

Legalism

VS.

Faith

Second Edition



David P. Levin

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TIDINGS

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*Lord God, we pray for your grace and
guidance as we grow in Christ.*

*Help us to know, we ask in Jesus' name, to
discern faith and incorporate it into our lives.*

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Preface to the Second Edition

IT HAS BEEN WELL OVER 20 YEARS since the original printing of *Legalism vs. Faith*. The first run, published by the *Tidings* magazine, sold out quickly, and likewise a second printing. However, shortly after that, during the installation of a new computer system, the electronic version of the text was lost. The magazine articles that comprised the book were available on the *Tidings* website, but it was not in the *Tidings* publishing vision to continue with any further printings.

Thus the book went out of print, but the demand did not abate. Both the *Tidings* and I received many requests for permission to make reproductions of various sorts, or to have the book reprinted.

One of the requestors was Beth Symes in Australia. Given that a new edition of *Legalism vs. Faith* was not forthcoming, and responding to a high demand in her country, she and her publishing group, Christadelphian Books and Literature, took up the task of creating a new electronic version and courteously sent it to me for any additions or revisions before it went to press. That led to a massive re-writing project that took over two years, during which the original text was substantially expanded and updated.

However, circumstances arose that prevented the Australian publisher from completing their work. Meanwhile, the *Tidings* book publishing division gained new leadership, a new vision, and industry-level publishing capability. The publishing effort returned to the *Tidings* and the second edition, at last, is now a reality.

That this second edition of *Legalism vs. Faith* has come to fruition is the product of God's grace and the contributions of many. I owe an enormous debt to Beth Symes for insisting that this book come to print again and for the editorial work by her team on the first eleven chapters. An equally large expression of gratitude goes to Shawn Moynihan for reviving what appeared to be a dead manuscript, editing and guiding the work to completion. Thanks also to Steve Snobelen and Jason Hensley for reading and commenting on the historical chapters, and to Ethel Archard for her astute editing and much valuable advice on many

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aspects of writing and publishing. Nancy Brinkerhoff carefully read the entire manuscript and made numerous spot-on observations of passages to clarify or correct, and Kevin Flatley also caught several bloopers. Most of all I owe my gratitude to my beloved wife, Cora, for her careful copyreading, redirection when I got lost or overcooked, and sometimes not-so-patient putting up with her confused, ill-tempered, perfectionist-about-writing husband, who can be quite a challenge to live with.

*David Levin
Greeley, CO
August, 2023*

Introduction

TWO BACKGROUND LARGE-SCALE PRINCIPLES undergird the writing of this book. I want to emphasize these because the subject matter of this book, and how I treat it, can be easily read into, as in “Where’s he going with this?” There is, in fact, nothing controversial or difficult to grasp as long as you keep these two principles in mind.

The first has to do with emphasis. This book amasses historical, expositional, theological, and psychological arguments to address an issue that can be stated simply: in a life of faith, behavior doesn’t count for much, attitude counts for everything. God looks at the heart, not the outward appearance. You can fool people, who see only what you do, but you can’t fool God who knows your mind. If it’s such a simple matter, what’s the benefit of an involved investigation? The cliché “taking a deep dive” to describe a detailed look at a matter fits here.

I have gone seemingly overboard for three reasons.

First, I am emphasizing what the Bible emphasizes. Occasionally hinted at in the Old Testament, the superiority of faith and grace over works emerges as the most important theological doctrine of the New Testament. The multitude of instances of Jesus versus the Pharisees is God’s emphasis. The gospels have dozens of confrontations, parables, teachings, miracles, and warnings, all in the context of Pharisaic teaching and practice versus religion based on faith. In the gospels, Jesus’ chief antagonists are the Pharisees and their allied legalistic religious leaders. It’s the same for most of Paul’s writings. What is his predominant context? Legalism versus faith and grace. Paul’s letters are saturated with both lengthy discussions and direct statements about legalism versus faith, teachings and warnings that surely apply today. The letter to the Hebrews is the longest and most detailed exposition of the superiority of the “new and living way” over the expired Mosaic system. The subject of legalism versus faith deserves intensive treatment because that’s how Scripture treats it.

And why does Scripture spend so much time with this subject? Why is there a law given in the first place only to become defunct later? What does

that teach? A deeper matter emerges, something called human nature. This itself describes a foundation principle of life: humans are limited in lifespan, knowledge, power, and everything else in which God is “omni.”

My second reason for the heavy-handed treatment is anchored in the needs of human nature: the Bible emphasizes the contrast of legalism versus faith because human nature is so prone to want to operate in the legalistic mode. A life-changing understanding of God’s saving grace and the workings of faith requires a mature, multi-level understanding of what you find under the rubric “legalism versus faith.”

The third reason for the length and detailed coverage of this book arises from the many ways to explore this subject. Besides the massive amount of biblical text devoted to law versus grace, there are extensive historical matters—mostly extra-biblical events during the inter-testamental period—that provide insights not available in the Bible itself. The social and political relationship of the Pharisees to the Roman government and the development of their theology are necessary backgrounds to fully appreciate the interactions between Jesus and the Pharisees, his primary interlocutors. Biblically, the entire law of Moses is the core of legalism, but it by no means exhausts what “law” meant to the Pharisees; that expansion of law is another major topic in this book. I will also investigate at length the psychological processes that differ between law and grace. Other topics include the practical outworkings of faith, social implications, considerations of how we worship, how we conceive of God, and even apparently distant matters such as funeral eulogies and the temptation of Adam and Eve.

Summing up, the first guiding principle of this book, emphasis, is due to the Bible’s own emphasis, our inherent bias towards legalism, and the many fields of inquiry that pertain to our investigation of legalism versus faith.

How, not so much What

The second guiding principle of my writing is the shift of focus from the “what” of belief to the “how” of belief. Christadelphians, as a religious organization that adheres to the first-century beliefs taught in the New Testament as opposed to the fictions of orthodoxy, often need to mark out clearly the “what” that unites them. Their fundamental beliefs separate us from other Christian denominations in such vital matters as the nature of human mortality, the relationship between God and Jesus

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Christ, and the physical and political reality of the Kingdom of God when it is manifested at Christ's return. We make our creedal position clear to all; this has been the Christadelphian tradition and practice since before the name was adopted about 160 years ago. There is no doubt about the *what* of our religion, and its importance.

This book focuses on an aspect of belief that has been relatively neglected—the *how* of our religion. Any of us can answer the question, “What do you believe?” How many can answer this question: “How do you believe?” How many of you have even ever thought about that question, or have been aware that it *is* a question just as vital as “What do you believe?”

The transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant was much less a matter of a change of “what” than it was to a change of “how.” Even if the fundamental doctrines were only adumbrated under the Old Covenant, they clearly did not change: the declaration of the Kingdom on earth, the Messiah being God's son, mortality, sin, and most others. The “whats” never changed and never will. What did change was the “how.”

In brief, the “how” that changed was a change of relationship. Under the Old Covenant, a Jew related to God via law—a written code that specified proper conduct and discerned between items that were acceptable and those that were taboo, or unclean. Under the New Covenant, the spiritual Jew relates to God via a living person. That one person has a history of living a perfect life, being sentenced to death without cause, and being resurrected from the death state to immortality. That same person will return to Earth and restore God's kingdom. The change of “how” is the change from following a code of specified behaviors to developing a trusting and loving relationship based on knowing the one in whom we believe. If a righteous life can be obtained by scrupulously adhering to the code of conduct, what purpose was served by the change? And if the second covenant is the superior, what purpose was served by starting off with an inferior method of fostering a godly life? These are some of the important matters explored in the pages to follow.

This book is not at all an exposé of anyone's legalistic practices; neither is it intended to scold, excoriate, or wave any red flags—the “it's creeping into our ecclesias” warnings. My intention is to foster your own personal introspection regarding the nature of your own faith.

Changes from the First Edition

The first edition comprised 24 articles originally published in the late 1990s in the *Tidings*. The main points are all valid and remain in the second edition, but the writing has been updated and simplified. The historical background chapters (Four through Seven) are all new. Chapter Two, “Contrasting Legal and Faithful Minds,” has been moved from near the end of the book to the beginning so that as you read the succeeding chapters you will have a clear mental picture of what it means to be in the camp of either legalism or faith. Chapter Sixteen on New Wineskins is greatly expanded and continues in Chapter Seventeen. Finally, I have added an annotated list of every occurrence in the gospels that mentions Pharisees or any other antagonists of Jesus.

The Structure of This Study

Section I deals with two start-up matters: the biblical warrant for making legalism versus faith an important study, and a comprehensive look at what the terms “legalism” and “faith” signify. Section II covers the historical development of legalism, from early Genesis through the crucial period of the exile, and then examines numerous passages in the gospels and Paul’s letters that show how Jesus and Paul countered legalism and its consequences. Section III moves from historical and scriptural matters and focuses on the individual believer today. It is an in-depth theological and psychological investigation of what it means to live under a legalistic perspective on religion versus an outlook based on faith and God’s grace. Finally, Section IV looks at some practical considerations of living by faith.

The writing devices (oft used in Scripture) of contrast and emphasis are used throughout the book. The purpose of this book is to study what legalism comprises, not to look for it in others, but to reflect on your own faith.

To avoid confusion between references to chapters in this book and chapters in the Bible, the former are written out as titles, e.g., Chapter Twenty-One and the latter expressed with numerals, e.g. chapter 21.

Hebrew has no upper and lower cases, so transliterated Hebrew words are spelled in all lower case, as in *yhwh*. Also, pronouns referring to God are in lower case, e.g., his.

Section I

CONTRASTS: LEGALISM VERSUS FAITH

CHAPTER ONE

The Contrast to Faith

THE INSPIRED WRITERS OF SCRIPTURE often used the device of contrast to give definition and substance to their subject. The very beginning, for instance, set creation against the contrast of “without form, void, and wholly dark.” Darkness gave way to light, dry land appeared out of the formless water, and living creatures filled the void. The formation and population of the earth became more meaningful after God also described its opposite, contrasting condition.

Frequent Use of Contrast

The pattern of contrasts repeats again and again. Righteous Abel contrasted with his opposite, unrighteous brother Cain. Jacob and Esau were twins with opposite values. The most detailed account of any life of the Old Testament, that of David, finds sharper relief because of the extensive contrast to Saul, his nemesis and predecessor as king.

The natural world sees the same principle at work. For example, how good would satiety feel if you never felt hunger? Freedom has a vastly higher value for those who have endured slavery or oppression. In all experiences of life, contrast provides fuller meaning. Even the light of each day, when it illuminates the darkness of night, gives new hope and rejuvenation of spirit.

The grandest example of contrast in Scripture sets the New Covenant—God’s plan of salvation by grace through faith—against the background of the Old Covenant, the law of Moses. The prologue of the Gospel of John makes the succinct declaration, “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). God could merely have given a record of his grace. God could have started

the Bible with the gospels, but then the significance of faith and grace would be unclear. Scripture goes beyond telling us about grace; it also tells us about law, so we see grace clearly because of the contrast.

The Contrast to Jesus

Looking at the life of Jesus our Lord, and the various possibilities God could have used to contrast his son, reveals a remarkable and utterly sobering reality. God put forth Jesus as the image and fullness of Deity in human form (Heb 1:1-3). He represented the supreme revelation of every virtue of God and every aspect of holiness (Col 2:9).

With whom did God contrast this magnificent life of perfection? There are many ways to be ungodly. Where is the divinely selected contrast to the Son of God?

The idolatrous Canaanites might seem a likely choice, but they scarcely receive mention in the New Testament, and when they do, they seem to come out on the right end of the matter (e.g., Matt 15:21-28).

How about the Romans, the vanguard of polytheism in Jesus' day? No, it was only at the insistence of the Jews that the Romans paid any attention at all to Jesus. The Romans, by and large, hardly knew he existed or cared what he did. They're not the contrasting party.

How about the great sinners of the time, the harlots, drunkards, and materialist pleasure-seekers? We find them, too, but not in the role of contrast. In fact, the New Testament recorded the conversion of many of them (Matt 21:31-32).

Though many schools of Greek philosophy were active in the first century A.D., they receive only one direct mention in Scripture, in Acts 17 where Paul addressed the Stoics and Epicureans. Greek philosophy would come to have enormous influence in Western civilization, but we find nothing about it in the gospels or other New Testament writings that would place it as contrasting or competing with the life and teaching of Jesus.

All the groups you might think the Bible could use to serve as a contrast to Jesus find little mention in this regard—not the idolaters, the pagans, the Romans, the gross sinners, or even the atheists. Instead, God set forth an unlikely choice, a group that had much in common with Jesus. They were Jewish, so they shared his ethnic, national, and historical heritage. Monotheistic and pious, they were the custodians of God's revelation, devoting themselves to a life of strict religiosity.

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These were the Pharisees. They confronted Jesus at every opportunity. They contradicted his teachings, his religion, even his miracles. They set out to trap him in his words, to find fault with his disciples, and ultimately to bring him to a death sentence.

They also misrepresented God, exchanging his glory for their own system of rules and rituals. They received much of Jesus' attention, yet showed the least response to his teaching. They were the only group he would call "hypocrites." When the Lord's teaching ministry concluded, they drew the most withering of his excoriations: the seven woes recorded in Matthew 23.

The opposite of faith is not atheism, materialism, idolatry, or licentiousness. It is the false religion of humanly contrived holiness. You find it when you see faith turned into rules, love turned into scruples, holiness turned into a masquerade, and piety turned into pretense. All this happened when God's own people took his holiness and turned it into a human system of rules and rewards. They turned away from God, and turned away others; they turned a deaf ear to his voice, and turned out to be not only the religious and moral opposite of Jesus, but also the group most responsible for his murder by crucifixion.

The Bible contrasts faith not so much with unbelief (atheism), but with misbelief, misbelief of that particular stripe which corrupts faith by establishing a facade of pseudo-holy laws and rituals in its stead. The Bible sets forth legalism, with its charade of holiness, as the darkness that gives contrast and context to the light of faith.

In each of the four gospel accounts, the opposite, the contrast, the antagonist to the person and teaching of Jesus was played by a group of highly religious, covenant-sharing, Bible-reading, zealous people. Their approach to religion—substituting laws for faith—drew Jesus' harshest condemnation. All of this material isn't there just as a matter of historical record. It's there to teach by way of contrast: don't be like this. It's a directive to look at the legalistic tendencies inherent in your heart, because human nature hasn't changed since the first century.

Don't become like a Pharisee, claiming to be one of God's holy people and an inheritor to the promises made to Abraham and David, only to nullify your standing by turning your faith into legalism.

What is Faith?

Faith has many meanings and nuances of meaning. In this book, “faith” denotes a *relationship to God based on belief, reverence, trust, love, and obedience*.

Belief means you take God at his word. You believe he exists and has communicated to humanity through his written word and most importantly through the Lord Jesus. *Trust* means you go beyond your own knowledge and feelings—you live outside of your comfort zone, knowing that whatever happens, God is in control. *Love* means that you truly feel and understand the debt you owe to God for what he has already done—and continues to do—for you. *Reverence* means you understand God is the Creator and you are the created. This dynamic is perhaps fundamental to your relationship with God. *Obedience* means that you do what God asks of you, not to gain his favor, but because of the love he has shown you. Obedience is the true test of your relationship, but is valid if and only if it results from the first four dynamics. The key word of all this is *relationship*: understanding and acting on the principle that you relate to a living, personal, eternal being and his son, the Lord Jesus.

Of course legalists will insist that they are godly believers, and everything written in the definition of faith applies to them. At some level that is true, because they believe that God gave the laws that they follow. However, rules, codes of conduct, prescribed rituals and the like can never create the kind of love, reverence, trust, and obedience described above. Obedience out of fear of punishment, or because it gives you merit, or because it makes you a good person, is not an act of faith. As later chapters will discuss, it is inevitable that when laws are in place, the God who gave them is no longer the object of relationship; it is the rules themselves that co-opt allegiance. *Legalism cannot escape the reality that it relates to rules and rituals, not to a living being*. And that, my friend and dear reader, is not a relationship any more than a marriage is a relationship to a marriage contract rather than to a spouse.

Scope of Legalism

Is legalism a problem of time and place long ago and far away? After all, the Pharisees’ legacy is the dictionary definition “a hypocritically self-righteous person.” To assume the Pharisees invented and perfected legalism would be far too narrow a view. Legalism is a human problem.

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It encompasses more than religion and all human institutions. It is as much a part of your humanity as your sin-prone nature—in fact, it is basic to that nature. The next chapter explores how it had its roots in the first human encounter with God; and it hasn't gotten any better since. It is natural to want religion to consist of rules and rituals and rewards instead of the life-transforming experience of true godliness.

Legalism describes a fundamental approach to life and religion. It is not in itself a creed or religious doctrine; rather, it is a pervasive principle that will color one's perspective of many doctrines, including God, sin, salvation, righteousness, atonement, forgiveness, worship, and fellowship. Legalism relies on Three R's: Rules, Rituals, and Rewards. Remember these, and you'll remember what legalism is all about.

Legalism describes the human proclivity toward substituting the seen for the unseen, the tangible for the intangible. Rule-following can be observed; faith is seen only by God. Legalism is not a name to be tossed at others, but rather a convenient, biblical, and accurate description of a human limitation. People want what seems to be the easy way: the concreteness of a rule-and ritual-based religion. Know the rules, follow them, and believe you have done something good for which God will take note and reward you accordingly. The concept of avoiding external evils is attractive, as it fosters seeing yourself as better than those who don't follow the rules. However, God is looking for spiritual growth, which lacks definition and measurement. The ambiguities of developing personal faith can be frightening. You want to know what you should do, but you shy away from knowing who you should be.

A Human Problem

The bent towards legalism extends beyond Pharisaic tradition, and even beyond religion per se. It's part of the human mentality and it pervades every aspect of your daily life. Tax codes, insurance contracts, organizational bylaws, and user's agreements for any digital service are but a few examples of the proliferation of legal rules, specifications, clarifications, and such that provide necessary institutional and societal structure.

Legal documents provide to all parties a common understanding of how business is to be conducted. As necessary and proper as these are, they carry an implicit message also: people aren't trustworthy. We won't or can't rely on good faith to resolve any misunderstandings. Codes and laws are a necessary expedient because of human nature, but their very existence amplifies and exploits that nature.

This book, however, is not about the role of law in society, but rather the role of law in the realm of morality and religion. It specifically addresses the misuse of legal structures as a substitute for the coinage of true religion, grace and faith. In the context of religion, rules do not imply "I don't trust you"; they imply, "I don't trust myself." The expansive development of this intriguing observation occupies the next 28 chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

Differences Between Legal and Faithful Mindsets

THIS CHAPTER IS AN OVERVIEW of the contrasting operations of the legalist and faithful minds. The following table shows side-by-side 24 specific attributes that affect worship, service, and interaction with ideas and people. These topics are presented here to clarify what I mean in the chapters ahead when I refer to the legalist mind and the faithful (or spiritual) mind. Most of these specifics show up throughout the book.

Legalism is the Opposite of Spirituality

Spiritual thinking does not have a natural home in the human mind (1 Cor 2:14). The journey to spirituality involves recognizing that legalism easily creeps into your life and worship because it *does* have a natural home there. If the following analysis seems harsh, it's because of innate and cultural tendencies toward legalism.

You can easily recognize the Pharisee in the Legal Mind column, but this list is not meant for them—they are long gone. Jesus started with the covenant of grace, and the Pharisees with the covenant of works. New Testament legalism corrupted grace, a far more serious matter.¹ The table is not meant to describe Pharisaism, nor is it intended for you to read the left-hand column and nominate people you know who seem to fit the description. If you have pegged anyone for the legalist side, you belong there too, for “judgmental” is a feature of legalism. Use the list only for your own personal assessment and spiritual development—it's not about someone else. You might find only one or two entries that apply to you personally, and maybe only sometimes, or you might find

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way too many, enough to rattle your spiritual cage and reassess your concept of what it means to be a believer.

Subject		Legalist Mind	Spiritual Mind
1	Source of Sin	Contact with taboo objects or breaking a rule	Thoughts of inherently carnal mind
2	Default State	Acceptable, “clean”	Unacceptable, “unclean”
3	Cause of Sin	Behavior	Thought
4	How to Protect from Sin	Avoidance	Overcoming
5	Worldview	Narrow-minded, restrictive	Open-minded, free
6	Role of Rules	Many rules and do nots	Few rules, mostly dos
7	Role of Worship Rituals	Many rituals, uniformity expected	Few rituals, much leeway in worship
8	Life Guidance	Lives by rules	Lives by principles
9	Focus	Things	Thoughts
10	Concrete versus Abstract	Concerned with behavior	Concerned with attitude and values
11	Content versus Process	Content thinker	Process thinker
12	Change	Fears and opposes change and new ideas	Accepts and adapts to change
13	Tradition	Adheres to tradition for its own sake	Evaluates usefulness of traditions
14	Role of Works	To earn God’s favor	Response to God’s favor
15	Approach to Problem Solving	Needs certainty and definites	Comfortable with uncertainties and ambiguities
16	Risk Aversion	Fears failure	Takes risks of faith
17	Forgiveness and Judgment	Fears the judgment	Confident in God’s grace
18	Individual Differences	Insists all maintain same rules	Allows for varying levels of growth
19	Spiritual Life	Little or no spiritual growth	Spiritual growth
20	Learning and Knowledge	Absolute, finite knowledge	Relative, expanding knowledge
21	How to Achieve Unity	Uniformity of belief and behavior	Accommodation, cooperation, and submission
22	Self-Assessment	Claims of purity and holiness	Makes no claims, but lives a holy life
23	Self-Assessment	Righteous	Abased
24	God’s Assessment	Hypocrite	Forgiven sinner

The List of Contrasts

The table lists 24 aspects or particulars of religious thought and practice; these are in the left-hand column under the heading “Theological Domain.” The center and right-hand columns respectively list the Legalist and Spiritual views for each. Following the table is a lengthier discussion of the entries in the table.

These are not necessarily mutually exclusive pairs; some of the legalist problems only accrue as a matter of emphasis or priority. For instance, we all need book learning, but the legalist sees this as an end in itself, not as part of the growth process.

Locus of Sin (1, 2)

Legalist thought centers on belief in external uncleanness, namely, that sin does lie outside of oneself (See Chapter Twenty-Four: “Clean and Unclean”). For the legalist, the belief in external uncleanness eventually culminates in good/evil dualism and vain attempts at righteousness. Every entry on the list flows from this fundamental error. The recognition that sin is an internal matter of human nature stands at the core of our need for mercy.

How does confession sound coming from a legalist? How can you reach the depths of need when the real problem isn’t you, but only what you contacted? The spiritual mind knows that while the world has many temptations, the real problem is within. This confession says, “Be merciful to me, a sinner (Luke 18:13).”

Mistaking the enemy engenders misguided effort. Human nature and habitual sin constitute the enemy. If you look elsewhere, you’ll fight the wrong battle, as if you believe in an external devil, whether it be the internet, orthodoxy, or the world in general. If you control your will and impulses, you can deal with any circumstances and distractions of life (Prov 16:32).

Dealing with Sin: Cause and Orientation (3, 4)

Believing that some things out there really are inherently sinful, avoidance strategies rank high for the legalist, and these require vigilant cataloging and labeling. “This is good; this is bad.” To avoid is to keep away, thus the legalist has a general “away from” orientation to the world. Things, objects, people, activities become subject to ritual rejection. The Pharisees’ avoidance agenda lists certain foods, people,

clothes, work, houses, and so on. Your lists tend more to entertainment and educational choices, social media, career goals; only occasionally do you trivialize down to fashion styles or holiday observances. Nonetheless, it's usually not too hard to find someone who's glad to tell you what evil to avoid, but it's all a vain attempt at creating holiness in the heart (Col 2:20-23).

The spiritual mind knows problems come from within, not from the environment (Mark 7:20-23). This fundamental first principle applies to daily life. The spiritual person feels comfortable in moving toward and engaging the world, allowing opportunities for service and learning. The spiritual mind nourishes spiritual growth through wise choices. This is called overcoming, not avoiding (Rom 13:12-14).

The avoidance or "away from" perspective naturally focuses on behaviors, what you do. The spiritually-minded believer is much more concerned with the content and focus of developing righteous thinking, and avoidance becomes mostly a secondary matter.

Restrictions (5)

With so many potential external defilements, the legalist lives in a narrow, self-restricted world. The spiritual mind, not ruled by fear of defilement, lives in a free and open world (Rom 14:2), and that permits more options for growth and service. The Samaritan episode illustrates this perfectly: the priests and Levite demonstrate their "away from," behavior-oriented avoidance policy. Their legalist, narrow² world doesn't include bloodied persons, sinners, Gentiles, and many other people and things; they are of no value to the stricken traveler. The Pharisees' hyper-avoidance strategies helped them achieve monasticism without the inconvenience of the Essenes' troglodytic lifestyle.

The spiritual mind has a broad view of the world and sees in it opportunities for learning, growth, and service. The spiritual mind can help far more people than the legalist, who is quite busy enough keeping ritually clean.

Rules (4-7)

Rules, rituals, and rewards form the three pillars of legalism. Rules typically fall into the categories of do and do not. Do not rules address the need for avoidance of the unclean, and do rules address the need for ritualistic justification. Neither has much usefulness; contrast these

rules with activities such as preaching, teaching, and looking after another's welfare. Rules can impede a legalist's care for other people.

Do not rules create an inferior pretense of faith (Col 2:20-23) and inhibit spiritual growth. "Do rules" tend toward the legislation of worthwhile activities: do the daily Bible readings, attend class, go to meeting, serve the ecclesias, and such. Necessary activities all, but thinking that they are commands to be ticked off so that one pleases God reduces them to works of the flesh.

Spiritual minds have few rules, mostly do rules, used as expedients to develop good spiritual habits. Moreover, they keep rules primarily for personal improvement, with no expectation for reward or credit from God and no insistence for anyone else to abide by them.

The spiritual mind lives by principles, not rules. These in turn motivate the necessary behaviors of spiritual life. Attending ecclesial functions has spiritual benefits, such as learning, worship, fellowship, and service. You go there because you want to be there, not because you're supposed to be there. While the legalist thinks that works provide, or even guarantee, favor with God, a spiritual principle, such as "I owe my existence to the Creator," surpasses countless rules in effecting godly behavior. Thanksgiving (Psa 50:14, 23) motivates the works of the spiritual mind. With spiritual development and service as highly-placed values, the necessary behaviors fall accordingly into place. A legalist does ritual and avoidance works in order to obtain salvation; a spiritually-minded person does useful works because God *has already provided* salvation through faith in Christ.

Life Guidance (8)

Life guidance refers to the basis for a proper and righteous life. The legalist ind, not surprisingly, looks to a set of rules, behavioral dictates for each situation of life. Do this, don't do that. Spiritual persons employ principles to guide their life: simple generalities that cover wide areas. For example, the legalist might have a rule for donating a specific amount of money each week; a person of spiritual faith would live instead by a principle, such as "Be generous." In non-religious contexts, people who publish their "rules of life" are usually actually stating principles. The nine characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit translate to principles, not rules. Paul makes that clear in the context of Galatians 5.

Mental Activity (9-11)

These three closely related entries elaborate on #7, above. The legalist, striving to maintain rituals and avoid external evils, needs to categorize every object and activity as clean or unclean. The focus is on the inherent qualities of the external object or activity, not on the relationship of the object or activity to the person. The spiritual mind believes the New Testament teaching that evil comes from within; all things remain clean if used properly. Thus, the spiritual mind focuses not on the external object, but on the use of the object, that is, the *relationship* between user and external object. The legalist focuses on the *what*, the spiritual mind on the *how*. Things are neutral, we can use them for good or for evil purposes.

To illustrate the difference between *what* and *how* thinking, suppose that someone participates in a committee meeting. You ask that person what went on in the meeting, and they report that the group discussed purchasing a new building versus repairing the old, and how the money might be raised. That's content thinking, observing the *what* of the proceedings—the subject matter.

A process thinker says something like this: "It was another show of dominance by the perceived power players. There was no listening or challenging to be had. It didn't take long before most of the group had given up." This observer focuses on the *how*, the interactions among the participants in the meeting, regardless of what they were talking about. No doubt this person also knows *what* was talked about, but the emphasis is on abstractions such as dominance, challenging, and motivation. In ecclesial life, dynamics such as these are more important than the course of action a group decides on.

What makes awareness of and focus on process superior to content focus? Because, this perspective captures *relationship*, and the New Covenant is about *relationship*, as Paul wrote, "to the pure all things are pure (Titus 1:15)." This short saying teaches us that it is not what's "out there" (content), but *how* we relate to it. Again notice the focus on *how*, not *what*. Another example: The parable of the Good Samaritan teaches that "neighbor" is not defined by a person's worthiness (in our eyes), but by whom you choose to be neighbor to. That is the lesson Jesus taught when he asked which of the three proved to be a neighbor of the stricken man. "Neighborness" is determined by *how* we relate, not by *what* a person is.

Change (12, 13)

Things that people avoid don't change; if something is unclean, it's unclean, and that's not going to change. The legalist mind, entrenched in "identify and avoid," fearfully looks upon any kind of change as suspect, unhealthy, unnecessary, and possibly destructive. Synonymous with change, the legalist also lacks the concept of "growth." What the legalist understands by "growth" is "doing a better job at following the same rules." After decades of religious practice, a legalist still functions at the same level.

By contrast, the spiritual mind continually changes, and modes of worship, prayer, study, and service might also take new forms. Ideas once thought unworkable become possibilities and then realities. This doesn't mean all changes are good, but good change is necessary.

The "no change" mindset of the legalist is a ripe breeding ground for thoughtless adherence to tradition. When a practice or belief goes untested and maintains its life only because "that's what we've always done (or believed)," then that's a potentially unhealthy tradition.

Such esteem for tradition (Mark 7:8) blinded the Pharisees to the real word of God. Any belief or practice requires evaluation—and regular re-evaluation for truth and spiritual utility. Clearly, our fundamental doctrines will stand this test, but let's look at an example that, although relatively trivial, illustrates both adherence to tradition as well as content versus process thinking: the use of English archaisms, that is, words once common but no longer in general use. Of the many archaisms in the King James Version (KJV), we're going to look at just two classes: verb endings (e.g., maketh, dost), and second person pronouns (e.g., thou, thine). The short version is that all English words were at one time new to the language, and their meaning over time can change.

In our day, some people use the older words in prayer; some do not. Some feel irreverent praying in conversational English, while others feel stilted praying in archaic English; to each their own on this matter. To quote from the original 1611 KJV preface, "For is the kingdome of God become words or syllables? Why should wee be in bondage to them if wee may be free, use one precisely when wee may use another no lesse fit, as commodiously?"

There is no inherent respect or holiness in archaic forms³, but holding on to them just because "that's the way we always have prayed" is a form of rejection of change. Language is an extension of our

humanity that changes as assuredly as clothes styles or any other aspect of human culture. We don't wear breechclouts or doublets, so why adhere to archaic language? It's when you think that the words themselves have an inherent holy or vulgar connotation that you have a problem. People who do use "thou" and other archaisms in prayer should know that these linguistic artifacts have cultural meaning to some, but no scriptural basis. To insist that they must—or must not—be used represents content thinking. Whether you say "you" or "thou," we all pray with holy intent.⁴

Role of Works (14)

The legalist works in order to become righteous in God's eyes; the person of faith works as a response to God's love and mercy in providing reconciliation and salvation. The legalist thinks, perhaps ever so subconsciously, "I did something good—now God owes me something." The spiritual person thinks, with great conviction, "God did something amazingly good for me—now I owe God something." To the human observer, the work, whatever it is, will look the same, but God knows the motive from which it came.

Fears: Uncertainty, Failure, and Judgment (15, 16, 17)

The legalist has several fears: fear of uncertainty and ambiguity, fear of failure and rejection, and fear of God. Not the *awe* of God, but being *afraid* of God, in the sense that one is afraid of an angry superior. The spiritual mind, on the other hand, lives in awe of God, and has a profound respect for God's power, goodness, and mercy. The spiritual mind knows that an omnipotent God controls the universe and acts accordingly. More often than not, however, the action of the spiritual person is non-action, because the truly spiritual person can tolerate a lot of loose ends and unknowns.

Fear of ambiguity and uncertainty stems from the fundamental belief in external evil. Because the world has so many defilements, it's vitally important to carefully and precisely box everything and leave nothing to chance or doubt. When in doubt, cast it out, but leave nothing to uncertainty. The legalist fears the undefined because it can let something unclean in through the door. Legalist minds place much on the slippery slope.

Legalists, being under law, have a hefty load of ritual observance and defilement-avoiding to obtain their reward. This begets a fear-based religion. Legalists live in constant fear of something going wrong—missing a ritual, contacting a defilement, doing something wrong. This fear leads to a restrictive life; it also leads to a dreadful misconception of our loving heavenly Father.

In the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30), one man is afraid to risk his money. The others do risk much, for no one in business doubles their investment without considerable risk-taking. One makes ten talents of five, the other four of two; the exact amount (content) is unimportant. They must have trusted that even if their ventures fail, their master will accept them. But the man who hides his talent for fear of losing it doesn't even avail himself of a safe investment.⁵ He has no trust or love for his master. He only has fear that if he fails, he will incur his master's ire. Therefore, at all costs, he refrains from doing bad. His definition of a good work, preserving what his master gives him, reflects the legalist thinking, "avoid evil and I'm okay." His conception of God does not inspire him to do anything useful at all. His fear of God is the wrong kind of fear.

Legalists fear the God they have made in their own image, a vengeful, offendable, and irascible projection of human ideology and attributes. The legalist fears this God as if he were a powerful human tyrant who doles out rewards only to those who have earned it.

Spiritual minds serve a loving father. They operate from a basis of respect, love, and trust. Their belief in providence and forgiveness supports the mandatory risks of faith so that they can lead a productive life. Think of Abraham as an example of risk-taking, and you'll know the power of one's conception of God to control the destiny of life. He left his city life in Ur to become a nomad, relocated often to places he'd never been, lived among different cultures—all of this because he trusted God.

Scruples (18)

Another fear-based feature of legalistic minds is trying to force their scruples on others. This happens because they focus on the external thing, not their relationship to it. If something is unclean, then it must be unclean for everyone. The spiritual mind knows that the New Covenant has much inherent ambiguity. For instance, Paul said it's fine

to get married, but better to stay unmarried (1 Cor 7:38). Some people celebrate a day (which might include hauling a tree into the house), some don't (Rom 14:6); both can be okay. Some, "the weak," eat only vegetables; others eat anything (Rom 14:2). Some bring forth sixty-fold, some thirty, some a hundred (Matt 13:8); God accepts them all.

We have one standard, the perfection of Christ, but many individual approaches. Paul's lack of precise definition when dealing with matters of scruples would have totally unwound true legalists who read his letters. Paul didn't say "meat offered to idols is unclean." Instead he said, "Maybe, it depends on your attitude and circumstances." He allowed for a different content standard (food clean or unclean), but the same process standard (spiritual growth). The legalist looking only at the content sees ambiguity, and that's scary.

Thus, legalists desire to export their weaknesses. If it's unclean, then it must be so for everyone. "If I can't handle social media, then it's bad for everyone." Anything that represents an evil to the legalist must be forbidden, period. Differing levels of faith and practice make no sense in the absolute world of the legalist.

Spiritual minds keep their faith as a personal standard, (Rom 14:22), and they're perfectly happy to allow others their scruples. They have no fear of ambiguity because they know that we all grow at different rates toward an infinite standard, and of course ecclesial and personal life will have uncertainties in language, form of worship, dress, style, musical taste, and so many other variables. The spiritual mind knows that ecclesial life proceeds much more easily when we tolerate others' scruples and keep ours to ourselves. The spiritual mind has no spiritual fears because most of those scruples focus on externals, and not on issues of personal faith.

Regeneration (19)

An extension of numbers 12 and 13. Following laws and rules only yields stenosis and stagnation, not spiritual growth. The concept of moral regeneration, the only answer to the evil within us, has no place in the legalist construct of external evil.

Knowledge (20)

Jesus commended the Pharisees' scripture knowledge (Matt 23:2); what they did with it led to their downfall. Knowledge (content) can yield faith, or it can yield laws. It's how you use knowledge (process) that

counts. To the legalist, the acquisition of knowledge is an end in itself. Moreover, knowledge is treated as an absolute quantity (the more you know, the more you know—not the more you know, the more you realize what you don’t know); the legalist always wants more, because more knowledge means more wisdom. We do have a wonderful tradition of scholarship and Bible study, but it is an asset only if you use it to build your faith.

The oft-heard phrase “wise unto salvation” is wrested Scripture. The passage reads, “wise unto salvation *through faith* which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15 KJV). Wisdom is knowing that salvation comes not through knowledge, but through faith. Spiritual minds also know that the more they know, the more they know how much they don’t know. Anyone who studies the Bible with the intent to amass knowledge itself for teaching status, ecclesial power, winning arguments, or the ego of being a noted Bible student is a fool. For the faithful mind, the purpose of learning is not acquiring more knowledge, but developing the fruit of the spirit.

How to achieve unity (21)

This is an easy task for the legalist mind: everyone believes what I believe and does what I do (e.g. styles of dress, music, forms of worship). It’s like a marching band: uniformed players all marching in the precise order and cadence. The legalist, of course, is the drum major. Unity occurs when we are “all of one mind,” and clearly *my* mind has got things right. The legalist’s idea of unity really isn’t unity; it’s redundancy.

For the spiritually-minded, unity is a process of agreement, not uniformity. Unity only becomes a spiritual process when the dynamics of tolerance, submission, accommodation, and adaptation come into play, and those virtues are only developed in the presence of non-uniformity of thought and spiritual practice.

Self-Assessment (22, 23)

A writing technique used by John in his first epistle contrasts the claims of the pseudo-holy from the lives of the truly godly. The apostle often repeated the phrase “If we say...” to start the negative line of a contrasting ethical couplet (compare 1 John 1:6 with 1:7; 1:8 and 10 with 1:9; 2:4 with 2:5; and 2:9 with 2:10).

Some people claim purity, others just do it, leading lives that reflect the work of God in their hearts. You have no need, like the Pharisees, to stand up for the “purity of the truth.” No human can sully God’s truth.

Claiming to uphold purity amounts to nothing; doesn't everyone believe they uphold "pure truth"? Who wouldn't claim that they don't stand for true apostolic religion? If you allow God to rule in your heart, you have no need for claims, because your life speaks for itself. Moreover, because it's God's purity, not yours, spiritual minds know that you cannot have or hold God's purity purely. Paradoxically, you uphold "the purity of the truth" by recognizing that as a human you can only impurely reflect God's ineffable truth.

God's Assessment (24)

The end of the legalist approach comes to, "I do thus and so; I obey the rules." The consequence of self-justification is that you take God and grace out of the picture, and make salvation a matter of your own doing. This defines pride. However, because no one can fully do right, you have the blotches which lead to "hypocrite," Jesus' special label for the Pharisees.

Hypocrisy happens this way: you establish a rule and attempt to keep it. Maybe you do, but even if so, God extrapolates from the specific behavior of the rule to the ethos represented by the rule, and then holds you entirely responsible for keeping that (Rom 2:22). You affirm that it's wrong to steal, but do you steal from God in the sense of failing to use your time and resources in his service? You become a hypocrite when you claim adherence to a law, but fall down in another application of the same principle.

Should you adopt consistent immorality to avoid hypocrisy? God forbid! Instead, you search for the perfect standard of Christ, and devote your life to growing into his character, relying on his grace to cover you in the process. Forming character cannot lead to hypocrisy, because you know that you are a work in progress.

Summary

The end of the parable in Luke 18:9-14 makes a convenient conclusion to our discussion of the legal mind in contrast to the faithful mind. The tax collector who dares not compare himself with others or trumpet his good works, but only begs for mercy with his head bowed, goes home justified. That's really all you need to know. He trusts and loves his God; it is his recognition of that relationship as manifested in his confession—not his good works—that saves him. To those with heads bowed in the true humility of contrition Jesus gives the exhortation, "raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28).

Section II

HISTORICAL AND BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

CHAPTER THREE

The Beginnings of Legalism

THE UNIVERSAL LEGALISTIC TENDENCY started at the beginning of humanity, in the very first human scene in the Bible.⁶ Adam and Eve were confronted by a choice as to whether or not to obey a restriction that God had placed on them. The account is brief and condensed, with every detail contributing to an analysis of their thought process and ultimate choice. Their prototypical legalist strategy failed them as a means to adhere to God's stipulations.

The scriptural account of humanity starts on Day Six of the creation week (Gen 1:24-31). On this last day of creative work, God made the various terrestrial animals and finally the humans. Genesis 2:4-24 is frequently considered another creation record, but it's a detailed narrative referring to Day Six only.⁷ The distinctive vocabulary of the Genesis 2 record reflects an emphasis on the humans that God created on that day.

A Test of What?

An enormous conceptual gap lies between what God said to Adam and what God said to the other animals when he told them to be fruitful and multiply and fill their environments. Those creatures would fulfill their roles automatically; they had no capacity to choose otherwise. The humans, however, stood alone as the only species upon whom God conferred sufficient mental capability to have a personal and moral relationship with their Creator, and this inherently meant that humans could choose if they would do what God commanded. The key word here is *relationship*, a concept that I reiterate throughout this book.

A Significant Detail: How Eve Refers to God

Among, and perhaps most important of, the new vocabulary introduced in Chapter Two is *yhwh elohim*, translated as LORD God in the English convention of using small caps LORD to represent the divine name, *yhwh*.

In Genesis 1, only *elohim* occurs. Translated “God,” *elohim* functions as a title, indicating power, while *yhwh* is a name, indicating personhood. The two designations occur as *yhwh elohim* throughout Genesis 2 and 3, a linking that unmistakably refers to a single being and ensures a monotheistic perspective. The personal name *yhwh* is first used by itself, without *elohim*, by Eve in Genesis 4:1.

Throughout the general creation account in Genesis 1, God (*elohim*) speaks rhetorically, calling the components of creation into existence and naming them. It’s not dialogue, as there is no sentient being listening or responding. God, designated as *yhwh elohim* (Gen 2:16-17), now speaks to an entity that can listen, understand, and comport his behavior in light of God’s commands.

God (*elohim*), designating the omnipotent eternal Creator, calls the universe, and specifically Earth, into existence in Genesis 1. In Genesis 2, the detailed and anthropocentric account of Day 6, the text switches to *yhwh elohim*; the divine name, indicating personhood, comes into use because God interacts with the persons he created. The name/title *yhwh elohim* is used for the remainder of the Adam and Eve account—except for the dialogue between Eve and the serpent. Here, significantly, the dialogue reverts to the use of *elohim* only.

This brief dialog (almost certainly representing Eve’s internal processing), and especially the use of *elohim* instead of *yhwh elohim*, suggests an insight into Adam and Eve’s understanding of their Creator: a power, not a person. In this very abbreviated way, with details in early Genesis so important, we have the first hint—given in the use of designations for Deity—that a relationship to a power, not a person, yields a legalistic conception of God. People of faith relate to a person, not a law or power. The explicit link to legalism is just a few words away.

God's command to Adam comprised four directives: watch the garden, keep the garden, eat abundantly, and don't eat of two special trees. You already know what occurred, so it's hard to imagine that history could have gone down as Adam living happily in the garden and never eating of the tree, but given that it was his and Eve's choice to eat, they could have chosen to abstain. If they had no free choice, then no humanity was involved, and thus no transgression.

Although not explicitly stated, the presence of these directives constituted a test. On the surface, they look like a test of obedience, especially the tree restriction. Eat these, don't eat those, and all will be well with you. If you do otherwise, you die that very day. However, God was testing much more than their do-or-don't obedience.

Adam could serve and keep the garden, or not. He could eat abundantly of all the trees in the garden, or not—that was probably an easy one to do. The proscriptive injunction, “don't eat,” was of a different sort. As noted, it was a law, and that meant that for humans with free choice, it *could* be violated. That was implicit in the prescribed punishment—if you do eat, death will ensue. Also, any limitation or restriction stirs up the affections for the taboo object or behavior. Why not eat? What was there about that tree? Given human nature (they were humans and they did have a nature), it had to put the thought in their minds. They were not yet what we call “fallen, sin-broken creatures,” but they were capable of considering the alternatives—eating or not eating—and being tempted by the proposition. “We *could* eat. I wonder”⁸

The Temptation and Their Defensive Strategy

What failed in Adam and Eve's strategy for dealing with temptation? John's description of “the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life” (1 John 2:16) obviously recalls “good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise” (Gen 3:6). Adam and Eve face three temptations: become wise (like God), enjoy the fruit for its own tastiness, and ... wait a moment. Delight to the eyes? God spoke nothing of not looking at the tree. How was “delight to the eyes” a problem?

That the tree of knowledge of good and evil was delightful to look at, there can be no doubt, but so were every other tree in the garden. This one was special, though, and here's where maybe the process of transgression began to develop. Good for food demanded that the fruit

would be eaten, likewise “desired to make one wise.” Being a delight to look at wasn’t in the same category. Nothing would happen if they just looked at the tree and its fruit—unless they thought that looking was the first step of a downward slide to eating.

Here’s where Eve’s addition of “neither shall you touch it” made sense. Possibly they reckoned that erecting a fence between looking and eating would keep them safe. If they only looked, but kept far enough away so that they didn’t touch, then they wouldn’t transgress the law. They added a layer of protection, a move known much later to the Pharisees as erecting a “fence law.” Fence laws were added to prevent transgression. If eating was wrong, and you couldn’t eat unless you touched, then you added a prohibition on touching. Perhaps their reasoning could have gone something like this:

If the fruit of that one tree is off limits, then it must have some inherent not goodness about it. Why else would God have declared it off limits? Something must be odd or wrong with that tree—even if it’s the prettiest tree in the garden. And if there’s something wrong with it, then by all means, even touching it would be wrong. We must not even touch the fruit, let alone eat it! We must stay away from that tree!

Hence, they added to God’s law, to protect themselves from a perceived external contamination. In fact, Eve wouldn’t even say its name when talking to the serpent; she referred to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as “the tree in the midst of the garden.”

The Whole Context

God’s exact words to Adam were: “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen 2:16-17). Eve had yet to appear, so Adam must have informed her about the eating rules. However, Eve’s reply to the serpent was, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but *God said*, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, *neither shall you touch it*, lest you die’” (Gen 3:2-3).

Eve’s statement included additions, deletions, and substitutions to God’s original command to Adam. She mitigated the penalty of “you shall surely die” to “you will die.” She reduced the beneficence of God in “you may abundantly eat” to “you may eat.” These changes carry more

significance in Hebrew than in English. The key difference for the present discussion is the addition of “neither shall you touch it.”¹⁰

God’s instruction forbade only eating; there was no mention of touching or not touching. Eve’s statement was the only time a prohibition against touching was mentioned in the entire episode (see also 3:1, 11). Eve gave it the reinforcing “*God said*” (italicized above), making the addition to God’s law, “touch not,” equal to His own decree, “eat not.” Adam and Eve erected a fence to protect themselves from eating. It didn’t work, because temptation is overcome through faith, not rules.

