PARALLEL GUIDE 27
The Letter of Paul to the Romans, Part II

Summary

This chapter continues the study of Paul's letter to the Romans. The major themes of this section are reconciliation in Christ, "what it means to live under grace," faith and belief, and salvation.

Learning Objectives

• Read Paul's letter to the Romans, chapters 5-11

• Explore what it means to live under the Law

• Explore what it means to live under grace

Assignment to Deepen Your Understanding

1. What is the relationship of the good news of the gospel and the demands of the Law in your experience?

2. Think of times when you believe the Law should apply with vigor. Then think of times when grace should abound and the Law should be tempered. How do you reconcile these?

Preparing for Your Seminar

The Law calls for justice and equity—the same treatment for everyone. The gospel calls for love. Some need more than others. How, in our culture, can we reconcile the rule of Law and the grace of the love of God? What are some modern applications of the tension between the need to apply justice equally to all and the demands of those who have special needs?

Additional Sources

For works cited in the text and bibliography for further reading, see Parallel Guide for Chapter Twenty-eight.

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Chapter 27
THE LETTER OF PAUL TO THE ROMANS, PART II

Second Part: Demonstration and Defense (5:1-11:36)—
Peace With God Through Christ

Paul presents a dissuasion, arguing against dependence on anything save God's justice and grace—manifested in the cross of Jesus Christ and witnessed to in the Law. In particular, he argues against dependence on the Law itself. Now he must argue for something. He must demonstrate what he calls "my gospel," and in doing so he must defend it against certain difficulties that have already been raised—namely, the suggestion that his gospel militates against the moral life (3:5-8) and that it implies God is no longer faithful to the promises (3:3).

Reconciliation in Christ 5:1-11

The immediate result of Christ's work is, he says, that we have peace with God (5:1). "Peace" in Hebrew understanding is wholeness and harmony: fundamentally, then, we are whole in our relationship with God, and into this context the pain of our lives now fits (5:2-5). Paul sees even suffering associated with rejoicing, not because he is a masochist but because he sees suffering as a way of association with Christ who also suffered (cf. 8:17). Suffering so accepted "produces endurance" (5:3)—the sign of true self-control. Our present love of God, itself the mark of the Spirit, is the pledge that our salvation will one day be complete. The outpouring of the Spirit is the sign that the "last days" have begun (5:1-5; cf. e.g., Joel 2:28-32); already God is renewing the face of the earth.

In connection with verses 5:1-5, we find an example in the Mishnah of how close Paul remains in many ways to rabbinic patterns of thought. After a passage on afflictions and griefs that will be associated with the coming of the Messiah, Rabbi Phineas ben Jair (ca. 165-200) describes the qualities of character that spring from devotion to "our Father in heaven" in this distress. He concludes: "Fear of sin leads to piety, and piety leads to the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit leads to the resurrection of the dead, and the resurrection of the dead comes through Elijah of blessed memory" (m. Sota 9.15). Note the pattern of thought: affliction endured in the divine fellowship leads to growth of character, which leads to the hope that is affirmed by God's Spirit. The difference is, however, that for Paul the "first fruits" of the Resurrection are already here, in the Resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:20).

Our love for God is also the sign of our response to Christ's cross, for we see that "while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" (5:6). In these and the following verses Paul once more states the centrality of the death of Jesus. We are "justified by Christ's blood"—here are the metaphors of the Temple and the courtroom again (cf. 3:25)—and we are "reconciled to God through the death of his Son"—a metaphor of the family or perhaps of a lovers' quarrel. Note that it is we who needed to be reconciled to God, not God who needed to be reconciled to us (cf. 2 Cor. 5:19). Being "reconciled to God" by Christ's death, we shall "be saved by his life" (5:10). The contrast may be only another rhetorical flourish. Perhaps Paul

also means to imply that it is in the death of Jesus that God is supremely shown to be "God with us." In that death God's love is supremely manifested to us, and the power of this showing of divine love is such that it breaks our hearts and reconciles us to God, rebellious children that we are. The living, sovereign Christ draws us on to new vision, to our sanctification, and to that moment when we shall find wholeness and so finally "be saved."

Life in Adam and Life in Christ 5:12-21

The comparison of life in Adam and life in Christ involves the redemption of our whole history. For the nature of this history Paul once more refers us to the story of Adam (5:12; cf. 1:19-32). By this he assumes the ideas about "solidarity" that we have already mentioned.

