

Faith, Obedience and Perseverance: Aspects of Paul's Letter to the Romans. By Don Garlington. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 79. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1994, xi + 204 pp., 128 DM.

This volume represents a collection of five previous articles published by Garlington which have been revised, and a concluding chapter and an introduction have been added. This is a very stimulating book, and it should be read carefully and seriously considered. The first chapter picks up where Garlington left off in his doctoral dissertation (*The Obedience of Faith: A Pauline Phrase in Historical Context*). He argues that the expression "obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5; 16:26) refers to both the obedience which "springs from faith" and the obedience "which consists in faith." This chapter is a valuable contribution, and Garlington rightly insists that faith and obedience are inseparable in Paul.

Chapter two presents the interesting thesis that the robbing of temples in Romans 2:22 should not be understood literally. What Paul inveighs against is the making of the Torah into an idol. Garlington canvasses a number of texts to demonstrate that Israel clung to the law as an idol, and used the Torah to exclude Gentiles from the people of God. The former thesis is best supported by Galatians 4:3, 8-9. And Garlington follows his mentor Dunn in seeing nationalism rather than legalism as the central point of tension between Paul and his Jewish compatriots. I remain unconvinced by both Dunn's and Garlington's claim that there was no polemic against legalism in Judaism, and I have interacted with this thesis elsewhere. The main difficulty with the chapter at hand is the contention that robbing temples is metaphorical rather than literal. The proscriptions against stealing and idolatry in

Romans 2:21-22 are likely literal, and thus the grounds for identifying robbing of temples as metaphorical seems weak. Moreover, in Jewish literature elsewhere robbing of temples is literal (2 Macc. 4:39, 42; 9:2; 13:6; Sib. Or. 2:14; 13:12; Ant. 16:45, 164; J.W. 5:562), and the same sense should be understood here.

The third chapter sketches in the relationship between the obedience of faith and the doing of the law. Garlington opts for the view that the righteousness of God refers to the activity of God rather than merely status (although he does not deny that a new status before God is also involved). The covenantal dimensions of the righteousness of God are also emphasized; his righteousness involves his covenantal loyalty which is available to both Jews and Gentiles. Garlington makes the provocative statement that Genesis 15:6 cannot refer to forensic righteousness in terms of Abraham's conversion since he already believed in Genesis 12:1-9, and this belief was attested by his exodus from his homeland. I believe Garlington is correct in saying that Genesis 15:6 cannot be understood as the conversion of Abraham. Most scholars have not even considered the relationship between Genesis 12 and 15, and we stand in debt to the author here. The central thesis of the chapter is also persuasive. Paul is dead serious and is not speaking hypothetically when he says that one must keep the law in order to be justified (Romans 2:13). The implications of Garlington's view are explosive. Paul believed that the law must be kept for participation in eschatological salvation. Such an emphasis on obedience, says Garlington, is hardly works-righteousness, for the good works stem from the "obedience of faith." Garlington emphasizes throughout the book that perfect obedience is not required. What is needed to obtain eternal life is perseverance, and such perseverance has its roots in faith. Faith is not

□

merely a one time act for believers but must characterize their entire life. Thus, justification and sanctification must not be rigidly separated as Garlington rightly argues in chapter six. In this concluding chapter he also explores helpfully some implications for the way systematic theology should be carried out. A small disagreement with part of Garlington's exegesis must also be registered. It is quite unlikely that the words "by nature" (*physei*) in Rom. 2:14 refer to "the image of God" (p. 53). The term denotes the natural condition at birth of the Gentiles.

Chapter four is a useful study of Romans 5, particularly the Adam-Christ relation. Garlington rightly emphasizes that the Torah is relativized by Paul, for the law is not the source of life. Two of his claims in this chapter are controversial. First, he claims that the terms "sin" and "disobedience" in Rom. 5:12-19 refer to apostasy. A number of texts are introduced to defend the thesis. Surely New Testament writers were concerned about apostasy, but I remain unconvinced that the term "sin" has such a specific meaning, although many texts would have to be consulted to defend my own view. Second, the righteousness of believers includes the idea of "making righteous" not merely the imputing of an alien righteousness. Obviously, this whole discussion is of crucial importance in the history of the church, but contra Garlington righteousness language is forensic in Paul. Some readers of this journal may be quick to brand Garlington's view as Roman Catholic. This would be a serious mistake, for the righteousness of God, according to Garlington, is a gift and received by faith. Thus his view is compatible with those who emphasize that salvation is by faith alone.

In the fifth chapter Garlington follows his mentor, James Dunn, in arguing that

□

Romans 7:14-25 refers to Christian experience. The tension between the already and the not yet is crucial for his interpretation here. This chapter helps one to see that the obedience which stems from faith is not perfect obedience according to the author. What is crucial for eternal life is perseverance to the end, even though our obedience is not perfected. Garlington is not afraid to tackle difficult issues, for this chapter is one of the most controverted today and in the history of the church. In any case, Garlington makes a good case for the thesis that Christian experience is contemplated. And the book as a whole is a valuable contribution to Pauline scholarship.

Tom Schreiner
Professor of New Testament
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary