A Study on the Meaning of ἐργα νόμου in Pauline Theology

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1. Purpose and Background
The purpose of this article is to clarify the meaning of ἐργα νόμου in Pauline Texts. The meaning of ἐργα νόμου is considered to be one of the most important elements of Pauline Theology. Certainly, the theme “justification by faith” is profound in Pauline Theology. Although “by faith” is relatively uncontroversial, “justification” has been extremely controversial. Justification has been related to “the righteousness of God.” For example, the arguments of Bultmann and Käsemann are well known.¹

The meaning of ἐργα νόμου has importance for how to relate “law” and “justification by faith.” Paul states: ¹⁵ διότι εξ ἐργῶν νόμου οὐ δικαίωσεται πᾶσα σάρξ ἐνόπτιον αὐτοῦ, διὰ γὰρ νόμου ἐπίγνωσις ἁμαρτίας. “Because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.” (Romans 3:20) Moreover, Paul states, (Galatians 2:15-16)

¹⁵ ἡμεῖς φύσει Ἰουδαίοι καὶ οὐκ εξ ἐθνῶν ἁμαρτωλοὶ. ἔδοτες [δὲ] ὅτι οὐ δικαίωσατε ἄνθρωπος εξ ἐργῶν νόμου ἐὰν μὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν, ἵνα δικαιωθῶμεν ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ καὶ οὐκ εξ ἐργῶν νόμου, ὅτι εξ ἐργῶν νόμου οὐ δικαίωσεται πᾶσα σάρξ.

“We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.” As we can see, here Paul seems to deny ἐργα νόμου. Does

Paul deny observing the whole of νόμος or a part of νόμος? That is significant for identifying the meaning of “justification.” If Paul’s usage of ἔργα νόμου includes the observance of basic norms like the Decalogue, along with norms concerning circumcision, cultic service, diet, and Sabbath, then observing the Decalogue should be denied as the antithesis of justification. This is Luther’s view. This view about the usage of νόμος weakens the continuity between the OT and the NT concerning the meaning of “righteousness.” Conversely, Dunn asserts that ἔργα νόμου does not include the Decalogue itself, but is limited to norms like circumcision. In Dunn’s position, foundational law, such as the Decalogue, is not denied by justification, thus the OT and the NT maintain continuity concerning the meaning of “righteousness.”

Therefore, clarifying the meaning of ἔργα νόμου becomes important, and should be carried out, not only through a theological method, but also through a linguistic method. In order to clarify the meaning of ἔργαν or ἔργα, this paper will deal with the Septuagint (LXX) that was widely read during the period in which Paul’s texts were generated, and examine the usage of sentences that includes ἔργαν or ἔργα. This will shed light on what Paul means by ἔργα νόμου. As Stuhlmacher writes, Christianity was derived from Hebrew Scripture, the Septuagint and oral traditions of Synagogues in the Diaspora. Paul often quotes from the Septuagint for Greek speaking believers who received the letter to the Romans and the Galatians; he also needed to consider the reactions of Jewish believers who read the Hebrew scriptures. So we must examine Greek texts with ἔργαν or ἔργα and Hebrew texts with the equivalent words. Thus this paper will pay attention to Hebrew texts as well as Greek texts.

Concerning the meaning of ἑργα νόμου in Pauline Theology, let us view the perspectives of Augustine, Luther, Bultmann, Wilckens, Conzelmann, Sanders, Dunn and Bachmann.

Augustine writes:

When St. Paul says, therefore, that man is justified by faith and not by the observance of the law, he does not mean that good works are not necessary or that it is enough to receive and to profess the faith and no more. What he means rather and what he wants us to understand is that man can be justified by faith, even though he has not previously performed any works of the law. For the works of the law are meritorious not before but after justification.5

Augustine’s understanding is that Pauline Theology does not deny the observance of the law.

Luther writes the following about Galatians 2:16.

In order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law.