At verses 5:13-14 Paul digresses to discuss the matter of those who sinned before the giving of the Law. Death reigns even over them, for sin is not a matter of God's arbitrary rules but of our very nature as God has made us.

"But the free gift is not like the trespass" (5:15). There follows a series of parallels drawn between life lived "in [solidarity with] Adam" and life "in [solidarity with] Christ." The cumulative effect of these is to emphasize that the human disaster represented in Adam is overwhelmed and redeemed by the abounding gift of God in the obedience of Jesus Christ: "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (5:20).

Defense (1): Does the Gospel Undermine the Commandment?

Does this then mean that we persist in sin so as to show God's glory—in order, perhaps, "that grace may abound" (6:1)? Paul has brought himself back to the point raised in verses 3:5-7, and he deals with it more fully. His reaction is firm: "By no means!" His objection is bound up with the idea of solidarity. To be baptised is to be "in Christ," to be identified with Christ. How then can we act against the one with whom we are identified (6:2-11)?

The Gospel and Obeying God's Commands 6:1-23

Put another way, it is a question of choosing whom or what will govern us: sin or God? The passage 6:12-19 assumes the rabbinic understanding that "redemption" does not mean deliverance to a state of abstract freedom but rather a "change of masters." "A section of the [Passover] Haggadah . . . begins thus: 'Originally our fathers were slaves of strange slavery' (or 'worshippers of strange worship'—the technical designation of idolaters), 'but now God hath brought us near to his slavery'" (Daube 1956, 281). For the rabbis there could be no question. "Slavery to God" means "keeping the commandment." For those who took the view presented in verses 6:1 and 6:15, it might mean the opposite. Paul is anxious to disassociate himself and the church from such a notion, and so he goes farther than the rabbis and uses an expression they did not use. The Christian is to be not merely a "slave to God" (6:22) but a "slave to righteousness" (6:19).

The Gospel and the Law 7:1-8:39

Paul returns to his main theme: What does it mean to live under grace? Death, he points out—any death—makes a difference to the position of those involved in it. He appeals to the teaching of Torah on marriage as an example of this (7:1-4). The death of a spouse changes the status of the spouse who survives; similarly, the death

of Christ changes the status of those who are Christ's in regard to the Law (7:4-6). (Paul's application of his example is actually slightly confused, but his overall meaning is plain.)

Again the imaginary student raises a hand: "What then should we say? That the law is sin?" (7:7a) Is Paul saying that the entire conception of Torah, the whole Sinai covenant, was in fact a mistake, a deviation from the will of God? "By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin" (7:7b). Who is the "I" in this statement? Is it Paul himself? Not according to those who studied the text in antiquity, notably Origen. Paul was here using the rhetorical technique commonly referred to in Greek as prosopopeia, or "speech in the character of another." Sometimes, as the orator Quintilian pointed out, the character to be presented was identified; sometimes the character was introduced without identification by a phrase such as "at this point someone will interpose"; and sometimes, as in Romans 7:7b-25, the speech was simply inserted "without mentioning the speaker at all" (Institutio Oratoria, 9.2.37). The element of dramatization involved was to be brought out by a change of tone by whoever was appointed to read the letter aloud or deliver the speech—a technique so common, incidentally, that Quintilian, in his advice about reading, warned against excess of it.

Who, then, is the "I" in Romans 7:7c? Some suggest that it is Adam. Since, however, the entire subject of this section is the Law given at Sinai, and since Paul is about to quote explicitly from the Sinai covenant, the sense of the passage appears in every way to demand that the "I" has to be "a Jew," or "one living under the Law"—which, incidentally, will include something of Paul's own history. Since, however, it was the entire history of Israel, and the giving of the Law within that history, that was called into question by the last question ("Is the Law sin?"), it is perhaps best if we take even "a Jew" in its fullest possible sense: it is

almost as if it were “Israel” itself, God’s own people, that stands before us in the “I.”

“Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet’ (Greek: epithymēseis; see LXX Exod. 20:17; Deut. 5:21; cf. Rom. 13:9). But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness (epithymia)” (7:7b-8a).