It’s just a likely speculation to state exactly how Adam and Eve cognitively processed dealing with a restrictive commandment. You can be sure, however, that the text as written—especially given the later development of the highly legalistic religious practice of God’s people—is revelatory and instructive. Adam and Eve’s failed method to resist temptation teaches that behind obedience there must be faith, and behind faith must be a trusting relationship to God.

Adding to the Law: Paul’s Assessment

Paul understood that adding to God’s law has been a human folly from the beginning. Adding vainly to God’s word, giving it the status of God’s word itself, avails nothing. The result of Adam and Eve countering temptation with law, not faith, resulted in “she took of its fruit and ate” (Gen 3:6). Notice the apparently unnecessary “she took of its fruit.” Of course she would have to in order to eat it, but the text highlights the irony that in failing to keep God’s command, Adam and Eve brook their own “addition” first!

Adam and Eve countered temptation by adding a stricter rule to give them another barrier against committing transgression. Their legalistic strategy failed and they succumbed to the temptation.

The failure of rules as a basis of morality had its roots in the rudiments of the world, writes the Apostle Paul (Col 2:20-23). He based this declaration on the Genesis account of the fiasco of Adam and Eve. This text reinforces the point:

What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” But sin, seizing an opportunity

through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. (Rom 7:7-12)

Here, Paul used allusions to Genesis to show how the commandment brought death. His language, especially the key word “deceived,” takes you back to Genesis. It’s hard to imagine Paul writing this without intending to remind his readers of the original failure of rules to check temptation. Although at the time Adam and Eve had no history or development of sin, they were clearly able to be tempted and deceived. The Romans paragraph clearly applies to them in principle, if not extent.¹¹ Their nature was the same flesh and blood human nature that we have; it was their experience that differed.

The most powerful and direct anti-legalism passage in the New Testament is in Colossians. Paul wrote that God forgave us by “canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross” (Col 2:14). Jesus rose again, but the law was dead forever.¹²

What exactly was this “record of debt” that God canceled at the crucifixion? The KJV translates the Greek literally as “handwriting of ordinances.” Which ordinances? Does this phrase refer to the law of Moses or to the legal morass of the Pharisees? If the law of Moses, does this include the moral precepts or just the rituals?

The law died at the crucifixion, at the least, the ritual worship aspects of the law. The context in Colossians supports this, for the next sentence declares the expiration of “a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.” (Col 2:16).

Then, in the passage where Paul really denounced legalism, he wrote that rules-and-rituals religion was worse than worthless; it was deceptive and dangerous. The archaic KJV here is barely intelligible, but many translators and revisers have given us a variety of renditions of Paul’s intent.¹³ The NIV gives this straightforward account:

THE BEGINNINGS OF LEGALISM

Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. (Col 2:20-23)

Paul referred to Pharisaic teaching in verse 21: “do not handle, do not taste, do not touch.” The law did have regulations in these matters (e.g. Lev 15:7), but Paul described these as “according to human precepts and teachings,” so clearly he was thinking about Pharisaic scruples and not about Leviticus. Not only that, but he was clearly also referring to Adam and Eve’s vain attempt to prevent the sin of eating by adding “do not handle, do not touch” to their law.

You see then that the “handwriting of ordinances” included both the rituals of the law of Moses (see also Eph 2:15) and also the Pharisaic additions which stemmed from them. However, what’s really at stake is a principle, not a definition. That’s what you always want to keep as the primary meaning of “law” when you refer to this struggle between law and faith. It is the principle of justification by works versus the principle of justification by faith that constitutes the struggle.

On the other hand, the New Testament maintains, reiterates, and amplifies the moral principles of God. The death of the law was not the death of morality, ethics, or godly character. God’s law, in the sense of God’s teaching, abides forever.

Unlike the risen Christ, rules and rituals cannot give life to their adherents. Paul referred to confidence in salvation by legalism as “empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world” (Col 2:8). He contrasted this vain show of worship with Christ, the true substance of religion, in whom “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col 2:9).

Paul referred to a point even before Pharisaism or any religious legalism. This has been the human tendency from the beginning, inherent in a limited view of the world. And if that’s how your first parents, in the prime of creation, dealt with temptation, what can you

say about yourself now? This is why God offers you grace through Jesus. This point will be emphasized in various ways throughout this book.

Test of Obedience, or Manifestation of Relationship?

Did Adam and Eve fail the test of obedience? Yes, of course. However, it was not so much a test of obedience as a measure of relationship. The law of obedience was on the surface, but the underlying and more important lesson was this: God restricted Adam. It wasn't about trees or fruit—God could have made any restriction.

The key issue was that God is unrestricted, or as conventional theological language puts it, eternal, omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent. As the Creator he has no limitations, whereas Adam, the created entity, inherently had restrictions, or limitations. Unlike God, Adam had a beginning. Unlike God, Adam had limited knowledge. Unlike God, Adam had limited—very limited—power. Could Adam create an Eve when he saw that none of the animals were “bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh?” Adam could not do what God did, he could not know what God knew, and he could not be who God was. The laws that God placed on Adam—call them restrictions—were meant to show Adam this relationship. Likewise, the freedom God gave Adam to eat of every other edible tree showed God's abundant provision and good will toward Adam.

The restrictions on the two trees demonstrated the difference of status between God and humans, and therefore the basis of their relationship. Adam, as a created being, did not have the wisdom (eternal perspective) to know how he should run his life. He could not create his own food. He would have trouble even growing his own food. Adam was supposed to learn that he must trust that whatever God designed for him was in his best interest. That was the nature of a trusting relationship between a created being and an uncreated God.

The point made above about the use of designations for God highlights the difference between obedience and relationship. Had God interacted with Adam as *elohim*, the emphasis would have been on his power and otherness as the Creator of the universe. The restriction would be an impersonal test of obedience. However, the narrative includes the use of the divine name, *yhwh*, so it was a person, not a power, who interacted with Adam (see text box). The limitation became the

basis of the relationship between two sentient entities—one omnipotent, one not—rather than a relationship between Adam and a law.

Under the law of Moses, Israel related to law, not a personal God. The prologues of Hebrews and the Gospel of John both proclaim that now we relate not to law, but to God's son, Jesus, a person. Relating to a set of rules can at best develop obedience, but relating to a person develops love and faith.

Adam Makes His Own Laws

When Eve and Adam decided to eat that which God had restricted, they in effect made their own law. Their law was “we may eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” By doing so, they assumed a role only proper for God—they declared that they also had no limitations or restrictions on their lives. The irony of the serpent's beguilement was that they become like God in that sense. The fatal problem was that they possessed their “limitlessness” in a human form—limited in time, knowledge, and power—and thus they were in an impossible situation. They could no longer have a relationship with God, because they had assumed his position.

Adam and Eve had no right or position to be making their own laws and thereby declaring their status as equal to God. The limitation on their cuisine was not so much about what they could or could not eat, it was about their understanding that as created beings they were dependent on God and they could trust that their dependency would be met with goodwill. Genesis 3 is ultimately about relationship, not law. You need to think beyond the concrete, simplistic world of rules and laws to see this perspective.

A Beginning Lesson

Rule-making is the pervasive problem of religion. Later chapters explore many of the questions raised by this observation. For instance, how can Paul also call the law “holy, just, and good”? What about the rules necessary for the maintenance of order and organization in a group endeavor, such as an ecclesia? Rules are necessary and appropriate for children. You need to know when and how to make rules for yourself for your own growth.

Paul knew what he was writing—rules don't work. Don't replace faith by letting your worship devolve into rule-following. Faith grows

LEGALISM VS. FAITH

when it does not hide behind a facade of rules and rituals. Even worse is attempting to force your scruples on others with the imprimatur of “God said.” Faith leads to obedience out of love for the teachings of the New Covenant. Additional laws, rules, regulations, and codes lead to the misguided sense that avoiding something brings holiness. They divert your attention from the true internal problem, thus impairing your ability to deal with temptation.

However, the challenge of legalism is always present. The easy way of religion says, “Give me the rules to follow.” This is much easier to embrace than “I commit my life to spiritual growth, self-denial, self-sacrifice, and serving others.” You feel safer dealing with God through rules than through a face-to-face confrontation. The historical prevalence of ritualistic religion attests to this.

CHAPTER FOUR

Context of the Law of Moses

IF SALVATION COMES THROUGH the operation of faith and grace, what was God's purpose for giving the law of Moses? Salvation has always been by grace, not works. Why would God add something ineffective after first establishing the efficacy of faith? What could God be teaching in giving hundreds of commands when the Israelites had no chance of keeping them, and even if they did, they wouldn't gain salvation through them anyway? A look at the "big picture" provides some perspectives on the law of Moses in its historical and theological context.

Chapter One presented the biblical use of contrast. God gave law to put grace in perspective. You know the concepts of grace and faith better for having seen the operation of law. The life and teaching of Jesus the Messiah, the living manifestation of the one true omnipotent and merciful heavenly Father, was prefaced by the dead code of written law (Heb 1:1, 2; 2 Cor 3:4-9; John 1:17). The law as a contrast to the dispensation of grace was the core reason for its delivery to Israel.

The Priority of Salvation Through Faith

A chronological point, argued by Paul in both Romans and Galatians, is that the New Covenant actually preceded the Old Covenant, effectively reversing their titular designations. Paul used two different lines of reasoning to establish this teaching, one from within the life of Abraham, and the other from the broad sweep of Israel's history. Based on these expositions, the New Covenant also became the First Covenant.

In Galatians, Paul explained that faith had precedence over law because the Lord God made promises to Abraham, according to his faith, four centuries before the giving of the law. Paul referred specifically to God's ultimate promise made to Abraham in Genesis 22:17-18 (Gal 3:8, 16-17). He stated that a later addition (that is, the law of Moses) could not annul these promises. Paul's citation of the 430-year span from the promise to the giving of the law emphasized this immutability. It's as if Paul had written, "Not just precedence, but precedence by more than four centuries!" The law could not annul the promises (Gal 3:15-18); the operation of faith, which brought the promises, retained priority over the law.

In Romans, the argument hinged on a sequence of events in Abraham's life: God accepted Abraham's faith as righteousness (Gen 15:6) before He gave the ordinance of circumcision (Gen 17:10). Even within Abraham's life, justification by faith preceded the giving of the ritual (Rom 4:9-12). Just as Abraham preceded Moses, Abraham's belief in God's promises preceded Abraham's ritual circumcision. Paul adroitly used both examples, ironically negating justification by works of the law on the issue of precedence, itself a point of law. With the law thus made secondary, the New Covenant of justification by faith had a dual legacy of precedence over the Old Covenant. It bore the title New Covenant because it replaced the law of Moses, but it also represented "that which was from the beginning" (1 John 1:1).

Added Because of Transgressions

In Galatians 3:19 Paul asked, and then answered, the question: Why then the law? "It was added because of transgressions." Just what did Paul intend by "because of transgressions?"

This phrase correlates with Romans 7:13, where Paul stated that the law given to Moses exposed and magnified sin, making it "sinful beyond measure." Paul had also made the same point just a bit earlier: "Now the law came in to increase the trespass" (Rom 5:20).

How did law magnify sin? In three ways. Firstly, like a pseudo-cure, it allowed disease to progress unchecked. Secondly, laws exacerbated sin by creating more opportunities for transgression. Obviously, the more laws you have to remember and keep, the more likely it is that you will transgress. Thirdly, the presence of a law in the form of a prohibition stimulated perverse human nature. Just put the

word “don’t” in a command, and it generates an insatiable desire to find out what will happen if you do. To make any temptation attractive, just declare it “off limits.”

It seems that magnifying sin would hardly serve any spiritual purpose; however, God had two lessons to teach. In the rampant transgressions of the law, you see both your innate sinfulness and your utter inability to achieve righteousness through a set of rules and rituals. It was in the context of this line of thinking—the exposure to and multiplication of sin—that Paul wrote that “the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (Rom 7:7-12). The law, and here Paul was citing specifically the tenth commandment “you shall not covet,” exposed your internal sin. You could not blame law for your sin; sin comes from within. Law only exposes human weakness. If law were in itself “unholy,” then you could claim an excuse. Hence Paul’s statement: it’s not the law, it’s *me*.

Shown to be both depraved and destitute, you can readily seize the gracious offer of salvation by faith. God be thanked that he reckons your faith as righteousness, for you can claim neither inherent goodness nor due payment by your works. Therefore, the magnification of trespass, manifested by raking your sinful nature over the coals of the law, necessitates approaching God with a faithful appeal for his mercy.

The Schoolmaster

Paul continues in Galatians, calling the law a “schoolmaster” (KJV) to bring us to Christ (3:24). Other translations render this word “custodian,” “trainer,” or “guardian.” The word “schoolmaster” may lead you to consider the law as an instructor, with its shadows and hints teaching the faithful Israelite about the Messiah. Scripture, however, does not take this view. For instance, the writer of Hebrews emphasizes the contrast, not the similarities, between Christ and the law of Moses.

In this instance, a shadow means a poor representation, not some sort of approximation. Certainly, Christ is a high priest who entered the sanctuary (Heb 9:24). The point here, however, is not that the Mosaic rituals prefigure Messiah’s eternal mission, but that the Mosaic rituals pale in contrast with the eternal verities.

Moreover, when the shadow precedes the reality, can you expect to discern the reality? Take the children’s game of making shadow figures on a wall. You place your hands in front of a bright light and make

representations of animals such as a rabbit or a dog. However, if you had never seen a rabbit before, would you have even the slightest notion of “rabbit” based on the shadows of two fingers suggesting long ears? Only because you have already seen a real rabbit does the shadow make any sense, and even then it’s still the crudest of representations. Certainly, the Israelites could not discern the nature and mission of the Messiah to come from the various aspects of ritual law, any more than you can know what a rabbit is like from a shadow on the wall.

In retrospect, having the entire New Covenant and the life of Messiah in mind, you can project backwards and note the various symbols, hints, and types contained in the law of Moses. Nevertheless, it seems extravagant to think that the people of Israel, not having seen the revelation (1 Pet 1:10-12), would come to these same conclusions and thereby construct a faith in the future Messiah. What they could see, if anything, was the vanity of the law, not the reality of its shadows.

How then did the law teach Israel? The term schoolmaster is a misleading translation. The word for “schoolmaster,” at its root, means “child leader.” The word Paul used here came down to us today as “pedagogue,” which means “teacher,” but the pedagogue of Classical times was a slave put in charge of the children as a keeper and disciplinarian. “To understand it as equivalent to ‘teacher’ introduces an idea entirely foreign to the passage, and throws the apostle’s argument into confusion.”¹⁴ What Paul had in mind was not the abundant teaching of the law, but the constraints of the law. Paul said we are “shut up” under the pedagogue, meaning the law restrains us. Paul referred to our condition as children, for whom restraining rules are appropriate, though they’re hardly a guarantee of obedience. Adults have learned to make the right choices without being told what to do, but children need to be told. Children need a rule such as “wash your hands before dinner”; adults know to do this without being told.

The law of Moses was for the newborn children of Israel when they exited Egypt via the birth canal of the Red Sea. When Israel grew up, God removed the pedagogue and gave them Christ, so they could live by faith and pursue righteousness of their own volition, as “God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts” (Gal 4:6). This broad history, as Paul wrote in Galatians 4:1-7, is all allegorical, representing the growth of faith in the individual.

The Big Picture

The details of the law—the symbolic meanings of the details of the tabernacle, sacrifices, priestly garments, and ritual activities—have been the subject of much exposition. The big picture, the “forest” as contrasted with the “trees,” is the subject now. However, these interpretations are from hindsight. What would the Israelites in their own time see and understand? Even the most faithful and insightful could have barely a glimpse of what you see now.

Take a few steps back and get the big picture. Look at the whole system of law as a unit, or pattern. What do you see? An entire landscape of ceremony and ritual—but you know what the writer of Hebrews knew and what the faithful of Old Testament times knew: rules and rituals aren’t going to get you salvation. The Israelites to whom the law was given had to see through the system for their faith to operate.

Old Testament Critique of the Law

When the insightful and faithful Israelite, such as Isaiah, David, or Jeremiah, looked into the ritual law, they saw not so much the likeness of Deity, but the vanity of ritualized religion. The following quotations from the Psalms and prophets testify to the law’s inadequacy even during its own dispensation:

“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil.” (Isa 1:11-16)

“I will not accept a bull from your house or goats from your folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.” (Psa 50:9-15)

For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. (Psa 51:16, 17)

They understood God’s rebuke of Israel for their failure to develop morality through rules and rituals (Isa 1:4, 12-17). They saw the weakness of human flesh exposed (Jer 7:21-26). They saw the hypocrisy of feigned obedience without moral commitment (Amos 8:4-6). They saw that ritual works lacked the power to develop the right attitude, and they saw their nation lapse into hypocritical worship. In Psalm 50, Asaph reflected on the superiority of attitude (“sacrifice of thanksgiving”) over the merely ritual aspects of animal sacrifice. These passages give a clear indication of how an insightful, faithful Israelite viewed the efficacy of ritual religion. They knew that a better covenant would someday remove the shackles of the law. Jeremiah prophesied of this new covenant, written not on tablets of stone, but written on their hearts (Jer 31:31-34).

God gave Israel well over a millennium under the law. What did he find at the end? The original ten moral precepts and 613 commands multiplied into thousands of regulations, but faith was nowhere to be found. He came looking for fruit in his vineyard, but he found wild grapes, and his people rejected his son (Matt 21: 33-43). So God ended the law, reinforcing for all time that “the righteous shall live by faith.” The veil of the Temple torn in two at the crucifixion signified the death of the dispensation “added because of transgressions.” Transgression had shown all of its ugliness, and then lay ironically defeated by its own provision, in the body of the sinless Messiah hanged on the tree.

The law of Moses never effectuated salvation and is now extinct, even if various details live on as foreshadows that we now see in Christ.

CONTEXT OF THE LAW OF MOSES

It mainly lives in God's record as a necessary part of the development of the theology of grace. It gives perspective to see grace by showing the opposite. It shows that while rules are necessary for children, faith is for the spiritually mature. It magnifies transgression, thus driving you to the mercy of God.

CHAPTER FIVE

Pharisees, Scribes, Sadducees, and More

PHARISEES WERE AS MUCH A PART of the New Testament landscape as the Temple in Jerusalem or the Sea of Galilee. Like a geographical feature, they had no explanation or background given; they were just there. The original readers of the gospels would be familiar with the Pharisees, but we are far removed in time and culture.

Pharisees weren't the only Jewish group mentioned, but they occupied the role of the principal opponents to Jesus, at least insofar as recorded in the gospel accounts.¹⁵ Legalism was by no means confined to them, as the law of Moses was the basis of all forms of Judaism in the first century in some way or another. In the gospels¹⁶ the Pharisees represent the quintessential adherents to the law, the masters of casuistic interpretations and practice, and the primary opponents of Jesus, both of him personally (e.g., “born out of fornication,” John 8:41) and of his teachings.

For purposes of this book, I have used the Pharisees and pharisaism as *the* representatives of the legalistic mode of religion. Whenever you read “Pharisees” in this book, understand that they aren't the only ones against Jesus, but they have earned pride of place as the icons of resistance to the gospel.

The next few chapters provide historical, sociological, and theological background material about who these people were, how they originated, what they believed, and what roles they played in New Testament times. This chapter will introduce the three main groups as far as the gospels are concerned—Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees—who question Jesus, attempt to trick him, argue with him, stir up the

people against him, and eventually machinate his crucifixion by the Romans. As noted above, this book focuses on the particular role of the Pharisees as antagonists to Jesus.

Pharisees predominated over all other groups both in number of occurrences and in importance in the gospel narratives.¹⁷ This does not *necessarily* mean, however, that they were the most powerful, numerous, or influential group, or that they were unified in their opposition. All we can say for sure is that *as recorded* they took the greatest offense at the unlettered teacher from Galilee and presented themselves more often than anyone else as face-to-face opponents.

Despite their important standing as lead players in the gospels, determining what it meant to be a Pharisee is no easy task; the gospels give no background information about them whatsoever.¹⁸ As one historian wrote, “they [the New Testament writers] at no time feel called upon to define the Pharisees explicitly or to delve into their prior history.”¹⁹ Almost everything we know biblically comes from inference. Other historical records (e.g., Josephus and the Apocrypha) and rabbinical writings provide some historical, theological, and demographic information.

Something New: Secular Teachers and Authorities on the Law

An important feature of the Pharisees is that they are a lay, or secular, group. This fact is easily overlooked, but at the time when the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) conclude—the time of the post-exilic prophets, in the fourth century B.C.—religious matters, including teaching and interpreting the law, are still entirely under Levitical aegis. However, by the second century B.C., a secular—that is, non-Levitical—group has taken a position that for 1,200 years belonged only to the priests and Levites.²⁰

Thus, the Pharisees represent a sea change in the Mosaic structure: authorities on the law, but without any Levitical or priestly duties, teachers but without any divine sanction, pious and devoted followers of a way of life that in some sense make them even more separated unto God than the Levites themselves. Whenever you encounter Pharisees in your gospel reading, remember that in the time of Jesus they are relatively a new phenomenon. Their existence is an anomaly, a residue of life in exile without a temple. There is no warrant in the law for such a group.

If the Pharisees have no warrant under the law for their existence, how do they justify themselves? They claim antecedence to Ezra, whom they venerate as the first scribe (Ezra 7:6, 10, 21). Skilled in the law, a teacher and a leader in Israel, he creates the role which Pharisees would strive to replicate for centuries to come. When Ezra and his fellow Levites read the law to the nation, they also give the sense (Neh 8:7-8). In the thinking of their followers, they sanctify the process of commentary and clarification and the process of oral tradition.

According to the Mishnah (the division of the Talmud containing the codified oral law), “Moses received the law from Sinai and handed it down to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets handed it down to the men of the Great Assembly.”²¹ The Great Assembly refers to 120 scribes and sages who return from exile with Ezra.²² This Great Assembly represents both clerical Levites and lay teachers, with whom the Pharisees would have had a greater identification.

Synagogues, too, correlate with the Pharisees, not the Levites. There are no synagogues in the Hebrew Bible. The synagogue is a place for study and worship. The point to remember is that like Pharisees, synagogues seem perfectly normal when you read about them in the New Testament. However, that familiarity is an artifact based on our position in history. Synagogues came out of the exile. It is reasonable to suppose that some kind of gathering place started in Babylonia to maintain the teaching and worship while in exile, and these congregations returned to their land, bringing this new religious structure with them. Think of the synagogue as a lay temple, not enjoined in the law, but serving a necessary purpose to maintain the Jewish way of life in exile and after the return.

The Main Groups: Pharisees, Scribes, Sadducees

With respect to the various groups, overlap is a possibility, if not a certainty in some cases. For instance, chief priests are most likely Sadducees, although some are Pharisees. Gospel accounts of the same incident often use different terms, so we don't know if each writer cites only some of the participants, or if they are known by more than one term, or if the writer has another purpose in using the groups that he chooses. The picture is far from clear.

A few facts seem to arise:

PHARISEES, SCRIBES, SADDUCEES, AND MORE

1. All of the opponent groups are Jewish, with the possible exception of the Herodians, but they have no independent role anyway. The Roman rulers have no interest in Jesus until the Jewish groups force their hand in the crucifixion. The gospels record nothing of any Roman opposition to, limitation of, or even awareness of Jesus' ministry. There's only the one episode of the Roman centurion whose servant Jesus heals (Luke 7:1-10). There is no other Roman interaction with Jesus until the time of the arrest and crucifixion, unless we count the census in Luke and Herod's treachery with the magi.
2. Pharisees are the acknowledged authorities on the law,²³ but have no control over what people believe or do. Josephus ascribes great power and influence to the Pharisees in one text, but it seems that most historians see a bias here (Josephus was a Pharisee), and they do not take him at face value. Although the Pharisees are highly respected as legal authorities, the Romans run the state and the priests and Levites run the Temple. At times before the gospel era the Pharisees do have great influence with the Seleucid and Hasmonean rulers. However, no one *controls* anybody; people can believe and behave as they chose. It is clear, for instance, that some Jews, like Levi (Matthew) become tax collectors, others are sinners (those who do not follow the law), and many follow Jesus and accept his teaching. The Pharisees are unable to bring Jesus to trial without the cooperation of the priests, who have close access to the Roman government, hence the emphasis on the chief priests, rather than the Pharisees, in the gospel records of Jesus's trial and crucifixion.
3. In the first century, at the time of the gospels, there are about 6,000 Pharisees²⁴ and about 20,000 Levites.²⁵ We can assume a preponderance of the Pharisees are in or near Jerusalem; the Levites are probably spread throughout their ancestral home towns, but will make regular sojourns in Jerusalem to serve at the Temple.
4. The Pharisees are not of one stripe; Paul says that he belongs to the "strictest party (or sect) of the Pharisees" (Acts 26:5). Some gospel narratives use the phrase "some of the Pharisees" which

might indicate that there is disagreement within the group as to if or how they would confront Jesus.

5. The Pharisees are predominantly middle-class tradesmen, merchants, and the like. They are “lovers of money” (Luke 16:14), but this probably means that they view material success as an indication that their righteousness has earned them God’s blessing. Some, probably a small minority, of the priests belong to the Pharisees.²⁶
6. Pharisees, like Sadducees, are a political party, but not in the sense that we think of political parties. They aren’t elected to anything. Being a Pharisee means belonging to a group having political as well as religious beliefs. They attempt to exert influence on the Seleucid and Roman rulers, sometimes gaining favor, sometimes enduring great persecution for their political affairs. Earlier generations of Pharisees actively participated in armed conflict and other violence, although we read nothing of that in the gospels.
7. A chief difference between Pharisees and Sadducees is acceptance of the oral law, the additions to the law of Moses. Per Josephus:

What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observations by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them, and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers; and concerning these things it is that great disputes and differences have arisen among them.²⁷

8. Pharisees are more nationalistic than the Sadducees, who are more likely to adopt Hellenistic ideals and accept the Roman rulers. Sadducees are by and large aristocrats who benefit from a close association with Romans. Think Sadducees = Tories (Loyalists) and Pharisees = Whigs (Patriots) during the period of the American Revolution, and you’ve got a fair analogy.

9. Although they have a nationalistic bent, the Pharisees' general perspective of nationalism is toward their own world of worship. They don't like having Roman overlords and aren't about to compromise their beliefs and way of life in order to be "Roman," but they also are content to abide with the foreign rule as long as such rulership permits them to follow the law of Moses and their added traditions.
10. One historian sums Josephus' information on the Pharisees thus: "The Pharisees were an aggressive scholar class that championed the authority of the two-fold law—the Pentateuch and the *paradosis* [oral traditions]—earned the respect and support of the masses, and advocated loyalty to any state that recognized the authority of the two-fold law."²⁸

Scribes

The lay Pharisees displace—maybe to a large extent—the clerical Levites as the main keepers, protectors, defenders, and teachers of the law and their many additions and clarifications. The Levites are still represented in that area under the rubric "scribes." The New Testament scribes are best understood as a continuation of the Old Testament scribes, who were Levites (2 Chr 19:5-11; Ezra 7:1-6; Neh 8:7-12, 13:13). Scribes perform a number of duties in addition to copying the *Tanakh*, and probably rabbinical writings; they have both clerical and secular functions. They can read and copy documents.²⁹ As Levites, they have various duties in the Temple, but only when their course is on duty, so they have most of the year to study, practice a trade, and perform any number of legal services involving documents such as contracts, deeds, or wills for the general (illiterate) public.

Most relevant, in my view, is the continuity of the work of scribes in the late Old Testament. An artifact of Scripture interferes with what otherwise would be an obvious point: the Levitical scribal class of the post-exilic period is the same as that of the New Testament. This artifact is the "break" between the two testaments, a period of a few centuries with no canonical writings. Politically and socially there is much change during this time, but daily life regarding the Temple continues despite all of the turmoil. The Temple of the gospel accounts, the Temple where Jesus teaches, is the same Second Temple rebuilt in the time of Ezra.³⁰ The Temple institutions of prayer, sacrifices, offerings, burning of the

incense, services, teaching, tax collection, and maintenance continue throughout the centuries. Priestly and Levitical duties carry on according to the law of Moses, year after year. When the camera opens on the New Testament in Luke—if you hadn’t been conditioned to think in terms of centuries of missing time between Malachi and the gospels—you will recognize Zechariah the priest doing his regular rotation of service as the continuation of Old Testament practice. There is no reason to think that the scribes of the New Testament are anything other than the scribes of the Old Testament, from the tribe of Levi.

Another line of evidence that suggests the scribes of the gospels are the Levitical scribes is the pairing “scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites,” used seven times by Jesus in the great condemnation recorded in Matthew 23. Jesus says, “The scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat.” This cannot be said of the Pharisees alone—they are a lay group. The scribes, however, are of Levi. The Pharisees have by then co-opted many of the priestly duties as teachers and keepers of the law. Jesus does not mention the Sadducees, as they never confront Jesus on any legal matter. It seems that the combination “scribes and Pharisees” might equate with “the law and the prophets,” meaning the priestly and secular classes together occupying Moses’ seat, now represented by the scribes and Pharisees.

There is also a lexical argument based on comparing the use of the Greek word translated “scribes,” γραμματεῖς (*grammateis*), in the gospels and Septuagint.³¹ This word indicates that the New Testament scribes are more than writers and recorders; they also correspond to the Old Testament Levitical scribes in that they have other official duties, mostly concerning the Temple.

Although none of them alone is absolutely conclusive, the evidence cited strongly supports identifying New Testament scribes as Levites. Their role as adversaries of Jesus remains the same, however, whoever the scribes really are.

Sadducees

If not all that much is known about the Pharisees, we know even less about the Sadducees. Unlike the Essenes, who left an entire library in the Qumran caves, and unlike the extensive rabbinical writings,³² historians have yet to identify any writings attributable to the Sadducees. For our purposes, however, that is not a huge problem as the

Sadducees' role as opponents of Jesus is limited to, really, only two occasions: the trick question proposed about the sevenfold widow, and their role in the arrest and trial of Jesus. Even though the later occasion is massively important, their involvement there is only implicated, as the chief priests play a leading role in the arrest and trial accounts.

Sadducees are mentioned only seven times in Matthew, and once each in Luke and Mark and not at all by John. Contrast this to the 80 times the word Pharisee appears in the four gospels. Sadducees are not significant players as theological opponents of Jesus during his ministry, at least insofar as the New Testament record.

We know from Acts 23:7 (and the Josephus quotation above) that the Pharisees and Sadducees are ideological opponents. They do not believe in a resurrection. They accept only the Torah, and they have no use for the oral law. Acts only mentions the matters of the resurrection, angels, and spirits.³³

Socially, the Sadducees are aristocrats³⁴ who largely accept Hellenistic adaptations to gain favor with the Roman rulership. Most of the priests are Sadducees.

On no occasion do the Sadducees ever contest Jesus about any legalistic matter. This is consistent with their religious position, which rejects the oral tradition that the Pharisees zealously develop and protect. Their one cavil with Jesus is about the (presumably) hypothetical instance of the sevenfold widowed woman. Clearly she cannot be married to seven husbands in the resurrection, *ergo*, no resurrection. Jesus replies by citing a passage from Exodus, that is, from the Torah, the only accepted authority for the Sadducees.

The other interaction they have with Jesus is at the arrest and trial. No gospel account mentions Sadducees by name, but there are many references to the chief priests and the high priests, who are undoubtedly Sadducees. They seem to have judicial control at this point, something the Pharisees do not have. Thus, the role of Sadducees is not as upholders of the legalistic tradition, but those who have the position and influence with the Roman government to arrest, try, and crucify Jesus.

The Pharisees and Sadducees are at odds in theology, ritual, domain (Temple versus synagogue) and social status. Yet their common hatred of Jesus triangulates them together to plot the crucifixion. The Sadducees have a significant place in history, but they will be discussed no further in this book.

CHAPTER SIX

History of the Pharisees: Part 1

THE REGIME OF LAW STARTS WITH the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai to Moses, but the rabbis reckon God's commands from the beginning, counting up to 613 individual commandments given in the Torah, both positive and negative.³⁵ By the first century A.D., the Pharisees and their predecessors had created a labyrinth of clarifications, definitions, rulings, exceptions, and other ordinances that resulted in the most thoroughly legalistic expression of Jewish life to appear up to that time. How do the Pharisaic traditions arise from the original Mosaic code recorded in the Pentateuch?

Under the common law system used in most English-speaking countries, once a law is in place, a cascade of clarifications and definitions will necessarily follow. Lawyers will argue for this interpretation or that in a given circumstance and a judge will render a decision, thus creating a precedent and a line of reasoning that will add to the legal corpus. This progression into a multiplicity of regulations, each covering a specific application of a law, is inevitable; but even this process does not provide a full narrative from Sinai to the Pharisees. If it were just a matter of inevitable legalism, a movement such as the Pharisees would have arisen before the Israelites entered Canaan. As it is, it takes over a millennium until the Pharisees emerge.

How then *does* all this come to pass? How does Israel get from Sinai to the legalistic piety of the Pharisees? How do the Pharisees become the religious establishment of Jesus' day? Where do they originate, and how do they develop their meticulous approach to religion? How do the

Pharisees handle the law, and what do they find so offensive about Jesus? As important as these questions are, the lack of historical knowledge leaves any explanations open to debate.

The immediate precursors to the Pharisaic movement are unknown. No background is given in history or by the gospel writers. However, it is possible to piece together a likely narrative, from which certain truths will emerge. In the end, the Pharisees' opposition to Jesus is not only about whether he follows their understanding of the law—their opposition is as much political as it is religious.

A Big Picture Perspective of Israelite History

Israel lives under the law for well over a millennium, 1,200 to 1,400 years, beginning at Sinai and ending in Jerusalem with the veil of the Temple rent in two. The law does set Israel apart from the other nations, but adherence to it can never be fully achieved, and it cannot achieve salvation. It helps define “righteousness,” which is either ritual cleanliness and acceptance, or ouster from the body of Israel. Apart from a few brief reformatations, the people of Israel never even give themselves to the spirit of the law to live as a sanctified, just, loving nation. Had Israel lived ideally after God gave them the law, they would have entered the land, walked faithfully in accord with its principles, and rejoiced in God's blessings and protection. Unfortunately, nothing close to that happens.

I will divide the theological history of Israel into five periods to approximate general trends:

1. In the Desert of Sinai
2. The Time of Joshua and the Judges
3. The Monarchies and Prophets
4. The Exile
5. The Return from Exile to the New Testament

The development of the Pharisaic movement from Sinai to synagogue has no clear start. The Pharisees are first mentioned by name in the middle of the second century B.C., and that reference indicates they are already a significant group. Several antecedent events move history along up to the emergence of this group of ardent Jews who play such a large role in the gospel accounts. Nominating a single historical event or one date to define “this is when the Pharisees begin” is like arguing for the date of the fall of the Roman Empire. The history of any

event is multifactorial; a number of causes come together to produce a given state of affairs. This is certainly the case in the development of the Pharisees of the gospels, even though some of those causes remain unknown, lost to the ages.

Moving through this history, the amount of relevant detail increases, with a significant gap in about the fifth century B.C. To reinforce the drama that history really is, I'll call the stages of development "Acts," as acts in a play.

Act One: Between Egypt and Canaan—in the Desert of Sinai

Two principal events initiate Israel's life under the law. Of course, receiving the various commandments in the first place is the primary event. The delivery of the law includes both those given on Mt. Sinai and also the other laws added during their journey, as recorded in Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Building and consecrating the tabernacle is the other big event.

According to Pharisaic tradition, God dictates the entire Torah as well as the oral law to Moses on Mt. Sinai: "the oral tradition they believed God had revealed to Moses at Sinai, that Moses transmitted to the prophets,³⁶ and the prophets to sages, down to that very day and to their own group."³⁷ Thus, the Pharisees' believe that the oral law is just as valid as the written. However, there is no mention during this period of any legal clarifications, additions, definitions, or the like outside of what God gives.

There are a handful of direct references to the implementation of the law, such as the man stoned for breaking the sabbath by gathering sticks (Num 15:32-36). The golden calf incident surely hints at the law of jealousy (Num 5:11-21) when Moses has the Israelites drink of the powdered remains of the burnt image—an oblique reference to the law.

The Israelites commit numerous sins and acts of rebellion during the Wilderness wanderings, and Moses repeatedly intercedes for them. On no occasion (at least insofar as we have recorded) does Moses (or Aaron) make a sacrificial offering to atone for Israel's misbehavior—he appeals to God and God forgives. Moses' direct intercessions anticipate the New Covenant far more than they reference the fresh-off-the-press law.

Act Two: Coming into the Land—Joshua through Samuel

The procession bearing the ark of the covenant as the priests lead the Israelites' crossing of the Jordan is the last specific mention of the law for about two hundred years. After the priests bear the ark and lead the march around Jericho, then what? How much is said about the operation of the law thereafter? Very little. During the entire span of the Judges period until Samuel, the law seems almost absent.

The period of the judges could have been a time of peace, faithful worship, and moral development for Israel. Instead, the Bible records that Israel's continual backsliding and whoring with the foreign gods bring them repeated periods of oppression. There are more references in Judges to Israel serving foreign gods than serving Yahweh. Both Levitical leadership and national unity disappear. The Levites mentioned in the sordid episodes of the closing chapters of the book of Judges show how far that tribe has fallen from their holy duties. Aside from one reference to "offering sacrifices and inquiring of the LORD" (Judg 20:26-27), in the context of civil war against the tribe of Benjamin, there is little in Judges.

The only reference to an aspect of the law is the angel's instruction to Samson's parents, that he should be a nazirite from birth. The nazirite ordinances (Numbers 6:1-21) do not have any provision of dedication from birth—it is a vow an adult takes on. Moreover, it is not Samson's parents who initiate the dedication, but an angel sent from God, so this episode does not register as an instance of the law in use by the Israelite community.

During the first two hundred years or so of Israel's life under the law, they have few prophetic voices. They add no sacred writings, such as from a psalmist. They have little recorded worship. The law seems to have almost disappeared. There are references to the location of the ark during the late Judges period under Samuel, but these narratives relegate the ark to some kind of token status, like a religious icon.

The corruption of the priesthood during Eli's high priesthood (1 Sam 2:12-17) also suggests that the tabernacle service has become a folly, though certainly there remains a faithful few, such as Hannah and Elkanah. Only in the spiritual oasis of the book of Ruth, whose events probably occur in the mid-Judges period, is there any significant recognition of the law. And, more pertinent to our topic, there is nothing whatsoever that will answer to even an inchoate legalistic

movement. The principal theme of this period seems to be that the law never takes hold of Israel's consciousness.

Act Three: The Monarchies and Prophets

Saul, the people's choice for the first king of Israel, does nothing to restore the law to its proper place in Israelite life. When God transfers the kingdom to the tribe of Judah, by his own choice of King David, restoration is under way. The major event of this era, without question, is the building and dedication of the Temple in the reign of King Solomon, David's son.

Many other references to the law appear in the period of the kings. We read of a few reformations, notably those of Hezekiah (2 Chr 29-31) and Josiah (2 Chr 34-35). The prophets refer to the law in calling Israel back to the spirit of its worship. Although the overall piety of the nation remains low (except for the times of reformation), at least God's word regains its status as a moral standard and guiding light of the faithful. The Levitical priests maintain religious leadership, and the prophets warn against mere formal worship without moral regeneration (Psa 50:13, 14; Amos 8:5, 6).

Still, through the end of the monarchy the scripture record mentions nothing of any legalistic movement. There seems to be a hint of a legalistic approach to sabbath-keeping in Amos 8:5, where the prophet castigates the hypocrisy of the merchants who dutifully wait for the sabbath to end so that they can resume their corrupt business practices. The big picture, though, is that the historical narrative books of this period (Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles) have relatively little to indicate that the codes of conduct or rituals prescribed by the law were extant.

The exceptions that do occur (e.g., the reformations mentioned above) imply that neglect of the law is the norm. The prophets repeatedly repudiate Israel's backsliding, and Solomon's grand temple becomes home to a syncretic system of foreign gods impregnated into the worship of Yahweh. Competing centers of worship, more prevalent in the Northern Kingdom, are explicitly pagan but esteemed by their patrons as properly ordained worship. God wants the fruits of righteousness and faith from his people, but he finds only the wild grapes of unmitigated immorality (Isa 5:2). The trial of living by law produces little in the way of a righteous nation.

Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes show that at least for a few there is some moral presence.³⁸ The books of the prophets have frequent allusions or references. Even here, however, there are limitations. The references are almost exclusively in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and these references are always in the context of what Israel *isn't* doing.

For instance, Isaiah opens with an attack on the unfaithfulness of Israel (1:10-14) citing several practices under the law: burnt offerings, incense offerings, new moons, and feast days. God is wearied that Israel keeps these rituals while they remain morally reprobate. Continuing through Isaiah, there are occasional references to the law, but it is mostly written in terms of moral failings leading to punishment before an ultimate restoration.

Look at the big picture. Given the amount of text in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy recording the law of Moses, and emphasizing the importance of keeping that law, and given the prominence of the law to the nation during the time of the exodus and wilderness encampments, the law is surprisingly neglected during Israel's life after they enter the Land of Promise. As the curtain falls on Act Three, nothing at all hints at even the stirrings of a legalistic movement.

Act Four: Exile

Technically, exiles, plural. The inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom are hauled away to Assyria mostly in 722 B.C. The Kingdom of Judah falls to the Babylonians (who conquer the Assyrians about 608 B.C.) in 586 B.C.³⁹ The destruction of Jerusalem means not only the end of the Temple, but also the end of the monarchy, a functioning priesthood, the land of promise, and, as far as Israel could know at the time, the end of any interest God has with them. Only a few prophets remain—Daniel, Ezekiel, Jeremiah—to maintain a spark of life in God's people.

Somewhat short of a millennium in their land, the Israelites find themselves largely dispossessed. On a theological level, it is the result of their failure to worship and serve only the One God, Yahweh, who delivered them from Egypt and brought them into the land originally promised to their forefather, Abraham.

On a political level, it is just another day at the office of empire for first the Assyrians (conquerors of the Northern Kingdom) and later the Babylonians, who sack Jerusalem and take the Southern Kingdom.

On a sociological level, all but the poorest of the peasants are removed from their homes, their country, their way of life, and taken to a strange land. Somewhere in this context legalism is born; this is where the story of the Pharisees truly begins in earnest, even if no one knows how it comes to pass. This is a black box of history.

That the Babylonian exile provides the first venues for the development of the Pharisees' ancestors seems likely, but not certain. Something happens there so that the Jews who return to Israel bring with them a hitherto unknown form of religion. It seems that a main, if not *the* main impetus, is to develop a rigorous approach to the law as a means to preserving national identity. No land, no king, no Temple, no nation—what is left as the basis for their identity? What can hold them together and keep them distinct from the people among whom they live? How does a people remain a people when they are in exile? And this Israelite nation is not just another tribe or nation of the Eastern Mediterranean. This is a nation with a unique history:

For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of. Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live? Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? (Deut 4:32-34)

Now, in Babylonia, all of this treasured heritage seems lost. Yet abides their desire to keep themselves as a unique people and not become assimilated into the landscape of their captors. They have two possible avenues to achieve this: ethnic purity and Scripture. As for the former, it may have been a losing battle to live for several generations in a foreign land without intermarriage, and then to return to the homeland and find that the conquerors have installed their own populace there also.⁴⁰

Thus, Scripture alone becomes the defining character of the people. Without a temple, places of assembly are established by those learned in the law to read, teach, and worship—what would be called synagogues

after the exile. In the teaching and remembrance of *torah* would the integrity of the nation remain.

Edersheim provides a plausible account of Jewish activities in Babylonia during and after the exile.⁴¹ Compelled by a duty to preserve *torah*⁴², its teachings and its applications, those learned in Scripture begin, in a formal sense, the great era of oral tradition. They compile oral laws and traditions. They define, legislate, and teach. Their academic activities bolster their status among the people as keepers of God's law. Citing Josephus and Philo, Edersheim writes that the majority of the exiles remain in Babylonia, even after the return under Ezra. Some of the large and influential Jewish communities become permanent homes; centuries later the rabbinic activities in these settlements provide the basis for the Babylonian Talmud, whose authority becomes the standard Talmud, overshadowing the Palestinian (Jerusalem) Talmud.

Those who do return from Babylonia bring with them the same zeal for interpretations, laws, methods, and traditions. Even though they will come back to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple, the spiritual center of Israel will soon become divided between two loyalties: the Temple under the jurisdiction of the priests and Levites, and the law and oral traditions in the hands of the lay scholars and teachers. The Temple and the oral traditions will eventually become the respective bases of the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

To sum up, no one knows for sure what goes on in Babylonia because the relevant historical records are either never written or are lost to time. It is safe to infer, though, that the synagogue movement under the aegis of lay scholars eager to maintain the soul of the nation—the law—begins during the Babylonian captivity.

The next chapter, Act Five, covering the post-exilic Second Temple Era until New Testament times, concludes this historical overview of the Pharisees' background.

CHAPTER SEVEN

History of the Pharisees: Part 2

Act Five: Return from Exile and the Second Temple Era

When the exile ends and the people return to rebuild the Temple and restore the walls of Jerusalem, they have only partial rejoicing—the Persians still control the land. Cyrus' decree (537 B.C.) allows the Jews to return home, but it is still in Persian territory, the Province of Yehud.

As a province in an empire, the land of Israel [called *Yehud* in Persian times, *Coele Syria* in Hellenistic times, Judea (also spelled Judaea) in early Roman times, and *Palaestina* (or Palestine) after the defeat of Bar Kochba], is governed like any other province. It has governors and administrators, tax collectors and generals, cities and villages. But the Jews of the country, who are a substantial part of the population, constitute a “nation” or “religious community” that is recognized by the state and allowed to have its own institutions and jurisdiction. As a result, throughout the Second Temple and rabbinic periods, the Jews of the country are citizens of two parallel political systems. They may have returned to their land, but the land is not theirs.⁴³

That state of affairs remains in place for some two centuries under the Medo-Persians (Achaemenid Empire) until Alexander and the Macedonians conquer them (330 B.C.) and much else: the entire eastern Mediterranean and east all the way to India. Alexander dies in 323 B.C.; after his death his generals divide his empire into four parts, and three of those succeeding empires will at different times include the eastern Mediterranean. After the Maccabean revolt the Jews have their

own rulers, the Hasmoneans, and for several decades they have sole rule of their own land. Then comes the expanding Roman empire which occupies the land from about mid-sixties B.C. through the New Testament era until its own demise.

In the five plus centuries from the beginning of the return from Babylonian exile until the birth of Jesus, the Jewish nation has sole control (free of any foreign powers) only about ten percent of that time.