All these words are to be read with feeling and emphasis. As I have warned before, Paul is speaking here not about the Ceremonial Law alone but about the entire Law. For the Ceremonial Law was as much the divine Law as the moral laws were. Thus circumcision, the institution of the priesthood, the service of worship, and the rituals were commanded by God as much as the Decalogue was.6

Luther denies the observance of the whole law as the antithesis of justification; not only individual cultic norms, but also basic norms like the Decalogue. Building on Luther, Bultmann intensified the view, and consequently greatly influenced German Theology.

Bultmann writes:
But why is this the case? Because man’s effort to achieve his salvation by keeping the law only leads him into sin, indeed this effort itself in the end is already sin. 7

Wilckens, however, raises the following question:
How can the judgement according to the works in Rom. 2 and the thesis in the train of thought of 1:18, “in the basis of works of law, no one can be justified before God” (3:20) be intrinsically harmonized? On the one hand, in 2:13, only doers of the law can be justified in the last judgement: on the other hand in 3:28, conversely, man can be justified only through faith without works of law. How can both be harmonized? The answer to this question has profound effect on the understanding of the Pauline doctrine of justification. 8

Conzelmann writes:
It also becomes clear that on the one hand the law has come to an end as a way of salvation, …, whereas on the other hand it remains in force as a moral demand. The law is certainly not false! Indeed, it was given for life (Gal. 3.12; Rom. 7.10). 9

Conzelmann recognized that the dimension of the law is involved with salvation and ethical norms, and Paul denied the former, but not the latter.

Sanders writes:
<Gal. 2:11-22>. What specific ‘work of the law’ triggered this situation is not

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entirely clear. Perhaps it was the food – Gentile meat and wine, or perhaps it was the company – the chief apostle to the Jews should not associate too much with Gentiles. In any case, the issue was the degree of association between Gentile and Jewish members.”10 Sanders seems to be unclear on the issue.

Dunn writes:

The point is that Protestant exegesis has for too long allowed a typically Lutheran emphasis on justification by faith to impose a hermeneutical grid on the text of Romans. The emphasis is important, that God is the one who justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4. 5), and understandably this insight has become an integrating focus in Lutheran theology with tremendous power. The problem, however, lay in what that emphasis was set in opposition to. The antithesis to ‘justification by faith’ – what Paul speaks of as ‘justification by works’ – was understood in terms of a system whereby salvation is earned through the merit of good works.11 Dunn continues:

The phrase “works of the law” in Gal. 2.16 is, in fact, a fairly restricted one: it refers precisely to these same identity markers described above, covenant works – those regulations prescribed by the law which any good Jew would simply take for granted to describe what a good Jew did. To be a Jew, was to be a member of the covenant, was to observe circumcision, food laws and sabbath.12

In short, Dunn asserts that Paul only denied the detailed norms about circumcision, diet and Sabbath. Moreover, Bachmann intensified the view and states that ἑγανόμον indicates regulations of the law.13

These views indicate that there is no consensus among scholars concerning

11 ibid.3.Dunn, 2005,131.
13 M. Bachmann, Lutherische und Neue Paulusperspective, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen,2005,83-94.
the meaning of ἐργα νόμου in Pauline Theology. Thus a semantic word study will be used to clarify the meaning of Paul’s terminology.

3. An Examination of the Meaning of ἐργα νόμου in Greek and Hebrew Texts

In this section, let us examine the meaning of ἐργον (or ἐργα) that Paul denied in Romans and Galatians. We will deal with the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy), the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings) and 1 and 2 Chronicles from the Septuagint (LXX). From these texts, sentences with ἐργον (or ἐργα) and its derivative words (cognates: ἐργάζομαι, λειτουργία and others such as ἐργοδιωκτέω) are extracted, and each meaning is identified. Then Hebrew texts (MT) that will be parallel with the above Greek texts will be examined.

