn precludes any antinomian implications of *πληρῶσαι* in 5.17.

Those who deny this conclusion on the basis of statements made elsewhere in the Gospel sometimes point to the temporal qualification added in 5.18c (*ἕως ἂν πάντα γένηται*), which some take as a reference to the fulfilment of the law in the life, death, resurrection and/or teachings of Jesus or the early Church<sup>20</sup> – in the third or fourth sense of *πληρῶσαι* above. But in the immediate context of 5.18–19, it is more likely that this clause merely reiterates the sense of 5.18a, which affirms either the eternal validity of the law (as popularly understood),<sup>21</sup> or (more probably, in view of 24.34f) its validity until the Eschaton.<sup>22</sup> In either case, it must be understood in the traditional Jewish sense.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, those who claim that 'these commandments' in 5.19 refers to Jesus' teachings that follow in 5.21 – 7.12,<sup>24</sup> and not to the commandments of the law spoken of in 5.18, can do so only by ignoring the plain meaning of the expression in the more immediate context of 5.17–19. It can only be concluded, then, that the passage as a whole is to be understood as an affirmation of the continuing validity of the entire law for Christian disciples – right down to the least jot and tittle. But whether the point of view represented in this assertion is consistent with the rest of the Gospel is a quite different question.

Matthew's belief that the law is binding upon the Christian community is evidenced also in his redaction of Marcan pericopes dealing with legal questions. At a number of points where Mark seems to portray Jesus in sharp disagreement with the law, Matthew reduces the sharpness of the disagreement or otherwise colours it so as to avoid the implication that the law is no longer authoritative and binding.<sup>25</sup> Consider the following passages:

*12.1–8, 9–14: the sabbath*<sup>26</sup>

It has long puzzled scholars that one of the few Marcan pericopes omitted by Matthew should be the first Marcan account of Jesus' healing on the sabbath (Mk. 1.23–8), with its otherwise significant reference to Jesus' authority (a key Matthean motif).<sup>27</sup> But the omission of this pericope, together with its introductory reference to the sabbath (Mk. 1.21; cf. verse 29), has the effect of separating the following stories of Jesus' healing of

Peter's mother-in-law and the crowd (Mt. 8.14–15\*, 16–17\*<sup>28</sup>) from any awkward reference to the sabbath at all.<sup>29</sup> Further, it is significant that when Matthew does at last deal with the thorny issue of Jesus' apparent violations of the sabbath law, it is only after he has first laid the groundwork by making explicit both Jesus' affirmation of the abiding authority of the law (5.17–19) and his radical yet humanitarian interpretation of it (5.20–48; cf. 7.12; 9.13). The shifting of the two major pericopes dealing with Jesus' sabbath 'violations' back to chapter 12 would seem to be an attempt by the evangelist to remove them from the embarrassing position of prominence they hold in Mark's Gospel (Mk. 2.23–8; 3.1–6). It is also noteworthy that Matthew has prefaced the two pericopes with 11.28–30, which – apparently in contrast to the burdensome tyranny of Pharisaic legalism – speaks of Jesus' 'easy yoke' and 'light burden', and thus functions as an interpretative principle in its own right for what follows.<sup>30</sup>

Within the first pericope (12.1–8), Matthew's addition of *ἐπιβάσασθαι* (12.1) may be intended either to show that the disciples had a reason for breaking the sabbath,<sup>31</sup> or to bring their situation more into line with that of David, who, with his companions, was 'hungry' and 'ate' (12.3f);<sup>32</sup> or it may simply be an attempt to make explicit what is already implicit in the passage, with its underlying concern for the priority of human needs (12.7).<sup>33</sup> Undoubtedly more significant is the evangelist's insertion into the argument of a precedent from the Torah itself (12.5; cf. Num. 28.9–10) as legal support, in good rabbinic *qal waḥomer* fashion.<sup>34</sup> Here the law itself is seen to allow for one commandment to take precedence over another. Also important is Matthew's careful omission of Mark's sharp statement, 'The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath', while retaining the following expression of Jesus' lordship over the sabbath (12.8\*). Our overall impression, then, is that while Matthew makes allowance for Jesus' authoritative interpretation of the law with its emphasis on compassion (12.7), he is careful to avoid leaving the impression that the general law of the sabbath itself is in any way invalidated.<sup>35</sup> For Matthew, 'Jesus performs the radical action, yet the Law remains inviolate'.<sup>36</sup> Some see Jesus portrayed here as a 'special dispensation'-giver with regard to the sabbath law, exercising his Messianic prerogative to 'bind' and to 'loose';<sup>37</sup> but it is preferable to take it simply as a matter of the true interpretation and use of the law. Matthew's point is that 'the law and the prophets' themselves allow for precisely such an interpretation.

In the second pericope (12.9–14), the Matthean reformulation (12.10) turns the focus away from the healing itself to the more general question of the legality of healing on the sabbath. Again the evangelist depicts Jesus as entering into *qal waḥomer* argumentation (12.11) to defend his action: