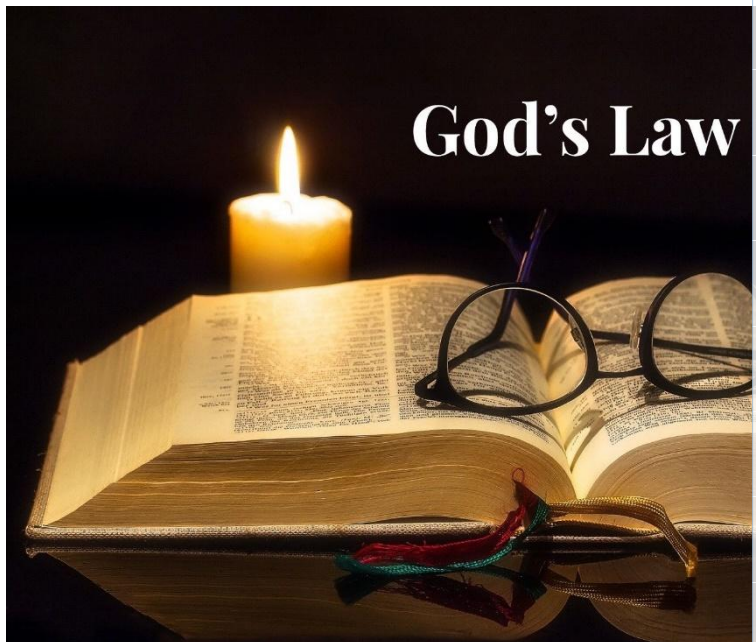


**Bible Study**

# **Law of God Resources & Handbook of Quotes**



**Craig M White**

**Version 1.6**

**Bible Study**



“So the law is holy, and the  
commandment is holy and righteous and  
good...”

“For I delight in the law of God, in my  
inner being”  
(Rom 7:12, 22)

## ***Law of God Resources and Handbook of Quotes***

Authored by Craig Martin White.

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Our purpose and desire are to foster Biblical, historical and related studies that strengthen the Church of God's message & mission and provides further support to its traditional doctrinal positions.

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## **Associated Readings and Bible studies**

- *Feast Day Typology in the New Testament (parts 1 & 2)*
- *God's Law and Way of Life Before Moses*
- *Graded Holiness and Graded Sin*
- *Old Testament Laws and Spiritual Requirements repeated in the New Testament*
- *Research by non-Church of God theologians & researchers supporting Church of God positions*
- *Which Commandments do the Churches of God observe/teach and not observe/teach? And why?*

These works are available online [here](#).

## Introductory Remarks

**T**he document you have before you has been the product of scores of hours in preparation. It is not a paper or an article. It is not even a Bible study. Instead, it is a compilation of useful and interesting quotes mostly from non-Sabbatarian and non-Church of God scholars and academics concerning God's Law. A sort of digest or collection of quotes that can be used as a handbook to assist with one's research in this very critical aspect of God's word.

It is not exhaustive of course (that would be an impossibility) and **I should state at the outset that I do not agree with all the scholars that I quote.** But they do have valuable insights and information and pointers to further research. For example:

“... we are ... not ‘without the law’ (I Cor. 9:21) (as though the law had nothing whatever to say to us about our behaviour). Rather, the power of the indwelling of the Spirit makes it possible ‘that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who ... live ... according to the Spirit’ (Rom. 8:4; my italics). **The indwelling Spirit, far from removing us from any connection with the law, actually enables us to live in the way the law originally intended the Israelites to.**” (Christopher Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, p. 318)

The use of non-Church of God sources (for this or any other doctrine) are to demonstrate that *many* of them do not believe God's Law is ‘done away’ as such although *some* go through all sorts of mental hoops and after their long explanation how it is not done away write about how it is fulfilled in Christ and He sort of acts out the Law in our stead via the spirit in us!

Calvinists, Presbyterians and others believe that observing the Laws (including the 10 Commandments) is not salvational. That rather it is a way of life that God wants us to live by. The great Moral Code which governs how Christians should live. They are quite close to the truth about this because the Law cannot save – it is not God – it cannot forgive us, die for us or resurrect us. But it is God's Way of Life that develops Godly character so that we can become like Him.

They are quite close to the truth about this because the Law cannot save – it is not God that can forgive us, die for us or resurrect us. But it is God's Way of Life that develops Godly character so that we can become like Him.

Some of them have written positively of Biblical economics, land sabbaths, health and purification laws, clean & unclean meats, tithing, vows & oaths etc with many advocating their observance or application in some way to the Christiana and even to society in general. This compilation does not include those sorts of items in an attempt to keep the size of this document to a reasonable size. However, some of these are touched upon in other articles of

mine such as *Research by non-Church of God theologians & researchers supporting Church of God positions.*

Recently (2024) another book appeared on the scene advocating for the 'Old' Testament laws in the life of Christians - *The Old Testament Law for the Life of the Church* by Dr. Richard Averbeck. He discusses the difficulties in classifying the law into moral, civil, and ceremonial categories, how the Torah continues into the New Covenant, and why the Messiah's one-time sacrifice for sin is not incompatible with the Levitical sacrificial system.

In his article "The Law of Moses and the Christian: A Compromise," *Journal of the Evangelical Society*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (September 1991, pp. 321-34) David Dorsey discusses various positions taken by Christians on God's commandments and how they can be observed in some way (though he seems to see mainly a spiritual aspect of these commandments). In one section he compares these various views:

"Paul considers the law "good" (Rom 7:12-13) and "spiritual" (7:14) and maintains that it was issued and written "for us" (1 Cor 9:8-10). He denies that his emphasis on faith nullifies the law and exclaims: "Not at all! Rather, we establish the law!" (Rom 3:31). Furthermore the NT writers frequently appeal to various individual OT laws to support their views (cf. 1 Cor 9:8 ff.; 1 Tim 5:18; Eph 6:1-3; 1 Pet 1:15-16; etc.). Church history and modern Christian scholarship have offered numerous doctrinal statements, theological positions, and theories attempting to resolve the question of the relationship of the law to the Christian...

World-Wide Church of God. Representing one of several positions advocating an even higher degree of continuity, Herbert W. Armstrong argues that only a few of the laws, such as the sacrificial regulations, are no longer valid because they have been fulfilled in Christ, and that the great majority of laws still apply to spiritual Israel, including the Ten Commandments, with the observance of the seventh day, the keeping of all the Jewish feast days and holy days, the observing of the dietary laws, and some of the ceremonial laws." (pp. 332, 324) [emphasis mine]

He is not completely correct about the old Worldwide Church of God's position which evolved over the years and decades.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, all laws have physical, spiritual and metaphorical applications.

As one researcher explains, the faith as explained by Paul, is not new but a continuation of the same faith as expressed in the Old Testament:

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<sup>1</sup> He represents one of many authors and critics that observes the old Worldwide Church of God position on many doctrines including the Law. They often get it wrong on so many, for instance, we did not believe, as far as I am aware, that the sacrifices were completely fulfilled in Christ. It is more of a practical fulfillment. The Church spoke of spiritual sacrifices and that they will be re-implemented during the Millennium.

**"The view of faith and law [by Paul] reflected in this narrative is the same as that in Deuteronomy 30:11-14**, where Moses said, "What I am commanding you [*hammiswah hazzot*, lit., 'this command'] is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach ... it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it [*ubilbababeka la'asoto*]" . It is all so in keeping with the apostle Paul's understanding of Deuteronomy in Romans 10, where he writes that the "word" that Moses says is "in your heart" is "the word of faith we are proclaiming" (Rom 10:8)" (John Sailhamer, *Genesis. The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, pp. 186-87).

There is not some huge gulf between Old and New Testaments at all, including in faith. Faith is the same in both Testaments.

Another view held to in the early years of the Church of God was that all the rituals and sacrifices were nailed to the stake. By the 1950s sometime this was amended to the view that sin and its penalty was nailed to the stake.

Also by the early-mid 1950s, other laws were taught such as land sabbaths, third tithe and mixed fabrics but due to the difficulty for observing them in the modern world and some ministers enforcing them with rigour and penalties, they were later viewed as optional and hardly taught at all. The Church of God came to see that we are not some sort of physical, little Israel that is ruled by an inspired priesthood – a Church that was to implement the Commandments as if we lived in ancient times.

The Church, however, always considered the sacrifices to have continued in a spiritual sense and that they will be revived during the millennial reign of the Messiah (as do many adherents to pre-Millennialism).<sup>2</sup> For example:

"Notice it! The Levites shall never lack a man — "want a man" in the archaic wording of the King James Version — to present offerings continually. There will always be Levites available to do the job — or God's promise is not true. The Levites have been punished — there is now no temple or tabernacle whereupon to present their offerings, but they have never lacked a man who could perform the rituals whenever they might be required.

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<sup>2</sup> The Old Testament does indeed include a spiritual level to all commandments including the sacrifices: ISam 15:22; Ps 21:3; 50:23; 51:17; 107:21-22; 141:2; Eccl 5:1; Is 1:11-16; Jer 7:21-23; Mic 6:6-8. And even circumcision has a spiritual level: Lev 26:41; Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4; Ezek 44:7.

"Although Jesus' task is accomplished, for the believer it is continuing, we are to present our bodies as living sacrifices unto the Lord (Rom 12:1-2). No longer with gory animal sacrifices, but with the sweet smelling savor of committed lives under Christ's dominion, devoted to His service and worship. Steve Walton presents six applications of sacrificial language and terminology for NT Christians which can be emphasized in group contexts where sacrifices play a significant role. **These are "praise of God" (IPet 2:9; Heb 13:15), "witness" (IPet 2:9; Rom 15:16), "prayer" (Rev 5:8; 8:3), "giving" (Phil 2:17, 25), "laying down one's life for the gospel" (Phil 2:17), and "the consecration of the life to God's will" (Rom 12:1).** When person in group-oriented contexts are made to realize that their spiritual sacrifice is expressed in these forms it will result in passionate worship, devoted service, and zealous commitment for the cause of God." (Kelvin Onongha, "The Doctrine of Atonement in Communal Contexts," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, Vol. 31, Nos. 1-2, 2020, pp. 186-87) [emphasis mine]

In Ezekiel we find that after Christ's return the Levites will still be available to perform the physical duties of the priesthood as a reminder of Israel's failure as a nation to do God's will (Ezekiel 40.46; 43.19; and 44.9-21). **The very statutes which were perpetually, established upon the priesthood in Moses' day are still binding during the millennium upon the Levites (Eze 44.17-25).** When God declares a statute everlasting, HE MEANS IT! Read these verses for yourself." (Herman L Hoeh in "Are God's Festivals to be Observed Forever?" *The Good News*, March 1959, p. 6) [emphasis mine]

"And then, **beginning chapter 40, the remainder of the Book of Ezekiel reveals the ideal THEOCRACY — God's NEW ORDER of divine government upon earth** — the permanent forms and institutions which shall express the ideal relation between God and man!" (Herbert W Armstrong, "Will Russia Attack America?" *Plain Truth*, July 1956, p. 19) [emphasis mine]

Yet there are those who see the Law as spiritual and somehow fulfilled in Christ and acted out in Christians without reference to the Commandments, the studying the Biblical texts on these or hearing sermons on the subject.

Instead, they feel, that the spirit of Christ within us keeps them – and many of these people do indeed strive to observe the moral code of the Bible. Yet, if the spirit dwelt within them, they would surely observe the seventh day Sabbath rather than the day that Christ supposedly rose on. And they would observe the other Commandments too.

But why don't they? Because they believe the holy spirit inspires them to fulfill the law of Christ which is love – not realising the gaps in their love and understanding of the Bible. They really think that this is not anti-nomianism!

An example is Paul Copan's *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God*. He has an excellent understanding of an area of Scripture that he specialises in (like other Protestant authors), but gets mixed up when it comes to the Law like most others:

"It's significant that Abraham trusted God—and was declared righteous—before the law of Moses came. Even without the law, Abraham kept the intention or purport of the law because he lived by faith: "Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws" (Gen. 26:5). Notice the words used: these are post-Sinai law terms used in Deuteronomy ("obeyed," "charge," "commandments, statutes," "laws"), yet they apply to Abraham before the law was given. The point is to show how Abraham essentially kept the law and pleased God because he lived by faith (Gen. 15:6). This connection wasn't lost on Paul in the New Testament (Rom. 4; Gal. 3—4). As he reread the Scriptures in light of his encounter with Christ, he discovered that Abraham lived by faith and was declared righteous by God. That's Genesis 15. In Genesis 17 came the covenant of circumcision, and over four hundred years later the law was given at Sinai. In

other words, Abraham didn't need circumcision or the law to be right with God" (p. 44).

Finally, at the rear of this document are several appendices and lists of further reading for interested researchers:

- **Appendix. Do the Words of Christ hold more weight than other portions of the Bible?**
- **Appendix. Did Christ Approve Profaning of the Sabbath?**
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- **Suggested Reading – Select Church of God Literature**

## The Covenants

“In all lexical study, it is imperative that the meaning in the present context be given precedence over all other considerations. The fact that a word may be used 99 percent of the time it is found in ancient writings to mean one thing is essentially irrelevant if in the context of the biblical passage under study it is used to mean something else. Any author may choose to use even a common word in an unusual way. Thus the final question must always be “How is it used here?””

Stuart adds that the primary question in lexical analysis is “the question of meaning in its immediate context.” (Douglas Stuart, “Exegesis,” *Anchor Bible* (Vol. 2). Douglas N Freedman (ed), Vol. 2)

This is one reason so many get tripped up by Paul’s remarks on the Law.

Many decades ago, the Church of God did not realise that the New Covenant is more of a refreshing of the Covenant with God’s spirit given to humans to enable them to observe his commandments and way. It used to think it was completely abolished and replaced by a new one. But that the laws continued on – after all the covenants includes obedience – the agreement to obey God and to fulfill His commandments.

In other words, there has been a misunderstanding by some that the New Covenant was thought to replace many Laws of God including the sacrifices. But we continue to sacrifice spiritually and the priesthood and sacrificial system will be revived in the Millennium. The continuity of God’s Laws and way of life should not be overlooked as the New Covenant is an agreement to obey God’s commandments in the spirit.

One author who has a good grasp of the covenants, Walter Kaiser, wrote:

“The way to test the greatness and incisiveness of any truly evangelical theology is to ask how it relates biblical law to God’s gospel of grace. The history of **the [protestant] Church’s achievement on this issue has not been remarkable or convincing.**” (Walter C. Kaiser, “God’s Promise, Plan, and His Gracious Law,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, September 1990, p. 290.)

Kaiser emphasises the importance of understanding the relationship between Biblical law and grace. As his (and other’s) works filter down into the Protestant churches, it seems that many are beginning to wake up to the significance and importance of observing the Commandments.

I highly recommend his work *Toward Old Testament Ethics*.

In his thesis *The Relationship of the Old Covenant to the Everlasting Covenant*, Ashwani Kumar of Andrews University states:

In his Master's thesis *The Relationship of the Old Covenant to the Everlasting Covenant*, Ashwani Kumar states:

"The goal of this study is to present that the new covenant was not established because it was different in its content than the old or the old was faulty. Even a modern dispensationalist, Kenneth L. Barker concluded that the claim that "the Old Testament is a Testament of Law while the New Testament is the Testament of grace is a false dichotomy." **This study will seek to demonstrate that the old and new covenants are actually the same in nature or one in kind (first is shadow and second is fulfillment) and belong to the one everlasting covenant.** God has only one covenant and He called it "My covenant" also known as the "everlasting covenant," which He establishes with different people throughout history and it also has its local promises, signs, and implications." (p. 2)

Kumar's argument highlights the continuity between the Old and New Covenants, stating that they are not *fundamentally* different but rather represent different aspects of the same everlasting covenant. This perspective challenges the notion of a law vs grace/faith dichotomy and emphasises the unity of God's covenant throughout history.

"After a careful analysis of the old covenant by comparing it to the ANE treaties and after establishing a covenant formula, the essence of the covenant, the role of sacrifice and the stipulations of the covenant, some fair conclusions can be drawn. First; the old covenant was a relationship idea contrary to the contract and the old covenant belongs to the same everlasting covenant. **The divine covenants with Abraham and Israel, through Moses, along with the new covenant, can be viewed as successive stages of God's single covenant of redeeming grace that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.**" (Kumar, *ibid*, p. 64) [emphasis mine]

This conclusion reinforces the idea that the old and new covenants are part of a whole – a single, continuous relationship between God and His people, which has been adapted to different cultural contexts throughout history. The common thread is God's Laws that are required to be obeyed to be able to participate in a relationship with God.

The above represents a re-think by a Seventh-day Adventist, which shows similarities to the research by Walter Kaiser and is a growing school amongst honest Protestant scholars.

This growing trend among conservative scholars and theologians suggests a move towards a more holistic and unified view of the covenants, which can lead to a deeper and more accurate understanding of God's relationship with His people.

Refer also to United Church of God's excellent booklet *The New Covenant. Does it Abolish God's Law?* For growing insights<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> It is available here <https://www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/booklets/the-new-covenant-does-it-abolish-gods-law>

If only more could have this sort of understanding, perhaps they would begin to discover and observe the Sabbath.

Scholars understand that the word *law* refers to several things in the Bible (Torah, 10 commandments, 613 instructions, rituals and sacrifices etc) dependent upon context. Antinomians would like to think that the 10 Commandments are abolished; or minimised as only a moral code; or only 9 are to be kept etc. But these conservatives have come to understand that the mainstream protestants were wrong all along – that the laws are still current and will continue into the Millennium.

**“Thus the word “new” in this context would mean the “renewed” or “restored” covenant** (cf. Akkadian *edesu* “to restore” ruined temples, altars, or cities; Hebrew *hds* connected with the new moon and Ugaritic *hdt*, “to renew the moon”). We conclude that this covenant was the old Abrahamic-Davidic promise renewed and enlarged ... Thus the new is more comprehensive, more effective, more spiritual, and more glorious than the old - in fact, so much so that *in comparison* it would appear as if it were totally unlike the old at all. **Yet, in truth, it was nothing less than the progress of revelation.**” (Walter Kaiser, *Towards an Old Testament Theology*, pp. 232-34).

“When the items of continuity found in the New covenant are tabulated in this passage, they are: (1) the same covenant making God, "My covenant"; (2) the same law, My torah (note, not a different one than Sinai); (3) the same divine fellowship promised in the ancient tripartite formula, "I will be your God; the same "seed" and "people," "You shall be my people"; and (5) the same forgiveness, "I will forgive their iniquities"." (ibid, p. 233).

“The truth of the matter was that Jeremiah found no fault with the Sinaitic covenant. Both Jeremiah and the later writer of Hebrews were emphatic in their assessment of the trouble with the covenant made in Moses' day. The problem was with the people, not with the covenant making God nor with the moral law or promises reaffirmed from the patriarchs and included in that old covenant. The text of Jeremiah 31:32 explicitly pointed the finger when it said, "Which covenant of Mine they broke." So also did Hebrews 8:8-9: "His finding fault with them because they continued not in [His] covenant"." (ibid, p. 232).

“When the items of continuity found in the New Covenant are tabulated in this passage (Jer 31:31-34) [the largest piece of text to be quoted *in extenso* in the NT, viz., Hebrews 8:8-12], **they are (1) the same covenant-making God, “My covenant”; (2) the same law, My torah (note, not a different one than Sinai); the same divine fellowship promised in the ancient tripartite formula, “I will be your God” (4) the same “seed” and “people,” “You shall be my people” and (5) the same forgiveness, “I will forgive their iniquities.”**

**"... the principles underlying the OT are valid and authoritative for the Christian, but the particular applications found in the OT may not be. The moral principles are the same today, but insofar as our situation often differs from the OT setting, the application of the principals in our society may well be different too..."**  
(Gordon Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus. New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, p. 35).

Peter Enns, "Exodus," *The NIV Application Commentary Series*:

"The reference to commands and decrees at this stage in the journey is admitted vague, but consider two approaches. (1) **We should not assume that Israel had no law until Sinai. This seems especially true in 16:23, where the Sabbath day is mentioned explicitly for the first time in the Old Testament. Although the command to keep the Sabbath is explicitly given only in 20:8-11 (the fourth commandment), this does not mean that God's will for his people to keep the Sabbath was unheard of until then.**

"It is reasonable to assume that the Ten Commandments as they are given on Mount Sinai are not new but a reiteration of things that the Israelite (and probably other ancient Near Eastern peoples) already knew. After all, are we to think that the command to honor one's parents or the prohibition against stealing, murder, or adultery are unheard of before Sinai? The Israelites most likely have known something of God's laws before Sinai, even though we are not told what they know or how they came to know it..."

**"The "giving" of the law at Sinai is not the first time Israel hears of God's laws, but is the codification and explicit promulgation of those laws** (allowing, of course, for the imposition of additional laws at Sinai)..."

"The flow of the narrative is plain. The people want to know what must be done in order to settle their disputes; they are coming "to seek God's will" (v.15)..."

"The concern is not just in chapter 18 but elsewhere in the Old Testament. **God is in the process of raising a people, as a father raises his child, to know him... What is at stake is not simply knowledge *about* God in an academic or detached sense, but actually knowing *him*. The law is not some legalistic mumbo jumbo but the expression of God's will and character to his people. Hence, in order to know God, the law that comes from God's "inner being" must be *in us*.**

"This is the refrain we find in Deuteronomy... While the law was not merely external at Sinai, now all of a sudden it must be on the heart..."

**“Jeremiah does not see the Sinai covenant as essentially useless because it was written and therefore in desperate need of being superceded by a more “spiritual” version of the law, one written on the heart. Such a view ignores the witness of the Old Testament ... the necessity of having the law on one’s heart. In other words, this is no preview of a supposed law-grace dichotomy. Rather, Jeremiah is saying that the covenant with Israel at Sinai will be taken to an even greater level of intimacy; it will be “taken to heart” more deeply. In other words, we have here a glimpse of the ultimate realization of what the law all along has required - heart assent.**

**“... this new covenant is not to be contrasted *absolutely* with the old. It is rather a heightening and full realization of what the Old Testament had always required. God wants us, all of us. He wants our devotion... Christian now have in them not the law in a legalistic sense. What we have is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who will guide us in the proper path and enable us to have a true heart for God.**

“This is what Jesus was zeroing in on the Sermon of the Mount.

“Blessed are the *pure in heart*, for they will see God (Matt 5:8)

“But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his *heart* (5:28)

“For where our treasure is, there your *heart* will be also. (6:21).

“Throughout the Gospels, Jesus makes it clear that it is the heart that he is after (e.g., Matt 13:15, 19; 15:8, 18-19, and parallels). We should not think of statements such as these as innovation. Jesus is calling the people back to the standard of morality that the Old Testament itself call for, a message that may have been obscured in the religious climate of the day.

“God’s purpose has always been to make a people who have an intimate knowledge of him, a knowledge of the heart that leads to proper behavior, not simply knowing about God. Exodus 18 is the first concrete step God uses to give his people such knowledge...

“Law is more than precepts. Even in the Old Testament, it encompasses Israel’s *story*, what God has done to and through his people. In this sense, law is much more than we normally take it to mean... Law in the broader sense is the expression of God’s character. It is a story of how he cares for his people.

**“In other words, to have the law on our hearts is to know God, which ultimately means to have his grace clearly imprinted in us. This is the essential element to living the Christian life.**

“... in Exodus 18 knowing God’s will was for the express purpose of *behaving* correctly...

**“Unlike the Israelites of Exodus, the law, in Christ, is truly written on our hearts. But like the Israelites, we still need to discern daily what God wants us to do...”**

**“That God has put the law on our hearts means, if anything, that our wills *are being conformed to his own* because, as we live day by day and struggle in our decisions, we are getting to know him more and more. We learn to lean towards him, as a flower leans towards the light. It is in the process of this desire to do right that we seek God with our whole hearts. We seek him because we, like the Israelites, want to do his will. And because of the spirit of Christ dwelling in us, that quest is never in vain”** (pp. 371-83).

Have a look at Ezekiel 44:9; Lev 19:2, 18, 34; Jer 31:31; Ezek 11:19-20; 36:27. Now read Daniel Block’s analysis:

“After the opening citation formula reminding the audience (and readers) of the divine source of the following ordinances [verses 9-14], Yahweh takes the first step to safeguard the holiness of the temple and its cult: he bars all who are outside the covenant community from the sacred precinct (v.9). Obviously answering to the offences described in vv.7-8, Ezekiel reaffirms the Mosaic restrictions (Exod. 12:43-51) on access to the sanctuary. Resident foreigners who had not identified with Israel physically and spiritually were prohibited entry” (Daniel Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 25-48, New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, p. 626).<sup>4</sup>

### **Minor Commandments?**

What is troubling is that many do not study the so-called “minor” commandments and thereby miss out on the rich depths of God’s Word and truths. This goes for all of us.

It is true that it is not possible to observe or to adhere to all of the commandments today. But at least we should try and understand them and even apply them in a spiritual sense. This way we develop the mind of Christ as we thereby align our minds with His views and way of thinking in a range of areas.

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<sup>4</sup> NB: According to Roy Gane, the term *cult* here means: "H. Gese aptly describes "cult" as "worship in ritual procedures" " (*Cult and Character - Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy*, p. xix). The word *cult* in the context of Old Testament scholars conjures up the wrong idea in today’s world – a nutty, controlling and extreme religious group. But not in this context:

"In the centuries before the kingship, the cult was the centripetal force that held the tribes together as Israel, the people of God. It was here that the identity and character of Israel was formed. "Cult" refers to every dimension of organized service to a deity. In Israel it included the Tent of Meeting, furniture, artifacts, and priests as well as the rituals, sacrifices, and sacred seasons" (John Hartley, *Word Biblical Commentary. Leviticus*, p. lxvii).

But there are those who think that because they keep the 10 Commandments, they have an understanding of God's Law. But the 10 Commandments are the high level, over-arching commandments which the others dovetail into or come under. In a way the 10 Commandments form a sort of table of contents of a book but not the complete detail.

Therefore, to comprehend and really know the book, reading the table of contents does not suffice. An example is Deuteronomy where it is acknowledged by scholars to contain the following:

- The Introduction – chapters 1-4
- Table of contents (10 Commandments) – chapter 5
- The book in detail (Statutes and Judgments) – chapters 6-28
- Appendices – chapters 29-33

When we view God's Laws and books of the Torah like that, it helps in understanding that there is a lot more to the 10 Commandments than only Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. For all the commandments dovetail into the 10 in some way. Or can be categorised within one of the 10.

In the **Appendix. Law of God in Graphics** is a table that I found on the internet with the title "The Ten Commandments in the New Testament" which should be viewed in this context.

## What does the Word “Law” Mean in the Bible?

“Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.  
Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me.  
I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation.  
I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts.” (Ps 119:98-100)

### **What does “Law” mean in the New Testament? By Justin Taylor:**

[www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/what-does-the-word-law-mean-in-the-bible/](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/what-does-the-word-law-mean-in-the-bible/)

“...The word for law in the Old Testament is *torah*; in the New Testament it is *nomos*. It is often said that *torah* in the Old Testament does not refer so much to commands (to the keeping of commandments) as it does to instruction (to teaching). According to this view, the word *torah* does not focus on admonitions, commands, and requirements. Instead, the word has a more general referent, so that it includes God’s instruction more generally. Hence, if one follows this view, the word *torah* also includes God’s promises to save his people, his threats if they do not obey, and also narrative accounts that we find, for example, in the Pentateuch. **But such a wide definition for the word *torah* is almost certainly wrong.**

**Torah usually refers to what human beings are commanded to do.** In some instances, a broader sense (that goes beyond commands and prescriptions) aptly captures the meaning of *torah* (e.g., Job 22:22; Ps. 94:12; Prov. 1:8; 4:2; 13:14; Isa. 2:3; 42:4; 51:4; Mal. 2:6–8), although even in some of these passages the instruction probably consisted of what was required by the law. In the vast majority of instances, however, the word *torah* focuses on doing what is commanded in the law, that is, the commands and requirements that were given to Moses on Mount Sinai. The emphasis on observing the law and carrying out what it demands is evident from the verbs of which *torah* is the direct object (see figure 1a).

FIGURE 1A: VERBS USED FOR OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW	
Keep	<u>Gen. 26:5</u> ; <u>Deut. 17:19</u> ; <u>28:58</u> ; <u>31:12</u> ; <u>Josh. 22:5</u> ; <u>1 Kings 2:3</u> ; <u>1 Chron. 22:12</u> ; <u>Ps. 119:34, 44</u> ; <u>Prov. 28:4</u> ; <u>29:18</u> ; <u>Jer. 16:11</u> ; <u>Ezek. 44:24</u>
Walk in	<u>Exod. 16:4</u> ; <u>2 Kings 10:31</u> ; <u>Ps. 78:10</u> ; <u>Jer. 26:4</u> ; <u>32:23</u> ; <u>44:10</u> ; <u>Dan. 9:10</u>
Do	<u>Deut. 27:26</u> ; <u>29:29</u> ; <u>31:12</u> ; <u>32:46</u> ; <u>Josh. 1:7–8</u>
Break	<u>Ps. 119:126</u>
Obey	<u>Isa. 42:24</u>

*Note:* The list of verbs in figure 1a is representative, not exhaustive. Nevertheless, the examples demonstrate that in the Scriptures a focus on the prescriptions of the law is pervasive.

Other terms that are used with the word *torah* and are roughly synonymous with it confirm that the term *torah* focuses on regulations and prescriptions (see figure 1b). All these words convey the idea that Israel must obey what God has required in his law.

FIGURE 1B: WORDS FOR GOD’S COMMANDS	
Commandment (s)	<u>Gen. 26:5; Exod. 16:28; Deut. 30:10; Josh. 22:5; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 17:34; 2 Chron. 19:10; Neh. 9:13</u>
Statute(s)	<u>Gen. 26:5; Exod. 18:16; Deut. 4:8; 30:10; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 17:13, 34; 2 Chron. 19:10; 2 Chron. 33:8; Ezra 7:10; Neh. 9:13; Jer. 44:10; Ezek. 43:11</u>
Rule(s)	<u>Lev. 26:46; Deut. 4:8; 33:10; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 17:34; 2 Chron. 19:10; 33:8; Ezra 7:10; Ps. 89:30</u>
Testimony(ies)	<u>1 Kings 2:3; Jer. 44:23</u>

We see something quite similar with verbs that describe a wrong response to the law (see figure 1c). In every instance Israel’s disobedience to the law, i.e., their failure to keep what the Lord demanded, is featured.

FIGURE 1C: VERBS USED FOR DISOBEDIENCE TO THE LAW	
Forget	<u>Hos. 4:6; Ps. 119:61, 109, 153</u>
Transgress	<u>Dan 9:11</u>
Abandon	<u>2 Chron 12:1</u>
Forsake	<u>Pss. 89:30; 119:53; Jer. 9:13</u>
Rejects	<u>Isa. 5:24; Jer. 6:19; Amos 2:4</u>
Do violence to	<u>Ezek. 22:26; Zeph. 3:4</u>

Often a particular regulation is introduced especially in Leviticus and sometimes in Numbers, with the words, “this is the law.” The law often is associated with a book. In most instances what is written or found in the book are the *regulations* of the law. **The emphasis on *doing* what the law commands, on *keeping* it, and on *obeying* what the Lord has prescribed is quite extraordinary.** When the word *torah* occurs in the Old Testament, the emphasis is not on instruction in terms of teaching, as if the word *rehearses* God’s saving work on behalf of his people. **It is quite the contrary. The term *torah* concentrates on what God *requires* his people to do: his commands, statutes, and laws.”**

“The use of the term *law* (*nomos*) in the New Testament is comparable. In some instances the word *law* refers to the Old Testament Scriptures, and the focus is on the Pentateuch: “the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 5:17; 7:12; 22:40; Luke 16:16; 24:44; John 1:45; Acts 13:15; 24:14; 28:23; Rom. 3:21; cf. Matt. 11:13). In some texts “Law” alone seems to refer broadly to the Old Testament Scriptures (Matt. 22:36; Luke 10:26; John 7:49; 10:34; 12:34; 15:25; 1 Cor. 9:8–9; 14:21, 34; Gal. 4:21), though in some of these texts a particular precept from the Mosaic law may be in view as well (John 7:49; 1 Cor. 9:8–9; 14:34). Nevertheless, in the New Testament, as we saw in the Old Testament, the term *law* most often refers to what is commanded in the Mosaic law. Matthew speaks of every “iota” and “dot” of the law (Matt. 5:18), and it is clear from the next verse that he is referring here to the “commandments” found in the law (Matt. 5:19). Elsewhere Matthew considers particular matters commanded in the law (Matt. 22:36; 23:23). Similarly, Luke often uses the word *law* to refer to what is prescribed in statutes (Luke 2:22, 23, 24, 27, 39; Acts 23:3) or uses the term to refer collectively to what is commanded in the Sinai covenant (Acts 6:13; 7:53; 13:39; 15:5; 21:24; 22:3, 12; 25:8). Similarly, when John does not use the word *law* to refer to the Pentateuch or the Scriptures, he uses it to refer to the Mosaic law (John 7:19, 23, 51; 8:17; 19:7).

Paul regularly thinks of the law in terms of its commands, and this is evident because he speaks of those who sin by violating the law, of the need to do what the law says, and of relying upon and being instructed in the law (Rom. 2:17, 18, 20). When Paul speaks of righteousness (Rom. 3:21; 9:31; 10:4; Gal. 2:21; 3:11; 5:4; Phil. 3:6, 9) or the inheritance (Rom. 4:13–14, 16; Gal. 3:18) not being attained via the law, he has in mind doing what the law commands. Most scholars now agree that “works of law” refers to the deeds required by the law (Rom. 3:20, 28; Gal. 2:16; 3:2, 5; 10), as does the phrase “the law of commandments” (Eph. 2:15). The law is conceived of as a body of commands summarized in the Mosaic covenant, which came at a certain time in history (Rom. 5:13; 7:4, 6; 9:4; 1 Cor. 9:20, 21; 15:56; Gal. 2:19; 3:17, 19, 21), and the phrase “under law” fits here as well (Rom. 6:14, 15; 7:1; Gal. 3:23, 24; 4:4, 5; 5:18). In Hebrews the word *law* always refers to the commands of the Mosaic law and to the Mosaic covenant (Heb. 7:5, 11, 12, 19, 28; 8:4; 9:19, 22; 10:1, 8, 28), with the focus being on the prescriptions for priests and sacrifices that are offered.

Scholars debate intensely whether in some cases Paul uses the word *law* metaphorically to refer to a “principle” or “rule” (see Rom. 3:27; 7:21, 23, 25; 8:2) or whether in every instance the Mosaic law is in view. Deciding this matter is not vital for the purposes of this book, but it seems preferable to think that Paul uses the term metaphorically in these texts. It is hard to conceive of Paul saying that the law in conjunction with the Spirit frees people from sin (Rom. 8:2), since elsewhere Paul emphasizes that those who are “under law” are under sin. In

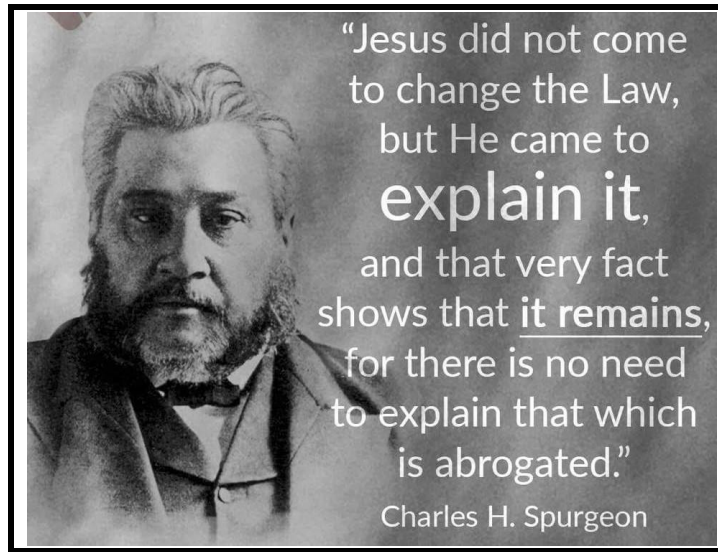
addition, it is most natural to take the noun “law” as a direct object in Romans 7:21 (“So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand”) instead of an accusative of general reference (“So I find with reference to the law”). And if “law” is the direct object, the term is clearly metaphorical. Finally, it is quite awkward to say that the phrase “another law” (Rom. 7:23) refers to the Mosaic law. It is more natural to conclude that Paul is playing on the term *law*, using it to refer to another principle or rule in his members. Indeed, understanding what Paul might possibly mean by saying the Mosaic law is in one’s members is difficult, but it makes eminent sense to think of another “principle” or “power” in one’s members. **Hence, it is more likely that Paul uses the term *law* in some texts to refer to a principle or power.**

#### **SUMMARY**

In both the Old and New Testaments, the word *law* focuses on the commands and regulations of the Mosaic covenant. In most instances the word *law* does not refer to instruction in a general sense but concentrates on what God demands that his people do. **In both the Old and New Testaments this is apparent, for verbs like “keep” and “do” are linked with the law.”**

So, one idea is that the law of sin is what Paul is referring to in some cases, rather than the Mosaic Law which includes the 10 commandments, feast days, clean and unclean etc. And the many other ordinances which we fulfill spiritually and which will be reinstated upon the Messiah’s return.

## Non-Church of God advocates for the Law of God



As we shall see, many conservative protestant scholars (and some of the churches) believe in the value of the Law of God and especially the 10 Commandments as the ‘great moral code.’

They do not possess the misconception of many or most mainstream protestants that the Old Testament or parts of it or the Law of God were abolished or superseded in Christ.

As most Christians know the word law or commandment can refer to several things in the Bible (Torah, 10 commandments, 613 instructions, rituals and sacrifices etc) dependent upon context. Anti-nomians would like to think that the 10 Commandments are abolished; or minimised as only a moral code; or only 9 are to be kept etc.

One of the compromises that has crept into some quarters is that Paul is talking about the overall Law in Galatians and about over-exuberance to it (not its abolition they say) – but this error in interpretation leads to ever more watering-down. Though this is not half as bad as the general view that the Paul abolishes the Law or similar, it is not quite accurate.

As such, the nuances in interpreting Paul’s writings in Galatians, have led to different views on the role of the Law in the New Covenant. These misinterpretations can dilute the original meaning and create confusion among believers.

### Miscellaneous Quotes on the Law

***Agnosticism and Religion*, p. 200 quoted in “The Ethics of the Old Testament,” by William Greene, Jr, *Princeton Theological Review*, XXVIII (1929), p. 365:**

**“The Mosaic, so far from being a barbarous or bloody code, surpasses beyond comparison every other code of the world ever known, for delicate, thoughtful,**

**and beneficent humaneness** ... No one, I suppose, will accuse Professor Huxley of prejudice in favor of the Old Testament, yet he says: 'There is no code of legislation, ancient or modern, at once so just and so merciful, so tender to the weak and poor, as the Jewish law.'"

**Law in the New Testament by Thomas Kazen** (Stockholm School of Theology. Below is a draft for an article in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Bible and Law*):

"When applied to the Jesus tradition, this would indicate an early understanding of Jesus' teaching not as new law, revising or replacing the Torah, but as a contextual elaboration on the given law."

**"The commandment(s) of Christ, which is/are described as both new and not new, but old, are thus based on the Holiness Code,** and just as it is said of the commandments in the Holiness Code that the person who keeps them *will live* through them ('*ašer ya'aséh 'otām hā'adam wāḥay bāhem*), new and not new, but old, are thus based on the Holiness Code, and just as it is said of the commandments in the Holiness Code that the person who keeps them will live through them ('*ašer ya'aséh 'otam ha'adam wa.ay bahem*), new and not new, but old, are thus based on the Holiness Code, and just as it is said of the commandments in the Holiness Code that the person who keeps them will live through them ('*ašer ya'aséh 'otam ha'adam wa.ay bahem*) ..."

**"Jesus did not reject the Torah in principle; although he had conflicts with some of his contemporaries over issues of legal interpretation..."**

"While it has been common to view Paul as taking Jesus' purported law-critical stance even further, this picture has changed as the so-called "parting of the ways" has been pushed further into the first or even second century CE, and as the "new perspective on Paul" has gained ground, mainly in the form of a less theologically biased understanding of Second Temple Judaism."

"Paul's seemingly derogatory treatment of the law, together with his allegory of the two women as "two covenants" (*dvo diathēkai*), and his closing blessing on "the Israel of God," easily suggest to modern interpreters a rejection of God's covenant with Israel, including its covenant law, for all practical purposes. **Such a view would, however, be incongruous with Paul's general argument in Galatians, which assumes that the Abrahamic covenant was already by faith ... Such expressions suggest that Paul can use "law" with a number of different meanings and connotations.**"

"James' *erga* have little to do with Paul's *erga nomou*. Jewish practices could in theory be taken for granted, but there are no indications that the threat from the Pauline tradition would concern such matters. The focus is on the law in a more general sense, as a basis for ethics."

**Paul and the Gentiles. Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World** by Terence Donaldson makes for an interesting read. He argues that Gentile Christians join with Jewish (ie Israelitish) Christians:

“... rather than replacing those that have been removed ... while the ingrafted branches may have benefited somehow from the lack of faith of the others, it was not be the direct means of simple displacement” (p. 218)

This has major repercussions for the observation of the commandments of God. In fact, many Church historians have come to accept that the early Church did indeed observe the Sabbath, Feast Days etc and were known as the Nazarenes. But they then argue that God somehow guided them into Sunday worship etc. You go figure.

**David Rensberger, “Anti-Judaism and the gospel of John” pp. 120–157 in *Anti-Judaism and the gospels*. Edited by William R. Farmer:**

“... ‘John does not represent, in my judgment, an outsider’s hostility towards Judaism or towards people of the Jewish faith ... The primary reason for this assertion is that the fourth evangelist, **like other early Christians did not yet regard his Christianity as a new or separate religion, but considered it to be Judaism ... as Craig A. Evans reminds us, John and the other New Testament writings were not produced in the context of later relationships but in the very different and irreproducible environment of first-century Judaism, which was not monolithic but was composed of a wide variety of competing groups, theologies, and ideologies. In its beginnings Christianity was one of these ...**’ (p. 138); ‘... The hostility that John expresses is fundamentally that of one group towards others within the same religious/ethnic entity’ (p. 139).” (pp. 66-67)

***Paul, the Law, and the Dawning of the Messianic Age: An Eschatological Proposal For The Law/Faith Contrast In Galatians 2: 15-21*, by Stephen Turley:**

“The apologetic significance of the eschatological paradigm for Paul was that he could rhetorically demonstrate that **because his sufferings were in fact symbolic of the sufferings of the Messiah, who is the law-keeper *par excellence*, it was Paul who was indeed the law-keeper and not his opponents.** By avoiding persecution, they demonstrated that they were not identified with the messianic age of the Spirit and thus, by the history of the law’s own testimony, are not participants in the pneumatically effected obedience inherent within that age. **It was Paul’s opponents who remained under the “curse of the law.” In contrast, Paul called “those who once received him like an angel” over whom he “labored as children” back to the gospel, the messianically inaugurated age of faith where the blessings of Abraham have come to the Gentiles.** It is in this sphere, this new covenant, where the Galatians will find the end of the curse of the law, the blessing of newness of life; indeed, the very presence of God himself.” (pp. 90-91)

## Sabbath

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." (Exodus 20:8-11 ESV)

"And he said to them, "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 ESV)

Amongst non-Sabbatarians, the views on the Sabbath take various stances or forms. Among them are:

1. It is holy and there is nothing wrong with keeping it, but Sunday has superseded it;
2. It is holy and will be observed in the Millennium, but we don't have to today;
3. It was ceremonial and would be a denial of Christ to keep it today
4. It was oppressive and implemented to demonstrate that we need grace and not law, rather freedom in Christ.

Here is an example of one who understands the holiness and value of the Sabbath, but does not advocate observing it!

### L. Michael Morales' work *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*

*"The Sabbath day: humanity's chief end*

Last in creation, first in intention," the Sabbath is "the end of the creation of heaven and earth." This statement by Abraham Heschel, that the Sabbath is the telos or goal of creation, accurately captures the emphasis of Genesis 1:1 — 2:3 on the Sabbath, leading other scholars to refer to the creation account as a 'cosmic liturgy of the seventh day,' and even as the 'creation of the Sabbath.' Indeed, beginning with seven-word sentence, developed through seven paragraphs, and climaxing on the consecration of the Sabbath where the seventh day is given threefold emphasis, the role of the Sabbath is dominant, leaving its impress on the account in strong ways, as in the literary structure, and in more subtle ways, as in the number of times key words appear, being some derivative of seven." (p. 43)

"The seventh day is not only the first day to be blessed, and the only day mentioned three times, but it is also the first object ever to be set apart as holy by Gd/ moreover, the seventh day is the only object of sanctification in the entire book of Genesis ..." (p. 45)

“... the primary blessing of being created in God’s image is in order to have fellowship with the Creator in a way the other creatures cannot.” (p. 46)

Morales quotes Westermann:

“Man separated from God has not only lost God, but also the purpose of his humanity ... man is not the goal of God’s creation. From the very beginning the seven-day framework has been progressing toward the seventh day. The goal is really the solemn rest of that day. In the blessing and hallowing of the seventh day, we may detect the still veiled goal the day of worship on which the responding congregation audibly utters the praise of the Creator ...” (*The Genesis Accounts of Creation*, pp. 21-22)

He also quotes Blocher:

“So we see linking together the meaning of the Sabbath and the theme of the image of God, which are in a manner interdependent ...” (*In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis*, p. 58)

After all, writes Morales,

“The image of God describes ‘the unique-ness of human existence by virtue of which the individual can enter a relationship with God. The human being is regarded as God’s counterpart on earth.’” (p.47)



## Sermon on the Mount and the Law of God

Read Matthew chapters 5-7.

R. Laird Harris, *Leviticus. Expositor's Bible Commentary*:

**"This significant verse [Lev 19:17. Cp Rom 7:14] shows that the OT law did not concern itself only with outward obedience. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount was not giving a new spiritual meaning to the law as is often supposed. It already had the spiritual meaning. He was protesting against the Pharisaic interpretation of the law that limited it to externals" (Vol. 2, p. 605).**

Refer to Scriptures such as Ex 23:23-24; Sam 24:17; Prov 25:21-22; Jer 12:1-3; Jer 17:18; Rom 12:20

**"Therefore, if thine enemy hunger ...** - This verse is taken almost literally from Pro 25:21-22. **Hunger and thirst here are put for want in general.** If thine enemy is needy in any way, do him good, and supply his needs. This is, in spirit, the same as the command of the Lord Jesus Mat 5:44, "Do good to them that hate you," etc" (Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Whole Bible* online).

**"The precept is quoted from Pro 25:21, Pro 25:22; so that, high as it seems to be, the Old Testament was not a stranger to it...** Saul was melted and conquered with the kindness of David, 1Sa 24:16; 1Sa 26:21..." (*Matthew Henry Commentary* online).

"This is taken from Pro 25:21, Pro 25:22, which without doubt supplied the basis of those lofty precepts on that subject which form the culminating point of the Sermon on the Mount" (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary* online).

"Paul continues quoting the OT: the exhortation in v.20 is a straightforward rendering of Prov 25:21-22a. Paul was probably drawn to this text for several reasons. First, the reference to the "enemy" may have attracted his attention since the teaching of Jesus on which he depends throughout these exhorts is to "love our enemies" (Matt 5:43 = Luke 6:27) ..."

**"Second, feeding and giving water to enemies is similar to the action Jesus recommends as the expression of his love: turning the other cheek; giving our shirts to those who ask for our coats; giving to those who beg from us** (cf. Luke 6:29-30). And, third, such a response to our enemies is a practical way of putting into action our "blessing" of those who persecute us (v.14) and a specific form of "doing good in the sight of all people" (v.17b)" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans, New International Commentary on the New Testament*, pp. 787).

"He is probably drawn to this text because of the word 'enemy,' the same word Jesus used in the tradition that Paul is using here..." (Douglas Moo, *Romans, NIV Application Commentary*, p. 413).

Now look at Lev 19:2 with Matt 5:48:

"Holiness cannot be regarded as an optional luxury of a believer's life-style. **If Lev 19:2 sets the mark high at "be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy," the NT sets it just as high:** "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:48, NIV). The standard is not abstract or philosophical but personal and concrete; it represents the very character and nature of the Lord. **When Jesus urged Christians to be perfect, he was making the same demands of holiness as those found here in Leviticus 19"** (Walter Kaiser, *The Book of Leviticus, New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 1, p. 1136).

**"The word *love* implies both attitude and act; one must not only feel love but also act in ways that translates love into concrete deeds. Just as one expresses love for God through active obedience to God's commandments,** so one must demonstrate love for others by reaching out to them with tangible deeds of compassion and concern. It is not without reason, therefore, that when instructing the disciples on the matter of judging others, Jesus frames his admonition positively: "Do to others as you would *do* to you" (Matt 7:12); Luke 6:31)... The word *neighbor* refers to a wide range of persons with whom Israel would have had relationships. The list of ethical admonitions in Lev 19:9-18 uses no fewer than eight words to describe the person Israel is obligated to care for: "poor" [*ani*] (v.10), "alien" [*ger*] (v.10), "neighbor" [*rea*] (v.13 [& 16]), "laborer" (v.13), the "deaf" (v.14), the "blind" (v.14), "poor" [*dal*] (v.15), "fellowcitizen" [*amit*] (vv. 15, 17; NRSV: "neighbor/people"). The inclusiveness of this list indicates that the "neighbor" is not limited to the peer with whom one shares a certain social status. **If also the disadvantaged person shunted to the edge of society, especially those persons the community may be tempted to ignore, perhaps even abuse for economic, political reasons..."** (Samuel Balentine, *Leviticus: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, p. 1645). [NB See Lev 19:10, 18; James 2:8]

"[Leviticus 19] Verse 18 is quoted often in the NT (Matt 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14). From the passage in Luke, it seems that Jesus was not the first or only one to couple this verse with Deuteronomy 6:5 as the greatest commandments. The error of the lawyer who tempted Jesus was not that he did not know the law but that he did not apply it to himself. The law is plain and gives a noble teaching. As Paul says, it sums up the commandments of our duty to our fellow man. Notice that the same law is given requiring love for aliens in v.34).

"The great parable on this verse is the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). Its usual interpretation is that to love your neighbor is to help the unfortunate as the Good Samaritan did... The view of J. Gresham Machen on the parable of Luke 10 is also noteworthy (from class notes): Obviously the Good Samaritan is the hero of the story. Jesus asked who became *to the wounded man*. The obvious answer is the Samaritan. The natural teaching is, the, love the Samaritan your neighbor. And this was exactly the sin of the expert in the law. He hated Samaritans. Jesus knew this and placed his finger on the man's deep sin. **He provided himself on keeping the law, yet the lawyer really did not keep it in the vital point.** The parable is more against justice [should be injustice?] than specifically in favor of helping the poor" (R. Laird Harris, *Leviticus. Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 2. pp. 605-06). [See Matt 5:43; Luke 10:25-29]

"The rule of equality before the law for aliens and citizens alike (24:22; Exod 12:45, Num 15:16, 29) is bound by an envelope structure contrasting the alien in Israel and alien Israel in Egypt-land. Hence Israel should not oppress the alien, but love him. These two contrasts project the theology of this unit: *land* (Israel and Egypt) and *behavior* towards the alien, negative in not cheating him and positive in loving him (M. Hiddenbrand) ...

"Schwartz (1987: 171-72) points out that there is a reciprocal relation between the alien and the Israelite: it is incumbent on the Israelite to love him (Deut 10:19), not to oppress him (Exod 22:20; 23:9) support him (19:10 =23:22; Deut 14:28-29, 24:19), include him in festival celebrations (Deut 16:11; 26:11). allow him to rest on the sabbath (Exod 20:10; 23:12), and provide him safety (Num 35:15). It is incumbent on the alien to follow the same sacrificial procedures as the Israelite (Exod 12:48-49; Lev 17:8, 12, 13; Num 9:14; 15:14, 29, observe the same prohibitions (16:29; 18:26), and receive the same punishments (20:2; 24:6, 22)" (Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, pp. 1704, 1706). [NB Lev 19:34; 24:22]

"The principles underlying the precepts of this chapter are affirmed by the NT. Jesus identified the love of God as the first commandment and love of neighbor as the second (Matt 22:37-40; Mark 12:20-31; Luke 20:27-28). This second command is found echoed in other NT texts like Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; and Jas 2:8. In Judaism at the time of Jesus there was a great debate over who was one's companion or neighbor, some groups favoring a broader definition than others. Jesus entered the debate; in the parable of the Good Samaritan, he broadened the definition of neighbor to include anyone who stand in need of help. Further more, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' identifies one's enemies, i.e., those who curse, hate, patronize, and persecute a believer, as the object of love (Matt 5:43-48). Jesus was both challenging the interpretation of "acquaintance" by the scribes and rabbis and also **bringing out the full intent of the Levitical law**" (John Hartley, *Leviticus. Word Biblical Commentary*, p. 325).

Regarding Ex 23:4-5:

"Note the neat balance in 23:4-5 between *your enemy* (someone you are hostile to) and *someone who hates you* (someone hostile to you). There is also a balance between (lit) 'in the absence of your enemy' (4) and his presence (5)" (Alec Motyer, *The Message of Exodus: The Days of Our Pilgrimage. The Bible Speaks Today*, p. 241). [NB Deut 22:2-4]

It does not necessary follow that you enemy is "someone you are hostile to"; but it may follow that an "enemy" is defined as "someone who hates you."

"Not only was their conduct not to be determined by public opinion [see 23:2], the direction taken by the multitude, or by weak compassion for a poor man [see 23:3]; but personal antipathy, enmity, and hatred were not to lead them to injustice or churlish behaviour" (Keil & Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*).

"The point at issue in these two verses is not so much a humane attitude towards a lost or improperly laden animal as it is a refusal to take advantage of another's misfortune because he happens to be an enemy. The loose animal is usually enjoying himself, and the animal that lies down under a poorly arranged load is protecting himself. The one at risk here is the owner, who may lose a valuable animal altogether or have to unload and reload an animal in an insecure spot and without help. Under normal circumstances, there would be no question about catching a stray animal or helping even a stranger rearrange a load. **But if the animal should belong to an enemy, to one who hates (and is perhaps hated), there is a temptation to permit and hope for the worst to happen, and to take satisfaction from its occurrence. A member of the covenant community is forbidden to do so; instead, he should catch and return the straying animal, or assist in the arrangement of a poorly placed load**" (John Durhan, *Exodus, Word Bible Commentary*, p. 331). [see Ps 35:19; John 15:25]

"If it be wrong not to prevent our enemy's loss and damage, how much worse is it to occasion harm and loss to him, or any thing he has" (Matthew Henry).

"Social responsibility: testimony in court, an enemy's animal, oppression (23:1-9). The final cycle of laws pertaining to social responsibility focuses mainly on matters of legal justice...

"Verse 4-5 are case laws. They envision situations in which one Israelite should go out of his way to help another. In fact, you are even to help your enemy. The identity of the enemy is not given, but we should presume that these laws concern members of the Israelite community, not foreigners. These verses are aimed not at the welfare of animals but that of the enemy. "Love your enemies" is not a sentiment found only in the New Testament. Why are these laws placed here in the context of legal practice? It is not clear. Perhaps verses 4-5 are striking examples of the impartiality commanded in the surrounding laws. The unity that

God's covenant people are to express towards each other extends even to those who do not like each other. Again, what is right, not how one feels, determines behavior.

"Finally, it is worth pointing out verse 4-5 do not express enforceable law. This is what make these two case laws different from most of the others in the Book of the Covenant. No penalty is mentioned, since behavior described can hardly be monitored. These laws aim further than mere legal dealings. They get closed to the heart of the matter treating all Israelites with love, whether one loves them or not.

Ex 23:9 Also thou shalt not oppress a **stranger [ger]**: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

"The final verse of this section repeats the essence of 22:21. In this context, however, it serves as a fitting conclusion to 23:1-8: Israelites are to deal fairly (lovingly) with everyone in their midst: fellow countrymen, whether poor or rich (vv 1-3, 6-8); enemies (vv 4-5); and even non Israelites, the "aliens." As a kingdom of priests, they are not to oppress those to whom they are to reflect the glory of God. Having experienced firsthand "man's inhumanity to man," they are to turn around and exemplify the opposite behavior: God's love for all" (Peter Enns, *Exodus. The NIV Application Commentary*, p. 455).

See Ps 25:21-22:

"Two laws are given that reflect an intimate, face-to-face agrarian community (vv.4-5). In such communities, as in any community, there are "enemies" (v.4) and those whom one hates (v.5). One is not inclined to help or enhance the life of one's adversaries. Nonetheless, in an agrarian economy the loss of one's working animal is a most serious matter. Thus even an enemy's stray animal must be returned, and if it has fallen from too heavy a load, then, it is to be assisted. These two commands indicate for the sake of the neighbor, i.e. for the health of the community, one has obligations that override one's emotional propensity. Calvin suggests that believers "should testify their forgiveness of their enemies by being merciful to their animals" (*Commentaries*, 57). The basis of this command is not some romantic "do-gooder" sense, but the practical awareness that the community depends on neighborly acts that enhance the life of all" (Walter Bruggemann, *The Book of Exodus. New Interpreters Bible*, Vol. 1, p. 870).

"**Thine enemy's ox.** A private enemy is here spoken of, not a public one, as in Deu 23:6. It is remarkable that the law should have so far anticipated Christianity as to have laid it down that men have duties of friendliness even towards their enemies, and are bound under certain circumstances to render them a service. "Hate thine enemies" (Mat 5:43) was no injunction of the Mosaic law, but a conclusion which Rabbinical teachers unwarrantably drew from it. Christianity, however, goes far beyond Mosaism in laying down the broad precept - "Love your enemies"" (*Pulpit Commentary* online).

"It is only a short step from this practical concern for the good of our adversary to the 'love your enemy' of Matthew 5:44" (R. Alan Cole, *Exodus. Tyndale Old Testament Commentary*, p. 185).

"Never does the OT command, "Hate your enemy," as the oral tradition of Jesus' day enjoined (Matt 5:43)" (Walter Kaiser, *Exodus. The Expositor's Commentary*, Vol. 2, p. 443).

"The proverb presupposes that one has a neighbor who hates Him (cf. 25:16-17). The context of the admonitions represent the enemy in urgent need, concretized as being hungry (verset Aa) and thirsty (verset Ba), two sides of the same situation...

"Meinhold (*Sprüche*, p.430) comments, "Generally speaking, this admonition means that the enemy ought to be supported in every need one knows him to be in. It is left unsaid that this help will not be given in a such a way that will enable him to continue his enmity in a stronger position. Rather, one silently counts on the fact that by giving him help and benefit, his enmity will be overcome and terminated. From the helper's perspective, he has already practically left the enmity behind. The reason for this action cannot be found in the past but in the future (v.22) ...

"Both Old and New Testament instruct the covenant community to love, not hate their enemies (Lev 19:17-18; Ps 35:13; Matt 5:43)" (Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 15-31, New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, pp. 330-31).

**"In effect, the concrete terms of v.21 tell the reader to love not only neighbor and stranger, but also one's enemies** (cf. Lev 19:18, 34; Matt5:43-48). The law in Exod 23:4-5 embodies a similar principle (cf. Deut 22:1-4;...)" (Raymond Van Leeuwen, *The Book of Proverbs, The New Interpreters Bible*, Vol. 5, p. 220).

See Scriptures such as II Kings 6:21-23.

**Nicholas Wright, *The Letters to the Romans, The New Interpreters Bible*, Vol. 10, pp. 714-75:**

**"In place of private vengeance, Paul recommends a shocking line of action: feed a hungry foe, give drink to a thirsty one. He quotes from Prov 25:21-22, and the Bible contains one or two striking examples of this practice, notably 1 Kgs 6:20-23..."**

"The Aramean army is not struck down by the swords of soldiers but by a blinding light (*sanwerim*) This is not ordinary blindness (*eiwwaron*), but a bright light that causes a temporary distortion of vision. In this fourth episode the Aramean army is taken captive by Elisha and led to the capital (6:18-20). The original command of the Aramean king is to go and find Elisha (v.13); once they get to the city where

they are unable to find them, but instead are lead to the city where they will find him. Elisha then prays a prayer virtually identical to the one that enabled his servant to see the heavenly armies (v.20; cf. v.17). The eyes of the soldiers are opened and they see their man, but they can also see that they are surrounded by the enemy army.

"In the final episode the king of Israel believes he has an opportunity to inflict a debilitating defeat on the Aramean army (6:21-23). Matters, however, are not in his control; he has not been responsible for taking the soldiers captive and requires permission from the prophet, respectfully and unusually addressed as "father" (v.21)" (August Konkkel, *1 & 2 Kings, NIV Application Commentary*, p. 449).

"In his joy at the deliverance of so large a force of the enemy into his hands, Jehoram forgets the coldness and estrangement which have hitherto characterized the relations between himself and the prophet (2Ki 3:11-14; 2Ki 5:8), and salutes him by the honorable title of "father," which implied respect, deference, submission... **Shall I smite them? shall I smite them? The repetition marks extreme eagerness, while the interrogative form shows a certain amount of hesitation...**" (*Pulpit Commentary* online).

**"And he prepared great provision for them. Jehoram followed the directions of the prophet, carrying them out, not in the letter merely, but in the spirit. He entertained the captives at a grand banquet (Josephus, 'Ant. Jud.,' 9.4. § 3), and then gave them leave to depart. And when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel.** The Syrian raids, which had hitherto been frequent, perhaps almost continuous (2Ki 5:2), now ceased for a time, and the kingdom of Israel had a respite... the *nexus* of the clause, "So the bands," etc; ... implies that the cessation was the consequence of Jehoram's sparing and entertaining the captives" (*Pulpit Commentary* online).

"The prophet instead follows the wisdom of a proverb: "If you enemy hungers, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you" (Prov 25:21-22). These soldiers are not to be slain or taken captive as spoils of war and made slaves, instead they are treated lavishly with food and drink and sent on their way. The result is a half in the border wars" and requires permission from the prophet, respectfully and unusually addressed as "father" (v.21)" (August Konkkel, *1 & 2 Kings. NIV Application Commentary*, p. 449).

"In a context of ongoing hostility, and in contradictions to current practice, Elisha exemplifies Proverbs 25:21-22: 'If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink...' These words are cited by Paul to support his exhortation to 'not repay anyone for evil ... as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone ... overcome evil with good' (Rom 12:17-21). The stories of

Naaman and the freeing of the Aramean forces belong together as examples of not conforming 'to the pattern of this world, but [being] transformed by renewing of your mind', informed by 'God's mercy' (Rom 12:1-2)" (John Olley, *The Message of Kings. Bible Speaks Today*, p. 243).

See Prov 24:17-18

**"... the proverb teaches that the LORD will not promote further moral ugliness by maintaining the situation that exacerbates it. His righteousness demands justice, but his holiness demands that he desist.** The two wrongs of the wicked person's action and of his son's reaction offset one another. The proverb censures the pollution of justice and the thwarting of it by another sin" (Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 15-31. New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, p. 285).

See II Tim 4:14

**"However, the proverb does not address the wrongs done to God. Other texts teach that those sins will be punished (11:21; 16:5).** Positively, the son should weep, not rejoice, at the tragic waste and destruction of God's image (cf. Job 10:8-9). One may legitimately hope for God to right wrongs (2 Tim 4:14) and should celebrate when God's righteousness prevails, but one must not nurse malignant revenge (2 Sam 1:10; Job 31:29; Ps 35:11-14; Luke 19:41-44). Some texts even enjoin positive assistance to the fallen enemy (Exod 23:4-5; Prov 25:2; Matt 5:38-48); Rom 12:20-21)" (Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 15-31. New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, p. 285).

"These verse are linked to vv.15-16 by the catch words "fall" and "stumble," and they qualify the admonition. When one's enemy suffers God just anger, one must not gloat (see 17:5 and Job 31:29). This is what the wicked do (Ps 35:15-16). The righteous who depend on God, must not become smug. **A further step on this dangerous path is to take God's justice into one's own hands...** Such sayings move into the direction of loving one's enemy (see 25:21-22; Exod 23:4-5; Matt 5:43-48). The motive cause (v.18) has caused some consternation. It seems to say that one may hope for God's wrath on one's enemies, in apparent contradiction to the warning in v.17. But the issue is leaving something to God's justice, the righting of wrongs (for which one may legitimately hope; see 2 Tim 4:14), as opposed to presuming self-righteous superiority. If one sins against an enemy in this matter, both then are subject to God's judgment - or mercy. The psalmists and the sages were aware that they themselves could move from righteousness and wisdom to folly and sin (Pss 19:12-13 NIV; 139:23-24; Prov 26:61)" (Raymond Van Leeuwen, *The Book of Proverbs. The New Interpreters Bible*, Vol. 5, pp. 221-22)

**"Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour" was a Mosaic precept (Lev 19:18); the addition, "and hate thine enemy," was a Pharisaic gloss, arising from a misconception concerning the extermination of the Canaanites, which, indeed, had a special cause and purpose, and was not a precedent for the treatment of all aliens... When he stumbleth; rather, *when he is overthrown*.** The maxim refers to private enemies. The overthrow of public enemies was often celebrated with festal rejoicing. Thus we have the triumph of Moses at the defeat of the Amalekites, and over Pharaoh's host at the Red Sea; of Deborah and Barak over Sisera (Exo 15:1-27; Exo 17:15; Jdg 5:1-31); and the psalmist, exulting over the destruction of his country's foes, could say, "The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance; he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked" (Psa 58:10). But private revenge and vindictiveness are warmly censured and repudiated" (*Pulpit Commentary* online).

**"There may be a holy joy in the destruction of God's enemies, as it tends to the glory of God and the welfare of the church (Psa 58:10); but in the ruin of our enemies, as such, we must by no means rejoice; on the contrary, we must weep even with them when they weep (as David, Psa 35:13, Psa 35:14), and that in sincerity, not so much as letting our hearts be secretly glad at their calamities"** (*Matthew Henry Commentary* online).

"Verse 18 shows that 17 is far from optional, for the point of 18b is that our glee may well be a more punishable sin than all the guilt of your enemy. A comparable warning appears in Romans 11:18-21..." (Derek Kidner, *Proverbs, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, p. 155).

"It would be dishonoring to God for us to rejoice over the misfortune of our enemies. The prohibitions "Do not gloat" (*'al-tismah*) and "do not rejoice" (*'al-yagel*) extend to the inner satisfaction (the "heart") at the calamity of the wicked; that person is still in the image of God. The motivation for this instruction is the fear of the Lord's displeasure. God might even take pity on them! The point is a little complicated. It is the property of God to judge, and is not to be taken lightly or personalized. God's judgment should strike a note of fear in the hearts of everyone (see Lev 19:17-18; Matt 5:44). So if we want God to continue his anger on the wicked, we better not gloat. These are personal enemies; **the imprecatory psalms for the enemies of God and his program provide a different set of circumstances**" (Alan Ross, *Proverbs. Expositors Bible Commentary*, Vol. 5, p. 1076).

See Matt 5:43-44:

"The last illustration cuts at the root of all sin and crime, the tap-root of selfishness. The scribes and Pharisees had made use of those regulations, most needful at the time, which separated Israel from other nations, as an excuse for

restricting the range of love to those prepared to render an equivalent. Thus that wonderful statute of the old legislation, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," was actually made a minister to selfishness; so that, instead of leading them to a life above the world, it left them not a whit better than the lowest and most selfish of the people. "If ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same?" Thus was the noble "royal law according to the Scripture" destroyed by the petty quibbling use of the word "neighbour." Our Lord fulfilled it by giving to the word neighbour its proper meaning, its widest extent, including even those who have wronged us in thought or word or deed, "I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (William Nicoll, *Matthew. The Expositor's Dictionary* online).

See Psalm 35:11-14:

"Perhaps this is where Jesus' admonition to "love your enemies" and "do good to those who abuse you" comes from" (Gerald Wilson, *Psalms* (Vol. 1), *NIV Application Commentary*, p. 588).

#### COMPARISON OF GOD AND HIS LAW

GOD	LAW
God is Spiritual — John 4:24	His law is Spiritual — Romans 7:14
God is Love — I John 4:8	His law is Love — Matthew 22:37-40
God is Truth — John 14:6	His law is Truth — Psalm 119:142
God is Righteous — I Corinthians 1:30	His law is Righteous — Psalm 119:172
God is Holy — Isaiah 6:3	His law is Holy — Romans 7:12
God is Perfect — Matthew 5:48	His law is Perfect — Psalm 19:7
God stands Forever — James 1:17	His law stands Forever — Psalm 111:7,8
God is Good — Luke 18:19	His law is Good — Romans 7:12
God is Just — Deuteronomy 32:4	His law is Just — Romans 7:12
God is Pure — I John 3:3	His law is Pure — Psalm 19:8
God is Unchangeable — James 1:17	His law is Unchangeable — Matthew 5:18

NOTE: As you can readily see, God's law is a transcript of His character. It can no more change or end than can the eternal God, Himself.

## The Old New Commandment (1 John 2:7-11)

“Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard.

At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.

Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.

But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.”

(1John 2:7-11 ESV)

**Steven J. Cole, *The Old New Commandment (1 John 2:7-11)*:**

<https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-7-old-new-commandment-1-john-27-11>

I think that we all chuckle at the Peanuts cartoon strip because so often we see the truth about ourselves there. That is especially so when Linus protests, “I love mankind; it’s *people* I can’t stand!” Love in the abstract is a cinch. It’s loving those irritating people that I rub shoulders with that is not easy.

In 1 John 2:3-6, the apostle gives a test by which you can know that you truly know Jesus Christ, namely, if you walk in obedience to His word. In 2:6, he states, “The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.” Then, in 2:7-11, John goes on to apply this test of obedience more specifically to the area of love. If Jesus’ life and especially His death epitomized love, then those who claim to follow Him are obligated to live in love.

In the Upper Room, on the night He was betrayed, Jesus demonstrated His great love for the disciples by taking a towel and a basin of water and washing the disciples’ feet. After that unforgettable object lesson, He drove the point home (John 13:14-15), “If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.” He was not instituting a ceremonial foot-washing service, where everyone comes with clean feet to be washed! He was saying something much more difficult to practice, that we who follow Jesus must set aside our rights and serve one another out of love.

In that same chapter (John 13:34-35), Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Obviously, those words of Jesus were behind John's words about the old, new commandment. It may be that the heretics against whom John was writing claimed to have some "new" truths. Using an obvious play on words, John counters them by saying that we don't need new truth, but rather the old truth that his readers learned early in their Christian experience. **On the other hand, if you want "new" truth, John says that the old commandment is the new commandment, which Jesus gave to us. In short,**

***Loving one another is an essential mark of a true Christian.***

Having said that, I must quickly add that that **we must define "love" biblically, not culturally. Culturally, if you mention the word "love," people think of "niceness." They picture a loving person as always being nice and sweet towards everyone. He never confronts sin or error. He never gets angry about evil or says anything that might upset someone.**

But if you are at all familiar with the four gospels, you will immediately see that by this cultural definition, Jesus was not a loving man! Jesus *loved* the Jewish religious leaders when He said to them, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites" (Matt. 23:15). He *loved* Peter when He said to him, "Get behind Me, Satan" (Matt. 16:23). He *loved* the multitude when He said to them, "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you?" (Matt. 17:17). The apostle Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit, whose first fruit is love, when he said to Elymas, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?" Then, he struck him blind (see Acts 13:9-11).

I'm not saying that we should go around blasting people, while claiming that we're loving them! I'm only pointing out that our definition of love, in a practical sense, must encompass all that the Bible says about love, not what our worldly culture says. John makes two points in our text:

**1. To love one another is to obey our Lord's commandment (2:7-8).**

In these two verses, John makes four points:

**A. JESUS' COMMAND TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER IS BOTH OLD AND NEW.**

John never specifically identifies the old, new commandment in these verses, and he only mentions love once in this entire section (2:10). But his reference to the new commandment makes it obvious that he is referring to Jesus' command to love one another.

**This commandment was old in two senses. First, it was old in that Moses taught it in the Law, "... you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18).** Jesus identified this as the second greatest commandment, after the command to love God with all your being (Matt. 22:37-40). So in that sense, this command had been with God's people for 1,400 years.

**But the main sense in which this was an old commandment is that these believers had heard it from the very earliest days of their Christian experience (2:7): "... which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard."** John uses the phrase, "from the beginning," in the same way in 1 John 3:11, "For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another" (also, 2 John 5).

But, John says (2:8), the commandment is also new, in that Jesus had issued it as the new commandment (John 13:34). John Stott (*The Epistles of John* [Eerdmans], p. 93) suggests four ways that this old commandment became new when Jesus issued it. First, it was new in its *emphasis*, in that Jesus brought it together with the command to love God as the summation of the entire Law. Second, it was new in its *quality*, in that His own self-sacrifice on the cross became the standard. Third, it was new in its *extent*, in that in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus extended the definition of neighbor to go beyond race or religion. Anyone in need who crosses our path is our neighbor. He said that we should love even our enemies. Finally, it was new in the disciples' *continuing apprehension* of it. The love of Jesus on the cross is inexhaustible. We can never plumb its depths. And so as we grow in our understanding of His great love, we will grow in our apprehension of how we must love one another. So Jesus' command is both old and new.

***B. FROM THE BEGINNING OF YOUR CHRISTIAN WALK, YOU SHOULD LEARN HOW TO ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN LOVING RELATIONSHIPS.***

John tells his readers that they have had this commandment "from the beginning," and then identifies it as "the word which you have heard" (2:7). It was part and parcel with the gospel that they had believed at the outset of their Christian experience. When we hear and respond to the good news that Jesus Christ died for sinners, at that point the love of God is "poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rom. 5:5). The first fruit of the Spirit is love (Gal. 5:22). As I mentioned, the entire Bible may be summed up by the two great commandments, to love God and to love one another. So learning how to establish and maintain loving relationships is not "graduate level" Christianity. It is basic, beginning Christianity.

Many of you came into the faith from backgrounds where you did not experience love. Your parents abused you verbally or physically. Maybe you were in a series of abusive relationships with the opposite sex. You've had no models of how to love other people. It is urgent, once you trust in Christ as your Savior, to learn from God's Word and from more mature believers how to love others in a practical, daily manner. You will need to unlearn many bad ways of relating to others that you brought with you from the past. You will need to relearn how to think and speak and act in loving ways, especially toward those who wrong you. If you do not learn to love others, you will fester with anger and bitterness, and your relationship with Christ will suffer.

It all begins with *how you think* about others. Instead of thinking first about yourself, your feelings, your rights, and your needs, you must learn to think first about others. How can I show this difficult person the love of Jesus Christ? How can I serve this person in love? Rather than thinking angry thoughts about how he wronged you and how you'll get even, you begin to think about how Jesus wants you to think about the one who mistreated you. You begin to pray for this person, that he would come to know Jesus. You look for opportunities to return good instead of evil. I recommend that you write out Paul's description of love (1 Cor. 13:4-7) on a card and read it over several times each morning, until you have in your mind how a loving person acts. Do the same with 1 Peter 3:8-12.

**Then, love extends to *your speech*. You put off abusive speech that tears down the other person, and you put on speech that builds him up** (Gal. 5:15; Eph. 4:29, 31-32; Col. 3:8). You stop lying or stretching the truth to your own advantage and begin speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:15, 25). You cease from gossip and slander (2 Cor. 12:20).

**Then, in *your behavior* you begin to practice loving deeds** (Rom. 12:9-13; Eph. 5:2). **You look for opportunities to serve others, beginning in your home.** You become "zealous for good deeds" (Titus 2:14). Again, this is not advanced, graduate level Christianity. This is freshman Christianity 101. But, maybe you're thinking, "I don't have the strength to do what you're saying." Then,

### ***C. YOUR NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST IS CENTRAL TO PRACTICING BIBLICAL LOVE TOWARDS OTHERS.***

John says that this old, new commandment "is true in Him and in you" (2:8). It is *true in Him* because the Lord Jesus is the greatest example of love in the history of the world. He left the splendor and perfect holiness of heaven, where He enjoyed unbroken fellowship with the Father. He came to this cruddy, sin-stained world, not as the conquering King, but as a lowly servant. He was obedient to death on the cross at the hands of sinful men that He could have obliterated, if He had given the command. He did it all to save sinners who deserved His wrath. This new commandment is supremely true in Him.

But John also says that it is *true in you*. If you ask, "How so?" the answer is, "Because you are now in Him." It is true in Him fundamentally and true in you derivatively because of your new relationship with Him. Paul often describes our new relationship as being "in Christ." John uses the term, "abiding" in Him. The glorious truth of the New Testament is that we are joint-heirs with Christ of all His riches (Rom. 8:17; Eph. 1:19-20; 2:6)! So if you are lacking in love for a difficult person, pray, "Lord, You know that I am empty and unable to love this person. But, I am in You and You do not lack love, even for the unlovely. Please love this person through me!" Understanding your new relationship with Jesus Christ is central to practicing biblical love.

**D. GROWING IN LOVE FOR OTHERS IS A LIFELONG PROCESS.**

John adds (2:8), "... because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining." Primarily, John is referring to the dawning of the gospel through Jesus Christ (see Luke 1:78-79; John 1:9). His coming inaugurated a new era.