3.1 The Meaning of ἐργα νόμου in the Torah and the Prophets.

See Table 1, The Meanings of ἐργον (or ἐργα) and its Appearances in the Septuagint. The meaning of ἐργον (or ἐργα) in the Torah and the Prophets can be roughly categorized into 10 meanings: (a) cultic service, (b) service, (c) labor work, (d) skilled work, (e) work of hands, (f) making, (g) His work, (h) business or mission, (i) practice and (j) deed, doing. The number of appearances of cultic service is 156 times which accounts for 37% of all usage. Thus cultic service is important as the main meaning of ἐργον (or ἐργα) in the Torah and the Prophets. Especially in Numbers, the cultic service usage is frequently found, indicating that it might include a nuance of “cultic service by people.”

The second major usage is (c) labor work. This usage often appears in the Exodus accounts of tabernacle or temple, and in the Chronicles’ accounts of temple construction by Solomon. (e) work of hands also has some affinity with temple construction. In addition to that, (g) His work that refers to God’s own work, has a similar meaning to the work of Your hands.

14 In my plan, I will deal with the whole OT in the future, yet I started up from so-called Enneateuch, and added Chronicles from the Writings here.
15 These words are taken from English version of the Bible (NASB).
Finally, it is notable that the meaning of (j) deed, doing appears only three times in the Torah and the Prophets. Moreover, in Exodus 36:4, it is used to mean “deed,” yet the original Greek is not ἔργον, but ἔργαζομαι. The other cases are in Genesis 20:9 and Numbers 16:28. Only three cases imply the meaning of doing or deed. Therefore, roughly speaking, ἔργον (or ἔργα) in Torah and Prophets means (a) cultic service or (c) ~ (h) (works, making). The meaning of (j) deed, doing rarely appears. As seen in the table, the total appearances of ἔργον (or ἔργα) are 253 times, ἔργαζομαι and its derivatives 36 times, λειτουργία and its derivatives 117 times, and ἐργοδισκέτω and others 15 times.

3.2 An Examination of Hebrew Words that are equivalent to ἔργα of ἔργα νόμου in the Torah and the Prophets

Next, let us examine Hebrew words that are equivalent to ἔργον (or ἔργα) in the Torah and the Prophets. The result is in Table 2 (The Relationship between ἔργον or ἔργα and its Hebrew Equivalents). The Hebrew equivalents are seven, namely פָּסַל, צָלָדָה, תְּשׁוֹבָה, תַּשְׁבִּית, מַשְׁכָּה, מִשְׁכָּנָה, מִלְּאכָה which appear more than six times. 16


Next, the general and theological meaning of the Hebrew equivalent for ἔργον (or ἔργα) must be dealt with in a semantic examination. See the right column of Table 2 concerning the above mentioned 7 Hebrew equivalents.  

Following (1) – (7) are the explanations of these Hebrew equivalents.

(1) נָבַר means to labor and to serve, servant, to make, to do, etymologically. Its verb form implies the meanings of ① to serve, ② to work, ③ to do cultic service and ④ to make among others. Its noun form is used in the meanings of ① slave, ② servant, ③ cultic service, ④ servant for god, ⑤ labor, and ⑥ worship among others. The usages of נָבַר in the MT and the LXX refer to “cultic service” appear 16 times, “service” 4 times, and “labor work” 16 times.

(2) פְּלַקָּמָה is the noun form of נָבַר and includes the meanings of ① the work in a general sense, ② the work as cultic service, ③ hand service, and ④ the work of bearing burdens among others, etymologically. The usages of פְּלַקָּמָה in the context of the MT and the LXX can be classified as “cultic service,” 82 times, “service” appears 2 times and “labor work” 12 times.

(3) מְלָאכָה means “to send a message, messenger”, etymologically. This meaning then came to mean ① skilled work, sanctuary construction, namely work for temple construction. Later it came to mean manual work in the Tannaitic period, that is ② work including labor. Moreover, ③ result of hands, ④ mission, business ⑤ work of hands, ⑥ cultic service(with labor). The usages of מְלָאכָה in the context confusion.