Enslavement to “desire”—epithymia—was precisely, in Jewish eyes (including Paul’s), what went with apostasy and idolatry—in other words, it was typical of Gentiles (see Chapter Twenty-six, and 1:24-32). According to Jewish apologists such as Josephus, Philo, and the author of 4 Maccabees (possibly Paul’s exact contemporary), the Jews’ possession of the Law was precisely what made them superior in this respect—that is, better able to control their desires and so achieve the “self-control” that was the ancient ideal. This is exactly what Paul thinks is not the case. There is obvious irony in his choice of “You shall not covet . . .” as representative of that Law, and even more in his claim that, far from enabling Israel to achieve “self-control,” possession of the Law actually worked against it.

In the presence of Law the nature of sin itself is changed. “Apart from the law sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law”—from Adam to Moses sin was not reckoned—“but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me” (7:8b-10). The Law given to Israel promised life (see Deut. 6:24); and undoubtedly, just as Moses had known it would, it had proven to be death (Deut. 31:29; cf. vv. 16-21).

For sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good. Did what is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. (7:11-13) As Paul said, “Law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied” (5:20). Israel’s sin before Sinai might be described as unwitting; after Sinai Israel knew, and henceforth sin was essentially rebellion, “sin with a high hand,” for which the Law could offer no atonement (Num. 15:30).

Paul’s use here of the language of external power creating psychological and moral states is typical of the soliloquies of prosopopeia and of the tragic monologue. Doubtless, Greek polytheism facilitated such a way of expressing the human dilemma of conflicting goods and obligations. Nonetheless, in thus speaking of sin as a “power” governing our actions and inspiring conduct, Paul is also incorporating a tendency that may be observed in post-biblical Judaism, notably in the Dead Sea Scrolls (for example, in the treatment of the “Spirit of Falsehood” in the Rule of the Community [1 QS 4]).

Paul stresses that in this case it is sin, not the Law, that causes the problem. “For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin” (7:14). Our reaction to the Law is like that of sick people who are made sicker by good food: there is nothing wrong with the food, and the fact that they are made worse by it merely indicates the seriousness of their condition. Nevertheless, good food in itself cannot be their road to health; so, according to Paul, the Law in itself can provide no road to self-control. On the contrary,

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good (or “noble,” Greek: kalos—that is, reflecting the divine beauty, order, and serenity). But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right (or “noble,” to kalon), but I cannot do it. (7:15-18)

This section would immediately have resonated with any among Paul's audience, Jew or Gentile, who had the slightest acquaintance with the Hellenistic educational tradition and, in particular, its attitude to akrasia ("lack of self-mastery," the opposite of "self-control"). Debate in the philosophical schools often focused on whether choice of wrong action resulted in the last analysis from misunderstanding (in other

words, if one was better informed and better educated, one would act with more self-control, as Epictetus taught), or whether wrong actions resulted from the defeat of reason in a battle that is waged in the human soul among the distinct powers of reason, appetite, and emotion (the Platonic and popular view). Paul's hearers would have heard a resonance between Paul's expressions and very probably they were intended to hear it. The substance of Paul's discourse remains rooted in the entirely Jewish question that he is considering—the relation of those under grace to the Law. Possession of the Law—the Jewish equivalent of Hellenistic "education"—will not, Paul says, of itself save us from enslavement to our "desire." On the contrary, sin turns the holy, just, and good Law into its opposite—a Law of sin:

For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good (Greek: to kalon), evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? (7:19-24a)

The final declaration—"Wretched man that I am!"—is like a parody of the way tragic heroes and heroines speak in Greek drama. Until this point the soliloquy uttered by personified Israel has been entirely, so to speak, "pre-Christian," lacking, as has often been pointed out, any mention of Christ or the Holy Spirit. Paul steps outside his tragic model, and "Israel" itself declares the solution to the dilemma. It is not some facile "do-it-yourself" solution, but God's solution. "Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (7:24b-25a) "Jesus Christ is the new human being, standing beyond all piety, beyond all human possibility . . . . He is the one who has passed from death to life. . . . Thanks be to God: through Jesus Christ our Lord I am not the wretch that I am" (Barth 1933, 269).

"Israel's" soliloquy over, Paul returns to his own voice. The first principle of the life of grace, he says, is "no condemnation." As the little old repair shops used to say, "Nothing is broken beyond repair." "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" has freed those who are "in Christ" from the "law of sin and of death" (8:1-2). It is not a matter of two different laws, but of the one Law understood rightly or wrongly. Understood rightly, as a witness to the faithfulness of God in Jesus Christ (cf. 3:21), the Law is a "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." Understood wrongly, as if it could in itself be a way to wholeness and self-mastery, it becomes simply a message of despair, a "law of sin and death"—not, of course, because of any flaw in the Law, but because of human weakness and sinfulness (8:3a).