Unstable Political History

The period from about 168 B.C. forward is marked by extreme instability of rulership, periods of civil strife and persecution,⁴⁴ brief and often deceitful political alliances, encroaching Hellenization, and the development of diverse factions among the Jewish population. The priesthood itself also undergoes a significant change. The High Priest is no longer required to trace descent from Aaron, but becomes a political appointee with little religious meaning, sometimes held dually by the ruling king.⁴⁵

The Antigonids, Ptolemies, and Seleucids (from Antigonus, Ptolemy, and Seleucus, three of the generals who inherited Alexander's divided empire) take turns fighting each other and seizing sovereignty of the land from their beginning until the Maccabean Revolt (167-164 B.C.). The land changes hands at least five times between the Ptolemies and Seleucids. There are 24 Seleucid rulers from 163 B.C. to 63 B.C., courtesy of almost as many assassinations and coups, sometimes involving fratricide and other internecine murders.⁴⁶

One Seleucid king stands out particularly in this historical backdrop, Antiochus IV Epiphanes (ruled 175-164 B.C.), whose activities precipitated the Maccabean revolt. According to Josephus' account, Antiochus is returning from a military campaign in Egypt when he seizes Jerusalem and slaughters many who oppose him.⁴⁷ He returns two years later, this time stripping the Temple. He pillages the city, sacrifices swine on an altar he builds in the Temple, takes thousands of captives, forbids Jewish worship, and crucifies the Jews that defy him. Many Jews submit to this Hellenization to save their lives, but others die, some notoriously when they are attacked on the Sabbath and will not defend themselves.⁴⁸

In this context the Maccabees arise, believing that if they do nothing to defend themselves, they will perish from the earth. They successfully

revolt against the Seleucids, which marks the beginning of the end of the Seleucid Empire and its rulership in Judea and the ascendancy of the Hasmonean Dynasty, the political successors of the Maccabees.

The first Hasmonean ruler is Jonathan, brother of Judas of the Maccabee clan. Hasmoneans rule with increasing autonomy, also occupying the high priesthood, until the Roman conquest in 37 B.C. The century-plus of Hasmonean rule is just as tumultuous as the Seleucid rule, with intrigues, murders, assassinations, treachery, and civil war.

A key factor in this time of instability is a collision of ideologies: remaining true to the law, God, and Jewish culture, versus adapting to the Hellenistic influences. This conflict is a major influence on the development of the Pharisees, who emerge as a coherent religious and political entity during this period.

Hasidim/Hasideans, Pharisees, Habirim, and Essenes

The apocryphal books of 1 and 2 Maccabees tell the story of the Maccabean revolt and surrounding events circa 165-160 B.C. There are three references to a group aligned with the Maccabees called the *hasidim* (ἁσιδαῖοι), or Hasideans.⁴⁹ The Hasideans are described as devout keepers of the law and militantly anti-Hellenistic.⁵⁰ Whether Hasideans represent a formal political entity or a convenient label for those of that persuasion seems to be a matter of scholarly contention, but in any case, these Hasideans will almost certainly be the rootstock of what will shortly become the party of the Pharisees.⁵¹

They refuse any accommodation, preferring the honor of martyrdom to the corruption of Hellenism. The Hasideans believe the survival of their national identity depends directly on their adherence to the law. As for foreign hegemony, if they can but practice the traditions of their fathers, they can live contentedly.

The Essenes also probably have roots in the Hasidean movement, although they take their piety in a different direction than the politically-involved Pharisees. They are not content with foreign hegemony or political involvement; thus their monastic community in Qumran. One nineteenth-century historian posits that the Pharisees come from the Essene group in response to the politically-active recently established Sadducee group.⁵² Theories about the origins of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes seem to far outrun the available evidence. Lots of plausibilities, but not much hard evidence.

Unlike the Pharisees (known among themselves as *haberim*⁵³) and the Essenes, the Sadducees (the priestly class, especially those of the aristocracy) adopt Hellenism as a means to save their positions, and even their lives. They distance themselves from the Hasideans, who espouse both patriotic and religious zeal. The priests, who reject the oral laws and most of the canonically accepted Bible, maintain only a tenuous theological connection to Judaism via adherence only to *torah*. From this group the Sadducees arise. Largely because they are an aristocratic class, they become more and more aligned with the Seleucid rulers. Eventually they lose much of their influence with the people, and the priesthood becomes largely political and symbolic.

The name Pharisee is first used in a historical citation referring to the mid-second century B.C.⁵⁴ Here, Josephus lists three main sects of the Jews: Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes. Clearly, these are all established entities at the time. The name Pharisee derives from a Hebrew root (פָּרַשׁ) that means “to separate” and thus indicates that Pharisees are “separated ones.”

This is not an internal designation—Pharisees never refer to themselves as Pharisees—it is used only by others to refer to them.⁵⁵ Whether signifying their resistance against Greek ways and the Hellenistic Sadducees, or placed on them derisively by the Greeks or some Jews, or referring to their strict adherence to ritual purity that separates them from any “others,” the name reflects a key aspect of the Pharisees’ existence. Using the oral law for ritual protection, they seek to separate themselves from all defilement, whatever its origin, Jewish or Greek.

The few generations before the time of Jesus will lead the Pharisees to view their religious practices as more than the proper way to worship and show piety. To be a Pharisee at times means to be part of a persecuted minority, suspicious of any ruling regime. They have strongly militaristic roots from the Maccabees, but after the Roman occupation their power lay in the only venue available to them: the religious realm, and therefore the practical daily life of the Jewish nation.

The Temple and its operations remain the domain of priests and Levites,⁵⁶ that is, the clergy of Israel. The Pharisees occupy the lay role of regulating, or at least attempting to regulate, the affairs of daily life. This is not a crisp distinction with no overlap, but it is a fair generalization. This gives the Pharisees, the acknowledged experts in the written and oral laws, considerable leverage in a time when religious dicta rule so

much of secular life. Their challenges to Jesus are confined to their interpretation and application of various laws, but the implication of those challenges reach deep into what it means to be a Pharisee.

Some historians argue that the Pharisees' power and influence can easily be overstated, but there is no doubt that they do have significant presence in probably both civil and religious realms, which at that time aren't even properly described as separate realms. The Pharisees to a large extent have replaced the priests as the scholarly and legal interpreters of *torah*, and in the eyes of the people they are the true defenders of the faith. Except for the political oversight of their foreign overlords, in a society where there is no distinction between religious life and daily life, the Pharisees become, in effect, a form of ruling body, or at least one that determines expected norms of daily life.

In summary, the historical background of the Pharisaic movement is one that probably starts in Babylonia, in exile, and continues during the several centuries of the Second Temple period, a period of almost continual shuffling of foreign rulers. The king over them is not a descendant of David, but a foreigner. The common spoken language is Aramaic, not Hebrew.⁵⁷ The inhabitants of the land of promise include Samaritans, Galileans, and others of mixed ancestry.

In the religious realm, the high priest is no longer necessarily one who can trace his lineage to Aaron, but a political appointee with little religious meaning. Sometimes the high priesthood is held dually by the ruling king. The party to which most of the priests belong, the Sadducees, becomes more aligned with the foreign rulers.

Thus, the Pharisees form as both a political *and* religious entity. Being neither royalty, nor priests, nor warriors, nor aristocrats—the traditional routes to leadership—the Pharisees seek political influence when they can and endure persecution when less sympathetic rulers are in power. Regardless of political oversight, they never waver from the reverence of, and adherence to, both the law of Moses and their traditions.

A Shift in Religious Practice

The return of the Jewish people after their banishment to a foreign land fosters a radical change in their religious life. Never again are foreign gods tolerated, never again will they be chastised by God's prophets for ignoring the law. They will redefine themselves as a people completely

zealous for maintaining their monotheism and doing the right thing. However, their *modus operandi* is to do so by developing a legal system so complex as to govern every act and decision of daily and religious life, and with that in place, essential moral principles such as faith and love have no chance to develop.

Historian Donald Gowan likens the return from exile to a resurrection. In exile, Israel, in any national sense, is dead. No land, no king, no temple, no evidence of God's promises still pertaining. Upon return, the nature of Israel's worship and religion have a distinctly different tone. He writes:

Where monotheism had been regularly compromised under the monarchy by the worship of other deities alongside of Yahweh ... after the exile the Jewish people were willing to die rather than to acknowledge the existence of another god ... Whereas the prophets had accused their people of caring little for the high moral standards which already existed in pre-exilic Yahwism, post-exilic Judaism had an ethic which would be unparalleled by any religion for centuries, adherence to which *was expected* of every Jew.⁵⁸

Expected, maybe, but in reality a number of versions of being Jewish arise after the exile, perhaps partly because of the multiple ethnicities that now inhabit Palestine, and partly due to the hellenizing influence of Seleucid rulers, which challenges how a Jew can remain Jewish while living under Gentile rule. The Pharisees represent the sentiment of the above quote. In general, the Sadducees, while maintaining the Temple and at least outward adherence to *torah*, will still find it convenient to adopt much of Hellenism.

Regardless of the extent to which it is true, the above observation reveals an important distinction between pre- and post-exilic worship. Whatever happened in Babylonia served to develop a new form of religious austerity and strict monotheism, at least as far as foreign idolatry is concerned. However, one could argue that they had merely replaced one form of idolatry with another. They now worshiped their traditions (at this point largely oral) rather than a living God.

The Pharisees' Perspective

Drawing all of this history together provides an approximation of the Pharisees' perspective, which elevates the gravity of their conflicts with

Jesus to far beyond matters of scriptural interpretation. They are the custodians of the law (remember, in terms of divine sanction, the Pharisees make no distinction between the law as given to Moses and their oral traditions), and to them fall the responsibility of maintaining its purity. An offense against the law is a sin, but to counter the existence of the law is a far more serious matter.

The battle over the law means the battle for the survival of their nation. The Pharisees aver that *torah* defines Israel, and that the oral traditions protect the written law⁵⁹. Therefore, they value their laws even higher than Scripture: "An offense against the sayings of the scribes is worse than one against those of Scripture".⁶⁰ Because they relate to God as a lawgiver, they believe the highest manifestation of godliness comes in living according to law. They make ever more laws, defining every aspect of daily life, and declare these injunctions as divinely sanctioned.

Moreover, their recent forefathers have martyred themselves to maintain their national identity. Concurrently, the priests default on their duties as teachers and upholders of the law. Thus the Pharisees have an obsessive need to maintain the traditions handed down for centuries; to them the preservation of oral traditional law means the preservation of the nation of Israel and the word of God. Hence, they spew their vehement antagonism to the threat of the gospel.

The matter of national identity cannot be overstated. Identity is an abstract term, and therefore hard to define; it is manifested in tangible ways, such as flag-waving, national anthems, and patriotic holidays, to give some current examples. These types of symbols represent for their adherents' membership, belonging, community, history, heritage, purpose, and other high-level values. For the returning Jews, the law becomes their symbol of nationhood, especially as it is the nascent Kingdom of Israel. This implies that knowledge, observance, and protection of the law via the oral law is essential to maintain national identity. One historian uses the term "viable self" to describe this identity: "in the Persian Period Israel is in need of a reformulated identity, a new 'viable self.'"⁶¹

For the Pharisees, firm grip on the oral and written law is far more than a theological way of life. It is as if their nationhood, promised by God to the patriarchs, is now subsumed into a code of rules covering every aspect of worship and daily life. The Temple is a tangible presence,

but it is in the aegis of the priests and Levites, who will likely be Sadducees or align with that position.

With all of this as a backdrop, Jesus of Nazareth is born. Never educated in the rabbinical schools, not from any important city, preaching a message of love, faith, forgiveness, humility, and a life of commitment to the Kingdom of God, Jesus rises to challenge the entire Pharisaic worldview.

The developing grace-based Christian movement in the second half of the first century poses an obvious threat to this law-based identity. One historian opines that the rise of Christianity is a challenge to Judaism even greater than the destruction of the two temples:

Christianity claimed to be Judaism, Christians to be Israel. So more subtle and more insidious, the challenge of Christianity addressed not the frontiers of the people from without, but the soul and heart of the peoples from within.⁶²

What would come to pass in the Christian movement, the Pharisees foreshadow in their opposition to Jesus. The lone preacher seems as much a threat as organized Christianity will generations later. They recognize him as a man whose mission is no less than to co-opt what is left of their nation—and they are right, for a change.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Core of Pharisaism

JESUS REPEATEDLY EXPOSES THE PHARISEES' theology and practices throughout his brief ministry. He counters them in their home territory in Jerusalem and when they send deputations to Galilee. He outwits them when they approach him with trap questions. They confront him in the marketplace, in private homes, in the Temple, and in synagogues. They dispute his miracles, his teaching, and his social milieu. In his many interactions with the Pharisees, which collectively constitute one of the major themes in the gospels, Jesus repeatedly repels their accusations by having both a better knowledge of Scripture and an impeccable use of their own argumentative traditions.

Most famously, near the end of his ministry, Jesus decries them with a stinging series of "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites" in Matthew 23. At this point, Jesus has finished his teaching and has performed his last miracle. His condemnation of the Pharisees immediately precedes his pronouncement of doom on Jerusalem in the Olivet Prophecy. These two sections fit together in that the reason for the prophecy is the same as the reason for delivering the woes, namely, the unfaithfulness of Israel's religious leaders.

In all of Jesus' disputes with and condemnation of the Pharisees, the gospel writers focus almost exclusively on their practices rather than their underlying worldview. This emphasis accords with the gospels being primarily historical narratives, not theological treatises. This perspective leaves some background material to unearth in order to gain a fuller understanding of what it means for a Pharisee to confront the teacher from Galilee.

The previous chapters focus on the historical background of the Pharisees as a political entity; this one will look at their theological background to discern the drivers of their religious practices. This supplemental material enriches our understanding of the ongoing antagonism of the Pharisees; it shows the Pharisees represent much more than men in long prayer shawls who will not lift a finger to help someone on the Sabbath. They have a legacy, a vision, a *raison d'être*, all based on a history dearly paid for and a principled view of their place before God.

Pharisees and Attitude

Pharisaism today is synonymous with meticulous adherence to a massive structure of punctilious legalism, even to the exclusion of civil decency: “Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe the mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness” (Matt 23:23). We depict Pharisees as self-righteous, despising others outside of their community, more interested in ceremonial purity than in helping needy people, more concerned with making a show of piety than in developing inner holiness.

This stereotypical New Testament picture is certainly true of the Pharisees that oppose Jesus. Jesus’ condemnation of them is based on this picture. However, there is another (or at one time might have been) unexpected side. As you read the Talmudic excerpts below, you will see much good intent, indistinguishable from Christian ethics. Where did they go off the rails?

Hugo Odeberg⁶³ makes a case that attitude and intention are important to the Pharisees, as is doing good to all and loving one’s neighbor. He provides testimony from rabbinical writings that merit comes not from works but from God, that good works themselves must be done for the right reason—for the sake of God, and that it is no credit to a man if God creates him to be a righteous man who follows the law.⁶⁴

Below are some excerpts from the Talmud, from the tractate *Avoth* (Fathers), sometimes referred to as *Pirke Avoth* (Ethics of the Fathers). Most of these teachings are in place in some form—even if the formal written statement comes later—by the time of Jesus. It is safe to say that these principles would have constituted a part of a Pharisee’s education.

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- Rabban Jochanan ben Zakkai received [the tradition] from Hillel and Shammai. He [Hillel] used to say, If you have learned much from the law, ascribe no credit for yourself, for thereunto were you created. (Avoth 2:8)
- Hillel said, Be disciples of Aaron, loving peace, and pursuing peace, loving your fellow creatures, and drawing them nigh to the law. (Avoth 1:12)
- He [Simon the Just] used to say, Upon three things is the world based: upon the law, upon Divine Service, and upon the practice of charity. (Avoth 1:2)
- [Simon the Just] used to say, ... “be like the servants that minister to the master without the condition of receiving a reward.” (Avoth 1:3)
- Rabbi Simon ben Gamaliel said, By three things is the world sustained: by judgment [justice], and by truth, and by peace. (Avoth 1:18)
- Do not judge your fellow until you have stood in his place. (Avoth 2:4)
- One who makes a name great destroys it. [The ambitious seeker after fame is liable to lose his reputation.] (Avoth 1:13)
- Do not pray as though by rote, but plead for mercy and grace before God. (Avoth 2:9)⁶⁵
- Rabbi Hillel taught: That which is hateful to you do not do to another; that is the entire Torah, and the rest is its interpretation.⁶⁶

The point is that the stereotypical notion of Pharisees as vain, absorbed only in fulfilling trivial rituals to earn a reward, degrading others, and intentionally looking for praise and honor is counter to their own teachings. The Pharisees, at least those Pharisees that Jesus encounters and counters, have dismissed their own ethic in order to fulfill their traditions. There is no doubt that Pharisees come in a variety of persuasions, like any human group, and maybe the ones who maintain their ethic are not the ones that challenge Jesus. Perhaps Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea are of this class of Pharisee.⁶⁷

The Pharisees of gospel infamy manifest the inevitable confusion when religion attempts to put the old wine of ritual works into a new wineskin of love. Even if a sage decrees that a work must be done in love and not for self-gratification or reward, the work itself still stands as the

criterion of ritual righteousness. There is no way to measure attitude, but the behavior is either done or not.⁶⁸ Public demonstration of doing a particular behavior inevitably ends up with the behavior itself being the standard.

Under the Old Covenant, law comes first. Later rabbinic teachers try to humanize it with good intentions. This means that as the law is given, and even more so as it is clarified and kept current by the addition of thousands of definitions and rulings, what is primary is the doing, the action of performing something classified as permissible or holy, and avoiding the commission of prohibited behaviors. You can do this, but not do that. At least some of the rabbinical tradition that grows up with this mass of ordinances notice a clear lack of humanity, and aim to remedy the shortfall with pronouncements such as those listed above. Nothing can ameliorate the failure to keep the law, but some saw this as not enough on its own. Proper intention and attitude are not integral to the law; they are add-ons, add-ons that don't stick very well.

This is vastly different from the New Covenant where love comes first, (John 15:12, 1 John 4:7-21), and the works, which derive from love, are focused entirely on helping others, not on trivial matters of food and the size of packages carried on the sabbath. The transition from the talmudic ethic to the Pharisaic practices recorded in the gospels is a result of efforts to maintain the law. Under the New Covenant, right attitude and intent are not only fundamental to good works, they are integral: one cannot do good works without them, and no amount of ritual can replace them.

The Pharisees' View of Human Nature

The doctrine of external uncleanness means that people are *de facto* clean until they contact an unclean object or person. In the world of rabbinic Judaism, this is more than an implication; it is a fundamental belief. Theology *per se* is not the way of Pharisaism, but they do have principle beliefs, or givens, upon which their legalistic structure is built. The two main principles are:

1. People are fundamentally good; defilement comes from bad choices made in life. For the Pharisee, that means not following the law.
2. The law itself, like humankind, is a creation of God. People are good, the law is good, and it is the duty of each person to follow

the law. God would not have instructed people to keep the law unless they could do it.

The Pharisees do not see the real lesson that giving the law is to point out that humans can't keep the law and that they need to depend entirely upon God for their righteousness.

This understanding of good and evil and the ability to choose the good amplifies the meaning of Jesus' interactions with the Pharisees, and to a greater degree, Paul's writings. For instance, Paul's despair in Romans 7— "I can will good, but I cannot do it"—given his Pharisaic upbringing becomes as poignant as it is theologically astute. No, he says, I can't follow the law—I am deceived by the idea that I can. When it comes to the tenth commandment, about coveting, he knows he is done for. This is a command that cannot be kept as it has no behavioral component—coveting is cognitive, not behavioral. Perhaps Paul can control his behavior, but not his mind.

It is that epiphany, sometime in the immediate few weeks after his baptism when his unblinded eyes could now see, that shines as bright as the vision of the Lord himself as he nears Damascus. No, I *am not* fundamentally good, and the law is not a source of manifesting my goodness by keeping it; it is the means of manifesting my sinful nature by exposing my weakness.

In Philippians 3:3-11 Paul discounts both his natural descent as a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin "circumcised on the eighth day," and his rightful claim of "as to righteousness under the law, blameless." As a Pharisee he does follow the letter of the oral law. What he misses is that he is still a sinful, incomplete, insufficient, and fallible human. In his revelation of Christ, he learns that *who he really is* is more important than *what he does*, so much more important that he now calls his former life *σκύβαλα*, variously translated as "dung," "rubbish," or "refuse."⁶⁹ This statement reflects more than trading the law for faith; it represents the reversal of Paul's sense of self. He thought he was someone, now he knows he's nobody, and with that awareness he begins his journey to a spiritual life in Jesus.

This perspective on the underlying beliefs of the Pharisees about self gives a different slant to the Pharisee of Luke 18. This infamous figure is characterized as the paragon of arrogance, one who thanks God that he is not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this ... like this ... (ewww, let me move a bit further away) ... tax collector!

The Pharisee expresses his thanks that God has given him a noble place in life, being born a Jew, and that he has fulfilled his obligation to God by doing all required rituals and rules, even to the point of fasting twice weekly and tithing. In one sense, his prayer would be no different from ours thanking God for calling us to life in Jesus, and to be inheritors of the promises made to Abraham and David. What then is the problem? The problem is that this Pharisee *is* like the tax collector. No matter what God has blessed him with in terms of birth, no matter the degree of his ritual blamelessness, he is still a sin-bound, limited human in need of grace. This is the Pharisee's error: he does not understand or appreciate his relationship to God. He displaces his inherent humanity with a catalog of rituals and rules.

Under the Pharisaic notion of self as being fundamentally good, the idea of redemption is nonsense. They might seek atonement for a transgression of a law, but have no need for redemption from a hopeless state. Paul proclaims all of his past as useless because now he knows he needs a redeemer, and he has one through faith in the Lord Jesus.

On the Theological Side

The conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees was primarily about whether or not there was any religious value in keeping the law. This issue alone would have engendered major strife. However, to the Pharisees, much more is at stake, and it is not, as we might think in our context of religious discussion, a major tenet of theology. It is not about the nature of God or the reward of the righteous or God's kingdom. What we identify as "first principles of the faith" never come up, at least directly, with the Pharisees. Their concern is solely to "maintain purity through adherence to the details of the oral law."⁷⁰ *"Not inquiry, but action,"* reads a dictum in the Talmud (*Avoth* 1.17). They have enormous respect for the wise, the learned, those who know the law inside out and can make clever arguments. They prize casuistry and sophistry. Processes such as "precise definition," "careful scrutiny" and "further clarification" dominate their teachings. They pander to precedence, ritual, and detail. They have thousands of specific rulings defining, for instance, what constitutes "work" with regard to keeping the Sabbath. Practical issues, like cleansing a house of leaven before the Passover, take on sometimes absurd dimensions. For instance, they debate what to do if a mouse should enter a house during the Passover with crumbs of

leaven on its whiskers.⁷¹ Yet they see in these trivial examples the process of debate, casuistry, precedent, analogy, and derivative argumentation that define the legal approach. Their entire approach to religion depends on human logic, not faith. Legalism exalts self, not God.

The Pharisees have far more interest in obeying traditions than in probing, say, the nature of God. Because Judaism is largely a religion of following rules, a remarkably wide span of thought exists on issues of basic principles and issues of the plan and purpose of God:

- “Do this!” or “Don’t do that!” says the Torah. “Don’t do that!—this is its typical statement. There isn’t much time for religious experience because there is literally too much to do, and everyone is caught on the hop. Judaism is not a theology, and not a system of piety. ... Judaism is a task, an activity, and work is the key to it.”⁷²
- The aim of Jewish study is not really the knowledge of God. That is too daring ... theology is not at the heart of religion. The aim of Jewish study is not to experience God, but to know His will. The former is, after all, a pleasure, but the latter is duty and work.⁷³
- In any event, the Talmud is primarily about conduct, about how a good Jew should behave in particular circumstances. The codes of Jewish law define the faithful Jew as the one who keeps the commandments. The emphasis is always on correct practice rather than correct belief.⁷⁴

The Pharisees also exalt external holiness, not a righteous attitude. Separation from things unholy means piety, and piety means reward. They believe that if they avoid external evil, God will reward them now (and in the life to come) because they have earned his approbation. The more separate, the more holy; thus they promulgate laws defining all the possible defilements to avoid. The more things they label unclean, the more laws they can follow, and the more holiness they can manufacture for themselves. All of this, however, obviates in their system the inward reality of human sin nature. They are skilled at straining out gnats, but oblivious to drinking the poison of self-made righteousness.

Over against this comes the unschooled carpenter’s son from Nazareth. Without any links to Jerusalem and the rabbinical academies, he has no status. Who is he to counter the teachings of generations of

rabbis? How dare he dismiss the oral traditions! The Pharisees see him as another false messiah and preacher of blasphemy.

The gospel of grace defies every aspect of the Pharisees' legalism. It relies on an entirely different set of principles. Justification by grace instead of ritual holiness leads the list. Above all, even above the completely different structure of religion, towers a larger issue: the very identity of God. At the heart of theology lies the fundamental question: Who is God?

The Pharisees envision God as the Supreme Rulegiver who rewards those who keep his statutes. In contrast, Jesus presents God as a concerned Father who graciously forgives his faithful, but innately unholy, children. At the root of the Pharisees' problems with Jesus lay their entirely differing perceptions of God.

The Pharisees have zeal, but because they don't know God, their zeal creates a system of self-righteousness. They are ultimately so bound up in their traditions that they can't even recognize the love of God when its living manifestation is in their presence.

CHAPTER NINE

Fears and Fences

You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.
(Exod 23:19, 34:26; Deut 14:21)

FROM THIS SIMPLE INJUNCTION—five words in Hebrew—the sages and rabbis of old derive hundreds of rules, clarifications, arguments and extensions. The ban on any cooking of milk and meat together extends at least as far back as the middle of the Second Temple era⁷⁵. Later observant Jewish practice might include two entirely separate kitchens to avoid any possible commingling of milk and meat products. The Mishnah has several regulations concerning the definition of “milk” and “meat” (*Chullin* 8:1-5). We will use this scriptural text and its progeny to examine the thinking of the Pharisees. This approach has remained stable for more than two thousand years, varying only in the application of prevailing social and technological circumstances.

The Scriptural Account

This prohibition appears in contexts covering a variety of seemingly unrelated issues. However, in general it ties into warnings about adopting the practices of the various heathen nations in and around the promised land. Umberto Cassuto, a Jewish commentator, links it to the previous command about bringing the firstfruits, which was also a Canaanite practice. Cassuto understands this verse, in context, to mean “Yes, offer your firstfruits, but don’t do the kid-boiling ceremony with which they accompany their offerings.” He cites a Ugaritic inscription, “boil a kid in milk, a lamb in butter,” referring to a fertility ritual.⁷⁶ The

command not to boil a kid in its mother's milk is probably intended to forbid this idolatrous Canaanite practice.

When Israel first enters the land and the Canaanites are still present, this prohibition will have direct relevance. However, with or without Canaanites and their rituals as a cultural context, it is still a commandment from God. In the hands of the sages of old, this prohibition takes on a life that will last to the present day and govern the lives of Jews the world over. It becomes the basis of Kosher laws regarding the separation of milk and meat. Dietary laws come in second, and not a distant second, only to Sabbath-keeping in terms of both the multiplication of laws and applications and their effect on the daily life of an observant Jew.

In the gospels Jesus uses the Sabbath as a contest arena far more often than dietary laws. This might suggest that such practices are less developed in the first century era.

Analyzing the processes that lead to this proliferation of laws gives a primer in the Pharisaic methodology that promotes them to standing as God's own word.

Knowledge

To the rabbis it makes little difference *why* God gives the prohibition about boiling a kid in its mother's milk. Their expositions wouldn't focus on spiritual lessons they can derive from the command. All that really matters is that they obey the law. As detailed in Chapter Eight, they are only interested in creating regulations to safeguard against transgressing the commandment.

The scholars and sages dominate the religious life of Israel for hundreds of years before and after the time of Jesus. Rabbinic traditions stress all the capabilities of the mind: memory, logic, intuition, deduction, analogy, inference, and so on. The sharper the mind, the more respect and reverence a rabbi commands from his disciples. They consider knowledge the greatest attribute anyone can have. Obedience, which they regard very highly, comes second to knowledge. Without knowledge one wouldn't know what rules to obey. For instance, scholars who specialize in dietary law would have an apprenticeship in a slaughterhouse to learn all the particulars of kosher meat production.⁷⁷ In many communities the *shochet*, or kosher butcher, has a status second only to the rabbi.

The rabbis don't think of their laws as splitting hairs; they think of them as necessary and appropriate mental exercises. As Steinsaltz observes, concerning the basic command to rest from labor on the Sabbath, "In every age this has immediately aroused a very practical question: how is labor to be defined?"⁷⁸ Concerning the instruction to dwell in booths (Lev 23:42) he adds, "...the student must immediately ask himself how to define booth."⁷⁹ If the first thing that comes to mind is *define*, it's easy to see how their minds work. It reminds us of the question "Who is my neighbor?" posed to Jesus by "an expert in the law," trying to justify himself (Luke 10:29).

Their idea of law leads immediately to definition, because behavior measures tasks, not attitude. Definition leads to further definitions, clarifications, exceptions, contingencies, what-ifs and whatever other mental gymnastics are required to specify exactly what to do. The mental exploits of the rabbis build a burden of law that eventually not even they can bear.

Fences

To the Pharisees blessing and cursing depend on following the rules. God has to be pleased always. They are afraid of God, afraid to the point of maintaining punctilious circumspection to avoid any encroachment on the legal code.

The rabbis think the proliferation of rules will protect both the people and the Torah. Many of these rules are in the category of extra precautions, rules which they believe keep the Torah sanctified and prevent the possibility of transgression. The rabbis call these rules "fences" because they provide additional space around what their scruples have defined as sin. A fence is a rule that keeps people further away from breaking another important rule by not letting them even get close. The *Mishnah* records a commandment attributed to the sages of the Great Assembly, "Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples, and make a fence around the law" (*Avoth* 1.1). A footnote gives this explanation: "to draw up cautionary regulations to act as a check against the committal of transgressions."⁸⁰ This eerie and unwitting echo of Colossians 2:23 clearly attests to the vastly different theology of the old and new covenants.⁸¹

The Kosher Laws

Regarding the commandment concerning the kid boiled in its mother's milk, the rabbis reason that to be safe, one must not cook any meat in any milk. How will a person making a stew with milk and meat know if perhaps the milk came from the calf's mother? They forbid any meat cooked in any milk, just to be sure.

What if one cooks the milk part of the meal separately from the meat part, then eat them together? Milk and meat will still contact each other, and even that could mean a mistake. Mixing any milk with any meat becomes regarded as *unkosher*, or unclean. But why stop there? Can they risk displeasing God?

Supposing a cook doesn't wash her pot thoroughly after the last custard, and a spot of dried milk remains on the pot. She tosses some lamb chunks into the pot for a stew. Contamination results, and thus transgression, a dire situation. So another fence is erected—don't use the same pot to cook milk, and then later use it for a meat dish. Two separate sets of cookware, dishes, cutlery, and utensils is clearly the way of safety and prudence. One gets used only with meat meals, the other with milk, and they are clearly marked to avoid possible misuse.

However, even separate sets of dishes won't guarantee ritual purity. They still could get mixed up with each other. I witnessed this infraction once as a youth at a Jewish summer camp. The camp had a kosher kitchen with separate utensils and cookware; separate refrigerators kept the milk and meat products apart. We segregated even the beverage pitchers, which could be used for either milk or juice, but obviously would never contain any meat products. However, a pitcher which once held milk could not be used to serve juice at a meat meal. All the meat items had a red nail-polish mark. Once, someone accidentally placed a washed meat fork in the drawer for milk utensils. The camp rabbi had to go through a special service to atone for this breach.

The ultimate kosher kitchen is really *two entirely separate* kitchens. All these arrangements have one purpose: to prevent any possibility of a cooking or eating utensil used with meat from contacting one that had touched a milk product. Such anti-contamination measures, according to legalistic thinking, preserve both the law and the people. Why all this fuss? Note the language in this description of a kosher kitchen:

The first necessity is to keep milk and meat foods completely separate. It is not enough to avoid serving them together. Minute particles of food can permeate crockery, cutlery, and cooking utensils and can thus mingle during the process of preparation.⁸²

Minute particles. Contamination in even the smallest degree will still mean a transgression of the fundamental law, no matter how far removed it might be in any physical sense from boiling a kid in its mother's milk. Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees about straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel (Matt 23:24) doubtless comes from this sort of scruple.

The milk-and-meat issue involves not only the preparation and serving of food, but also the digestion thereof. If milk and meat are not to be eaten together, how long does one have to wait after eating the one before consuming the other? What constitutes "separate meals?" Is ice cream for dessert okay after a roast lamb dinner? How about an hour later? Debate and discussion are needed to establish laws to regulate when a person can eat a milk product after meat, and vice-versa. This involves physiological details to determine when a meat or milk product is no longer identifiable as such in the system.

Biochemical and physiological knowledge are also important to determine when animal products (e.g., the rennet used in cheese production) become "mineral" and not "animal." After strenuous exercise, I take a whey protein supplement. Whey comes from a milk source, but by the time it's processed into whey protein isolate, is it a neutral chemical or is it still "milk?" And if a milk product, has it been produced in a kosher manner? These would be serious questions for an observant Jew.

Source of Sin and Holiness

Implicit in the concept of fences is the legalistic concept of sin. Sin means breaking a rule or coming in contact with something unclean. A person who keeps from uncleanness stays holy. A person becomes more holy by keeping even further (sometimes literally farther) from external defilement or transgression. For instance, separating milk and meat comes to mean not to eat them at the same meal, but Steinsaltz cites one especially pious rabbi who wouldn't even eat milk and meat on the same day.⁸³ The further away the fences, the holier one becomes.

If milk and meat consumed together is sinful, then that combination has to have something inherently wrong with it. The Pharisees believe that there are some things outside a man that by entering into him can defile him (Mark 7:15). If one can avoid sin by observing rituals, then sin clearly has an external, not internal, origin. The Essenes, who consider the Pharisees slackers in matters of holiness, withdrew to the caves of Qumran for just this reason: to avoid sin in a world of Gentile uncleanness. The Pharisees prefer their isolation without the inconvenience of ascetic monasticism. They do it with laws and punctilious circumspection.

Externalizing sin has multiple effects. Avoiding certain foods constitutes one large area of life. One can avoid certain combinations of foods, avoid foods from certain animals, avoid the animals themselves, avoid people who raise the animals, and so on. Clearly, the more one avoids, the holier one becomes. Holiness then becomes a function of *fear and avoidance*. In this system, holiness has little to do with one's relation to God and it ignores the fundamental concept of the inherent sin-prone nature and natural lust we all have.

Idolatry After All?

Does the attempt to save the law violate the first commandment? Does it make "self" a false God? Let's look at a key issue concerning salvation, and a key Bible text which tells us clearly, "Yes." Legalism looks holy, but it violates the supreme attributes of God.

Under the Pharisaic system, salvation and blessing reside in the individual. If you follow the rules, God doesn't offer you grace; he owes you a reward. You have him in your debt. He owes you the blessing that you have earned. Although the Talmud itself says that one should follow the law not for the sake of reward, but for the sake of duty (*Avoth* 1.3). Establishing laws inescapably implies justification by works. If you obey, God must reward you; if you disobey, God must punish you. This might not sound so different from our biblical theology. Worse yet, it might *be* our theology. That's the danger: Pharisaism appears so righteous and looks so close to the "real thing" it easily passes as true. Nevertheless, Paul labels it as "rubbish" (Phil 3:8).

Why is it so bad if it comes so close? Because it reverses a critical factor: who God is. It puts you in charge of your own salvation. If you do good, you *earn* your blessing. God becomes merely the dispenser of the blessing that you earned.

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It is the greatest manifestation of pride to think you can earn your salvation and blessing. You become your own (false) God, and the rules you make become your own (false) Word of God. The path of rules as a means of holiness inevitably ends in the same spiritual cul-de-sac: the idolatry of self as God. You can no longer apprehend the true God and his life-giving character and mercy. Thus, the condemnation of the Pharisees: “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in” (Matt 23:13).

CHAPTER TEN

The Sabbath

OF ALL THE MYRIAD RULES AND REGULATIONS the Pharisees keep to preserve their ritual holiness, the Sabbath rules stand at the top. If there is a single defining test of holiness, it would be “Do you keep the Sabbath?” (e.g., John 9:16).

Their Most Important Law

A salvation-by-works agenda tends to a hierarchy of laws. All laws are important, but some are more important. For the Pharisees, ritual holiness defines their religion, and the Sabbath, with its unremitting adherence to minutiae, defines their ritual holiness. Nowhere in ancient or modern Judaism exists a more Byzantine set of regulations. Because Sabbath is a regular event, every seventh day, and it offers so many ways to define the work from which a Jew is to abstain,⁸⁴ Sabbath laws become, so to speak, the alpha laws of ritual holiness.⁸⁵

These laws become the most important for a few reasons. The Sabbath predates the law, going back to the creation account (Gen 2:2-3). Although Genesis gives no command concerning any worship on the seventh day, God does cease from creative labors, establishing a precedent. If God himself rests on the seventh day, the rabbis reason they can do no less. Moreover, they note the precedence of the Sabbath over the law in Exodus, when the LORD God institutes Sabbath rest with respect to gathering the manna. This occurs before Moses ascends Sinai to receive the tablets of law. The rabbis have such a strong belief in the legalistic ideas of precedence that they thus elevate the Sabbath to the pinnacle of all laws.

The sages also find evidence for the superiority of the Sabbath in the decalogue itself. In both declarations of the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:1-17 and Deut 5:6-21), the fourth commandment is the longest of the ten. Only the second command, prohibiting graven images, has nearly as much elaboration. In the Exodus account, the model of God resting on the seventh day reinforces the command to rest. In Deuteronomy, God's deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage serves as the principle for abstaining from labor. This double reinforcement is unique among the commandments.

Besides the Ten Commandments, two full accounts of the Sabbath command—with capital punishment specified for violators—are given in Exodus 31:12-17 and 35:1-3. Additionally, the Torah has no less than five short statements of the Sabbath (Exod 23:12, 34:21; Lev 19:30, 23:3, 26:2). This multiple reiteration of the Sabbath law amply justifies its pre-eminence.

Outside of the Torah, Sabbath-keeping is mentioned many times. For instance, Ezekiel (Ezek 20:8-26) rebukes Israel at length for profaning the Sabbath. Nehemiah gives an account (Neh 13:19-22) of enforcing the Sabbath upon his return to Jerusalem. Other warnings occur scattered throughout the historical and prophetic books. As noted in Chapter Six, there are few references to the law in the Hebrew Bible after the Pentateuch, but the ones that are there often cite Sabbath laws and Sabbath keeping.

Work Not Clearly Defined

Despite the admonitions about keeping the Sabbath, rarely does Scripture give examples of what constitutes "work." Neither of the declarations of the Sabbath commandment in the decalogue defines work, although both say that work should cease for the entire household, animals included. Prohibitions against kindling (Exod 35:3), gathering firewood or manna (Num 15:32-36, Exod 16:29) and carrying a burden (Neh 13:19) are the few instances of listing what "work" might entail, yet even these acts require definition: How much is a burden? What can be considered kindling? This last example has taken major implications in the technological era, when rabbis and scholars have grappled with all kinds of electric and combustion-engine driven machines and devices. Does a spark of electricity constitute kindling? Largely, yes.

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Making rules governing daily activities often requires scientific investigation; for example, rabbis distinguish between turning on incandescent and fluorescent lights. The former has a heated filament, the latter has electrically excited inert gasses. LED lighting, a more recent development, requires a new set of inquiries.

With all this grist for their legalistic mill, the rabbis of old elevate Sabbath-keeping into the holiest of all laws. Of course, this level of piety requires precise definitions galore, and they go at it with an enthusiasm that has not abated in two millennia. One rabbi's summary of the sabbath laws:

In the most general sense, the numerous Sabbath laws are an expanding network of minute details deriving from several basic concepts, which eventually create an almost Gothic structure made up of thousands upon thousands of tiny and meticulously fashioned details clustered around an original form.⁸⁶

Forty Less One

Where did the sages of old begin when they undertake the task of delineating and categorizing the Sabbath restrictions on work? On the original Sabbath, because God rested from the work of *creation*, they nominated “creative activity” as the basic definition of work. To exemplify creative activity, they selected the construction of the tabernacle in the wilderness.

Also, two clear prohibitions against working on the seventh day come in the immediate context of the instructions for the building of the tabernacle (Exod 31:12-17, 35:1-3). Thus, the activities involving the construction of the tabernacle became the basic categories of what constitute “work” regarding Sabbath law.

The Mishnah, the written codification of the oral tradition, lists “forty less one” categories of work prohibited on the Sabbath.⁸⁷ Some of them come directly from the work of the tabernacle itself (e.g., spinning, warping, sewing, and dyeing). Other areas include the agricultural activities implied in the use of a finished product, such as linen cloth. These activities include sowing, plowing, reaping, binding sheaves, and winnowing. These prohibitions cover activities in growing the plants from which they obtained fibers for the linen cloth.

Past and Present Regulations

From these thirty-nine categories, well established by the time of Jesus, come the thousands of individual *halachot*, or specific rules governing each situation and contingency. A few examples will help us understand how much of a grip the Sabbath *halachah* has on everyday life.

Some of these come from current use. The process hasn't died; in fact, it thrives, largely due to technological innovations which have created the need for hundreds of new rulings. The modern examples, however, follow fully the same methodology as the rulings of the ancient sages. They will provide a time-relevant reference to the picayune scruples of the legal mind. An appreciation for this mentality clarifies the issues at stake when Jesus confronts the Pharisees and their Sabbath traditions:

- A tailor is advised to put down his needle well before sunset lest he inadvertently carry it on the Sabbath. Nor should one search for fleas by lamplight on the Sabbath, lest he forget and adjust the wick. But using candlelight is permissible (*Shabbat* 1:3).
- In an effort to make life somewhat functional on the Sabbath, the sages create a vast system of casuistry that defines household boundaries (*erubim*) in every location. These boundaries artificially establish the limits of one's domicile; for instance, it might include a whole section of a city with buildings connected by ropes to establish an artificial unity. Certain areas, while physically outside one's home, still remain within the limits of one's domain so as not to transgress the command of Exodus 16:29 to stay in one's place. However, one very strict sect, the Karaites, wouldn't leave their homes on the Sabbath.
- The rabbis carefully distinguish between "wearing" and "carrying." They have to decide if a woman's hair clip, for instance, is worn or carried. If carried, then it will be a burden and forbidden on the Sabbath. A woman can go into the courtyard of her house wearing a wig, but not into public streets. Carrying a mat clearly violates the ban on bearing a burden, and the Pharisees use this to incriminate the lame man whom Jesus heals (John 5:10).
- Items normally used for work cannot even be touched on the Sabbath. They were *mutzkeh* (off-limits) for fear of "accidental" use. The *mutzkeh* rules developed out of the idea of "fences,"

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those rules meant to keep one even holier by avoiding anything even close to sin. For instance, if the use of a tool, such as a hammer, violates the Sabbath, then the tool itself becomes *mutzkeh* on the Sabbath, and contact with it means defilement.

- *Shabbat* 2:6 lists three reasons why a woman might die in childbirth. One of them has to do with failure to light the Sabbath candles. This teaching, one of many that specify rewards and consequences for various acts of obedience or disobedience, demonstrates the exact retribution mentality inherent in a behavior-based religion of rules.
- To legally open a refrigerator door on the Sabbath, one must disconnect the interior light before the Sabbath lest one violate the injunction against “kindling,” as modern interpretations consider that using or turning on a light comes under the category of “kindling,” but that might depend on the type of lighting. Letting warm air into the refrigerator also creates a problem, because that will cause the compressor to activate before it otherwise would have. This would cause the compressor to spark, also a Sabbath violation. Therefore, the observant Jew has a timer installed to run the compressor motor at set intervals, rather than a thermostat, because opening the door would indirectly cause the motor to start. Another proposed solution: open the door only when the compressor is already running, or have a delay switch so that the opening of the door does not immediately cause the compressor to run.⁸⁸ All Sabbath laws regarding work are regularly updated to conform to prevailing technology. Thus, a “smart” refrigerator or other similar devices, might require a whole new set of rules as to how it is programmed and used.
- Is it okay to apply hand lotion on the Sabbath? Depends on whether it is in liquid or solid form. Liquid, such as coconut oil is okay, but coconut butter is prohibited, because when it is applied it liquifies, and that violates the prohibition on “smoothing.”
- Sabbath laws defer to very few others, but the care of the seriously ill constitutes a class of exceptions. If one does have to suspend Sabbath rules for a higher principle, one must do so with the least possible intrusion into the Sabbath laws. Also, one

must perform “in an unusual manner” any act that would otherwise transgress the Sabbath, thus acknowledging Sabbath law. For instance, a doctor may drive on the Sabbath if he must go to an emergency, but he should start the car by turning the key with two fingers, not the usual thumb and forefinger. As to the vehicle driven to an emergency, the doctor must leave the motor running, as turning *off* the engine is not necessary to save life. If a doctor has to write, he must write with his left hand if right-handed (and vice-versa), use the minimum number of words possible, and sign with his initials, not his full name. A nurse or doctor applying an antiseptic to the skin on the Sabbath must use a nonabsorbent (i.e., nylon) swab as opposed to cotton which could absorb the medication and thus, presumably, be classified as working under the rubric of “dyeing.”⁸⁹

- Does giving alms to a beggar who comes to your house violate the Sabbath? That depends, of course. The very first Sabbath *mishnah*⁹⁰ (*Shabbat* 1.1) relates how the rabbis distinguished between a beggar reaching *into* the window of a home to receive alms and a householder reaching *out of* the window. Also at issue is whether the beggar *took* the alms from the householder’s hand, or the householder *put* the alms in the beggar’s hand. Thus, four possibilities exist, and they pronounce guilt or innocence accordingly. If the beggar stands outside, stretches forth his hand inside the house, and the householder puts the alms in his hand for him, that’s permitted. It is very important to know these rules, as the punishment for flagrant violation is stoning.

Jewish laws and customs also include many rituals for the celebration of the Sabbath, such as lighting candles at sunset, wearing one’s best clothes, and eating festive meals. They aver that the Sabbath is a joy and a means of sanctification (Isa 58:13). However, most of the Sabbath regulations concern avoiding work. The less one does, the holier one becomes. Being useful to someone isn’t in the plan.

Edersheim’s late nineteenth century style trenchantly summarizes the rabbinic attitude toward the Sabbath. He lists a number of absurdly technical distinctions: for example, if one throws an object (presumably food) into the air and catches it with his hand—guilty; if one catches

the object with his mouth, not guilty (after being eaten the food no longer exists). He summarizes the rabbinical observation of the Sabbath thus:

In not less than twenty-four chapters [of the Talmud tractate *Shabbat*], matters are seriously discussed as of vital religious importance, which one could scarcely imagine a sane intellect would seriously entertain.... And yet in all these wearisome details there is not a single trace of anything spiritual—not a word even to suggest higher thoughts of God’s holy day and its observance.⁹¹

It is needless to continue the analysis of this casuistry. All the discussions to which we have referred turn only on the *first* of the legal canons in the tractate ‘Sabbath.’ They will show what a complicated machinery of merely external ordinances traditionalism set in motion; how utterly unspiritual the whole system was, and how it required no small amount of learning and ingenuity to avoid committing grievous sin.⁹²

The Battleground of Faith Versus Law

Against this thinking and its concordant practices came the program of the Lord Jesus for dismantling the Jewish idea of the Sabbath. In much the same way that Paul will later use circumcision as the main representation of ritual law (Acts 21:21, Gal 6:15, Rom 2:29), Jesus uses the Sabbath and its traditions. He chooses the Sabbath for his battleground because it makes an ideal subject for his teaching of the gospel of grace.

He does this with a succession of miracles, each more prominent than the last. Each miracle involves the healing of a chronically ill person or someone with a disability—people who can easily wait a few hours until sundown, after the Sabbath. As the healings increase in both complexity and in overt confrontation to the legalistic traditions of the Pharisees, their opposition likewise increases.

Starting with healing a man in a Capernaum synagogue and culminating with giving sight to the man born blind, Jesus systematically displays the need to “judge not by appearances, but to judge with right judgment.” He repeatedly challenges the Pharisees on the points they would consider most holy, to find out if they can somehow elevate their minds beyond their own traditions.

Alas, any positive responses remain all but unrecorded in the gospels. Instead, Jesus finds a group of people who have thoroughly enmeshed their own traditions with the word of God. They zealously strive to protect both themselves and the Torah with their fences, but those fences obstruct their view of the Messiah. They can't see the signs of God's son when he preaches and heals in their very presence. Tradition has so blinded them that they can't see a man walking who had never walked before; they only see a man carrying a mat on the Sabbath, forbidden by their traditions.

The Pharisees' definitions mean nothing in the eyes of God. The Sabbath has a greater meaning, but they entirely obscure it. So the Lord Jesus goes right to their perceived stronghold, repeatedly making pointed attacks against the traditions of men. The next two chapters trace the development of his strategy, and the progression of both attack and rebuttal in the greatest theological confrontation ever contested.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Sabbath Healings: Part 1

THE GOSPELS RECORD SEVEN HEALINGS performed by Jesus on the Sabbath. These healings constitute his main offensive against Pharisaism. The chronological sequence of these miracles reveals an unambiguous format of increasing intentional antagonism toward the Pharisaic concept of the Sabbath. By extension, Jesus is increasingly inviting them to reflect on their concept of God.

The first three occur in Galilee, the last four in or around Jerusalem. The first two have no opposition from the Pharisees. The last five all have significant opposition; the gospel accounts record interaction between Jesus and his adversaries concerning the healing. In each event the Pharisees accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath. The gospels record the escalating conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees on Sabbath healing.

The Sabbath Healing Ministry of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath, in Probable Chronological Order

Demoniac in the Synagogue [Capernaum] Mark 1:21-28, Luke 4:31-37.

Peter's Mother-in-Law [Capernaum] Mark 1:29-31; Matt 8:14-15; Luke 4:38-39.

Man with the Withered Hand [Capernaum] Mark 3:1-6; Matt 12:9-14; Luke 6:6-11.

Man Paralysed Thirty-Eight Years [Jerusalem] John 5:1-18, 7:23-24.

Woman with Eighteen Years Infirmary [Judea, near Jerusalem?] Luke 13:10-17.

Man with Dropsy [Jerusalem?] Luke 14:1-5.

Man Born Blind [Jerusalem] John 9:1-41.

Proclamation of the Sabbath Healing Ministry

The first Sabbath miracle comes early in Jesus' Galilean ministry, in a Capernaum synagogue. Luke records this healing shortly after Jesus' reading of Isaiah in a Nazareth synagogue. Significantly, the text he reads prophesied his Sabbath ministry. Isaiah speaks of the Messiah who will "proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound" (Isa 61:1). Jesus does all these on the Sabbath, opening the eyes of the blind and unloosing those who are captive to their infirmities. When the Lord Jesus proclaims, "*Today* this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21), he emphasizes *today* as the Sabbath. He may also intend to use the text from Isaiah as a general proclamation of his teaching, of which his Sabbath healings become figurative enactments of liberation.

1. The First Sabbath Healing

Immediately after proclaiming the Messianic stamp of his ministry in Nazareth, Jesus finds his life in danger. The Jewish leaders react sharply to his citations of the scriptural examples of providential blessings to faithful Gentiles (Luke 4:26-27). They take him to the edge of a cliff, but he escapes (Luke 4:28-30), and shows up, presumably the very next Sabbath, in the Capernaum synagogue (v. 31).

His teaching alone astonishes the audience on several Sabbaths (Luke 4:31-32), but the crowd could have no idea what they are about to witness on that Sabbath. Mark uses his characteristic "immediately" describing the man's appearance before Jesus. Possibly the man has just entered the synagogue, or perhaps he has just had a convulsive episode. Unlike a later synagogue healing, he does not appear to have been planted by the Pharisees as a test.

The account calls the man's infirmity "an unclean spirit", a phrase usually associated with mental disorders. It is the only healing where the malady is not specified. The man probably has a chronic mental condition and has suffered an acute episode. Chronic illnesses will become a key issue in the Sabbath healings, as Jesus pointedly performs cures on the Sabbath that could have waited. The first two miracles have the least overtly challenging aspect here, as Pharisaic tradition allows for suspension of the Sabbath laws in the case of life-threatening emergencies.

In this first healing, Jesus performs no “work,” that is, he does nothing physical to or with the man. In the other healings, he does at least some physical activity or contacts with the healed individual. In his final healing, he overtly does “work” (by the Pharisees’ definition). Thus, he commences the Sabbath healing ministry in the least intrusive manner. He only speaks the word, and the unclean spirit comes out of the man. He proves that he has the power to heal. Anything physical or ritualistic that he does at later healings further denigrates the Pharisaic Sabbath.

Neither Luke nor Mark record opposition or gainsaying of anyone in the synagogue. This is the first and last Sabbath healing that Jesus performs in a public setting without opposition. News of the miraculous healing spreads rapidly (Mark 1:28), and the Pharisees will make their presence known the next time Jesus heals on the Sabbath in a synagogue.

2. Peter’s Mother-in-Law

All three synoptic gospels record this Sabbath healing. Matthew, who doesn’t record the previous episode, places this healing in a collection of healing miracles (Matt 8:14-17). Luke has the most thorough medical description, noting that Peter’s mother-in-law had a *high* fever. However, though she may have been very sick, or perhaps in a life-threatening situation, it also appears that in this instance the Lord Jesus could have waited a short time for the Sabbath to end. The healing probably comes in the late afternoon, for the details “he arose and left the synagogue” and “when the sun was setting” frame Luke’s narrative.

In this, the only private Sabbath healing, Jesus takes hold of the woman, and she serves him when she recovers. Had the Pharisees seen this, they surely would have objected vehemently, even if they gave allowance for her acute condition. In their legalistic system, “serving” on the Sabbath would certainly be a violation of some Sabbath regulation. She would have been holier if she lay sick in bed rather than be useful to the Lord.

3. The Man with the Withered Hand

The third miracle receives detailed coverage in the synoptic gospels. Reconstructing the incident from a compilation of the three accounts yields a dramatic confrontation not fully revealed in any one of them. This is the first miracle the Pharisees directly oppose, and it is likely they

precipitate the confrontation by bringing the man into the synagogue to test Jesus' interpretation of the Sabbath.

This incident follows the eating of the grain, the only other specific "violation" (other than the healings) of the rabbinical Sabbath traditions cited in the gospels. Jesus counters the Pharisees' accusations by referencing the priority of the priests' service over the Sabbath. Jesus continues by saying that something greater than the Temple, which the priests serve, is here. He himself is that something, and he declares, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27-28).

The Temple, representing ritualized religion, holds its servants in bondage to its rituals and sacrifices. Jesus, representing grace, comes to liberate those who would accept the gospel. The Sabbath is not lord over Jesus; he is lord over the Sabbath. The Jews who rejected Jesus remain in bondage to the Sabbath, which represents their bondage to the law. It is lord over them. The title "Lord of the Sabbath" implies freedom in Christ through the grace of the New Covenant.

Inviting Confrontation

All three gospel accounts place the grain-eating incident immediately before the healing of the man with the withered arm, but only Luke identifies the day as *another* Sabbath. Also, only Luke has the detail "whose *right* hand was withered." He may have suffered an injury, or it could have been a contracture after having a stroke, or he may have had a congenital condition. If it had been the result of an injury or stroke, it could take months or years to develop the severe condition that "withered" describes. In any case, the man has a long-term disability issue, not an acute health problem requiring immediate intervention. He can easily wait a few hours until sunset, but Jesus has a different outlook on the situation. He is going to provoke the Pharisees because they are in confrontation mode.

The scribes and Pharisees brought the man into the synagogue and now they are watching to see whether he will "heal on the Sabbath, so that they might find a reason to accuse him" (Luke 6:7).⁹³ They know he *might* heal the man on the Sabbath; Jesus knows that he *must* heal the man on the Sabbath. Being Lord of the Sabbath, he needs to heal the man to teach the proper use of the Sabbath and show the Pharisees that he has no regard for their Sabbath traditions.

Reconstructing the Sequence

Integrating the three gospel records reveals the full dramatic impact of this clash in the Capernaum synagogue. Matthew has the incident starting with the Pharisees asking Jesus, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” Mark and Luke omit this; instead, they have Jesus calling the man to the front of the hall, and questioning the Pharisees. Luke adds that Jesus knows what they were thinking, reinforcing the suggestion that they had placed the man in the synagogue as a test. Mark records Jesus asking the Pharisees, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” Matthew then provides a third question, Jesus asking the Pharisees if any of them would not pull a sheep from a pit on the Sabbath. Of course, they would answer yes; the rabbinical traditions covered the various aspects of this issue. Then Jesus said, “Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”

Reconstructing the event from the three accounts shows that the Pharisees’ question to Jesus instigates the interaction. They ask him about the legality of Sabbath *healing* (Matthew). Jesus responds with his own question about whether it is lawful to *do good* on the Sabbath (Mark and Luke). The Pharisees (as was usually the case) ask Jesus the wrong question. The *legality* of healing on the Sabbath is only an issue within the rabbinical traditions. The real issue is, “Is it lawful to *do good* on the Sabbath?” Of course, doing good is lawful: in fact, God requires it. That is why Jesus doesn’t delay the healing until sunset merely to avoid upsetting the Pharisees. He *has* to do a non-emergency cure on the Sabbath to destroy the traditions that negate the law of love.

When the Pharisees ask, “Is it lawful to *heal*?” Jesus retorts, “Is it lawful to *do good*?” Then he calls for the man to come forward. Everyone’s attention fixates on the two men at the center of the synagogue. Imagine the tension as Jesus’ piercing eyes look around and through the assembled rabbis and lawyers. What will happen? The silence breaks as the Lord of the Sabbath commands, “Stretch out your hand!” At once, for the first time in years, the man extends his atrophied, shriveled arm, now fully muscled like his left.

As the man gapes, overcome with awe and joy, he sees a look no one ever saw before or thereafter. Unable to answer his questions for fear of inculpating themselves in their own hypocrisy, and inert to the wonderful blessing the Lord has just bestowed on the man, the

Pharisees generate in the Lord Jesus a unique reaction. “And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart” (Mark 3:5). This is the only reference in the Bible to Jesus being angry.⁹⁴

The Pharisees do not see the healing power or the goodness of God. They do not see the fulfillment of grace, and they most certainly do not see a figurative emancipation from the thralldom of sinful human nature. Their tradition-filtered eyes can only see an infraction of their Sabbath regulations—but what exactly is the infraction? Jesus does no work, he only speaks the words, “Stretch out your arm.” But when the legalist mind confronts a good work performed with any reason to contradict it, the work itself means nothing. Beneficence means nothing; only formalities and tradition count. No wonder Jesus is grieved at the hardness of their hearts.

Then the Pharisees immediately congregate outside the synagogue and hold counsel with the Herodians to plot to destroy Jesus. They do evil on the Sabbath! Jesus has just asked them about the “legality” of doing good versus doing harm, or saving life versus killing. They hold their peace for fear of being exposed as hypocrites. Now they prove their hypocrisy beyond measure; they plot on the Sabbath to kill the Lord of the Sabbath, because he has done good.

This first of five direct Sabbath healing confrontations ends in what will become a familiar pattern. Jesus performs a good work (healing) and proves his authority to do so, leaving the hardhearted religious establishment so bewildered and embarrassed. Jesus now moves his Sabbath campaign to the heart of legalism, Jerusalem.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Sabbath Healings: Part 2

THE FINAL FOUR SABBATH HEALINGS come in pairs. Two of them are unique to Luke, while the other two are recorded only in the Gospel of John. The two healings in each pair have similar structures, and in both, Jesus justifies his actions using the Pharisees' own academic methodology.

Chronologically, I place the two healings recorded in Luke between the two in John, though most gospel harmonies place them after John's. Since there is some uncertainty about the chronology of the seven Sabbath healings, the discussion below follows a thematic pattern: the Luke pair first, then the two in John.

Two Brief Accounts

Luke alone records the accounts of the woman who has been infirm for eighteen years and the man with dropsy. Jesus heals the woman in a synagogue and the man in the home of a prominent Pharisee. Apparently, both occur as he is en route to Jerusalem (Luke 13:22, 33-34); but Edersheim places both events in Perea.⁹⁵ The ruler of the synagogue opposes the first healing, and although this account does not mention Pharisees by name, the form of the encounter and the details of the narrative indicate that at least some of those who oppose Jesus are of the party of the Pharisees. Pharisees are present by name at the second, but they do not answer Jesus. Rather, Jesus silences his opponents by taking the initiative and asking them pointed questions, anticipating their objections.

4. Eighteen Years' Infirmary

The woman suffers from what seems to be a degenerative spinal condition for eighteen years (Luke 13:10-17), so she can easily wait a few more hours until sundown to be healed. Obviously, her infirmity constitutes no life-threatening illness that demands immediate attention, unpleasant though it must be to be "bent over." Always looking at the ground, she can hardly see where she is walking, yet she comes to the synagogue.

The Pharisees seem to have nothing to do with her presence; this is not one of their traps set for Jesus. Perhaps she has heard that Jesus, the healer and teacher, would be at that synagogue on that Sabbath, or maybe she is merely attending the synagogue as usual. In either case, upon seeing her, Jesus immediately calls her to him and declares her free from her infirmity. Then he lays his hands on her, and, for the first time in nearly two decades, the woman stands upright, her now horizontal sight line looking into the love and compassion of the Master's eyes! She might have no awareness of the theological implications of what Jesus has just done, but she knows that her body is restored, sound, and fit. Can we imagine her elation and gratitude?

Reaction of the Pharisees

The ruler of the synagogue sees this miracle, but to him it only registers as a violation of the Sabbath; apparently he cannot appreciate at all the woman's relief. But what is the specific charge? Which rabbinical precept did Jesus transgress? Laying on his hands? Declaring her healed? Which of the 39 categories or hundreds of rulings does he have in mind? Possibly nothing, except the fear that this act will lead to something worse.⁹⁶ So he rebukes Jesus, stipulating that there are six other days of the week to do such things rather than healing on the Sabbath.

The ruler is not alone in his attitude. Jesus, anticipating the objections of the assembly, answers his criticism with the plural, "you hypocrites." Luke writes "the Lord" answered them, indicating Jesus' role as Lord of the Sabbath. The force of "ought not" in "ought not this woman ... be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath" (Luke 13:16) is likely stronger than the English indicates. The ruler of the synagogue uses this word to indicate the six days of the week designated for work.

Jesus' reply says, in stark contrast to the legalistic mindset of the rabbis, "and the Sabbath is designated as the day of healing."⁹⁷

Moreover, Jesus quotes the Pharisees' own teaching in order to reveal their hypocrisy and justify his actions. He cites their own easement of Sabbath regulations to provide for the normal, necessary care of their beasts.⁹⁸ They would have to unbind the animal from its stall to lead it to the trough. If unbinding is permissible for the animal, is it not permissible for a human? This type of reasoning is precisely how the rabbis use precedent and analogy to establish Sabbath strictures.

Luke adds one more perspective to the event to close the narrative, that of the common folk who are also in the synagogue. The episode ends with the Lord's adversaries being put to shame and the common folk delighting in the healing, and perhaps also in the theological triumph. For the Pharisees, though, it is another humiliation. From the woman's perspective, it is a joy, intense and unreal, as she adapts to her new view of life. For Jesus, it is another step in demonstrating the superiority of the New Covenant over the Pharisees' theology of the Sabbath.

5. The Man with Dropsy

On another Sabbath, likely soon after healing the woman, Jesus is dining at the home of a prominent Pharisee. Evidently the "ruler of the Pharisees" invited Jesus and various others, including a man suffering from dropsy. "Dropsy" (from the Greek ὑδρωπικός, *hudrōpikos*) refers to what we call today edema, or fluid accumulation, which can be a symptom of various diseases. The man would have swollen, turgid extremities, perhaps a distended belly and shortness of breath. Depending on the severity, this condition can need urgent care, which will make his situation different from that of the woman with the degenerative spine condition. However, nothing in the narrative seems to point in the direction that this is other than another chronic problem that can wait until the Sabbath passes.

Jesus, knowing the Pharisees' tendency to dispute with him, puts forth the very question that is posed to him on an earlier occasion, when he heals the man with the withered arm (Matt 12:10): "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" He has already repeatedly demonstrated the "legality" of Sabbath healing through both his healing power and his use of their own argumentative methods. What can they say?

Anything they might say would further diminish their waning credibility, so “they remained silent.”

Jesus heals the man and then teaches the Pharisees another lesson. Using a similar line of Pharisaic reasoning and undoubtedly quoting one of their own Sabbath rulings, he cites the permissibility of rescuing an animal from a pit on the Sabbath. If this applies to a beast, how much more so to a man? Again, they have no reply. Jesus silences them with both his use of their own logic and his divine power of healing. The now-healthy man, free of both symptoms and underlying disease, rejoices, while the Pharisees have another long night ahead. Like Pharaoh, they harden their hearts and ignore the work of God in their midst, for they have too much at stake to see or admit their error.

John's Healing Accounts

The two episodes in John provide the most complete account of the Pharisees' enmity toward Jesus and Sabbath healings. These two healings demonstrate the extreme of Jesus' intention to provoke confrontation on the Sabbath. The two men represent the two most chronic conditions of all: thirty-eight years without walking (John 5:1-18) and a lifetime of sightlessness (9:1-41). John's narratives contain features unique among the Sabbath miracles:

- Both occur in the heart of Jerusalem.
- In both healings Jesus overtly—and gratuitously—adds elements of “work.”
- Both accounts report Jesus afterward finding and speaking to the healed person.
- Both incidents lead to discussions of sin and judgment, and of Jesus' relationship with the Father.

6. The Invalid Man at the Pool

Thirty-eight years is a link to consider Israel in the desert, but if you look solely at the symbology, you will miss the human side of the incident. This man has lain by the pool since before Jesus was born! Jesus comes up to him and asks, “Do you want to be healed?” (John 5:6) What an odd question to ask someone who has lain immobile for that long! What might be Jesus getting at? Has the man heard of Jesus, the miracle worker and teacher in all this time? Has he given up hope? As recorded in the gospel accounts, this is the only time that Jesus initiates a healing or asks if someone wants to be healed.⁹⁹

This question doesn't indicate any disregard Jesus has for the man's motivation or intelligence. Instead, it's a way for Jesus to preach about the futility of hoping for some magical healing from the pool and to introduce himself as the Messiah.¹⁰⁰ For thirty-eight years, this man has believed that healing requires some special ritual ablution in the pool. Jesus merely instructs him to walk. When the man does get up to walk, he apparently goes directly to the Temple. Jesus finds him there, and it seems that's where Jesus identifies himself, for right after that the man tells the Jews that it was Jesus who healed him (vv. 13-15).

The Lord, however, goes beyond the instruction to get up and walk. He tells the man to "get up, *take up your bed*, and walk," a detail so important that John repeats it five times in five verses (John 5:8-12). John also records the crux of the event tersely, "Now that day was the Sabbath." Healing is one thing; the Lord has already demonstrated that it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath. Now, however, he adds fuel to the fire: he instructs the man to carry his bedroll. This clearly violates the Sabbath injunction against carrying a burden. Jesus overtly creates a confrontation over a scruple.

Will it not be easier for the Lord to wait just a few hours and then do the healing, thus avoiding all the hassle? Does he *have* to tell the man to carry his bedroll? Is this nose-twisting really necessary?

Yes, it is. He has to destroy the Pharisees' notion of legalistic righteousness. He has to destroy the Sabbath as they kept it. This is a necessary part of the work of the Messiah: to emancipate all those bound by the law.

God Works on the Sabbath

Amazingly, the Jews¹⁰¹ have no eyes to see a man walk for the first time in nearly four decades. They do not share in the joy of healing. They refuse to acknowledge the power of God at work in their midst. They see only one thing: a man violating the Sabbath by carrying a burden. So they interrogate the man, asking him who had directed him to do this sinful act. They hold him in violation of the law, and they likewise hold Jesus culpable, for they decide that he does not keep the Sabbath either (John 5:16).

The Pharisees also misinterpret Jesus' claim that God is his father (v. 18). They think he is claiming divinity and they think he broke the

Sabbath. Neither, of course, is true. His Father is still working, the basis of the Lord's Sabbath ministry.

"My Father is working until now" (v. 17) means that God has never rested. On the seventh day of creation, with the work of creation finished, he ceased from his creative work, yet he has never stopped maintaining his creation. Since the beginning, the work of saving and rescuing his people has never ceased. God always hears prayers; every day he forgives, restores, sustains, cares for, and upholds his creation and all who dwell in it.

Do not the Pharisees realize that God never stops working? This is what Jesus means when he says, "My father is working until now."

7. The Man Born Blind

The last and greatest Sabbath healing (John 9:1-41) stands out in several ways. At 41 verses it is by far the longest of the Sabbath healing accounts. It has the most chronic and hardest to cure (from a physiological perspective) disability (v. 32). It features the most obvious of Jesus' attacks on the Pharisees' Sabbath scruples. And it ends with a condemnation of the Pharisees like no other Jesus uttered (v. 41). This final healing centers on a man whose condition spotlights the absurd distinction the Pharisees make between "Sabbath" and "Not Sabbath" with respect to healing.

Jesus has just engaged the Pharisees in the Temple concerning the woman taken in adultery. John 9:1 states, "As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth." Probably a beggar at the Temple steps, this man has never experienced sight. In his world of darkness, all days look the same. Even if he does possess a degree of light detection, he is unable to discern for himself when the sun sets and the Sabbath starts or ends. When Jesus asks the lame man, "Do you want to be healed?", that man certainly knows what walking means, but how can a congenitally blind person have any concept of sight? Only after the healing will he be able to reflect on his previous world of only four senses.

John duly records, "Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes" (John 9:14). Can Jesus wait a few hours till sundown ends the Sabbath with its restrictions? Will the man even have any way of knowing if it is the Sabbath or not? He won't, unless someone tells him. Can a man blind from birth wait? These questions point out the increasing vexation that Jesus heaps upon the Pharisees.

Moreover, Jesus goes one step further than ever before: he himself does what the Pharisees define as “work” as part of the healing process. This time, they can legitimately remonstrate with him. Jesus spits on the ground and makes clay. Does he have to do this to give the man his sight? Of course not.

On previous healing occasions, he only spoke the word; sometimes laid on his hands. The Pharisees will have strained to fit those actions into their categories of work. Jesus increases the tension when he tells the lame man of the previous healing in John to carry his mattress—that is clearly “work.” Now Jesus himself does the work. He must do it to show the Pharisees “the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” This is the most deliberate of all the Lord’s challenges to the Pharisaic Sabbath.

The Pharisees will judge that his actions in this healing are flagrant violations of the sanctity of the Sabbath. Again, the Pharisees, blind to the healing, have selective vision for the violations of their code. They deem Jesus guilty of making clay on the Sabbath, carrying a load, and probably also furrowing the earth to gather the dust. Their conclusion: this man is not from God because he does not keep the Sabbath. Judging the Lord’s actions by their own standards, as valid in their world as the Word of God, the Pharisees condemn themselves. They do not allow the Messiah into their lives, because substituting laws of their own devising for things divine (grace), they exclude the possibility of Jesus being the Son of God.

The Pharisees not only exclude Jesus, they also excommunicate the healed man. Jesus finds him and reveals himself to the man who is now sighted, literally and figuratively. The Pharisees, on the other hand, claiming to see, are condemned by Jesus. They see the obvious works of God and choose to ignore them to find fault over scruples. Because they have eyes only for judgment, Jesus pronounces them guilty.

The Conflict Summarized

Edersheim eloquently sums up the theological and human contest of the Sabbath: Jesus, who represents the ongoing work of God and his role in our salvation, versus the Pharisees, who represent the human system of rules and justification by adhering to them to the uttermost iota:

LEGALISM VS. FAITH

While they [the Pharisees] were discussing the niceties of what constituted labour on a Sabbath, such as what infringed its sacred rest or what constituted a burden, multitudes of them [the suffering people] who laboured and were heavy laden were left to perish in their ignorance. That was the Sabbath, and the God of the Sabbath of Pharisaism ... Nay, if the Christ had not been the very opposite of all that Pharisaism sought, He would not have been the Orient Sun of the Eternal Sabbath. But the God Who ever worked in love, Whose rest was to give rest, Whose Sabbath was to remove burdens, was His Father. He knew Him; He saw His working; He was in fellowship of love, of work, of power with Him. He had come to loose every yoke, to give life, to bring life, to be life—because He had life: life in its fullest sense.¹⁰²

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Jesus Confronts the Pharisees: Ritual Cleanliness

JESUS'S SABBATH MISSION CLIMAXES when he heals the man blind from birth. He proves his lordship over the Sabbath by doing the Father's works on the Sabbath. He shows that the plan of God for the Sabbath especially means to sustain and restore his creation. All of this foreshadows the great restoration of the earth when the tangible Kingdom of God commences at Jesus' return.

Combining miraculous healings of chronic conditions and irrefutable logic from the Pharisees' own methodology, Jesus convincingly trounces the Pharisees on the issue of the Sabbath. Dismantling the Pharisees' Sabbath regulation morass, the most ritually convoluted of all their myriad legalistic entanglements, however, is not his goal. He is not out to win arguments, but to help people see the better way of the New Covenant.

Issue of Ritual Cleansing

Jesus confronts the Pharisees on other aspects of law versus grace, too. One notable situation is recorded in detail in Matthew 15:1-28 and Mark 7:1-30. This time, the issue of ritual cleansing instigates the contention. I suggest you review these passages before reading on here.

The incident starts with a confrontation in Galilee. A deputation of Pharisee leaders and scribes from Jerusalem—presumably a formidable delegation from the center of Pharisaism—comes north to scrutinize the teaching and behavior of this “unofficial” teacher and healer.

They quickly find grounds for accusation: Jesus and his disciples eat without washing. Edersheim suggests they find the alleged transgression at the feeding of the five thousand (Matt 14:13-21) which he calculates was just the day before.¹⁰³ If so, then this incident follows the same pattern as the Sabbath healings: Jesus does an astounding work, clearly showing the role of the Father's Holy Spirit, and the Pharisees see only an infraction of their picayune scruples. Edersheim's evaluation of the legalist mindset: "So this was all which these Pharisees and Scribes could see in the miracle of Christ's feeding the multitude—that it had not been done according to law!"¹⁰⁴

The Pharisees overlook the miraculous provision of food. They do notice, however, that Jesus and his disciples eat without first going through the washing ritual. This hand washing is not about hygiene or polite behavior, but a ritual washing that cleanses a person of ritual uncleanness that might occur because of the presence of Gentiles or their unclean products.

The Pharisees' allegation, that Jesus' disciples eat without first washing, means "Why do you ignore God's laws concerning ritualized cleansing?" The issue is: (1) Does contact with the Gentiles in the marketplace constitute ritual defilement? (2) Can defilement come from any external contact? This deputation of the wise and learned scribes fails to fully consider the consequences of their question. Perhaps they had not yet enough experience with the Lord to know that his acumen will transpose their pedantic cavils into pertinent questions about the nature of God and religion. Jesus, for the moment, avoids dealing with the accusation against the disciples by counter-charging the Pharisees with a much higher level of defilement: transgressing the Word of God for the sake of their traditions.

In any other context, changing the subject is a breach of argumentative protocol. It's a rejoinder guaranteed only to escalate a conflict, such as this stereotypical exchange:

"You left the toilet seat up again!"

"Oh yeah, well what about all the times when you leave the lights on?"

However, Jesus *does* change the subject with his counter-charge. They have been talking about the need for ritual hand washing, and the Lord introduces the apparently unrelated "Oh yeah, what about ..."

topic of the *korban* donation. Is there anything in the *korban* reply that can justify this switch?

Jesus' Devastating Rebuttal

Jesus raises the issue of *korban*, (a transliteration of a Hebrew word, *קורבן*) which means "gift" or "offering." It seems by New Testament times that *korban* also carries the implication of "a vow." Once a person designates something *korban*, it becomes the property of God and cannot be restored to secular use, although retained by the owner until the time of his death. In this instance, the *korban* refers to a Pharisaic practice of dedicating assets to the Temple which might have gone to support elderly parents. This way they receive "credit" for making a big contribution to the Temple treasury but continue their use of the resource (as a building for their business, for example). Once he has designated money or property *korban*, a Pharisee cannot help his parents with it even if they become desperately poor, all the while using it himself. Thus, Jesus accuses them of violating the fifth commandment for the sake of their tradition.

Why the jump to an apparently unrelated issue? For one thing, there is a connection, although it may have been obvious only to the Pharisees. Edersheim traces how the idea of "sanctified hands" is involved in the *korban* dedication protocol.¹⁰⁵ The entire account reflects an accurate and detailed knowledge of the Pharisees' system both by Jesus and the gospel writers. To vilify eating with ceremonially unwashed hands but sheltering funds for self-serving ends using "sanctified hands" is abject hypocrisy.

Also, the salient point of priorities shines through regardless of the connection between honoring parents and ritual cleansing. The behavior of the Pharisees exemplifies "straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel." Jesus directly tells them that they void the word of God (the fifth commandment, honoring their parents) for the sake of their own tradition, the *korban* offering.

What good does it do to eat with washed hands but think with an unwashed mind? What good does it do to keep petty rituals if they void the true message of God? It is as if those who practiced this say to their parents, "Go, be warmed and filled. Sorry but I gave your support money to the Temple treasury. And if you do find something to eat, make sure you ceremonially wash first."

This gospel narrative continues with a lesson for the disciples and an ironic contrast. Jesus quotes Isaiah 29:13, which adds a prophetic dimension to the entire episode. In Mark, the quotation from Isaiah comes before he raises the counterexample of *korban*; Matthew has it afterward. Perhaps Jesus repeats the quotation, for emphasis.

A Lesson on Uncleanness

The Pharisees' fear of ritual defilement results in many of their prohibitions. They make rules to declare certain items unclean and certain behaviors unacceptable. They extend the prohibitions to avoid even coming close to something unclean. If they visit the marketplace, they will wash in case they had inadvertently come close enough to non-kosher food that might have, by chance, alighted on them. Even worse, they might have brushed against a Gentile in the crowd who was ritually defiled.

The Pharisees deeply believed that defilement comes from external sources. They believe certain household articles and foods (such as animals) are either clean or unclean. A clean animal improperly slaughtered becomes unclean, but nothing can make an unclean animal clean. If something is unclean—for any reason—then contact with that item renders a person unclean.

The Pharisees' notion of holiness revolves around carefully defining what can render them unclean, making rules that exclude contact or even the possibility of proximity with these items, and then following the rules scrupulously. With this point of view, Gentiles will be in a continual state of ritual defilement through touching a dead body, eating unclean food, contact with bodily issues, and other actions, without having ritually cleansed themselves according to Pharisaic law.

Then comes Jesus who teaches, "There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him." Mark adds parenthetically, "Thus he declared all foods clean." This teaching stuns the Pharisees as much as "It is lawful to heal on the Sabbath." Jesus isn't only declaring certain items clean that had been in the unclean category; he is dismantling an entire system of reckoning good and evil.

Defilement, teaches the Lord Jesus, comes from within; out of the heart come evil thoughts. Evil thinking begets all manner of vices, and these defile a person. The list in Matthew has six entries, while that in Mark has twelve. In both, "evil thinking" seems to stand out as a heading, followed by the actions (behaviors) that come from evil thinking.¹⁰⁶

Physical things that we contact or eat, e.g., food, pass right through the system; they have nothing to do with our thinking and attitudes.

The distinction between righteousness based on ritual cleansing versus righteousness based on faith cannot be sharper. The gospels draw our attention to this with the immediate next event: the encounter of Jesus with the Syrophoenician woman.

The Gentile Woman

The meeting occurs in the far reaches of Galilee, near Tyre. A non-Israelite woman, hearing of Jesus' presence (despite his intention to remain hidden), begs him to heal her daughter. Matthew records three pleadings before Jesus yields to her importunity.

Jesus has no intention of ignoring her needs; he is demonstrating to his disciples, and to all who would read this account afterward, the difference between the righteousness of faith and the deceit of legalism. He has just dispatched the Jerusalem contingent, the learned elders of Israel. They came to him not to find healing, but with an agenda to inculcate Jesus and with eyes blind to the work of God. The Gentile woman, a beggar, identifies herself as a lowly dog merely asking for table scraps.

This precious woman knows that the promises belong to Israel, but isn't there a morsel for her? No arguing or faultfinding or ostentation from her, merely the humility of persistent pleading to the one whom she knows has the power of God. The Pharisees don't plead for the healing power of God because they do not recognize that they need healing.

Can there be a greater contrast in players of the gospel drama than between the Jerusalem Pharisees and the Syrophoenician woman? No, for Jesus needs this arrangement to show that the gulf separating faith and legalism is as far as east is from west. The high and mighty get nothing but condemnation. To the lowly Gentile woman Jesus speaks the words we would all love to hear: "Oh woman, great is your faith!"

Isaiah's Prophecy

Jesus' quote from Isaiah 29 hits right on the Pharisees' problem: they honor God with their lips, but their heart is far from Him. They worship therefore in vain, because they teach as doctrine human precepts. They claim all manner of piety and devotion, but in reality they devote themselves only to the false god of self. Moreover, they

create an image of God that is little more than a projection of their grotesquely legalistic theology. Grace is so far from the Pharisees' hearts that they can have no heart for God.

Regarding Isaiah 29, perhaps a dozen or so details fill out what's happening in this episode. Perhaps most cogent are verses 17 to 19:

Is it not yet a very little while until Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be regarded as a forest? In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord.

The reference to Lebanon, of course, presages the location where Jesus finds humble faith, in the region of Tyre and Sidon, in a Syrophoenician woman. Isaiah states that Lebanon will become a fertile field, corresponding to the woman's faith, her fruit of the spirit. Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees continues the agricultural metaphor, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up" (Matt 15:13). They have no faith, they bare no fruit, and thus they are weeds soon to be pulled up. Further, Jesus calls them "blind guides," echoing the wording of Isaiah 29:9,18. The Pharisees, who think they see well, are blind; the woman, who acknowledges her limited vision, receives unlimited illumination.

The deputation of the Pharisees from Jerusalem corresponds to Isaiah's description of reprov'd faultfinders in verse 23;¹⁰⁷ contrast that passage with "the meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord, and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel" (Isa 29:19). It is the Gentile woman, pleading for mercy from the Son of David, who places herself among spiritual Israel. She obtains fresh joy in the Lord.

The lesson came first to the disciples, and now it comes to us. Those who would seek to create a God on their own, replete with a set of rules, contravene the truth of the gospel of grace. They will fall condemned in their reputed wisdom. Those who seek the God of Israel with pleadings for his mercy find the blessings of grace.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Legalism in the Early Church

AS THE EARTHLY MINISTRY OF JESUS draws to a close, he issues his final statement concerning the community of the Pharisees. Never have they successfully argued a theological point or made the slightest defense of their rules-and-rituals religion. Now, at the end, he can go no further with his legalist opponents; they are of no further use except as a good model of a bad example of religion. The series of woes against the Pharisees in Matthew 23 stands in contrast to the beatitudes with which Jesus commenced his teaching ministry.

To finish their evil work, they engineered the crucifixion of the Son of God—but they are stultified yet again, for on the third day God raises Jesus from dead, seats him at his own right hand, and declared him Son of God in power (Rom 1:4). Although their rituals had been nailed to the cross (Col 2:14), the Pharisees understood this doctrine no better than anything else Jesus had taught in their many confrontations.

The Pharisaic tradition continued on as a religious institution, as they and their successors completed their Talmuds and commentaries. Their theological descendants, down to Orthodox Jewry of our day, maintain the same outlook, persuaded that every activity of life must be governed by a strict set of rules, which they continue to define and expand as cultural changes and technological advances require.

The Pharisees of the first century continued in another manner besides religious zeal. Just as they had vehemently opposed Jesus and did all they could to eliminate him, they now had not just one man, but a rapidly expanding network of congregations to deal with.

Continued Opposition to the Gospel

The emergence of the infant church created at least two crises for the Pharisees. One, of course, was theological. The Pharisees weren't by any means ready to capitulate on circumcision, Sabbath keeping, or anything else. Now they faced an entire movement espousing, as they would see it, the heresy of dispensing with ritual law.

The other crisis was financial, and thus had a greater impact on the Sadducees than the Pharisees. The Temple and its operation required considerable revenue, provided for by the Temple tax, other donations and tithes, and the sale of animals for offerings. (e.g., Mark 11:15-16). If the burgeoning new movement drew people away from the Temple, there would be serious fiscal concerns—not to mention jealousy.

No wonder, therefore, that the early church faced the same opposition Jesus had faced. He crucified the law, not its adherents. Unlike the immortal Jesus, the mortal church was vulnerable to the encroachments and assailments of the Pharisees. Jesus had won the theological battle for grace, and God proved it by raising him from the dead, but now came a new battle. Could an organized body of believers uphold a covenant of grace?

The Pharisees lived on to fight against this movement. They had provided the primary foil to the Lord's ministry, and they continued in that role with the early church. Except for the riot at Ephesus (Acts 19:23-41) and the jailing at Philippi (Acts 16:19-24), every confrontation in the book of Acts came by instigation of the Jewish leaders. Some of their nefarious activities included:

1. Stoning Stephen and Paul (Acts 7:58, 14:19).
2. Inciting riots in public places (Acts 21:30).
3. Pretending to be disciples to preach adherence to rituals (Gal 2:4).
4. Writing letters, with Paul's signature forged, containing false teachings (2 Thess 2:2).
5. Bribing Greeks to riot against Paul (Acts 17:5,13).
6. Accusing Paul of treason against Rome (Acts 17:7, 18:12-13).
7. Accusing Paul of preaching for various selfish reasons (1 Thes 2:5-6).¹⁰⁸
8. Preying on vulnerable new converts to reclaim them into the law (Gal 1:6-9; Col 2:8).

The Jewish leaders often had little regard for ethics or civility in their determined resistance to the growth of the new faith, as they firmly believed they were protecting God-given truth.

As if this organized opposition weren't enough, there was yet another major source of legalistic intrusion to contend with. Unlike the intentionally malevolent opposition of the Pharisees and their allies who deliberately set out to wreak theological and physical destruction, there was an entirely ingenuous group, sincere believers who weren't ready to abandon the traditions of ritual worship. Naturally, the first group preyed on the vulnerability of the second.

The two forces—intentionally disruptive from without and unintentionally disruptive from within—together formed a massive challenge for apostles and ecclesial elders.

Judaizers in the Ecclesias

Paul distinguishes between the deliberate onslaught of the Jewish leaders and the guileless legalistic inclinations of new converts. Paul differentially treats these two classes as seen in one of his earliest letters, Galatians. Here, with legalism the main issue in the survival of these ecclesias, Paul approaches the two persuasions with entirely different attitudes and strategies. He addresses the letter itself to the struggling faithful in Galatia. He refers to the evil outside as Judaizers, but we have no record of any direct writings to them.

Paul addresses them as brethren, chastising them in love. He treats them as the deceived, and the outside agitators as the deceivers. For the members of the ecclesia, he has compassion mixed with dismay. For those causing the problems, he has contempt. To the one, the misleaders, he would not yield or submit “even for a moment” (Gal 2:5). To the others, the misled, he had patience to wait in travail “until Christ is formed” in them again (Gal 4:19).

Distinguishing between the two groups of legalists gives a perspective on handling similar issues in today's ecclesial environment. Currently, we have no parallel to what Paul and the early church faced in the first century. We have no equivalent of another religious group setting out deliberately to infiltrate and destroy our body from within. We have no opponents who believe we are a financial threat to them. We have no single religious denomination out of which we all came that has set out to destroy our faith. While we certainly face oppositions, we

have nothing that compares to the first-century struggle against the vehement antagonism of the Jewish establishment.

We do, however, have problems with legalism that develop out of our growth process in the faith, until Christ is formed in all of us. We all attempt, from time to time, to reduce the faith to a code and foist our scruples on others. We need to be sure that we handle such situations the way Paul would, as internal struggles of faith, not as external agitation.

The Spirit Gifts

So massive is the cultural and theological change inherent in the dispensation of the New Covenant, that God provides a unique support to his witnesses: the Holy Spirit gifts. A discussion of the first ecclesias' struggle with legalism requires a view of the work of the Spirit gifts often left unnoticed. The usual explanation is that the outpouring of the Spirit gifts in the first century was necessary for witnessing. While healing a lame person definitely adds credibility and interest to a teaching moment, there's more going on. Two additional scriptural perspectives clarify the role the Spirit gifts played in the continuing controversy against legalism. One concerns access to the character of God, and the other relates to God's acceptance of the Gentiles.

The first aspect, that of access to the character of God, reflects the change from legalism to faith. It related to the necessary impact God had to make on Jewish minds that had not yet responded to the gospel of grace. What would it take for God to change centuries of entrenched traditions? How could God tangibly and forcibly show that oneness with him came through faith, not law? What could God do to give an unmistakable imprimatur to the preachers of apparent heresy? Issues such as this created the need for manifestation of Spirit gifts and powers in the early church.

A key passage in this regard comes from Galatians, probably Paul's first epistle directed primarily against legalism. Paul queries the believers who had begun to crumble under pressure from the Judaizers:

Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? (Gal 3:2,3,5)

Paul reminds them that when they practiced legalistic religion, they had no manifestation of the Spirit. When they came under the operation of faith, they experienced the operation of the Spirit. Luke records several miracles Paul and his band did in Galatia (Acts 14:3, 10, 20). The Galatians witnessed the works of the Spirit.

These miracles testify to the working of God, and they also manifest God's character. Healing, goodness, mercy, life, and all the other attributes of Deity come to humans by the operation of faith. Under their religion, they had no such experience of God. They only had the sterile experience of the false religion of rules. They had no access to mercy or grace. They had no access to a living God (Rom 5:1-5), because their worship centered on the dead letter of the law (2 Cor 3:6). Through the apostles' miracles, Jesus showed the character of the God of grace.

The Holy Spirit gift of healing obviously brought healing. Tongues and interpretation of tongues brought unity to ethnically and culturally diverse congregations. Prophecy, teaching, and utterances of wisdom brought the authoritative word of God to formative congregations, and so on for other spirit gifts. Giving a foretaste of a relationship with a living God, the Spirit gifts reflected access to God unavailable through the law.

The Lord God and the Lord Jesus obviously well knew the struggle their people would encounter as the disciples established a religious movement based on faith in the risen Christ. They would have opposition from the Jews and Greeks on theological issues, they would have the daily wrestling of spiritual living in a pagan society, they would have the internal striving against the innate desires of sinful human nature, and they would face persecution from their jealous former colleagues in Judaism. They would have a strange gospel to preach. They would have an entirely new relationship to build with the heavenly Father. They would have an immortal high priest in Jesus. How could they accomplish all the work of the gospel? God provided the tangible manifestation of his powerful Spirit, allotted to the apostles and their designees (Acts 8:18) for the work of establishing a community of those believing and preaching grace.

The work of God's Holy Spirit in the first century came in the historical context of discarding an entire national history under the law. The gifts manifested the power and love of God, giving life to believers through their faith in the risen Lord Jesus.

Gentiles, Too

Another message carried by the giving of the Spirit gifts came when the gentle Cornelius and his household receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Acts 10, evidence of their justification by faith. Gentiles, who previously lacked any national connection to Yahweh, receive grace and acceptance. Peter quickly and rightly interprets the significance of the Holy Spirit gifts now poured out on Gentiles and commands baptism for them.

Gentiles, too, receive the Spirit! As uncomfortable as this is for Peter to accept, he takes it at face value and defends his actions to legalistic brethren of the circumcision party (Acts 11:1-18). Appalled that Peter would even enter the house of Gentiles, let alone eat with them and baptize them, they castigate Peter and the six brethren with him. However, Peter rehearses the entire episode in their hearing, emphasizing the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on Cornelius's household. This silences Peter's foes, as even they realize that God accepts Gentiles.

The giving of the Holy Spirit gifts showed the Jews that they could have a relationship with God only through faith, not through law. If faith, not adherence to law, was the key, then Gentiles could have the same faith. Bewildered Jews would now eat side-by-side with awestruck Gentiles. God nurtured the newborn church, a mixed multitude, with the guidance, teaching, healing, and witness of the Spirit gifts.

The Jerusalem Conference

The Jerusalem conference, described in Acts 15, brings to a head the controversy over keeping the law in the dispensation of grace. Some in the ecclesia at Jerusalem believe new Gentile converts should also practice the ritual laws. Luke describes these legalistically-minded brethren as "believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees." These brethren are of the class of sincere believers, though still not yet mature in their faith. The leading faithful brethren do not expel or ignore them; in fact, the conference's outcome is largely a concession to their scruples. Unlike outside agitators, these brethren hold sincere faith in Christ, but need help in letting go of their deeply imbedded justification-by-works mind set. Some believers, Jew and Gentile, would get the concept of faith quickly and had to wait patiently until others matured, each at their own pace.

LEGALISM IN THE EARLY CHURCH

“And after there had been much debate,” the conference climaxes when Peter retells the episode about his call to the household of Cornelius and the ensuing events. Gentiles received the Holy Spirit and acceptance of their faith. Barnabas and Paul then relate their own experiences of the Spirit gifts working among the Gentiles. James summarizes the evidence, adds some scriptural exposition, and declares the law void with respect to Gentile converts. On the other hand, though, he cautioned that these converts must cease their former pagan practices.