17 The numbers of appearance are in the Septuagint.
of the MT and the LXX can be classified as ① “cultic service” 16 times, “skilled work” 14 times, “labor work” 61 times, “His work” 4 times, “business” 6 times and “work of hands” 4 times.

(4) הָרָה etymologically means to serve. In addition to that, the word is also used to mean ① to do cultic service publicly, to serve as a priest or to present offerings, ② to serve, ③ to work among others. The usages of הָרָה in the MT and the LXX can be classified as “cultic service” of a priest 40 times and “service” 10 times.

(5) הָנַשֶּׁה is derived from הָנָשֶׁה and means “work,” “making” and “deed” among others etymologically. The word is used to mean ① work, ② the work of human hands, ③ fruits, ④ God’s work, ⑤ deed of moral, ⑥ labor, ⑦ God’s governance, ⑧ creation, making, ⑨ practice, ⑩ deed among others. The usages of הָנַשֶּׁה in the context of the MT and the LXX can be classified as “labor work” 14 times, “work of hands” 44 times, “making” 2 times, “His work” 8 times, “idols” namely “skilled work” 5 times, “practices” 5 times, “business” 3 times, “cultic service” 2 times and “deed, doing” 2 times.

(6) הָנַשׁ means “to do, to make, to build, to offer sacrifice,” among others. The word is used to mean ① to do act, ② to make, ③ to make an idol, ④ to create, ⑤ to produce, ⑥ God does great things, God’s works, God’s judgement, ⑦ to do good or evil ⑧ God’s act in history ⑨ to work among others. The usages of הָנַשׁ in the MT and the LXX can be classified as “making” 2 time, “labor work” 2 times, “work of hands” 2 times, and “deed, doing” 1 time.

(7) הָשָׁל generally means “to make, to do, to serve.” It is similar to הָנַשֶּׁה but has a more poetic origin. This word, in verb form means ① to make, ② to work, ③ to serve, ④ to do among others. In noun form it is used as “deed(s) of human beings” and “works, wages” of God. The usages of הָשָׁל in the context of the MT and the LXX can be classified as “making” 1 time, “labor work” 3 times and “His work” 2 times.
From the examination, it became clear that original Hebrew words for ἐργον (or ἐργα) which appear in the LXX, are נָעְשָׁה, מָעָשָׁה, מָןָאָס, מְלַאָס, נְבַרְת, מְלַאָסָה, נֶבֶרַת, מְלַעֲלָ. The meaning of ἐργον (or ἐργα) of ἐργα νόμου in Paul can be either “נָעְשָׁה, מָעָשָׁה, מְלַאָס, נְבַרְת, מְלַעֲלָ” that have a strong connotation of cultic service, or “נָעְשָׁה, מָעָשָׁה, מְלַאָס, נְבַרְת, מְלַעֲלָ”. However, נָעְשָׁה, מָעָשָׁה, מְלַאָס, נְבַרְת, מְלַעֲלָ mean “labor work, work of hand, making, God’s work, idol(s), practice(s), deed and doing.” Apart from “practice(s), deed or doing”, these meanings do not bear any significant theological meaning in Pauline Theology. Moreover, “deed or doing” only appears three times. Thus this usage is uncommon in the Torah and the Former Prophets. Therefore, ἐργα νόμου must mean “cultic services” from נָעְשָׁה, מָעָשָׁה, מְלַאָס, נְבַרְת, מְלַעֲלָ, which was suggested by Klaus Haacker. Whereas נָעְשָׁה refers to special cultic service carried out by priests in tabernacle or temple, and always is translated as λειτουργία in Greek. It is clearly different from ἐργον. That is, ἐργον (or ἐργα) is distinguished from λειτουργία, thus it is distinguished from “cultic service” by priests. I suggest that Paul might distinguish נָעְשָׁה from ἐργα νόμου.