The truth is that God has now sent "his own Son" into the very territory of sin, and by the grace of his presence there has pronounced a verdict against sin. Nothing is broken beyond repair. The purpose and result of this sending is that the fundamental demand of Torah, the demand broken by humankind from the beginning (1:19-23)—to confess God as God—can now be fulfilled in all of us, Jew and Gentile, male and female. All are now able to live a life not bound to the merely human level of things but filled with the divine power and dynamic (8:4).

One important distinction in human life now becomes apparent. This is the distinction between life lived on a merely human level ("according to the flesh") and life lived in openness to God's dynamic ("according to the

Spirit"; cf. John 3:5-8). The former is inevitably hostile to God and is oriented to death. The latter is oriented to life and wholeness ("peace"). Though not exempt from death, the latter is assured of resurrection through God who raised Christ from the dead (8:5-13; cf. John 11:25-26). What is the mark of the Spirit? How do we know that we possess God's Spirit or, better still, that God's Spirit possesses us? For Paul the true mark of the Spirit is simple. To call God Abba, as Jesus did, is the sign of trust and love. Those who do so show the Spirit at work in them, bearing witness that they are God's children by adoption. They are fellow heirs with Christ, an identification that brings with it suffering in union with his suffering, and also the promise of glory (8:14-20). To be united with Christ brings with it the prospect of suffering (cf. Mark 8:34-35), yet it is never without hope. The life of grace is the life of hope. Nothing is broken beyond repair. The glory destined "to be revealed" (the passive voice of the verb hiding the action of God) will not merely recompense but will swallow up the pain of the world. Pain is not merely to be replaced by glory. It is to be overwhelmed by it, so as to be "not worth comparing" with it (8:18).

"The creation" waits with "eager longing" for the revelation of God's children (8:19). Scholars have raised some question here as to whether Paul meant by "creation" (Greek: ktisis) simply humankind or the whole created order. The Greek word can carry either meaning. In view of the reference to Genesis that is about to be made (8:20-21), it seems most likely that Paul intended to refer to the whole creation. He looks at the world and sees not what it is, but what it will be. In accordance with the normal rabbinic view Paul speaks of the entire creation as marred (or subjected to futility) in view of humanity's sin; but creation is never without hope (8:19-20). It will be delivered (8:21). For the moment all creation, including the church, is like a woman in childbirth. We wait for our destiny (8:22-23). "In hope we were saved." The life of grace is to wait for this hope (8:24-25).

"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know what to pray for that is right" (8:26, NRSV alt.). Yet there is a prayer that is perfect, offered in our hearts as "that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words" (8:26b). Even among sinners there is such a thing as religious experience and mystical awareness, and if it is of God it is, like all life, a gift and not an achievement. "And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (8:27). "This," observed C. S. Lewis, "is the courtesy of deep heaven, that when you meant well, God always takes you to have meant better than you knew."

This life of grace rests upon a single security: God. When all else fails, "On whom are we to lean? On our Father in Heaven" (m. Sota, 9.15). This clearly is Paul's view, though his expression of it here involves a famous problem (see NRSV 8:28, text and margin). The distinction between the two readings is perhaps not as important as it appears. Either way, the verse speaks of our trust in the overarching of God's

providential care. Neither interpretation says that the verse is a statement that "bad things don't happen to good people." The force of the whole letter—indeed of Paul's whole faith—is against that. Instead, the verse affirms that even in bad things, God is still working "for good."

The life of grace is a life lived on the basis of God's good will. Those whom God "foreknew" are also "predestined to be conformed to the image" of Christ (8:29). Few passages have been more misused in scripture than this. If we are to understand it, we must first be aware that it is not theology. It is a description of the life of grace. The mistake of Calvin, and to some extent of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, was to erect upon this description a rigid dogmatic system. Paul's words about being "foreknown" and "predestined" are simply ways of speaking about the experience of grace. Prior to any act or choice of our own we are aware of an eternal love seeking and caring for us. This love calls, forgives, and eventually glorifies us (8:30). This is what it feels like to be committed to Christ. Nothing whatever is being said about those who do not have this feeling or about those who are not yet committed to Christ or anything else in the world!

Paul sees that our destiny is to be "conformed to the image" of Christ (8:29; cf. 1 John 3:2).

There is no end to the ideas (or fantasies) of salvation that the human mind can form—unending sensual bliss, absorption into the All, crowns and harps, Nirvana, or what not. Paul holds us to the essential thing: that, whatever else it may be, salvation means sharing the likeness of Christ, and Christ we know. (Dodd 1932, 142)

"What then are we to say about these things?" (8:31a) Paul sweeps together all that he has been saying into an affirmation of the certainty of God's grace. "If God is for us, who is against us?" (8:31b) The one who might bring most charges against us in court is the judge who acquits us (8:33). Jesus Christ, crucified, risen, and exalted, intercedes for us (8:34). Our sins, then, have not been allowed to separate us from God. Neither will anything else be allowed to do so, whether natural (8:35-37) or supernatural (8:38-39a). Nothing in heaven or on earth will be able "to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (8:39b).

Does the Gospel Question God's Faithfulness?

In the next three chapters Paul turns to a question that, if it could not be answered satisfactorily, threatened to call into question the entire edifice of his gospel. In essence, if the gospel is God's power to save (1:16), how is it that many in Israel are not being converted to Christ? Is God, after all, unreliable—since God has (apparently) failed the Jews? Is God unfaithful to the promise? Was Israel actually disadvantaged by possessing the Law (cf. 3:9)?

The Problem of Israel's Unbelief 9:1-10:15

Paul poses these questions in verses 9:1-5. He refers (9:3) to the Jews who are not Christians as his "kindred" (Greek: adelphoi). This is not an expression he uses lightly or out of politeness. It is reserved by him, as by scripture generally, for members of the people of God (cf. 1:13; 7:1, 4; 8:12; 10:1; 11:25; 15:14, 30; 16:17). In Paul's

understanding (unlike that of some modern "evangelists") Jews are, and remain, a part of God's people (cf. 11:1). For Paul the problems between Jews and Christians are not differences separating insiders from outsiders, but differences within God's family.

In response to the question Paul points to the fact that scripture itself at several points shows some being left, so to speak, "unbelieving" for the sake of others (9:6-29). His examples are Esau and the Pharaoh of the Exodus. Paul uses the scriptural picture of God "hardening" the hearts of the unbelievers (9:18; cf. Exod. 4:21). The purpose of this "hardening," as Paul emphasizes, is that mercy may be shown to those whom God has called: "God . . . has endured with much patience the objects of wrath that are made for destruction . . . in order to make known the riches of his glory for the objects of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory" (9:22b-23).

Paul points out that scripture instructs us that not all in Israel respond to God's word (9:27-29, quoting Isa. 10:22-23 and 1:9). The implication is that there is nothing very surprising or novel in the present situation in which some in Israel do not accept the Messiah. We should note, however, two things that Paul does not say either about Esau and Pharaoh or about the unbelieving Israelites of whom Isaiah speaks. He does not say that their rejection is final or that they have no place in the world to come. Paul has said enough, particularly in his remarks about unbelieving Israel, to justify the next question. "What then are we to say—Gentiles, who did not strive for righteousness, have attained it, that is, righteousness through faith?" (9:30) It would, of course, have been nonsense to pretend that no pagans attempted to live virtuously, or even that they never

succeeded (cf. 2:14-16, 27). In saying that the Gentiles "did not strive for righteousness" Paul was not saying those things. In Paul the righteousness of God, witnessed in God's Law, is here in question. Those who do not have the privilege of knowing God's Law can hardly, in the nature of things, have been concerned with striving for that righteousness, and yet—and this is Paul's point— some among the Gentiles have stumbled upon it—"through faith." Here Paul again echoes Habbakuk 2:4, and Romans 1:17. Some among the Gentiles have stumbled upon God's righteousness simply because God is faithful, and has confronted them with that righteousness in the face of Jesus Christ, summoning them to faithfulness in return!