This approach carries the day. The key point again: the character of God, demonstrated in powerful gifts, made available to those outside the law. Jewish believers had to come out of legalism, and Gentile believers had to avoid lapsing into it. God accepts people by faith. He reveals his character to us only through faith. Today we have different circumstances, but the same challenge: we can only apprehend the character of God through our faith, not through any code of rituals or standards.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

From Pharisee to Apostle of Grace

AFTER JESUS' ASCENSION (Acts 1:10-1), the disciples continue his preaching. The original twelve (less Judas, plus Matthias), become the leadership core, with Peter at the helm. During the early years of the movement, even before there was something called Christianity, others also join their ranks, including prominent figures such as Barnabas, Luke, Timothy, Stephen, Titus, and Paul. The apostles guide the growing body of believers through the difficulties and stresses of Jewish opposition, internal strife, Roman persecution, rapid growth, difficult people, and all the other headaches and heartaches inherent in managing an organization whose product is a people for the Lord.

The Unlikely Apostle

One of the greatest of the Lord's servants is a man who, at the time of his calling, had dedicated his life to destroying the apostles' work. The most unlikely of converts, it is one Saul of Tarsus: an entrenched Pharisee, vigorous persecutor, and ideological opposite the gospel message of grace. As often happens, however, the ways of Providence yield improbable results.

God had a special role in the new synagogue of Christ that only Saul of Tarsus could fill. All his life Saul thought he was preparing to be a leading rabbi, but God had a different occupation in mind for him. Keeping this great religious leader in his chosen field, but reversing his perspective, God redirects Saul to a unique calling.

The New Testament contains no biography of Paul, but there is enough background to provide an outline of his early life. Paul scattered autobiographical bits throughout his letters and his

speeches as recorded in Acts where he had occasion to refer to his earlier life as Pharisee.

We know this about him:

1. He was born in Tarsus of Cilicia (Acts 22:3), given the name Saul.
2. His ancestry was of the tribe of Benjamin (Phil 3:5)
3. He was born a Roman citizen (Acts 22:28), probably meaning his parents were citizens.
4. His family heritage was belonging to the Pharisees (Acts 23:6, 2 Tim 1:3).

Top Pharisee

Paul went to Jerusalem to study with the great rabbi Gamaliel. In his first Jerusalem trial (Acts 22:3), Paul introduces himself to the Sanhedrin as one who learned “at the feet of Gamaliel.” This phrase means more than idiom, though it sounds like Paul is giving homage to his teacher, and that he hung on Gamaliel’s every word. Actually, Paul uses this phrase to remind the Sanhedrin just how important a figure Saul of Tarsus was, even from his earliest years in Jerusalem. In the synagogues, students sat in an arrangement that reflected their academic position:

The academy head presided, seated on a chair or on special mats. In the front rows opposite him sat the important scholars, including his colleagues or outstanding pupils, and behind them all the other scholars. When the academies grew larger, particularly in Palestine, the order of the seating was based on a precisely defined hierarchy. In the first row sat the great scholars, in the second row the less important sages, and so on.¹⁰⁹

Picture the apostle as a young man, seated front and center, at the very feet of the renowned and revered Gamaliel. Already at the top of his class, he is on his way to becoming the leading Pharisee. Paul wrote to the Galatians (1:14) that he was extremely zealous for the law, and his academic accomplishments exceeded that of many of his peers. This may have been a humble way of saying that he really excelled above *everyone* when it came to legalistic knowledge. Given other mentions of his qualifications (Phil 3:4-6, Acts 22:3, 23:6), it is likely that he had no superior in the world of Pharisaism. He was destined

to become a great rabbinical leader, perhaps achieving the esteemed title of Rabbi Saul of Tarsus.

The Necessary Apostle

The growth of the new church after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus necessitates an apostle who can successfully engage the ongoing theological debates with the unconverted Jews. The Christian movement needs to counter legalism, both within and without the body. No one among the original twelve can do this, as Jesus had not chosen any learned men among his first group of twelve apostles; even Jesus himself had no academic credentials (John 7:15). If salvation is to come to the Jews through Jesus, then the preaching of the cross must come into the synagogue through a credible spokesperson.

The ideal person for the job is someone who knows Judaism well and thus can argue persuasively and knowledgeably, one who speaks with absolute authority on matters of the law and the rabbinic additions. That person is Saul of Tarsus. Later in life, Paul recognizes that this calling came from his mother's womb (Gal 1:15); his life of Pharisaic education and religious practice had prepared him for apostleship. Never would he have thought, as he studied and argued with the sages about abstruse points of ritual law, that this was God's way of preparing him for the work of the gospel of grace.

God's selection of Jewry's leading figure accomplishes two purposes. One, it gives the church the most qualified person they could possibly have in the ongoing battle against legalism. Paul presents unassailable credentials to anyone who wishes to debate theology. Paul knows their methods from the inside. He can debate anyone, anytime, anywhere.

The other purpose relates to personal grace. Before his conversion, Paul prided himself on his extensive knowledge of the law and of rabbinical interpretations, and his exemplary adherence to those laws and rituals. Later in life, he calls these supposed advantages "rubbish" (Phil 3:7,8). He describes himself as a persecutor of the church, the least of all apostles (1 Cor 15:8-10), and the foremost of sinners (1 Tim 1:15). The Philippians passage tells of the excellency of faith, and the latter two passages emphasize the abundance of grace in God's calling him.

If God can forgive Saul, he can forgive anyone. Saul had vitriolically opposed God's work. He voted for the execution of Stephen. Saul was

an evil person, but God put his finger on him, and said, in effect, “I need you on my side.” When he responded favorably, God forgave him. Grace covered the multitude of his evils.

Chief Pharisee to Foremost Sinner

Autobiographical details from his letters and speeches reveal how this great mind reframes his previous career as a Pharisee. What Saul the Pharisee finds praiseworthy, Paul the apostle dismisses as odious. He discards all the pillars of his self-righteousness: ritual holiness, works, rabbinical knowledge, traditions and genealogy. The “foremost of Pharisees,” in Christian retrospect, considers himself only the “foremost of sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15), and the least of the apostles. By using “foremost,” Paul contrasts his Pharisaic standing with his standing in Christ. As a Pharisee, he stood at the top by reason of his learning and ritual purity. Now, casting legalistic achievement aside, he places himself as the chief sinner, receiving and accepting the grace of our Lord.

Saul the Pharisee	Paul the Apostle
Foremost Pharisee	Foremost Sinner
A Hebrew of Hebrews (Phil 3:5)	Neither Jew nor Greek (Gal 3:28)
Circumcised on the eighth day (Phil 3:5)	Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, but faith working through love—a new creation (Gal 5:6; 6:15)
As to righteousness under the law, blameless (Phil 3:6)	By works of the law shall no man be justified (Gal 2:16; Rom 3:20)
Advanced in knowledge (Gal 1:14)	Knowledge puffs up, love builds up (1 Cor 8:1)
Zealous for the traditions of my fathers (Gal 1:14)	They [the Jews] have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened (Rom 10:2)
Traveled widely to persecute (Acts 26:11)	Traveled widely to preach (Acts 13:2)

Jesus Appears to Paul

The apostles' witness of the resurrection does not convince Saul of Tarsus that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. Neither does he come to believe from his academic learning or through argumentation in the synagogues. He may have personally seen and heard Jesus teach.¹¹⁰ Not even Stephen's magnificent proclamation sways Paul; it only generates murderous antipathy.

What does it take to get Paul where he needs to be? *A personal appearance by the resurrected Christ*. Paul's conversion—which he relates often as part of his witnessing—is not an academic teaching that he can dispute. Paul knew all the scriptures and rabbinical teachings but he read and studied with a veiled mind.

Saul the Pharisee, like all his fellow Jews, believed in a messiah (Christ), but he doesn't believe that Jesus is the Christ until after the Lord appears to him on the Damascus road (Acts 9:22). As he lays in darkness those three days in the house of Ananias, he has a new experience of life: the awareness of being absolutely wrong. Jesus himself had proven his resurrection by appearing to and speaking to Paul. Paul now sees his knowledge base through new, unveiled eyes. The vitriolic opponent becomes the vehement proponent.

Paul's belief that Jesus is indeed the Christ comes through a personal encounter.

We come to know Jesus and his role in God's purpose through our learning, but our discipleship in Christ does not fully develop through intellectual apprehension of Scripture. It relies on the realization that we serve a living Lord. The same Jesus who presented himself visibly and audibly to Saul of Tarsus presents himself to us through our faith. The covenant of grace is a living religious experience, not one based on the dead letter of the law.

Section III

THEOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

A New Wineskin

AS THE WRITERS AND LEADERS of the New Testament countered Judaistic influences in the early church, they left us the legacy of the gospels and epistles. These writings had current and compelling meaning to those who first received them, but we read them as historical documents that contain timeless teachings about redemption by faith through God's grace. Set in the eastern Mediterranean some two millennia past, the New Testament writings reach into remote history and vastly different ways of life, and at the same time teach universal and eternal truths about God's purpose with humanity.

The Universality of Bible Teaching

One aspect of Scripture's universality is its understanding of human nature, making it relevant for everyone, whenever and wherever they live or lived. Paul taught the universality of legalistic tendencies when he referred to rules-making as part of the "basic principles of this world" (Col 2:20, NIV). Far from being just a Pharisee issue or a Jewish issue, legalism is a people issue, and a vital topic for today.

The Pharisees were not abnormal or unique, but possessors of the same human tendency we all have. You will miss valuable instruction if you view the Pharisees and legalism as a "then and there" issue instead of as a sample of universal human nature, highly magnified so you can't miss the lessons you need to know if you want to avoid the same fate.

The study of legalism demands this perspective, to raise awareness and avoid the tendencies of our human nature and preserve the real meaning of *truth*: the fullness of God's revelation in Jesus (John 1:18).

Reducing the truth to behavioral prescriptions and proscriptions places you back under the law, a position that Scripture describes as crucifying the Son of God anew (Heb 6:6), and removing yourself from the grace that brings salvation (Gal 5:4).

A New Wineskin

In his brief parable about putting new wine into fresh wineskins (Matt 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37-39), Jesus addresses perhaps the most fundamental issue separating the divergent world views of legalism and faith. Jesus gives this little lesson in tandem with another, just as brief, about sewing a new patch of cloth on an old garment. In context, this pair of mini-parables comes as part of the Lord's answer to his disciples' question regarding fasting.

They had just been to a feast at Levi's (Matthew's) house, but some scribes and Pharisees abstained from eating and rebuked them for their participation. The Pharisees complain about Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus replies, "Those who are well have no need of a physician" (Matt 9:12), meaning that he came to call (those who recognized themselves as) sinners. He also adds the New Covenant prophetic quotation from Hosea, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (Matt 9:13).

The next question comes from John's disciples, asking why they and the Pharisees fast, but Jesus and his disciples don't. The reply employs imagery of a wedding feast and two brief analogies: new patches on an old cloth and new wine in old wineskins. Evidently, this query came from Pharisees who had submitted to the baptism of John (Matt 3:7) but had yet to understand the New Covenant fully.

Still stuck between Pharisaic ritual fasting and learning the principles of faith, they represent a frequently encountered position. Well into the apostolic era, and continuing to today, the same issue persists. The old wineskin, representing the domain of law, cannot contain the new wine of the New Covenant.

No New Law Code

Jesus did not lay down his life to usher in another code of law. He didn't replace one system with another on the same level, even if it was a better one. No set of moral rules, liturgy, or prescription of ritual could contain his covenant. Any attempt to shoehorn the New Covenant into the same structure as the Old would fail, bursting the container and spilling the contents. You cannot patch up the Old Covenant with some

moral teachings, because true morality cannot exist in a vessel of laws. The lesson of Jesus to the Pharisees and disciples of John warns us as well: don't attempt to ritualize the covenant of grace.

If the old wine represents the law, then the old wineskin is the conceptual realm in which law can exist. That realm deals with the tangible, the concrete, the observable, and the measurable; that is, it deals with objects and behaviors. It deals with jugs and houses and trees and animals, with how long you could keep a slave, and what to do if someone commits adultery or practices sorcery. The law exists in the realm of the humanly observable and measurable; it cannot deal with intangibles such as motivation, values, attitudes, and intentions.¹¹¹

A New Realm of Spirituality

The realm of the intangibles, therefore, is the realm of the New Covenant. This is the realm where God sees into the heart (1 Sam 16:7). The New Covenant, based on grace, cannot fit into an old wineskin. You cannot measure grace anymore than you can measure faith. You can measure behavior, but not intention or motivation. Rules deal with tangible items such as clothes and food and animals, but sin or righteousness do not reside in those (Rom 14:17).

This new realm must be something of a higher order altogether, a new dispensation requiring a new way of ascertaining godliness. It is the realm where only the Creator can judge, not with human eyes or ears, but with righteousness (Isa 11:3-4). It is the wineskin of the mind of God, searching the deep things of our heart—character, values, and attitudes—with unimpeachable exactitude, intangible to humans, but known perfectly by God¹¹². The Old Covenant asks the question, “What did you do?” The New Covenant asks, “Who are you?”

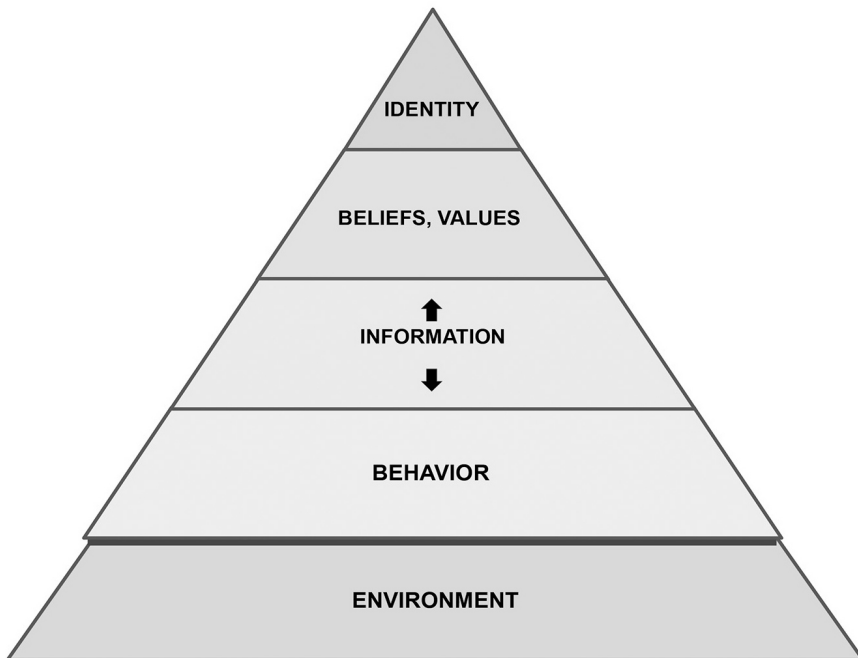
The shift in perspective described above anticipates the key concept of *identity*, the “Who are you” question. The next step is to see how identity applies in our religious life.

You are familiar with the basic idea from secular life, which has identities such as father, teacher, violinist, nurse, rancher, Estonian, and so on. The next chapter introduces a five-level model known as Logical Levels that uses context to clarify the concept of identity.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Identity in Context

SHIFTING FROM WINESKINS TO a conceptual hierarchy, let's look at a five-level pyramid-shaped model of human experience called Logical Levels.¹¹³ Each higher level represents an increasingly more complex and essential part of human existence.



The Logical Levels Pyramid

Many adaptations and variations of this model have been proposed; you can find them on any Web search of “Logical Levels.” The one below is my own version that I used with my therapy clients for over 25 years. It covers all aspects of human existence, but its use here is to illustrate religious and spiritual matters.

Lowest Level: Environment

The thick line between the lowest and second levels indicates that the bottom level is not something about you *per se*. It is your environment: where you live, your local congregation, your home, your neighborhood, or your workplace. This level represents the people, places, and things that you contact daily. Your surroundings affect you, but you aren’t your surroundings.

Second Level: Behavior

This second level includes only observable behavior: what you do at work, home, or any other place. This level pertains to your actions, not to any motives or rationale for those actions. The sinner and the Pharisee about whom Jesus told the parable exhibited the same behavior in the same place; both prayed at the Temple (Luke 18:10). Likewise, two people can attend a religious service (same behavior and environment) but have vastly different thoughts. Because behavior *qua* behavior is equally the domain of trained animals as well as humans, it has very little to say about our faith.

Third Level: Knowledge

This is the level where your *knowledge* resides. Knowledge comes from life’s experiences as well as your formal education, reading, and other modes of learning. You can become greatly learned, but not do much with what you learn. What you know only increases your potential and capabilities.¹¹⁴ Knowledge *can* change your behavior, but it doesn’t always. Many people knowingly lead sedentary, unhealthy lives; they know it’s bad for their health, but they continue anyway. There’s no health benefit in just *knowing* about healthy dietary intake. Likewise, Bible knowledge gives you the possibility of improving your spiritual life, but it needs something more to make that happen.

The two arrows in this level indicate that our learning can change you via two pathways. The down arrow indicates a low-level behavioral change based on acquisition of new knowledge. Low-level because in

this formulation you have no personal investment in the behavior—you do it because you were told to, or because you learned a new fact. For instance, you read that a certain food lowers blood pressure, so you start eating it. If there's no personal belief or understanding of what you're doing, it's just information changing behavior.

The “up” arrow points to the fourth level; we're headed there next.

Fourth Level: Attitudes, Values, and Beliefs

Moving up one more level, you come to the level that represents *attitudes, values, and beliefs*. These also arise from knowledge, but at this level knowledge has taken hold in your mind. The difference between *knowing* something and truly *believing* something comes when you have personalized that knowledge through experience. For instance, the Bible teaches forgiveness to repair interpersonal wrongs (e.g., Col 3:13). You've read this dozens of times, but until you have experienced through forgiveness the restoration of a damaged relationship, it remains but a point of information. All of your faith remains academic until you act on it, experience it, and find its place in your life. This is why many powerful beliefs come not from book learning, but from personal experience.

If you have negative experiences at an early age, you might have beliefs about yourself and the world that make it very hard for you to function. Nearly every day in my work as a psychotherapist I saw adult clients living with beliefs from their childhood:

If other people don't like me, there's something wrong with me.

I don't deserve to succeed.

I am destined to be unhappy.

Always play it safe. Never take risks.

Don't trust doctors.

If I'm emotional, I must be weak.

Depression means I lack faith.

Some people have had experiences that make it very hard for them to trust others, or to trust God. Some people have never experienced love and affection. They may read and learn about these ideas, and know that *some* people experience them, but they themselves have no personal experience to relate to. We want to nourish each other, especially our children, with positive experiences congruent with God's love for us, and ours for God, so our community practices and accepts love, not just talks about it.

One further point of clarification on the two arrows in the third level. When you do learn something new, such as about how forgiveness heals relationships, and it becomes a firm belief either because of your own personal experience or internal processing, then it is a high-level change, not easily dislodged. The low-level behavioral change, on the other hand, bypasses this step. If you change a behavior just because someone said so (“exercise more”), but it’s not your own personal value, it’s not likely to last long. When the first stressor, change of schedule, or social inconvenience arises, it’s off the agenda.

Fifth Level: Identity

The fifth and uppermost level represents what could be called the sum (though it’s really more than that) of your beliefs, values, and attitudes. This level is your *identity*. Identity holds the most strategic position in your minds and will have more impact on your behavior than any single belief or bit of information. Identity is marked by the verb of being—“I am a child of God,” or I am a disciple.” If you have a negative identity, it might be “I’m a loser,” or “I’m a victim.”

An identity is resilient and not easily changed by circumstances of life. People with strong identities as believers do not lose their faith when difficulties of life arise, or great spiritual doubts beset them.

On the other hand, people with negative identities tend to be unswayed by any success or good fortune that does come their way. For them, these occurrences are explained away as just oddities or “it won’t last long” type responses.

God sees you as an identity, not as a ledger sheet of your behaviors or even as the quality of your beliefs. God only sees a whole, a sheep or a goat. There’s no such thing as “a pretty good goat,” or a “not-so-good-sheep.” God judges, completely and ineffably, at the identity level. Either you are his disciple or you aren’t.

Identity is the most important force in determining the outcome of your life. This is true for both how you conduct your life and for God’s assessment of whether you are the kind of person he wants for his Kingdom.

Good Trees, Good Fruit. Bad Trees, Bad Fruit

Jesus taught the primacy of identity *long* before the Logical Levels model. He used a tree metaphor, likely based on Psalm 1 and/or the vine allegory in Isaiah 5. If you want good fruit, you need to plant, water, nourish, and prune good stock. Good fruit doesn’t grow on trees—it

grows on *good* trees. Likewise, good attitudes and works of faith don't come out of nowhere—they come if and when you develop yourself into the type of spiritual person for whom bearing good fruit is a matter of course. If you take care of the basics, the fruit will come.

The Stoic philosopher Epictetus, who lived in the apostolic era, wrote, “First, say to yourself what you would *be*; and then do what you have to *do*.”¹¹⁵ The same teaching from another quarter.

All Factors Interact

Obviously, all these levels interact with each other; you do have stairs leading up and down in your house. As your knowledge changes, so can your beliefs, and so should your behavior. Also, changes in behavior can lead to new beliefs. For instance, if you practice a skill, such as public speaking, until you master it, you might develop a new belief about your efficacy as a teacher. You might move from “I hate giving talks” to “I love to encourage others” by practicing that behavior. Knowledge of the principles of preparing and delivering a talk can help shape the behavior, which in turn can help shape your attitude. Conversely, a negative experience (which could be at the environmental or behavioral level) giving a public address could adversely change you at the attitudinal level.

What does all this have to do with the two wineskins?

The Old Covenant dealt mainly with the two lower levels: what you do, and where you do it. Although there were rabbinic teachings about the character that one should have, including values such as temperance, generosity, and kindness, the real hold of the religion was in its behavioral strictures. Ultimately, a good life was one that observed the laws and kept the rituals. The wineskin of the New Covenant is needed to accommodate the higher levels. This is not to say that the lower levels are of no importance; however, they only have importance relative to the attitudes which drive them.

Moving from the Old Covenant to the New requires not only an appreciation of the higher levels, but the realization that you cannot move them down to the lower levels. In other words, to live in the New Covenant, you need to live in the less tangible world of values and attitudes, and search for a personal identity congruent with the values of the Kingdom of God. You cannot ritualize your faith, nor can you assess another person's faith by what you observe in their life.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Identity and Relationship

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. ... For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1:14, 17)

IT IS EASY TO MISS the implicit message of this statement by focusing on the explicit message: the difference between law and grace. Law came through Moses, the lawgiver; grace came through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Grace stands in opposition to law; you cannot be justified by following law, but you can be justified by trusting in God's grace.

The implied message is *the medium* of expression of each covenant. Law was delivered on tablets of stone. Law is not a person, but a set of rules, words that describe behaviors to do or avoid. Under law a written code represents God.

Grace does not come on a tablet or in anything written. Grace came in the life of Jesus. Under grace you relate to a living person, not to an impersonal code. It doesn't matter if that code is updated from the law of Moses to a Statement of Faith. You relate to God through the life of Jesus, and because Jesus is alive now, you relate to God through a living person. The message of John 1:14-17 is explicit (law versus grace), the medium is implicit (written code versus living person).

Logical Levels and Relationship

Refer back to the Logical Levels pyramid from the previous chapter. Under law the relationship occurs at the two lowest levels, Behavior and Environment. Under grace, the relationship is primarily at the highest level, Identity, and then flows down from there.

A person following a legalistic religion does the correct rituals in the correct fashion and avoids contamination by contact or association with anything taboo. This avoidance takes place at the environmental level, the lowest level, the one that is outside of you. This is the “Where” domain, which asks, “Where have you been and with what have you been in contact?” Rituals and prescribed behaviors (e.g., wear this, eat this, read this, go here, don’t do *that*) are located in the level above Environment. This is the lowest level that represents something about you, not your surrounds¹¹⁶. Because proper doing does not necessarily distinguish you from a trained animal, Behavior as a category is a low-level part of your humanity.

Superimposing legalistic religion over the Logical Levels pyramid involves only the lowest levels of human potential. Cognitive process (Knowledge or Information, the middle level) comes into play only insofar as you need to know what rules to observe. Even then, the arrow in the Knowledge level points downward, indicating that you needn’t internalize the rules; all that matters is that you follow them.

In contrast, observe where the dispensation of grace fits into the Logical Levels scheme. Grace is a shorthand way of referring to the New Covenant; it’s not just about grace per se. The New Covenant starts with a loving God who gave his Son who gave his life wholly to his Father’s will. As noted above, whereas under the law the connection between God and people was a written set of rules, the connection under the covenant of Grace is a person. Personhood involves personal identity. We speak of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, a living person who knows you, and to whom you relate.

In the following pairs of verses I have made substitutions to illustrate this point. The first version of the verse, in italics, has the word “person” where “Jesus,” “Jesus Christ,” or a pronoun referring to Jesus appears in the original text. Right below that each verse, indented, is the same verse, this time using “the law” as the substitute for Jesus or Jesus Christ. Clearly, the “law” reading of each pair makes no sense at all.

IDENTITY AND RELATIONSHIP

And walk in love, as a **person** loved us and gave himself for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Eph 5:2)

And walk in love, as the law loved us and gave himself for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Eph 5:2)

For the love of a **person** controls us, because we have concluded this: that **one person** has died for all, therefore all ... who live might no longer live for themselves but for **the person** who for their sake died and was raised. (2 Cor 5:14)

For the love of **the law** controls us, because we have concluded this: that **the law** has died for all, therefore all ... who live might no longer live for themselves but for **the law** who for their sake died and was raised. (2 Cor 5:14)

All this is from God, who through a **person** reconciled the world to himself. (2 Cor 5:18)

All this is from God, who through **the law** reconciled the world to himself. (2 Cor 5:18)

[We] are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in a **person**. (Rom 3:24)

[We] are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in **the law**. (Rom 3:24)

A **person** through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name. (Rom 1:4)

The law through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name. (Rom 1:4)

“For God has done what the *law*, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own *Son* in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom 8:3). The “difference that makes a difference” is the difference between a written code of conduct that only deals with behavior and a person who had the very nature that lies at the source of disobedience.

Christ the Head of the Body

The New Testament figure of Christ as head of the body of believers also shows the contrast between behavior (law) and identity (grace). One passage will illustrate the point, as all occurrences of this metaphor have the same implicit logic.

... we are to grow up every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Eph 4:15-16)

Revising this passage like the ones above renders it incoherent: “grow up in every way into the head, into the law.” A code of behavior simply cannot engender this metaphor—a body that supports and nourishes itself. One in which each person is different, yet all have a place. Under law, everyone is the same: just do what the law says. While there might be a group of people who follow the same practice, there’s nothing in a system of law that conduces to a living body under the headship of a divine leader.

A Big Message from a Small Preposition: In

Another New Testament feature that implicitly teaches identity and personal relationship is located in the tiny preposition “in.” Prepositions do a huge amount of work in conveying meaning, but they often have multiple and overlapping connotations, making any assertions about their meaning a cautious exercise.

Taken at face value, “in” (ἐν) typically means “in” as one thing contained by or within another. The ball is in the bag. The doghouse is in our backyard. “In” denotes location of the closest proximity: not beside it, in front of it, close to it, above, behind, nearby, and so on, but in— one thing actually inside of another.

The New Testament frequently uses “in” to describe our relationship to Jesus:

- “We are his workmanship, created **in** Christ Jesus for good works” (Eph 2:10).
- “**In** him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Eph 2:22).

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- “Abide **in** me, and I **in** you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides **in** the vine, neither can you, unless you abide **in** me. ... Whoever abides **in** me and I **in** him, he it is that bears much fruit” (John 15:4-5).
- “To all the saints **in** Christ Jesus who are at Philippi ... Greet every saint **in** Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:1, 4:21).
- “The riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ **in** you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27).

These and many others express the relationship succinctly stated by the Jesus himself: “The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I **in** them and you **in** me, that they may become perfectly one” (John 17:22-23). The relationship described by “in” indicates the closest possible connection between God and Jesus, Jesus and God, Jesus and us, us and Jesus, God in us, us in God—all one. This is a relationship of persons, again something incoherent under a system of law. Would you say that you are “*in* the law?” Perhaps you might say that you know the law so well that the law is in you, but that’s only a cognitive-level statement. You can never be *in* the law, and God and Jesus certainly aren’t in any law.

No law can crucify flesh; this comes from your love for and identity with Jesus. Paul is contrasting law and grace when he writes, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal 5:22-24). It is a relationship with a living person, being *in* Christ, that gives you the strength and motivation to live a spiritual life.

Being *in* Christ is an Identity-level function of the Logical Levels pyramid. Because of shared identity with God and Jesus, the next step down on the pyramid—Values, Attitudes, and Beliefs—would contain the fruit of the Spirit, or any list of godly attributes. These are not behaviors or aspects of knowledge, but high-level constructs that emanate from your identity and drive your behaviors.

Thank you, “in,” for taking us to the top.

One more feature of the Logical Levels pyramid helps illustrate the concept of “in.” Some depictions of the pyramid have a circle around it. The circle represents something bigger than you, something of which you are a part. For some people it might be a vague notion of spiritual

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connectedness among all living things or the powers of the universe. For you and me, it is the God of the Bible and the family of those who believe in his promises brought to reality through the resurrection of Jesus. You are part of something much bigger than yourself.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

A Faith of Works, or Works of Faith?

Behavior—a word that calls for an adjective indicating if the behavior is acceptable or unacceptable, appropriate or inappropriate, juvenile or adult, and so on. Like the word “weather,” it seems incomplete without a descriptor. Talking about behavior with no adjective seems odd and even pointless. How can we talk about something that’s undefined?

This chapter, however, considers behavior itself, not good or bad behavior, but the concept of behavior, the contents of the second level of the Logical Levels pyramid. Behavior refers to your actions, deeds, comings and goings; it simply means what you *do*, the visible and measurable part of our existence. Standing, walking, talking, sitting; anything physical that you *do* comes in the category of behavior. A behavior can be as small as a wink or as large and complex as driving across the country.

Emotions and Motives are not Behaviors

Behaviors normally have thoughts and emotions associated with them, but the thoughts and emotions themselves are not behaviors. Thinking “I’m lonely” is not a behavior, it’s a thought, or in technical language, a cognition. Sadness might be the emotion associated with that thought, and the correlated behavior is likely to be crying. The three go together—the thought, the emotion, and the behavior—but you can see only the behavior.

Religious rituals are behaviors. All works are also behaviors, such as contributing money, teaching, or singing. You can’t know what people think or feel when they do acts of service or worship; only God knows the heart. Humans can only observe the tangible aspects of being (that

is, the behavior rather than the attendant thoughts). Because that's the only part of existence that is perceptible, people often interpret faith in behavioral terms, such as "doing the readings" or "always in attendance."

The New Testament squarely addresses the question, "at what level does God measure righteousness?" Jesus said, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:20). How can anyone exceed the punctilious righteousness of the Pharisees? Paul wrote this of himself: "as to righteousness under the law, blameless" (Phil 3:6). How can anyone exceed blamelessness? The answer must come from another place than ritual observance.

Jesus taught that our righteousness extends beyond behavior into *thinking*. If adultery (a behavior) is sin, the higher righteousness calls even the thought of lust, sin (Matt 5:28). To exceed the Pharisees in matters of morality, you must avoid sin at the thought level, not just the behavior level.

Paul Doesn't Command Giving

Donating (money, time, expertise, goods) as a behavior can benefit others, but for your benefit it must come from a willing heart. Paul expends much ink on this issue in 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15. He won't command the Corinthians to give. He doesn't make a rule that they must give any set amount or percentage of their assets; to do so would obviate any possibility of their giving being a free-will act of beneficence. Their intent alone would determine God's view of their giving.

This instance of monetary giving amply illustrates the difference between *behavior* and *attitude*. If all that mattered was the actual giving of a tithe or any specified amount, then Paul will tell the Corinthians to give the money, period. He doesn't do that because he wants to know how much the Corinthians love their brothers and sisters in famine-stricken Judea. Will they give without being commanded? Will they be truly glad to give and count it an honor? Will some only give because everyone else is and they will feel ashamed if they didn't? Paul leaves this territory unaddressed. He exhorts them to stir up their generosity, and then he lets them act as their conscience directs them.¹¹⁷

The nature of the situation makes Paul's non-directive approach even more thought-provoking. The issue at hand meant meeting a basic need for the saints in Judea who were suffering from the famine

prophesied by Agabus (Acts 11:28-30). This could well be a life or death matter for the recipients. They need the giving to happen. Still, Paul refrains. He typifies God himself, allowing people the option of making the right choice of their own accord. Indeed, giving is good, and giving a lot is better; but once it becomes a standard, a law, or a rule, only the behavior itself matters.

Behavior, Attitude, and Free Will

Note the difference between God *commands* and God *demand*s. The former is a directive, the latter a standard. God does demand willingness when giving. However, by its very nature of being a mental disposition, willingness cannot come from a direct command. The command “You must give” makes sense at a behavioral level, but the command “You must willingly give” is incoherent. Love (willing giving) *is* the standard God demands, but you arrive at it through a different path than obeying a direct rule of behavior.

Jesus and Paul both taught that the way our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees comes not in outdoing them in good works, but in having a basis of righteous thinking from which the behavior emanates. The Pharisees, working under the system of law, could only measure *behavior*. God looks at the *intent* that drives the behavior.

Directives, in the form of rules, laws, regulations, or codes of conduct eliminate the possibility of doing good as an expression of our faith and love. Virtue must be initiated by one’s free choice. Rules nullify the New Covenant and revert to the realm of behavior and the pseudo-righteousness of works.

Law or Free Will?

Why not then take the next step and create rules which legislate love? Why not improve the rule of “giving” to a rule of “willing giving”? This can’t work, for two reasons.

One, as just noted, the presence of an external law precludes the possibility of true willingness. If you tell your children to wash the dishes, can they possibly now do it of their own free will? No, because the command to do a task takes free will out of the picture. They can obey your request, but they can’t show voluntary free will. They either obey or they don’t; the matter now no longer concerns their initiative.

However, can't someone willingly follow a command? Can't the children willingly and cheerfully wash the dishes at your request? Yes, they can willingly obey, but they can't offer, because you have asked them to do it, and that's the key difference. If we have a rule that asks for money, we can't give of our own accord.

The second reason you can't legislate love is because there is no way to measure it. How would you measure attitude? How would you measure or quantify willingness? Look for a smile on someone's face? That's back to behavior. You can neither detect nor legislate attitude. It must come from a heart touched by the love of God. A good attitude will produce good works.

Following commands can show faith, for Hebrews 11 lists several acts of obedience, all done by faith. Abraham left Ur, at God's command, by faith. This was not his initiative; it was God's. Hebrews does tell us that Abraham's motivation came through faith. God knew this, but you would not know this without divine revelation. You could see Abraham's behavior—leaving Ur—but not the inner workings of his heart.

The basic principles of love, commitment, service, humility, and faith suffice for generating good behaviors, initiated and given freely. The more you live by principles instead of laws, the more you display your faith, your love, and your spiritual maturity. God allows the struggles that develop character rather than commanding behavior for behavior's sake.

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James delivers the message: the attitude of faith really doesn't exist unless it manifests itself behaviorally; it must show itself where it counts by doing something. This is where behavior does count, but you can never judge a person's faith by their doings. Only God can distinguish true works of faith from their counterfeit counterparts.

To live by faith, you need to have a clear appreciation that what you *do* stems from your faith and your love for God and your love for others. Doing itself does not suffice, either alone or as some addition to your faith. Neither is this a matter of balance; don't believe for a moment that somehow faith and works compete with each other. You either have both, or neither. If you esteem works as faith, you have neither. If you have a faith that develops from a relationship with God and Jesus, you will have an abundance of both.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Sin, Righteousness, Repentance, and Judgment

THESE FOUR WORDS ENCOMPASS A VAST PLOT of theological territory, but this chapter concerns only what is relevant to this book: how they differ under the law versus under the covenant of grace.

Assessing Sin

What constitutes a “sin?” Under the law, to sin meant doing a proscribed behavior. These proscriptions, or “thou shalt nots,” are known as negative commandments. The law also had positive commandments, such as keeping holy days (Lev 23), helping your neighbor’s beast of burden (Exod 23:4-5), or reporting someone else’s transgression that you witnessed (Lev 5:1). Transgressing a negative command was a sin of *commission*; conversely, transgressing positive command was a sin of *omission*.

The law made some accommodation for intent, though offenders were still counted guilty even if they were unaware of their transgression (Lev 5:14-19).

Under the New Covenant, the concept of sin differs in two significant ways. One, sin shifts from being defined mostly in behavioral terms to focus largely on cognitive and character-related aspects. Two, sins of omission rather than sins of commission are primary. Combining these two changes yields an understanding of sin unavailable under law. The main sin under the covenant of grace is not doing something wrong, but failure to develop your spiritual self. Achieving excellence does not mean not a list of behaviors to avoid; developing the Fruit of the Spirit is the new standard.

Sins of commission are still in the picture, but they now have labels such as lust, envy, pride, judging, and party spirit. Adultery, theft, lying, and murder are still sins, but these are so far from the norm of spiritual life that it hardly speaks to your credit to say that you have avoided these.

Avoidance or Activity?

You can be guilty of sin when you have done nothing wrong or even had a wrong thought. Under the New Covenant, sins of omission are not defined as “failure to do a prescribed behavior,” but by the generic “Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.” This means that sin is defined in the context of faith, not law. This is a key understanding in New Covenant ethics.

Sin encompasses far more than “doing something bad” or even “thinking something bad.” “Failing to do good” is a serviceable definition. A full definition finally comes to rest at something like “falling short in the quest to live in faith and love.” What you need to see most is the growth of your faith, and that the greatest sin is the indifference and unawareness that stunts your spiritual growth. The question about life’s activities and choices that you want to ask is not “What’s wrong with it?” but “What’s right with it?” Better yet, “Is this consistent with the growth of my faith?”

The omission is what you haven’t yet grown up to in Christ. Failure to prepare yourself to take advantage of opportunities when they arise and creating opportunities when they don’t arise. In the ethic of the New Covenant, sins of omission are the main downfall, and they are mostly the lack of spiritual growth. This conceptualization of sin emphasizes preparation for performance rather than creating layers of avoidance. This is what Jesus meant by “unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees.” This is a true paradigm shift in what constitutes sin.

The greatest sin of omission lies not in the specific lack of any certain act or deed, it lies in your failure to become whom you ought to be in Christ.¹¹⁸

The Thought Behind the Deed

Jesus adds the cognitive component in the Sermon on the Mount, when he expands sins such as adultery to include the preceding thought. The idea here is not so much “the thought itself is sin”; rather, it’s about the process of sin. Jesus is teaching that thinking about sinful behavior leads

to the sin; that is where you need to take control. To paraphrase, Jesus might have said, “If you want to avoid adultery, don’t harbor adulterous thoughts.” Even if the deed never materializes, it’s clearly unhelpful to think about adultery.

A Legalistic View of Sinful Thoughts

If it were the case that even thinking about committing adultery were a sin, how would you define it? At what point does a thought become a sin? Trying to define when a thought becomes sinful is reverting back into legalistic thinking. There’s an old adage something like, “You can’t stop the flies from landing, but don’t let them lay their eggs.” Random thoughts fly through your head continually. It’s pointless trying to decide if any of them has stayed long enough to be a sin. Better is to have the awareness of what your human brain can cook up, and what you need to do to get it back on track.

Does that mean you don’t need forgiveness every time you for every moment of lust, jealousy, envy, anger, resentment, hate or prejudice? Of course you do, especially when they develop into regular traits of mind. You don’t want that to happen.

Missing the Mark about Missing the Mark

The Greek word translated “sin” (*ἁμαρτία hamartia*), and its Hebrew equivalent, (*חַטָּה hatah*) are usually understood as “missing the mark.” This definition implies a sin of commission: you did something wrong, and therefore is inadequate as a New Covenant definition without revising the scope of “missing the mark.”

Upgrade the mark to “maturity in Christ” (Phil. 3:14). The mark, or goal, of your calling is not to avoid mistakes, but to grow in spiritual character. Missing the mark means failing to reach your potential in the development of the Fruit of the Spirit. It is a sin of omission.

The Unholy Trinity

Sin, with its two evil companions, transgression and iniquity—comprise the trio of malfeasance I call the Unholy Trinity. They make frequent appearances as a trio in the Old Testament, and also in Romans 4, as quote from Psalm 32.

It is possible that these three together represent more than a poetic or literary emphasis on human failings. I lean toward the nuances of the words yielding this interpretation:

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Transgression (פֶּשַׁע) = doing something wrong

Sin (חַטָּאת) = wrong thinking and attitude

Iniquity (עָוֹן) = being a limited, fallible human

Or

Transgression = I didn't *do* the right thing

Sin = I didn't *want to* do the right thing

Iniquity = I *cannot* (always) choose or do the the right thing

The New Covenant formulations of sin, repentance, and righteousness leave the simple, inadequate legalistic model in the Sinai dust. God judges by identity. Your mental identity as disciple, a child of God, an heir to the promises, and a holy person is something you create now. God's grace and resurrection will house that identity in an incorruptible body, a spiritual body, free from your current human limitations.

Righteousness

Under the law, righteousness meant strictly abiding by the commandments of God; to the Pharisees this meant strictly abiding by the multiple additions and clarifications they made to ensure against transgression. However, this righteousness amounted to nothing. Paul looked back on his legalistic righteousness and dismissed it as worthless.

You have no way to acquire righteousness except through your faith. God counts your faith as righteousness (Rom 4:5); moreover, this passage comes in the context of forgiveness. One aspect of this faith is the firm belief that God forgives all your sins, omitted and committed, thought and deed.

Paul quotes from Psalm 32 in Romans 4. This psalm refers to King David's nefarious murder of Uriah. God does forgive the worst of sins, and Paul places this teaching in the midst of his discussion of Abraham's faith. You have faith that God will establish his kingdom on earth; by that same faith you believe God will forgive your sins, and when God forgives them, they are gone.¹¹⁹ Note how much this differs from the ritual atonement sacrifices under the law.

Righteousness-via-forgiveness does not mean you are counted righteous because the deficit side of your ledger is now empty, so any good work you did carries the day. There is no ledger in the New Covenant. God counts (reckons, to use the familiar Bible term) you as righteous because of your faith, your belief in the process. This is so

important it bears repeating, with emphasis on New Covenant concepts: righteousness accrues from your faith (intangible, a state of mind) in God's forgiveness (an intangible gift).

Considering the Judgment

Do you anticipate that there will be some people who will just barely be accepted into the Kingdom of God? Or conversely, there will be those who just won't quite make it? In other words, there will be "close calls" at the judgment seat of Christ?

You err towards legalism if you think that some people have marginal qualifications for the Kingdom. Thinking of the judgment as a gradient with a minimum acceptable score comes via legalistic constructs. You would have to envision a paradigm of judgment that looks like a balance sheet, with debits and credits. If the credits and debits seem about the same, you predict an "iffy" situation. Many good works could be offset by a few grievous sins. Conversely, a history of many evils is countered with great deeds of charity in a desperate attempt to balance them out.

These sorts of calculations are nothing but rubbish. No one is accepted with a lukewarm "You're the caboose, but you're in." And none of the rejected will hear words of consolation like "Sorry, but you just missed. You're not as bad as the truly evil, but you're not quite up to my entrance requirements."

God judges the heart and knows immediately if you belong to him or not (John 10:14). God sees sheep and goats, wise and foolish, servants and imposters. It's either "Enter into the joy of your master" or "I never knew you." There are no gray areas, close calls, or tough decisions. You are either wholly in or wholly out. There aren't any "close calls," because close calls could only come from a false paradigm of balancing good and bad works.

Does God Keep a Credit and Debit Ledger?

The credit and debit system has no place in the New Covenant. It never really did in the Old Covenant, either—God never had a system where he weighed good works against sins. God's justice looks at your faith (Hab 2:4; Eph 2:8,9). If you have faith that God forgives your sins, then you have no debits (Psa 103:12; see also Psa 32, 51, 65). If you don't believe that he really does forgive, then you are left to believe that somehow God retains your sins and weighs them against your good works.

Another consideration of counting sin in the New Covenant comes from Paul's statement in Romans, "Where there is no law, there is no transgression" (Rom 4:15, 3:20, 5:13, 7:7). You are not under law but grace. If you receive grace, you have no record of transgression. If you believe in grace, you can stand before your God. If you believe in law (righteousness through works), you have an accounting of your sin.

If you have faith, you have forgiveness. If you have forgiveness, you have no debt of sin. If you have no debt of sin, you have a clear conscience toward God and a place in his Kingdom at our Lord's return. The judgment seat of Christ has nothing to do with any kind of careful weighing of your merits and failures. It will not be any lengthy process of evaluation. It is Jesus recognizing in an instant those whose hearts are his.¹²⁰

Repentance

A legalist-based model of sin is something like: If you don't sin, you don't need repentance. However, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23) therefore we all need repentance. Shortcomings in repentance stem from the thinking that only overt sins of commission count as "sin."

Repentance adds to your prayer for forgiveness; it is the part that acknowledges the need to correct the problem that led to the sin. Meta-repentance is your awareness of underestimating or missing entirely your need for repentance. That's because you were locked in to a sins-of-commission track

Some people might bristle at the idea of repenting for your human nature. You were born a human with not much say in the matter. It's not your fault, but everything you do as a human has been imperfect, limited, and selfish. The repentance appropriate to having human nature stems from acting as if you really didn't have that nature—in other words, your ego. This is an expanded application of repentance consistent with the principles and ethics of the New Covenant.

What to do about Sin

The legalist view of sin reduction is avoidance by means of a vast array of rules. That program won't work in the New Covenant, where sins of omission are primary.

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Rather than live by avoidance lists, instead list spiritual characteristics to develop. Then, when you realize at the end of each day that you still have a long way to go, you'll have no trouble finding the right mindset to seek and receive the forgiveness we all need to stand before our God.

Choose a virtue in which you have a severe deficit. Just one, to start—the list could be long. List a number of daily or regular situations that call for that virtue. Then write down next to that entry how your ideal spiritually developed self would handle that situation. That is your self that has already developed that virtue.

This exercise is not about “trying” or “I wish I could.” This is creating the outcome that you want, so that that image of the spiritual self-acting, speaking, choosing, and thinking is implanted in your brain. Frequent repetitions of the imagery *as if* you already that virtue well-developed will lead to that virtue actually showing up in the real-life situation.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Have You Considered My Servant Job?

THE BOOK OF JOB CLEARLY ADDRESSES SUFFERING and the magnitude of God, but legalism is the core implicit issue of the book. Job, and his three friends also—Bildad, Zophar, and Eliphaz—all had the same legalistic worldview, manifested as “exact retribution.” The entire thesis of the book centers on that background, the connection between legal righteousness and material well-being. In the end, Job, prefiguring the Apostle Paul, eschews his legalistic righteousness.

