In my previous post I discussed the differences – what strike me, at least, as the differences – between the Gospel of Matthew and Paul’s letter to the Galatians and with respect to whether the followers of Jesus are to follow the law or not. Matthew’s Gospel indicates that the law will not cease to be in force until the heavens and earth pass away, and that Jesus’ followers need to follow the law to the limit, to follow it even better than the scribes and Pharisees do. Paul, on the other hand, insists that the followers of Jesus must not think that they have to follow the law. Any gentile who thinks he has to be circumcised, or to follow other aspects of the Jewish law, is in danger of losing salvation.

I would like to clarify one point about my view and explain one of its complications. Clarification: in my post I was not discussing whether Paul saw eye-to-eye with Jesus about this issue. My post was about the Gospel of Matthew. I do not necessarily assume that Matthew’s portrayal of Jesus represents Jesus “as he really was.” In a future post I will discuss the issue of whether Paul and Jesus saw eye to eye on this matter; but for now I just want to say that I have not yet addressed that issue here. I instead have talked about what appears to be a difference between Paul and Matthew.

But one might object that in fact Matthew and Paul are not at odds. Matthew’s Jesus is talking to his disciples and others during his public ministry. These people would have been Jews. He is telling Jews that if they want to be right with God, they need to follow the law God has given them to the utmost, even better than the most righteous Jews who are not among his followers. Paul in Galatians is not speaking to Jews in Palestine but to gentiles outside of Palestine, and is telling them that they must not think that they have to become Jewish in order to have the salvation brought by Jesus’ death and resurrection.

So are these really at odds?

One important aspect of this question is this:

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