But in a secondary sense, what John says here applies to every person who has trusted in Christ. Paul put it (2 Cor. 4:6), "For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." (See also, Col. 1:12, 13.) Or, as Peter put it (1 Pet. 2:9), God saved us "so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." So becoming a Christian is a radical change from darkness to light, where God opens your blind eyes to see something of the glory of Jesus Christ.

Yet at the same time, there is a process involved that takes time. The darkness does not dissipate instantly, but rather it is gradually dispelled as the true Light of Jesus Christ and God's word shines more and more into your heart. When it comes to the practicalities of learning to live in love, it is a lifelong process. You never arrive at the place where you can say, "I love everyone perfectly now! Let's move on!" Paul put it this way (1 Thess. 4:9-10), "Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more, ..." Or, as he prayed for the Philippians, "that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment" (Phil. 1:9).

So, don't be like the husband who grudgingly accompanied his wife to the marriage counselor. She complained to the counselor that he never told her that he loved her. The counselor asked, "Is this true?" The man gruffly responded, "I told her that 25 years ago when we got married, and it hasn't changed!" You've got to work at growing in love on a daily basis for the rest of your life. To love one another is to obey our Lord's commandment.

**2. Love is inseparable from the light, just as hatred is inseparable from the darkness (2:9-11).**

The phrase, "The one who says," tips us off that John again has the heretics in mind. They claimed to be enlightened, and yet, apparently, they were arrogant and self-centered. They did not love others in a sacrificial way. They were using people to build a following for themselves, rather than building people to follow Christ. So John gets out his black and white paint again, and without mixing them into shades of gray, he shows that these false teachers were not true believers. They do not love; they hate. They are not in the light; they are in the darkness until now (2:9).

But we should not only use John's words to identify false teachers. We should also apply them honestly to our own lives. Sadly, there are many that profess to know Christ, but in their marriages and towards their children they do not practice

biblical love. Many evangelical churches are torn apart by conflict because certain powerful members did not get their own way. Rather than acting in love, they viciously attack those who don't agree with them. So John shows that love is inseparable from the light, just as hatred invariably is bound up with darkness. He does not allow for any middle ground, where you can be sort of loving, but sort of cantankerous, too! He makes three points:

**A. YOUR PROFESSION OF BEING IN THE LIGHT IS EXPOSED AS FALSE IF YOU HATE YOUR BROTHER (2:9).**

You may be thinking, "Hate is a pretty strong word! While I may not *love* that difficult person, I wouldn't say that I *hate* him." But John doesn't let us go there! You either love the other person, which requires sacrificing yourself for that person's highest good, as Jesus did for us on the cross (John 13:34)—or, you hate him.

Writing to a Gentile church situation, Paul contrasts the new way in Christ with the old life before he met Christ (Titus 3:1-3):

Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.

He goes on to talk of how God's kindness and love transformed us through salvation. The point is, no matter how pagan or unloving your background, if you continue in a lifestyle of hate rather than a lifestyle of love, your profession of faith is suspect.

**B. IF YOU LOVE YOUR BROTHER, YOU ABIDE IN THE LIGHT AND HAVE NO CAUSE FOR STUMBLING IN YOU (2:10).**

Whether "light" should be capitalized (NASB) to represent Christ or whether it refers to the truth of God's Word, I don't know. It doesn't matter in that if you abide in Jesus Christ, you also abide in His Word, which sheds His light into your heart. To abide in the light means to live with your life exposed and open to God's Word. You allow the Word to shine into the dark recesses of your mind, exposing and rooting out what is evil. John says that loving your brother is inseparable from abiding in the light.

If you love your brother and abide in the light, "there is no cause for stumbling" in you. This may mean that you do not cause others to stumble in their walk with God because, out of love for them, you only say and do that which builds them in Christ. Or, it may mean that the person who walks in the light will not stumble himself, because the light illumines his path (John 11:9-10).

In both senses, walking in love preserves you from sin. Failure to love often leads you into other sins. For example, lust and sexual immorality are serious sins, but both are rooted in a lack of love for others. To lust after a woman is to desire to use her to gratify your desires. It is a failure of love. Or, take the sins of greed,

stealing, and murder. They all stem from a failure to love others. Invariably, those who commit these sins love themselves quite well! None of us need to work on loving ourselves, as the “Christian” psychologists repeatedly emphasize. The task is, to love others as we all in fact *do* love ourselves!

***C. IF YOU HATE YOUR BROTHER, YOU ARE STILL IN THE DARKNESS, YOU WALK IN THE DARKNESS, AND YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING BECAUSE YOU'RE SPIRITUALLY BLIND (2:11).***

I'm not making up these points. I'm merely summarizing each of these verses. The plain meaning of verse 11 is that if you live for yourself with no regard for others, no self-sacrifice or willingness to be inconvenienced to meet others' needs, then you are not saved. John is not talking about occasional lapses into selfishness. We all fail in that at times. Rather, he's talking about a lifestyle (“walks”). The person who lives for himself and is indifferent towards others (which is what hatred means) “does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes” (2:11). He is spiritually blind, groping through life without the light of God's Word to guide him in God's ways.

I have often counseled with people who profess to know Christ, but their relationships are marked by anger, abusive speech, bitterness, and self-centeredness. Invariably, they don't have a clue as to why they keep experiencing broken relationships. While I do not know their hearts (only God does), their lives do not give evidence that they have experienced the love of God in Jesus Christ. Rather, they seem to be in spiritual darkness, blindly colliding from one broken relationship to the next. They do not practice biblical love, which is an essential mark of every true Christian.

**Conclusion**

Again, none of us loves perfectly. When we fail, we need to repent and ask forgiveness of the one we wronged. It is a lifelong process of being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. But those who have met Him at the cross will be growing in love for others.

**Also, note that love for others is a commandment, not a warm, gushy feeling.** That should give you hope, because God's commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:3) and God's Spirit gives us the grace and power to obey His commands, which are for our good. *Biblical love is a self-sacrificing, caring commitment that shows itself in seeking the highest good of the one loved.* You can obey the commandment to love others!

So if you're thinking, “But I don't love my mate any more,” or, “I just don't like that difficult person,” the Bible is clear: Get to work obeying God's commandment to love him or her. It's not optional for the follower of Christ. It's essential!” [emphasis mine]

**Steven J. Cole, *The Old New Commandment (1 John 2:7-11)*:**

**Gordon Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus. New International Commentary on the Old Testament*:**

“Verse 18, “love your neighbor as yourself,” is quoted frequently in the NT (Matt. 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31, 33; Luke 10:27; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8) and ever since has been regarded as the quintessence of Christian ethics.

“It is, however, more than a summary of Christian principles. In its original context Lev. 19:18 epitomizes and expresses the principles governing all laws that surround it. Love for one’s neighbor comes out as in not stealing from him, or lying to him, or cheating him in business. The other precepts about neighborly conduct in this chapter are applications of the principle of love in specific situations.

“For the Christian it is self-evident that love for God and neighbor still govern his actions, we must ask ourselves whether similar situations still exist in our society, and if so how love would act today.

“Many of the general precepts are just as pertinent today as they ever were in ancient Israel. Corruption (vv. 15-16), prostitution (v. 29), divination (v. 26) and the occult (v. 31), exploitation of foreigners (vv. 33-34), and deceitful marketing methods (vv. 35-36) all flourish where man does not make love of his neighbor his guiding principle.

“... man is still called to imitate God (Matt. 5:48; 1 Cor.11:1), to be holy, for I am holy,” (Lev. 19:2; cf. 1 Pet. 1:16). The detailed application of these imperatives may change from age to age, but the principles of holy living remain unaltered” (pp. 274-75).

## The Law as Grace from God

"For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.  
For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."  
(John 1:16-17 ESV)

"For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came into being through  
Jesus Christ." (John 1:17 J. Ramsay Michaels translation)

"Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you:  
Moses, on whom you have set your hope.  
For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.  
But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?" (John 5:45-47)

Read Peter Nathan's article "Charis, Hesed, Law and Grace," *Living Church News*, Nov/Dec 2014, pp. 9-11.

**J. Ramsay Michaels, *The Gospel of John, New International Commentary on the New Testament*:**

"The explanation of "grace upon grace" is that the "grace" or gift of the law through Moses has now through Jesus Christ, given way to "grace and truth." Some commentators find here an almost Pauline contrast between law and grace, but this is not evident in the text. The accent rather is on continuity.

"The law is itself grace from God, "given through Moses" as a preparation for more and greater grace to come. The point is not that the law failed because it could not provide "grace and truth," but that it paved the way for the latter to come into being "through Jesus Christ" (compare 1:45; 5:45-47).

This above paragraph is only partially correct and needs to be expounded further by the author.

""Grace and truth," therefore, are more than simply the "mercy and truth" revealed to Moses (Exod 34:6). Here, as in verse 14, they are closed linked to the person of Jesus, but now with the stipulation that they are something believers have "received" (v.16) from Jesus.

"This is consistent with the notion that together they refer to the gift of the Spirit (compare 7:37-39) ...

"In the case of the law, the passive "was given" points to God as the Giver, even though it was given "through Moses." "Grace and truth," by contrast, "came into being" (*egeneto*), just as the world "came into being" (vv.3, 10), just as John

"came" as a messenger (v.6), and just as the Word "came" in human flesh (v.14). More specifically, "grace and truth" came into being "through Jesus Christ" just as all things came into being "through him" (vv.3, 10). The coming of "grace and truth" is a kind of new creation, and the Word through whom all things came to be finally has a name - Jesus Christ." Because of differing verbs, therefore, the phrases "through Moses" and "through Jesus Christ" are not strictly parallel. Jesus is not a new Moses receiving and delivering a new law, but the Word in human flesh, calling "grace and truth" into being.

"Although, as we have seen, "grace and truth" points to the gift of the Spirit, the focus of our text is not on the Spirit as such, or on any particular gift, but on "Jesus Christ," who made both new creation and the new birth (vv.12-13) possible...

"The full name, "Jesus Christ," occurs only here [1:17] and in 17:3 in the Gospel of John (see however, 1 Jn 1:3; 2:1; 3:23; 4:2; 5:6, 20; 2 Jn 3, 7)" (J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John, New International Commentary on the New Testament*, pp. 90-91).

"God's gift of the Jewish law, he says makes way for grace and truth, the gift of the Spirit through Jesus Christ.

Another objection also came to the author's attention and must have cut deeply into the message of hope. Its essential thought line ran: Even granting that all that is said about the covenant, its law, and its promise for the future, does not the covenant itself, backed up by the entire past history of Israel, show that the same disasters would overtake the nation again? If disobedience to the law carried such terrible consequences, and if the nature of Israel in the future remained what it had been in the past, would not the same consequences befall Israel yet again? One way or another the nation was doomed!

This serious objective is counted by the words of 30:6: "God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live." God would transform the inner mind and spirit of Israel by "circumcising" the hearts of the people in order to implant the will to obey the commandments. The theology is virtually identical to that expressed in Jer 31:33-34 and Ezek 36:25-27. By a spiritual transformation the power of God would create a new spirit of obedience within every Israelite. God would give the power and the willingness to obey" (Ronald Clements, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 513).

"The fullness of Jesus Christ is an expression based on the conviction that Jesus himself was a man full of grace and truth (v.14), a phrase recalling the description of Stephen in Acts 6:8 ("full of God's grace and power") and the more common expression "full of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:3, 5; cf. Luke 4:1; John 3:34.

"If the Spirit in Luke-Acts means "power" (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8), the Spirit in the Johannine writings means "truth" (John 4:23-24; 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 5:6).

“The Spirit that rested on Jesus after his baptism now belongs to all his followers, for he is “he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit” (1:33).

“God’s gift of the Jewish law, he says makes way for grace and truth, the gift of the Spirit through Jesus Christ.

**“The distinction is not between law and grace as contrasting ways of salvation, but between two gifts of grace: the law and the Spirit (cf. Paul in 2 Cor 3:7-18)”** (J. Ramsey Michaels, *John. New International Bible Commentary*, p. 24). [emphasis mine]

## The Adaptability of the Law

"We know that Christ spoke in parables. We know that the parables were not to be taken literally, but were intended to convey a deeper meaning. It was a meaning that was conveyed to some and hidden to others. It seems that God did much the same thing with the law." (Ron Dart, *Law & Covenant*, pp. 28-29)

Are the various commandments of God fixed in such a way that there is no flexibility for humans given circumstances and cultures one resides in? Is it so rigid that one has to leave society and reside in communities in rural areas to be able to fully adhere to them?

On the other hand are they so flexible to undermine them and render them of little consequence other than a very broad moral code?

Old Testament commentators explain that there are sometimes little changes and adaptations here and there, though one must be supremely careful not to be so adaptable to make the commandments whatever one would want them to be.

Compare

"Now on the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be for you a time of holy convocation, and you shall afflict yourselves and present a food offering to the LORD." (Lev 23:27)

"But in this way Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with a bull from the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering." (Lev 16:30)

... with the Millennial prophecy:

"Thus says the Lord GOD: In the first month, on the first day of the month, you shall take a bull from the herd without blemish, and purify the sanctuary.

The priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering and put it on the doorposts of the temple, the four corners of the ledge of the altar, and the posts of the gate of the inner court.

You shall do the same on the seventh day of the month for anyone who has sinned through error or ignorance; so you shall make atonement for the temple." (Ezek 45:18-20)

Notice that the cleansing of the tabernacle occurred on Atonement but during the Millennium it occurs 1 Abib.

**"Ezekiel's program is a revision - and up-dating and a rectification - of selected topics of existent priestly legislation and practice very similar to, if not identical**

with, that of the Pentateuch..." (Moshe Greenberg, "The Design and Themes of Ezekiel's Program of Restoration," *Interpretation*, Vol. 38, No. 2, pp. 233, 235).

A further Millennial revision is revealed in Ezekiel 46:

"On the Sabbath day, two male lambs a year old without blemish, and two tenths of an ephah of fine flour for a grain offering, mixed with oil, and its drink offering:

this is the burnt offering of every Sabbath, besides the regular burnt offering and its drink offering." (Num 28:9-10)

Compare with:

"The burnt offering that the prince offers to the LORD on the Sabbath day shall be six lambs without blemish and a ram without blemish.

And the grain offering with the ram shall be an ephah, and the grain offering with the lambs shall be as much as he is able, together with a hin of oil to each ephah." (Ezek 46:4-5)

**Stephen Cook, *Ezekiel 38-48: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* explains:**

"**Ezekiel 46:4-5 mandates a sizeable increase in Israel's Sabbath offerings** (see Num 28:9). It adds a ram, an extra four lambs, and an extra four-fifths of an ephah of grain" (p. 249).

Cook further explains Sabbath references in Ezekiel:

"Moreover, I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them." (Ezek 20:12)

"Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore." (Ezek 37:28)

"Rather than "contradicting" Mosaic Torah, Ezekiel 46 aims at *intensification*... The Sabbath ... has a central place in the ... understanding of God's program to sanctify and ennoble Israel (Exod 31:13; Ezek 20:12, 44:24)" (p. 249).

**Roy Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians: Original Context and Enduring Application***

God "can maintain justice through variable circumstances **by giving somewhat different laws to different people for different situations. Thus OT law is dynamic and adaptable rather than static and rigid.**"

**Patrick Miller, *Deuteronomy: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*:**

“At the beginning of the specific rules and cases that Moses teaches Israel for ordering its life – many of which echo earlier statutes and ordinances of Exodus 21-23 **but are revised to fit changing social and historical circumstances** (see van rad, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 12-15) ...” (p. 129)

Here is another one to explore:

“If any one of the house of Israel kills an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp, or kills it outside the camp,  
And does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting to offer it as a gift to the LORD in front of the tabernacle of the LORD, bloodguilt shall be imputed to that man. He has shed blood, and that man shall be cut off from among his people.  
“This is to the end that the people of Israel may bring their sacrifices that they sacrifice in the open field, that they may bring them to the LORD, to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and sacrifice them as sacrifices of peace offerings to the LORD.” (Lev 17:3-5)

Yet later on we find the following:

"However, you may slaughter and eat meat within any of your towns, as much as you desire, according to the blessing of the LORD your God that he has given you. The unclean and the clean may eat of it, as of the gazelle and as of the deer. If the place that the LORD your God will choose to put his name there is too far from you, then you may kill any of your herd or your flock, which the LORD has given you, as I have commanded you, and you may eat within your towns whenever you desire." (Deut 12:15, 21)

This is explained well by author **Roy Gane** in *Old Testament Law for Christians: Original Context and Enduring Application*:

“... Lev. 17 requires Israelites who wish to eat meat of domestic sacrificable animals to offer them as well-being offerings at the central sanctuary (vv.3-9). By contrast, Deut 12 allows them to slaughter and eat such animals at any of their settlements, without sacrificing them, them, provided that they drain out the blood (vv.15-16, 20-25). The difference is not a legal contradiction or polemic between two schools of authorship, because **the law in Lev. 17 regulates the wilderness setting during the journey from Sinai to Canaan, where all the Israelites camped around the sanctuary (v.3, “the camp”; cf. Num 2-3), but the law in Deut. 12 is to apply once they have spread out in the land of Canaan, where they may dwell too far away from the sanctuary to go there every time they want to eat meat of a sacrificable animal (vv. 20-21; cf. chap.6)”** (p. 35).

This overlaps with the question “which of God’s Laws are applicable to us today?”

The answer is that all apply physically and/or spiritually. Evangelist Ron Dart delves into this in his article “Which Old Testament Laws Apply Today?” *The International News*, August 1983. He also has an audio about this *Which laws do we keep today-CGI\_correspondence\_course\_7?*

**In his book *Law & Covenant* Ron Dart presents an example of this:**

“It isn’t that easy to show the meaning of all the laws in the Old Testament, but that doesn’t mean the meaning isn’t there. It may mean nothing more than that we have not been paying attention.

Consider this one, for example: “Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together” (Deuteronomy 22:10). Now I am no authority on agriculture, and I didn’t immediately see the problem. I did hear one fellow opine that the fertilizer which fell from the two animals differed in some important way, and it would be bad for the ground to mix them. I fear I was rather rude in my response to that theory. Another gentleman pointed out the obvious, the animals were of such disparate sizes that it simply wouldn’t work. No one would ever think of doing that. I could see that, but all that did was raise another question. Couldn’t man have figured that out for himself? If you simply can’t make that combination work, why would it be necessary to hand down a law? The answer to that came out of the blue.

Years ago, when I was Dean of Students at a college in England, a fellow member of the faculty and I were discussing a young man who was, as young men are wont to do, pursuing one of the female students. I told my friend, “I know that relationship doesn’t look right, and I have a feeling it’s not going to work. Why do I feel that way?” My friend replied: “It’s simple — ‘you shall not plow with an ox and an ass together.’” Since the young man’s behavior somewhat resembled one of the named animals, we were both vastly amused.

As it happened, my friend had put his finger on what this law was really about. There can be such differences between two elements, be it the size or pulling power of two animals, the personalities of two individuals, the abilities of two business partners, or even the religions of two persons, that the relationship is unworkable. It is obvious that Paul draws on this law when he uses the word “yoke” as he did: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14).

This raises an interesting distinction. I have heard people ask of this or that passage: “Is it a law, or is it a principle?” I decided to look it up. Here’s what I found:

Principle: A comprehensive and fundamental law, doctrine, or assumption, the laws or facts of nature underlying the working of an artificial device, a primary source, an underlying faculty or endowment.

There's more, but this will serve our needs. As the question was asked, a law was inflexible, while a principle was optional. But as we become more familiar with biblical law, the roles are reversed. It is the underlying principle that is inflexible. It is the principle that is the fundamental thing. The enforceable stuff is built on the principle. But these are just words. What can we take away from this that means anything in life?

Laws like those I have cited create axioms, aphorisms that imply a universal, underlying truth. In this case, it is a law that there can be such great differences between two people that they should not attempt to be tied together in any way that does not give them the freedom to walk. That law makes as much sense today as it did when Moses wrote it down.

So, what happens if you break it? A loss of salvation? A denial of your eternal reward? No, what breaking this law gives you is heartache, financial loss, and if you are plowing, some busted up harness. As it happens, that is what most of the law is about. It is about life, not salvation. It is optional only in the sense that you can decide to break it and bear the consequences. There will be consequences, and they may not go away just because you are sorry.

As it happens, the verse about plowing immediately precedes the law I cited earlier about wearing a garment of mixed fabric. It suggests that both laws are saying the same thing in different words. What the law is about is recognizing diversity (a good, modern term), and realizing that there are some diversities that just cannot be bridged.

We know that Christ spoke in parables. We know that the parables were not to be taken literally, but were intended to convey a deeper meaning. It was a meaning that was conveyed to some and hidden to others. It seems that God did much the same thing with the law." (pp. 28-29)

## Acts 15:19-21 & 21:23-26 Explanation

“Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God,  
but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.<sup>5</sup>  
For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.” (Acts 15:19-21 ESV)

A useful 14 page paper is **Acts 16 - The Jerusalem Conference by Wilf Hey and John Meakin (1995)**. It is too long to include here. Another worthwhile read is “Torah is for All People,” *Yavoh*, March 2008.

### “The Jerusalem Council,” *The Berean*:

“Examining the original language of Acts 15 is necessary to properly discern what this chapter is about. Therefore, verse 1 states, “And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the 'ἔθει' (meaning, 'an unwritten custom based on oral tradition')....of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

Luke further added, “But some of the 'αἰρέσεως τῶν Φαρισαίων' (meaning, 'self-imposed opinionates of philosophical discord from the Pharisees')....who believed rose up...” (verse 5).

Therefore, notice how the participants and their agenda are further exposed by placing the inspired Greek of verses 1 and 5 together: “And certain self-imposed opinionates of philosophical discord from the Pharisees came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the unwritten custom based on oral tradition of Moses, you cannot be saved.’”

Notably, while Leviticus 12:3 instructs circumcision, there is no “custom” or “manner” recorded beyond when the procedure ought to occur. **Therefore, these “unwritten customs” (later codified in the Talmud); consisted of additional stipulations. These rules were falsely attributed to Moses to postulate credibility. Whereas, Moses wrote all that God instructed -leaving nothing to verbal transmission (cf. Exodus 24:4; 34:27; Deut 31:9; Joshua 1:8; 8:34-35).**

**Hence, the Pharisees of Acts 15, weren’t simply advocating for Gentile circumcision according to biblical precedent. Instead, they were imposing their**

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<sup>5</sup> Compare ““If any one of the house of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people.” (Lev 17:10)

**self-appointed legislative control through oppressive traditions for the purpose of inducting the Gentiles into their Pharisaical fold** (cf. Galatians 6:12-13).

Several years later, Paul encountered a similar doctrine in Galatia; whereby he contrasted the bondage of those seeking initial justification via circumcision, against the freedom of those who are in Christ. However, this didn't mean they experienced freedom from proper obedience. Instead, Paul was questioning whether Gentile converts should become Jews before becoming Christians (cf. Galatians 5:1-6; verse 12).

In those days, The Jews falsely viewed their covenant relationship and subsequent presumed justification before God, as rooted in Abraham's physical progeny. Whereas, John the Baptist previously warned them, "Do not think to yourselves, 'We have Abraham [the father of circumcision] as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees" (Matthew 3:9-10; Luke 3:8-9).

In other words, the prerequisite or covenant initiation was no longer predicated on outward circumcision of the flesh, but repentance from dead works (cf. Acts 2:38); whereby we worship God in Spirit and truth (cf. John 4:24). Undoubtedly, the change was fueled by the associative sanctimonious attitude whereby Jews were presenting themselves as righteous before God, instead of allowing Christ to emulate His righteousness through them. Such inclinations were viewed as invasive, and therefore, properly condemned (Galatians 1:6-7).

Peter likewise responded to the proposed tradition by stating, "Now therefore, why do you test God by adding a heavy burden against the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers, nor we were able to bear?" (verse 10). In other words, the disciples first priority was to Jesus Christ who had previously instructed, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:29). This was spoken after Jesus had identified every "jot and tittle" as remaining within God's written Law (Matthew 5:18); and ironically, it was immediately prior to the Pharisees accusing Jesus of transgressing the Sabbath according to their added stipulations (Matthew 12:2).

Therefore, Christ's "yoke" (consisting of things written), vastly differed from the Pharisees "yoke" -which Paul and Peter referenced (Galatians 1:14 & Acts 15:10 respectively). In effect, by no means were the apostles now lumping "yoke[s]" together, nor should they.

As this issue pressed against the Gentile converts, James added, "Therefore, I judge that we should not trouble those from the Gentiles who are turning [from sin] to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted to idols [from Leviticus 17:7], from sexual immorality [from Leviticus 18:6-30], from things

strangled [from Leviticus 17:13-14], and from blood [from Leviticus 17:10-12]." It is evident that Gentiles represented, "the stranger among [them]" -repeatedly mentioned throughout the preceding verses. Thus, James appropriately assigned the value of each statute upon them (verse 20).

Having addressed the most common and egregious sins prevailing the Gentile world, James further countered the unwritten oral traditions when concluding, "From ancient generations, Moses has had in every city, those who proclaim him, for 'ἀναγιγνωσκόμενος.' (meaning, 'to know again through reading what the original author conveyed)...every Sabbath in the synagogues" (verse 21). **In other words, the rest of what the Gentiles needed to know could be obtained by having Moses read and not by listening to oral tradition.**

Because the letter proceeding from the apostolic meeting (chronicling the above decision) was intended for the Gentiles in Antioch (verse 23), likely this would include those already convoking in the synagogue and keeping the Sabbath there (Acts 13:42-44).

Of special note, the following phrase from within the letter appearing in several Bible translations including the King James: **"You must be circumcised and keep the law, to whom we gave no such commandment" (verse 24); is not in the original Greek and therefore, does not exist. Compare to the Old Latin Vulgate (AD 157), Italic Bible (AD 157), Chester Beatty papyrus (p 45) (AD 250), Codex Sinaiticus (AD 325), Standard Latin Vulgate (AD 382), Codex Bezae (AD 400), Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (Byzantine MS AD 450), The John Wycliffe Bible (AD 1380), Novum Testamentum Graece (AD 1520), The Moffatt, Phillip's, Fenton, and Jerusalem Translations, as well as the NIV, NLT, ESV, NASB, HCSB, ISV, NET, ASV, DRB, ERV, WNT, AMP, and the GOD'S WORD® Translation."**

In other words, it is absolute nonsense to claim that the Gentiles, because they were not a part of the Old Covenant, did not have to observe the Sabbath etc but only a few items. God is consistent throughout the Bible and His Laws and ways apply to all peoples, regardless of ethnic origin, through all time.

Rather, these Gentiles had particular pagan issues to address immediately and the other commandments would be learned and accepted over time – the most basic necessities to permit synagogue attendance – a starting point for entering into fellowship with God. A modern analogy would be to command new convert to quit Christmas, New Year's, Halloween, Valentine's Day, Easter and such like prior to attending church services. By attending Sabbath services, they would learn the rest of God's truths.

Notice Acts 15:21:

“For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.” (Acts 15:19-21)

Clearly (or at least it is implied) the Gentiles are expected to attend the synagogue to learn from the Torah each Sabbath which includes the 10 and other commandments.<sup>6</sup>

**Below is from *Book of Romans Study. Background Part 3*, <http://www.yashanet.com/>:**

“In the book of Acts, Luke makes it clear that those of Israel who accepted the Messiah of Israel AND followed the Torah, were the “ecclesia” (meaning, “called out ones” and NOT “the Church”) (2) Paul did not hold a different view. Scripture shows that He himself kept Torah and spoke in favor of it:

He circumcised a man who had not yet been:

**Acts 16:1-3** – Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek.

He took a Torah vow:

**Acts 18:18** – And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.

He continued to follow the Levitical feast day of Unleavened Bread:

**Acts 20:6** – And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days.

He kept and encouraged others to keep Passover:

**Cor. 5:8** – Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

He continued to follow the Levitical feast day of Shavuot (Pentecost):

**Acts 20:16** – For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost.

**1 Corinthians 16:8** – But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost.

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<sup>6</sup> Here is an interesting quote, but unfortunately, I lost the reference for it:

“Why these four issues (idol meat, sexual immorality, strangled meat, consuming blood)? It should be agreed that the Noahide laws are not in evidence, that their formulation is later than the first century, so it is very unlikely that Yaakov is referring to this concept. It is likely that Yaakov has in mind Leviticus 17-19, which are about holiness in the camp and the land of Israel. These chapters emphasize the sanctity of blood, refraining from idolatry, and refraining from various forms of sexual immorality including incestuous relationships. In Leviticus, these are seen as Gentile evils which would contaminate Israelites by association. Gentiles in Messiah must not live like Canaanites and contaminate the movement. It should not be inferred that Yaakov saw only these issues as applying from Torah to Gentiles, but that these were the most urgent issues.”

He kept Yom Kippur (this is the fast mentioned in the following verse):

**Acts 27:9** – Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them, He proved he did not teach against Torah by taking a vow:

**Acts 21:21-26** -And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? The multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law. As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication. Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.

He cited his continued Torah observance in his defense before a Roman governor:

**Acts 24:14-17** – But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void to offence toward God, and toward men. Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings.

And again to another Roman governor:

**Acts 24:14-17** – While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all.

And to a Jewish audience:

**Acts 28:17** – And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.”

Now notice the nonsense some commentators adopt:

“These four prohibitions, in fact, became widely known in Judaism as the Noachian precepts (cf. B. Sanhedrin 56b, based on Lev 17:1-18:30) and were viewed by some rabbis as the essential requirement for Gentiles in the eschatological age (cf. Gen R. 98.9)” (Richard Longenecker, *Acts. The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 9, p. 449).

These Noahide Laws were made up a couple of hundred years after the apostles and cannot be taken seriously or be accepted. Many advocates of this believe that the Gentiles do not have to observe the Sabbath and that only Israelites have to. This opens the door to antinomianism and Sunday observance.

**“The biblical context for understanding the importance of these injunctions against pagan religious practices is Leviticus 17-18, a text from Moses that is “read aloud every sabbath in the synagogues” (Acts 15:21). This text legislates the behaviour of “resident aliens” living in the holy land among Jews and sounds a cautionary note about possible effects of “aliens who sojourn in your midst” whose practices may defile and subvert the people’s covenant relationship with God.** The exhortation to avoid “the practices of the nations” is deeply rooted in the prophet’s keen awareness that Israel’s single-minded loyalty to God (and so its future) can be imperiled by the manner of a people’s worship in a heterogeneous culture. This same concern is here adapted by James to guide the behaviours of converted Gentiles who share Christian fellowship with repentant Jews in the urban synagogues of the diaspora (cf. 15:21). In effect, James implies that Jews should treat uncircumcised Gentiles who otherwise share the same sacred space as “resident aliens.” James offer guidelines to ensure that Christian fellowship in the mixed congregations of Paul’s urban mission will nurture faith rather than contaminate. The lack of sensitivity to the church’s Jewish legacy would surely have an adverse effect on a congregation’s Jewish membership (cf. Rom 14, 1 Cor 8-10) ...

“Upon an initial reading, the interpreter may wonder how James’s interest in table fellowship within the Christian synagogues of the 58reek58ra relates to the biblical prophecy just cited. Is it part of his midrash on this Scripture or a pastoral exhortation detached from Scripture? If the Gentile believers in the church are the Gentiles of the prophecy, whose salvation is then confirmed by prophecy (Amos), then this exhortation for them to remain pure according to Moses (Leviticus 17-18) should not be viewed as odd. **The same Scripture that claims them for God also obligates their civility...**

“The thematic interplay between this prophecy from Amos concerning the salvation of the nations and the Levitical injunctions against their “abominations” among Jews (cf. Lev 18:24-30) provides the biblical context for Luke’s subsequent narrative of Paul’s mission...” (Robert Wall, “The Acts of the Apostles,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 10, p. 219).

“James does not ... mention circumcision, but when he rules that Jewish should “stop troubling” Gentile converts he repeats in different term’s Peter’s protest against placing an intolerable yoke on those converts’ necks. The demand for their circumcision carried with it the obligation to assume such a yoke: James’s “stop

troubling” means in effect “stop demanding circumcision” (Frederick Bruce, *Book of Acts, Revised, New International Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 295).

## Matthew 5:17-20 Explanation

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt 5:17-20 ESV)

Many, conservative theologians and others can see how clearly Matthew 5 demonstrates that none of the 613 laws were abolished. Yet these conservative protestant theologians still observe Sunday as they think the Sabbath was transferred to the first day of the week or is somehow only spiritual.

An example of a Christian Messianic understanding is *The Laws and Torah Are Not Done Away. Christian Technical Notes. Matthew 5:17-20* by Wayne Atchison:

“For example: Matthew 5:18 “I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth pass away not the smallest letter or stroke of a letter will pass from the law **until everything takes place.**” The Greek text is translated by men of the Pauline Theology in a biased way (Reference “The Complete Word Study New Testament with Parallel Greek” \_ 1992 Spiros Zodhiates and AMG International, Inc. AMG Publishers; and “Analytical Greek New Testament” \_ 1981 Baker Book House Company). In the beginning of the sentence they completely leave out the Greek word (Strong’s) #302 which means “[by] perchance”. Actually this Greek word has no English-word equivalent, it is a concept, and was used to convey the notion or nuance of “limits” or “perhaps”.

<http://strongnumbers.com/60reek/302.htm>: “302 (άν) is often called the “untranslatable particle.” However, **it always influences** (“conditions”) **its sentence** and is key to properly understanding the verse (passage) in which it occurs.”

This Greek word was used to tell the reader that there is uncertainty or limits about what is being stated. Thus it is much more than saying “until heaven and earth pass away”, it is more like saying “**until [by] perchance heaven and earth [could] pass away**”” (p. 3)<sup>7</sup>

See also *Matthew 5:17-20. Yeshua’s View of the Torah. Some Preliminary Questions & Answers* by Tim Hegg, [www.torahresource.com](http://www.torahresource.com), 1989.

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<sup>7</sup> If this interpretation is correct, it could be an example of an ellipsis.

Remember that the writings of the first century were written in a way with background those of that time would more readily understand. Most Jewish hearers of the early writings would not have been tainted by anti-nomianism:

“Two features of this inter-testamental period are worth noting in view of their influence on the world into which Jesus arrived. The first was the increasing devotion to the law, the *torah*. This became the supreme mark of the faithful Jew. It eventually developed into a somewhat fanatical cause, supported by a systematic building of a whole structure of theology and exposition and application around the law itself. **There were professional experts, scribes, involved in this, and there also emerged lay movements devoted to the wholehearted obedience to the law – the Pharisees. We may be tempted to dismiss all this as legalism. Doubtless it tended in that direction, and we shall hear Jesus with his unique insight and authority exposing some of the failure and misguidedness of his contemporary devotees of the law and tradition. But we should also be aware of the positive and worthy motives that lay behind it.** Had not the exile, the greatest catastrophe in their history, been the direct judgment of God on the failure of his people precisely to keep the law? Was that not the message of the great prophets? Surely then they should learn the lesson of history and make every effort to live as God required, thus not only avoiding a repetition of such judgment, but also hastening the day of his final deliverance from their present enemies. The pursuit of holiness was serious and purposeful. It was a total social programme – not just a fringe of hyper-religious piety.

“The second feature was the upsurge of apocalyptic, messianic hope. As persecution continued and as the nation experienced martyrdoms and great suffering, there developed hopes of a final climatic intervention by God himself, as the prophets had foretold. He would establish his kingdom for ever by destroying his (and Israel’s) enemies, vindicating and lifting up the righteous oppressed, and put an end to their suffering. In varied ways these hopes included the expectation of a coming figure who would realize this intervention of God and lead the people. These expectations were not all linked together, or attached to one single figure. They included terms like messiah (anointed one), son of man, a new David, Elijah, or the Prophet, the branch, etc.... **The coming of such a figure would herald the end of the present age, the arrival of the Kingdom of God, the restoration of Israel and the judgment of the wicked.**

“One can the imagine the stirrings of hearts and quickening of pulses in Jewish homes and communities when, into this mixture of aspirations and hopes dropped the message of John the Baptist, and then of Jesus himself –

“The time is fulfilled! (what you have been waiting for as something future is now here and present); the kingdom of God is at hand! (God is now acting to establish his reign in the midst of you); so repent and believe the good news (urgent action

is required of you now)” (Christopher Wright, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament*, pp. 25-26).<sup>8</sup>

Note the explanation of Ernest Hengstenberg:

“The law is referred to here (and this is the very point which has been overlooked), not according to its accidental and temporary form, but according to its essential character, as expressive of the holiness of God, just as in Matt. 5:17... **The laws, which were afterwards given in the plains of Moab, are also included in the expression “in Horeb.” For they were merely a continuation and further development; the foundation was fully laid at Sinai**” (*Christology of the Old Testament*, Vol. 4, pp. 190-91).

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<sup>8</sup> Concerning the statement of Luke’s: “The law and the prophets *were* until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.” (Luke 16:16-17. See Matt 11:13), Dr Ron Moseley remarked: “Luke is simply stating that the Law and the prophets until John was all the Scripture there was at that time ... **Furthermore, the Book of Luke could not possibly mean that the Law of God was outdated, because it was used constantly by the Church after John the Baptizer a minimum of 185 times in the New Testament Writings.**” (*The Spirit of the Law*, chapter 1)

## Romans 14 and the Clean & Unclean Meats Question

Most believe that many years after Christ's death and resurrection, various commandments of God were reversed by Him and conveyed to Christians via revelations to Paul. The following are just two of many articles that disprove this.

### Does Romans 14 Abolish Laws Concerning Unclean Meats?

30 January, 2011

[www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/booklets/the-new-covenant-does-it-abolish-gods-law/does-romans-14-abolish-laws-on-unclean-meats](http://www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/booklets/the-new-covenant-does-it-abolish-gods-law/does-romans-14-abolish-laws-on-unclean-meats)

**Many believe Romans 14 says that Christians are free from all former biblical restrictions regarding the meats they may eat.**

They cite as proof Romans 14:14, in which Paul wrote, "I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean."

This approach, however, fails to consider the context of Paul's letter as well as the specific Greek words he used.

Many Bible resources agree that Paul wrote the book of 1 Corinthians around A.D. 55 and that he wrote his epistle to the Romans *from* Corinth in 56 or 57. The food controversy in Corinth (reflected in chapters 8 and 10) was over meat sacrificed to idols.

Since Paul was writing to the Romans from Corinth, where this had been a significant issue, the subject was fresh on Paul's mind and is the logical, biblically supported basis for his comments in Romans 14.

### Understanding Paul's intent

Those who assume the subject of Romans 14 is a retraction of God's law regarding clean and unclean animals must force this interpretation into the text because it has no biblical foundation. The chapter itself shows that the discussion concerned meat sacrificed to idols.

Romans 14:2 contrasts the person who "eats only vegetables" with the one who believes "he may eat all things"— meat as well as vegetables. Romans 14:6 discusses eating vs. not eating and is variously interpreted as referring to fasting (not eating or drinking), vegetarianism (consuming only vegetables) or eating or not eating meat sacrificed to idols.