Thus, when Paul uses ἐργα νόμου, he means “cultic services” by people, including labor, (נָעְשָׁה, מָעָשָׁה, מְלַאָס, נְבַרְת, מְלַעֲלָ). It could include norms concerning circumcision, diet, and Sabbath that should be observed by people. (These norms are stated by Paul as dispensable for Gentile believers). This leads to the conclusion that observing basic norms like the Decalogue is not included in ἐργα νόμου.

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18 Ibid.3.p.94. “Practice(s)” might have some affinity with theological implication related to law, because its object can be “way”, “method”, or “custom.” In the case, ἐργα νόμου means “way of law”, “method of law” and “custom of law.” It is close to “regulations of law” that Bachmann asserts. However, it appears only 4 times. Though “deed and doing” are widely translated as “carry out law” and “doing law,” but the usage rarely appears in the Torah and the Former Prophets as mentioned above, it only appears 2 times in the LXX.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hebrew translated with εργον in the LXX</th>
<th>Times occurred in the Tanakh</th>
<th>Times occurred in the Prophets</th>
<th>Meaning of εργον (or ἔργα) in the LXX (meanings) (times)</th>
<th>General meanings of Hebrew words translated with εργον (or ἔργα) in the LXX.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.hd’bo</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Cultic service service</td>
<td>Labor work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mbd</td>
<td>hbd'</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Cultic service service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h'lr'h</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Cultic service Labor work</td>
<td>Skilled work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sh'</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Cultic service (as a priest) service</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m'lt'sh'h</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Labor work</td>
<td>Work of hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n'nsh'h</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Making</td>
<td>Labor work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p'</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Making</td>
<td>Labor work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Etymology: ἔργα, Deuteronomy 23:21 to do serve 1 Noun: κατεργάστηκα Judges 16:16 to urge 1 Noun: ἔργον, Deuteronomy 23:4 to look after 1 and others: ἔργον, 2Chrons 20:10 govern 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total | 260 | 161 | 421 |
3.3 The Meaning of έργα νόμου in the Psalms

In the Psalms of the Septuagint, έργου (or έργα) appears 77 times and means “work of thy hand,” “work of God,” and “His work.” Moreover έργάζομαι is used as “doing.” This is a special usage in the Psalms and appears 20 times.

Next, see Table 3 (έργα νόμου in the Psalms in relationship to the Hebrew equivalents).

In the Psalms, θυμάω and ἐργάζομαι are mainly used. The former appears 37 times and the latter 36 times. ἐργάζομαι and ἑτορόη each appear once only.

In the Psalms, θυμάω is used with the meaning of “His work” (14 times), “work of thy hand” (9 times) and “work of God” (4 times). Its tendency is similar to the cases in the Torah and the Prophets, yet there is the case of “deed, doing” (3 times) in the Psalms and it occurs more frequently than in the Torah and the Prophets.

In the Psalms also has the same tendency. It is used to mean “His work” (3 times), “work of thy hand” (5 times), “work of God” (4 times) and “deed, doing” (1 time). It is noteworthy that ἐργάζομαι is translated as έργα νόμου meaning “doing” 20 times. As mentioned above, instead of ἐργάζομαι, the word θυμάω is mostly used in poetic texts. ἐργάζομαι, meaning “doing”, is translated as έργα νόμου in the Psalms of the LXX, because θυμάω is the equivalent for ποιέω in other cases. Therefore, θυμάω = doing = έργα νόμου can be seen as a special usage in the Psalms of the LXX when compared with the Torah and the Prophets. In the Psalms, έργου (or έργα) appears a little more frequently as “deed or doing” than that in the Torah and the Prophets. Other than έργα νόμου that is equivalent for ἐργάζομαι, the examination of the meaning of έργου (or έργα) in the Psalms supports the results from the examination of the Torah and the Prophets.

Here, the Psalm 61:13 should be noted in that the έργα is quoted in Rom. 2:6.