The book is written as if based on the travails of a real historical person. However, it’s just as easy to understand Job as a generic representational type of apparently unjust suffering. Nothing hangs on whether Job is historical or if it’s an extended dramatic parable.¹²¹

The style of the book itself demands it to be understood as a dramatization. The opening words that describe Job as “blameless and upright” are clearly dramatic hyperbole, for “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). However, to get the theological import of the book, you must take the descriptions of Job and his own accounts of his righteousness at face value. If you, like Job’s friends, go fishing for his sin, you will fall into the same legalistic trap of exact retribution and obviate the reason for Job’s suffering.

Undoubtedly throughout history there have been many decent people who have suffered great calamity, to the bewilderment of themselves and their friends. That mindset is so prevalent that the Bible has a lengthy book dedicated to this problem. Read it as a poetic account of a blameless man who suffers greatly, who fails to find reason for his devastation, and whose misery deepens even more when his

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friends try to fix his sufferings with theology. Finally the righteous man finds the answer when God sets forth the basis of how a human can have a relationship with the Creator.

Blameless Job Suffers

The book opens by describing Job as “blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil” (Job 1:1). Job has wealth, status, and a large family. However, he suffers the successive losses of all of these, and also his health. Worst of all, Job loses his understanding of God. Later, that will become his blessing, but for now, it is perhaps his greatest devastation. Proverbs 18:14 admonishes us that “A man’s spirit will endure sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear?” If you have endured a crisis of faith, when nothing about God seems to make sense anymore, you can appreciate Job’s misery.

Of all his multitudinous ills, the worst, and therefore the focus of the book, is his desperate attempt to regain his understanding of God. Job cannot explain what has happened to him, that God has struck him down without cause. Job’s theological wrestlings displace much of his mourning and physical suffering.

Three of his friends—Bildad, Eliphaz, and Zophar—gather to help, but when they arrive, they don’t even recognize Job, so ravaged by sickness and grief. Appalled to the point of speechlessness at his misery (2:13), for a week they provide their best ministrations, silent presence. Then, unfortunately, they start to talk. Unskilled helpers that they are, they make the fatal pastoral error of offering advice and theological explanation to one in great suffering. Not ones to offer verbal compassion and support, they attempt to restore Job by setting him straight concerning providence and sin. They think correct theology will enlighten Job, but the strategy exacerbates rather than alleviates Job’s suffering.¹²² Now he has another loss—the loss of empathetic friends to just sit with him in support. They have only one agenda, and it has no therapeutic value.

Retribution

The three friends operate under the same theological code as Job. All four believe in the classic legalistic paradigm of rules, rituals, and rewards. They all believe that if one does right, then God owes that person blessing *now, in this life*, for God rewards the upright and punishes the wicked. Wealth and well-being surely mark the upright.¹²³

Prior to his calamities, Job was the classic case of a wealthy man apparently rewarded for his piety. Blameless and upright Job, with his vast wealth, large family, and regional renown, enjoyed the blessings of God beyond any of his comrades. By their reckoning, he had it all because he deserved it all.

While all four agree on how God works, and why Job had previously accrued great temporal blessing, the friends disagree with Job on the cause of his current circumstance. Driven by the inevitable logic of their legalist theology of reward and punishment, they readily deduce the obvious explanation: Job had sinned. They hardly need to marshal any direct evidence; would not any one of Job's multiple calamities suffice for a guilty verdict?

Job, however, seeing the whole drama from the inside, refuses to admit culpability. He maintains Almighty God has smitten him without cause (e.g., 9:21). The three friends find this untenable. "You must have sinned," they repeatedly aver. Job continues in his denials, saying that he is totally at a loss to come up with any just cause or explanation of the Almighty's blast.

The first three-quarters of the book of Job, condensed:

Three friends: Job, you sinned and God is punishing you.

Job: No I didn't; I don't know why He's punishing me.

Three friends: Yes you did.

Job: No I didn't.

Three friends: Yes you did!

Job: No I didn't!

All four, enmeshed in the same paradigm of retribution, differ only on the issue of Job's culpability. For the three friends, the answer to the dilemma lies in Job's admitting he sinned. Job dismisses this option, having no sin to admit. For Job, the solution to the dilemma must come with an explanation of why the Almighty would consign Job to the dust heap without reason (9:17-24).

As Job nears the end of his self-vindication, he lists all his good deeds (ch. 29) and all the sins that he eschewed (ch. 31). In chapter 29, Job describes the esteem he had in the community, and enumerates his righteous works: "I delivered the poor who cried for help... I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame, I was a father to the needy" (29:12-16). Then, after an interlude bemoaning his blighted state, he categorically denies having done any sin (ch. 31).

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In these two sections, he covers both what he has done that's good and the bad things he has avoided. He never mistreated his servants, coveted someone else's wife, or walked with falsehood. He upholds his sexual morality, honesty, benevolence, truthfulness, single-minded worship of God, and generosity. He eschews any acts of adultery, idolatry, greed, covetousness, lying, vengeance, penury, and harshness. Blameless and upright indeed! Innocent on all counts!

The story requires you to take these self-reports at face value, as Job's entire theological dilemma comes from God's breaking him without cause. If Job has a flaw or a misdeed, then he has the explanation for his troubles. However, he is a righteous man, and he can prove it.

Therein lies the problem—Job's measuring system. Nowhere in chapters 29 and 31 does he mention his faith. Nowhere does he trust in God for his justification. Nowhere does he regard his deeds as just his reasonable service, with no obligation put on his Maker. He does not even hint at the possibility of some imperfection, limitation, or need for improvement. He does not recognize his dependence on God's mercy. In other words, Job's self-report, while accurate, reflects a mindset of self-justification, or justification by works. If anyone could boast, it was Job—but his criteria for righteousness are entirely self-created. He has become his own God, but he can't even make his present life a blessing. Fully righteous, and fully devastated, Job sits in the ash-heap of his theology.

The Resolution

The resolution of Job's theological vexation does not come in the uncovering of some secret sin to explain his downfall. It comes by reversing Job's model of rules and rewards. Job had to learn that ritualistic righteousness, even moral righteousness, as he proclaimed for himself, could never suffice to guarantee a life of blessing.

Why not? Why can't you expect God to bless you when you do right? What's the point of doing right if eventually you are going to be punished regardless? Three major reasons teach why legalism cannot suffice for salvation or guarantee temporal blessing:

Legalism reverses the roles of judging and blessing. Instead of God judging and giving you blessing, you become the controller of your own blessing, and God gets judged. This happened in Job's case. Job felt God owed him blessing, and when God delivered evil, Job judged God (e.g., 10:2-7)!

Legalism takes love and faith out of the equation. When you introduce the expectancy of reward for doing right, you remove the possibility of acting out of love and faith. You can no longer do good simply because it's the right thing to do; you have the reward factor ever lurking to diminish even good motives.

Legalism creates an impossible world. Take Job's theology and play it forward. Suppose that all blessing accrues to the holy, and the sinners receive swift and certain punishment. Someone falls sick, you know they sinned. Someone's house burns—big, bad sin. The consequences of sin are public. Those who suffer receive rebuke, not compassion, because they brought the problem on themselves by their own sinful behavior.

Can you imagine the fear you would live in constantly knowing that any slip meant suffering would soon follow, and everyone would know why? How restricted your life would be! And if you did manage to steer a straight road and nothing bad ever happened, what would that be like? How long would it be before some acquaintance of another religious view accused you of being in harmony with the devil! That's why nothing bad ever happens to you, you're an agent of the dark side!

Finally, how can God chasten those whom he loves? He would have to wait until they sin big, but this would put the teaching on their schedule, not his. Keep going with this line of thinking and you'll eventually realize how utterly absurd a world we would live in if, in fact, God did employ exact retribution.

A world based on the exact retribution postulated by Job and friends would be an impossibility. Extend their model over time and over all peoples to see that it cannot work. Curiously, this does not stop people from believing in it, as exact retribution abides to this day in various forms. Every time you think a person's suffering directly relates to a sin, you keep this form of legalism alive.

Rejecting exact retribution does not thereby endorse a world of randomness and happenstance occurrences. All things come under God's control. Job did not suffer randomly or maliciously. He suffered to show that life cannot hold any one-to-one correlation between sin and suffering, or rules and rewards.

Job, Bildad, Eliphaz, and Zophar need a new model to explain the suffering of the righteous and to understand providential interventions. They need to learn a lesson in God's supremacy and wisdom. God *can* punish sin directly, and he also can have the righteous, notably his own

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son, suffer.¹²⁴ God works with each of us according to his good will for our learning. This message comes from a fifth player in the drama, Elihu.

Elihu Speaks

After three cycles of vain arguing, another voice comes in, that of Elihu. The three friends speak no more, and Job only briefly. The last act of the drama focuses on Elihu and God.

Elihu has apparently heard the entire debate, though we don't know when he enters. Elihu faults all four men, and, in a lengthy speech, gets to the central issue. Elihu introduces the idea that God's bringing evil does not come because of their wickedness. Instead, evil has a preventive, not punitive function. The purpose of calamity is not to send people to the pit, but to keep them from the pit. He says this four times (33:18, 22, 28, 30). Elihu preaches a God who does not repay evil with evil, but forgives sin. The kernel of his argument, in 33:26-30, addresses God's forgiveness, chastening, and his good will toward sinners who confess. This contrasts starkly with Job's statement that God does not remit iniquity, but repays sin with evil (10:14).

Although much of what Elihu says sounds like the same rhetoric as the others, his key points show that he sees into the realm of the spiritual regarding sin and suffering. Elihu correctly asserts that God respects the prayer of confession with forgiveness.¹²⁵ He establishes the basis of salvation as confession, not legalistic righteousness (33:26-28).

Elihu says the purpose of suffering is to *prevent* not *punish* sin; suffering is didactic, not punitive (36:15). God uses adversity and pain to build up, not tear down. God does not mete out punishment in strict accord with our transgressions, but will in due time reward the faithful and dismiss the unfaithful.

Learning from Suffering

Suffering, adversity, pain, trials, loss, or any sorrow of life have a potentially positive role in your spiritual growth. This is only "potentially" because there is no learning that will necessarily occur. A receptive, humble, and spiritually-oriented mind will learn; but a hardened, bitter, or blaming mind will only complain and maybe even turn away from God. Experiential education takes you to a place that reading can only describe, and thus has high attrition as well high learning potential.

What, specifically, are you to learn from suffering? You learn dependence on God, and you see your life as completely in God's hands. You find out that a life of doing good does not guarantee a life of blessing now. You grow in patience and long-suffering as you wait for the resolution, which may only come in the Kingdom. You discover that you have the capacity to overcome adversity, and you increase the limits of your capabilities. You develop compassion for others who have calamities in life. You learn about priorities, what's really important in life. Most importantly, you see suffering as a symbol for the dispensation of mortality and secure your hope in the perfection of the Kingdom of God on earth.

All the above learning constitutes spirit-mindedness, which cannot be gained by following any set of codes or rituals. Spiritual growth comes only from spiritual activity, and painful as it is, suffering is a primary spiritual activity. Job's spiritual development would have ceased had God not intervened in his life. To be sure, he was blameless and upright. He was full of charity and concern for others. However, he thought that because of these virtues, God "owed" him something, in the sense of a contractual obligation. God was dependent on him, not vice versa. To demolish this erroneous concept, God had to nearly demolish Job.

Even of our Lord Jesus it is written, "Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered" (Heb 5:8). The writer could have noted, "Although he was blameless and upright like Job, he learned obedience through what he suffered." The various trials of Jesus throughout his life all led him to fully develop his faith and dependence on his Father. In the final test of allowing unlawful men to crucify him, he did not resist, but trusted in the God of his salvation. Only a life of suffering and hardship could prepare him for when the time came to secure his own and our redemption.

God Teaches Job

Elihu's speech melds neatly into God's appearance, as he shifts from theology to God's greatness manifested in nature, particularly the brewing storm. God's speech to Job contains not a whit of theology. It has not even one line of academic instruction or rejoinder to Job's declamations of his own blamelessness. Instead, it comprises dozens of examples of God's creative acts. How and what is this teaching?

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The teaching is about relationship and about who God and Job are in that relationship.

Any successful relationship depends on the involved parties' knowledge of who they are in the relationship. Remember from Chapter Eighteen that relationship is an identity-level function. God needed to teach Job this essential truth: I am the Creator; you are the created. I have unlimited power and knowledge; you have but a trifling. You are dependent on me, not vice-versa.

The last sentence—who is dependent on whom—is the key. In the legalistic theology of Job and his friends, God had become dependent on Job. If Job is righteous, God owes him blessing. Conversely, if Job is unrighteous, God must punish him. God has power, but its deployment is dependent on Job's behavior!

Hence the multiple manifestations of God's creative work, and the repeated question—implied more than stated—"Where were you, Job, when I" Where was Job? Nowhere, of course. He was physically nothing then, and now he knows that he is figuratively nothing now.

Job's "creations" (his theological beliefs) are his own criteria of righteousness (as exemplified in chapters 29 and 31) and his image of a God that rewards them. Job's problem isn't that he's the bad person that his friends make him out to be, but rather that his relationship to God is to the god of his own creation. Humbled by the dramatic display of his human limitations versus the unlimited power of the Almighty, Job finds the perspective of life he needs.

God's teaching elevates Job into the realm of the New Covenant. Legalism violates the Creator-created relationship; Job is pained and humbled into becoming a new man, a truly saintly man, dependent on God's love and mercy to a limited, fallible creature.¹²⁶

Job and Paul

Paul's autobiographical notes in Philippians invite a comparison with Job. Paul uses the very same word of himself, "blameless" (Phil 3:6). Like Job, he thought God owed him something, and God had to dismantle this perspective so Paul could serve him. Paul also suffered the "loss of all things" (v. 8). Paul's losses compare with Job, even if they didn't come in quickly successive blows.

Paul's conversion cost him his standing as a Pharisee, his income, his health, and a family life. Eventually, it probably cost him his life. But

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Paul acknowledges that suffering, not rules and rituals, lead to Christ-likeness; “that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead” (v. 10-11). God brought great suffering on Paul: “I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name” (Acts 9:16). Through suffering the loss of all things, Paul learned to reject the “righteousness of my own” (Phil 3:9; cp. Job 29, 31, and 32:2) in favor of the only true righteousness, that which comes from faith in God’s forgiveness and redemption in the Lord Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Spiritual Growth

I HAVE USED CONTRAST TO HIGHLIGHT many differences between legalism and faith. However, the topic of spiritual growth has no contrasting counterpart in the legalist system. The idea of “growth” carries implications that can only exist inside the covenant of grace.

The Lifelong Quest for Knowledge

This phrase “came to a knowledge of the Truth” is often used about someone who accepts the basics of the gospel, and asks to be baptized into that belief. Baptism is a new birth. If it’s a birth, then growth follows. Does it ever stop? Do we ever really know enough about God and Jesus? Can that which is mortal ever truly say it knows all about the immortal? If you could fully understand God, would God really be God?

Knowledge is always incomplete, and therefore always growing. The knowledge that builds faith and love is more than just book knowledge. It is the process of growing itself that marks the disciple. The kingdom of heaven has neither a minimum entrance requirement nor a “full” line on some spiritual dipstick. To think either “I need to know more” or “I already know enough” means you have replaced spiritual growth with a legalist construct, especially because such statements invariably focus on academic Bible knowledge.

Lifelong learning is essential, but not to “get into the kingdom.” The constant input of Scripture prevents the mind from reverting “to its original swinishness,” as Robert Roberts pungently stated in the preface to his original Bible reading plan¹²⁷. Anyone who thinks they know enough will quit learning, and then that knowledge will erode, leaving only human values and affections.

Another problem with thinking you have all the answers is that attitude can block further learning. This knowledge barrier had particular application to the Pharisees. The Pharisees couldn't see the Messiah because they already knew about the Messiah. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" "Is not he the carpenter's son?" Because they thought they knew all about Messiah, when Messiah came, they had no room for new learning. They left themselves no room for growth. The possibility of undiscovered truth was lost on them.

A closed mind gathers no new insights, and ceases to grow.

Building on the Past

Does this mean abandoning fundamentals in search of new teachings? Not at all. Growth, whether natural or physical, builds on itself. Don't reject the past; use it as the foundation for the next step to develop both understanding and discipleship.

Spiritual growth means there is always another plateau on which to stand to see a new horizon, and move on to the next higher level of spirituality. That plateau is not a final level of spiritual development, as the goal is not to comply with a known and finite set of rules and regulations. The goal is to be Christlike, like a star for navigation, a perfect but unreachable guide.

How We Grow Spiritually

Spiritual growth starts with your understanding of the Bible, but you only grow if you read as if you have never read it before. Never think that you "already know" what a passage is about. This kind of knowledge is a barrier to learning. You can't learn what you already think you know. Scripture never fails to offer more of its treasures to the diligent reader. If you are growing in your spiritual insight, it is not the same "you" that is reading, so it really *is* like reading it for the first time.¹²⁸

Knowledge of any sort is useless unless you apply God's word to your life. As children you know dozens of memory verses, but when do you really appreciate and act upon teachings such as "the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord"? Ask a fifty-year-old and an eighty-year-old who have known this teaching from their youth if it still has the same impact as it did decades ago. Age is one measure, but maturity is another. A fifty-year old who still sees Romans 6:23 as a memory verse hasn't gotten very far.

The application of Bible teaching to real life is where the proverbial rubber meets the road. Practices such as living a life of submission to others, refusing vengeance, turning down a promotion that would take you away from your family, helping people even when you know they will never thank you or even know who you are, extending forgiveness and compassion instead of anger and blame, actually register your Bible knowledge.

Just as Bible knowledge shapes daily life, spiritual practices develop Bible understanding. You don't know what faith is until you act in faith. You learn the meaning of compassion by doing compassion. You learn the meaning of chastity when you remain chaste. You learn the meaning of forgiveness when you forgive—these and countless more scriptural teachings. Only when you examine your actions—good or bad—against the truths of Scripture can you say that you have learned the meaning of that truth.

All of life is a learning experience if you decide to learn from your life experiences.

The one aspect of spiritual learning that most markedly sets us apart from the legalist model is what we can call “expanding horizons,” or the paradox of learning. As we will discuss in Chapter Twenty-Six, the New Covenant contains many inherent paradoxes. The nature of the New Covenant requires paradox, and the paradox appropriate to this chapter concerns the principle of knowledge and learning.

Human nature constitutes one of the principle teachings of scripture. We learn from the Bible that we are, as one brother elegantly stated, “a sackful of sin.” We learn of our faults, our limitations, our frailty, our utter dependence on God. We could cite again the last few chapters of Job, in which the Almighty reminds Job of these truths. So we learn that we really don't amount to much, by nature. We learn that we really don't know much. The more we learn about human nature, the more we learn how limited it is. Thus, the paradox: the more we learn, the more we don't know. At least if we study with the proper intention and use our Bible knowledge for its intended purpose, we grow in the realization of our ignorance.

Under the legal framework, the more you know, the more you know. In the realm of the spirit, the more you know, the more you become aware of how much you don't know. This is the expanding horizon mentioned above. When you learn spiritual truth, you learn the

relationship between yourself and God. You develop humility and meekness as side-effects. A young, inexperienced reader who has done a little studying might think that Romans is easy to understand. After decades of reading and study, and realizing how much is packed into that epistle, that reader will know more about Romans, but also know how much more remains unknown.

Spiritual growth means you do learn more and more. But this learning teaches more and more that you are indeed less and less. Each time you climb higher you realize a bigger and broader picture of God, Jesus, humanity, and the Kingdom. Your absolute knowledge grows, but your relative knowledge shrinks.

The principle of law can't contain a concept of expanding horizons. It has absolutes: a set of rules to follow. You don't grow into new sets of rules. You do them or you don't. The only thing to learn is all the rules, and the new rules that become necessary to protect the old rules. Because rule-based religion focuses on behavior, spiritual growth, which develops values, character, and identity, has little or no relevance.

Practical Applications

It is a given that we're all at different places along the way. You and I have the same goals, but we're at different places in our journeys to that goal. No one achieves the goal because it's impossible for humans to achieve perfection. Some of us will get further than others, but no one wins the race. Jesus said, in one of the many teachings on spiritual growth, that some would produce thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, some a hundredfold (Mark 4:20). God accepts all these and excludes only those who don't grow at all.

We accept our variations. We never alter our one standard, but we do understand that everyone is at a different level and moving at a different rate. This differential leads to and trains the discipleship characteristics of patience, longsuffering, tolerance, and forbearance.

Against Such There is No Law

Scripture often uses the natural world to illustrate spiritual growth. Going back as far as the creation, you can see the elements of a pattern. On the third day, dry land appears out of water. The dry land bears plant life. The plants sustain their life, bearing fruit containing the seeds for the next generation. The spiritual parallel is that when you emerge from

water (at baptism), you begin the process of bearing spiritual fruit. At first, it's just a planted seed, but the seed germinates into a seedling, then a distinct plant, and finally bears its own fruit with seed. The fruit of your faith, like its natural counterpart, sustains itself. The more faith you have, the more you can grow. No seed, no fruit. No fruit, no seed.

Many of Jesus' parables involve pictures of plants growing and bearing fruit—or not. All these figures of speech involve something living, thriving, growing, and, ultimately, bearing fruit, which is the goal of both natural and spiritual growth.

Without fruit, a plant cannot reproduce itself. Jesus cursed the fig tree because it only looked alive, but bore no fruit. Paul lists the nine aspects of the singular fruit in Galatians 5:22-23: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. In a letter filled with his most direct appeals about the vanity of following laws, Paul gives this apt example of spiritual growth.

Paul concludes the list of characteristics of spiritual fruit with the phrase, “against such things there is no law.” No law can substitute for the development of spiritual fruit. No law can condemn a person who bears spiritual fruit. No system of law can have spiritual fruit as its outcome. This phrase might mean any or all the above, but whatever Paul means, in some way he places spiritual growth outside the realm of law. Spirit can produce spiritual fruit, but law can't.

There is no such thing as “the fruit of the law.” Law can't give life, it can't build character, and it can't contain the ever-increasing perspective one needs for continual growth. Only spirit-mindedness can do this. Love, faith, an awareness of your utter dependence on God, an appreciation of your debt to the Lord Jesus Christ, and the ever-increasing awareness of your own humanity—these are the bases of spiritual growth. None of them can develop through legal and ritual observance.

The New Covenant of grace and faith provides the framework needed to allow for growth. You have the seed; your job is to cultivate the soil and pray for God's blessing on your growth.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Lessons from Hebrews

WHICH NEW TESTAMENT BOOK has the most detailed comparison of the law to the work of Christ? Hebrews seems to be the obvious answer, but there is a twist. While it is true that the epistle to the Hebrews has the longest discussion of Christ and the law, the author intends to show the differences, not similarities, between the law and Christ. He emphasizes *contrast* (looking at differences), not *comparison* (looking at similarities).¹²⁹ The many contrasts in Hebrews show that the atoning work of Christ addresses the key issue—sinful human nature—whereas the rituals of the law have no efficacy to ameliorate either the nature or consequences of sin.

Revelation Through Christ's Life

The writer¹³⁰ to the Hebrews repeatedly uses a word that shows the superiority of the New Covenant and the priesthood of Jesus over the Old Covenant and the levitical priesthood. Translated variously, often as “more” or “better,” the writer some dozen or so times claims that Christ’s work did what the law could not do. He makes detailed contrasts between the old covenant of works and rituals, and the new covenant of grace and faith. Then, in chapter 10, he quotes from Psalm 40 and establishes the vital factor by which the New Covenant of our Lord Jesus became eternally installed.

The first contrast comes in the prologue of the letter. This contrast highlights the difference between God’s communication of old through the prophets, and the current manifestation of the Son. “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his

nature” (Heb 1:3). God’s revelation through his son surpasses any spoken or written revelation of the past.

Previously, God communicated via prophets, psalmists, historians, Moses the lawgiver, and others. The lives of none of the people, inspired as they were to write and speak on God’s behalf, fully represent God. “Whoever has seen me has seen the father” says Jesus (John 14:9). It is his life, not just his words, that distinguishes Jesus’ ministry. The mediator of the New Covenant led a life of perfect faith. The message of Jesus’ *life* contrasts with a spoken or written message, especially the dispensation of laws. Eternal life comes not from following a written code, but from emulating the life of God’s son. The covenant of death had a basis of laws carved in stone (2 Cor 3:6-7); the covenant of life has its basis in a human life.¹³¹ Later in the letter, the writer will tell us the key factor which distinguishes this unique life.

Something Better

What does Hebrews tell us is “better” about the New Covenant? Here’s the list:¹³²

- better than the **angels** 1:4.
- a more excellent **name** (than the angels) 1:4.
- better **things that belong to salvation** 6:9.
- **Melchizedek** better than Levitical priesthood 7:5-10.
- a better **hope** 7:19.
- a better **covenant** 7:22.
- a more excellent **ministry**, a better **covenant** established on better **promises** 8:6.
- better **sacrifices** 9:23.
- a better **possession** 10:34.
- (the faithful of old) desire a better **country** 11:16.
- a better **resurrection** 11:35.
- something better for us (**the Kingdom**) 11:40.

The cumulative force of this list magnifies the writer’s perspective. He does not use details of the law to draw lessons about the ministry of Jesus; rather, he contrasts the failings and weaknesses of the law with the perfection of God’s work in Christ.

Take, for example, the issue of the priesthood (7:11-28). The priests of the Levitical priesthood had a limitation. They died now and then, in

contrast to the eternal priesthood of the immortal Jesus. Implied in this contrast is his sinlessness.

The writer's point in mentioning the Levitical priesthood is not to show the similarity with Jesus, but the contrast. To our minds, unfamiliar with actually living under the Old Covenant, they might look the same. To one born and raised under the Old Covenant system, the contrasts would be expressed by "For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God." Clearly, this is the language of contrast, spoken by one who had experienced both systems.

Metaphors of Body and Mind

Hebrews 9 explicitly contrasts a key difference between adherence to ritual and the righteousness that comes by faith. The first ten verses briefly describe the arrangements of the sanctuary and the priests' activities, particularly on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement: "By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing, (which is symbolic for the present age)". Something was wrong with the system.

The commentary continues, "According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation." The various rituals of the law dealt only with the body; they had nothing to offer for the conscience of the worshiper. That is, one could go through the motions of ritual without any inner perception, without any symbolic learning, without any vicarious awareness, without any devotion or reverence or faith. There is no necessary correlation between behavior and piety.

Law of Moses	Jesus
Blood of bulls and goats	His own blood
Purification of the flesh, regulations for the body	Purify the conscience

Hebrews 9:13-14 completes the analogy.

The Superior Sacrifice of Christ

Then Christ entered into the true holy of holies, not a tent made by the craftsmanship of Israel's finest artisans, but into that realm which represented the presence of his Father. He took not animal sacrificial blood, but his own. Ritual applied only to the realm of ritual, that is, ceremonial cleanliness. It had no effect in the realm of conscience.

What made the blood of Christ a "better sacrifice" (v. 23)? Was it because Jesus did no sin? But neither did bulls and goats. Not in the sense that they had no blemish, but in the moral sense. They could have no sin because they were amoral creatures, not subject to sin or righteousness. They were just animals, lacking awareness of God's will and having no capacity to exercise subordination of their own will. As much as they might represent certain aspects of human nature in their brute instincts and desires, no animal could willingly offer itself as a sacrifice. Thus, an animal could not represent faith, serve as a model of submission, or deal with human nature gone wrong.

The sacrifice of Christ is superior because of his identification with human nature; the benefit of his sacrifice for you depends on your identification with him.

"I have come to do your will."

Hebrews 10 has one more iteration of the failure of ritual to deal with the conscience, a divine repetition to make us fully aware of an immensely important theological principle: *rituals and behaviors cannot perfect conscience*. The two operate at different levels (recall the Logical Levels Pyramid from Chapter 17). Finally comes the blunt declaration: "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." Nearly a millennium and a half of Mosaic observance, and sin still ruled (through the law) over all Israel!

The quotation from Psalm 40 specifies the reason for the superiority of Christ's sacrifice, and what his blood truly represents. The quotation starts with one of the many Old Testament declarations of the law's futility, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired ... in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure." In what would God take pleasure? "I have come to do your will." This point gets repeated for emphasis, adding that God abolished the covenant of ritual in order to establish the second covenant (which is actually the first or Abrahamic covenant) upon "I have come to do your will."

Do your will. That's what gives superiority to Christ's covenant. It represents the subjugation of human will to God's will. The thought of a bull willingly offering itself upon the altar is incoherent. The priests dragged the ignorant beast out of the herd, slit its throat, drained its blood, cut it up, and burned it. It was just a stupid brute going to slaughter, brainlessly chewing its cud, not having any clue as to its imminent demise or purpose, with no idea that it was involved in something important.

Only a human could, in theory, make a sacrifice of self, because only a human would have a self to sacrifice. And in reality, only God's son, Jesus the human, could deal with the real source of sin, human nature. Only a perfect human's willing offering of self could address all the issues of human nature, namely:

1. He dealt with the **reality of human nature** in his own person.
2. He dealt with the **principle of sin**, nailing it representationally to the cross.
3. He gave us the **example to follow** so we can experience, although imperfectly, subjugating our own will.
4. He gave us a **basis of faith** so that by grace we can experience immortality, and thus the physical destruction of our own human nature.
5. By his own resurrection, he now has the immortal power to cleanse the earth **of all human nature**.
6. Jesus' willing subjugation addressed every aspect of the calamitous misuse of human free will: in himself, in us, in the world; symbolically, representatively, physically. Jesus conquered will. Animal sacrifice served only as an instrument of legal purification and a constant reminder of sin.

The Willing Slave

The quotation of Psalm 40 in Hebrews 10:5 comes from the Septuagint translation which reads, "a body you have prepared for me." However, this same line in the Hebrew text of Psalm 40:6 reads, "you have given me an open ear," or "ears you have dug for me" (ESV margin). This probably alludes to the practice of a slave willingly volunteering lifelong fealty to his master when he could have otherwise been set free (Exod 21:1-6). The master would take the slave to the door, put his ear

up against the flat of the jamb, and bore a hole in it with an awl, “and he shall be his slave forever.”

Psalm 40:8 reads “I delight to do your will, O my God, your law is within my heart.” Paul makes the same striking contrast when he speaks of the law of the dispensation of death, written on tablets of stone, with the spirit of Christ, written on our hearts (2 Cor 3:2-6).

The Hebrews quote ends with Psalm 40:7, but as is often the case, the mind of the reader goes on. Any diligent Jew of Paul’s day would know what came after, “I have come to do your will.” The next line reads, “I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart” (Psa 40:8). Here, stated clearly in the Old Testament, is the principle of Christ’s superiority over the law of Moses, and the basis of all the “betters” in the letter to the Hebrews—the subjugation of human will. Jesus loved his father so much that it became his delight to do his will, even though that meant death on the cross. Finally, a sacrifice was offered that encompassed conscience, values, and identity.

You can offer no greater sacrifice than to lay your will at the foot of God’s throne. This is not a ritual. It is the daily harnessing of your internal rebellion and desires and lusts of your human nature. It is the deference of self to God. This is the operation of the spirit on the highest level of your inner being, your will.

Christ identified with human nature in order to terminate the era of legal code. If you identify with the sacrifice of Christ at its fullest level, the level of will, you can assure that his death will not have been in vain. You have entered into the blood of the eternal covenant, the blood that represents sacrificed will, the blood that deals with conscience, the blood that represents the covenant of resurrection to eternal life. If you reduce his death to a mere ritual of Sunday observance, then the blood of the Son of God becomes the blood of animal sacrifice.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Clean and Unclean

BOTH THE LEGAL SYSTEM AND the covenant of grace use the designations “clean” and “unclean.” The difference in how they apply these terms manifests a fundamental distinction in how one views the universe, God, and human nature.

Keeping Clean

Unclean had clear delineation under the law, which forbade certain foods, animals, objects, and activities. When a gray area did appear, the rabbis supplied the necessary explications to achieve finer resolution and separate the gray area into pixels of black and pixels of white. The Pharisees and their like categorized every physical object and every nuance of the circumstances of their use, and then took extraordinary caution to ensure that they avoided any contact with anything that might render them unclean.

Some things were always unclean, such as pigs, so they were easy to label and avoid, but a cow could be clean or unclean, depending on how it was slaughtered and butchered, how it was prepared and cooked, and how it was eaten. Chapter Nine discusses these kosher laws, such as having two entirely separate kitchens to make sure that a vessel which once contained a milk product would never be used at a meal where meat was served. One has to know the rules and carefully follow a vigilant regimen to avoid defilement.

The observant Jew employed (and still does) numerous avoidance behaviors to prevent contact with the unclean, (e.g., Luke 10:31-32). God had ordained such distinctions (e.g., Lev. 13-15), so how could anyone ever contravene them or relegate them to disuse? How could

anyone, especially a Jew, say “all foods are clean”? This was a major part of why the Pharisees took such violent exception to the teaching of Jesus and the early church. The change of covenants signified a major change of perspective on the matter of clean and unclean. As we say today, the early believers experienced a paradigm shift.

The paradigm shift was necessary because a system of laws which specified external uncleanness could not co-exist with a system based on the individual faith of any Jew or Gentile in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus.

If one avoided the unclean, then one was ritually clean. The legal system of clean and unclean implicitly categorizes a person as “clean” until defiled. Logically, defilement can only occur if one was previously clean. Under this system, a human is by circumstance inherently innocent and clean and only becomes unclean or defiled by encountering some external source of uncleanness. Defilement was reckoned outside-in, not inside-out.

However, human nature isn’t clean. God has consigned all to disobedience that he may have mercy on all (Rom 11:32). You don’t start out clean and try to avoid anything out there that makes you unclean. You start out condemned to uncleanness by your mortal nature and the inevitable sins that come from your proneness to sin. The first lesson about clean and unclean is this: any system of designated clean and unclean objects or activities precludes the operation of grace, and vice versa. They can’t co-exist, because they clash at the nexus of human nature. The one system depends on your inherent uncleanness; the other implies you are inherently clean.

In the first century, those who first encountered this shift of focus didn’t easily accept this truth. Not only did they have to get used to eating swine and other previously verboten animals, but the basis of determining clean and unclean was abolished. To help establish this strange new concept, the New Testament has many references to this issue. Consider the following passages:

There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.... whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled.’ (Thus he declared all foods clean. ... What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft,

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murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person, (Mark 7:15-23, see also Matt 15:1-11)

The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner. And the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.... But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you." (Luke 11: 38-41)

And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." (Acts 10:13-15, see also Acts 11:8-9)

I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. (Rom 14:14)

Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. (Rom 14:20)

All things are lawful,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful,' but not all things build up. (1 Cor 10:23)

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving. (1 Tim 4:4)

To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. (Titus 1:15)

The testimonies of Jesus, Peter, and Paul all agree: the matter of external or ritual uncleanness is extinct. Nothing outside a person can carry the label "unclean." No food, no object, no place, no thing of any kind. On the one hand, this simplifies life; no longer does a person need to keep meticulous track of eating, utensils, food sources, and so on. Further, with the need for ritual cleanness gone, the various ablutions and atonements connected with acts of defilement also disappear.

Does this really make life simpler? Or does it allow license for all kinds of questionable activities? How can you learn to distinguish right and wrong if everything is clean? Clearly, the abolition of the law frees all people from the issue of slavery to a dead system, but it does not free us from the struggles of spirituality. Rather, the covenant of grace leads to a higher level of thinking. Instead of a Pharisaical regimen of casuistry and irrelevant polemics, you now dwell upon the virtues of love, self-discipline, faith, and forbearance. New Testament teaching could develop a level of morality unavailable to observers of law.

Looking Inside

Jesus' teaching recorded by Mark goes beyond declaring swine's flesh ceremonially clean. Mark's parenthetical comment, "Thus he declared all foods clean," extends beyond the issue of food, as Jesus' discourse covers much greater issues than eating.

At issue is the principle of the origin of sin. If something, *anything*, external is inherently unclean, then you become unclean through association with that object. On the other hand, if nothing is inherently unclean, then uncleanness has a different basis.

Jesus stated that basis: the human heart, here clearly referring to the brain, or thinking. Jesus said, "Out of the heart come evil thoughts." Physiologically, blood comes out of the heart and thoughts come out of the brain. This figurative use of heart demonstrates the intrinsic dearness of lust. A list of twelve evil activities follows: sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. These words connote behaviors, not thoughts. Out of the heart (brain) come evil thoughts, and the thoughts in turn beget the behaviors of sin (cp. Mic 2:1,2). These sins represent a far more reprehensible lifestyle than eating swine's flesh. Could eating any food inculcate such atrocious behavior? Food has no effect on morality. Eating the right stuff won't make you good; eating the wrong stuff won't make you bad.¹³³

You must look inside of yourself for the answer to the problem of immorality. All foods are clean and available for your use, to be received with thanks. Defilement comes from evil thoughts which lead to evil actions. The list in Mark 7:21-22 focuses on self-centered and sensuous behaviors. It pictures human nature at its worst.¹³⁴

Repentance Also Internal

Look inside because that's where the problem is—and that's also where to find the remedy. That same heart, by God's grace, can also recognize its own evil, and repent. That same heart can also harbor love and faith, and generate the ensuing good works. Just as you can think evil and then do it, you can also develop faith and then do the works of faith.

That same heart can receive grace and the love of God. These "things" go into a person and stay there; they don't just pass through like food does. The heart, which Jesus called "within" and Paul called the "inner being" (Rom 7:22), is bent by nature to evil, but it can, with spiritual intake, contain love and joy and peace. Spiritual intake affects the true heart, that is the thinking, but the intake (or avoidance) of physical things has no effect on morality or thinking.

Beyond Food

Most of the scriptural examples in the above list refer to foods, but what about other things? What about clothes? What about all the various media, entertainment, and so on? What about activities, hobbies, sports, other pastimes? What about jobs, homes, and everything else in the world? Can anything be clean and unclean anymore?¹³⁵

In one respect, these are all externals also; that is, they form the world you live in, but they aren't "you." They're still outside of you. They cannot be either good or bad. In and of themselves, they have no morality.

If everything then is clean, does that mean you can do whatever you desire? Is there no need for any discretion or restraint? Are you entirely free? "No, you are not," is the right answer, but the "no" must be for the right reason. Unlike totally neutral substances such as food, items such as music, movies, and web pages are the product of human hearts, and thus impact our brains while food does not. You cannot responsibly hide behind the rubric "all things are clean" and open yourself to all manner of influence to evil. The proper question to ask is not, "What's wrong with it?" but, "How is this helpful for my spiritual development?"

Go back to Paul's guidance in Corinthians, where he states that all things are lawful, but not all are helpful or edifying. The issue is not, "It's OK because nothing out there can defile me," but rather, "Will this help me grow in Christ?" (more on that in the next chapter). All things

are clean, but not all things are helpful. Not only do humans sin, but human hearts can produce works that influence others to sin. Paul wrote to Timothy, “For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving” (1 Tim 4:4). Not necessarily so for that which comes from human enterprise.

Creating Uncleaness

Paul asserts in the Romans and Titus quotations that although everything is clean, anything can also be unclean if you think it is unclean. This can apply in two ways. There’s also one meaning it cannot have, and we’ll look at that option first.

What Paul cannot mean was that your own value system could actually make something “unclean,” as if you were your own law-making body. If you esteem something unclean, does it actually become unclean? If it does, it would amount to a reversal of God’s plan of grace. All things are clean, and you cannot make them unclean no matter what you think of them. It would also mean that if you avoided the object that you had personally labeled unclean, then you would have title to some kind of legal righteousness.

For example, you can never make eating ham a sin. You can feel bad and ashamed about eating something you regard as unclean, but you can’t actually defile yourself, because nothing outside of you can defile you. The bad feeling you get is an ill conscience, as if you had actually transgressed, and that’s why Paul says, “Don’t eat it if it bothers you.” In fact, you haven’t transgressed, because the law or rule you internally established had no basis for existence: it is just a personal scruple.

To find out what Paul did mean, consider the historical and social context. Under the recently departed law, certain foods were unclean; now they’re permissible. Even food offered to idols is acceptable, because the idols have no real existence (1 Cor 8:4). Nonetheless, some believers have reservations about eating such food. Their conscience bothers them if they eat meat which has been dedicated to an idol of a Greek god. Eating something that one has always associated with sin and pagan behavior is too much of a stretch. Thus, Paul wrote: if it bothers you, don’t eat it. For you, it’s off limits, and that’s okay. Maybe someday you’ll accept that it’s all right, but if you feel ashamed or guilty, then by all means don’t eat. Paul recognizes variation in stages of personal spiritual growth and individual conscience.

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A second meaning alludes to a revived legalism that such an attitude might reflect. Let's say you grew up Jewish, so you have a life-long aversion to ham or any meat from swine. Scripture says ham is clean, but you're not comfortable with eating it. It still seems wrong, at some level, to eat swine's flesh, if you harbor in your heart some vestigial legalist scruples. Ham and other unkosher foods become unclean, not because they are unclean, but because you have delved back into legalism. To the pure all things are pure, because they will see all things as inherently okay. However, if you still believe that "some things out there can defile me," nothing is pure, because you have fallen away from grace and back into external defilement. You have judged yourself by your own legal system. You have fallen back into law, wherein you cannot survive (Gal 2:18).

All things are clean, but not all are helpful, and not all are good for everyone. Defilement comes only from the sensuous, self-centered thinking of human nature. That's the true uncleanness of the world, the uncleanness that you can wash away only in the blood of Christ, and not by any ceremonial work or ritual.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Freedom in Christ

VICTOR FRANKL, AN AUSTRIAN PSYCHIATRIST, was one of the millions of Jews brutally confined in concentration camps during the Holocaust of World War II. Unlike many, including all of his own family, who perished either by direct slaughter or from despair and disease in their dreadful conditions, Frankl preserved his life and sanity, as he could see beyond the horror of daily life. He had a purpose and meaning of life. After the war he became a well-known writer, lecturer, professor, and clinician. He had many academic appointments in the U.S.A., and he wrote until the end of his long life in 1997.

Having survived three years in imprisonment, oppression, utter deprivation, and dehumanization, you would expect that he might have championed totally free and unrestricted human destiny, but that was not the case. Rather, Frankl wrote:

Freedom, however, is not the last word. Freedom is only part of the story and half of the truth. Freedom is but the negative aspect of the whole phenomenon whose positive aspect is responsibility. That is why I recommend the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast be supplemented by a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast.¹³⁶

Entirely unrestricted freedom does not lead to any higher purpose in life, nor does it give any meaning or usefulness. *Responsible* freedom gives life value, meaning, and usefulness to others.

When you become free in Christ, you become a slave to personal responsibility. You do not shed your bondage; you exchange it for a new kind, the kind that is self-imposed. It doesn't have rules set by a master

who owns your life against your will. It has the rule of personal responsibility given by a master who loves you, and to whom you have voluntarily pledged your will.

More than any other definition, freedom in Christ means *the voluntary subjugation of free choice for the sake of others, especially your family in Christ*. Only when you come to know and live this principle can you truly say that you are free.

As long as you yield to your carnal desires, you live in bondage to them. As long as you erect laws and rules in vain attempts to keep yourself pure, you live in bondage to those rules. When you seek the fullness of the sacrifice of Christ, you find the freedom that allows you to sacrifice your own will back to the Father, and to all of God's children. Only freewill sacrifice avails any benefit; hence, freedom is the basis of a meaningful discipleship in the Lord Jesus.

The phrase "freedom in Christ," comes from Galatians 2:4, where Paul speaks of false brothers who came to spy out "our freedom we have in Christ Jesus" and also Galatians 5:1, "For freedom (liberty, KJV) Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." The Greek word translated "liberty" in the King James Version also shows up twice in 5:13 and several times in the analogy of Sarah and Hagar (Gal 4:21-31). Jesus declared directly: "The truth will set you free" (John 8:32). The truth of grace in Jesus gave freedom to those who lived in bondage to law and sin (John 1:17).

No Works? No Controls?

Freedom from law means liberty in service, but how can you be free if you still have service to perform? The issue at hand is not one of works versus faith, but rather a matter of attitude. A slave to the law has a belief system which says, "I must follow certain rules and rituals to please God and earn salvation. If I do the right things, God owes me eternal life." This, as we noted earlier, is self-centered and relegates God to a secondary role in the process of salvation. Conversely, a servant of Christ has the belief system which says, "Christ has freed me from law, sin, and death. Therefore, I acknowledge this great gift by voluntarily enslaving myself to his work."

Thus, the works of freedom come from an entirely different perspective. Moreover, never think that freedom in Christ somehow means freedom from any restraint or works. Paul wrote to the

Ephesians, “For by grace you have been saved ... not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Eph 2:8-10). Immediately after writing that we are not saved by works, Paul stated we are created in Christ for good works. Titus 2:11-14 has the same remarkable message, placing good works immediately in the context of being saved by grace. Freedom in Christ does not minimize works; the change you make is the attitudinal basis of the works.

Neither does this freedom imply freedom from law. We have a law of the highest order. “For the love of Christ controls us” (2 Cor 5:14). “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12). We do have controls and commands, but they come from the love of Christ.

Freedom does not mean license, nor does it imply freedom from restraint, morality, or law. The voluntary submission of your will to God’s purpose frees you from slavery to ritual and self-indulgence. Then you are free to be useful to God.

Freedom From or Freedom To?

Does freedom in Christ mean “freedom *from*,” or “freedom *to*?” Ultimately it must mean both, as you are both freed *from* the law and freed *to* use whatever resources you can with the aim of building up the body of Christ and helping others. Galatians 5:13 is the most direct statement about this matter: “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Paul exhorts us to use our freedom in service, not in self-indulgence.

Christ freed us from the law (Rom 8:2,3) so that we could be free to serve others without a yoke or burden of legalistic restrictions. Christ also freed us from the sin which the law magnified. Paul taught that one purpose of the law was the manifestation of sin (Rom 3:20; 5:20; 7:7-11; Gal 3:19); therefore, freedom from the law also implies freedom from sin. Hardly any believer today has had the experience of living under the law and its Pharisaic complications, but many of us have experienced liberation from some sort of religious legalism, and this liberation reflects the same principle. Freedom from any system of law represents freedom from sin, because we now have grace. Rules magnify sin, but grace annuls sin.

Freedom from sin is always an issue for anyone, at any time. The Pharisees, who had more laws than anyone, therefore also had the greatest reminders of their sin. They tried in vain to achieve righteousness, with yet more laws! Like trying to slay the Hydra, the more they made laws which they thought would protect them, the more they became enslaved to sin without remedy. Jesus told the Pharisees that every one who practices sin is a slave to sin, but the Son makes us free (John 8:34-36). They had no “freedom from.” We live without the constant vigilance that the law-impounded individual has. Jesus lifted the burden of the law (Matt 11:28-30) and yoked us to his way of life.