Romans 14:21 shows that meat offered to idols was the underlying issue of this chapter: "It is good neither to *eat meat* nor *drink wine* nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak." The Romans of the day commonly offered both meat and wine to idols, with portions of the offerings later sold in the marketplace.

The *Life Application Bible* comments on verse 2: "The ancient system of sacrifice was at the center of the religious, social, and domestic life of the Roman world.

After a sacrifice was presented to a god in a pagan temple, only part of it was burned. The remainder was often sent to the market to be sold. Thus a Christian might easily—even unknowingly—buy such meat in the marketplace or eat it at the home of a friend.

“Should a Christian question the source of his meat? Some thought there was nothing wrong with eating meat that had been offered to idols because idols were worthless and phony. Others carefully checked the source of their meat or gave up meat altogether, in order to avoid a guilty conscience.”

Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 8 that the main concern for a Christian is to not defile his own conscience or the conscience of other Christians. Jewish Christians especially might have been inclined to feel contaminated by anything related to idolatry. But because an idol cannot, by itself, render anything pure or defiled, a person’s conscience, not the idol, is the real issue.

So what is the point of Paul’s instruction about eating or not eating in Romans 14? Depending on their consciences, early believers had several choices. Those wishing to be sure of avoiding meat sacrificed to idols could choose to eat only vegetables or fast—avoid food altogether—when faced with the prospect of consuming foods of suspicious background.

For those whose consciences were not troubled by eating meat purchased in local markets just because it might have been ceremonially offered to idols, that option was open to them *with one important restriction*. They were (especially at group meals where offenses were more likely to occur) to consider first the conscience of others who were present, to be careful to give no offense.

Within this context, said Paul, “let each be fully convinced in his own mind” (Romans 14:5) because “whatever is not from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23).

### **Greek words clarify Paul’s meaning**

An understanding of the Greek words Paul used can also help us understand Paul’s meaning.

The New Testament writers referred to two concepts of unclean, using different Greek words to convey the two meanings. *Unclean* could refer to animals God did not intend to be consumed as food (listed in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14). *Unclean* could also refer to *ceremonial* uncleanness.

In Romans 14 Paul uses the word *koinos*, which means “common” (W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1985, “Unclean,” p. 649). In addition to the meanings of “common” and “ordinary” (see Acts 2:44; Acts 4:32; Titus 1:4; Hebrews 10:29), the word also applied to things considered polluted or defiled. This word, along with its verb form *koinoo*, is used in Mark 7:2, Mark 7:15-23, where it obviously refers to ceremonial uncleanness.

*Koinos* and *koinoo* appear throughout the New Testament to refer to this kind of ceremonial uncleanness. Something could be “common”—ceremonially unclean—even though it was otherwise considered a scripturally clean meat.

An entirely different word, *akathartos*, is used in the New Testament for those animals Scripture specifies as unclean. Both words, *koinos* and *akathartos*, are used in Acts 10, where Peter distinguished between the two concepts of uncleanness by using both words in Acts 10:14.

When Paul said in Romans 14:14 that “I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean [*koinos*, or ‘common’] of itself,” he was making the same point he had made earlier to the Corinthians: Just because meat that was otherwise lawful to eat may have been associated with idol worship does not mean it is no longer fit for human consumption. As seen from the context, Paul wasn’t discussing biblical dietary restrictions at all.

Paul goes on to state in Romans 14:20 that “all food is clean” (NIV). The word translated “clean” is *katharos*, meaning “free from impure admixture, without blemish, spotless” (Vine, “Clean, Cleanness, Cleanse, Cleansing,” p. 103).

“Clean” meats as such aren’t addressed in the New Testament, so there isn’t a specific word to describe them. *Katharos* is used to describe all kinds of cleanliness and purity, including clean dishes (Matthew 23:26), people (John 13:10) and clothing (Revelation 15:6; Revelation 19:8-14), “pure” religion (James 1:27), gold and glass (Revelation 21:18).

Realize also that, in both Romans 14:14 and Romans 14:20, the word *food* or *meat* doesn’t appear in the original Greek, but was inserted by later translators. No specific object is mentioned relative to cleanness or uncleanness. The sense of these verses is merely that “nothing [is] unclean [*koinos*: common or ceremonially defiled] of itself,” and “all is clean [*katharos*: free from impure admixture, without blemish, spotless].”

Paul’s point is that association of food with idolatrous activity had no bearing on whether the food was inherently suitable or unsuitable for eating. Understood in its context, Romans 14 does *not* convey permission to ignore the biblical laws as to which meats are clean or unclean. (To learn more, request our free booklet [What Does the Bible Teach About Clean and Unclean Meats?](#))”

Another item which proves that Romans 14 does not refer to unclean foods is”

### **Romans 14 And The Dietary Laws**

**by Avram Yehoshua**

<https://seedofabraham.net/Romans14andtheDietaryLaws.html>

“Romans 14 is often cited as a place where the Apostle Paul expressed that the Mosaic dietary laws are not binding on anyone. <sup>[1]</sup> That ‘Moses’ or ‘the Law’ or ‘the dietary laws’ or ‘unclean meats’ are never once mentioned, fails to influence the popularity of this Church doctrine. The issue isn’t the eating of biblically unclean meat, but the eating of meat ceremonially defiled (contaminated) by their being offered to pagan deities.

There are four verses in Romans 14 that are used to support the eating of pig and other unclean animals. They are:

1. 'One person has faith that he may eat all things' (Rom. 14:2),
2. and 'nothing is unclean in itself' (Rom. 14:14),
3. and that 'the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness' (Rom. 14:17),
4. and 'All things indeed are clean' (Rom. 14:20).

Like the vision of Peter, these verses taken by themselves, out of context, can be interpreted to mean that the dietary laws are done away with. This is certainly the way most in the Church understand it. Placed within their context, however, we'll see that they don't have anything to do with God's dietary laws, but with an argument over ceremonial defilement of meat that has been dedicated or blessed by pagan priests.

The central theological theme of the chapter is love and forgiveness for both the strong and the weak in the faith. At no point does Paul write about clean meats versus unclean meats. At no point does Paul say that unclean meats are now clean and acceptable to eat:

Rom. 14:2: 'One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only.'

Rom. 14:3: 'The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.'

Verse two mentions that one man believes that he can 'eat all things' or 'everything.' Although Paul is only relating what 'one man' or a group believes (which would seem to include pig, catfish, etc.), Paul will qualify what 'all things' means to him. It doesn't include biblically unclean meats. We'll see that it means that all (clean) meat is what Paul is saying. Verse 20 will show us this as he uses the same phrase 'all things' there.

The issue in Romans 14 is of one who thinks they can eat meat versus another group that thinks all meat is defiled and so only eats veggies. It's not about clean versus unclean meats or the Scriptural validation of previously known unclean meats, but whether a believer can eat any meat. It's not about clean meat versus unclean meat but meat versus no meat at all. It's not about which meat one can eat but if one can eat any meat.

Vegetables are never considered 'unclean' biblically. What would vegetables have to do with the eating of clean and unclean meats? In other words, if it had to do with unclean meats being eaten by the meat eaters, the veggie eaters wouldn't have just been eating veggies and Paul would have made reference to the difference in the meats (clean versus unclean). It is totally out of place for anyone to think that unclean meats are being validated in Romans 14. This is not a conflict of Jewish believer versus Gentile believer, clean versus unclean meats, but rather of Gentile believer versus Gentile believer and if *any* meat can be eaten. The assumption would be that it's biblically clean meat. Clean and unclean meats are never mentioned in Romans 14 and Paul nowhere else validates the eating of unclean meat.

Verse three deals with the accusations that the groups charged one another with and Paul's admonition to both of them. To the one who is eating meat, Paul tells them not to despise those who think that they can't eat meat. To those that think that eating meat is wrong or sinful, Paul tells them not to judge (to condemn) their brethren, thinking themselves as purer or holier.

Paul addresses the issue of condemnation again in vv. 10-11. Only Yeshua can condemn and these brothers shouldn't condemn one another but love one another. Paul quotes Scripture from the prophet Isaiah (45:23) saying that all shall bend the knee before Yeshua. Paul says to give way to His Way of seeing each other.

Paul brings the concept of oneness and judgment down to a practical level in v. 12 when he says that we should, in our hearts, not judge to condemn another. If we despise someone in our heart, we must deal with it now. This specifically addresses those believers who were condemning and despising their brothers and sisters for living in a way that they didn't think they should, whether meat eaters or meat abstainers.

That neither group was sinning *per se*, in that one ate meat and the other wouldn't, we see in that Paul doesn't correct or try to change either group's way of eating. Paul is bringing divine tolerance of things that are not sin. That the veggie group can't be Jewish believers is very obvious in that Jews know that God ordained clean meats to eat and so they wouldn't be saying that 'meat' was not fit to eat. Jews eat (clean) meat and vegetarianism is not a Jewish practice.

If either group was sinning by eating something like pig, Paul would have addressed it, but since it is only a personal thing not spoken of in the Bible (to eat meat or not is an option), one is able to walk before the Lord in one's own conscience. By speaking of a stumbling block here in v. 13, after v. 12 and one's conscience, it would seem that Paul is saying that one's attitude can also be a stumbling block. For if one despises someone in their heart, then the other will pick up on this, even if no words are spoken. This is a further admonition to get 'right' before the Lord, for all knees shall bow. No one walks in all the Truth.

Verse five has particulars changing from food to days, but the concept of not judging remains constant. Paul never brings up the Sabbath, so one cannot really insert it here. He speaks of days that one esteems over another, most likely for fasting. This has been seen to be special days for fasting by the veggie eaters and should not be construed to have anything to do with the 7th day Sabbath: As Christian theologian James Denney writes,

'It is not probable that there is any...reference to the Jewish Sabbath.'<sup>[2]</sup>

Verses 7-8 speak of unity in the Body, whether one eats only veggies or meat, or esteems all days over just 'a day.' Paul points to Yeshua as the One who makes us one. Assuming that Paul is speaking of the Sabbath, without his ever mentioning it in the chapter, is an unjustified presumption. <sup>[3]</sup> It would be unreasonable to assume that, without teaching on why the Sabbath had left its holy position in God's teachings, that Paul would dismiss it with a nebulous reference about it.

Verse 14 is where many Christians take those of us who walk in God's dietary laws, 'to show us' that they, and we, can eat anything (specifically meats that are classified as unclean in Lev. 11). Unfortunately, this is not what the context, nor the verse, is about. It states, "Nothing,"

"is common (*koinon κοινόν*) through (or in) itself, except to the one counting anything common (*koinon κοινόν*) to be. To that man it is common (*koinon κοινόν*)."

Three times the Greek adjective *koinon* is used and in most Bibles (KJV, NASB, NRSV, etc.), it's translated as, 'unclean,' but *koinon* doesn't mean 'unclean' in the biblical sense of unclean meats, but rather in the biblical sense of 'unclean' as 'ceremonially defiled' or 'common,' in relation to what is holy or set apart for God. The Sabbath is holy, set apart to Yahveh. The other six days of the week are 'common.' Obviously, it doesn't mean that the six days are bad or unclean. The days of the week are never called unclean. Specifically, in relation to unclean meats, Paul *never uses the Greek word for unclean* in Romans 14. The Greek word for unclean is *ακαθαρτος akah'thartos* (but Paul will use the Greek word for clean that is used for 'clean meats.' It'll be very interesting to see how he brings this out in verse 20.

'Common food' or meat is (clean) meat that was eaten by the Jewish people. There was also 'holy meat' that became that way because it was used in sacrifice to Yahveh. Clean animals offered to God on His Altar would be considered holy. All other (clean) meat would be 'common' and would naturally be referred to by Paul as 'all other meat.' *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* states, "In the OT *common* as opposed to *holy*...is 'common bread' (1st Sam. 21:4; NEB 'ordinary bread'), i.e., other than the showbread or bread of the Presence."<sup>[4]</sup>

In other words, the Bread in His Presence was holy, not common bread, even though any Israeli could make and eat that kind of bread in his home. In the New Testament the usual Greek word for 'common' is *koinos*, from the verb *koino*, indicating what is public, general, universal, as contrasted with *idios*, which pertains to that which is peculiar, individual, not shared with others.' <sup>[5]</sup> The adjective *koinon κοινόν* comes from *koinos*.

One might argue that the pig is 'common,' but God never calls the pig common. He always refers to it as unclean (Lev. 11:7, Dt. 14:8). The Greek word for 'unclean,' that is used in the dietary laws, is *ahka'thartone*,<sup>[6]</sup> which comes from *ahkathartos*. The word is also used of *unclean* spirits.<sup>[7]</sup> The conceptual use of the term 'common' or 'unclean' for Romans 14:14 is that it juxtaposes that which is 'holy' or set apart for God. Paul is not speaking of unclean meats, but common meat which is acceptable for us to eat. In other words, the context assumes that it is meat that is biblically clean.

Most likely, the meat eaters were seen as being 'defiled' or 'unclean' by the veggie eaters because the meat that they were eating was bought at the meat market. Meats were either gotten from pagan sacrifices or from pagan butchers who would have a pagan priest 'bless' the slaughter of the meat to their god. *This would defile the meat in the eyes of the veggie eaters.*

The veggie eaters were saying that the meat 'offered' to another god would defile the Christian who ate it because the meat was defiled *by its association with pagan sacrifice*. This, then, is a matter of conscience and Paul deals with it as such. It is not the commandment against unclean meats that is at issue in Romans 14. Romans 14 has nothing to do with unclean meats being declared 'clean.' Eminent Christian scholar F. F. Bruce believed that the weak in the faith referred to those who thought the meat at the market place was defiled or 'unclean' by it having come from a pagan temple, and therefore, it was unacceptable for them to eat: "The buying of butcher-meat in a pagan city presented some Christians with a problem of conscience. Much of the meat sold in the market came from animals which had been sacrificed to a pagan deity. The deity received his token portion; the rest of the carcass would be sold by the temple authorities to the retail merchants. Among resident Christians there would be some with a robust conscience who knew that the meat was neither better nor worse for its association with a pagan deity and who were quite happy to eat it; others were not so happy, feeling that somehow the meat had been 'infected' by its idolatrous association."<sup>181</sup>

In that most meats sold in Rome had the stamp of approval of the pagan priests on it, Paul uses the principle that 'the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it.' In other words, it was alright to eat that meat. This is how he dealt with the same issue at Corinth concerning meats offered to idols and then brought to the market for common consumption.<sup>191</sup> This doesn't mean the meat eaters in Rome were taking part in an idolatrous sacrifice, but as Bruce brought out, the pagan priest would 'bless' the meat in the name of his god and then the meat would make its way to market. Paul allows for them to eat the latter, but not the former. For if they ate that meat, then they would be taking part in the actual ceremony of idolatry. This Paul condemns (1st Cor. 10:14-22).

That the issue is one of ceremonial defilement or religious understanding about meats offered or blessed by pagan priests, and not unclean meats being acceptable to those 'strong in faith,' is also evident in that the Jewish community in Rome would have had their own butchers slaughtering only biblically clean meats. There would be no need for the veggie eaters to exclude all meats and eat only veggies. Any Gentile could have gotten clean meat from them and so there would be no need for the 'veggie only eaters' to eat only veggies. They could have gotten biblically clean meat if they wanted to. That this is not the case is seen in that they are *against the eating of all meats*.

If Paul was addressing this issue, of the priests blessing the meat for slaughter, the veggie group would think it was 'common' ('unclean' or 'defiled') and not fit for their holy bodies. The meat eating group thought it was alright to eat. It was the 'veggie only eaters against the meat eaters,' specifically for religious reasons of defilement, as the veggie eaters saw it.

In terms of nutrition or what one should put in their bodies for health reasons there could certainly have been veggie eaters in Paul's day who thought that all meat was 'contaminated' and just not fit to eat nutritionally. They would be the

forerunners of today's veggie eaters who tell us that meat is not fit to eat (and they may not be too far from the hormonal injected truth). They would also use the same word 'unclean' or 'defiled' to address the issue. Again, though, the word is not the word for 'unclean' as in the unclean meats of Lev. 11 or Deut. 14. The veggie eaters were saying that all meat wasn't fit to place with the new temple of God because of its association with idolatry. Paul says to the meat eaters not to judge the veggie eaters for their weak 'veggie only' eating faith (Rom. 14:2-4).

We know from Acts 21:20 that there were literally thousands of Jewish believers and they were all zealous for the Law of Moses. If we take this next Scripture verse and apply it to those who eat pig in front of us who don't today then they should not eat pig, at least not in front of us, as it truly grieves us. Paul, in another letter, says that if his eating meat is offensive to another, he won't eat any meat!, so as not to be a stumbling block to that person (1st Cor. 8:13). In Rom. 14:21 he says that if it makes a brother stumble (our eating or drinking) then we shouldn't do it. How many 'Grace only people' would lay that pork chop down because it offends us? Not many I'm sorry to say. They don't walk in *that* kind of Grace:

'For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food, him for whom Christ died' (Rom. 14:15).

'for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Rom. 14:17).

Many 'Grace only people' use v. 17 to nullify the dietary laws, but the context of Romans 14 has nothing to do with God's dietary laws. It has to do with offending our brethren by not considering their feelings in things of conscience, not biblical commandments. None of the unclean meats of the air, the land and the sea (Lev. 11; Dt. 14) are ever mentioned, let alone declared as acceptable now. Moses is not brought up once and neither is the Law. Paul is not talking about clean versus unclean meats or that unclean meats are now clean, but here in v. 17 he is redirecting our focus to the Eternal and not the temporal things. Of course, no one in the Church would interpret it to mean that because the Kingdom of God is not about food that we shouldn't eat any food anymore.

In Rom. 14:18-19, Paul again returns to his theme of love. He writes not to squabble over minor personal things, but to love one another. This cannot be used by those who eat pig, shrimp and catfish, to silence those who don't, as the dietary laws show us what is sinful to eat:

"For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another." (Romans 14:18-19 NKJV)

In Romans 14:20 Paul qualifies just what meats are acceptable and also closes the argument that 'all meats are defiled' with his ingenious use of the Greek word for biblically 'clean' meats.

'All things indeed are clean *καθαρα kathara*, but evil to the man who by eating, causes one to stumble' (Rom. 14:20).

In v. 14 the issue was a person becoming 'common' or 'defiled' from eating meat. Paul tells the meat eaters that they can eat meat, but not to flaunt their meat in

front of the veggie eaters. To the veggie eaters, who speak of meat as being defiled (whether for ceremonial and/or nutritional reasons) Paul says that these things ('all things') are clean. The word he uses for 'clean' is the word used for clean meats in the dietary laws of Moses (Lev. 11; Dt. 14). This is a definitive way of laying to rest the issue of defilement ('unclean...common') and also declaring that the meats in question were clean according to Moses. **The meat eaters are not defiled for eating meat. Paul is not declaring that all unclean meats are now clean, but what the veggie eaters, in their weak faith, called 'common' is biblically *clean* for the meat eaters to eat.**

'All things' refers to the context of Romans 14:2 where Paul began the discourse by saying the exact phrase 'all things' (which is actually just one word in Greek *panta*). 'All things' signifies the veggie attitude toward *all* meats, not specifically the unclean meats of Lev. 11 and Dt. 14. There is not a single reference to biblically unclean meats in Romans 14. Not one. Therefore, Romans 14 does not have anything to do with the dietary laws being overturned by the Apostle Paul. He is acting as a mediator between two groups of Christians-the meat eaters (v. 3) who despise the veggie eaters as weak in their faith for not eating meat, and the veggie eaters who think themselves superior and condemn (v. 3) the meat eaters for eating 'defiled' or 'common' meat. Also,

1. there is no place in the New Testament that could be called a 'second witness' (another Scripture) to lead us to understand that 'all things' includes biblically unclean meats or,
  2. that a believer can break the dietary laws 'because they are no more' or,
  3. even a second witness that explains that the dietary laws are 'done away with.'
- Moving on, v. 21 is very general, having nothing specifically to do with God's dietary laws. Paul says,

'It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles.'

This is Paul's conceptual theme of loving one another and giving way to another in matters of conscience. He's not speaking about dietary laws when he says not to eat meat nor wine, nor do anything, by which a brother could stumble. This verse should be taken to heart by 'Grace people' who eat pig in front of us who know it to be sin, but they try and convince us, without much success, that their understanding of eating pig is part of God's New Covenant. When we don't come over to their side they usually flaunt their 'liberty' in front of us instead of humbling themselves to walk in Yeshua's Love toward us and not eat it in our presence. This is sin for them. They are not loving us and this is the main concept of what Paul is speaking of in Romans 14. In v. 22 Paul speaks to the meat eaters that their liberty doesn't give them the right to strut about in front of the veggie eaters.

That Paul would lump both the eating of meat and the drinking of wine together, not having even mentioned wine before, again tells us that the chapter is not dealing with unclean meats, but with meat that a particular Gentile group in Rome considered 'defiled' because of their understanding of defilement. We are not

talking about the intrinsic quality of the meat in relation to the dietary laws, but the ceremonial defilement that would take place if a pagan priest blessed the meat.

In the closing sentence it seems that Paul is dealing with some form of asceticism (the veggie only crowd) and them 'wondering' if anyone can be saved who eats meat:

'But he who doubts is condemned if he eats because his eating is not from faith. And whatever is not from faith is sin' (Rom. 14:23).

If a veggie person eats meat believing that it will defile him, his conscience condemns him and he is not living 'in faith.' This would be sin for him. Paul says to let him live that way, just eating veggies. It's not a sin to live on only veggies so Paul doesn't have to bring the veggie people out of their personal belief system. It doesn't really effect their salvation. Let them eat veggies!

Romans 14 deals with settling a dispute over conscience and perceived ceremonial defilement. The 'weak faith' people termed all meat 'common' ('unclean' or 'defiled'). According to their understanding anyone eating meat was sinning. Paul settled the issue by saying that the meat in question wasn't defiled, but biblically clean. Yet, if one thought that it was defiled then they shouldn't eat it.

It's not biblical to think that Jesus overturned the dietary laws in Matt. 15 and Mark 7 or that Peter's vision of Acts 10 did away with the Mosaic clean and unclean meats. So, too, it is with Paul in Romans 14 (and 1st Tim. 4:4-5). To use Romans 14 to validate the eating of unclean meats is not biblical. <sup>[10]</sup>

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<sup>[10]</sup> F. F. Bruce, D.D., F.B.A., The Rev. Canon Leon Morris, M.Sc., M.Th., Ph.D., General Editor, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Romans* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), p. 230, 'Some Christians (like Paul himself) had no qualms of conscience about taking any kind of food.' Bruce defines the "weak in faith" as 'Not yet mature enough to grasp that all kinds of food are equally kosher ('fit')' p. 231. Bruce also writes that, 'Jesus, on one occasion, made a pronouncement about food which, as later reflection on it showed, had the effect of abrogating the Jewish food laws: 'he declared all foods clean' (Mk. 7:19). Peter, in his noonday vision on the roof of Simon the tanner's house in Joppa, learned not to count as unclean any person that God has pronounced clean,' p. 234. Also, in his comment on Romans 14:14, Bruce writes, 'For Paul all food was kosher,' p. 237.

Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1222, 'The stronger Christian was the one who believed he could eat all things.' In speaking of Paul, it states, 'He knows that nothing is unclean of itself.'

<sup>[11]</sup> James Denney, D.D., Author; W. Robertson Nicoll, Editor, M. A., LL. D., *The Expositor's Greek Testament: St. Paul's First Epistle to the Romans*, vol. two (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), p. 702.

<sup>[3]</sup> Presumption—an act or instance of taking something to be true or adopting a particular attitude toward something, esp. at the start of a chain of argument or action.

<sup>[4]</sup> Geoffrey W. Bromiley, General Editor, Everett F. Harrison, Roland K. Harrison and William Sanford LaSor, Associate Editors, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. one (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), p. 751.

<sup>[5]</sup> Ibid.

<sup>[6]</sup> Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* (USA: Hendrickson Publishers, sixth printing, February, 1997, originally published in London, 1851), pp. 139, 251.

<sup>[7]</sup> Mt. 10:1; 12:43; Mark 1:26; Luke 8:29; 9:42; 11:24; Acts 5:16; etc.

<sup>[8]</sup> Bruce, *Romans*, p. 235.

<sup>[9]</sup> Please see my article, *Law 102* at <http://www.seedofabraham.net/law102.html> or ask for its PDF, for the section dealing with Peter's vision, etc., to understand that what many Christians uphold as justification for eating pig, is not valid. Christian interpretation of the three 'food' texts of Jesus, Peter and Paul, speak just the opposite when properly understood.

<sup>[10]</sup> Revised on 7 August 2013.”

[emphasis mine]

See also **Figuring Out Christian Freedom: What Romans 14 Does and Does Not Say**. Accessed 24 Feb 2026. [www.ccwtoday.org/2010/04/figuring-out-christian-freedomwhat-romans-14-does-and-does-not-say/](http://www.ccwtoday.org/2010/04/figuring-out-christian-freedomwhat-romans-14-does-and-does-not-say/)

## Galatians 4

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.

But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now.

But what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.”

So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.” (Gal 4:4-5, 28-31 ESV)

One paper that I recommend for accurately and succinctly explaining Galatians 4 is Larry Walker’s paper *Basics of Galatians*. It is too lengthy to insert here, but it is available for free download on the [Friends of the Sabbath](#) website.

There are several interpretations of Galatians 4 such as:

1. The law is superseded
2. It refers to the ritualistic and ceremonial laws
3. It refers to chastising members for thinking that the law somehow grants salvation
4. It refers to pagan days or pagan influences (syncretism) within the feast days

### Warning Against Misusing the Law of God

The *Pauline Paradox* does an excellent job at explaining how Paul did not do away with or replace God’s Law in this chapter.

Concerning Gal 4:21-31 he states:

“Note in verse 25 that Hagar in this analogy “corresponds to the present Jerusalem.” Paul is not speaking against the Law of God but against the misuse of the Law of God but against the misuse of the Law of God by those in the Jerusalem [church] of Paul’s day who taught that Gentiles needed to ritually convert and circumcise themselves to be initiated into God’s covenant people. Paul’s point is that anyone who tries to gain salvation through their own effort is like Abraham trying to gain God’s promise through his effort with Hagar.” (p. 93)

See also *Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians* by Tim Hegg for further proof that most protestants misunderstand parts of the letter.

## Referring to Pagan not Biblical Observance

Gerhard Hasel, "Sabbath," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 5, p. 855:

"Within the context of the Galatian Judaizing heresy, 'sabbath' seems to refer to something other than wholesome weekly sabbath-keeping as the majority opinion holds."

**Paul Does Not Condemn the Biblical Calendar in Galatians 4:10 (video) by David Wilber:**

You can watch it at the link [here](#).

**Referring to "days and months and seasons and years" Samuel Mikolaski, *New Bible Commentary Revised*, p. 1100 wrote:**

"Such mummerly included *days* (sabbaths), *months* (new moons), *seasons* (recurrent festivals), and *years* (jubilee years). Are these Jewish or pagan observances? In writing to the Galatians, Paul clearly has Judaizers in mind. Did these worship elemental spirits? **Astrological elements were at times infused into Jewish as well as pagan practices. The *elemental spirits* of this age refer probably to the ethos of an age traceable in part to pagan astrological mythology, but which had become a religious habit as much as, and perhaps more than, a metaphysical system (cf. Col. 2:8).**"

**"The Letter of Paul to the Galatians," in Joel Green, ed., *The Wesley Study Bible*, p. 1428:**

"This may refer to **religious calendar observances that involve the movement of stars and planets**, often believed in the ancient world to be controlled by spirits (vv. 9-11)." (*The Wesley Study Bible* notes)

**Daniel Juster, *Jewish Roots: Understanding Your Jewish Faith*, revised edition, pp. 159-160:**

"The full context [of Galatians 4:8-10] has prompted many commentators to hold that **Paul here is not speaking of Jewish biblical celebrations *per se*. There must have been another problem in Galatia, it is thought. This problem, it is said, is connected to astrology. It is also known that heretical groups existed which *connected some of the Jewish holidays to astrology* and superstition. Paul could not be speaking of celebrations given by God as putting people under the bondage of evil spirits! Nor could he be speaking of Jewish holidays in saying that they, a non-Jewish group, are *turning back* to weak and beggarly elemental spirits.**

"Apparently what Paul refers to is a drift into superstition connected to special years, days, and seasons—akin to astrology. This is bondage, for during such days, some actions are safe and others are unsafe, some endeavors are to be

undertaken and will be especially fruitful, while others are especially dangerous. This actually brings bondage to evil spirits. There may have been a perverted Jewish content added to some of this.”

**Frederick Bruce, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: Galatians*, p. 207:**

“... if former pagans accepted the Jewish calendar, old astral associations could easily reassert themselves.”

Bruce is obviously only partially correct.

Read also *FAQ - Galatians 4:9 – Is the "Law of God" Actually "Weak and Beggarly Elements?"*, 119 Ministries, [www.TestEverything.net](http://www.TestEverything.net) and *FAQ - Galatians 5:1 – Is the Law of God "Bondage" or "Freedom?"*, 119 Ministries, [www.TestEverything.net](http://www.TestEverything.net)

### **The Temptation to Revert to the Sacrificial System to Save**

**Also read *A New Paradigm for Understanding Galatians* by Kim Papaioannou (8 Nov 2011):** <https://spectrummagazine.org/article/kim-papaioannou/2011/11/08/new-paradigm-understanding-galatians>

“Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38-9 ESV).

#### **Problematic Approaches**

Many commentators, including Adventists, believe that the problem Paul tackles in Galatians is legalism, believers who felt they could earn their salvation by strict obedience; a “Jesus +” model of salvation, as some have put it. This paradigm is highly problematic. First, legalism has less to do with legal precepts and more with a mental attitude. What I mean is that it does not depend on how many laws you follow or how strictly but rather on an attitude of self-sufficiency.

Second, a simple comparison with how Jesus related to Pharisees, the chief legalists, is revealing. He called them “hypocrites” (Mt 23:13) for teaching one thing and doing another; accused them of putting “heavy burdens” (Mt 23:4) on people through their traditions; noted that through their traditions they nullified God’s law (Mk 7:9); **and even stated that they had a mistaken view of God’s law placing more emphasis on the minor aspects and less on the major, when they should keep both in proper perspective (Mt 23:23); but He never accused them of keeping the law too zealously!**

Third, Paul himself kept the law faithfully. He references the 10 Commandments repeatedly (Rom 7:8-13; 13:9; 1 Cor 7:19; Eph 6:2), and even the Book of the Law

as a guide for normative behavior (e.g. Rom 1:27; 7:2; 1 Cor 5:1; 2 Cor 6:14; 2 Cor 13:1).

Finally, you never tell overzealous lawkeepers, “The one who does them shall live by them (Gal 3:12)! Those who view legalism as the problem of Galatia will get a skewed picture of the epistle.

### **An Alternative Paradigm**

**A better paradigm to understand Galatians has roots in Adventist theology but somehow seems to faded from view.**

The biggest theological danger Jewish Christians faced was to lapse back into the system of sacrifices and the temple cultus. This is the main issue that Hebrews tackles. Since that epistle is not addressed to a specific locale but to Hebrew people in general, suggests that the problem was widespread. The believer’s relation to the temple may form a background to such well known passages as the temple tax incident (Mt 17:24-27); the renting of the veil of the temple at the crucifixion (Mt 27:51); the difficult passage of Col 2:16-17 (see my separate study on that text); and many more.

The regulations about the sanctuary and the sacrificial system were contained in the Pentateuch, the Torah or Law. It is important to keep in mind that **when Paul refers to Law he refers to the Pentateuch as a complete package that contained both moral injunctions AND the sacrificial system.** Occasionally he hones in on one or another aspect and context determines what he does when, but Law generally refers to the whole package.

The Law had a problem. The moral injunctions declared humans sinners; but the sacrificial system, put in place to deal with the problem of sin, could not cleanse sin. It was incapable of performing the task it was set in place to perform. Hebrews therefore declares, “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins”(Heb 10:4). And, “Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant... since **a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant**”(Heb 9:15). As such, the OT sacrifices only functioned as a shadow to point forward to Jesus, the true sacrifice for sin.

Paul was fully aware of this reality and declared as much: “Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man [Jesus] forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38-9). The problem of the Pentateuchal system therefore, the problem of the “Law”, was that it declared a person a sinner but offered no real solution to the problem of sin.

This is precisely the point Paul tackles in Galatians. Take for example the parable of the slave woman (Hagar) and the free woman (Sarah) which he says represent respectively the Sinai Covenant and the New Covenant, which he discusses in Gal 4:20-31. The former leads to slavery, the later to freedom. Why does Sinai lead to slavery? Because it declares a person a sinner but can offer no real

solution. Why does the New Covenant lead to freedom? Because the blood of Christ cleanses sin! Hallelujah!

### **The Law of Galatians 3:19-25**

With these thoughts let us look at a passage for this week, Gal 3:19-25. I will argue that while Paul speaks generally of the inadequacy of the Law (Pentateuch) to save because it does not cleanse sin, that here he becomes more specific and hones in on the law of sacrifices. To demonstrate this, we will look at some elements of the language he uses.

*The Law was added.* In Gal 3:19 Paul says that the Law was added “because of transgressions,” and this addition happened 430 years after Abraham (3:17), i.e. at Sinai. Why does he say “added?” It is worth noting that when God gave the covenant at Sinai (Ex 19:1-24:18) He did not give initially any regulations about sacrifices for sin. That is not to say that such regulations were not known before. All the patriarchs offered sacrifices from the beginning. But as Israel was making a new beginning as a nation after centuries of slavery in Egypt, God initially only gave them legal requirements, the 10 Commandments and the Book of the Law. Three times Israel responded, “All that the Lord has spoken, we will do” (Ex 19:8; 24:3,7). Apparently, the people of Israel were confident they could live a life of full obedience, so God allowed that they try it out. The result? Within 40 days the incident of the golden calf happened and the covenant was broken. Israel deserved to die (Ex 32:10,27,33,34-35; 33:5) but God graciously presented them with the system of sacrifices, as a means of dealing with the problem of human sinfulness. So, in that sense, the law of sacrifices was “added” because of transgressions.

*Because of.* In Gal 3:19, the Greek for the “because of” in the phrase, “the law was added because of transgressions” is *charin*. It comes from the noun *charis*, “grace.” The same word sometime functions as the accusative of *charis* or as a preposition, “because of.” In the latter case, however, it nearly always conveys a sense of advantage (e.g. Lk 7:47; Eph 3:1,14; Tit 1:5,11) , and as such is better translated “for the sake of” rather than “because of.” **Was any law added “for the sake of” transgressions? The text might better be translated, “the law was added as grace for transgressions” in which case the sacrifices are in view as well as their function.**

*Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions.* The original text did not have punctuation marks. Later manuscripts consistently place the question mark after the word “law.” In this case, the question Paul asks is, “Why then the law?”

Conversely, the question mark could be placed after “transgressions,” in which case 3:19 would be translated: “Why then the law concerning transgressions? It was added by/as grace.”

The word *charin* and the variant possibilities of punctuating Gal 3:19a all suggest that the specific law that Paul has in mind here is the law of sacrifices.

**The Guardian/Schoolmaster.** Paul then proceeds to describe this specific law as a *paidagōgos*, “a guardian,” “schoolmaster,” or “tutor.” The word *paidagōgos* is gentle. It describes a person who looked after children, teaching them the realities of life. **Their chief task was to educate.** The most famous example of a *paidagōgos* was the philosopher Aristotle, tutor of Alexander the Great. Alexander later said that he owed his biological life (*zein*) to his father, but the quality or moral aspects of his life (*euzein*) to his tutor. Rich Romans would spend large amounts of money to buy/hire the best Greek teachers to give the most complete possible education to their children.

This is precisely what the law of sacrifices did. The sinner could find some comfort in the sacrifices; though they did not forgive sin, they pointed forward to the One who would.

### Synthesis

**The paradigm whereby Paul is battling legalism in Galatians is hollow. Rather, the problem Paul was facing was Jews who were falling back into the life they once had, focused on the Jerusalem temple and its sacrificial system, on the basis that it was ingrained in the Law, the Pentateuch.** Paul declares that this arrangement will not save them because the Law does not have an adequate mechanism for sin; and those who want to be saved through it, can only do so if their obedience is perfect (something no human has achieved except Jesus). **In Gal 3:18-25 he hones his attention on a specific aspect of the Pentateuch, the sacrifices, stating that they were added to deal with the problem of sin, temporarily, until Jesus would come, the true answer to the problem of sin.**

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## The Weak and Beggarly Elements were not God’s Law

**Galatians 4 verses 9-10. Are God's Laws Bondage? (30 Jan 2011):**

<https://www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/booklets/the-new-covenant-does-it-abolish-gods-law/galatians-4-verses-9-10-are-gods-laws-bondage>

“Some view Galatians 4:9-10 as condemning Old Testament laws. In these verses Paul wrote: “But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God,

how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years."

Those who argue against God's laws see Paul's reference to "days and months and seasons and years" as pointing to the Sabbath, festivals and sabbatical and jubilee years given in the Old Testament (Leviticus 23, 25). They view these God-given observances as the "weak and miserable principles" (NIV) to which the Galatians were "turn[ing] again" and becoming "in bondage" (Galatians 4:9).

Is this Paul's meaning?

There is an obvious problem with viewing these verses as being critical of the Sabbath, since the Sabbath is not even mentioned here. The term "Sabbath," "Sabbaths" and any related words *do not even appear anywhere in the epistle to the Galatians*.

To argue against keeping the Sabbath, some assume that the "years" referred to in Galatians 4:10 are the sabbatical and jubilee years described in Leviticus 25. However, the jubilee year was not being observed *anywhere* in Paul's day, and the sabbatical year was not being observed in areas outside Palestine (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 14, p. 582, and *Jewish Encyclopedia*, p. 666, "Sabbatical Year and Jubilee"). The fact that Galatia was in pagan Asia Minor, far outside the land of Israel, makes it illogical to imagine Paul could have been referring to the sabbatical and jubilee years.

The Greek words Paul used for "days and months and seasons and years" are used throughout the New Testament in describing normal, civil periods of time. They are totally different from the precise terms Paul used in Colossians 2:16 specifying the Sabbaths and festivals of God. He used exact terminology for biblical observances in Colossians, but used very different Greek words in Galatians—a clear indication that he was discussing altogether different subjects.

To understand what Paul meant, we must examine both the historic and immediate contexts of these verses.

### **The Galatians couldn't "turn again" to days they had never observed**

The Galatian churches were composed mostly of members from a gentile, rather than Jewish, background. Paul made it clear that they were physically uncircumcised (Galatians 5:2; Galatians 6:12-13), so they could not have been Jewish.

This background is important in understanding this controversial scripture. In Galatians 4:9-10, Paul said that the Galatians were "turn[ing] again to the weak and beggarly elements," which included "days and months and seasons and years." Since Paul's readers were from a gentile background, it is difficult to see how the "days and months and seasons and years" they were turning back to could be the Sabbath and other biblical festivals, since they could not "turn again" to something they had not previously observed.

This is made even clearer by the immediate context. In Galatians 4:8, Paul said, "When you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods." By

this Paul referred "clearly to the idols of paganism, which, in typical Jewish idiom, Paul termed 'not gods'" (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 1976, Vol. 10, p. 475).

### **Not referring to biblical practices**

Is it possible that these "weak and beggarly elements" they were returning to (Galatians 4:9) could be God's laws, Sabbaths and festivals? The word translated "elements" here is the Greek word *stoicheia*. What does it mean? *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* explains:

"It would seem that in Paul's time . . . *stoicheia* . . . referred to the sun, moon, stars, and planets—all of them associated with gods or goddesses and, because they regulated the progression of the calendar, also associated with the great pagan festivals honoring the gods. In Paul's view these gods were demons. Hence, he would be thinking of a demonic bondage in which the Galatians had indeed been held prior to the proclamation of the gospel . . .

"In the verses that follow, Paul goes on to speak of these three crucial subjects in quick succession: (1) 'those who by nature are not gods,' presumably false gods or demons; (2) 'those weak and miserable principles,' again *stoicheia*; and (3) 'days and months and seasons and years' (vv. 9, 10). No doubt Paul would think of these demons in ways entirely different from the former thinking of the Galatians . . . Thus, this whole issue takes on a cosmic and spiritual significance. The ultimate contrast to freedom in Christ is bondage to Satan and the evil spirits" (p. 472).

### **Superstitious observance of days and times**

This is the context in which at least some of the Galatians were observing special "days and months and seasons and years." The word translated here as "observe" or "observing" is the Greek word *paratereo*, meaning "to watch closely, [or] observe narrowly" (W.E. Vine, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1985, "Observation, Observe").

This word "seems to have the sense of 'anxious, scrupulous, well-informed observance in one's interest,' which . . . fit[s] regard for points or spans of time which are evaluated positively or negatively from the standpoint of the calendar or astrology" (Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1995, Vol. 8, p. 148).

Whatever "days and months and seasons and years" the Galatians were observing, they were apparently observing them in a superstitious manner, as they had observed days and times before their conversion.

**From the context, we see it is simply not logical to conclude that Paul was criticizing the observance of the biblical Sabbath and festivals, since they were not even mentioned anywhere in this epistle. Instead, he was attacking misguided efforts to attain salvation through unnecessary superstitious observances.**

Paul tells them, "I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain" (Galatians 4:11). He was trying to prevent them from again becoming entangled in their former pagan practices."

## The Risk of Returning to Heathenism

**Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Whole Bible* online:**

**“Howbeit** - But, ἀλλὰ *alla*. The address in this verse and the following is evidently to the portion of the Galatians who had been pagan. This is probably indicated by the particle ἀλλὰ *alla*, but denoting a transition. In the previous verses Paul had evidently had the Jewish converts more particularly in his eye, and had described their former condition as one of servitude to the Mosaic rites and customs, and had shown the inconveniences of that condition, compared with the freedom imparted by the gospel. To complete the description, he refers also to the Gentiles, **as a condition of worse servitude still, and shows Gal\_4:9 the absurdity of their turning back to a state of bondage of any kind, after the glorious deliverance which they had obtained from the degrading servitude of pagan rites.** The sense is, “If the Jews were in such a state of servitude, how much more galling and severe was that of those who had been pagans. Yet from that servitude the gospel had delivered them, and made them freemen. How absurd now to go back to a state of vassalage, and to become servants under the oppressive rites of the Jewish law!”

**When ye knew not God** - In your state of paganism, when you had no knowledge of the true God and of his service. The object is not to apologize for what they did, because they did not know God; it is to state the fact that they were in a state of gross and galling servitude.

**Ye did service** - This does not express the force of the original. The meaning is, “Ye were “slaves” to (ἐδουλεύσατε *edouleusate*); you were in a condition of servitude, as opposed to the freedom of the gospel;” compare Gal 4:3, where the same word is used to describe the state of the Jews. The drift of the apostle is, to show that the Jews and Gentiles, before their conversion to Christianity, were in a state of vassalage or servitude, and that it was absurd in the highest degree to return to that condition again.

**Unto them which by nature are no gods** - Idols, or false gods. The expression “by nature,” φύσει *phusei*, according to Grotius, means, “in fact, *re ipsa*.” The sense is, that they really had no pretensions to divinity. Many of them were imaginary beings; many were the objects of creation, as the sun, and winds, and streams; and many were departed heroes that had been exalted to be objects of worship. Yet the servitude was real. It fettered their faculties; controlled their powers; bound their imagination, and commanded their time and property, and made them slaves. Idolatry is always slavery; and the servitude of sinners to their passions and appetites, to lust and gold, and ambition, is not less galling and severe than was the servitude to the pagan gods or the Jewish rites, or than is the servitude of the African now to a harsh and cruel master. Of all Christians it may be said that before their conversion they “did service,” or were slaves to harsh and cruel masters; and nothing but the gospel has made them free. It may be

added, that the chains of idolatry all over the world are as fast riveted and as galling as they were in Galatia, and that nothing but the same gospel which Paul preached there can break those chains and restore man to freedom.”

**Adam Clarke, *Commentary and Critical Notes* online:**

“**When ye knew not God** - Though it is evident, from the complexion of the whole of this epistle, that the great body of the Christians in the Churches of Galatia were converts from among the Jews or proselytes to Judaism; **yet from this verse it appears that there were some who had been converted from heathenism;** unless we suppose that the apostle here particularly addresses those who had been proselytes to Judaism and thence converted to Christianity; which appears to be most likely from the following verses.”

**Jamieson, Fausett, Brown, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* online:**

“Appeal to them not to turn back from their privileges as free sons, to legal bondage again.

**then** — when ye were “servants” (Gal\_4:7).

**ye knew not God** — not opposed to Rom\_1:21. **The heathen originally knew God, as Rom\_1:21 states, but did not choose to retain God in their knowledge, and so corrupted the original truth.** They *might* still *have* known Him, in a measure, from His works, but as a matter of fact they knew Him not, so far as His eternity, His power as the Creator, and His holiness, are concerned.

**are no gods** — that is, have no existence, such as their worshippers attribute to them, in the nature of things, but only in the corrupt imaginations of their worshippers (see on 1Co\_8:4; see on 1Co\_10:19, 1Co\_10:20; 2Ch\_13:9). Your “service” was a different bondage from that of the Jews, which was a true service. Yet theirs, like yours, was a burdensome yoke; how then is it ye wish to resume the yoke after that God has transferred both Jews and Gentiles to a free service?”

**Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary for Schools and College online:**

“Danger of going back to the observance of the legal ceremonial. **8–11**

**8. Notwithstanding, is it so that you who once were idolaters and ignorant of God, yet after having been brought to the knowledge of the true God, are turning back to a system of ceremonial observances?** If this be so, I fear the labour I have bestowed on you is thrown away.

The *emphatic* words in Gal\_4:8-9 are ‘did service’, ‘to be in bondage’. The verb is the same in the original. The tense is different. **‘Before your conversion you were in slavery—will you go back to a state of slavery? Then you served demons—will you now submit to the bondage of weak and beggarly elements?’**

*knew not God*] Comp. 1Th\_4:5 ‘The Gentiles, which know not God’. They might have known something of Him from the universe or from tradition or intuitively,

but 'they did not like to retain God in their knowledge', Rom\_1:28.

*them which by nature are no gods*] The order of these words, so far as the position of the negative particle is concerned, is uncertain in the original. Adopting the A.V. we explain, 'which by nature (in reality) are not gods, but demons'. If however the negative stand earlier in the sentence, the rendering will be, 'which are not by nature, (not really, but only by repute) gods'. If the former be retained, comp. 1Co\_10:20, "The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God." If the latter order be adopted, we may compare 1Co\_8:5, "there be that are called gods."

**Matthew Taylor, Galatians 4:8-11 – The Danger of Turning Back to Legalism (9 Oct 2020):**  
<https://seekingourgod.com/galatians-48-11-the-danger-of-turning-back-to-legalism/>

**"ASIDE:** Let's talk about the word "elemental"

(Greek *stoicheion*; *Strong's 4747*) (4:3, 9; Col 2:8, 20; Heb 5:12; 2 Pet 3:10): This Greek word can mean (1) **elementary or rudimentary principles; basic components of something, pertaining to either substances underlying the natural world, basic components of celestial constellations or heavenly bodies, or things that constitute the foundation of learning.** Or (2) it means elemental spirits or transcendent powers that are in control over events in this world. The word itself means things placed in a line or row, like an alphabet. It was used to speak of rudimentary principles (Heb 5:12) or basic elements of the universe, whether physical or spiritual. If Paul was thinking of elementary principles, he meant that people were in bondage to the basic elements of religion; if he meant spirits, **he was saying that people are in bondage to the "elemental spirits," meaning certain gods or demons.** "Principles" suits the overall context of Galatians, whereas spirits accords with 4:8-10. In either case, Paul was saying that people were in bondage until Christ came."

**Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers online:**

"(8-11) The results of the foregoing argument are now turned against the Galatians. **In their old heathen state they had been in bondage to gods that were no gods. From this bondage they had been delivered.** They had been raised to a true knowledge of God, and received a Father's recognition from Him. How then could they possibly think of returning to a system of mere ceremonialism. All this painful observance of times and seasons could only make the Apostle think that his labours on their behalf had been thrown away.

(8) **Them which by nature are no gods.**—The gods of the heathen are called by St. Paul "devils." (See 1Corinthians 10:20: "The things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to devils, and not to God.")"

**Joseph Benson's Commentary of the Old and New Testaments online:**

**"Galatians 4:8-11.** *Howbeit* — **Ἀλλὰ**, *but, or however*, that ye Gentiles may not foolishly reject, neglect, or forfeit your privileges, as the sons of God, you ought to remember what your condition was while under *the elements of the world*, and compare it with your present happy state: that *then, when ye knew not* the one living and true **God, ye did service** — **Performed many degrading, burdensome, irrational, and abominable acts of worship and service, unto them which by nature are no gods** — "This is a true description of the idols worshipped by the heathen, for either they had no existence, being mere creatures of the imagination; or, if any of them existed, **they were dead men, or evil spirits, or the luminaries of the heavens, [or other creatures of God, as most of the idols of Egypt were,] deified by human folly: and being destitute of divine perfections, they were utterly incapable of bestowing any blessing whatever on their worshippers.**" *But now, after ye have known* the only true *God* — And his mind and will; *or rather are known of God* — Are acknowledged, approved, and accepted, as his children; *how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements* — *Weak*, utterly unable to purge your conscience from guilt, and to inspire you with filial confidence in God, or to change your nature, transform you into his likeness, and to enable you to do and suffer his will: *beggarly*, or poor; that is, incapable of enriching your souls with such wisdom, holiness, and happiness, as ye are heirs to, or to give you a hope of a blessed immortality after death; *whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage* — Though of another kind: now to these *elements*, as before to those idols; changing indeed the form and object of your ceremonies, but retaining many of the same low, perplexing, and unprofitable observances. *Ye observe days* — Jewish sabbaths; *and months* — New moons; *and times* — As that of the passover, pentecost, and the feast of tabernacles; *and years* — Annual solemnities. The word does not here mean sabbatic years: these were not to be observed out of the land of Canaan. This was addressed to such of the Galatians as had embraced Judaism. Some think this verse should be read interrogatively, *Do ye observe?* &c, because it seems to intimate a hope that it might be otherwise. As a question, it likewise expresses the apostle's surprise that the Galatians observed these days. *I am afraid of you* — See on 2 Corinthians 11:2-3; *lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain* — As will be the case if you continue the use of these ceremonies and think to be justified by them together with Christ, Galatians 5:2."

Comment: Benson is partially correct, but gets mixed up in his interpretation of sabbaths.

**Heinrich Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament:**

"Galatians 4:8. **Ἀλλὰ]** *Nevertheless*, how fearfully at variance is your present retrograde attitude with the fact of **this divine deliverance from your previous**

**lost condition!** This topic is dealt with down to Galatians 4:11. Observe that **ἀλλά** introduces the two corresponding relations **τότε μὲν** and **νῦν δέ** in conjunction.[187]

**τότε**] *then*; reminds the readers of *the* past time, in which they were still **δοῦλοι** (Galatians 4:7).

**οὐκ εἰδότες Θεόν**] Cause of the **ἐδουλεύσατε** which follows. In the *non-knowledge of God* (for **οὐκ εἰδότης** forms one idea) lies the fundamental essence of the *heathenism*, to which the apostle's readers had mostly belonged. Comp. 1 Thessalonians 4:5; Acts 17:23; Acts 17:30, *et al.* As to the relation of the thought to Romans 1:20 f., see on that passage.

**ἐδουλεύσατε**] The aorist simply designates the state of bondage then existing as now at an end, without looking at its duration or development. See Kühner, II. p. 73 f.

**τοῖς φύσει μὴ οὔσι θεοῖς**] *to the gods, who by nature however are not so!* For, in the apostle's view, the realities which were worshipped by the heathen as gods, **were not gods, but demons**. See on 1 Corinthians 10:20. In his view, therefore, their nature was not divine, but at the same time not of *mere mundane matter* (Ewald) (comp. Wis 13:1 ff.); it was *demoniac*,—a point which must have been well known to the Galatians from his oral instruction.

The *negation* denies *subjectively*, from the apostle's view. Comp. 2 Chronicles 13:9 : **ἐγένετο εἰς ἱερέα τῷ μὴ ὄντι Θεῷ**.

[187] But so, that the thought introduced by **δέ** (ver. 9) is the main thought. Comp. Baeumlein, *Partikell.* p. 168."

#### **Expositor's Greek Testament online:**

"Galatians 4:8-10. BUT THOUGH IN TIME PAST WHEN YOU KNEW NOT GOD YOU WERE SLAVES TO FALSE GODS, HOW CAN YOU, NOW THAT YOU HAVE LEARNT TO KNOW HIM, OR RATHER HAVE BEEN RECOGNISED BY HIM, TURN BACK TO THE LESSONS OF CHILDHOOD AND CRAVE A BONDAGE TO TIMES AND SEASONS?—**The guilt of past idolatry** is palliated on the score of ignorance, in the same spirit as in Acts 17:30, in order to press home the responsibility of those who have learnt to know God (**γνόντες Θεόν**) in Christ. There was some excuse for their former bondage to imaginary gods who had no real existence: but how can they now turn back in heart to the weak and beggarly lessons of their spiritual childhood after they have received the spirit of sonship? Instead of ruling their own lives by reason and conscience under the guidance of the Spirit like men in Christ, they are bent on subjecting themselves like children to elementary rules of formal service."

#### **Bengel's Gnomon of the New Testament online:**

"Galatians 4:8. **Τότε**, *then*) *when we were children* [Galatians 4:1].—**οὐκ εἰδότες Θεόν**, *not knowing God*) The very wretched state of the Gentiles.—

ἔδουλεύσατε, *ye did service*) being under a different bondage from that of the Jews, Galatians 4:3. You worshipped gods not true with a worship not true. You had not been accustomed to the Mosaic worship; and therefore it is more a matter of wonder, that you now desire [affect] it. You attained to the truth without those elements, and now at length [for the first time] you follow them.—τοῖς μὴ φύσει οὐσί θεοῖς) So the LXX., τῷ μὴ ὄντι θεῷ, 2 Chronicles 13:9.”

**Pulpit Commentary online:**

“Verse 8. - Howbeit (ἀλλά); a strongly adversative conjunction, belonging to the whole sentence comprised in this and the next verse, which are closely welded together by the particles μὲν and δέ. In contravention of God's work of grace just described, they were renouncing their sonship and making themselves slaves afresh. Then (τότε μὲν). The μὲν, with its balancing δέ, here, as often is the case, unites together sentences not in their main substance strictly adverse to each other, but only in subordinate details contrasted, of which we have an exemplary instance in Romans 8:17, Κληρονόμους μὲν Θεοῦ συγκληρονόμους δὲ Ἐριστοῦ. In such cases we have often no resource in English but to leave the μὲν untranslated, as our Authorized Version commonly does; "indeed" or "truly," for example, would be more or less misleading. The truth is, the apostle in these two verses is heaping reproach upon the Galatian Judaizers; first, in this verse, for their former (guilty) ignorance of God and their idolatries, and then, in the next verse, for their slighting that blessed friendship with God which they owed only to his preventing grace. **In dealing with Gentile Christians the apostle repeatedly is found referring to their former heathenism**, for the purpose of enforcing humility or abashing presumption, as for example in Romans 11:17-25; Romans 15:8, 9; 1 Corinthians 12:2; Ephesians 2:11-13, 17. In the case of the Galatians his indignation prompts him to use a degree of outspoken severity which he was generally disposed to forbear employing. The "then" is not defined, as English readers might perhaps misconstrue the Authorized Version as intending, by the following clause, "not knowing God," which in that version is "when ye knew not God" - a construction of the words which the use of the participle would hardly warrant; rather the time referred to by the adverb is the time of which he has before been speaking, when God's people were under the pedagogy of the Law. This, though when compared with Christ's liberty a state of bondage, was, however (the apostle feels), a position of high advancement as compared with that of heathen idolaters. These last were "far off," while the Israelites were "**nigh**" (compare the **passages** just now referred to). During that time of legal pedagogy the Galatians and their forefathers, all in the apostle's view forming one class, were wallowing in the mire of heathenism. When ye knew not God (ou)k ei)do/te Qeo/n); **ye knew not God and, etc.** "Knowing not God" describes the condition of heathens also in 1 Thessalonians 4:5," Not in the passion of lust, even as the Gentiles which know

not (τὰ μὴ εἰδότα) God;" 2 Thessalonians 1:8, "Rendering vengeance to them that know not (τοῖς μὴ εἰδόσιν) God." Both of these passages favour the view that the apostle does not in the least intend in the present clause to **excuse** the idolatries which he goes on to speak of, but rather to describe a condition of godlessness which, as being positive rather than merely negative, inferred utter pravity and guiltiness. He uses οὐκ with the participle here, in place of the μὴ in the two **passages** cited from the **Thessalonians**, as intending to state an historical fact viewed absolutely - a sense which is made clear in English by substituting an indicative verb for the participle. Ye did service unto (ἐδουλεύσατε); **served**; devoted yourselves to. The verb is, perhaps, used here in that milder sense in which it frequently occurs; as in Matthew 6:24; Luke 15:29; Luke 16:13; Acts 20:19; Romans 7:6, 25; Romans 14:18; 1 Thessalonians 1:9. The Revised Version, however, gives "were in bondage to" in the present instance, but "serve" in the **passages now** cited. The aorist, instead of an imperfect, describes the form of religious life which they then led as a whole. Them which by nature are no gods (τοι = fu/sei mh\ ou = si θεοῖς). The Textus Receptus has τοῖς μὴ φύσει οὔσι θεοῖς, which would apparently mean "which are not gods by nature, but only in your imagination;" like "There be that are called gods," in 1 Corinthians 8:5 - Zeus, Apollo, Here, etc., mere figments of imagination (comp. 1 Corinthians 8:4). **The more approved reading suggests rather the idea that the objects they worshipped might not be non-existent, but were certainly not of a Divine nature; "by nature," that is, in the kind of being to which they belong (Ephesians 2:3; Wisd. 13:1, μάταιοι φύσει). The question may be asked - If they were not gods, what then were they? The apostle would probably have answered, "Demons;" for thus he writes to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 10:20): "The things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to devils (δαμονίου), and not to God." Alford renders, "to gods which by nature exist not," etc.; but the more obvious sense of οὔσιν is that of a copula merely (comp. 2 Chronicles 13:9, *Septuagint*, "He became a priest (τῷ μὴ ὄντι θεῷ)"). Galatians 4:8."**

### **Slavery to Paganism, not Jewish Legalism**

#### ***Galatians 4:8-11 meaning (The Bible Says):***

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/gal/gal-4/galatians-48-11/>

*"Before believing in Christ, the Galatians were slaves to sin and tried to please false gods. But now that they are in right relationship with the true God, they're still choosing to live in slavery to rules and rituals. Paul worries that he wasted his time teaching them.*

Paul refers to the time before the Galatian Gentiles knew God, when they were *slaves* to the *elemental things of the world*. Different from Jews, the Galatians were *slaves* to pagan gods. Paul makes it clear that these pagan gods were, in actuality, *by nature* not really *gods*. However, these pagan *gods* did have

rules for how to get blessings, how to prosper in the world. These religious rules included observing various *days and months and seasons and years*. **Many of our current Christian holidays (an abbreviation of holy days) are Christian substitutes for pagan holidays.**

When Christianity became the official religion of Rome, Christian leaders faced the challenge of offering constructive alternatives to the old holidays of pagan converts. So they were very creative. They substituted “Easter” for the “Feast of Ishtar.” They now celebrated the resurrection of Jesus instead of celebrating the fertility goddess Ishtar. Ishtar worship included superstitions regarding Spring and crop productivity, as well as gross immorality.

**But here Paul is not referring to times of remembrance for what Jesus did for us. Rather, he is referring to rituals that are likely supposed to gain us something we desire.** In this case, Paul is saying something quite critical of the Jews. He apparently is saying that the way they are approaching their Jewish *days and months and seasons and years* is fundamentally no different than what the Galatians did in paganism. We know enough about paganism to know the rituals promised we could “get the god to do stuff for us.”

In chapter 2, Paul criticized the Galatians for “*seeking to be justified*” in the sight of God when they have already been justified. In Gal 5:4, Paul will say that those who seek to be justified by the Law make Christ unnecessary or ineffective. If we are already righteous in God’s sight, all that remains is to live out that righteousness in this world. Paul asserts that there is no need to seek something we already possess.

But that is exactly what the competing Jewish “authorities” have gotten the Galatians to begin doing. And Paul tells them this is like going back under the *elemental things of the world*. Instead of living out the righteousness of Christ through a walk of faith, they are following *days and months and seasons and years*, seeking to be justified before God.

Paul presents a completely different paradigm. Rather than seeking to perform for or manipulate God, Paul presents that we should live like a *son* in God’s Kingdom. God desires that all who believe in His Son and possess His Spirit take on the responsibility of managing His business here on earth. The Galatians are leaving the high and lofty calling of being sons in God’s Kingdom to once again live as slaves and children.

Paul says he *fears for* them. He is concerned that he has *labored over them in vain*. Paul is adamant that the Galatians should not seek to be justified through following rules or rites when they have already been justified by faith. Paul has sought to lead the Galatian believers to maturity in Christ. But if they are going to spend their time seeking to be justified (2:17, 5:4) then Paul is wasting his time. His work on their behalf is *in vain*. Seeking to be justified by following rules prevents growth in Christ. Paul tells his disciple Timothy to spend his time on “faithful men” who will also disciple others. “Don’t spend time on people who aren’t faithful, that isn’t a good investment of time” is Paul’s point (2 Tim 2:2). Paul’s comment about *laboring in vain* is a similar statement.

**Biblical Text**

**8 However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. 9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? 10 You observe days and months and seasons and years. 11 I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.”**

The usual interpretation of Christians is that Galatians 4 refers to the Sabbath and Feast days as legalism. The David Guzik *Galatians and Ephesians Commentary* is an example. It is a very forced and unfortunate interpretation.

## Gal 3:23-26 - and the Commandments as *paidagogos*

“Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.  
So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.  
But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,  
for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.” (Gal 3:23-26 ESV)

Some claim that Paul is saying that the Old Testament (and especially the Torah) has been sort of superseded by the New Testament. While others believe that Paul is in effect either ‘doing away’ with the Law or minimising it.

However, there are those that think he is referring to the ceremonial or ritualistic laws. Still some feel that he is writing about the over zealotry for God’s Law without faith and not its abolition or replacement.

What of those who believe that after Christ’s ascension, there was an almost complete break with the Old Testament and a virtually new religion emerged which became known as Christianity?

But there is no indication of this at all in the New Testament, is there? Where can it be found in the actions and beliefs of Christ; anywhere in the four Gospels; anywhere with the exception of misinterpretations of a few verses of Paul?

I cannot, with the plain reading of the New Testament, see any picture of such. I cannot find anywhere that there is an all of a sudden, quick veering away from that which has ancient roots to Israel, Abraham, Noah and even Adam.

That plain reading reveals that there is no radical break with the Laws and way of God – Christ did not come to keep the Law so that we don’t have to. How silly and illogical, let alone unBiblical.

Christ was, in fact, God the Father’s servant:

“The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him.” (Acts 3:13)

After all:

“Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.  
Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father

of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.  
Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." (James 1:16-18)

So, how do we explain Gal 3:23-24 in the Biblical context and Christ's example?

"Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.

So then, the law [*nomos*] was our guardian [or schoolmaster – *paidagogos*] until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith." (Gal 3:23-24)

The following is from **Charles Cousar, *Galatians. Interpretation:***

*"The Role of the Law*

"Throughout the larger section, Gal 3:6-29, Paul is concerned with the question as to who is the true Israel. In verses 6-14 ... he begins with Abraham and argues that Abraham's descendants are those who, like Abraham, respond to the faithfulness of God. In light of the promise given in Gen 12:3 and fulfilled in Christ, it is obvious that nations and ethnic considerations no longer count: the door is now open to the world.

"Christ is the one who has caused the redefinition of the people of God; because he has taken on himself the curse of the law and has made possible the giving of Abraham's blessing to non-Jews."

Comment: this is only partially correct. Replacement theology is heresy and Cousar seems to be at least sliding toward it. Rather, physical Israel with its Biblical blessings and role continue on as a distinct physical people of God.

"Most commentators are quick to point out - and for good reason - that in verse 24 the word *paidagogue* should be translated as "custodian" (RSV) or "tutor" (NEB) rather than school-master" (KJV). In wealthy Greek and Roman families the *paidagogue* was the individual, usually a slave, entrusted with the care of the child at those times when the child was not at school. The translation "school-master" has often led to the notion that the law has a continuing function as educator, and in this context of course that is a negative function. It humiliates sinners by exposing their folly and failures, or it crushes their self-righteousness and pride leaving them guilty and totally without hope. They must encounter first the law and its inexorable demand creating anxiety and doubt before they are in a position to receiving healing and forgiving grace of the gospel. This interpretation is not entirely false. Outside of Christ the law can only identify wrong and condemn it. **But Paul speaks historically, not existentially (3:22-25). He is not thinking of the way sinners come to Christ, via the law, but of the role the law played until the coming of the Messiah, who by fulfilling the law and taking its**

**curse made its custodial function obsolete.** "But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian" (3:25).

"But Paul is not writing merely as a historian who divides the biblical time-line into three periods: from Adam to Moses (before the law); from Moses to Christ (the law functioning as custodian); from Christ on (the law no longer a custodian). There is also an inner connection between the law and Christ, perhaps obscured somewhat in the RSV. Verse 25 reads, "So that the law was our custodian *until Christ came*" could just as accurately read "... *with a view to Christ's coming.*" Probably both temporal and purposive ideas are to be understood. The law as a custodian served an essential function leading up to as well as ending with the advent of Christ.

"Paul is certainly in a position to speak about the law. In his pre-Damascus Road days his attitude was that of an orthodox Pharisee. He delighted in the law and zealously kept its precepts. His comments about being "blameless" (Phil 3:6) need not imply that he imagined he was without fault, but in times of failure he had availed himself of the law's means of restitution and pardon. It was his passion, and thus he set about persecuting any who claimed a relationship to God outside its boundaries. But the appearance of Christ to Paul changed all that. To think of salvation in terms of the law now would be to revert to a pre-Christian time. True freedom is found in the promise, not the law. It is an inclusive promise, which in the light of Christ's coming results in an amazing unity of Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female.

"Careful readers of the Bible today can appreciate Paul's need to deal forcefully as he does with the issue of the law because of the context out of which he came and for which he is writing. Still the inevitable question arises: What part should the Mosaic law play in the life and theology of the church? Paul is very negative, leading some to conclude that the law has no place at all in the church (3:15-29). Yet in other places he describes the law as "holy, just and good," something to delight in (Rom 7:12, 22). If God's salvation comes through his grace alone and human performance in no way a precondition to grace, then what use is the law? Are not all the ritual laws and moral demands outdated?

"Paul of course is not writing for the twentieth century church and does not answer directly all the questions one might want to put to him. **Too often he has been disengaged from his context and dragged into the modern era to support this or that theory in a proof-text fashion. On the other hand, one of the tasks of the theologian is to listen to a biblical writer like Paul on the basis of what he says and to take the risk of dealing with contemporary questions.** What, therefore, in the light of 15-29 and some other passages in the letter, can be said about the place of the Mosaic law in the church?

"As previously noted, Paul returns time and again to this theme in Galatians as he contends for the rightful place of the Gentiles in the church. **Secondly, the law can no longer be a threat. Its curse has gone; its custodial role is at an end.** To be terrorized now by its stringent demands and to feel the anxiety of its

condemnation is to forget that Christ has taken its curse. There may be places in the church where proof-texts from the law are still hurled in anger and judgment at those whose conduct is less than perfect, but that, too, is to live anachronistically as if Christ had never come."

Comment: Cousar is on to something, but is only partially correct. First of all there is consistency throughout Scripture on a single system of worship toward God. Secondly, how does he square his comments against others in the New Testament condemning lying, stealing, homosexuality etc? How can law observance be stressful? It is a struggle with the flesh and outside pressures and in that sense it is a good stress. What of the continuation of the Law including the sacrificial and priestly system into the Millenium?

What Paul is talking about is that we should not be over stressed with guilt in that God will forgive us as Christ has paid the penalty for us. Cousar is edging toward anti-nomianism, though he may not see that or admit to it. We must not condemn one another or be self-righteous. Nor be abusive. Because we have access to the Father Who will readily forgive us, applying the shed blood of Christ in our stead.

"The situation, however, in most circles today is not that the law either divides or threatens people; it is more often ignored. Its stories and commands are written off as belonging to a bygone era, primarily nomadic or agrarian, where polygamy prevailed and life was cheap. What *positive* value does the law have? In the third chapter of Galatians Paul has undeniably devalued the law in relation to the exalted place it occupied in Judaism, **but even in this polemical context he never suggests that the words of the law should be forgotten. It is from confinement under law that Christ redeems his people.**

"(a) The law is thus important to the church because it witnesses to the salvation which comes in Christ. By "law" Paul means in this chapter not an abstract imperative or a universal sense of oughtness but the Mosaic law, given at Sinai and in its written form embracing narrative as well as legal material. He can even use the term synonymously with "scripture" (3:22); cf. 3:8). In verses 6-14 he can quote from it to document the point that God had intended the blessings of Abraham to include the Gentiles. **In verses 21-25, where admittedly the definition of law narrows and the emphasis falls more on its demand than its story,** he acknowledges that it renders a service in preparation for Christ's coming by closing all other exits to the confinement. To change the metaphor, the law functions, like blinders on a horse, to point Israel in one direction - to the advent of the new age and the fulfillment of the promise.

"The church still needs this witness because without it the New Testament makes little sense. Christ is the climax of a story which includes Sinai, with the giving of the Decalogue and the establishment of the cult. To neglect the story is to rob

Christ of his particular roots, one who was "born of a woman, born under the law" (4:4).

Christ is not in climax of the story. After all He had pre-existence and He will reign during the Millennium. Rather, His first coming possesses partial fulfilment of His role – the next stage in His working with humanity.

"The law identifies what sort of God it is who sends his Son and adopts others as his children. It defines for the church exactly what his family is like, where it came from, and what it is called to be. Undoubtedly the dawn of the new age brings a discontinuity with the past, with the result that God's people find their identity now in Christ and not in the law. But the discontinuity must be kept in proper balance with the continuity, which lays the foundation, provides the context, and gives meaning to the Christian gospel.

"(b) This leads to a second reason why the church needs the Mosaic law, a reason Paul appropriately does not mention until later (5:14 and 6:2)

"For the whole law [*nomos*] is fulfilled in one word, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law [*nomos*] of Christ.

"The law is instructive for the Christian community as it lives out its life in the world. Christians are no longer "under the law" (5:18) but nevertheless can be guided by the law in facing all sorts of moral and ethical dilemmas. It is very significant after all the denigration of the law in verses 19-25 Paul should still use the word in describing responsible freedom. It is of course the law now fulfilled in Christ. To return to James A. Sanders comment ... *torah* (*nomos*, law) is composed of both narrative and legal code, never exclusively the one or the other. Paul is reading the *torah* as a narrative has come to see Jesus as the decisive chapter in an otherwise unfinished story. He is the one to whom the *torah* is directed. But that does not mean a negation of the legislative dimensions of the *torah*, only a fresh perspective on it.

"He can call it "the law of Christ" (cf. 1 Cor 9:20-21). **By that he does not mean a different code or document; it is the Mosaic law, but summed up in the command to love and interpreted in the light of Christ.**

**"More will be said about this later (in connection with 5:13-15), particularly the way love radicalizes the law. It deepens demands and makes them more thorough-going and pervasive. At the same time, the command to love does not replace the law, as if the law being summarized were no longer necessary. Love does not always tell one exactly how to respond or what to say in the many ambiguous situations people face daily. Neither does the law; but in numerous cases passages like the ten commandments when read in the light of Christ gives positive definition to the loving will of God.** They help to prevent love from becoming soft sentimentality or merely abstract principle. The church still needs the law to throw light on the human situation and love to keep that law from being rigidly interpreted" (pp. 77-83).

Comment: He misunderstands that the Law has always been spiritual. He works around it not being done away with one of sort of keeping its general principles. But at least in this section of the book he is getting somewhere.

"In chapter three he made use of two striking images in the description of the law and its place prior to the coming of Christ. The law was a jailor, who locked up prisoners and kept guard over their confinement. No escape was possible until Christ came to liberate them (3:22-23). Then, the law also served as a custodian, who took care of the children, directed all their activities, and tended to their discipline. Both expressions are evocative and suggestive. The negative task of the law might have been discussed with more precision in a lengthy treatise but hardly with more vigor" (ibid, p. 90).

"There is something of a debate among the commentators as to the exact meaning of the verb "is fulfilled." Does Paul say here that the law is summarized in the one command "You shall love your neighbor as yourself"? Or does he say that in love the law is obeyed and thus brought to completion? A parallel passage, Rom 13:8-10, suggests that he may have both summarization and completion in mind. The citation from Lev 19:18 clearly represents the essence of the law (though Paul regularly omits the command to love God mentioned in the Synoptic accounts (Mark 12:28-34; Matt 22:22:34-40; Luke 10:25-37). He seems, however, to go beyond summarization by saying that the free life of love in reality (and of course in Christ) does fulfil the law. To put it in the words of the Romans parallel, "He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law" (Rom 13:8). This *love puts the law in proper perspective*. It frees people from misuse through the law and frees the law from misuse by people.

"Two comments about this. First, when Paul speaks of believers "loving," it is of a different order from saying they are joyful, or patient, or even just. Love is not one virtue among a list of virtues, but the sum and substance of what it means to be a Christian. **In dying with Christ and in the subsequent new life, persons discover they are the recipients of God's love, and faith essentially means surrendering to this love (2:20; Rom 5:5, 8). Only out of such surrender does the fulfillment of Lev 19:18 become a reality.** As we have seen (in connection with 5:6), being loved and loving are inseparable components within Pauline theology. Thus to say that the law is fulfilled in love is to take account of God's love in Christ. As sinners are placed "in Christ," they are remade by love so that they are no longer characterized by self-interest. "For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one had died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (II Cor 5:14-15).

"Secondly, **love does not do away with the law but confirms it and provides its correct interpretation. Paul turns to the *torah* (Lev 19:18) itself to find the "one word" which describes its fulfillment. The *torah* is not then destroyed but set in**

**a new perspective by the command to love. Unfortunately, the interpretive role love plays is often misunderstood. It suggest to many nothing more than a way to get around the law, permissiveness, an excuse for doing whatever it is that one wants to do.** The catch of course lies in the understanding of love, which for Paul is not to be confused with warm feelings of moments of tenderness. Love finds its true expression in God's giving of himself in Christ (2:20; Rom 5:6-8), and just such concrete and **substantial self-giving lies at the heart of the command to love. The obligation demanded by the law is no way lessened by love; it is instead made more radical and comprehensive.** What is owed to neighbors is not the carrying out of a specific law but a total approach to live continually being servants of one another. Love's claim is without restriction."

"The law, then, has value as a norm only in light of the dominion of grace, the power of love, and the new life of the Spirit" (ibid, pp.130-32).

And refer also to J McKee, *Galatians 3:24-25. Are Messianic Youth Properly Trained in the Torah and All the Scriptures?* 14 July, 2008 [www.tnnonline.net](http://www.tnnonline.net)

**John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 69-81 wrote:**

**"A Christian's righteousness: Christ, the Christian and the law**

"So far Jesus has spoken of a Christian's character, and of the influence he will have in the world if he exhibits this character and if his character bears fruit in 'good works' [ie *Sermon on the Mount*]. He now proceeds to define further this character and these good works in terms of righteousness.

"He explains that **the righteousness he has already mentioned twice as that for which his disciples hunger (6) and on account on which they suffer (10) is a conformity to God's moral law** and yet surpasses the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (20). The 'good works' are works of obedience. He began his Sermon with beatitudes in the third person ('Blessed are the poor in spirit'); he continued in the second person ('You are the salt of the earth'); and now he changes to the authoritative first person and uses for the first time his distinctive and dogmatic formula *I say to you* (18) or *I tell you* (20) .

"This paragraph is of great importance not only for its definition of Christian righteousness but also for the light it throws on the relation between the New Testament and the Old Testament, between the gospel and the law. It divides itself into two parts, first Christ and the law (17, 18) and secondly the Christian and the law (19,20).

**Christ and the law**

"He begins by telling them not for one moment to imagine that he had come *to abolish the law and the prophets, i.e.* the whole Old Testament or any part of it.

"The way in which Jesus phrases this negative statement suggests that some had indeed been thinking the very thought which he now contradicts. Although his public ministry had so recently begun, already his contemporaries were deeply disturbed by his supposed attitude to the Old Testament.