δις ἀποδώσει ἕκαστῳ κατὰ τὰ έργα αὐτοῦ. (Rom. 2:6)
σὺ ἀποδώσεις ἕκαστῳ κατὰ τὰ έργα αὐτοῦ (Ps 61:13b, in the LXX)
καὶ ἀνετώσεις ἕκαστῳ κατὰ τὰ έργα αὐτοῦ (Ps 62:13b, in the MT)

“For you recompense a man according to his work” (Ps 62:12b) In this case, έργα means “works” or “deeds,” and its Hebrew equivalent is ἐργάζομαι (singular in the MT).
It is continued in Rom. 2:7:

tois men kai o`posouv ergou agathou doxein kai timh kai afharaian zetosisin zwhi aionion,
“to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life”; In Rom. 3:20 Paul writes, dioti e` ergon nomou ou dikaiwsetai pasax saxe enisipoii autow, dia gar nomou enigmwos a`martias. “because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight: for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.” It seems that Rom. 2:6-7 and 3:20 are ambivalent. Then, the equivalent of έργα in Rom. 3:20 must not be from ἤμα. It would be from ἰδαμ. and ἰδαμα. The author suggests that the Hebrew equivalent is יִדְבָּה. Therefore, the Hebrew equivalent for έργον(or έργα) could be יִדְבָּה, not ἤμα.

Table 3  έργον(or έργα) in the Psalms in relationship to the Hebrew equivalents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hebrew translated with έργον or έργα in the LXX</th>
<th>Times occurred in the Psalms</th>
<th>Meaning of έργον (or έργα) in the LXX</th>
<th>General meanings of Hebrew words translated with έργον(or έργα) in the LXX.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>מִשְׁמָךְ</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>His work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
work of thy hand | 14 | Same with table 2 |
| | | work of God | 9 | |
| | | work of men's hand | 4 | |
| | | practice | 5 | |
| | | deed, doing | 2 | |
| | |  | 3 | Etymology of פָּעַל is to make, to do, to work, to serve, resemble with ḫā. This root was more poetic contexts. 
Verb: ① to make ② to work ③ to serve. 
The LXX translates: verb (Human) Διαγόρησαι, toio, (God) ἔργα. 
Noun (Human) ποιήμα, ποιήσαι; deeds, (God) ἔργον, ἐργάσαι; works, wages |
| צָעָה | 16 | His work | 
work of thy hand | 3 | This root was more poetic contexts. Verb: ① to make 
② to work ③ to serve. 
The LXX translates: verb (Human) Διαγόρησαι, toio, (God) ἔργα. 
Noun (Human) ποιήμα, ποιήσαι; deeds, (God) ἔργον, ἐργάσαι; works, wages |
| | | work of God | 5 | |
| | | make | 4 | |
| | | labor work | 1 | |
| | | work of men's hand | 1 | |
| | | deed, doing | 1 | |
| | |  | 20 | |
| and others | 4 | His work | 
Deed | 1 | |
| | | Labor work | 1 | |
| | | Business | 1 | |
| Total | 77 | 77 | |

20 Concerning νόμος, Rom. 7:12 states, ὅστε ὁ μὲν νόμος ἁγιός καὶ ἡ ἐντολὴ ἁγία καὶ 
δικαία καὶ ἁγαθή, “So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.”
4. ἐργα νόμου in Rabbinic Literature

Next, let us see how νόμος is used in Paul’s day, namely from the 2nd century BCE to the 2nd century CE. Simeon the Just (Simeon II) who was the High Priest in 200 BCE is recorded in the MISHNAH Aboth Chapter 1, Mishnah 2, “Simeon the Just was of remnants of the Great Synagogue. He used to say: By three things is the world sustained: by the law, by the [temple] service, and by the deeds of loving-kindness.” Here we can see that νόμος is important as much as νόμος.21

Moreover, Sanders states, “Not only is it the case that the halakah induces the feeling of the presence of God by regulating it, as it were, into the fabric of every day life, but the study of the Torah itself cause one to feel that he is in the presence of God. Thus the Temple service, where the priest ministers before God, prayer and the study of the Torah are all called ’abodah, service. Wherever two speak of the Torah together, God (‘the shekinah’) is with them.”22

The above-mentioned Sifre Deuterononmy (41 piska) includes the following.