Slaves to Love

No constraints hinder your utility to God. Unlike the priest and Levite who bypassed¹³⁷ the fallen traveler on the Jericho road, you have no restrictions on whom you can serve, and when and how you can order your lives of service and good works. Yes, Jesus freed you from the law and any ritualized worship or codified morality, but this does not free you from the eternal principles of God. You have traded slavery to law for slavery to love. The key word “love” replaces the restrictions of the law. You are freed *from* so you can be free *to*.

Those impounded by a system of law have their primary service in fulfilling the law. Those whose only law is love have their primary service as fulfilling the precepts of love. Love requires interpersonal awareness; you must think outside of yourself. Love of God requires you to think of God. Life under law requires that you think of the law and of self, in the sense of what you must do to fulfill the law.

Freedom to Serve, Not Anarchy

Being freed from law is not just freedom from the behavioral burdens of ritual and avoidance; it is freedom of mind so that you can develop yourself in love. Freedom *from* without freedom *to* results in moral license and theological anarchy. This is not the freedom of the Bible. Hence, we have these two ideas immediately adjoined in some of the principal passages concerning freedom in Christ (e.g., Gal 5:13-14; 1 Pet 2:16).

The law of love says, “I will only use my freedom insofar as it helps others.” True freedom does not authorize licentiousness; it offers widened opportunity. It gives permission to remove restrictions in service.

Under the Pharisees' version of the law, holiness came from doing less and less. The more one avoided, the more holiness one had. Even good works had limitations: not on the Sabbath, not to lepers, not to Samaritans, not with sinners, not if it meant eating with Gentiles. The freedom you have is the liberation from those social restrictions which limit your usefulness to others. This therefore allows you to work on the Sabbath, eat with Gentiles, preach to Samaritans, offer balm to lepers and sinners. This is the only freedom enjoined under the New Covenant.

The freedom of which Christ spoke was a *yoke*. Take my yoke upon you, he asks. I touched lepers, talked with Samaritans, ate with sinners, let a prostitute anoint me, and fed the Gentiles. That's freedom of service, not freedom of self-indulgence. If you orient your life to good works, preaching, serving, and holiness, you can do so in any fashion, without fear of "the unclean."

The Conclusion in Galatians

In Galatians 5, following Paul's declaration of freedom comes a parenthetical section where he again warns the Galatians of falling back into the law. If you establish one law, says Paul using the example of receiving circumcision, you have bound yourself to keep the whole law, because you have exchanged the principle of grace for law.

Then Paul returns to the subject of freedom. Here he exhorts us to serve one another through love. The word translated "serve" usually indicates slave status. Peter used the same word when he wrote, "live as free men...but live as servants to God" (1 Pet 2:16). The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament renders both instances as "slaves." New Testament usage often has the connotation of a willing bondsman, (e.g., Rom 1:1). Freedom in Christ means slavery to service.

The chapter ends with descriptions of the works of the flesh and fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:19-23). These two lists contrast the outcomes of living under law versus living under grace. Law begets no faith, and therefore no basis of morality. The fruit of the spirit, however, teaches the development of morality and character in the absence of law. Freedom from law allows faith, and faith grows morality. Hence, those who are truly free in Christ achieve the highest levels of spirituality and service. Freedom in Christ means personal responsibility, freewill slavery to righteousness, and the highest development of morality.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

The Paradox of the New Covenant

THE NEW TESTAMENT CONTAINS several seemingly self-contradictory statements that make no sense when taken at face value. To understand how these statements do make sense, and in fact make superlative sense, you need to think on another level. The difference between “nonsense” and “makes sense” mirrors the difference between the thinking inherent to the legalist system and the thinking required for understanding the New Covenant.

A Catalog of Contradictions

The pattern of the verses below will appear readily as you read them.

1. The first shall be last, and the last first (Luke 13:30; Mark 10:31; Matt 19:30; 20:16).

Jesus uses this formula to conclude several parables. It serves as a moral of the story and clarifies the point of the parables: those who thought first of themselves, and then, if at all, of the needs of others, would be last at the judgment, i.e., rejected. Dead last. The phrase also carries the meaning “whoever comes in first in this life will come in last at the judgment.” If you want what this world has to offer, you already have your reward. When you put others first and yourself last, you become first in God’s sight.

2. He who loses his life will save it (Matt 10:38,39; 16:25).

This statement is a stronger version of the preceding. If you seek the favors of this life, you’ve thrown away eternal life. If you lose your life (for the sake of the gospel, a critical ellipsis) you will actually find, or save it. Living for the gospel means dying to the world. Jesus realized

this saying when he remained on the cross, defying the taunts, “he saved others, let him save himself” (Luke 23:35) and “let him come down now from the cross” (Matt 27:42). He found his life by losing it.

3. Whoever would be great among you must be a slave (Matt 20:26-27; Mark 10:44-45).

This is also similar to the first entry, but set as an exhortation, not a warning. This teaching comes in the context of the request from Zebedee’s sons to sit at Jesus’ right hand in the kingdom. The Lord’s reply teaches that rulership comes from service.

4. Become a fool to be wise (1 Cor 3:18).

Paul says that wisdom isn’t wisdom, foolishness is wisdom. Of course, the foolishness to which he refers is God’s “foolishness”: a crucified Messiah, humility, meekness, giving up all in this life. The way of life commensurate with the atonement in Christ made no sense in the Greek mind (identical to the Pharisees in this respect). To the Greeks and Pharisees one gained wisdom through knowledge, experience, argumentation, and debate. In God’s wisdom, however, one had to be wise enough to become foolish, for in becoming foolish (in the eyes of the world) one became truly wise (also Matt 11:25).

5. Childlikeness is maturity (Matt 18:4).

Whoever humbles himself like this child will be greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. Children aren’t humble; they are totally self-centered. But Jesus is saying become childlike, not childish. A child doesn’t have all the answers. A child learns and grows with curiosity and a respect for the freshness of new experience.

Adults think they have the answers, and they know what’s what because now they’re grown-up. This is really immature and not very adult. Choosing “I want to find out” in contrast with “I already know” is what Jesus is getting at here. The rest of the chapter deals with interpersonal offenses and forgiveness: the wisdom of this world is indeed lacking in this dimension. The little ones “who believe in me” that Jesus receives are not literal children, but people who have chosen to humble themselves and become as children.

Their belief doesn’t make them perfect. In their struggles with sin, do not reject them, even unto seventy times seven times.

6. When I am weak, then am I strong (2 Cor 12:10).

Here the Apostle Paul refers to his dependence upon God's great providence in dealing with his adversary. He cannot access this strength unless he is first made weak. He has to empty himself so God can fill him with power. In this context, God weakens Paul with affliction, and strengthens him with the power from above. Paul's weakness becomes his strength.

7. Giving is getting (2 Cor 8: 6-11; see also Prov 11:24, 25).

The more you give, the more you get. But giving with the intent to get doesn't count in the ethic of the New Covenant. The "getting" is the abundant resources to serve; God provides seed for the sower. You cannot get this seed, except by giving it with the right intent, which is purely for the service of others, yet the limitations of human nature make this nearly impossible. God does see those glimpses of selflessness that show up from time to time in our lives, and responds with more for us to give. The return will not necessarily be of like kind, though, and the ultimate gift in return is a satisfied mind.

8. Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled (Luke 14:11) and humility is exaltation (Matt 18:4; Eph 1:3-9).

If you humble yourself now, God will exalt you later, but only if you develop true humility, not a sham humility for the sake of gaining exaltation. True humility comes from self-awareness and the relationship your limited self has with your unlimited Creator. The real sense of place and space between yourself and God yields a teachable heart, dependent on God.

As you grow in this awareness, placing your essential being further from God, you become closer to God and share in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. There is both a now and also a Kingdom age application of this truth.

9. The ungodly are justified (Rom 4:5).

This teaching relates immediately, directly, and daily to your standing before God. It has everything to do with how you become righteous. You become righteous when you acknowledge your unrighteousness and accept your need for God's mercy and forgiveness. In Romans 4, Paul writes that Abraham trusted him who justifies the ungodly. In the same context, Paul also quotes from Psalm 32 where David, confesses his sins—far more blatant and egregious than Abraham's—and receives mercy. Only

in the Lord does this recognition of your unworthiness account for righteousness. Paul takes “let us sin that grace may abound” off the table (Rom 6:1), leaving a clean connection between recognizing your sin and finding righteousness in God. You cannot sin to obtain righteousness, nor can you do right to become righteous. When you confess “I have sinned,” God removes the sin and you are justified in his sight.

The Common Thread

All of these examples depend on an effect of opposites; you get what you don’t strive for. It seems you have to do the opposite of what you want, and the desired result comes indirectly. At the very least, the cumulative force of these structurally parallel passages reveals something extraordinary going on. You are led to contemplate on what line of thinking undergirds these passages. This curiosity is the first step to understanding the nature of paradox.

True paradox is a recursive statement that lives in a circular (that is, without cause-effect status, but only a continuing system) world, without beginning or end, that represents the infiniteness of God and the universe. Legalist thinking says, “I’m righteous because I don’t sin.” Faithful thinking says, “I’m righteous because I acknowledge my sin. But this must be a confession from the heart, not a mechanical confession. Then I become righteous through faith, which makes me unrighteous again, because the righteousness of faith states that I’m unrighteous—only God is righteous. But that makes me righteous, which means I’m unrighteous.” So on it goes, only a continuous loop, not a cause-and-effect linearity that depends on human behavior as the cause.

The Teaching of the Teachings

Taking the passages cited above as a unit, a collective meaning arises. Unlike the black-and-white, linear, cause-and-effect world of the Old Covenant of works, the New Covenant of grace requires a special sense of our interrelationship with a limitless God. Our salvation becomes not a direct result of our own actions, but an indirect, passive consequence of our selfless lives given to God for the benefit of others.

The list of parallel teachings could not occur as part of the teaching under the law. The type of thinking needed to make them work demands elevation to a higher order of perception and an entirely selfless application of their principles. One can’t fake the New

Covenant; one can't go through the meaningless charades of offering ritual sacrifice without a scantling of devotion or understanding as often happened when the ritual became an end in itself. Nor can one do anything to cause righteousness; righteousness only comes indirectly from the realization of our unrighteousness. This is a basic fact, but we want to highlight the type of thinking fundamental to this indirect righteousness. One can only train the mind to God's eternal principles, and slowly learn that everything we naturally think is right, is not. We become void and powerless, and in our emptiness, we become filled.

Paradoxes teach that you cannot do anything to directly cause the result, i.e. the result must happen as an indirect consequence. This doesn't affect the concept of free choice. You choose each behavior. You make moral choices, such as choosing to be baptized and submitting to the purpose of God; but you cannot choose, directly, to be saved. That comes as the indirect result of faith, service, and growth. Living in the New Covenant means far more than accepting a set of beliefs and worship practices. You must do, but with no thought of doing (Matt 25:37). Your doing must emanate from the affections of a mind trained on eternal values.

"My ways are not your ways," said God through Isaiah. Appreciating the paradoxical nature of the New Covenant is essential to fully understand God's ways.

Section IV

PRACTICAL MATTERS AND APPLICATIONS

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Beneficial Use of Rules and Rituals

WHILE I HAVE ASSERTED throughout this book that the New Covenant functions by faith, not laws, I do not want to imply that this equates to anarchy, or that the three “Rs” of legalism — rules, rituals, and rewards—entirely lack utility. Rules and rewards can play a role in personal development and ritual is a vital component of worship.

This chapter uses the word “rules” generically. It’s a shortcut that stands for any statement of required behaviors or policies, including rules, regulations, bylaws, charters, constitutions, codes of conduct, articles of incorporation, or guidelines.

Freedom to Use Rules

Any congregation of believers, typically an ecclesia, is both a spiritual and a human organization, so it functions best when it conforms to both spiritual and organizational principles. A group only works well when everyone performs their individual role in the context of the group interest. To that end, organizational rules are necessary so everyone has the same understanding of what’s expected of them.

Foremost for this discussion is the principle developed at length in Chapter Twenty-Four, “Clean and Unclean,” which states that *sin does not lie in those things external to you, but rather in the attitudes and values of your heart*. Thus, rules, constitutions, and the like cannot be inherently wrong to have, and abiding by them doesn't make you righteous or unrighteous. It is only your attitude towards rules that makes them helpful or not. We have freedom to use them—both individually and collectively—if they further our spiritual goals.

Therefore, remember that the organizational rules themselves are only as helpful and spiritual as the attitude in which they are used. They are to be followed by everyone so that they conduce to harmony and mutual development, but they are not to enslave the ecclesia so that they become the end, not the means to an end. Also, you must remember that following the rules is for the benefit of organizational function, not for your personal merit as a way to earn credit with God.

Submission

Another principle regarding the use of rules comes from biblical teachings concerning the discipleship practice of mutual submission (Eph 5:21). Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, covers many aspects of unity. He addresses unity between God and humans, between Jew and Gentile, between members of the body of Christ, and between husband and wife. Each of these relationships depends on creating unity and harmony between disparate members. This is especially true in the ecclesia, a multitudinous arrangement with potential for either enormous benefit or considerable stress.

A structured ecclesia creates opportunities for the practice of submission. It's easy to have an "everyone does what's right in their own eyes" situation when the ecclesia, or any inter-ecclesial structure, has no guidelines. Garbed in gossamer freedom, the structureless organization loses not only its character and boundaries, but it also denies its membership the discipleship of submission for mutual good.

Submission to others' wills and preferences can occur in any social organization. Personalities, emotions, and lapses in interpersonal communication, however, add complexity to the issue at hand. Submission becomes clouded, and withdrawal often gains ascendancy as a solution to what has become an engaged conflict.

However, when a formalized, codified policy is present¹³⁸ to guide the organization, you now have an impersonal, impartial arbiter that excludes personality conflicts. You can submit, or you can depart in a cloud of pride.

Perhaps the written guideline that led to conflict or departure had no utility. Perhaps less-than-spiritual principles led to the formation of the rules in question in the first place. Even better for the practice of submission. When you submit to a good, principled policy, that's just common sense. The submission part is that you want to do things

differently, even though you recognize the policy has merit. Greater submission, however, is required when the policy is out-of-date but maintained for tradition's sake. The statement "we've always done it that way" is one of the worst justifications for any policy decision, but it does get used. Say what you need to say, and then accept the decision.

A special application of submission occurs when a small group, maybe perhaps one individual, has a belief or lifestyle, some peculiarity or scruple that sets them aside from the local norm. Conceptually there are two different principles at work depending on the size of each party. It is the duty of the larger group to follow the principle of *accommodation*, and the duty of the individual or smaller group to follow the principle of *adaptation*. That is, the large group relaxes its boundaries, mores, regulations, as far as possible, while still retaining their fundamental identity, to extend membership to the outlier. The outlier/s, on their account, must rein in their peculiarity as far as possible to allow peaceful entrance into the group. When these two principles overlap, they result in harmony and unity. When they don't, strife and division is the outcome.

All of this spiritually directed discussion means nothing when someone decides, as is so often the case, that "being right" is more important than "being together"; and thus they demonstrate that they aren't right at all.

Are there times when one party's position represents a clear departure from the Truth? In my fifty or so years in the faith, I have yet to see a divisive situation that rested on a genuinely first-principle matter. It would take something that serious to warrant separation.

Ecclesial rules give us the opportunity for true submission, sometimes the kind of unjust and emotionally painful. Submission is among our least favorite tasks of discipleship, and is therefore the one we need the most opportunity to practice.

I'm Above the Rules

A recurrent problem is the "rules don't apply to me" mindset. Bible school committee members know this one all too well. Who really thinks that the curfew applies to *me*? No, it's for other people, I have important agenda; I need to be up late to talk. Four hundred people at a Bible school with rules for the common good, and there will be some, perhaps many, who hear rules and think, to give some examples, "I don't

have to wear my name badge, or be in my room and quiet by curfew time.” “Twenty minutes for an exhortation? Maybe the other speakers, not me. I’ve got important things to say.”

The rules do apply to you, *and* to your children. Make sure they know that the rules apply to them also. And make sure they know why they must follow the rules, to practice submission and set the right example for others, not to chalk up credits on your righteousness ledger (which doesn’t exist).

If you think a certain organizational rule is out of place, overly restrictive, or whatever, there is a time and place to challenge it, but the time and place is outside of the context of when the rule is being applied. If a Bible school has a curfew or quiet time, which you think is excessively early, or you have a special event planned that evening that is likely to extend beyond the curfew, this is to be addressed with the relevant committee members well in advance. You don’t break the rule and then say you did that in protest or purposeful transgression of what you deemed to be a rule that needed to be broken. That form of behavior is neither Christlike nor constructive.

Group Behavior

Besides the spiritual principle of submission, there’s a human reason for the application of rules to our organization: in groups, behavior degrades.¹³⁹ People lose their values, sensibility, and priorities. This phenomenon is observed primarily, but not exclusively, in teens and young adults. Take any ten people, individually well-bred and thoughtful, and put them together in a group, and most likely you will witness an immediate dissipation of appropriate conduct. Even a strong leader can often do little to counter the inevitable decay of principles within a group.

Group mentality must be reckoned with when creating structures and guidelines for events such as Bible schools and youth weekends. Organizers learn to over-govern and over-regiment, because they must. You just can’t expect the attendees to help with any kind of voluntary compliance, let alone spontaneously do what needs to be done.

At home, most people would do something as simple and reasonable as pick up a book off the floor. But look at the room after a session at a gathering or youth weekend. Hardly anyone picks up, because, well, everybody else’s books are all over the floor, so why should I pick up mine? Likewise with curfews, starting times for meetings, and dozens of other details.

People in groups don't behave as responsible individuals; you can rely on that dictum. Distractions come easily. No one wants to appear like they're the only one so weak as to want to help the organizers by submitting to their agenda. Yet that's exactly the recipe for a good function—each individual submitting their will to the minutiae the organizers have had to place on the event to keep necessary order in a large group of disparate human agendas and preferences.

Any organizer knows that to get results at, say, a level of 50, you have to organize at a level of 100. This isn't legalistic; it's just recognizing the inherent difficulties of dealing with group behavior.

Master or Servant: When Rules Become Rulers

Regarding any set of rules, keep this priority in mind: rules serve you; you do not serve rules.

You become a slave to rules when you cannot change them or lift them under special circumstances. When the "letter of the law" eclipses human need, then you know you have reversed your role, and the rules rule you. No longer are rules your servant to help you learn spiritual thinking; they have taken on their own life and trapped you.

For example, your ecclesia might have a rule that says the arranging board must approve visiting speakers by Friday for Sunday's meeting. A brother known for giving excellent exhortations has a disruption of travel plans and ends up unexpectedly at your meeting on Sunday morning with no advance notice. Do you ask him to speak, or defer to your rule?

If the rule wins only because it is the rule, then that rule has enslaved you. If you realize that circumstances warrant a suspension of what otherwise would keep things orderly, then you have realized that rules cannot cover all human expedencies; sometimes you must make an exception. Thus, you suspend the rule and welcome the visitor to speak. You're not breaking a rule, you are only realizing that the wisdom of establishing the rule couldn't predict all possible circumstances of life. Therefore, you suspend the rule for this instance.

Rituals

The New Covenant has but two rituals: baptism and the breaking of bread. The former we do only once, and we have carefully stated our teaching position on this matter: immersion in water does not save you; faith saves you. Immersion serves as a public and discrete sign of your

faith, a remembrance for reflection, a rite of inclusion into the family of God, an act of submission to the righteousness of God, and many other purposes. It does not serve as a law you fulfill for the sake of earning a reward from God. The proper attitude of baptism includes your inability to make yourself right before God except by his grace.

Unlike baptism, the breaking of bread comes on your schedule every week. God gave this service as an aid to remember the sacrificial death of Jesus. It is a tangible cue, or stimulus, to trigger thoughts of penitence, devotion, thankfulness, grace, resolve, and commitment. Only to the extent that your mind generates spiritual thinking does this service hold any benefit. You do not do it as a command to follow for the sake of earning righteousness. You do not do it as a legalistic duty. You do not do it thinking, "I have faithfully broken bread on the first day of the week, per the Lord's directive." Any member can break bread; the behavior itself means no more than anyone going under water. Just as we emphasize proper understanding for the efficacy of baptism, we emphasize proper understanding for the breaking of bread.

Other rituals serve to anchor collective worship experience. Each Sunday morning local congregations use a variety of service protocols throughout the world. For the members of each group, the familiar pattern and order of hymns, prayers, reading, exhortation, partaking of the bread and wine, announcements, collection, and any other agenda items all function to provide a familiar structure. This structure, in turn, like any well-learned pattern of behavior, can provide the cues for a reverent and receptive frame of mind. Psychologically, it's equivalent to a pre-performance routine an athlete would use. Bounce the ball twice, take a deep breath, relax the shoulders, look at the target, balance the stance with flexed knees—do whatever the sport or skill requires. These moves are all part of a sequence that leads the brain to perform the intended task. In a worship or learning context, you can use the same principle to set your mind to its contextual performance.

Rituals have even more to offer at what are known as nodal events: weddings, graduations, baptisms, new babies, retirements, moving, and funerals. All of these affairs of human life have culturally and socially developed rituals. Some clearly have spiritual dimensions. Rituals signify to all in attendance what is going on and why they are there.

In all of these instances, whether in a spiritual or secular context, whether a once-in-a-lifetime event, an infrequent event, or a regular

event, rituals are behaviors that can serve us well. As behaviors they have no inherent meaning, but as cultural, religious, and social icons, and as cues for an appropriate frame of mind, they have great utility.

Rituals and symbols are especially useful when words cannot express the import of the occasion. A corpse in an open coffin says more about death than any eloquent presentation of scriptural teaching on the subject. At a wedding, the exchange of rings can say more about commitment to each other than even the most heartfelt vows.

Never demean a ritual because “it’s just a behavior”; rituals are behaviors that usually incorporate various objects, music, or sayings that carry social and spiritual meaning. And never let a ritual become your master. Don’t think that you *must* use a given ritual because “that’s what everyone else does.” Nearly fifty years ago my beloved, Cora, and I never said “I do” to each other, but we are still quite certainly married!

Use rituals that generate meaning for *you*, and don’t assume everyone benefits from your set of rituals.

Children

Children live in the world of the tangible, not the abstract, so rules apply to children in a way that is unnecessary for (most) adults. For young children, rules provide structure and a guide for correct behavior that is appropriate for that stage of life. It is not until early teens, at the earliest, that we humans grow to guide our lives by principles and abstract ideas such as justice and integrity.

Children need rules for several reasons. As a young child, you don’t know right from wrong. You can’t figure out things like “submission” and “faith.” You live in a world of objects and behavior, the same realm as the law. That’s why Paul writes to the Corinthians, referring to the law, that “when he was child he thought like a child,” and why he teaches allegorically in Galatians that law belongs to childhood, just as the law of Moses belonged to Israel’s childhood.

Laws can teach right behavior, and habituate young ones to proper conduct. As a child you probably learned to put money into the collection, but you didn’t learn about faithful generosity until you became an adult. Just as the law can only prescribe behavior, not attitude, rules alone cannot make children into adults. Rules function at the only level children understand, and give them a good start toward understanding God and principles later in life.

As an adult, you grasp that the essence of faith precludes immediate reward. Faith deals with delayed gratification, waiting until later. Those under the mature concept of faith know that they might live their entire lives without any tangible reward or reinforcement, and then die in faith and hope. Don't expect this level of abstraction from children.

Nonetheless, rewards have a useful place in child development. Reward them for their little efforts at doing good.

Conclusion: Rules and Rituals are Contextually Valuable

Having freedom in Christ, you are free to make and use rules and rituals. They themselves are neither good nor bad; how you use them determines their spiritual value.

Rules and rituals do have a significant place in our worship and spiritual growth. They organize human behavior, give us opportunity to practice submission, offer reminders of the spiritual, and train children in the way of righteousness.

The same caveats apply to ecclesial rules as to the law of Moses. You can falsely think that in the keeping of them you create righteousness. You can deem them immutable and become enslaved to them. You can add, clarify, and expand their scope until you have defined everything in a vain attempt to regulate morality, thought, and behavior, which only faith and love can properly regulate. You can fall into the trap, like the Pharisees, of actually voiding the principles of God for the sake of keeping your own rules. You can blaspheme the covenant of grace by thinking that following rules and believing our creeds fulfills the command to live by faith.

Rules, necessary as they are to a human organization, are as much a route to regress back into legalism as they are an opportunity to grow in faith. Rules present a challenge; like sin, you master them, or they will master you.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Works of Faith

A YOUNG MAN EMERGED from a cold pond on a Sunday morning, a new brother in Christ. Later that day, an older brother, at least thirty years his senior in the faith, said this to him: “If the kingdom were to come right now, you’d be the person most likely to get in, because you haven’t had time to sin yet.” Unlearned and inexperienced, the young man didn’t know what to say, but it stuck in his mind. Years later, the theological naïveté of the statement began to bother him. Was this just an idle, encouraging remark, or did it represent conventional thinking?

During his pondering, he heard this account from a woman who spoke about growing up Catholic. As a child she went to confession Saturday evening, came home, and went straight to bed before she could sin! Then, at Sunday mass she could take communion undefiled. The elder brother in Christ expressed the same theological understanding as the little Catholic girl.

They could both join with the pious Pharisee, biding away his Sabbath in inertness, waiting for sunset so he can enter another mark of pseudo-righteousness into his resumé. All three make the same fundamental error about the nature of sin: that it is something you can avoid, and having so avoided, you can stand “clean” before God. However, the Bible teaches reality: you cannot avoid sin because it dwells within you.

Your default setting is “unclean.” God offers you cleansing and forgiveness in Christ; your good works of faith show your appreciation of his grace. Avoiding ritual defilement does not qualify as a “good work” and it does not manifest faith.

Determinants of Faith

This book has treated rudely the doctrine of legalism, or salvation by works, until the previous chapter, where works or behaviors gained some redemption. When employed appropriately, works have a positive and necessary role in our worship, assemblies, and organizational life.

Now we come to two more positive aspects of works: they demonstrate true faith and they help you grow spiritually. But how do you know if your activities in the name of worship and service are actually works of faith? Doing faith takes a different course for each disciple, so there is no specific prescription. There are, however, some criteria that help determine when a given activity is likely to manifest faith. Works of faith will have one or more of these characteristics:

1. Risk-taking
2. Utility
3. Proper Motive
4. Spirituality
5. Delayed Reward
6. Personal Hardship

Due to inherent human self-deception (Jer 17:9) and limited perspective (1 Cor 4:4), you can never judge your attitudes perfectly. Only the perfect judge can truly know your heart, but your limitation doesn't mitigate your need to strive always to see yourself more clearly.

Risk-taking

Acts of faith involve the element of the unknown. You must go beyond your comfort zone into that scary area called "out of control" or "uncertainty." Abraham left his comfort zone behind when he left Ur. He was a city dweller, not a nomad. And that was just the beginning of his journey of faith.

The faithful servants in Jesus' parable of the talents went there when they invested their money (Matt 25:16). You remember—the master who departed his country for a lengthy time and entrusted his business to three of his servants. Two of them doubled their allotment, a 100 percent return on investment. That's an impressive figure, and it doesn't come without risk. Whatever they did, they extended themselves and acted in faith.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego went there in the furnace. Ananias went there when he went to lay hands on Paul (Acts 9:13-17). Jesus lived his entire life outside the comfort zone, and Calvary was the

WORKS OF FAITH

ultimate test of faith for anyone ever. *You* go there when you undertake a venture that stretches your personal resources.

Acting in faith does not mean you will be free from fear and anxiety. Courage is not the absence of fear; it's acting despite the fear. You put your hand in God's invisible hand, and go forward. You know that ultimately God is in control, but you don't know the extent to which he might let you falter and suffer before he steps in, so risk is always involved.

Another term that describes risk-taking is *vulnerability*. When you make yourself vulnerable, you open yourself up to God's care and to expanding the limits of your capabilities. The saying, "What doesn't challenge you doesn't change you" applies to spiritual growth also.

Risk-free activities can still have much spiritual value, such as showing up for ecclesial functions. For some people, in some situations, even this can be risky, and therefore all the more beneficial to faith.

Utility

The utility test means that someone benefits from what you do. Much of ritual religion lacks utility as well as the element of risk-taking. However, when you visit a widow in her grief, personal benefit occurs. Maybe you didn't want to visit her because you thought you would feel uncomfortable and have nothing to say. Nevertheless, you took the risk anyway, and did something of significant value for someone.

Usually, what benefits the recipient also benefits the giver. You teach Sunday school; you and your students both benefit. You give money or time in prayer to help others, and they benefit from your kindness. You get that intangible feeling of knowing that you have stretched yourself, and thus you can move to a higher level of faith. Benefit results from the loving application of faith. The giver and the receiver both gain from the works of faith.

Proper Motive

Can you say that you have a pure motive of love and service and devotion when you do works of faith? No way—none of us can; we all lack perfect pureness of heart. However, you can nurture the correct motive. Motivation to do good comes not from a desire to earn salvation, but from an appreciation of what God and Jesus have already done for you.

Proper motives demonstrate a clear connection between academic theology and living faith. To the extent that you perceive the true

character of God and Jesus, and likewise understand the desperately enfeebled nature you possess, you grow in your appreciation of the reconciliation God freely offers. As your understanding of God, Jesus, and human nature grows, your understanding of the atonement grows. With that comes your appreciation of grace, and from that springs the heartfelt thanksgiving, gratitude, and honor through which you can offer works of faith.

Spirituality

You can offer useful services to people and yet remain entirely materialistic and earth-bound in your thinking. Volunteering to coach the soccer team at work might fall into this category, even if pure motive and benefit to others all came into play. Others must accrue spiritual benefit from your works, that is, helping yourself and others grow in the fruit of the Spirit. To this end, focus your works on spiritual matters, not on the purely material, temporal, or ritual.

However, material needs of the needy constitute a significant portion of spiritual acts of faith. "If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (Jas 2:15-17). "If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" (1 John 3:17). The material becomes spiritual when faith and love impel the giver.

Delayed Reward

This principle is stated in Hebrews 11:39, "And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised." Countless others also belong on the list of those who died never having received the reward of their faith. Resurrection, judgment, and the Kingdom of God all lie in the future. At its psychological core, faith puts you in a different realm than legalism. Legalism, a behaviorist structure, expects recompense in this life for righteous deeds, as explored in Chapter Twenty-One.

You may never have any tangible evidence in this life of God's recognition of your faith. If you do, it's still a long, hard journey to the end of life with only the mind of faith maintaining the hope of the resurrection. Expect to live your entire life devoted to the service and

calling of him who saves by grace without any positive reinforcement along the way. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just (Luke 14:14).

This does not preclude the satisfaction you get from knowing you acted in faith, nor does it mean that you won't perceive God's peace and love in your life in some meaningful way.

Personal Hardship

A work of faith will likely put you at some personal discomfort. Whether it's emotional, financial, physical, or logistical hardship, you know you're on the right track when you don't want to do something, but you do it anyway because it's the right thing to do.

These six criteria might assess whether or not any particular activity you do really involves faith, but there are many spiritual activities that take little or no faith, such as playing or singing worship music. However, don't confuse those activities which help build your faith with those activities which show your faith. Sometimes they're the same, sometimes not.

You also need to allot time for many functions that don't require faith. You need to care for your physical self with proper nutrition, rest, and exercise. You need time to read, study, meditate, and be within yourself. You need time with family and time at work. None of these are acts of faith, yet you do them manifesting a spiritual character, which in many cases will require faith.

What you want to look for is whether anything you do as a believer meets the criteria for real acts of faith. If you come up lacking in this department, read on for a few suggestions. I have listed below several where you can exercise your faith.

Believing

Does it take much faith to accept Bible teaching as true? No, believing the Truth is logical and well-evidenced, such as the structure and harmony of Scripture, prophecy, the moral teachings, and the psychological insights. The first-principles are abundantly rational. Bible truth attracts many adherents because of its reasonableness. Given all this, accepting the Bible as the true word of God doesn't take any great act of faith.

However, you don't come to believe in a social vacuum. The implications of believing may take great faith. It can cost your job or career. Believing has cost many their family ties or even their lives. It has

cost many people their world views and belief systems. They had to start over, making drastic changes in their thinking. Faith enters when we consider the social implications of believing.

Morality

Morality could require faith for some, but for most of us morality should come as easily and plausibly as the facts of the Truth itself.

Having said that, however, immorality can have an enormous sensual pull to it; it can take great faith for someone hooked on a vice to quit. It can take great faith to sustain some necessary relationships. It can take great faith for a young person to remain chaste until marriage. Given societal norms and pressures, combined with our inherent lust, to stand ground as a virgin can take a conviction of true faith.

Service

With so much work to do in a lay, volunteer, non-hierarchical organization, opportunities and responsibilities for service abound. However, there is one big caveat in the road to navigate around if you will render your service as an act of faith. It's the related word *servant*.

Acts of service are visible; sometimes too visible. Servant attitude is invisible, known only to God and somewhat dimly to the servant.

We don't see all service, though, and we often over emphasize the starring roles: teachers. Many other forms of service go entirely unnoticed, at least to humans, but not to God. Perhaps those acts of service which gain the least public notice most represent the true works of faith. At least they eliminate polluting our motives with the pride of human recognition.

Do acts of service manifest faith? Sometimes yes, sometimes not necessarily, and, certainly not always. For some people, stepping up to take an ecclesial function might be a great stretch, a true act of faith. For others, it could be the deceptive moment of self-exaltation and exercise of power and control. On some occasions, not doing something might be a greater act of faith, like refusing to take a perceived status role when you know you don't belong there. Doing something that only God sees could represent an exercise in faith.

Practice Restraint

Restraint is an example of expressing your faith by *not* doing something. You see a problem, and you wait, with patience and prayer, trusting

God. You act when you need to, but you also learn to let God deal with issues that you can't fix, or have no business trying to fix. You might think that *you* are the only person in the world who can fix a certain problem, or that you are the one who needs to step in and set everyone right on some issue, or that you are certainly the right person for a task or position.

Not necessarily. "The cemeteries are full of indispensable people," goes the old adage. If you think that you have the only solution to a problem, you're deep into pride as well as lacking in faith. Sometimes doing nothing, or deferring to a more capable brother or sister, is the right decision.

Knowing when to act and when to defer is a dilemma you'll encounter frequently in our lay organization, where the life of the body depends on the active good will of its members. It will often be a test of your faith, self-awareness, and true humility to act, defer, or overlook.

Character

The character ethic refers to the putting on of true Christian virtue. Those who achieve this level have probably, but not necessarily, made considerable deposits into their faith account. Do you maintain true humility after a significant accomplishment, keep patience during a crushing trial, exhibit goodwill in the face of enmity, pursue peace when consumed by strife, and persevere in zeal when surrounded by apathy? How do you get to that level? Even to desire such outcomes displays a mind of faith. To achieve them requires diligent application of spiritual resources, often without any gain or progress for some time.

However, the full manifestation of faith requires more than developing a lovely and virtuous character. The only character trait that fully answers to the demands of faith is that process the Bible calls "self-sacrifice," that is, the subjugation of your will to God's. The Bible has many ways of describing this: "living sacrifice" (Rom 12:1), "loses his life" (Matt 16:25) NIV, "died with Christ" (Rom 6:8), "put off your old self" (Eph 4:22), and "crucified with Christ" (Gal 2:20). These phrases describe a complete renunciation of will and a complete devotion to a new way of life. Disregard for what seems so naturally comfortable for no tangible reward in this life unequivocally meets the conditions of faith. This means a complete trust in the Kingdom, and all for the glory of God (not self) and the benefit of others (not self).

Of all things a legal code can't engender, subjugation of will stands at the acme.

What Can We Do?

Faith without works is dead. Our lay organization gives a structure in which no one need die for lack of works. We don't have a sit-in-the-pew-on-Sunday religion. We have an active relationship with an abundantly kind and merciful God. He wants to know, and wants us to know, how much we really appreciate and understand the gracious offer of forgiveness and eternal life. A developing, active faith answers the question.

What can we do that meets the criteria described above? What can you do that might in some way put you alongside the exemplars of Hebrews 11? "By faith, Arnie attended meeting on Sunday." "By faith, the CYC went bowling together." Something sounds a bit hollow, doesn't it? If a review of your life comes up with nothing more substantial than perfunctory attendance at ecclesial activities, perhaps it's time to reassess your commitment.

Money Matters

We have no legalistic rule about tithing, no set percentage or amount. The dollar amount, Jesus taught, is not important. If you give abundantly but it doesn't affect your standard of living, then that's not an act of faith. It's still helpful, though, to whatever cause it was directed. Jesus has asked much more, you know! (Matt 19:21).

Aside from monetary giving, financial restraint and downscaling your standard of living can be acts of faith.

Spiritual Support

Jesus noted that anyone can be friends with people like themselves (Matt 5:46-48, Luke 6:32-33). It's easy to make friendships and support those you know well and who are like you, people with whom it's easy to interact. Get out of your comfort zone and you'll find the disenfranchised, the sick, grieving, elderly, poor, any marginalized group or anyone that is "other." These are the people that probably need healthy social contact and encouragement a lot more than your friends.

Openness and Honesty

You miss a rich part of discipleship when you masquerade as a spiritually healthy and strong brother or sister when inside you might have a heart full of anger, sorrow, or fear. Opening your soul is risk-taking of the highest order, but you need to know when and to whom. Most social communication usually floats along at a superficial level of niceties. However, you probably have a small circle of brothers and sisters with whom you discuss the tough issues of life. Even smaller, often zero, is the group to whom you reveal your deepest struggles and fears. This requires real faith, and for the same reason, also one of the most spiritually rewarding—when it works.

It's risky to reveal and confide because so few know how to provide support. Broken confidences, judgmental condemnation, and misguided attempts to heal can further alienate an already hurting soul.

Three essentials must be in place if you are in the role of helping someone who has laid bare their soul to you: confidentiality, confidentiality, and confidentiality. You are there to listen, to validate, to clarify, and support. Appreciate the risk the other person is taking by opening up to you, and value that. Sharing our humanity and supporting each other with love and without judgment requires little and repays much.

Do Something New and Different

Every good function had a beginning. Someone planned the first service project, first orphanage, first week-long Bible school, and so on. You can find many venues to express your faith in already existing structures and programs, but perhaps the greatest faith comes from those creative and visionary minds. Not many are in this category, but if you are, here's a great opportunity to not only do good, but also take the risks and increased investment of resources necessary to promote a new idea. If you're not in this category, supporting the worthwhile project of someone who is can be a rewarding exercise in faith.

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Gospel References

An Annotated List of Every Gospel Mention of the Pharisees and Other Opponents of Jesus

MATT 3:7. **Pharisees** and **Sadducees** come to John the Baptist for baptism (RSV). John calls them a “brood of vipers” and warns them to bear fruit that befits repentance. This is, obviously, the first reference in the Bible to Pharisees and Sadducees; they appear without any explanation of who they are or what their purpose is.

MATT 5:20. Jesus exhorts the crowds listening to him teach on the mountain side that their righteousness must exceed that of the **scribes** and **Pharisees**. Jesus explicates this advanced idea by citing a few examples from Pharisaic rules: it’s not just what we do, it’s what we think that must be holy and pure.

MATT 7:28-29. After the sermon on the mount, the crowds were astonished at Jesus’ teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, not as the **scribes**. The “authority” they perceived could be in contrast to the multiple opinions from various rabbis and their specious reasoning.

MATT 9:2-8 (Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26). In Capernaum, some of the **scribes** thought Jesus was blaspheming when he forgave a paralyzed man in the course of healing him. Luke also refers to **Pharisees** and **teachers of the law** (v17)

MATT 9:11-13 (Mark 2:15-17; Luke 5:29-32). **Pharisees** took exception to Jesus eating with Matthew (Levi) and other tax collectors and sinners. Jesus rebukes them saying the sick have need of a physician. Mark has **scribes of the Pharisees**. Luke records **Pharisees and their scribes**. The scribes indicated here are therefore not the Levitical scribes so often referred to just as “scribes.”

MATT 9:14 (Mark 2:18, Luke 5:33). **Pharisees** and John the Baptist’s disciples fast.

MATT 9:34. **Pharisees** accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the prince of demons. That is, they are saying that Jesus is the prince of demons (Matt 10:25).

MATT 12:1-8 (Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5). **Pharisees** accuse Jesus' disciples of breaking the sabbath by plucking ears of grain. Jesus replies with an OT precedent and "the sabbath was made for man," not vice-versa, and the Son of Man is Lord of the sabbath.

MATT 12:9-14 (Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11). **Pharisees** plant a man in the synagogue to see if Jesus would heal on the sabbath, which he does. Luke adds **scribes** also. Jesus teaches that it is lawful to good on the sabbath, but the Pharisees (with the **Herodians**, Mark 3:6) begin to plot to kill Jesus—on the sabbath!

MATT 12:22-29 (Mark 3:22-27; Luke 11:14-23). **Pharisees** (**scribes**, Mark) accuse him of casting out demons by the prince of demons, Beelzebul, after Jesus heals a blind and mute demoniac. Luke records this incident, but only says "some people" accused him (Luke 11:29-32).

MATT 12:38-42. **Scribes** and **Pharisees** ask Jesus for a sign; he replies with the "sign of Jonah" speech. Mark has a similar incident (8:11-12, this could be the same as Matt 16:1-4) citing only the **Pharisees**. Luke records the "sign of Jonah" speech, but does not attribute it as an answer to anyone's request for a sign.

MATT 15:1-20 (Mark 7:1-23). A deputation from Jerusalem of **Pharisees** and **scribes** cavil with Jesus about the disciples eating with (ceremonially) unwashed hands. Jesus responds with the accusation about *korban*. See Chapter Thirteen for an explanation of why Jesus changed the subject from ceremonial washing to the matter of dedicating resources.

MATT 16:1-4 (Mark 8:11). **Pharisees** and **Sadducees** test Jesus by asking for a sign from heaven. Similar to Matt 12:38-42. Mark mentions only the Pharisees, but says they "began to argue with him," indicating that that question posed first by both groups ended up in an argument with the contentious Pharisees trying to best both Jesus and the Sadducees.

MATT 16:5-12 (Mark 8:14-21; Luke 12:1). No interaction, but Jesus warning the disciples to take heed of the leaven of the **Pharisees** and **Sadducees**, that is, their teaching. Mark has "beware of the leaven of the **Pharisees** and the leaven of **Herod**" (or the **Herodians**, mg). Luke identifies the leaven of the Pharisees as hypocrisy.

MATT 16:21 (Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22). Jesus began to tell his disciples that he would suffer and be killed by the **elders**, **chief priests**, and

scribes. The **Pharisees** are never mentioned in a prophecy of the actual arrest, trial, and crucifixion, and only peripherally twice during the actual events. They might be included in the term **elders**.

MATT 19:3-9 (Mark 10:2-9). **Pharisees** test Jesus with a question about the legality of divorce for any cause.

MATT 20:17-19 (Mark 10:33; Luke 18:32). Jesus prophesies that he will be delivered into the hands of the **chief priests** and **scribes** who will mock and scourge him and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles, indicating the Romans who carried out the machinations of the Jewish authorities. Luke only has being delivered into the hands of the Gentiles.

MATT 21:12-13 (Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48; John 2:13-18). Jesus overturns the money-changers' tables and quotes from Isaiah and Jeremiah about them making God's House of Prayer a den of robbers. Matthew records no more, but Mark and Luke note the machinations of his adversaries. Mark reports that the **chief priests** and **scribes** sought for a way to destroy him, Luke adds also the **principal men of the people**. The Greek word translated **principal men** (πρωτοι) occurs only here in the gospels, but Luke uses it several times in Acts to denote either civic or Jewish people in some office of authority. John has his characteristic term **Jews**, and it is possible that John records another, but similar incident.

MATT 21:15. **Chief priests** and **scribes** were indignant at Jesus' popularity and the people crying out "Hosanna to the Son of David."

MATT 21:23-27 (Mark 11:27-33; Luke 20:1-8). **Chief priest** and **elders of the people** question Jesus' authority to "do these things" (that is, his teaching and miracles). Mark and Luke include **scribes** also.

MATT 21:45 (Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19). The **chief priests** and **Pharisees** perceived that the parable Jesus just told was about them. The parable tells of a householder who planted a vineyard, built a wine-press, and went into another country. When he sent servants to collect the harvest, the tenants treated them brutally, and also killed the householder's son. Mark's account has "they perceived"; the nearest antecedent (11:27) of "they" is the **chief priests, scribes** and **elders**. Luke has **scribes** and **chief priests**.

MATT 22:15-22 (Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26). The **Pharisees** attempt to trap Jesus with a question about paying taxes. Mark has

“some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians.” Luke just has “they,” the last antecedent would be **scribes** and **chief priests** from verse 19. It is likely that there was a crowd there, as the incident unfolds with other questions. If **Herodians** refers to supporters of the Herod regime, they would likely be the same as the **Sadducees**.

MATT 22:23-33 (Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-40). The **Sadducees** “who say that there is no resurrection” then come and ask one of their pet trap questions about which of seven brothers would be married to the serial widow in the resurrection. This was an attempt to discredit the idea of a resurrection. Luke ends the questioning here, but Matthew and Mark record one more, which may have been omitted by Luke as it was posed by only one person. Though he was possibly deputized, it is of a slightly different nature than the first two.

MATT 22:34-40 (Mark 12:28-34). One of the **Pharisees**, described in Matthew as a **lawyer** (νομικός) and by Mark as a **scribe** (γραμματέων) tests Jesus by asking which is the greatest commandment. This person could have been a Levitical scribe who was a Pharisee.

MATT 23:1-39. Jesus' famous catena of woes against the “**scribes** and **Pharisees**, hypocrites.” They are seven in number, roughly corresponding to the Beatitudes at the beginning of his ministry. “Nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions” at the end of chapter 22 signals also (in Matthew) the end of the teaching ministry of Jesus. Now come the woes, the judgment on Jerusalem (ch. 24), then the parables of judgment at Jesus' return, and finally the account of the arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection. Mark has only a brief paragraph (12:38-40) and only mentions the **scribes**. Luke has a related section, see entry on Luke 11:37-54.

MATT 26:3-4 (Mark 14:1; Luke 22:2). The **chief priests** and **elders of the people** gathered in the palace of the **high priest, Caiaphas**, and plotted to arrest and kill Jesus. Mark and Luke have **scribes** instead of **elders of the people**, which argues for the scribes being Levites, because of their association with the chief priests in doing the actual deed of apprehending Jesus, which the Pharisees seemed unwilling or unable to do. This statement is the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecies of his arrest and death (e.g., Matt 16:21).

MATT 26:14-15 (Mark 14:10; Luke 22:3-4). Judas Iscariot goes to the chief priests to arrange the betrayal. Luke adds **officers** (στρατηγούς)

(**captains**, RSV, AV; **officers of the temple guard**, NIV). This word, originally the Greek word for a military officer but used also for civil magistrates (e.g., Acts 16:20), occurs in the gospels only elsewhere in Luke 22:52, where it is explicit: **officers of the temple guard**, hence the NIV's assumption that it was these same people in v 4.

