

GOSPEL, OBEDIENCE AND JUSTICE: A NARRATIVE INTERPRETATION OF ROMANS 6:12-18 IN CONTEXT

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Abstract. In this paper I would like to explore the connection between three crucial themes in Paul's letter to the Romans: gospel, obedience and justice. Most commentators will agree that these are key concepts in Romans and so it is worth exploring them together. The argument put forward is that the three themes are intimately related and that both obedience and justice are intrinsic parts of the gospel and so Paul wants to communicate to the believers in Rome that the gospel, which is the justice/righteousness of God manifested in Jesus Christ, and their acceptance of the gospel, implies a new life of obedience which leads them to become instruments of justice. By using a narrative reading, the paper offers an interpretation of Romans 6:12-18 in the context of the letter and proposes that such a narrative interpretation better enables the readers to understand the intrinsic connection between gospel, obedience and justice.

Keywords: gospel, obedience, justice, Romans, Paul's theology, narrative interpretation.

Introduction

Among the exciting new developments in the interpretation of Paul's letters nowadays we find the rediscovery of the public dimension of the biblical witness and a narrative reading in Paul. In recent decades we are witnessing a renewed interest in appropriating Scripture for the public life. It is argued by many that apostle Paul was more profoundly political than is usually perceived and that the gospel he preached had significant social and political dimensions.¹ The extent of

¹ The most recent and significant studies include two excellent books edited by Richard HORSLEY *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000) and *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg/London: Trinity Press International, 2004.). There are also several very significant monographs: Bruno BLUMENFELD, *The Political Paul: Justice, Democracy and Kingship in a Hellenistic Framework* (JSNTS, 210. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); Neil ELLIOTT, *Liberating Paul: The justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999); Mark STROM, *Reframing Paul: Conversation in Grace and Community* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000); R. A. HORSLEY and M. A. SILBERMAN, *The Message and the Kingdom: How Jesus and Paul Ignited a Revolution and Transformed the Ancient World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997); Elsa TAMEZ, *The Amnesty of*