"Perhaps the sabbath controversy had flared up thus early, for Mark puts both the sabbath plucking of corn and the sabbath healing of a man's withered hand before even the appointment of the twelve. Certainly from the very beginning of his ministry, people had been struck by his authority. 'What is this?' they asked. 'A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him' (Mk 1:27). It was natural therefore that many were asking what the relation was between *his* authority and the authority of the law of Moses. It was clear to them that the scribes were submissive to it, for they were 'teachers of the law'. They devoted themselves to its interpretation and claimed for themselves no authority apart from the authorities they quoted. But it was not so clear with Jesus. Jesus spoke with his own authority. He loved to use a formula no ancient prophet or modern scribe had ever used. He would introduce some of his most impressive utterances with 'Truly I say to you', speaking in his own name and with his own authority. What was this authority of his? Was he setting himself up as an authority over against the sacred law, the word of God? So it seemed to some. Hence their question, spoken or unspoken, which Jesus now answered unequivocally: *Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets.*

"People are still asking today, though in different ways, about the relation between Jesus and Moses, the New Testament and the Old. Since Jesus grasped the nettle and declared himself plainly on the issue, we should not be shy of following suit. **He had come (notice in passing that he had come on a mission) neither to *abolish* the law and the prophets, setting them aside or abrogating them, not even just to endorse them in a dead and literal way, but to *fulfil* them.**

"The verb translated 'to fulfil' (*plerosai*) means literally 'to fill' and indicates, as Chrysostom expressed it, that his (*sc.* Christ's) sayings were no repeal of the former, but a drawing out and filling up of them' [*Homilies on the Gospel of S Matthew, Part 1*, p.229]. In order to grasp the far-reaching implications of this, we need to recall that 'the law and the prophets', namely the Old Testament, contains various kinds of teaching. The relation of Jesus Christ to these differs, but the word 'fulfilment' covers them all.

**"First, the Old Testament contains *doctrinal teaching*. 'Torah', usually translated 'law', really means 'revealed instruction'; and the Old Testament does indeed instruct as about God and man and salvation, etc. All the great biblical doctrines are there. Yet it was only a partial revelation. Jesus 'fulfilled' it all in the sense of bringing it to completion by his person, his teaching and his work...**

"Second, the Old Testament contains *predictive prophecy*. Much of it looks forward to the days of the Messiah, and either foretells in word or foreshadows him in type. Yet this was only anticipation. Jesus 'fulfilled' it all in the sense that what was predicted came to pass in him. The first statement of his public ministry was, 'Fulfilled is the time...' (Mk 1:14). His very words here, *I have come*, imply the same truth. Again and again he claimed that the Scriptures bore witness to him, and Matthew emphasizes this more than any other evangelist by his repeated formula, 'All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophets...' The climax was his death on the cross...

"Third, the Old Testament contains *ethical precepts*, or the moral law of God. Yet they were often misunderstood and even more disobeyed. Jesus 'fulfilled' them in the first instance by obeying them, for he was 'born under the law' and was determined (as he had already told John the Baptist) 'to fulfill all righteousness'. 'He has in fact nothing to add to the commandments of God,' wrote Bonhoeffer, 'except this, that he keeps them'. He does more than obey them himself; he explains what obedience will involve for his disciples. He rejects the superficial interpretation of the law given by the scribes; he himself supplies the true interpretation. His purpose is not to change the law, still less annul it, but **'to reveal the full depth of meaning that it was intended to hold'**. So then he 'fulfils it by declaring the radical demands of the righteousness of God'. This is what he stresses in the rest of Matthew 5, by giving examples, as we shall see.

**"In every generation of the Christian era there have been those who could not accommodate themselves to Christ's attitude to the law.** The famous second-century heretic Marcion, who rewrote the New Testament by eliminating its references to the Old, naturally erased this passage. Some of his followers went further. They dared even to reverse its meaning by exchanging the verbs so that the sentence read: "I have come not to fulfill the law and the prophets, but to abolish them"! Their counterparts today seem to be those who have embraced the so-called 'new morality', for they declare that the very category of law is abolished for the Christian (though Christ said he had not come to abolish it), that no law any longer binds Christian people except the law of love, and in fact that the command to love is the only absolute there is. I shall have more to say about them later. For the moment it is enough to emphasize that according to this verse (17) the attitude of Jesus to the Old Testament was not one of destruction and of discontinuity, but rather of a constructive, organic continuity. He summed up his position in a single word, not 'abolition' but 'fulfilment'.

"The apostle Paul taught very clearly the same truth. **His statement that 'Christ' is the end of the law' does not mean that we are now free to disobey it, for the opposite is the case. It means rather that acceptance with God is not through obedience to the law but through faith in Christ,** and indeed that the law itself bears witness to this good news.

"Having stated that his purpose on coming was to fulfil the law, Jesus went on to give the cause and consequence of this. The cause is the permanence of the law

until it is fulfilled (18), and the consequence is the obedience to the law which the citizens of God's kingdom must give (19,20).

"This is what Jesus has to say about the law he has come to fulfil: *Truly I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota* (which is Greek for *yod*, the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet, almost as small as a comma), *not a dot* (*keraiā*, a horn referring probably to one of the tiny hooks or projections which distinguish some Hebrew letters from others), *will pass from the law until all is accomplished*. His reference now was only to 'the law' rather than to 'the law and the prophets' as in the previous verse, but we have no reason to suppose that he was deliberately omitting the prophets; 'the law' was a comprehensive term for the total divine revelation of the Old Testament. None of it will pass away or be discarded, he says, not a single letter or part of a letter, until it has been fulfilled. And this fulfilment will not be complete until the heaven and the earth themselves pass away. For one day they will pass away in a mighty rebirth of the universe. Then time as we know it will cease, and the written words of God's law will be needed no longer, for all things in them will have been fulfilled. Thus the law is an enduring as the universe. The final fulfilment of the one and the new birth of the other will coincide. Both will 'pass away' together (*parelthe* is repeated). Jesus could not have stated more clearly than this his own view of Old Testament Scriptures.

#### **Christians and the law**

"The word 'therefore' introduces the deduction which **Jesus now draws for his disciples from the enduring validity of the law and his own attitude with respect to it. It reveals a vital connection between the law of God and the kingdom of God. Because he has come not to abolish but to fulfil, and because not an iota or dot will pass from the law until all has been fulfilled, therefore greatness in the kingdom of God will be measured by conformity to it. Nor is personal obedience enough; Christian disciples must also teach to others the permanently binding nature of the law's commandments.**

"**True, not all the commandments are equally 'weighty'. Yet even one of the least of these commandments, precisely because it is a commandment of God the King, is important. To relax it - i.e., to loosen its hold on our conscience and its authority in our life - is an offence to God whose law it is.** To disregard a least commandment in the law (in either obedience or instruction) is to demote oneself into a 'least' subject in the kingdom of God; greatness in the kingdom of God belongs to those who are faithful in doing and teaching the whole moral law. 'The peerage of Christ's kingdom,' wrote Spurgeon, 'is ordered according to obedience'

"**Jesus now goes further still. Not only is greatness in the kingdom assessed by a righteousness which conforms to the law, but entry into the kingdom is impossible without a conformity better (much better: the Greek expression is very emphatic) than those of the scribes and Pharisees, for God's kingdom is a kingdom of righteousness.** But surely, someone will protest, the scribes and

Pharisees were famous for their righteousness? Was not obedience to God's law the master-passion of their lives? Did they not calculate that **the law contains 248 commandments and 365 prohibitions**, and did they not aspire to keeping them all? How then can Christian righteousness actually *exceed* pharisaic righteousness, and how can this superior Christian righteousness be made a condition of entering God's kingdom? Does this not teach a doctrine of salvation by good works and so contradict the first beatitude which says the kingdom belongs to 'the poor in spirit' who have nothing, not even righteousness, to plead?

"Our Lord's statement must certainly have astonished first hearers as it astonishes us today. But the answer to these questions is not far to seek. Christian righteousness far surpasses pharisaic righteousness in kind rather than in degree. It is not so much, shall we say, that Christians succeed in keeping some 240 commandments when the best Pharisees may only have scored 230. No. **Christian righteousness is greater than pharisaic righteousness because it is deeper, being a righteousness of the heart.** There has been much talk since Freud of 'depth-psychology'; the concern of Jesus was for a 'depth-morality'. Pharisees were content with an external and formal obedience, a rigid conformity to the letter of the law; Jesus teaches us that God's demands are more radical than this. **The righteousness which is pleasing to him is an inward righteousness of mind and motive. For "The Lord looks on the heart'.**

"It was a new heart-righteousness which the prophets foresaw as one of the blessings of the Messianic age, 'I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts,' God promised Jeremiah (31:33). How would he do it? He told Ezekiel: 'I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes' (36:27). Thus God's two promises to put his law within us and to put his Spirit within us coincide. We must not image (as some do today) that when we have the Spirit we can dispense with the law, for what the Spirit does in our hearts, is precisely, to write God's law there. So 'Spirit', 'law', 'righteousness' and 'heart' all belong together. The Pharisees thought an external conformity to the law would be righteousness enough. The 'Teacher of Righteousness' who figures in the Dead Sea Scrolls was stricter, for he 'defined the demands of the Law more exhaustively and more stringently than did even the Pharisees, and urged upon the Sect (*sc.* The Essenes of Qumran) radical obedience to them *all*'. Yet Jesus was more radical still, for if the Essenes asked for 'more and more obedience', he asked for 'deeper and deeper obedience' (W.D. Davies, *The setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, p. 216). Now it is this deep obedience which is a righteousness of the heart and its is possible only in those whom the Holy Spirit has regenerated and now indwells. This is why entry into God's kingdom is impossible without a righteousness greater (*i.e.*, deeper) than that of the Pharisees. It is because such a righteousness is evidence of the new birth, and no-one enters the kingdom without being born again.

"The rest of Matthew 5 contains examples of this greater, or rather deeper, righteousness. It consists of parallel paragraphs which illustrates **the principle Jesus has just propounded in verse 17 to 20 of the perpetuity of the moral law,**

**of his coming to fulfil it and of his disciples' responsibility to obey it more completely than the scribes and Pharisees were doing.** Each paragraph contains a contrast or 'antithesis' introduced by the same formula (with minor variations): *You have heard that it was said to the men of old ... But I say to you...*(21,22).

"What is this antithesis? It is clear who the authoritative *ego* is. But with whom is Jesus contrasting himself? It is essential to consider this question now before, in the next three chapters, we look in greater detail at the six antitheses themselves. Many commentators have maintained that in these paragraphs Jesus is setting himself against Moses; that he is here deliberately inaugurating a new morality, and is contradicting and repudiating the old; and that his introductory formula could be paraphrased 'you know what the Old Testament taught ... But I teach something quite different.' Popular as this interpretation is, I do not hesitate to say that it is mistaken. It is more than mistaken; it is untenable. **What Jesus is contradicting is not the law itself, but certain perversions of the law of which the scribes and Pharisees were guilty. Far from contradicting the law, Jesus endorses it, insists on its authority and supplies its true interpretation.** Four arguments will be sufficient to prove that this is so.

"First, there is the substance of the antitheses themselves. At first sight in each instance what Jesus quotes appears to come from the Mosaic law. All six examples either consists of or include some echo of it, *e.g.*, *You shall not kill* (21), *You shall not commit adultery* (27). *Whoever divorces his wife, let him give a certificate of divorce* (31). Not until we come to the sixth and last antithesis do we see clearly that something is amiss. For this reads: *You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy* (43). Now the first half of this sentence is a clear command of the law (Lv. 19:18), although even this is a truncated commandment, omitting the vital words which set the standard of our neighbour-love, namely 'as yourself'. The second half of the sentence, however, is not in the law at all. It comes neither in Leviticus 19:18, nor anywhere else. So here was a contemporary addition to the law, which was intended to interpret it, but in fact distorted it. When we look more closely at the other five antitheses ( as we shall in the following chapters), it becomes plain that a similar distortion is implied. It is those distortions of the law which Jesus rejected, not the law itself. After all, the first two antitheses do not read 'It was said "You shall not commit murder and adultery", but I say you may.' Rather, 'but I say you shall not even have angry or lustful thoughts'.

"Secondly, there is the introductory formula, beginning *you have heard that it was said to the men of old* (21, 33), or *you have heard that it was said* (27, 38, 43), or more briefly still, *it was also said* (31). The words common to these formula are *it was said*, which represent the single Greek verb *errethe*. Now this was not the word which Jesus used when quoting Scripture. When he introduced a biblical quotation, both verb and tense were different, namely *gegraptai* (perfect, 'it stands written'), not *errethe* (aorist, 'it was said'). So in the six antitheses what Jesus was contradicting was not Scripture but tradition, not God's word which

they had 'read' but the oral instruction which was given 'to the men of old' and which they too had 'heard' since the scribes continued to give it in the synagogues.

"Professor David Daube confirms this from his comprehensive knowledge of rabbinics. The verb 'hear' is associated, he says, with 'the superficial, literal meaning of Scripture'. So in the two parts of the introductory formula, 'the first gives a scriptural rule narrowly interpreted, the second a wider demand made by Jesus'. Again, 'These declarations "You have heard - But I say unto you" are intended to prove Jesus the Law's upholder, not destroyer ... it is the revelation of a fuller meaning for a new age. The second member unfolds rather than sweeps away the first' (*The New Testament and rabbinic Judaism*, p. 55-60). One might sum it up by saying that in relation to scribal distortions of the law, the term 'antithesis' rightly describes the teaching of Jesus, whereas in relation to the law itself 'exegesis' would be a more accurate word. His quarrel was not over the law, for both the Jewish leaders and he accepted its divine authority, but over its true interpretation.

"Thirdly, there is the immediate context. We have already seen that in the verses preceding and introducing the antitheses (17-20) Jesus affirmed in a quite unequivocal way what his own attitude to the law was and what his 'disciples' ought to be. This was 'fulfilment' in his case and 'obedience' in theirs. Not a dot or iota would pass away; all must be fulfilled. Not one of the least commandments might be disregarded; all must be obeyed. Are we now seriously to suppose that Jesus contradicted himself, that he proceeded at once in his teachings to do what he had just categorically said he had not come to do and they must not do? For this is the dilemma: if in the antitheses Jesus was contradicting Moses, he was thereby contradicting himself. 'Commentators have exhausted their ingenuity', writes W.C. Allen, 'in attempts to explain away this passage' (*A critical and exegetical commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew*, p.45). He goes on to exercise his own ingenuity by supposing that verses 18 and 19 'did not originally belong to the Sermon, but have been place there by th editor'. His reason is that in his view 'the attitude to the law here described is inconsistent with the tenor of the Sermon.'. But this is an entirely subjective judgment, and moreover it does not solve the dilemma. All it succeeds in doing is to remove the supposed discrepancy from the teaching of Jesus and attribute it instead to the first evangelist or through him to some early Christian community. The better way is to accept the statements of verse 17 to 20 as genuine and demonstrate that they are consistent not only with the Sermon as whole but with the rest of Jesus' recorded teaching. This brings us to the last argument.

**"Fourthly, there is Christ's known attitude to the Old Testament.** In the previous chapter Matthew has given an account of his temptations during forty grueling days in the Judean desert. Each subtle enticement of the devil was countered by an appropriate quotation from the Old Testament Scripture. Jesus had no need to

debate or argue with the devil. Each issue was settled from the start by a simple appeal to what stood written (*gegraptai*).

"And this reverent submission of the incarnate Word to the written word continued throughout his life, not only in his personal behaviour but also in his mission. He was resolved to fulfil what was written of him, and could not be deflected from the path which Scripture had laid down for him. So his declaration in Matthew 5:17 that he had come not to abolish but to fulfil the law and the prophets is wholly consistent with his attitude to Scripture elsewhere.

"From these four factors **it is evident that the antitheses do not set in opposition to each other Christ and Moses, the New Testament and the Old Testament, the gospel and the law, but rather Christ's true interpretation of the law and the scribal misinterpretation, and therefore Christian righteousness and pharisaic righteousness**, as verse 19 anticipates.

"What, then were the scribes and Pharisees doing? What were the 'tortuous methods', as Calvin called them (*Commentary on the harmony of the evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke, I*, p. 282), by which they debased the law. In general, they were trying to reduce the challenge of the law, to 'relax' (19) the commandments of God, and so make his moral demands more manageable and less exacting. They found Torah both a yoke and a burden (indeed they called it such), and wanted to make the yoke easier and the burden lighter. How they did it varied according to the form each law took, and in particular whether it was a commandment (either precept or prohibition) or a permission. Four of the six antitheses fall into the category of 'commandment', the first three of which are negative (forbidding murder, adultery and false swearing) and the last of which is positive (enjoining love for neighbour). These four are clear commands of God either to do or not to do something. The remaining two (the fourth and fifth antitheses) are best described as 'permissions'. They do not belong to the same category of moral commands as the other four. Both lack the prescriptive words "You shall" or "You shall not". The fourth antithesis concerns divorce, which was never commanded but was permitted in certain circumstances and on certain conditions. The fifth concerns retribution ('an eye for an eye...') which was permitted in the law courts and which restricted to an exact equivalent the penalties which Israelite judges might impose. Thus both these permissions were circumscribed by definite limits.

"What the scribes and Pharisees were doing, in order to make obedience more readily attainable, was to restrict the commandments and extend the permissions of the law. They made the law's demands less demanding and the law's permissions more permissive. What Jesus did was to reverse both tendencies. He insisted instead that the full implications of God's commandments must be accepted without imposing any artificial limits, whereas the limits which God had set to his permissions must also be accepted and not arbitrarily increased. It may be helpful to see the application of these principles to the antitheses in summary before considering them in detail.

"The scribes and Pharisees were evidently restricting the biblical prohibitions of murder and adultery to the act alone; Jesus extended them to include any angry thoughts, insulting words and lustful looks. They restricted the command about swearing to certain oaths only (those involving the divine name) and the command about neighbour-love to certain people only (those of the same race and religion); Jesus said all promises must be kept and all people must be loved, without limitations.

"But the scribes and Pharisees were not content merely to restrict the commands of the law to suit their convenience; they sought to serve their convenience still further by extending its permissions. Thus, they attempted to widen the permission of divorce beyond the single ground of 'some indecency' to include a husband's every whim, and to widen the permission of retribution beyond the law courts to include personal revenge. Jesus, however, reaffirmed the original restrictions. He called divorce on other grounds 'adultery' and insisted in personal relationships on the renunciation of all revenge.

"This preliminary look at the antheses has shown us that Jesus did not contradict the law of Moses. On the contrary, this is in effect what the Pharisees were doing. What Jesus did was rather to explain the true meaning of the moral law with all its uncomfortable implications. He extended the commands which they were restricting and restricted the permissions which they were extending. To him Moses' law was God's law, whose validity was permanent and whose authority must be accepted. In the Sermon of the Mount, as Calvin correctly expressed it, we see Jesus not 'as a new legislator, but as the faithful expounder of a law which had already been given' (*Commentary on the harmony of the evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke, I*, p. 282), p. 290). **The Pharisees had 'obscured' the law; Jesus 'restored it to its integrity'** (*Institutes*, I, viii.7).

**"And in this matter Christian disciples must follow Christ, not the Pharisees. We have no liberty to try to lower the law's standards and make it easier to obey. This is the casuistry of Pharisees, not Christians. Christian righteousness must exceed pharisaic righteousness.**

"Yet the advocates of the 'new morality' or 'situational ethic' are in principle trying to do exactly what the Pharisees were doing. True, they claim to take Christ's part against the Pharisees, but they resemble the Pharisees in their dislike of the law. They regard the law as rigid and authoritarian, and (just like the Pharisees) they attempt to 'relax' its authority, to loosen its hold. So they declare the category of law abolished (which Jesus said he had not come to abolish) and they set law and love at variance with each other (in a way in which Jesus never did). No. Jesus disagreed with the Pharisees' *interpretation* of the law; he never disagreed with their acceptance of its *authority*. Rather the reverse. In the strongest possible terms he asserted its authority as God's Word written, and called his disciples to accept its true and deeply exacting interpretation" (John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 69-81).

## Galatian 3:19 Meaning

“Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary.” (Gal 3:19 ESV)

David Grabbe, “Bondwoman Analogy,” *The Forerunner*:

<http://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Topical.show/RTD/cgg/ID/3100/Bondwoman-Analogy.htm#ixzz28bqABBx4>

### “Galatians 3:19

Throughout his writings, Paul uses the terms "law" and "covenant" interchangeably. One has to use the context to determine whether he is talking about a single statute, a body of laws, a covenant/agreement, or the Pentateuch. Notice how Paul uses the term "law" later in the book of Galatians:

Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. (Galatians 4:21-23)

The births of Isaac and Ishmael are recorded in Genesis chapters 16 and 21, hundreds of years before the Old Covenant was given. Yet Paul refers to that portion of scripture as "the law"! Obviously, in this example Paul uses "law" to mean the entire Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible), not just the commandments.

The end of Galatians 3:19, as well as verse 20, show that the "law" here was not just instruction to a group of people by a superior—the reference to a mediator shows that there was an *agreement* being discussed rather than a *decree* or a body of laws. **If a king makes a law, there is no need for a process of mediation because the matter is not open for discussion with the people.** A mediator is only necessary when both parties have to agree to something, which clearly indicates a *covenant* rather than just a decree or law.

**The Old Covenant was in addition to the one that God made with Abraham ("it was added"). It was not the first time that God's law had been taught, though;** the Bible says specifically that Abraham kept God's commandments (Genesis 26:5). It shows Abraham and Jacob both tithing. It shows Abel and Noah already having an understanding of clean and unclean animals. The Sabbath harkens back to Creation (Genesis 2:1-3), and was given to Israel again after they left Egypt but before the Old Covenant was proposed (Exodus 16). Reading through Genesis and Exodus, it is very clear that there was a codified set of rules—laws—long before they were officially recorded at Mt. Sinai.

**The Old Covenant was added because of the sins of the people. It was added, not to provide a means of justification, but to demonstrate to Israel what was right and wrong, because their "moral compass" had been badly damaged through their experiences in Egypt.** The children of Israel sojourned in Egypt for 400 years, and during

that time they lost the knowledge of God's way. They forgot His instructions to such a degree that God had to teach them all over again the way of life that was pleasing to Him. **They had been so immersed in the pagan Egyptian culture that all of these laws, statutes, judgments, instructions, etc., were completely new to them. God added the Old Covenant to the one He made with Abraham as a sort of "booster shot"—**Israel was so off track that God had to realign them with His ways by means of this temporary covenant, which would be in effect until Christ came. **After Christ came, the Holy Spirit of God was available to those whom God called and made this New Covenant available to, and thus God was able to write His laws—still in existence and effect!—into the hearts of His chosen people** (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10; 10:16).

It is evident that the Old Covenant has served its purpose, and now it is obsolete, replaced by an infinitely better covenant (Hebrews 8:6-10, 13). **But it is also evident that even though the covenant—the agreement between God and man—is no longer in effect, that does not mean God's law has become obsolete.** The *law* and the *covenant*, in practice, describe two different things. The *law* is the codified standard of conduct God gave to His people; the *covenant* was the agreement in which Israel agreed to abide by God's laws. **The abolition of the agreement, though, does not abolish the standard of conduct!** The New Testament abounds with examples of God's law still being in effect (Matthew 19:17; 23:23; John 14:15,21; 15:10; Acts 21:24;24:14; 26:19-20; 28:23; Romans 3:31; 6:1-2,15; 7:12,22,25; 8:7; I Corinthians 7:19; Ephesians 5:5; I Timothy 1:8-11; II Timothy 2:5; Titus 1:16; 2:11-14; Hebrews 8:10; James 1:22-25; 2:8-12; 2:14-26; I John 2:3-6; 3:22-24; 5:2-3; II John 1:6; Revelation 12:17; 14:12; 22:14).

Christ Himself stated clearly that He did not come to destroy the law, but to show how to fulfill it—keep it in its entirety (Matthew 5:17-20). He then goes on to demonstrate the intent, or spirit, behind some of the laws. James admonishes each to "fulfill the royal law of liberty"—and there is no hint that he means we should individually "do away" with it!

The Old Covenant was "ordained" by angels (Acts 7:53; Hebrews 2:2; Acts 7:38; Psalm 68:17; I Corinthians 10:4). "Ordained," *diatageis* (NT:1299), usually means "to arrange", "to dispose in order", and is commonly used with reference to the marshalling of an army. A similar word, *diatagas* (NT:1296), is used in Acts 7:53, where it is translated "disposition." It properly means the "constituting" or "arranging" of an army; disposing it into ranks and proper divisions. Hence, it has been supposed to mean that the Covenant was given "amidst" the various ranks of angels being present to witness its transmission. Deuteronomy 33:2 also shows God with His "holy myriads"—literally "ten thousands of holiness." God was attended by a vast army of intelligent beings, witnessing the ratifying of the Old Covenant with Israel and helping with prescribing, ordering, and arranging the covenant.

The covenant was "in the hand" or "under the control" of a Mediator, one who intervenes between two parties, either as an interpreter, intercessor, or reconciler. In the New Testament, in all the places where it occurs, it is applied to Jesus Christ, the great Mediator between God and man (I Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 12:24)."

**Galatians 4:22**

“Abraham actually had more sons through Keturah, but for the purposes of Paul's allegory, he focuses on Ishmael, the son through Hagar, and Isaac, the son of promise through Sarah.

Given that the false teachers were trying to convince the Galatians to turn to a Gnostic form of Judaism, Abraham would have been a character who would have been highly respected in their eyes (the Jews in Jesus' time trusted in descent from Abraham for salvation). Paul uses the example of Abraham throughout this epistle because he (Abraham) simultaneously served as someone that they would have looked up to, as well as a testament that they (the Galatians) were approaching this the wrong way—different from the way Abraham did.

Physical descent does not matter as far as the spiritual promises are concerned; Christ castigated the Jews for thinking that they could rely on being physical descendants of Abraham as a means of gaining favor with God. Christ showed that where it really counted was in *behaving* like Abraham—which the Jews did not.

Paul, in an attempt to help the Galatians to understand the covenants, is likening the Old Covenant to being born to a "bondmaid" (a female slave or servant) while the New Covenant is compared to being born of a "freewoman" (someone who is a citizen; unrestrained; not a slave; exempt from liability; at liberty). The carnal mind, as described by Romans 8:7, leaps to the conclusion that the New Covenant gives freedom from the confines of law, while the Old Covenant keeps one in bondage to a set of archaic rules. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The apostle James twice refers to the law as the "law of liberty" (James 1:25; 2:12). He could do this because when God was giving the Ten Commandments to Israel, He prefaced them with the declaration, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, *out of the house of bondage*" (Exodus 20:2). This—bringing Israel out of bondage—set the context, the foundation, for the giving of the law. Clearly, it is not God's definition of right and wrong that keeps us in bondage; the law was given as a guide to the right way to live. The "bondage" that we are subject to derives from Satan (Ephesians 2:1-3; 6:12; II Corinthians 4:4; Revelation 12:9), this world (Exodus 6:5-8; Deuteronomy 5:6), sin (John 8:33-36), and our own human nature—our carnal mind and heart. Our bondage is to sin (John 8:33-34)—not to God's definition of it.

*The Old Covenant did not provide a way to overcome these things.* Even though the Old Covenant included God's royal law of liberty, it had no provision for ever truly escaping the clutches of sin. God's law, which is also a part of the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:7-12; Jeremiah 31:31-34), merely defines what sin is, so that one may avoid it (Romans 3:20; 4:14-15; 5:13; 7:7, 12, 14). It neither enslaves, nor frees. The Old Covenant—the agreement, rather than the law that was its core—provided no means for overcoming the evil heart of unbelief (Hebrews 3:12, 19; 8:7-8), and so Paul compares it to a bondwoman. In verse 24 he says that it "engenders"—gives birth to—bondage. He does not mean that the agreement between God and Israel *was* bondage, nor that God's definition of right and wrong keeps people in slavery, but rather that the temporary covenant made no

provision for true spiritual freedom. It "gave birth to" bondage because, without addressing the incurable sickness of the heart, the only possible outcome was human degeneration back into the bondage from which they had been freed.

The New Covenant addresses these problems:

For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because *finding fault with them* [the weakness was with the people, not the agreement or the law], He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: *I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts*; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." (Hebrews 8:7-12; see Jeremiah 31:31-34)

The New Covenant allows God's way of life (law) to be internalized (put into the mind and heart). It allows for a personal relationship with God, rather than going through an intermediary. It allows for complete forgiveness of sins through repentance and accepting the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

In another place, God promises,

Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may *walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them*; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God. (Ezekiel 11:19-20)

Through the justification and forgiveness of sins available under the New Covenant, it is possible for the heart to be changed, and for human nature, which drives us to sin, to be overcome. Thus, true spiritual freedom is offered under the New Covenant, while absent under the Old."

## Colossians 2:16-17

“Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.” (Col 2:16-17 ESV)

One senior academic, Professor Troy Martin, came to the same conclusion as the Churches of God and Messianics. Someone sent it to me not long after he had it published: “But Let Everyone Discern the Body of Christ (Colossians 2:17),” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 114, No. 2, 1995, pp. 249-255. This article represents one of the best explanations for this verse.

Of the feast days he wrote:

“... the preceding grammatical and syntactical investigation of the clause ... in Col 2:17 suggests that the practices {sabbath and feast days} mentioned in 2:16 are those of the Colossian Christians and not the opponents.” (p. 255)

You can read the article [here](#).

**Ralph Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. Interpretation Bible Commentaries Series:***

**"Yet it is too simple to think that Paul's opponents were Jewish teachers, as we shall see from verse 18.** The Greek term for "law" (nomos) is strikingly absent from the entire letter, a fact that makes it very unlikely that Paul's problems are the same as at Galatia where he takes on the Judaizers". (p. 119) [Comment: if indeed, that was the problem in Galatia]

**Ralph Martin, *Colossians and Philemon. The New Century Bible Commentary:***

“The holy days, whether annual, monthly, or weekly, were also the subject of controversy at Colossae. Again the root principle needs to be noted. Paul is not condemning the use of sacred days and seasons. Nor does he have in view the Jewish observance of these days as an expression of Israel's obedience to God's law and a token of her election (a frequent OT idea, e.g. Hos. 2:11). What moves him here is the wrong motive involved when the observance of holy festivals is made part of the worship advocated at Colossae in recognition of the 'elements of the universe', the astral powers which direct the course of the stars and regulate the calendar. And so they must be placated (see E. Lohse, TDNT vii, p. 301; G. Bornkamm, 'Die Haresie', p. 148). It is bad religion leading to man's bondage to 'fate' that Paul attacks...

The 'shadow'<sup>9</sup> presages what is to come; and the time of the substance has arrived, thus antiquating all that pointed forward to it. That 'substance' is Christ. His new age delivers men from the bondage of fear and superstitious dread. He sets them free from false notions and insubstantial hopes, and gives them a taste of reality in religion as they come to know in him true communion with the living God. This reality is what Paul means in his earlier references to the 'hope of the gospel' (1: 5, 23) which his readers are not to abandon. It is likely that Paul is here employing the contrast 'copy /original' which derives from Plato and was used in the Colossian philosophy. Perhaps the teachers were insisting that 'full reality' (pleroma) could be attained only by way of veneration paid to the 'copy', i.e. the angels, and obedience to their ascetic regimen. If so, Paul turns the tables on them by giving a christological twist to the contrast." (pp. 90-91)

**Kevin Mullins, (Colossians 2:13-17) Did God's Festivals and Sabbaths Come to an End at Christ's Death? 14 April 2021:**

<https://lastmessageofmercy.com/article/view/did-paul-teach-that-gods-festivals-and-sabbaths-came-to-an-end-at-chri>

"The Commandments and Traditions of Men

Back in verse 8 Paul warns the Colossians to "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, **after the tradition of men**, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." The key phrase here is "after the traditions of men." Are the Festivals and Sabbaths "after the traditions of men" or are they according to the divine statutes from God? In verse 20-22 Paul continues this thought by saying:

*"Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) **after the commandments and doctrines of men?**"*

Again, are the God-given Festivals and Sabbaths "after the commands and teachings of men"? No. So what is Paul saying? Jesus said something similar in the book of Mark:

*"And when they (the Pharisees/religious leaders) saw some of His (Jesus') disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding **the tradition of the elders**. ... Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, Why walk not thy disciples **according to the tradition of the elders**, but eat bread with unwashen hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Elijah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. **Howbeit in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men**. For laying aside the Commandment of*

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<sup>9</sup> Greek for *shadow* is *skia* which is also used in Heb 8:5 and 10:1 and has nothing to do with antinomianism and not obeying God's Law.

God, ye hold **the tradition of men**, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And He said unto them, **Full well ye reject the Commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.**" (Mark 7:2-9)

The issue here isn't simply washing your hands or dishes for health and cleanliness. The washing the Pharisees are referring to is a ritual washing they imposed upon the people. This was merely tradition and commandments of men and have nothing to do with God's instructions. So we can see that we are not to exalt the traditions and commandments of men over God's Commandments. This is similar to what was going on at the time Paul wrote his letter to the Colossian assembly, but it was those **outside the church** who were judging those within. The context of Colossians 2 is in regards to the imposing of man-made rules and regulations. Six times the words **man** or **men** appear in this chapter.

**2:4** "And this I say, lest any **man** should beguile you."

**2:8** "Beware lest any **man** spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of **men**."

**2:16** "Let no **man** therefore judge you."

**2:18** "Let no **man** beguile you."

**2:20-22** "why...are ye subject to ordinances (touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using) after the commandments and doctrines of **men**?"

... "Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink." This phrase in the Greek is simply "eating and drinking" and refers to general food. The Greek words translated "food and drink" are βρωσις (*brosis*) and ποσις (*posis*). These words have nothing to do with Mosaic food and drink offerings that ended with Christ's death. These Greek words are never used with reference to meal and drink offerings in the Septuagint or the New Testament. Actually, *thusia* is the technical word for meat sacrifice, and *spendo* was the term meaning "to offer a libation or drink offering." Paul would have used these if his intention was to indicate the meat and drink offerings.

... Please do not miss this important point here. It says nothing about "not" taking part. Most teachers try to read into this their own preconceived idea that the Festivals and Sabbaths were done away with at Christ's death.

... Jesus told His disciples:

"With desire I have desired to eat **this Passover [shadow]** with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not anymore eat thereof, **until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God [reality/source]** ... And He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is My body which is given for you: **this do in remembrance of Me.**" (Luke 22:15, 16, 19)

The book of Hebrews tells us, "Through faith (Moses) kept the Passover and the sprinkling of Blood" (Hebrews 11:28).

... This Greek word is NEVER once used for anything related to God's Law in the Septuagint. **Every occurrence of dogma in the Greek Old Testament refers to man-made decrees or rulings. Most often it's the decrees and judgments of pagan rulers."**

**William Hendriksen, *Colossians and Philemon. New Testament Commentary:***

"“The translation, “But *the substance* — or *the reality* is Christ” is very popular. It may not be missing the truth by much. Nevertheless, it seems to me that because of the close relation between *skia* and *soma*, which are counterparts, Paul was thinking of *a shadow* and *an object casting the shadow...*”

“To be sure, for the time being a shadow that is cast by an approaching person may prove to be of some real value. For example, it is possible that one is eagerly expecting this person but happened to be situated that, at his approach, for a moment his shadow alone is seen. However, that shadow only guarantees the imminent arrival of the visitor but even provides a dim outline, describing him. **Thus, too, the Old Testament regulations had served a real purpose...**” (p. 124).

**Extracts from the paper *Colossians 2:16-17* (author unknown):**

<https://godslawtoday.com/>

“Gnosticism was a blend of “Jewish legalism, Greek philosophic speculation, and Oriental mysticism.” “Christian gnostics...adopted the complicated teaching of a sphere of psychic **intermediaries** (aeons) between God and earthly things.” The Gnostics taught that it is presumptuous for a Christian to think that he can reach God *directly* (or through just the *one* Mediator, Christ). They said that we must *humble* ourselves and start *lower* down on the scale,<sup>2</sup> and then move through an ascending scale of angels.

Yet, Paul condemned this self-imposed humility, along with their purposeful neglect of the body (which will be discussed later). Paul said that these things did **not** amount to *true* humility. He spoke of their “*false* humility” (verses 18 and 23). The word “Gnosticism” comes from the Greek word “*gnosis*,” which means “*knowledge*.” The central teaching of these Gnostics was that *secret knowledge* could enhance one's religion---and, in fact, that one's very salvation depended upon *having* this secret knowledge.

“...in the first and second centuries A.D. it [Gnosis] came to mean an esoteric knowledge of higher religious and philosophic truths to be acquired by an **elite** group of intellectually developed believers... [The] thing common to all types of gnosis is the effort to *transcend* rational, logical thought processes by means of **intuition**.”

So, the Gnostics relied upon “intuition” for their vital, secret knowledge. In other words, they just *made up* teachings that they regarded as “secret knowledge.” They made up “mysteries” and “philosophies.”

The Apostle Paul condemns their teachings. He warns the Christians in Colossae to not follow “a person [who] goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his *unspiritual* mind puffs him up with **idle notions**” (verse 18, NIV). He says, “Let no one *defraud* you” in these teachings (verse 18, AMP). “Now this I say lest anyone should *deceive* you with persuasive words” (verse 4). Paul says that this secret knowledge is nothing more than “**hollow and delusive speculations**, based on traditions of **man-made** teaching” (verse 8, NEB). He calls it a “**self-made religion**” (verse 23, NASV). Paul says that the *more important* knowledge is that “...of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden **all** the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (verses 2-3).

Now notice something else that these false teachers were trying to teach the Christians in Colossae. Gnostics oftentimes taught **asceticism**, and such was the case here. “Asceticism” was the belief that the body---as well as all physical *pleasure*---is **evil**. It was taught that only by practicing rigorous self-denial and extreme abstinence (and even self-torture) that one can attain a high spiritual state.

Notice verse 23: “These things indeed have an *appearance* of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and **neglect of the body...**” Regarding this phrase “**neglect of the body,**” a marginal rendering is “**severe treatment [of the body], asceticism**” (*The Ryrie Study Bible*).

Now notice verses 20 to 21: “...why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to *regulations*—„Do not touch, do not *taste*, do not handle“[?]” These “**regulations**” of not “**touching, tasting or handling**” were, in fact, **regulations of asceticism (or extreme self-denial)**.

“Many Gnostic practices came from a *Jewish* sect known as the **Essenes**.” The Essenes would not eat (or even touch) oil, wine, or meat. (Similarly, in the 14th chapter of Romans, Paul spoke of **some who practiced strict vegetarianism [no meat]---as a supposed means to be “more spiritual.”**) The Essenes “could prescribe *times* [such as certain days of the week] and conditions for the use of *other* foods; it could also regulate the *amounts* so as to protect the members from the *evils* of luxury or excess.”

Yet, Paul refers to these things as “commandments and doctrines **of men**” (Col. 2:22). This self-imposed, extreme self-denial gave them feelings of spiritual superiority---that they had risen *above* fleshly desires---and were in a *separate* category.

The Essenes vowed to *impart* their teachings only to those who underwent rigorous initiation.

#### **Verses 16 and 17**

With all the preceding information in mind, we can now better understand what Paul is speaking of in verse 16. He says, “Therefore let no one judge you **in food or in drink**.” This phrase “in food or in drink” should actually be translated “in eating

or in drinking”---says the *Expositor’s Greek Testament* (W. R. Smith, vol. 3, p. 530). Here, Paul is **not** referring to the issue of clean and unclean meats. Rather, he is referring to the heretical, ascetic teachings of abstinence from such things as oil, wine, and all meats (as alluded to in verse 21). If he *was* referring to clean and unclean meats, then why did he say to let no one judge you in **drinking**? “As for drinking, there is *no* prohibition in the Old Testament that would affect anyone but a priest (Leviticus 10:9) and a Nazarite (Numbers 6:3). An *ascetic* teaching, however, such as that of the Essenes, could prohibit wine and milk.”