MATT 26:47 (Mark 14:43; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:3). Judas comes with a crowd, *from* the **chief priests** and **elders of the people**. Mark adds **scribes**, Luke first calls them just a crowd (v. 47) then specifies them as comprising **chief priests**, **officers of the temple**, and **elders**. John identifies them as: a band of soldiers and some **officers** from the **chief priests** and **Pharisees**. All agree that the band was sent *from* the authorities who were not themselves present. The word translated **officers** here is not the *στρατηγοίς* that Luke uses, but *υπηρέτας*; this might mean the same thing, but is used almost exclusively by John.

The Trial and Crucifixion Accounts. Because of the many references and differing formats of these narratives in the gospels, I have listed the various groups and individuals under this one heading: Matt 26:57-27:50 (Mark 14:53-15:38; Luke 22:54-23:47; John 18:12-19:30). The lynch mob¹⁴⁰ takes Jesus to **Caiaphas the high priest**, where the **scribes** and **elders** were gathered. Mark adds chief priests, Luke only mentions **high priest**, and John says that they took him first to **Annas**, the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was “high priest that year.”¹⁴¹ In the remainder of the narrative there are many citations of **high priest**, **chief priests**, **elders**, **rulers of the people**, and **elders of the people**. The council (*συνέδριον*, transliterated **Sanhedrin**) is also cited in the synoptics as those who proffered false testimony. John uses his unique label **Jews** several times, no doubt to emphasize that the Jews were rejecting their own king, “King of the Jews” being used more in John than in any of the other gospels.

MATT 27:39-41 (Mark 15:29-30; Luke 23:35). Passersby mocked Jesus on the cross, tempting him to save himself by coming down from the cross—little could they imagine that he was saving himself by staying on the cross. Matthew lists the **chief priests**, **scribes**, and **elders**; Mark mentions only “those who passed by,” and Luke groups them all together as **rulers**.

MATT 27:62 and 28:11,12. This is the only post-crucifixion reference to any opponent groups, and one of the most important verses in the entire

Bible. The **chief priests** and **Pharisees** (who have been mentioned only once in the whole arrest and trial episode, as co-instigators of the lynch mob that arrested Jesus) ask Pilate for permission to set a guard at the tomb, lest the disciples steal the body, proclaim a resurrection, and perpetrate a “last fraud that will be greater than the first” (his proclaiming to be Messiah, Son of God). In providential irony, Jesus’ opponents inadvertently ensure that the only witnesses to the actual moment of resurrection would be those who least wanted it to happen, thus providing solid evidence for a real bodily resurrection.¹⁴² Some of the guards (the others being too afraid or too dumbfounded?) reported their eyewitness account to the **chief priests**, who took counsel with the **elders**, and ordered hush money and a fabrication, just like today’s politicians.

References Found Only in Luke

Luke 2:46. Perhaps the only time that Jesus and the establishment conversed peaceably. Luke identifies them as **teachers** (διδασκάλων); being in the Temple they were probably Levitical scribes. Among their duties would have been teaching. Before any conflicts, and Jesus still being a lad, “teachers” seems appropriate. Later, Jesus will become the one known as the teacher, although the AV often obscures that, using “master.”

Luke 4:29-30. After Jesus read from Isaiah in the synagogue of Nazareth, he stirred up the crowd by referring to Gentile faithful and Jewish rejectors from Old Testament accounts. “All in the synagogue” got angry and attempted to pitch him over a precipice. Though anonymous, this was the first opposition that Jesus encountered.

Luke 7:29-30. In an aside (given in parenthesis) Luke notes that the **Pharisees and lawyers** rejected the purpose of God for themselves by not accepting John’s baptism.

Luke 7:36-50. A narrative unique to Luke is the episode of Jesus dining in the home of **Simon the Pharisee**. Initially, Luke does not mention his name, referring to him four times only as “the Pharisee.” When Jesus starts conversing with him and telling the parable of the two people who were both forgiven of debts, he becomes “Simon,” and the title Pharisee is no longer used. Is Luke implying something here? Was there a conversion in the process? At the end of the narrative “those who were at table” questioned “who is this, who even forgives sins?” but Simon was not mentioned as so doing. There was no accusation of “blasphemy” as in 5:21.

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Luke 10:25-37. In another narrative unique to Luke, a **lawyer** tests Jesus by asking what he must do to inherit eternal life; this question leads to what we know as the Parable of the Good Samaritan. His questions “what do I do” and “who is my neighbor” smack of legalistic thought. The lawyer learns that it is not anything he can do, but who he must become—a neighbor to all in need.¹⁴³

Luke 11:37-53. A **Pharisee** invites Jesus to dine at his house and is “astonished” when Jesus fails to [ceremonially] wash before the meal. Jesus’ response includes several of the “woes” of Matthew 23. Then a **lawyer** chimes in, and Jesus adds more rebukes for their legalistic bent also. It seems clear here when Jesus says “Woe to you lawyers also,” that the lawyer represents a class other than the Pharisees. At the end of the episode, Luke records that the **scribes and Pharisees** began to press him hard, trying to force him into a contradiction or some lapse. Identifying the lawyers here as Levitical scribes would not be unjustified.

Luke 13:10-17. In this episode, unique to Luke, Jesus again heals a person with a chronic, non-emergent condition on the Sabbath. The **ruler of the synagogue** (v.14) indignantly castigates Jesus; Jesus responds that he is loosing this woman from her infirmities, just as any Jew would untie his beast to lead it to water or food on the Sabbath. Jesus’ reply is in the plural, “you hypocrites,” so we can infer that others beside the synagogue ruler held his position. Luke uses the term “Pharisee” more than any other gospel writer, so he could have easily identified the ruler as a Pharisee, but didn’t. Therefore, it’s a safe guess that he was not a Pharisee.

Luke 13:31. A unique event, and also unique to Luke: **some Pharisees** warn Jesus to get away (from Jerusalem) because Herod wants to kill him. As I have noted elsewhere, Pharisees themselves had many factions, so this might have been a group sympathetic to Jesus’ teachings. Or, possibly, they were luring him into a trap of their own. Or they were just using any means to get him out of Jerusalem. Or ...??

Luke 14:1. Another Sabbath healing of a chronically ill person recorded only by Luke. Similar to the episode in 13:10-17, but the setting is at the home of a **ruler of the Pharisees**. Those who implicitly took exception to the miracle are identified as **lawyers and Pharisees**.

Luke 15. The **Pharisees and scribes** (v. 2) grumbled “this man receives sinners and eats with them.” The parables that follow—lost sheep, lost

coin, and prodigal son—are all directed at the Pharisees. Keep that context in mind as you parse these parables.

Luke 16. Again, the entire chapter, including two lengthy parables of the unjust steward and the rich man and Lazarus, is directed at the **Pharisees** (v. 14) “who were lovers of money.” Not that they tended to be wealthy, but to them material well-being was an indication of God’s blessing on the basis of their righteous and pure living. Jesus rebukes this attitude in verse 15 (see also Luke 18:26 in context for the same principle).

Luke 18:9-14. A **Pharisee** and a tax collector go up to the Temple to pray. This is one of the most well-known and telling passages of any that mention Pharisees. There’s more than the surface reading, which is addressed in Chapter Eight, “The Core of Pharisaism.”

Luke 19:39-40. What is often referred to as the Triumphal Entry is recorded in all three synoptic gospels, but only Luke records the complaint of the **Pharisees** who asked Jesus to rebuke the multitudes who praised him, shouting “Hosanna” and strewing palm branches and garments in the road.

Luke 24:20. The two disciples walking to Emmaus are unaware that the sojourner who joined them is resurrected. Thinking him to be uninformed of what has just taken place in Jerusalem, they inform him that it was the **chief priests and rulers** who delivered Jesus to be condemned and crucified.

References found only in John

John 1:19-24. The first incident involves John the Baptist; his baptism and ministry aroused the attention of the **Jews**. This designation, unique to John, refers to Jewish leaders, and specifically seems to indicate a certain class of the **Pharisees** who had connections to the people with real authority, the priests. In this instance, the **Jews** sent **priests and Levites** to interrogate John (v. 19); then John identifies the **Jews** as **Pharisees** (v. 24). This is the only place in the gospels where the designation **Levites** is used. Their association with the chief priests here lends some evidence that these Levites were scribes, and usually identified as such in the synoptic gospels.

John 3:1-15. Jesus meets with Nicodemus, identified as a **Pharisee** and **ruler of the Jews**. Although not an oppositional interaction, it seems

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that Nicodemus's coming by night indicated his association with Jesus would not have been well-received by his colleagues.

John 3:25. A discussion arises between some of John the Baptist's disciples and a **Jew** about ritual purification. As is the case in such contexts in John, his usage of "Jew" means someone in a position of authority, not just anyone who was Jewish. (But see table below.)

John 5:1-47. Those who took exception to Jesus healing on the Sabbath the man who lay for 38 years at the pool of Bethesda are identified only as **Jews** (vv. 10,15,16); again, John's usual designation. This incident plays a major role in Jesus' offensive on Pharisaic legalism and is discussed at length in Chapter Twelve.

John 6:41. The **Jews** grumbled when proclaimed that he was the true manna that came down from heaven. This was not so much opposition as it was trying to understand a figurative saying. When Jesus continued with more figurative speech about eating his flesh, the Jews disputed among themselves what he might have meant. Jesus then challenged them further by speaking of drinking his blood.

John 7:1. Jesus withdrew to Galilee because in Judea "the **Jews** were seeking to kill him."

John 7:11. Jesus had returned secretly to Jerusalem and went into the Temple at the Feast of Tabernacles. The **Jews** were still looking for him, evidently at least some of whom were connected to the healing of the lame man at the pool of Bethesda (v. 23). The accusation about his not having "studied" would mean that he was neither from the Pharisaic rabbinical school tradition nor the Levitical tradition (v. 15).

John 7:32-52. The **Pharisees** and **chief priests** sent **officers** to arrest Jesus, but this failed (v. 45) as Jesus' teaching had swayed the officers' thinking. At this point Nicodemus reminds his Pharisee colleagues that they owe Jesus a fair hearing. Also of note here is the sharp division between the Pharisees and the common people, whom they deem accursed because they know not the law.¹⁴⁴

John 8:1-12. The **scribes and Pharisees** bring a woman "caught in adultery." How did they find her, what sort of voyeurism were they up to? I surmise that the man involved was a Pharisee and they conveniently chose not to bring him also. I think that's what Jesus wrote on the ground:

“Where’s the guy?” or something to that effect. The Pharisees would have some such rule for exculpating the man involved in adultery.

John 8:12-13. The **Pharisees** assert they Jesus is bearing witness to himself because he proclaimed “I am the light of the world.” This interaction with the Pharisees runs to the end of the chapter and diverges to other topics, including Jesus’ origins.

John 9. Jesus heals a man born blind and the **Pharisees** accuse him of healing on the Sabbath. This time the healing involved “work” as they would define it, in the making of the mud with which Jesus anointed the man’s eyes. Some of the Pharisees, though, take the miracle for what it is. For a full discussion of this last and greatest of Jesus’ Sabbath healings, please see Chapter Twelve, “Sabbath Healings, Part 2.”

John 10:30-31. The **Jews** attempt to stone Jesus because of his saying, “I and the Father are one.” They take this as blasphemy, understanding neither the saying itself nor Jesus’ response. Again, John records the split perspectives among people, some convinced by his miracles and teaching that he is at least something special, if not Messiah, and others ignoring everything but the scruples of their legalism.

John 11:45-57. After the resurrection of Lazarus, more people believe in him, but the opposition stiffens, also. The **chief priests and Pharisees** gather the council, and with **Caiaphas, the High Priest** that year¹⁴⁵, begin to plot to kill Jesus. They extend their nefarious plot to include Lazarus (12:9).

John 12:18-19. The **Pharisees** lament their powerlessness in the face of so many people believing in Jesus.

Number of Gospel References to Jesus' Adversaries				
Group	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Pharisees	30	12	28	20
Scribes	23	22	15	1
Sadducees	7	1	1	0
Chief Priests	25	21	15	21
Jews	0	0	0	46 +/-

Notes

1. This table does not record positions such as officer, elder, or captain. These designations usually applied to functionaries who did their service at the behest of the groups listed.
2. Scribes don't function independently in any interaction with Jesus; they are always with the Pharisees or chief priests or someone else.
3. The references to the chief priests occur chiefly in the arrest and trial narratives. In Mark and John all 42 references are from those sections; in Matthew and Luke, 31 of 40 references are to that context, with two additional references in Matthew to prophecies of his arrest.
4. Of the 69 usages of the term "Jews" in John, about two-thirds appear in adversarial contexts, referring to various Jewish authorities. The remaining third is divided between religious descriptors, e.g., "a feast of the Jews," or denoting the Jewish community in general. A few passages are not clear if the group labeled "Jews" is indeed in an adversarial role, hence "46 +/-" in the table.
5. The term "Jews" in the synoptic gospels can refer to specific people, e.g., "elders of the Jews" (Luke 7:3), but never, as in John, to designate Jesus' adversaries.

ENDNOTES

CHAPTER TWO

- ¹ See Heb 6:4-6 and Gal 4:9-11. Paul and the Hebrews author warned their audiences of how serious a matter it was to experience the covenant of grace and then revert to law, in those instances, the law of Moses. Their experience of grace included the first-century activity of the Holy Spirit, so backsliding into law again beggared the rational mind, but also showed the power that the perceived need for rules, rituals, and tradition had within the human psyche.
- ² The oft-cited “straight and narrow” directive doesn’t occur in Scripture. People wrest it from Matthew 7:14 (KJV), which unfortunately switches the adjectives that belong to “gate” and “way.” Also, the word is “strait,” meaning difficult (as in the phrase dire straits), not “straight.” The gate (faith in Christ) is narrow, as it’s the only way to the Kingdom. The way is difficult (not narrow) through trials of faith (see meaning of the Greek word for “strait”). The teaching refers to the way of life that few would find, but has no reference to legalistic constrictions of our behavior. The ESV gives an accurate translation, or look at an interlinear text. “Straight and narrow” is not only unbiblical, it is distinctly legalistic in its tone of avoidance.
- ³ The pronoun “you” first entered Middle English as the second person plural. A few centuries later, now in the era of Early Modern English, the time of Shakespeare and the KJV, “you” was used in the singular for formality, with “thou” indicating informal or familiar address. For example, in *As You Like It*, Orlando, a minor nobleman addresses his servant Adam with “thou” while Adam in turn uses “you” and “your,” showing respect and status, when addressing Orlando (I.i.3-25). Also, in *Twelfth Night* Sir Toby Belch advises Andrew Aguecheek to insult an adversary, “Taunt him with the licence of ink. If thou ‘thou’-est him some thrice it shall not be amiss” (III.ii.42). These forms, once everyday speech for ordinary people, were already on the decline by the beginning of the seventeenth century. “You,” for instance, was in general use, yet the KJV translators opted for the older term “thou.” They made no distinction between formal and informal, using the older forms with either God or humans as substantives. Even in 1611, the KJV had a ring of majesty to it, in part from its use of outdated English. In the mid-twentieth century the Revised Standard Version (RSV) became the first English version of the Bible to employ archaisms as formal language, reserving “thou” “thine” and obsolete verb endings only with reference to God, while using standard twentieth-century pronouns and verb endings for people. Over time, “thou” shifted from ordinary to eloquent to formal-for-God only. This is how language works. Meanings change, showing that the words themselves have no inherent formality. Formal language with respect to Deity has no linguistic basis. Neither Hebrew nor Greek has a formal pronoun or special address for God. English itself has no formals such as some languages do. Content-wise, archaisms have no inherent attribution of holiness,

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respect, or formality. As a process issue, English has taken a cultural turn that the original Bible languages did not do: using special words when referring to God.

- ⁴ If and only if the person praying has actually taken the time to think about the occasion, and to pray with meaningful words selected for the appropriateness to the subject at hand. Rattling off set phrases and wandering into areas of need or thanks not germane to the occasion are not helpful for either praise or supplication.
- ⁵ He tries not to lose money, but he actually does. The parable says that the master is gone for a long time, so by burying it he will in effect lose money because of inflation. Also worth noting is that the master has no fear in allotting his capital; he does not give it all to his most competent servant, but entrusts some even to his least competent servant, still hoping and expecting that this man will appreciate and reciprocate the trust given him.

CHAPTER THREE

- ⁶ The very first narrative involving human activity is about temptation and sin. There is no record of Adam interacting with Eve prior to this, or of what they might have done in the garden, where they went, what they saw, ate, made, or wondered about.
- ⁷ For details, see David P. Levin, *The Creation Text* (Livonia, MI: The Christadelphian Tidings Publishing Company, 2011), Studies 21 and 22 (pp. 141-152).
- ⁸ Levin, pp. 221-226.
- ⁹ More on fence laws in Chapters Nine and Ten.
- ¹⁰ Levin, pp. 170-175, 227-241 (Studies 26 and 34).
- ¹¹ The often-asserted teaching that Adam and Eve had a “very good” nature and it somehow changed after they sinned is neither borne out in the Genesis text, nor does it follow our first principle teachings about sin. Their experience as human beings was of course different; they had no birth, youth, development, and all the other factors that saturate us in all kinds of sin and wrongdoing before we reach adulthood, where they commenced life as new creatures.
- ¹² English translations and versions differ as to what was “nailed to the cross”: either the written law itself, or the legal indebtedness incurred because of the written law. In either case, the phrase “nailed to the cross” implies a symbolic death of the law.
- ¹³ For example, Weymouth, NEB, Moffatt, RSV, Jerusalem Bible, RV, NASB, ESV.

CHAPTER FOUR

- ¹⁴ W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1966), p. 265.

CHAPTER FIVE

- ¹⁵ Arguments from silence are of course not the strongest, but in this instance it would seem highly unlikely that another group not mentioned in the gospels has a more significant role than the Pharisees in opposing Jesus' teaching and ministry.
- ¹⁶ "Gospels" plural is always to be read as a shorthand for "gospel records" or "gospel accounts," that is, the first books of the New Testament. It does not mean there is more than one gospel.
- ¹⁷ There are about a dozen names and titles in the gospels to identify various groups or individuals who oppose Jesus: Pharisee, Sadducee, scribe, elder, elder of the people, Jews, Herodians, scribe of the Pharisees, chief priest, high priest, ruler of the synagogue, officer [of the Temple], Levite, lawyer, and teacher of the law. The Essenes, the sect that we know the most about, do not appear in the Bible. They had already decamped to Qumran; any that are still left in Judea are evidently separatist enough to avoid any interaction with Jesus.
- ¹⁸ Acts 23:8 is the only New Testament passage that tells us anything about the Pharisees. In the dissension between the Sadducees and Pharisees at the apostle Paul's hearing before the council, Luke notes "The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all."
- ¹⁹ Ellis Rivkin, "Who were the Pharisees?" in J. Neusner, and A.J. Avery, eds., *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, part 3, v. III (Boston: Brill, 2009), p. 9.
- ²⁰ "Secular" in this context means "non-Levitical" and has no implication of "non religious," as is in modern usage.
- ²¹ *Apoth* 1:1
- ²² These scribes were first known as *soferim*, from *sofer*, "counter," because their punctilious methods included the very counting of the letters in the Bible.
- ²³ Donald Gowan, *The Bridge Between the Testaments* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1986), p. 148. "Pharisees ... have the reputation of being unrivaled experts in their country's laws." He probably based this on Josephus: "... the Pharisees, which are supposed to excel others in the accurate knowledge of the laws of their country." (Josephus, *The Life of Flavius Josephus*, sec. 38)
- ²⁴ Josephus, *Antiq.*, XVII.ii.4
- ²⁵ Gowan, p. 206: "Estimates of the number of priests and Levites in Palestine during the Roman era are very hard to make, but something like 20,000 seems to be with reason." This figure comes from Josephus: "For what I have now said is

publicly known, and supported by the testimony of the whole people, and their operations are very manifest; for although there be four courses of the priests, and every one of them have above five thousand men in them, yet do they officiate on certain days only . . .” *Against Apion*, II:8 Evidently historians think that Josephus’ number of priests includes Levites as well. Also, “There were only a few Sadducees, more than 4,000 Essenes and (at the time of Herod) 6,000 Pharisees We cannot assume that these numbers are precise, but we should accept what they imply: that relatively few Jews belonged to one of the parties and that the Pharisaic party was the largest of the three, followed by the Essenes.” (D.E Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief, 63 BCE-66CE* [Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1992], p.14.)

²⁶ Sanders, p. 26: “Among the Pharisees there were both priests and non-priests, but we do not know the percentage of each ... in the later period [time of the gospels] they were predominantly lay.”

²⁷ Josephus, *Antiq.*, XIII. x.6.

²⁸ Rivkin, p. 12.

²⁹ Sanders, p. 171: “The post-biblical evidence uniformly points to the fact that the priests (and Levites), at least a few of them were ‘scribes’ in the sense that they could read and write and that some of them were able to draw up documents and copy texts.”

³⁰ Not really the same temple; the edifice built by Ezra’s crew, headed by Zerubbabel, was greatly expanded and beautified during a ten-year remodeling project shortly before the birth of Christ, during the reign of Herod the Great. The temple of the gospels, still technically the Second Temple, is also known as the Temple of Herod or Herod’s Temple.

³¹ Daniel R. Schwartz, *Studies in the Jewish Background of Christianity* (Tubingen: Mohr, 1992), Chapter 5, “‘Scribes and Pharisees, Hypocrites: ‘Who are the ‘Scribes’ in the New Testament?’” pp. 89-101.

³² The vast amount of rabbinical tracts for the most part post-date the time of the gospels but still reflect older oral traditions.

³³ I think that the Sadducees’ denial of angels and spirits is not about their existence, which they would have to acknowledge as being mentioned in the Torah. What they are likely denying is in the area of providence. Josephus wrote that the Sadducees reject any notion of God’s activity in our lives; all that happens to us is because of our own choices.

³⁴ “The Sadducees are able to persuade none but the rich, and have not the populace obsequious to them, but the Pharisees have the multitude on their side.” Josephus, *Antiq.*, XIII.x.6.

CHAPTER SIX

- ³⁵ This number traces at least as far back as the tabulation of the great twelfth-century Jewish scholar, Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides). The first commandments predate Sinai, including the command to be fruitful and multiply in Genesis 1:28, as well as the Passover observances given in Exodus 12. About two-thirds of the total are in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, and many of them are for priests and Levites.
- ³⁶ In this context the prophets begin with Joshua.
- ³⁷ Jacob Neusner, *From Testament to Torah: An Introduction to Judaism in Its Formative Age* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1988), pp. 20-21. Neusner undoubtedly based this on *Avoth* 1:1
- ³⁸ Psalm 119 comprises 176 variations of thoughts expressing the Psalmists delight in God's commandments. Not a single one of these mentions any particular law or commandment. The psalm registers affection for a godly life, not adherence to legalistic scruples.
- ³⁹ Generally accepted dates for these events can vary a year, thus 721 B.C. or 587 B.C. might be seen as the dates of captivities. The fall of Nineveh in about 611 B.C. to the Babylonians and Medes could also be seen as the end of Assyria. Probably also the exiles took place over several years, as did the returns.
- ⁴⁰ Thus the origins of the Samaritans and the Idumeans, the latter of whom spawned the Herodian line.
- ⁴¹ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, vol. 1* (London: Longmans, Green & Co. 1887), pp. 7-16.
- ⁴² *Torah* usually refers to the Five Books of Moses, or a scroll containing those writings. It can also mean "law" in general, encompassing all of Jewish laws, oral and written. The word itself means "teaching," thus common phrases such as "the teaching of torah" are redundant. Likewise, one would not say "the law according to *torah*."

CHAPTER SEVEN

- ⁴³ Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah, 3rd ed.* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), pp.103-4. Babylonians also called the land of the returned exiles the Province of Yehud. The name "Palestine" derives ultimately from "Philistia" and forms of that name are very old, but the first use of Palestine is by Herodotus 450 B.C.
- ⁴⁴ The Hasmonean king and high priest Alexander Janneus who ruled from 103 B.C. to 76 B.C. was continually engaged in foreign wars, and had a civil war on his hands due to his harsh treatment of the Pharisees. In one incident, he crucified 800 men "as he was feasting with his concubines, in the sight of all the city, ... and while they were yet alive murdered their families in front of them." (Josephus, *Antiq.*, XII.xiv:2)

- ⁴⁵ Cohen, p.105: “even after the Roman conquest of 63 BCE, the consequent loss of most of its civil jurisdiction, and the elevation of social nobodies to the office by Herod and the Romans, the high priesthood still enjoyed prestige and power through the first century of our era.” This prestige and power was good as long as they remained loyal to the Roman government, which apparently was the norm.
- ⁴⁶ “Seleucid Kings,” *Livius* article. <https://www.livius.org/articles/dynasty/seleucids/seleucid-kings/#Table%20of%20kings>, accessed 02 May 2020.
- ⁴⁷ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XII.v.2-4. This occurred in “hundred and forty-third year of the Kingdom of the Seleucidae” (168 B.C.).
- ⁴⁸ A thousand perished in a massacre when they refused to defend themselves on the Sabbath. Mattathias, father of Judas Maccabee, taught that the people should defend themselves on the Sabbath, lest they perish entirely. They did so, but only to protect their religious freedom, not to acquire political independence. 1 Macc 2:30-40; (Josephus, *Antiq.* XII. vi.2)
- ⁴⁹ *Hasidim* here does not refer to the modern-day Orthodox Jews; these historical *hasidim* are usually referred to by the Anglicized form, *Hasideans*.
- ⁵⁰ 1 Macc 2:42, 1 Macc 7:13; 2 Macc 14:6
- ⁵¹ Gowan, p.147: “The Pharisees appear to have been hasidim who were willing to accept the leadership of Hasmoneans, and who, because of their high standards and reputation for faithfulness to the law developed naturally as a group providing guidance to a regime founded on defense of the faith.”
- ⁵² John Kampen, *The Hasideans and the Origin of the Pharisaism* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), pp.33-40. Summarizing earlier writings of Zechariah Frankel, “The Pharisees, who called themselves *Haberym*, arose out of these *Essenes-Hasydym* only later in opposition to the *Seduquym*” [Sadducees].
- ⁵³ See Kampen note, above.
- ⁵⁴ *Antiq.* XIII.v.9
- ⁵⁵ Anthony J. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadduces in Palestinian Society*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), p.221. “No Jewish group refers to itself as Pharisees. The authors of rabbinic literature refer to themselves and their forebears as sages ... and after the destruction of the Temple, they used the title ‘rabbi’ for ‘sages.’” Gowan, p. 146: “they probably called themselves *haberim*, “neighbors” or “companions,” a term which in rabbinic writings always means those who strictly observe the law, especially in regard to ritual cleanliness.”
- ⁵⁶ Despite all of the political and military turmoil during the roughly four centuries of inter-testamental times, the Temple more or less functioned continuously, and in the same fashion, same protocols, same rotations of the Levites, sacrifices, incense offerings, and the works. Other than the edifice itself, what went on in the Temple didn’t change much at all, so that the New Testament temple function was really an Old Testament holdover.

ENDNOTES

- ⁵⁷ Recent scholarship has questioned to what extent, and where, Aramaic was spoken, and if Hebrew was used more widely than previously accepted. <https://history.stackexchange.com/questions/1299/when-did-the-hebrews-stop-speaking-hebrew-and-start-speaking-aramaic>. Accessed 02 May 2020.
- ⁵⁸ Gowan, p.14.
- ⁵⁹ “Written law” means the Torah, or Five Books of Moses. By this time in history, some of the oral tradition had been written down, but to avoid confusion, it is always referred to as the oral law or oral tradition/s.
- ⁶⁰ Sanhedrin, xi.3
- ⁶¹ Bob Becking, “Law as Expression of Religion (Ezra 7-10)” in R. Albert and B. Becking, eds., *Yahwism after the Exile* (Aasen, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Van Gorcum, 2003), p. 18.
- ⁶² Neusner, prologue, xvi.

CHAPTER EIGHT

- ⁶³ Hugo Odeberg, *Pharisaism and Christianity*, translated by J.M. Moe (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964).
- ⁶⁴ One prayer went: “Praise be to you, Lord our God, who has not created me to be a woman.” This was supposed to be a prayer of genuine thanksgiving, not a statement of some inherent personal merit. Likewise, the Pharisee in Luke 18 may have been giving God genuine thanks that he was created to be a law observant Pharisee, but he missed the point that he too was a sinner, and didn’t therefore know his standing before God.
- ⁶⁵ Also cited as 2:13 in some editions.
- ⁶⁶ *Shabbat* 31a:6. Cited from <https://www.sefaria.org/Shabbat.31a.6?lang=bi>. Boldface in web version. Accessed 21 June 2022.
- ⁶⁷ It may have been the case that the Pharisaic opponents of Jesus were from the school of Shammai, the stricter of the two main schools of Judaism in the gospel era. “The polemics with the Pharisees, the harsh ‘woes’ addressed to their teachers were, in fact, directed at the zealous Pharisees, the disciples of Shammai’s academy.” Asher Finkel, *The Pharisees and the Teacher of Nazareth* (Leiden: Brill, 1964), p. 134. This may be the case, but the gospel writers make no distinction as to which Pharisees Jesus reproved. Neither does Josephus, nor other historians I have consulted.
- ⁶⁸ The law did not entirely ignore attitude or intent—the cities of refuge system being the prime example. The law distinguished between unintentionally caused death, such as one’s axe head flying off and striking someone (Deut 19:5) and planned murder (v. 11). Exodus 21:28-29 contrasts the case of an ox goring someone to death versus an ox that has been known to be prone to gore people and its owner already warned. In the former case the ox’s owner is innocent; in

the latter case, the ox's owner is sentenced to death. God instructs Moses to accept offerings to build the tabernacle and its furnishings from "whoever is of a generous heart" (Exod 35:3). In Deuteronomy, Moses twice exhorts the Israelites to love God with all their heart and soul (6:5, 10:12). More examples could be added, but the main point to remember is that whatever instructions or encouragement was given regarding attitude, intent, or cognitive position, the behavior or ritual is all that could be observed and verified, and therefore would default to being the only valid measure. The priests did not, and could not, evaluate an offerer's mindset, eventually only the behavior would count.

⁶⁹ σκῦβαλα (*skubala*) has come down to us in English as a medical term *scybala*, "a hardened fecal mass."

⁷⁰ Cohen, p. 127, "Christianity is a creedal religion ... Judaism, however, was not (and in large measure, is not) a creedal religion. The cutting edge of ancient Jewish sectarianism was not theology but law."

⁷¹ Following is an excerpt from "Regulations concerning the removal of leaven from the house on the eve of Passover and the exact time when this must be accomplished." This is a series of comments and opinions of rabbis based on the regulations of the Talmudic tractate *Pesachim* chapter 1. Rabha said: "If a mouse entered a house with some *Chometz* [leaven] in its mouth and the man going in after it poured crumbs on the floor, he must make another search; because as a usual thing a mouse leaves no crumbs behind; but if a child entered and he finds crumbs when entering after the child, he need not make another, for usually a child leaves crumbs behind it." Rabha propounded a question: "If a mouse entered a house and another came out of the same house and both had pieces of *Chometz* in their mouths, shall we presume that it was the same mouse in both cases or not? If it should be said, that it is the same, how is it if the mouse entering was black and the other was white, shall we assume that one took the piece of bread away from the other or that there were two separate pieces of bread? If you will say that one mouse would not take anything away from another, how would it be if a mouse entered with the piece of bread and a cat came out with a piece of bread? If we presume that the piece of bread is the same, would the cat not have held the mouse in its mouth also? If then, you say, that the piece of bread was a different piece, how would it be if the cat came out with the mouse and the piece of bread in its mouth? Shall we say that it is the same piece of bread and, the mouse having dropped it through fright, the cat picked it up, or that were it the same piece of bread the mouse would have had it in its mouth?" This question is not decided. Cited from <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/tractate-pesachim-chapter-1>, accessed 11 April 2020.

⁷² Lionel Blue, *To Heaven, with Scribes and Pharisees* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 19.

⁷³ Blue, p. 91.

⁷⁴ Lavinia and Dan Cohn-Sherbock, *A Short Introduction to Judaism* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1997), p. 19.

CHAPTER NINE

- ⁷⁵ Adin Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), p. 189.
- ⁷⁶ Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on Exodus*, English edition, (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), p. 305.
- ⁷⁷ Steinsaltz, p. 189.
- ⁷⁸ Steinsaltz, p. 12.
- ⁷⁹ Steinsaltz, p. 12.
- ⁸⁰ Philip Blackman, ed. *Mishnayoth* (New York: Judaica Press, 1964), vol. 4, p. 489.
- ⁸¹ Throughout this book I refer to the vanity of rules and rule-keeping in the theological sense only. They have no value in attaining righteousness. That does not imply that there is no value in, say, keeping kosher. Many people find that a rigorous set of laws and rituals gives them a sense of self, belonging to a community, a place in history, and other benefits. The focus here concerns the theological aspects of rules, and those instances where adherence to a multiplicity of rules actually hinders a person's ability to render service to God.
- ⁸² Cohn-Sherbock, p. 119.
- ⁸³ Steinsaltz, p. 189.

CHAPTER TEN

- ⁸⁴ Sabbath-keeping depends on defining "work"; this opens a vast arena for defining exactly what does or does not constitute "work." Also, the very nature of Sabbath-keeping is *avoidance*, which perfectly accords with the legalist paradigm.
- ⁸⁵ Circumcision took precedence over the Sabbath (John 7:22-23); a male child born eight days before the Sabbath would be circumcised on the Sabbath, even though that would otherwise mean "work." See also Matt 12:5-8 and Num 28:9-10.
- ⁸⁶ Steinsaltz, p. 115
- ⁸⁷ *Shabbat* 7.2
- ⁸⁸ See: <https://www.star-k.org/articles/articles/kosher-appliances/483/the-sabbath-mode/> This article addresses some of the main considerations of Sabbath keeping with respect to household appliances. Star-K is a kosher certification organization.
- ⁸⁹ Abraham Abrahams, *A Comprehensive Guide to Medical Halachah* (Spring Valley, NY: Feldheim Publishers 1990), 248 p. This book is filled with examples. Medical *halachah* is another domain that requires frequent updating and new rulings due to technological developments.
- ⁹⁰ *Mishnah* refers both to the entire work, *The Mishnah* (capitalized) and to each individual verse, a *mishnah*, meaning, a ruling or teaching point. The plural, *Mishnayoth* (capitalized), refers to the entire collection. In lower case, it would refer to more than one *mishnah*; e.g., six *mishnayoth* about ritual cleansing.

⁹¹ Edersheim, vol. 2, p. 778

⁹² Edersheim, vol. 2, p. 779

CHAPTER ELEVEN

⁹³ Marshall's *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* translates the verb "watched carefully."

⁹⁴ The misconception of an angry Jesus overturning the tables of the moneychangers in the Temple comes to us only from artists' drawings. None of the gospels record or even imply that he was angry.

CHAPTER TWELVE

⁹⁵ Edersheim, vol. II, pp. 223, 303. Perea lay east of the Jordan, covering roughly the area occupied by the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

⁹⁶ A Talmudic reference, in Shabbat 53b (remember, this compilation came a few centuries A.D. and any specific ruling may or may not have been in place in the first century) forbids all healing on the basis that one might come to grind medicinal herbs, a clear violation of the Sabbath.

⁹⁷ Alfred Marshall's *Interlinear Greek English New Testament* renders "ought" as "behave," as in "six days there are on which it behoves to work," and "this woman ... behaved it not to be loosened from [this] bond on the day of the Sabbath?"

⁹⁸ Edersheim, vol. II, p.61.

⁹⁹ Jesus did ask Bartimaeus "What do you want me to do for you?" but this was after Bartimaeus had already called for Jesus to come have mercy on him (Mark 10:46-52; Mt. 20:29-34; Luke 18:35-43).

¹⁰⁰ The narrative episodes in John's gospel all follow a general pattern that starts with a miracle or some ordinary interaction, and then escalates to the matter of belief in Jesus as Messiah and the judgment to come.

¹⁰¹ See the entry for John 1:19-24 on p. 218 for an explanation of John's use of the term "Jews."

¹⁰² Edersheim, vol. I, p. 466.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

¹⁰³ Edersheim, vol. II, pp. 6-7. "Again, from the place which the narrative occupies in the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark, as well as from certain internal evidence, it seems difficult to doubt, that the reproof of the Pharisees and Scribes on the subject of 'the unwashed hands,' was not administered immediately after the miraculous feeding and the night of miracles."

¹⁰⁴ Edersheim, vol. II, p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ Edersheim, vol. II, pp.17-22.

ENDNOTES

¹⁰⁶ See Chapter Sixteen, “A New Wineskin,” for a discussion of the relationship between thinking and behavior.

¹⁰⁷ In Isaiah, it seems that blind leaders, at least some of them, will see God’s work among the Gentiles and will come to see their errors.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

¹⁰⁸ Paul’s defensive words here imply that he had been accused of these motives.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

¹⁰⁹ Steinsaltz, p. 59.

¹¹⁰ That might be implied in 2 Cor 5:16, though that statement only says that at one time Paul regarded Jesus as a mere man. In any case, whether it was through personal encounter or by hearing what others said about Jesus, he clearly was not receptive to the teaching of the New Covenant. It was not time for him—yet.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

¹¹¹ Many laws did distinguish violations done by accident from those done by carelessness and/or those committed with actual intent to harm someone. If your bull gored someone once that was one thing, but if you kept a bull that repeatedly gored people, that was a worse crime. Also, the cities of refuge allowed those who committed unintentional manslaughter a place of safety; this would not be the case in premeditated murder. Any legal case involving these laws would be judged by necessarily imperfect humans.

¹¹² The nine virtues of the Fruit of the Spirit belong here. You can see the behaviors that emanate from these, but never make any judgments as to the ultimate source of the behavior.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

¹¹³ Robert Dilts, an important contributor to the field of Neuro-Linguistic Programming, created the Logical Levels model about 50 years ago based on the theoretical work of Gregory Bateson. Bateson, in turn, used some ideas from mathematics and philosophy proposed by Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell. The history of Logical Levels itself is an interesting example of how an idea from one area of intellectual pursuit can influence another field conceptually far distant. In this case, the mathematical and logical question of whether or not a set can be a member of itself ultimately led to a tool that is widely used by mental health therapists.

¹¹⁴ Dilts’s original Logical Levels model, called this level Capability. I prefer to use Knowledge (or Information) because knowledge is what gives us capability.

¹¹⁵ Epictetus, *Discourses*, book III, ch. 23. Italics added for emphasis. The Stoics are one of two schools of Greek philosophy mentioned in the New Testament; the Epicureans are the other. Paul encountered both of them in the Areopagus as

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recorded in Acts 17: 18-19. Stoic teachings have a lot to say about personal integrity, being responsible for your own thoughts and actions regardless of circumstances, and being at peace with yourself and others despite any challenges. The emphasis on being the right kind of person is what gives resilience to our character to function in a proper manner in a world full of problems, pains, obstacles, unfairness, and the like. The Stoics recognized the nature of the world—don't look for happiness or a good life from circumstances, look for it within, where you always have control.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

¹¹⁶ Remember, in this context “behavior” is not understood to mean good or bad behavior in the sense of “behave yourself.” Here, behavior refers to our actions, what we do, what is seen and measurable.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

¹¹⁷ Paul does direct the Corinthians to contribute some each week so that when he arrives the collection will be already be in hand. This seems more of an expedient for Paul than an impingement on their free choice.

CHAPTER TWENTY

¹¹⁸ Chapter Twenty-Two covers this concept, commonly known as “Spiritual Growth.”

¹¹⁹ A handful of passages that seem to say that God gives us whatever we want are actually about forgiveness of sins. God will forgive any sin that we commit. Jesus' statement as recorded in Mark is plainly in the context of forgiveness: Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. Mark 11:24-25. The conjunctive “and” at the beginning of v. 25 indicates a direct connection between the two statements. The phrase “whenever you stand praying” therefore to be understood as “whenever you stand praying for forgiveness for your trespasses.” Thus, the “whatever you ask in prayer is “whatever sins you ask to be forgiven.” This is the same message as in the Lord's Prayer (Mt. 6:14-15)—God forgives whatsoever we ask, provided we also grant the same to those who cause us harm—whatever it might be. Another passage that bears directly on this subject is Paul preaching in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia. He tells the audience, “through this man [Jesus] forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him *everyone* who believes is freed from *everything* which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. Italics emphasize the universality of forgiveness.

¹²⁰ Passages such as 1 Pet 4:5, Rom 14:12, and Heb 4:13 speak of having to “give account” (λόγος) at the judgment. However, it is clear from the contexts that “giving account” does not refer to a lengthy listing of deeds, good or bad, but rather a weighing of the heart.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

- ¹²¹ The references to Job in Ezekiel and James are equivocal on this point; they refer to his character, which is demonstrated in either case.
- ¹²² Attempting to console the grieving with theological clichés is worse than silence. No, you don’t need to say something. Just be there and share the person’s grief. What do statements like “God won’t give you more than you can handle,” or “It will all work for good in the end” and dozens of other banalities really sound like to a bereaved person? If you’ve been there, you know. No one is going to thank you for reminding them it’s all in God’s plan, as if they would slap their forehead and say, “Oh, thank you. I forgot that. Yes, it is God’s plan. My grief is greatly alleviated now!” Theology, especially the trite kind that tends to show up at such occasions, has no place in the support of those who have suffered loss.
- ¹²³ Jesus’ disciples (at least some of them, at some time) held the same belief, which is why the gospels record their “exceeding astonishment” at Jesus’ teaching about the difficulty of a rich man entering the Kingdom (Mark 10:23-26). If a rich man, obviously blessed for his piety, could hardly enter the Kingdom, who could?
- ¹²⁴ See also 2 Chron 32:1. Immediately after Hezekiah’s reforms, God brought the Assyrians against Judah and smote the king with grave illness.
- ¹²⁵ Job’s friends do address the therapeutic power of confession and forgiveness, but they have a legalistic formulation of how it works. Bildad (8:5-6) and Eliphaz (22:21-28) assert that if Job will confess his wrongdoings, God will restore his fortunes—a necessary consequence. You can call this exact retribution in reverse. This formulation excludes grace being a gift from God.
- ¹²⁶ For an exploration of Job’s conversion from belief in a legalistic God to an appreciation of the Creator’s infinite greatness, mercy and love, see: Ethel Archard, *Job’s Quest* (The Christadelphian Tidings, 2022). Available from: tidings.org/books/jobs-quest.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

- ¹²⁷ Robert Roberts, *The Bible Companion* (Birmingham: Atheneum 1870).
- ¹²⁸ The idea of reading the Bible for the first time even after years of reading it depends both on spiritual maturity as well as Bible reading skills. Learning about historical context, literary structures, Bible patterns, cultural history, geography of the Bible lands, and original languages will open many new insights into familiar texts. Like an expert in any field of study, when you know what you’re looking at, you see features that are hidden to the untrained eye, even though often in plain sight!

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

¹²⁹ An example of comparison would be: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up” (John 3:14). Here, Jesus makes the comparison between his atoning sacrifice and the incident of the bronze serpent recorded in Numbers.

¹³⁰ It is customary to refer to the anonymous person who wrote this epistle as “the writer to the Hebrews.” However, the epistle has clues that it is a transcript of what was originally an address. The “speaker to the Hebrews” might be more accurate, but for convention’s sake I retain the identification “writer to the Hebrews,” who in either case remains unknown.

¹³¹ Chapter Eighteen explores this concept in depth.

¹³² In this list “more excellent” (Heb 1:4 and 8:6) translates διαφώς (*diaphoros*), while “better” translates κρείττων (*kreitton*).

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

¹³³ We are not talking about nutritional content, although a healthy-minded person should value themselves enough to take care of their physical self through nutrition, exercise, and proper rest and relaxation methods to manage stress.

¹³⁴ The list roughly corresponds to the nefarious deeds King David committed in the affair with Bathsheba. Although he would suffer the consequences for the remainder of his life, he found forgiveness because he repented.

¹³⁵ Some occupations, such as military and law enforcement, would clearly put a believer in a compromised position regarding keeping the commandments of Christ or any other measure of spiritual living.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

¹³⁶ Victor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, revised version (New York: Washington Square Press, 1984), pp. 155-156.

¹³⁷ Either because of fear of ritual defilement or determination that the beaten man was “not neighbor.” Less likely, the avoidance of the priest and Levite was a caricature to highlight scruples interfering with being compassionate. In any event, we presume that the priest and Levite were not heartless, for they would have assumed that another traveler would soon come to the man’s aid. Experiments in social psychology and real-life incidents teach us that people will avoid “getting involved” if they know or think that someone else will come to a person’s aid.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

¹³⁸ Ecclesial constitutions, ecclesial guide, organizational charters, and the like.

¹³⁹ Witness the famous remark of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, “Insanity in individuals is something rare, but in groups, parties, nations and epochs, it is the rule.”

GOSPEL REFERENCES

- ¹⁴⁰ It is possible, if not likely, that they intended to kill Jesus on the spot, not arrest him and take him to a trial. The plot was always to kill Jesus (e.g., Matt 12:14, 26:4. Something “went wrong” during the apprehension scene—perhaps Peter’s defense, or when they all fell backwards (John 18:6) at Jesus declaration “I am he,” and at that point they lost heart and went to plan B. However, the trial and crucifixion were necessary in God’s purpose.
- ¹⁴¹ This underscores the political office that the high priesthood had become. Annas had been put in office in A.D. 6 and was removed nine years later. Five of his sons and Caiaphas, his son-in-law, succeeded him, but Annas himself still retained enough power for John to refer to him as high priest (18:13,19) and also use the same title for Caiaphas, who was then the official high priest.
- ¹⁴² In one of the worst tactical blunders in the history of anything, the Pharisees and chief priests totally misread the situation and end up essentially proving the resurrection by this one act alone. Had they not set the guard, then no one would have been there early Sunday morning, and when the empty tomb was discovered, they could have said that the disciples came by night and took the body away. Now, that story could have no credence whatsoever. The Pharisees failed to realize that the disciples had no inkling of a resurrection (Luke 9:45, 18:34); moreover, they were doubtless fearful for their own lives and were in hiding. That the guards were taken seriously is evident by the authorities’ absurd attempt to make the thing go away.
- ¹⁴³ A similar question arises in Matt 19:16-22 (Mark 10:17-22, Luke 18:18-23). I omitted this incident in the list because the questioner is identified only as “a man” in Matthew and Mark and “a ruler” in Luke. Also, it is not an act of opposition or contention, but apparently a genuine, if misguided, question.
- ¹⁴⁴ John 7:45-49 supports the idea the “separation” inherent in the name “Pharisee” was a separation from the common people, or “people of the land,” as they called them, a derogatory term referring to those uneducated in the Torah and the oral laws.
- ¹⁴⁵ The High Priest at this time was an appointee of the Herodian overlords, not a successor of lineage who held the position for life.