"But [are we saying that] Israel, who did strive for the righteousness that is based on the law, did not succeed in fulfilling that law?" (9:31) Are we saying that in a sphere where some pagans have succeeded, so to speak, by accident, the people of God have failed? It is Paul's imaginary interlocutor who is speaking again—and this time finding the teacher in substantial agreement. Paul's answer, implicitly, is "Yes." "Why?" (9:32a) "Because," Paul says, they pursued the Law "not on the basis of faith"—not, that is, on the basis of faithfulness, God's faithfulness calling us to be faithful, the basis on which alone Habakkuk had said that the just would live—"but as if" it were a matter of "works" (9:32b). In his next words Paul provides the explanation. "They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, 'See, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make people stumble, a rock that will make

them fall, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame'" (9:32c-33, alluding to Isa. 8:14 and 28:16). The passages from the Bible to which Paul here alludes seem to have been interpreted very early in Christian tradition (Mark 12:10; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:4). According to that early Christian reading the "stumbling stone" was Jesus, and those who put their trust in him are the ones who will "not be put to shame"—compare Romans 1:16! If that is how Paul understands the allusion, then the first part of his explanation is that many in Israel are not living "through faith" because they do accept the faithfulness of God manifested to them in the crucified Jesus, who is God's Messiah. Paul continues:

Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. I can testify that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God's righteousness. (10:1-3) "I can testify [for them]": here, inevitably, we must suppose that Paul is criticizing his own earlier view. According to his own testimony he had grown up a Pharisee (Phil. 3:5-6; Gal. 1:13-14). Precisely what that meant is not as clear as we would like, but we may make some suggestions. Jacob Neusner observes:

Among those sympathetic to the Pharisaic cause were some who entered into an urban religious communion, a mostly unorganized society known as the fellowship ('avurah). The basis of this society was meticulous observance of laws of tithing other priestly offerings as well as the rules of ritual purity outside the temple where they were not mandatory. The members undertook to eat even profane foods (not sacred tithes or other offerings) in a state of rigorous levitical cleanness. At table, they compared themselves to Temple priests at the altar. (1984, 27)

If we see such a group as connected with the Mishnah tractate Taharoth ("Purities"—the one tractate in the Mishnah that seems likely to go back in its entirety to the period before 70 CE), we probably are not far wrong. This is the work of those who choose to conduct their day-to-day lives as if they were living in the Temple. The purpose of such a formulation is clear: to preserve the cleanness of the people of Israel, of the produce of the land of Israel, of the sexual life of Israel, of the hearth and home of Israel (Neusner 1981, 20-21). All that would certainly be one possible way of understanding and pursuing "a law of righteousness."

Paul's "testimony" to their "zeal" in this cause is notable—the more so because it is the word that he also uses of himself in speaking of his earlier life. Before his call he had, he says, been "zealous for the traditions of [his] ancestors" and "zeal" led him to be "a persecutor of the church" (Gal. 1:13-14; Phil. 3:5-6). It seems

clear that in a number of circles in first-century Judaism (including some linked to Pharisaism), “zeal” was associated with passionate adherence to Torah for oneself and also with the commitment of those who, looking to Phinehas as their example (Num. 25:1-18), were willing to act violently against any who were seen as violating Israel’s purity

by compromise with paganism. This is the “zeal” that would have led a Pharisee like Saul to persecute those who defiled Israel by proclaiming a humiliated Messiah—one who had been crucified by pagans and had signally failed to bring about the redemption of Israel that God’s righteousness demanded (Phil. 3:6; 1 Cor. 15:9; cf. Acts 17; 22:3-4). This is the “zeal” that would, in 66 CE, lead such Pharisees to cohere with other revolutionary groups in launching a war against pagans who were presuming to govern the holy land of Israel. This may have been seen by Pharisees as the “zeal” that would alone be acceptable to God in that great day when God finally acted to vindicate Israel, sending the victorious Messiah to punish both Gentiles and renegade Jews.

Granted its polemic tone, “seeking to establish their own righteousness” could be said to reflect precisely the religion of the Pharisees as described by Neusner and Taharoth, which was concerned with Israel’s own purity. While the mention of “zeal” would be especially appropriate to the Pharisees, in order to make plain their own faithfulness in the Day of the Lord, they were prepared to act violently against those whom they regarded as corrupting Israel’s purity. Perhaps Paul had this in mind when he declared that some in Israel were pursuing “righteousness . . . as if” it were a matter of “works.”