Continuing in verse 16, Paul says, “Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink [in eating or in drinking], or regarding a **festival** [„holyday”—KJV] or a new moon or **sabbaths**.” Here, Paul is *warning* the Colossian believers about these Gnostic teachers who “were telling the Colossian believers *how* to eat, *how* to drink, and *how* to observe the annual, monthly and weekly days. **They were telling the believers that if you really want to be saved, if you want to reach perfection, you have to eat in a certain way, drink in a certain way and observe the annual, monthly and weekly [holy] days in a certain way.** They were laying down the *dogma*—that is the Greek term used—the rules and regulations [or “ordinances”].”

**In all probability, the Colossian believers were being judged for eating and drinking---and for rejoicing---during the Sabbath and other holy days.** Again, ascetics believe that physical pleasure---rejoicing---is evil!

Furthermore, and to repeat, many Gnostic practices came *from* a Jewish sect known as the Essenes. And, “according to first-century Jewish historian Josephus, they [these Jewish Essenes] kept the Sabbath so *strictly* that they would not even take care of bodily functions during it....**No wonder the Gnostics were unhappy at Christian rejoicing and feasting on God’s weekly and annual Sabbaths!**”

“Paul, therefore, told the Colossian converts not to let these outsiders judge [or dictate to] them as to how they were keeping these days, „which are a shadow of things to come“ (v. 17)....[and] notice that Paul said they **ARE** a shadow---not WERE a shadow, Thus, [these days] are **still** to be kept!” (pp. 1-3)

***The Sabbata of Colossians 2:16: Reflections on a Debated Text, p. 9 by Ron du Preez*<sup>10</sup>:**

He reminds us of the use of chiasms by the New Testament writers which helps to throw light on Scripture and doctrine. Various biblical scholars have provided evidence of chiastic structures in this epistle,<sup>11</sup> including one which spans Colossians 2:6-19, which “enriches our understanding of the movement of Paul’s thought:”<sup>12</sup>

***Introduction:*** 2:6 “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him”

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly he claims that the term *sabbat* can even refer to Sabbatical years (p. 7, footnote 42)

<sup>11</sup> In footnote 55 he writes: See, for example, Ralph P. Martin, *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul’s Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 115; Ekkehardt Mueller, “Focus on Scripture: The Firstborn (Col 1:15),” *Reflections: A BRI Newsletter*, October 2005, 7.

<sup>12</sup> He references this in footnote 56: “Ian H. Thomson, *Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters, Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, Supplement Series 111 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 152.”

- A 2:7 **“Rooted and built up** in Him and established in the faith”
- B 2:8 “Beware lest anyone cheat you . . . not according to **Christ**”
- C 2:9 “In Him dwells . . . the Godhead **bodily**,” 10a “You are complete in Him”
- D 2:10b “Who is the head of all **principality and power**”
- E 2:11 “Circumcised with the circumcision made without **hands**”
- F 2:12 **“Buried** with Him in baptism, in which you also were **raised**”
- F’ 2:13 **“Dead** in your transgressions . . . He made you **alive** together with Him”
- E’ 2:14 “Wiped out the **handwriting** of requirements that was against us”
- D’ 2:15 “Having disarmed **principalities and powers**”
- C’ 2:16 “Let no one pass judgment;” 17 “But the **body** is Christ’s”
- B’ 2:18 “Let no one cheat you;” 19a “Not holding fast to the **Head**”
- A’ 2:19b **“Nourished and knit together** by joints and ligaments, grows.

Also, **“The Cheirographon and Christ: Recent Scholarly Findings,”** *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, Vol 31, Nos 1-2, 2020, pp. 189-216 by Ron du Preez:

“The idea of the law nailed on the cross with Christ would have been unthinkable for Paul.” (Paul Mason, *L’Epitre de St. Paul aux Colossians* quoted in du Preez, p. 207)

**One person wrote about “the handwriting of Ordinances” to an internet forum:**

“Years ago, I took the Epistles of Paul course by Ron Dart. To my amazement I have never understood the Book of Colossians until I took that course, especially Colossians 1.14. He explained Colossians 1.14 that The handwriting of Ordinances is a bond of indebtedness of a note. **This describes our indebtedness that was against us. All of our accounts, as a result of our having broken the Law, is Blotted Out. Then he referenced Numbers 5.23** which is the trial of jealousy. The priest took the water and blotted out the “handwriting of accusations “of the indictments of this woman and was innocent and free to go away. This is Paul’s imagery of Metaphor. **That Jesus Christ blotted out the indictment that was written against us, which was contrary to us and took it out of the way, and took it upon himself and nailed the whole thing to the cross in his own body.** This makes more sense that the Anti-law opponents have; that the Law of God has been blotted out.”

Another person responded:

“Right! Charles Dorothy discovered this from his research in the 60's! He pointed out that the Greek word from this bond of indebtedness is translated is “cheirographon tois dogmasin”. He showed that only but was nailed to the cross, and with Him this bond of indebtedness. To a great extant, Dr. Dorothy was an unsung hero in the old WCG.”

**Curtis Vaughan, *Colossians and Philemon. Bible Study Commentary:***

"The real redemption [*apolutrosis*, lit. ransoming away] needed by men is not a redemption from fate by gnostic aeons [intermediate deities]; it is a redemption from sin by a Divine-human Mediator." "Redemption and forgiveness are not exactly parallel or identical concepts, but by putting the two terms in apposition to each other, the apostle teaches that the central feature of redemption is the forgiveness of sins." (p. 180)

**Thomas Constable, *Colossians. Expository Notes:***

**"Colossian mysticism (vv. 18-19) seems to have been mainly Gnostic and pagan.** Paul's readers were in danger of becoming diverted as they ran the Christian race and not staying on the track. Thus they could lose the prize that God will give those who run the race well (cf. 2 Tim. 4:7-8). "Self-abasement" is the practice of denying oneself with the idea that this will gain merit with God. Specifically fasting is in view. **The false teachers also advocated the worship of angels** probably with the idea that they were the proper mediators of prayer and worship to God. Similarly many Roman Catholics so regard dead Christians, some of whom they have labeled "saints." The basis of such claims was personal experience, not revelation from God." (p. 34)

**Todd Still, *Colossians. An Introduction and Commentary, Vol. 12:***

"Certain unnamed people were apparently advocating dutiful observance of certain days, including religious festivals, New moons, and Sabbaths... Presumably the "philosophy" was prescribing certain religious activities in conjunction with these special days, perhaps with a promise that these observances would enhance congregants' purity and spirituality. It is now impossible to know precisely who were seeking to pass judgment on the Colossians ... and exactly what motivated them to act as self-appointed arbitrators [Jewish regulations and/or theosophical asceticism?]. The paucity of textual particulars results in interpretative uncertainties. While such ambiguity does not sate our curiosities, "biblical studies are not helped by being certain about the uncertain" (Brown, 596)". (pp. 311, 316-17)

Refer also to the *Interpreters Bible* which mentions that Col 2:1-14 refers to synchronism of God's Way with paganism and *The New Bible Commentary* which states that this does not refer to the law of God (pp. 133, 200)

**Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary:***

"The word πλήρωμα [fullness] was frequently used by the Gnostics. It is a technical term use by the most influential Gnostic school, the Valentinian Gnostics

(second century A.D.) for a complex spiritual world of thirty aeons (intermediaries) arranged in fifteen pairs who emanated from the primordial pair, Depth and Silence. The last created aeon, Sophia (“wisdom”), disturbed the *πλήρωμα*, which led to her fall whereby she was excluded from the *πλήρωμα* and this meant that part of the Godhead was lost. She became the creator of the evil material world of which humans are a part. In order to bring Sophia back into harmony with *πλήρωμα*, two new aeons, Christ and the Holy Spirit, were created” (p. 303)

**It is interesting that *The New Interpreter’s Bible* has this to say on Colossians 2:16:**

“Let no man **therefore** judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday [*heorte*], or of the new moon [*noumenia*], or of the sabbath [*sabbatōn*] days”

“As a consequence (again “**therefore**” provides the link) of his perspective on how God in Christ has dealt with the issue of the supposed hold of cosmic powers over humanity because of humanity’s existence in physical bodies, the writer can now exhort the readers not to allow anyone to judge them negatively for failing to comply with the philosophy’s regulations. The regulations singled out are requirements about food and drink and calendar observance. **These are clearly parts of the philosophy taken over from Judaism, but now apparently they are put to use in its proponents’ program for dealing with the cosmic powers.** The issue of food and drink, however, is likely to be not so much one of purity laws as of abstinence as part of a strict asceticism. In the OT there are prohibitions against certain foods, but stipulations about drink are found only in regard to the particular cases of priests ministering in the tabernacle (see Lev 10:9) and those under Nazirite vows (see Num 6:3), though Jews in the diaspora were also cautious about wine in case it had been offered to idols. **But there is no indication here that the motivation for abstinence from food and drink was due to observance of the Torah. Rather, the requirement of abstinence should be linked with the mention of fasting in preparation for visions in v.18, of ascetic regulation in vv.21-22, and of severity to the body in v.23.**

“The writer describes the calendar observance required by the philosophy in terms of feasts or festivals, new moons, and sabbaths. These three calendrical features are listed together in the OT (see LXX 1 Chr 23:31; 2 Chr 2:3; 31:3; Ezek 45:17; Hos 2:13, where they were days on which special sacrifices were to be made to God. Again there is no hint that such special days are being observed because of the desire to obey Torah as such or because keeping them was a special mark of Jewish identity. **Instead, it is probable that in the philosophy they were linked to a desire to please the cosmic powers, the “elemental spirits of the universe” (vv.8, 20), held to be associated with the heavenly bodies and, therefore, in control of the calendar.** Sabbath observance would have no exception to this. Elchasai would later teach his followers that the

sabbath was to be observed because it was one of the days controlled by the course of the stars” (Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Letter to the Colossians*, Leander E. Keck, General Editor, *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Vol. 11).

So, as the Churches of God have always taught, no one is to judge us by the way we keep the Sabbath and Feast Days, including these Gnostics.

**David Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary: A Companion Volume to the Jewish New Testament*:**

“These are a shadow of things that are coming, meaning the good things that will happen when Yeshua returns; or, alternatively, “These are a shadow of things that were yet to come,” meaning the good things that happened when Yeshua came the first time but were still in the future when *kashrut* and the festivals were commanded...

“The festivals do *indeed* have value; since God commanded Jewish people to observe them, they remind Jews of God and of what he has done.

**“... of even greater importance and value than a shadow is the body which casts the shadow, the reality behind it, because it is of the Messiah.** See MJ 8:5; 9:23-24. 10:1 for a similar metaphorical comparison of shadow and substance, also MJ 10:1-18N [MJ = Hebrews]. Lenski’s commentary agrees with my point about the shadow, although his emphasis locates its value in the past:

““We should not think slightingly of the shadow. It was no less than the divine promise of all the heavenly realities about to arrive. **The shadow proved the actual and even the nearness of the realities, for only an actual body and one that is not far away casts a shadow...**” [Richard C. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon*, Augsburg, Minneapolis, MN, 1964, p. 126]” (p. 611).

## Ephesians 2:14-15 explained

“For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace” (Eph 2:14-15 ESV)

**John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount, The Bible Speaks Today*:**

“At first sight this is a surprising declaration. How can the apostle declare that Christ abolished the law, when Christ himself in the Sermon on the Mount specifically declared the opposite, that he had not come to abolish it but to fill it? We shall see that the discrepancy is only verbal; in substance they were referring to the law in two different senses” (pp. 99-100).

**Charles Cousar, *Galatians, Interpretation*:**

“Paul of course is not writing for the twentieth century church... Too often he has been disengaged from his context and dragged into the modern era to support this or that theory in a proof-text fashion...”

“He can call it “the law of Christ” (cf. 1 Cor 9:20-21). By that he does not mean a different code or document; it is the Mosaic law, but summed up in the command to love and interpreted in the light of Christ” (Charles Cousar, *Galatians. Interpretation*, p. 80, 82).

**Frederick Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians. New International Commentary on the New Testament*:**

“It is not the law as a revelation of the character and will of God that has been done away with in Christ. In that sense of the term the question and answer of Rom 3:1 remains valid: “Do we overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.” **The righteousness required by the law of God is realized more fully by the inward enabling of the Spirit** - in Jew and Gentile alike - **than was possible under the old covenant**. But the law as a written code, threatening death instead of imparting life, is done away with in Christ, as Paul argues in 2 Cor 3:6-15. And when the law **in that sense** is done away with, the barrier between Jew and Gentiles is removed. Jewish particularism and Gentile exclusion are things of the past...” (pp. 298-99).

**Scott Haffemann, 2 Corinthians, NIV Application Commentary:**

"**The problem with the Sinai covenant was not with the law itself, but,** as Ezekiel and Jeremiah testify, **with the people** whose hearts remained hardened under it.

"**The law remains for Paul, as it did for the Jewish traditions of his day, the holy, just and good expression of God's covenantal will (Rom 7:12).** Indeed, Paul characterizes the law itself as "spiritual" (7:14). As the expression of God's abiding will, it is not the law per se that kills, or any aspect or perversion of it, but the law without the Spirit, that is, the law as "letter." **Devoid of God's Spirit, the law remains to those who encounter it merely a rejected declaration of God's saving purposes and promises, including its corresponding calls for repentance and obedience of faith. Although the law declares God's will, it is powerless to enable people to keep it. Only the Spirit "gives life" by changing the human heart..."** (p. 132).<sup>13</sup>

**Gordon Wenham, The Book of Leviticus. New International Commentary on the Old Testament:**

"Man is expected to respond to God's grace. But how? This is the role of the law. The law explains how men are to imitate God. **The NT insists that the law is** not a means to salvation, but **a response to salvation.** The disciple is not merely to observe the letter of the commandments. His righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. He must be perfect as his heavenly Father is perfect (Matt 5:17-48)" (p. 34).

Comment: I don't think it is a response to salvation – it is a requirement that we develop holy, righteous Godly character, which includes keeping His commandments. Wenham means well, but he de-emphasises the Law whether he realises it or not. Unfortunately some people find such fancy language and arguments convincing or are bamboozled by them; or find them impressive. Straight-forward language is not acceptable to such people!

**John Stott, The Message of the Sermon on the Mount, The Bible Speaks Today:**

"The word 'therefore' introduces the deduction which Jesus now draws for his disciples from the enduring validity of the law and his own attitude with respect to it. It reveals a vital connection between the law of God and the kingdom of God. Because he has come not to abolish but to fulfil, and because not an iota or dot will pass from the law until all has been fulfilled, **therefore greatness in the kingdom of God will be measured by conformity to it. Nor is personal obedience**

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<sup>13</sup> "According to Ezekiel 34, the expected change in Israel's governance will be accomplished not so much in the change in the nature of the *office* but through a change in the nature of the *occupant*" (Iain Duguid, *Ezekiel & the Leaders of Israel*, p. 47).

**enough; Christian disciples must also teach to others the permanently binding nature of the law's commandments..."** (p. 74).

"It was a new heart of-righteousness which the prophets foresaw as one of the blessings of the Messianic age, 'I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts,' God promised Jeremiah (31:33). How would he do it? He told Ezekiel: 'I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes' (36:27). Thus God's two promises to put his law within us and to put his Spirit within us coincide. We must not image (as some do today) that when we have the Spirit we can dispense with the law, for what the Spirit does in our hearts, is precisely, to write God's law there. **So 'Spirit', 'law', 'righteousness' and 'heart' all belong together...** Now it is this deep obedience which is a righteousness of the heart and its is possible only in those whom the Holy Spirit has regenerated and now indwells" (p. 75).

"... *torah* (*nomos*, law) is composed of both narrative and legal code, never exclusively the one or the other. Paul in reading the *torah* as a narrative has come to see Jesus as the decisive chapter in an otherwise unfinished story. He is the one to whom the *torah* is directed. **But that does not mean a negation of the legislative dimensions of the *torah*, only a fresh perspective on it.**

**"In the Sermon on the Mount, as Calvin correctly expressed it, we see Jesus not 'as a new legislator, but as the faithful expounder of a law which had already given'.** The Pharisees had 'obscured' the law; Jesus 'restored its integrity'.... His purpose ... [was] 'to reveal the full depth of meaning that it was intended to hold'...

"Christian righteousness must exceed pharisaic righteousness.

"Yet the advocates of the 'new morality' or 'situational ethic' are in principle trying to do exactly what the Pharisees were doing. True, they claim to take Christ's part against the Pharisees, but they resemble the Pharisees in their dislike of the law. They regard the law as rigid and authoritarian, and (just like the Pharisees) they attempt to 'relax' its authority, to loosen its hold. So they declare the category of law abolished (which Jesus said he had not come to abolish) and they set law and love at variance with each other (in a way which Jesus never did). No. Jesus disagreed with the Pharisees' *interpretation* of the law; he never disagreed with the acceptance of its *authority*. Rather the reverse. In the strongest possible terms he asserted its authority as God's Word written, and called his disciples to accept its true and deeply exacting interpretation" (pp. 81, 72, 80-81).

**Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians, NIV Application Commentary*:**

““Abolished the law” is strong language and can easily mislead. But note the qualifiers to this text: ‘the law with its commandments and regulations.’ **Paul does not abolish the law as the Word of God or as a moral guide (cf. his quoting one of the commandments in 6:2). What is abolished is the law as a set of regulations that excludes Gentiles. The moral instruction of the law continues, but Paul tolerates no practice of the law that excludes Gentiles or forces them to become Jews. One of the main messages of Ephesians is that Gentiles are accepted by God in Christ on equal footing with Jews”** (p. 133).

**PHEME PERKINS, *The Letter to the Ephesians. New Interpreters Bible, Vol. 11*:**

“The expression ... “commandments and regulations” ... has sometimes been understood to imply that only part of the law is abolished: the ceremonial or other statutes that divide Jews from Gentiles, or those elements that are “in decrees” made by those who interpret the law...

“The assumption that the law is divisible has little support in Jewish texts. Both apologetic writers like Josephus and the writer of *Letter of Aristeas* and inter-sectarian text like the CD and 4QMMT assume that Moses’ legislation, including the peculiarly Jewish rites and customs and proper halakhic interpretation, belong together... Therefore, Ephesians refers to the whole law...” (pp. 399-400).

... hence it – the Law – is not done away or spiritualised away.

## Law in Romans

"Moreover, the law of love sums up and brings to perfection all the commandments of the Mosaic law (Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:14)." (Frederick Bruce, *Romans. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, p. 55).

### William Hendrikson, *Romans. New Testament Commentary*:

"8:4 *righteous requirements of the law*. The law still plays a role in the life of a believer - not, however, as a means of salvation but as a moral and ethical guide, obeyed out of love for God and by the power that the Spirit provides. This is the fulfillment of Jer 31:33-34 (a prophecy of the new covenant). *fully met*. Lit. "fulfilled." God's aim in sending his Son was that believers might be enabled to embody the true and full intentions of the law. *according to the Spirit*. How the law's righteous requirements can be fully met - by no longer letting the sinful nature hold sway but by yielding to the directing and empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit.

"9:31 *law of righteousness*. The law that prescribed the way to righteousness. **Paul does not reject obedience to the law** but righteousness by works, the attempt to use the law to put God in one's debt" (NIVSB).

"Since the apostle often makes mention of God's law, as also in the present passage, it may be useful to give a brief summary of the functions of this law, as indicated in Paul's epistles and elsewhere in Scripture. Undoubtedly one or more references can easily be added to each of the following:

"a. to serve as a source of man's knowledge of sin and to sharpen his consciousness of sin (Rom 3:20, etc...).

"b. to fix the sinner's attention on the far greater power of God's grace in Jesus Christ, and to lead him to the Savior (Rom 5:20; Gal 3:24).

"c. To serve as guide for the expression of the believer's life of gratitude to God's honor (Ps 19:7, 8; 119:105; Rom 7:22).

"d. to function as a bridle, restraining sin (1 Tim 1:9-11).

"There is, of course, a very close connection between these various functions" (p. 184).

Comment: obedience to the Law is a requirement for salvation, but cannot give you salvation. After all, the Law is not a personage – only God Himself can give salvation.

### Frederick Bruce, *Romans. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*:

**"The term 'law' (*nomos*) occurs over seventy times in this letter, not always in the same sense. Most often it means the law of God in one form or another, but there are some places where it means something else.** Here are its principle meanings, in order more or less from the less frequent to the more frequent.

"1. *Law in general.* When Paul says in Romans 4:15 that 'where there is no law there is not transgression', or in 5:13 that 'sin is not counted where there is no law' he may be echoing a general legal maxim, even if he is thinking more particularly of the Mosaic law. Again, what he says in 7:1, 'speaking to those who have some knowledge of the law' (NEB), that 'the law is binding on a person during his life', it makes no difference to the sense of the words whether he or his readers took them to refer to Jewish law or to Roman law. Theologically, however, he ignores the presence of non-Jewish codes of law before or alongside the law of Moses. Gentiles are said to 'have no law' (2:4, NEB) in the sense that they do not live under the Mosaic law; indeed, before the Mosaic law was given there was 'no law' (5:13). Had Paul known of the laws of Hammurabi or other pre-Mosaic codes, these would have been irrelevant to his theological argument as was contemporary Roman law.

"2. *A principle.* In Romans 3:27 Paul, having established that the grace of God justifies men and women through faith, says that, this being so, there is no room for boasting. 'By what manner of law? Of works? Nay: but a law of faith' (RV). These two occurrences of 'law' rightly appear as 'principle' in RSV. The law of works (not the same thing as 'the works of the law') and the law of faith are two contrasted principles by which human beings seek to secure God's acceptance.

"In 7:21 Paul, considers the moral conflict that rages in the soul of one who lives under law, discovers 'a law' - that is a principle or an observed regularity - 'that when I want to do right, evil lies at hand'. In the same context the moral conflict itself is viewed as conflict between two laws or principles: **first, the law or principle which hands one over bound to the domination of sin (7:23, 25b), and second, 'the law of my mind' which acknowledges the goodness of God's law and desires to do it, but lacks the power to enforce what it acknowledges and desires (7:23).** But when yet another principle begins to operate in the soul - 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus' - thus proves stronger that 'the law (principle) of sin and death' and sets one free from the thralldom of the latter (8:2).

"3. *The Pentateuch.* When it is said that God's way of righteousness through faith is attested by 'the law and the prophets' (Rom 3:21b), 'the law' means the first five books of the Old Testament, as 'the prophets' is a comprehensive designation for the remaining books. This is common New Testament usage, and reflects the Jewish application of the Hebrew word *Torah* not only to the law in the stricter sense, but also to the five books which pre-eminently contain the law.

"4. *The Old Testament as a whole.* In Romans 3:19 Paul says, 'we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under law.' The clause 'whatever the law says' refers to the catena of biblical quotations in the preceding verse (10-18); but of these quotations five are from the Psalms and one from Isaiah. If it is 'the law' that says these things, 'the law' can mean only the Hebrew Bible - our Old Testament.

"5. *The law of God.* To a man of Paul's heritage and training it was most natural to equate the law of God with the law of Moses - in other words, with the law as God gave it to Israel through Moses (not to speak of the oral amplification of the written law, which in rabbinic tradition was received by Moses at Sinai as truly - in theory, at least - as the written law itself). This was the form in which Paul had come to know the law of God in his own experience.

"When Paul deals with the situation of the Jews, who rejoiced in being the people of the law (2:17-27) and set themselves to attain the standard of righteousness which it prescribed (9:31; 10:3), it is naturally the Mosaic law that he has in mind. When he speaks in 5:13-14, 20a, of 'law' being unknown in the ages between Adam and Moses - that is, until God spoke at Sinai - the same equation of the law of Moses with the law of God can be recognized. Indeed, when he shows how Christians ought to live, and stresses the supremacy of the law of love, he formulates the law of love (as Jesus had done before him) in a commandment from the Pentateuch: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (13:9, quoting Lv 19:18). Similarly, when he goes on to say that 'love is the fulfilling of the law' (13:10), he explains what he means by 'law' by quoting a selection of commandments from the Decalogue.

"Paul does not mean that the revelation of God's will was confined to the Mosaic legislation, but that in the Mosaic legislation his will was given the form of law. When he argues that Jews and Gentiles are on an equal footing before God as regards their failure to do his will, he points out that, **while Jews had a special revelation of God's will in the Mosaic law, Gentiles were not deprived of all knowledge of his will**, for 'when Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires ... they show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness' (2:14-15). That is to say, the Gentiles had not been given the *Torah*, or even the Ten Commandments, but they did have a sense of right and wrong; they had a built-in awareness of the essence of God's law. So when Paul says (3:20) that through law comes our knowledge of sin, he says something that is true in principle of Jews and Gentiles alike; and when he says in the same context that by the works of the law no human being will be justified in God's sight, this too is equally valid for Jew and Gentile. Whether the 'works of the law' are performed in accordance with a code promulgated by express divine authority, or in accordance with the dictates of conscience, the moral law within, Wordsworth's 'stern daughter of the voice of

God', or in accordance with an accepted standard of decent behaviour - no matter, these are not the grounds on which men and women are accepted by God. Whichever of these forms 'law' may take, it is right to keep it; it is wrong, and indeed disastrous, to break, or defy or ignore it; but it is vain to imagine that by keeping it one can accumulate a store of merit in the heavenly treasure-house. God has given law for a variety of purposes, and it has many uses; but when it is a question of his *justifying* human beings, he proceeds by a more excellent way.

"The law, then, whether spelt out in a code or implanted in the conscious, is God's law, 'holy and just and good' (7:12). If, as Paul insists, it was not given as the means of justification, why was it given? To this question the letter to the Romans provide a variety of answers, which may be arranged under four principle heads.

(i) *It was given to be a revelation of God and his will.* The distinction between right and wrong is not simply a matter of social convention: it is rooted in the being and character of God, and is written into the constitution of man, created as he has been in the image of God. Because the law is God's law, it is, like God himself, 'true, and righteous altogether' (Ps 19:9).

(ii) *It was given for the health and preservation of the human race.* This particular purpose is served mainly by civil government, which (as is clearly stated in Rom 13:1-7 is a ministry instituted by God to protect and encourage well-doing and to curb and punish wrong-doing. ('Pray for the welfare of the government', said Rabbi Hanina, deputy high priest (Paul's contemporary), 'since were it not for their fear of it men would swallow one another alive' (*Pirqa Aboth* 3.2)).<sup>14</sup>

(iii) *It was given to bring sin to light, and to lead sinners to cast themselves on the pardoning grace of God.* While in theory the person who keeps the law will live by it (10:5), **in practice no-one is justified by the works of the law, because of universal failure to keep it perfectly** (3:20a, 23). The innate human tendency to go to contrary to the will of God maintains itself in concrete acts of disobedience when his will is revealed in the form of specific commands commandments (5:13), so that 'through the law comes knowledge of sin' (3:20b; *cf.* 7:7). But those who experienced the law's power to bring sin to light, together with its inability to procure for them a righteous standing in God's sight, are the more ready to cast themselves in faith on the grace of God brought near as the sole means of their justification. Thus, as Paul puts it in another letter, the 'law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith' Gal 3:24). But now Christ has come, he 'is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified (Rom 10:4). Not only has he fulfilled the law himself, by his perfect obedience to the will of God, but since God's way of righteousness has been opened up in him,

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<sup>14</sup> Rabbi Meir said: "'Ye shall therefore keep My statutes and My ordinances, which, if a MAN do, he shall live by them' (Lev. 18:5). It is not said that priests, Levites and Israelites shall live by them, but 'a MAN'; therefore, even a GENTILE." (Sanhedrin 59a).

he marks the supersession or 'end' of the law as even a theoretical means of justification. Those who are justified by faith in him are 'not under the law but under grace' (Rom 6:14-15).

Comment: he is incorrect in his statements above (last two lines).

"(iv) *It was given to provide for the believer's life.* Thanks to the indwelling of the Spirit in those who are 'in Christ Jesus', the righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled in them by a divine spontaneity as they live 'according to the Spirit' (Rom 8:3-4). But even so Paul finds it proper at a later point in the letter to lay down fairly detailed guide-lines for the lives of Christians, so that by experience they may 'prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect' (Rom 12:1-2). These guide-lines coincides with what Paul elsewhere calls 'the law of Christ' (Gal 6:2). While he himself was 'not under law but under grace' so as to 'serve not under the old written code but in the new life in the Spirit' (Rom 7:6), yet he could speak of himself as 'not being without law towards God but under the law of Christ' (1 Cor 9:21). But the law of Christ is the law of love which he himself embodied and which he bequeathed as a 'new commandment' to his disciples.

Paul's gospel is thus fully absolved from the charge of antinomianism. When men and women have been justified by faith, right is still right, wrong is still wrong, and the will of God is still the rule of life. But for them the will of God is not simply enshrined in an external code of regulations; it is implanted within their hearts as a new principle of life. Like Paul, they are for evermore subject to the 'law of Christ'. The detailed resemblance between the ethical directions of Romans 12:1-15:4 and our Lord's sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7) amply entitles those directions to be described as 'the law of Christ'. The law of Christ is no more able to justify the sinner than the law of Moses was; whether expressed in the ethical directions of Romans 12:1-15:4 or the Sermon on the Mount. Christ's law of love sets a higher standard than even the Ten Commandments. 'The Sermon on the Mount is not, as many people fondly imagine nowadays, the fulfilment or essence of the Gospel, but it is the fulfilment of the Law' (A.R. Vidler, *Christ's Strange Work*, (1944), p.14). It represents the standard by which the disciples of Christ - those who have been justified by faith in him - ought to live. Those into whose hearts the love of God has been 'poured' by the Holy Spirit are empowered by the same Spirit to fulfil the law of Christ by that love to God and mankind which is the reflection of God's own love, and their proper response to it" (pp. 50-56).

But then he makes a silly mistake:

"Even if *the law of sin and death* is not to be identified outright with the law of Moses, the law of Moses nevertheless stimulates sin and condemns to death" (p. 151).

### **“Defining Righteousness**

‘The ideas of right and wrong among the Hebrews are forensic ideas, that is, the Hebrew always thinks of the right and wrong as if they were to be settled before a judge. Righteousness is to the Hebrew not so much a moral quality as a legal status. The word "righteous" (*saddiq*) means simply "in the right", and the word "wicked" (*rasha*) means "in the wrong". I have sinned this time", says Pharaoh, "Jehovah is in the right (AV. righteous), and I and my people are in the wrong (A.V. wicked)", Exod iv.27). Jehovah is always in the right, for He is not only sovereign but self-consistent. He is the fountain of righteousness ... the consistent will of Jehovah is the law of Israel’ (W.R. Smith, *The Prophets of Israel* (1882), pp.77f.)

"God is himself righteous, and those men and women are righteous who are in the right in relation to God and his law. [Or to use a modern expression, ‘in the clear’ -with which may be compared God’s insistence in the Old Testament that he ‘will by no means clear the guilty (Ex 34:7). When, therefore the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel, it is revealed in a twofold manner. The gospel tells us first how men and women, sinners as they are, can come to be ‘in the right’ with God and second how God’s personal righteousness is vindicated in the very act of declaring sinful men and women ‘righteous...

"These words from Habakkuk 2:4b have already been quoted by Paul in Galatians 3:11 to prove that it is not by the law that people are justified before God... Hebrew *‘emuna* translated ‘faith’ in Habakkuk 2:4 (LXX *pistis*) means ‘steadfastness or fidelity is based on a firm belief in God and his word, and it is this firm belief that Paul understands by the term.

"Habakkuk, crying out to God against the oppression under which his people groaned (late in the seventh century BC), received the divine assurance that wickedness would not triumph indefinitely, that righteousness would ultimately be vindicated, and the earth would ‘be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea’ (Hab 2:14). The vision might be slow in being realized, but it would certainly be fulfilled. Meanwhile, the righteous would endure to the end, directing their lives by a loyalty to God inspired by faith in his promise.

"When Paul takes up Habakkuk’s words and sees in them the foundation truth of the gospel, he gives them the sense, ‘it is he who is righteous (justified) through faith that will live.’ The terms of Habakkuk’s oracle are sufficiently general to make room for Paul’s application of them - an application which, far from doing violence to the prophet’s intention, expresses the abiding validity of his message" (pp. 73-76)

Comment: one would not agree with all of Bruce’s comments, but there is a lot we would agree with. He misunderstands the purpose of the Law – it does not and cannot stimulate sin. It shines a light on it. It compares the Way of God vs the Way of Satan.

**James Edwards, *Romans, New International Biblical Commentary*:**

"Like the Himalayan giants whose immensity is compromised because of their proximity to one another, Romans 3:21-31 may at first deceive the reader because of its compactness. Here is a veritable glossary of the Christian faith, AND SURELY THE MOST SUCCINCT AND PROFOUND EXPRESSION OF THE GOSPEL IN THE BIBLE...

"Paul employs a wide variety of vocabulary in developing the theme of righteousness by faith. One set of terms comes from the law courts, consisting of "righteousness," "law," and reckoning" (NIV, "maintain," 3:28). The first two terms are heavyweights; in this passage of some 150 words "righteousness" recurs nine times and "law" seven times. A second set of terms, deriving from the institute of slavery, includes "redemption" and perhaps "grace." A final set comes from the ritual of animal sacrifice and includes "expiation" (NIV, "sacrifice of atonement"), "sin," and "blood." The most common word in the entire section, "faith," recurs ten times. It is the key to the vocabulary of the whole, and the means by which these momentous truths are appropriated by the believer ...

"Paul concludes the discussion of righteousness with an obvious question: DO WE, THEN NULLIFY THE LAW BY THIS FAITH? He denies this categorically, NOT AT ALL! The purpose of the laws had never been to bring salvation, as he will argue in chapter 4 (4:13f.; see also Gal 3:1-20). The law's function had been to reveal sin (3:20) and to demonstrate the need of a savior apart from the law... **The purpose of the commandment, in other words, had been to engender a proper attitude and behavior towards God's will. It is this original intent or motive which faith perceives, for "the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good" (7:12). The law drives one to Christ, and where one lives by faith in Christ, there one fulfills the intent of the law.** "The righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit" (8:4)." (pp. 97-98, 108)

Comment: Edwards partially there. The 10 Commandments and other aspects of God's Law are *requirements* to build Godly character. But apart from faith in God as Saviour, such law abidance falls short. As it does if one does not develop the beatitudes or fruit of the spirit. The development of Godly character cannot be undertaken by just faith alone. Or believing that God does everything for us.

**Walter Wessel, *Romans, NIV Study Bible*:**

"**3:24 justified.** Paul uses this verb 22 times, mostly in 2:13-5:1; Gal 2-3. It is translated "justify" in all cases except two (2:13; 3:20, where it is translated "declared righteous"). The term describes what happens when someone believes

in Christ as his Savior: From the negative viewpoint, God declares the person to be not guilty; from the positive viewpoint, he declares him to be righteous. He cancels the guilt of the person's sin and credits righteousness to him. Paul emphasizes two points in this regard: 1. No one lives a perfectly good, holy, righteous life. On the contrary, "there is no one righteous" (v. 10), and "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (v. 23). "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his [God's] sight by observing the law" (v. 20). 2. But even though all are sinners and not sons, God will declare everyone who puts his trust in Jesus not guilty but righteous. This legal declaration is valid because Christ died to pay the penalty for our sin and lived a life of perfect righteousness that can in turn be imputed to us. This is the central theme of Romans and is stated in the theme verse, 1:17 ("a righteousness from God"). Christ's righteousness (his obedience to God's law and his sacrificial death) will be credited to believers as their own. Paul uses the word "credited" nine times in ch. 4 alone. *freely by his grace*. The central thought in justification is that, although man clearly and totally deserves to be declared guilty (vv. 9-19), because of his trust in Christ God declares him righteous. This is stated in several ways here: (1) "freely" (as a gift, for nothing), (2) "by his grace," (3) "through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" and (4) "through faith" (v. 25) ..." (p. 1710)

**David Brown, *Commentary on Romans, Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary, Vol. 3, Part 2:***

"**being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets** - being attested by the Old Testament Scriptures themselves. Thus this justifying righteousness is at once *new*, as only now fully disclosed, and *old*, as predicted and foreshadowed in the ancient Scriptures." (p. 207)

**James Edwards, *Romans (Understanding the Bible Series):***

"Chapter 8 begins with the triumphant crash of Beethoven's "Emperor Concerto" - **Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**. The Greek behind **Therefore** (*ara nyn*) signals an emphatic break from the preceding train of thought. To be **in Christ Jesus** is to experience something not offered by the law of Moses. Paul's tireless labors have shown that the law revealed sin (3:20), aggravates sin (7:8-9), and condemns both sin and sinner (7:11); and the burden of this awareness causes him to cry out, "What a wretched man I am" (7:24). His only recourse is to cry for help outside himself, and help he finds in Jesus Christ.

"Without diminishing the force of verse 1, we must not mistake its message. Paul does not say that those in Christ Jesus no longer sin or that they are exempt from the struggle against sin so dramatically portrayed in 7:7-25. Romans 8 is not an apology for Christian perfection. **What he does say is that there is no**

**condemnation for those who are in Christ.** The antecedent idea is found in 5:16 where, in speaking of Adam's sin, Paul said, "The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation" (also 5:18). **It is that condemnation which is revoked in Jesus Christ.** Verse 1 is therefore a victorious summary of 5:12-6:11. The ongoing skirmishes with sin do not defeat believers, but the thought of being cursed or abandoned by God does. Believers need to know that they do not stand condemned by God. Christ has cancelled the bond of indebtedness against humanity (Col 2:14). The accent throughout fall on Christ's victory, not on human merit.

"When Paul says, **there is now no condemnation, he means that the sentence of death and judgment on the Last Day has been commuted. Verse 11 will repeat the idea of 7:24: believers remain in "mortal bodies" (see also 2 Cor 4:7-11).** But the consequences of sin are annulled through Christ's death, and even now the Spirit begins in believers a work of regeneration that will be completed in the world to come. Grace is knowing that God is for us and with us even in our "body of death" (7:24).