And to serve him (Deut. 11:13): This refers here to study. You might say, “This refers to study (according to you), but might it not refer to actual work?” (The answer is No,) since Scripture says, And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to work it and guard it (Gen 2:15) – What kind of work or guarding was there at that time? Thus you learn that to work it refers to study, and to guard it refers to the commandments. Just as serving at the alter is called “service”, so is study called “service.”23

The Sifre Deuterononmy is a part of the Tannaitic Literature. It is dated in the first and the second century CE. It can be seen that 41 piska provides Jewish thought in

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22Aboth 3:2, This is related to Rom.10:8a.
almost same age as Paul’s age. The text supports our view that the Hebrew equivalent of ἑργῶν (or ἑργα) is נָבְרָה, while נָבְרָה has an additional meaning of “the study of the Torah” to the meaning of Temple Services. This is related to Rom 2:13a, because listening to the Torah is one form of the study of the Torah.

And then, the Sifre Deuteronomy (piska85) includes another phrase, explaining the Deuteronomy 13:5 \( \text{אֲדֹנָי תַּעֲבֹרֶה הָעַבְרָה} \) ‘ye shall serve Him’. The Sifre Deuteronomy say: ‘אֲדֹנָי תַּעֲבֹרֶה הָעַבְרָה’ the meaning as following:

\(-\) and Him ye shall serve—serve Him according to His Torah and in His Sanctuary

Therefore ἑργὰς νόμου is equivalent to נָבְרָה הָעַבְרָה or נָבְרָה הָעַבְרָה in Hebrew and Services according to the Torah in English.

5. Summary
As we have seen, the following become clear.

(1) The meaning of ἑργῶν (or ἑργα) in the Torah and the Prophets can be summarized as (a) cultic service, (b) service, (c) labor work, (d) skilled work, (e) work of hands, (f) making, (g) His work, (h) business, (i) practice, and (j) deed, doing.

(2) The most frequent meaning of ἑργῶν (or ἑργα) is (a) cultic service. The next frequent meaning is (c) labor work. These are followed by (d) skilled work, (e) work of hand, and (g) His work.

(3) In the Torah and the Prophets, ἑργῶν (or ἑργα) rarely means (j) “deed, doing”.

(4) The Hebrew equivalents for ἑργῶν (or ἑργα) can be שֶׁרֶה, מִלַּאֲכָה, נָבְרָה, עֲבֵר, סְעֵל, נִסְחָה, מִנְשֶׁה.

(5) ἑργα (or ἑργα) has meaning of “cultic service” including labor by people (עֲבֵר, מִלַּאֲכָה, נָבְרָה). Especially נָבְרָה seems to fit in the context.

(6) The Hebrew equivalent of ἑργα of ἑργα νόμου can be נָבְרָה, עֲבֵר (as seen in the comparison between Rom. 2:6-7 and 3:20).

(7) ἑργα νόμου does not include the special cultic service by priests at tabarnacle or Temple (שֶׁרֶה). שֶׁרֶה is always translated as λειτουργία.

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26 העבר (plural) was used rarely and העבר (singular) was generally used for the plural cases in the Scripture, so it can be בער הָעַבְרָה.
(8) ἔργον (or ἔργα) is not be equivalent for ἱσόθ.
(9) So far, the joint form of ἔργα νόμον in Hebrew could not be found.
(10) ἔργα νόμον does not include “keeping out the Decalogue.”
(11) ἔργον (or ἔργα) indicates ἀνθρώπος, so ἔργα νόμον means observing detailed norms such as circumcision, diet, Sabbath and participation in service in the Temple.
(12) ἔργα νόμον also can mean “the study of the Torah” (תנובה). 27
(13) ἔργα νόμον is equivalent to הבורנ תור in Hebrew and Services according to the Torah in English.

27 Note the relationship with Rom 2:13a
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<Text, Dictionary, Software>


<Commentary>


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