Such “zeal,” Paul says, is “not enlightened”—not in accord with the “enlightenment” that came to him on the Damascus road, where he was overwhelmed by that same crucified Messiah whose followers he had been persecuting. There, he believed, he encountered the Son of God, and learned that the crucified Jesus was, after all, the true and living Lord. If that were so, then everything was changed. It became evident that the story, as Saul in his zeal had been telling it, was being told wrongly. “For” it now transpires that “the Messiah”—not the zealous and victorious Messiah who destroyed pagans (not, that is, the Messiah “according to the flesh” whom Paul had previously “known” [2 Cor 5:16-17]), but the crucified Messiah, the apparently defeated Messiah, that Messiah—“is the end (Greek: telos, that is, the goal, the fulfillment) of the law,” so as to lead “to righteousness for everyone who believes” (10:2-4). Jesus, the crucified and humiliated Jesus, is, as N. T. Wright has strikingly expressed it, “the climax of the covenant” (1992, 241).

Paul quotes the Law to support what he is saying: “Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that ‘the person who does these things will live by them’” (10:5, alluding to Lev. 18:5)—and some have heard that as if it were a call to establish by any and all means their own “righteousness that comes from the law.”

But the righteousness that comes from faith [God’s faithfulness calling us to faith, by which faithfulness alone, according to Habakkuk, the just “will live”] says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim). (10:6-8, echoing LXX Deut. 30:11-14)

God’s righteousness assures us that Christ has already been brought down to us, because in God’s moment he was “descended from David” (1:3), and already he has been brought up from the dead, for God has “raised [him] for our justification” (4:25). The Word—the only word that matters, God’s word, the word that saves, the word of faith that we proclaim—is already near us. Our proper activity as believers is therefore not to

consider, as Paul had once considered, what we must do to establish our own righteousness, but to joyfully acknowledge what God has done through the Messiah to establish God's righteousness, because, "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved" (10:9-10).

In Paul's view this word is available for everyone who has faith and confesses the name of the Lord. This applies to Jews and all believers, because scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame," and "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (10:11-13, quoting Isa. 28:16; Joel 2:32). The ability to call on God at all comes through hearing those whom God has "sent." In other words it is a gift, mediated through the mission of the church (10:14-15).

The Final Salvation of All Israel 10:16-11:32

The Scriptures themselves have consistently shown that many in Israel have not accepted God's gift (10:16-21). That brings Paul full circle, back to his original problem. Are we then saying that God has rejected God's people? (11:1a) Paul's answer is blunt, as always. "By no means!" "God forbid!" (11:1b; cf. KJV). As in the time of Elijah, God always keeps some faithful among the people of God (11:1c-4). Now there is a remnant, chosen by grace, and no doubt including the faithful Jewish Christians at Rome. Grace brought them there, not their own achievements (11:5-6).

What of those who have not been brought, by grace, to believe? As scripture says, there are always some in Israel who become hardened and whose eyes are closed (Isa. 29:10 and Ps. 69:22-23; Rom. 11:7-10). What of these? Have they indeed "stumbled so as to fall?" (11:11a) Paul is passionate. "By no means!" (11:11b) "But through their stumbling salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous" (11:11c). In other words, the pattern of hardening for the sake of others to which Paul referred in the cases of Pharaoh and Esau is repeated in the cases of those in Israel who do not believe. We see why Paul was careful not to say of Pharaoh and the others that their loss was final, for of the Jews he now says: "If their stumbling means riches for the world, and if their defeat means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!" (11:12)

At last Paul turns to address his Gentile readers. So far he has spoken chiefly to fellow Jewish followers of Jesus, inclined to regard themselves as superior to Gentile believers in the community, and also concerned about their fellow Jews who have remained outside the church. Here Paul takes on a different matter. What of Gentile believers who may be inclined to think themselves superior to Jews, and in particular may be inclined to sneer at Jews who have not yet come to see Jesus as their Messiah? What of Christians who may speak of such Jews as having been rejected or as having lost their place as God's people? Paul's sarcasm is never fiercer. If God

can have mercy on Gentiles and show them the truth, God can certainly do the same for Jews (11:13-24). The Gentiles are wild olive branches, grafted into a cultivated tree: "Remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you" (11:18).

Finally, Paul addresses all his fellow Christians at Rome, both Jews and Gentiles: "A hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved" (11:25-26). God's final purpose is mercy for everyone, Jew and Gentile alike (11:26-36).

For the people of God there is always the temptation to pursue God for the sake of our own salvation without concern for God's gracious purposes to the world. Lest we may be tempted to limit this problem only to first-century Pharisees (10:1-11:12), and so dismiss the whole problem by setting it in "historical context," Paul

himself explicitly turns to “you Gentiles” and says that exactly the same applies to them (11:13-24).

End of Chapter