"Paul now resumes the thought of 7:6 concerning the "new way of the Spirit." Paul's Jewish contemporaries were familiar with the belief that the day of the Messiah would be accompanied by an outpouring of the Spirit. Keying off the theme of **law**, Paul says, in effect, that a higher **law of the Spirit** supercedes **the law of sin and death**. We know of instances in nature where the effects of one law are cancelled out by another. When an airplane wing provides the necessary "lift" to raise a plane upwards, one law (that nature abhors a vacuum) prevails over another (the law of gravity). In like manner, **the law of the Spirit of life sets me free from the law of sin and death**. This is a development of 5:20-21, "Where sin increased, grace increase all the more." The Spirit now stands where the law formerly stood. It is the **Spirit of life through Jesus Christ which set me free**. The past tense, **set me free**, refers to a decisive point, most probably Christ's crucifixion, but possible the believer's conversion. At any rate, it is no vague, undefined spirit which stands there for **me**. Paul expressly links the Spirit with the redemption and liberating work of Jesus Christ. What God did through the historical Jesus on Golgotha, he now applies and extends to believers through the Spirit in the community of faith. The emphasis again falls on God's initiative. Christ's work, and its ongoing effect as applied by the Spirit, brings peace and freedom. "Grace renders that most easy, which seems difficult to man under law, or rather does it itself," said Bengel (*Gnomon*, vol. 3, p.98).

**"There is, to be sure, a bristling tension between being a "prisoner of the law of sin" (7:23) and being free from the law of sin.** But the inherent intellectual contradiction does not cancel the fact that both represent the experience of believers (see also 2 Cor 4:7-12). In their earthly frames Christians are never free from the hold of sin, yet there is a marked difference between their response to

that grip and non-Christians. Augustine said prior to conversion, "my sin was all the more incurable because I did not think myself a sinner" (*Confessions*, 5.10). Christians are alerted to the ways of sin and are no longer ignorant and unresisting accomplices to its work. They recognize the power and deception of tyranny and fight against it in the name of Christ and in the power of the Spirit.

"Christians may still live with the effects of sin, but they do not live under its *authority*. When Paris was liberated in 1944 the allies declared France free, even though a large portion of the country still lay under Nazi control. With the loss of the capital, however, the Nazi power base was broken, and it was only a matter of time until the remaining forces were driven from the land. The Christian experience is similar. The cross of Christ has once and for all broken the claim and power of evil over the lives of believers. The capital belongs to Christ, so to speak, even if mopping-up operations are still in effect. The liberating edict of the Spirit is now effecting Christ's victory throughout the creation. The future is assured even if the present is still uncertain. "He must win the battle" proclaimed Luther in the hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God."

"Verse 3 is a classic formulation of redemption. The beginning of the verse lacks a verb in Greek and is somewhat defective, reading literally, "For the inability of the law because of the weakness of the flesh." But there is no doubt of its meaning: the law was rendered ineffective because of the "flesh." Paul does not say the law was unable to condemn sin; that it *could do* because it was "holy, righteous, and good" (7:12). **The law is not bad, but its good counsels are undermined by a bentness and gravitational pull in human nature towards evil. The law offers a proper diagnosis of the disease, but no cure.**

"To accomplish what neither the law nor human will could carry out, God entered decisively and historically **by sending his own Son...**

Ro 8:3 For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, **God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man,** (NIV).

**"The mission and goal of the incarnation were to be a sin offering. God did not send the Son primarily as a moral reformer. The essential aspect of the incarnation is not ethical but sacerdotal: he condemned sin in sinful man** (v.3). Before humanity can live it must be freed from sin and death. It is a delusion to think that humanity needs only a better model for life. Its plight is more desperate. It needs a savior from bondage to sin, and the price of deliverance was the suffering and death of a sacrificial victim. In the old covenant God had established the practice of animal sacrifices in anticipation of the future and ultimate sin offering of the new covenant, the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29) And thus death which had until Christ's advent been sin's ally became in Christ's death sin's defeat.

"Understanding the progression of thought in verse 2-4 is essential. Paul begins with the Spirit who brings liberation from "the law of sin and death." The Spirit, however, is not a free agent. The Spirit attends to Jesus Christ and is the divine auxiliary who makes Christ's redemption efficacious. **Moreover, the Spirit salvages the law as a moral standard, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit (v.4).** Paul does not say "*righteousness of the law*," for he has argued that righteousness comes by faith. Rather he speaks of the righteous requirements of the law (see 2:26), meaning that which the law demands, even if the law cannot provide it. Those who live in the Spirit are for the first time enabled to acknowledge the true intent of the law, and they are empowered to begin fulfilling it. This is the first positive role of the law in Romans so far. The Spirit is the supernatural reinforcement of God's grace who empowers Christians to fulfil the intent and requirements of the law. Paul does not say that one must keep the law in order to be saved but that one must be saved in order to keep the law! Augustine understood Paul correctly, "The law is given that grace might be sought; grace is given that the law might be fulfilled."

"The reader familiar with the OT cannot resist the allusion here to Jeremiah 31:31ff, and Ezekiel 36:26ff. Both prophets agonized over the fatal flaw in Israel which thwarted Israel from fulfilling the law and pleasing God. Both saw the need for a new covenant and new spirit, not coercing Israel by external dictates but *moving Israel from within* to fulfil God's righteous will. And the longing and anticipation of both are fulfilled in Christ.

"Does not Paul's confidence in fulfilling the law in verse 4 ... contradict his frustration in *not* fulfilling it in chapter 7? According to verse 4, the Spirit reveals the essence of the law and enables Christians to conform to its fundamental intent, even if not to its every detail. The Christian is like a man who as the right tune in his head but cannot remember all the words. Accordingly, when Paul says that love fulfills the law (13:8; also Gal 5:14), that is not asserting that Christians are perfect, but they **live ... according to the Spirit**. The present tense of the Greek *peripatein*, "to walk" or **live**, connotes continued action, a pattern of behavior under the Spirit's leading. The idea is one of direction, not perfection; orientation toward a goal, if not yet attainment of it. Otto Michel correctly notes that the willingness and strength to resist sin is the unmistakable sign of the Spirit. "The claim to possess the Spirit of God is justified only when it is accompanied by the battle against the flesh" (*Der Brief an die Römer*, p.180 [my translation])." (pp. 200-04)

**John Stott, *the Message of Romans, The Bible Speaks Today*:**

"... Paul clarifies the ultimate reason God sent his own Son and condemned out sin in him. It was *in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit*

(4). One might have been expected Paul to write that 'God condemned sin in Jesus in order to that we might escape the condemnation', that is, 'in order that we might be justified'. Indeed, this was the immediate purpose of the sin-bearing death of God's Son. Consequently, most of the early Fathers, the Reformers and subsequent Reformed commentators seem to have interpreted Paul's statement of verse 4 in the same way. Hodge, for example, insists that verse 4 must be understood of justification, and not of sanctification. He condemned sin, in order that the demands of the law might be satisfied' (*Commentary on Romans, in the Geneva Series of Commentaries*, p.254f), the law's main demand being the sentence of death for sin. Yet if God's purpose in sending his Son was limited to our justification, the addition of the final clause (*who ... live ... according to the Spirit*) would be a *non sequitur*.

**"It is the phrase which directs out attention to law-abiding Christian behaviour as the ultimate purpose of God's action through Christ. In this case the laws *dikaïoma* or 'just requirement' (singular, not plural requirements' as in the NIV) refers to the commandments of the moral law as viewed as a whole, which God wants to be 'fulfilled' (i.e., 'obeyed', not 'satisfied') in his people.** For Jesus had himself spoken of fulfilling the law (Mt 5:17), and Paul will write later of neighbour love as the chief 'fulfilment of the law' (Rom 13:10; cf. Gal 5:14). Moreover, the law can be fulfilled only in those 'who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit' (RSV). The flesh renders the law impotent, the Spirit empowers us to obey it. This is not perfectionism; it is simply to say that obedience is a necessary and possible aspect of Christian discipleship. Although the law cannot secure this obedience, the Spirit can.

"Some modern scholars find Paul hopelessly confused, even self-contradictory, since he writes of both the abolition and the fulfillment of the law, of our being released from it and committed to it, our discharge and our obligation being both attributed to Christ's death (7:4; 8:3-4). The most outspoken critic of Paul's supposed inconsistencies is Heikki Raisanen. He rejects all eulogies of Paul which depict him as a profound, logical, consistent theologian. Instead, 'contradictions and tensions have to be *accepted* as *constant* features of Paul's theology of law' (p.11). In particular, 'we find two conflicting lines of thought in Paul's theology of the law. Paul asserts both the abolition of the law and also its permanently normative character' (*ibid.*, p.69). Indeed, 'Paul's thought on the law is full of difficulties and inconsistencies' (*ibid.*, p.264), for (Dr Raisanen presses the question) how could a divine institution be abolished and abrogated? (*ibid.*, p.265). But I fail to see any inconsistencies in Paul's declarations that, because the law is unable to justify or sanctify us, it has been abolished in those roles, whereas the Spirit can enable us to fulfil or keep the moral law.

"This was certainly the prophetic expectation. Through Ezekiel God promised, 'I will put my Spirit in you,' and through Jeremiah, 'I will put my law in their minds and write in on their hearts.' These promises are synonymous. When God puts his Spirit in our hearts, he writes his law there.

"Verse 4 is of great importance for our understanding of Christian holiness. First, holiness is the ultimate purpose of the incarnation and the atonement. The end God had in view when sending his Son was not our justification only, through freedom from the condemnation of the law, but also our holiness, through obedience to the commandments of the law. Secondly, holiness consists in fulfilling the just requirements of the law. **This is the final answer to antinomians and adherents of the so-called 'new morality'. The moral law has not been abolished for us; it is to be fulfilled in us. Although law-obedience is not the ground of our justification (it is in this sense that we are 'not under law but under grace), it is in the fruit of it and the very meaning of sanctification. Holiness is Christlikeness, and Christlikeness is fulfilling the righteousness of the law.** Thirdly, holiness is the work of the Holy Spirit. Romans 7 insists that we cannot keep the law because of our indwelling 'flesh'; Romans 8:4 insists that we can and must because of the indwelling Spirit.

"Looking back over the whole passage which runs from 7:1 to 8:4, the continuing place of the law in the Christian life should be clear. **Our freedom from the law (proclaimed for instance in 7:4, 6 and 8:2) is not freedom to disobey it. On the contrary the law-obedience of the people of God is so important to God that he sent his Son to die for us and his Spirit to live in us, in order to secure it. Holiness is the fruit of ... grace, of the Father sending his own Son into the world and his Spirit into our hearts.**" (pp. 220-22)

He should really have written "Our freedom from **the penalty of the law ...**"

**Nicholas Wright, *The Law in Romans 2*, in *Paul and the Mosaic Law* noted:**

"And what about the law in all of this? Pulling the 'law' threads of the discussion together into a quasi-systematic form, we might deduce the following:

1. The law, *nomos* in Paul, is the Jewish [ie Biblical] law. Gentiles do not possess it by birth.
2. The law defines Israel over against the nations, and moreover indicates that Israel is designed by the creator god as a light to the nations.
3. The law sets the standard by which Israel will be judged; Gentiles will be judged without reference to it. However, there is one class of Gentiles who in a sense will be judged with reference to Torah. This class consists of Gentile Christians; though by birth they do not possess the Torah, they are now in the strange position of 'doing the law', since the Spirit has written the 'work of the Torah' on their hearts.
4. Israel boast in her possession of the law; it sets her apart from the nations.
5. The boast is not made good, because that could be so only if Israel kept the law perfectly; and this is not the case. Israel is still in exile, still 'in her sins'. She is still guilty of lawbreaking.
6. The category of Gentiles mentioned above in connection with the final judgment is invoked again, this time to demonstrate how far ethnic Israel is from being affirmed as she stands. The covenant *has* already been renewed; its

beneficiaries now 'fulfill the law', even though, in the case of Gentile Christians, they do not possess it. This 'fulfillment' seems to be of a different order from the fulfillments thought of within Judaism. Nor is it simply the (Lutheran) *tertius uses legis*. It is without precedent, for the simple reason that it has not happened before, and the manner of covenant renewal was not anticipated. As Paul says in Romans 8, 'what the law could not do ... God has done'.

7. The way is now clear for ch. 3, with its exposition of the cross, and of justification by faith in the *present* as a direct result. Paul will go on, later in the letter (ch. 8), to declare that there is no *katavkrima* for those who are *ejn Cristw:/*. But this is no more than a recapitulation, and a filling out, of what has already been said in principle in ch. 2. It is greatly to the detriment of the doctrine of justification by faith that exegetes have frequently not taken the trouble to notice what Romans 2 is actually about, as opposed to what it is usually supposed to be about." (*The Law in Romans 2, in Paul and the Mosaic Law*, pp. 131–50)

**Walter Wessel, *Romans. NIV Study Bible*:**

"*the law of the Spirit of life*. The controlling power of the Holy Spirit, who is life-giving. Paul uses the word "law" in several different ways in Romans - to mean, e.g., a controlling power (here); God's law (2:17-20; 9:31; 10:3-5); the Pentateuch (3:21 b); the OT as a whole (3:19); a principle (3:27). *law of sin and death*. The controlling power of sin, which ultimately produces death" (p. 1716).

**Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Whole Bible* online:**

"**For the law.** The word "law" here means that "rule, command, or influence" which "the Spirit of life" produces. That exerts a control which is here called a law, for a law often means anything by which we are ruled or governed... The phrase "the Spirit of life" then means the Holy Spirit producing or giving life; that is, giving peace, joy, activity, salvation; in opposition to the law spoken of in Rom. 7 that produced death and condemnation"

"**The law of sin and death** - The controlling influence of sin, leading to death and condemnation; Rom 7:5-11."

**John Gill's *Commentary* online:**

"**For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus** ... These words are of difficult interpretation."

**Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans. New International Commentary on the New Testament*:**

"The "*nomos* of the Spirit ... cannot refer to the Mosaic law. It may however allude to the "law written on the heart" (cf. Jer 31:31-34), the "law" of the New

Covenant that, according to the parallel text in Ezek 36:24-32, is closely related to the Spirit. But it is not clear that the "law" in Jeremiah is anything but an internalized Mosaic law; and it is not, in case, the liberating power of the new age. This also rules out any notion of "the law of the Spirit" being a new, Christian ethical standard that takes the place of the law of Moses (as some interpret "the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2)). Paul's use of *nomos* here may be rhetorically dependent on his customary use of *nomos*, but he does not use it in order to suggest that the Spirit is, or conveys, a norm that functions like, or can substitute for, the Mosaic law. Others think the *nomos* is the gospel, the new "rule" of which the Spirit is the author. This is possible, but the other texts in which Paul uses *nomos* in a "nonlegal" manner (cf. 3:37; 9:31-32), and especially the immediate context (7:21-25), points rather to *nomos* meaning "power" or "binding authority," with the following genitive specifying that authority or power. Paul always use *nomos* with this meaning in contexts where he has been talking about the Mosaic law" (p. 475).

**The Preacher's Commentary online:**

"As we have noted earlier, Paul's use of the word "law" varies considerably, and in the key statement about the "*law of the Spirit of life*" in verse Rom 8:2, there is a further development. In the same way that a law can be either a legal requirement or a scientific principle, so Paul sees the law sometimes as a divine requirement and other times as a spiritual principle. It is the operation of the principle of the "*Spirit of life*" in the believer that sets him free from the operation of the principle of "*sin and death*." The practical experience of deliverance from sin that dwells within is clearly related to an understanding of the dynamic interaction of the opposing principles of the "*Spirit of life*" and "*sin and death*."

"To understand what Paul means by the "*law of sin and death*" we need to note the link between "the flesh" and "sin" in his thinking. For instance, he concludes the previous chapter with the dismal words "*with the flesh* [I serve] *the law of sin*," thereby clearly identifying "the flesh" as the means whereby sin operates within the human experience. At this point, considerable confusion can arise because of Paul's habit of using "flesh" (Greek, *sarx*) in a number of ways. In Rom 2:28, "flesh" obviously means the tissues of the physical body; in Rom 1:3, it means natural descent; in Rom 3:20, it is a synonym for the human race, and in Rom 8:30, it refers to human nature. To add to the confusion, the translators of English editions of the Bible occasionally translated *sarx* words by the English word "carnal." But all is not lost if we remember that when *sarx*, whether translated "flesh" or "carnal," appears in contrast to God and His work in human lives, it means human nature with particular reference to its inbuilt sinfulness. Godet defines it as "the inclination to seek self-satisfaction in everything," and Bruce weighs in with "sinful propensity from Adam." The flesh is an attitude or inclination operating in complete rejection of the divine will that requires self-sacrificial submission, choosing rather the free expression of anything and

everything that will bring self-gratification. It is in this flesh that the law of sin and death moves and has its being.

"Anyone who reads Romans 8 should have little difficulty grasping the significance of the flesh. The law is said to be "*weak through the flesh*" (Rom 8:3); those who live "*according to the flesh*" set their minds on the "*things of the flesh*," which we are told is "death" (Rom 8:5-6); the fleshly mind is "*enmity against God*" and "*is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can it be*" (Rom 8:7); furthermore, "*those who are in the flesh cannot please God*" (Rom 8:8). To be "in the flesh" means the same as being "in Adam," or unregenerate; to live "according to the flesh" means to live as if unregenerate after becoming regenerate. Paul's cry for deliverance is therefore a longing to be free from the discouraging tendency he has discovered in himself to live, although justified, as if he is not. He finds within himself a sinful propensity which is so powerful that he recognizes he, in himself, is incapable of breaking it; in fact, it is so pervasive that he feels as if he is "sold under sin" because his human nature is so thoroughly imbued with selfishness and self-serving. This is the law of sin and death from which he longs to be free.

"Paul carefully outlines the stages of God's dealings with sinful human nature, the flesh in which the law of sin and death operates. First God gave the law which could neither make man right with God nor make him live rightly before God. This lack of ability was no reflection on the law, but rather a condemnation of human nature.

"In my youth I attended a school where we had a brilliant musician on the staff. His first and only love was music, and he lived for nothing else than to make music. He longed to join our youthful voices into a choir which would perform the works of the masters. Unfortunately, he was trying to produce music through a bunch of young thugs whose interests were limited to football and rugby. The result was that he, like the law, although brilliant, was weak through our flesh! Nevertheless, by his own musical genius he did expose the total Philistinian lack of his youthful choir - a similar achievement to that of the law.

"... Christ came "*for sin*" (Rom 8:3) - an expression which in the Greek is found in the Septuagint as a translation of "sin offering" in Psa 40:6. Having condemned sin in the flesh by His flawless 33 years inhabiting our humanity, He then assumed our sin on the Cross, and in dying for sin, He made the most thoroughgoing denunciation of sin once and for all."

**David Garland, *Romans*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries:**

"The *commandment* [Rom 7:10] need not refer only to the one commandment given Adam in the garden but **can represent the whole law**. The Scriptures attest that **the law was given as a way of life that leads to life** (Lev 18:5; Deut 6:24); Prov 6:23; cf. Sir. 7:11; 45:5). **In providing a moral standard for what is right and wrong, the commandment dispels moral indifference**. Knowing what to do and what not to do, however, does not enable one to obey. Sin is so powerful that it manipulates the law, and, like a parasite, sucks the air out of the life-giving

function so that it yields only a suffocating death ... After their expulsion from the garden, life east of Eden turned into a train wreck as sin and death pervaded all human existence (5:12)” (p. 241).

**David Garland, *Romans. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries:***

“Many commentators regard the word *law* (*nomos*) in the phrase the law of the Spirit to refer to a ‘principle’ (cf. 7:21). Paul uses the word ‘law,’ however, in 8:3 to refer to the Mosaic law and presents it as coming under the control either of the flesh or the Spirit. He does not intend his original audience to guess whether the word *nomos* refers to the Mosaic law or a principle. He uses the word seventy-plus times in the letter consistently to refer to the Mosaic law. Here he describes it under the influence of different force fields. *The law of the Spirit ... in Christ Jesus* refers to the Mosaic law in the power sphere of the Spirit that makes the believers’ fulfilment of the law possible. *The law of sin and death* refers to the Mosaic law in the power sphere of the flesh where sin warps and exploits (7:11) so that it produces condemnation and eternal death. Since the law is ‘spiritual’ (7:14), it only operates as God intended it in the sphere of the Spirit. Living in the force field of the Spirit frees believers from the law that is engraved on stone and in the sphere of the flesh is so easily forged as a tool of sin. ‘The obedience of faith among all the Gentiles’ that Paul understands to be the objective of his apostleship (1:5; 15:18; 16:26) is possible only through the operation of the Spirit who does not work ‘on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts’ (2 Cor. 3:3)” (pp. 258-60).

“Paul’s argument is this. Sin worms its way in through the portal of the flesh and distorts the law and deforms humanity. The Spirit’s power re-forms those who are in Christ and transforms them so that they can fulfil ‘the just requirements of the law’ (8:4) and be conformed to the image of God’s Son (8:29). Freedom does not come from trying to conform to a written code but only from surrendering oneself completely to the control of God’s Spirit. Paul asserts that under the Spirit’s power the external Mosaic law develops into an interior law (Jer. 31:33) — in this case, as argued below, the Christian law of love” (ibid, p. 260). [see Jeremiah 31:33; Romans 8:4]

**Gordon Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus. New International Commentary on the Old Testament: (concerning Lev 18:5)***

“*He will enjoy life through them* (v.5). Literally “he will live through them.” For the OT writers life means primarily physical life. But is clear that in this and similar passages more than mere existence is being promised. What is envisaged is a happy life in which a man enjoys God’s bounty of health, children, friends, and prosperity. **Keeping the law is the path to divine blessing**, to a happy and fulfilled life in the present (Lev 26:3-123; Deut 28:1-14)” (p. 253).

**Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers. NIV Application Commentary:***

“Leviticus 18:5 expresses the same idea as Deuteronomy 5:33: “Walk in all the ways that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess” (cf. Deut 8:1; 32:46-47). The fifth of the Ten Commandments promises long life in the land for those who honor their fathers and mothers (Ex 20:12). Since respect for parents and other family members, which is essential for healthy society, is the topic of Leviticus 18, it is not surprising to find the stakes of obedience verse disobedience in terms of the land.

“Thus, Leviticus 18:5 has to do with life in the Promised Land rather than eternal salvation. **The Israelites did not save themselves by doing works of the law as an alternative route to eternal life that God gives by grace through faith. Obedience was predicated on preexisting grace.** The Lord had already saved his people from slavery in Egypt (Ex 20:2) and was about to give them the land of Canaan (Lev 18:3, 24; 23:10; 25:2, 38). They could not earn it. However, he could not bless his people with life and prosperity in that land if they violated laws of cause and effect and severed their covenant connection with him by acting abominably.

“Suppose the Lord says, “I have a gift for you — a beautiful, wonderful expression of what love is. I will provide you with a spouse — a husband or a wife. Your relationship with this person will bring about the very best in you...

“But then He says, “You shall not commit adultery” (Mat 5:27). Is that command to limit or restrict you? No! It is to protect and free you to experience love as its human best. What happens if you break the command and commit adultery? The love relationship is ruptured between husband and wife. Trust is gone. Hurt set in. Guilt and bitterness creep in. Even the children begin to respond differently. Scars may severely limit the future dimensions of love you could have experienced.

“When the Israelites repeatedly apostatized, it was God’s compassion that saved them from their enemies (Judg 2:15-16, 18; 3:9, 15). While their return to obedience demonstrated their sincerity (10:15-16), it did not pay for past sins so that they could merit deliverance. **No amount of law-keeping can make up for past failure.** Even today, a murderer can behave well on death row but then be put to death for a crime he committed in the past. The only thing that can save a sinner is unmerited mercy. **While keeping God’s law is beneficial to those who are obedient (Lev 18:5), it cannot help those who are disobedient (Gal 3:11-13, quoting Lev 18:5)”** (pp. 322-23).

## Is Christ the “end of the Law”?

“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”  
(Rom 10:4)

Does this Scripture mean that with Christ we do not need to observe the Commandments? Or that He somehow, through the spirit, keeps it within us? That we do not have to know or study it as it automatically happens within us?

Or that the spirit of God so inspires (virtually possesses) us that we just somehow do it? If that is the case, then why do those that teach such a theory not observe the seventh-day Sabbath, feast days and such like?

**James Dunn, *Romans 9-16. Word Biblical Commentary:***

"As the context makes clear, **it is not the law as such which ceased** with the new epoch brought in by Christ. But the law seen as a way of proving righteousness..."

"... in view of so much misunderstanding of Paul's theology of the law, we should stress that Paul neither says that the law as such has been brought to an end in Christ - how could he in light of such assertions as 3:31; 8:4 and 9:31?" (p. 587)

**William Hendriksen, *Romans. New Testament Commentary:***

"Accordingly, to avoid ambiguity and misunderstanding, it is probably better, even in the translation, to substitute *goal* for *end*" (p. 342).

**Everett Harrison, *Romans. Expositors Bible Commentary, Vol.10:***

"Considerable debate has centered on the interpretation of v.4, especially on the intended meaning of the word translated "end"." (p. 110).

**James Edwards, *Romans, New International Bible Commentary:***

"On the meaning of Christ is the end of the law. Gerhard Delling lists four possible meanings of the Greek *telos*: goal, exit, end, and cessation." (p. 251).

***Pulpit Commentary online:***

"The word "end" (*telos*) might in itself mean

- (1) *termination,*
- (2) *fulfilment,*
- (3) *aim or purpose,*

which is the evident meaning of the word in 1Ti 1:5 and 1Pe 1:9. This last seems best to suit the line of thought in this place. The Jews evinced *ignorance*, *i.e.* of the real meaning and purpose of Law, in resting on it for justification. This is St. Paul's constant position in speaking of the office of Law—that it could not and was never meant to justify, but rather to convince of sin; to establish the need of, and excite a craving for, redemption; and so prepare men to appreciate and accept the righteousness of God in Christ which was its *telos* (see especially ch. 7.; and cf. Gal 3:24, [Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith]. *Nomos* being here anarthrous, we translate it according to the rule observed in this Commentary. The apostle has, indeed, in view the Mosaic Law; but it is the principle of law, as such, that he is speaking of. He next proceeds, as elsewhere throughout the Epistle, to quote from the Old Testament in illustration of the contrast between the two principles of justification, and this with the intention of **showing that even in the Pentateuch that of justification by faith was intimated**, and thus that it was all along the real *telos* of the Law."

Comment: he needs to fully explain this, by adding the essential nature of the Law.

**Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans. New International Commentary on the New Testament*:**

"For "Christ is the culmination of the law, so that righteousness might be available to everyone who believes" (pers. trans). This, at least, is how I understand this controversial verse..." (p. 330).

"Interpreters who translate "goal" divide over just how it should be taken here. A few think Paul is referring to Christ as the "inner meaning" of the law, the goal to which all the law points. But most think he is looking at the matter from a salvation-historical perspective. With the coming of Christ, the goal towards which the law was pointing has been reached. I think this latter idea is close to Paul's point. But if we think for a minute, we will see that the idea of "end" is bound up with this meaning also...

"As a result of Christ's coming and bringing the law to its culmination, righteousness is now available for everyone who believes. Christ opens a new phrase in salvation history, in which God extends his offer of a right relationship with himself to Gentiles as well as to Jews. Faith, apart from ethnic origins or works, is the sole basis for experiencing this gift he offers to the world" (pp. 330-31).

Comment: Moo's commentary is 'unfinished business' and needs to be clarified and expanded upon.

**William Hendriksen, *Romans. New Testament Commentary*:**

"Does one wish to understand the goal, the meaning and substance, of the Old Testament law? Then study Christ. **Is not the very purpose of the law the establishment of love? See Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18 (in that order);** cf. Matt 22:37-39).

"Is not Christ the very embodiment of that love, both in his life and in his death? And is it not true that because of this love which caused him to suffer and die in people's stead, there now is right standing with God for everyone who reposes his trust in the Savior? Is not this the very theme of Romans?" (p. 342).

"Instead of "For Christ is the *goal* of the law," many prefer, "For Christ is the *end* of the law." As a *translation* this can stand. The further question is, "What is meant by the Greek word *telos* [transliteration instead of the Greek] and the English word *end*? In addition to other meanings, both of these words can mean: (a) termination, finish; or (b) goal, intention, purpose, meaning and substance. However meaning (a) does not apply in the present case, for the notion that because of the work of Christ the Old Testament law has in every respect lost its usefulness, and is therefore "finished," is contrary to Paul's teaching, as is clear from Rom 3:31; 7:7." (p. 342)

**Nicholas Wright, *The Letters to the Romans. The New Interpreters Bible, Vol. 10:***

"I conclude that in 10:4 **Paul does not intend to declare the law's abrogation in favor of a different "system,"** but rather to announce that the Messiah is himself the climax of the long story of God and Israel... God's purposes in Torah, purposes both negative and positive, have reached their goal in the Messiah...

"This means, too, that there is an end, a termination, to the period of time from Moses to the Messiah... every "goal" implies a "termination of sorts..." (p. 658).

## II Cor 3:6-8

“And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts...

who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end,

will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory?” (II Cor 3:3, 6-8)

“And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.” (Ezek 11:19-20)

“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” (Ezek 36:26-27)

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD.

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jer 31:31-34)

**Scott Hafemann, 2 Corinthians, The NIV Application Commentary:**

### **"The Ministry of the Spirit, Not the Letter**

If Paul's authority as an apostle is based in part on the parallel between his sufficiency and the sufficiency of Moses (3:4-6a), it is equally supported by the contrast between his "ministry" (*diakona*) and the "ministry" (*diakonia*) of Moses (3:6 is unpacked in 3:7-18). Paul is called like Moses, but with a distinctively

different function. In the end, then, the character of Paul's ministry as an apostle, compared and contrasted to the ministry of Moses, becomes the key to understanding Paul's self-conception and defense. The heart of the comparison and contrast is the famous letter/Spirit of 3:6.

The use of the "letter/Spirit" contrast as a proof text for a literal (= "letter") versus allegorical (= "Spirit") reading of the Scriptures has a long history in the church, going back as far as Origen (d. 254). It has even survived in modern times as an idiom for considering the "spirit" of a law more important than its "letter." Since the Reformation, however, interpreters have recognized that the letter/Spirit contrast does not signify two different ways of reading the Scriptures (with the church herself determining the "spiritual" meaning of the text). Rather it refers to the distinction between the law and gospel, either as two manners of relating to God or as two epochs within redemptive history.

Under the influence of the law/gospel contrast so central to Reformation thinking, the letter/Spirit contrast is often taken to refer to the law (= "letter") and the gospel (= "Spirit") themselves. Read in this way, the law is said to "kill" because of its demand for sinless perfection as a means of works righteousness and its corresponding condemnation of all those who fail to keep it perfectly (which is everybody!). All is not lost, however, for the law forces the sinner to despair under its demands and judgment, thereby driving a person to the life-giving promise of forgiveness and power found in the gospel. The "letter" (= law) kills *in order that* the "Spirit" (= gospel) might make alive. The unity of God's message in the Bible is found by virtue of the fact that the demand for works righteousness leads, through our failure, to the promise of the gospel.

Yet many student of the Bible have become uncomfortable with attributing such a negative function to the law itself, realizing that within the covenant structure of the Old Testament the law was an expression of the election and salvation of Israel, not a precondition for it. As a response to God's acts of deliverance and commitment to provide for his people, obedience to his commands became an outward expression of trust in his promises. Keeping the covenant stipulations is the way God's people demonstrate that they belong to him, not a way to become his people. Moreover, the Old Testament law itself provides for forgiveness, for its call for obedience is clearly given within the provisions of the sacrificial systems.

"Consequently, many today argue that the "letter" does not refer to the law as such, but to its later perversion into legalism by the Judaism of the post-exile period. It is not the law that kills, but legalism. Others maintain that the "letter" terminology is Paul's reference to some smaller subset of the law, such as purity regulations, food laws, the calendar or circumcision. Read in this way, it was not the law as a whole, but an inappropriate emphasis on some aspect of the law (usually in order to maintain a Jewish separatism or self reliance) that killed, while

the Spirit, given to both Jew and Gentile alike, gives life. In both cases the Spirit brings one back to a proper understanding of the true intent of the law.

**"But this interpretation is not entirely satisfying either, since it is hard to demonstrate that Paul has such a subset or perversion of the law in view in his letters, while others note that Judaism itself was not always as legalistic as many assume. The law, for Paul, is a whole, and in the end the issue is the relationship between God's work in Christ and his saving work under the Sinai covenant, not what this or that Jewish community may have thought.**

The key to the meaning of the letter/Spirit contrast, therefore, is its immediate context. In 3:3b, Paul had established a contrast between God's work in the past under the old covenant, in which he engraved his covenant document on stone tablets, and his present work under the new covenant, in which he engraves his "letter of Christ" on the "tablets of human hearts." Moreover, God's work by means of the Spirit was seen to be a fulfilment of Ezekiel 11:19 and 36:26-27. **Against this backdrop, Paul's concern is not with two distinct messages, but with two materials on which God wrote**, corresponding to the two basic ages within the history of salvation. If anything is to be assumed as implicit in Paul's contrast in regard to the law, it is that those who have received the Spirit are now keeping the law, just as Ezekiel prophesied.

The flow of Paul's argument from 3:3 to 3:6 demonstrates that Paul understood the coming of the Spirit as promised by Ezekiel to be equated with the promise of the new covenant from Jeremiah. Paul's allusion to Ezekiel 11:19 and 36:26-27 in 2 Corinthians 3:3b, whose main point is that **God will pour out the Spirit on those whose hearts were previously made of stone so that he might cause them to observe his statutes and ordinances**, calls attention to the corresponding new covenant promised from Jeremiah 31:31-34 in 2 Cor 3:6a. **The "law written on the heart" from Jeremiah 31:33 is equivalent to the obedience to God's statutes that according to Ezekiel, the Spirit will bring about at the time of the restoration of God's people. As was true for Jeremiah, for Ezekiel too this promise of a new heart with its Spirit-caused obedience to the law is a reversal of the hard-heartedness that characterized Israel since the Exodus** (cf. the stone heart imagery in Ezek 11:19b, 36:26b with Ezek 2:1-8, 20:1-31).

**Finally, for Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, this new relationship to God's law will be made possible only by a divine act of redemption and forgiveness**, which for Ezekiel is pictured in the priestly terms of cleansing his people from their uncleanness and idolatry (Ezek 36:25-20).

Once Ezekiel 36:25-26 and Jeremiah 31:31-34 are seen to be the keys to Paul's thinking in 2 Corinthians 3:6, the meaning of the letter/Spirit contrast become readily apparent.

The passages from Ezekiel supply Paul's references to the work of the Spirit in 3:3b, while the Jeremiah passage provides the focus of the new obedience to the law in 3:6. Within the framework created by these two texts, Paul's role as a servant of the new covenant involves mediating the Spirit, which in turn brings about transformation of the 'heart' that makes obedience to the law possible.

**"For this reason, Paul is careful in 3:6 *not* to establish a contrast between the law itself and the Spirit. Nor is the Spirit to be read as a code-word for the gospel, so that the letter/Spirit contrast is transformed into the law/gospel contrast.**

The problem with the Sinai covenant was not with the law itself, but, as Ezekiel and Jeremiah testify, with the people whose hearts remained hardened under it.

**The law remains for Paul, as it did for the Jewish traditions of his day, the holy, just and good expression of God's covenantal will (Rom 7:12). Indeed, Paul characterizes the law itself as "spiritual" (7:14).** As the expression of God's abiding will, it is not the law per se that kills, or any aspect or perversion of it, but the law *without the Spirit*, that is, the law as "letter." Devoid of God's Spirit, the law remains to those who encounter it merely a rejected declaration of God's saving purposes and promises, including its corresponding calls for repentance and obedience of faith. **Although the law declares God's will, it is powerless to enable people to keep it. Only the Spirit "gives life" by changing the human heart.**

**In this regard, Paul can say that the gospel too kills when it encounters those who are perishing (cf. 2:16).**

The letter/Spirit" contrast encapsulates the distinction between the role of the law within the Sinai covenant, in which it effects and pronounces judgment on Israel, and its new role within the new covenant in Christ, in which it is kept by the power of the Spirit. The contrast here is not between the law and the Spirit, as if the Spirit now replaces the expression of God's will, but between the law *as letter* and the Spirit. By choosing the designation "letter" (*gramma*) Paul brings out the nuance of the law under the old covenant (cf. 3:14) as that which remained expressed merely in writing, acknowledged as God's Word but not kept, rather than being obeyed from the heart by the power of the Spirit. The law without the Spirit remains merely a lifeless "letter."

**Under the old covenant, Israel as a whole received the law, but only the remnant received the Spirit** (see comments on 3:7-18). **In accordance with the establishment of the new covenant, the pouring out of God's Spirit on all those within the covenant community reverses the state of affairs.** In Christ it is no longer possible to be a member of the covenant people ethnically or corporately, but not spiritually. Those who are members of the new covenant community are

so only by virtue of having been made alive by the Spirit. Hence, the letter/Spirit contrast is a contrast between *the law itself without the Spirit*, as it was and still is experienced by the majority of Israelites under the Sinai covenant (cf. 3:14-15), and *the law with the Spirit*, as it is now experienced by those under the new covenant in Christ. At the center of this contrast is the determinative role played by the Spirit as the mark of the new covenant reality.

Accordingly, Paul's assertion in 3:6b that God made him sufficient to be a servant of the Spirit, in contrast to serving the letter, points to his assumption that just as Moses was called to be the mediator between God and Israel, Paul has been called to be an apostle of Christ to the church. Accordingly, the function of their ministries is radically different. Moses was called to mediate the law to a stiff-necked people, who could not obey it, whereas Paul is called to mediate the Spirit to a transformed people who are being empowered to keep the law as appropriated under the new covenant. The startling implication of the letter/Spirit contrast, therefore, is that Israel's promised restoration is now beginning to take place in and through Paul new covenant ministry within the church.

**The Nature of the covenant.** Our exposition of this passage [3:4-6] makes clear that how one understands Jeremiah 31:31-34 will determine to a great degree how one reads and hence applies this passage. For all are agreed that our expectations and self-understanding as people of the new covenant must be derived from the spiritual contours of that covenant relationship. The decisive question is what those contours actually are. In approaching the question it is important to make clear that the operating assumption of this commentary is that Paul did not rip scriptural passages out of their original contexts in order to use them as isolate proof texts for his own theology in service of his own polemical ends. Rather, Paul derives his thought and self-understanding from the Scriptures themselves, read solely in their own literary and canonical contexts. Thus, to bridge contexts we cannot merely read Paul's letters in isolation from that canonical contest. Instead we must return to the biblical sources of Paul own theology. To understand and apply Paul's calling to be an apostle of the "new covenant" in our own context thus necessitates understanding the new covenant within its own original setting.

What, then, are the contours of Jeremiah 31:31-34? It may be outlined in four main points.

(1) The new covenant is the divinely promised answer to the perennial problem of Israel's hard-hearted rebellion against Yahweh, which apart from the remnant, continues to characterize the people as a whole. **What is needed is nothing less than a new beginning, a new (or renewed) covenant**, in which Israel's relationship with Gd will be decisively changed.

(2) The nature of this new covenant is described in 31:32-33 by contrasting it to the Mosaic/Sinai covenant (cf. 11:1-11; cf. 22:9-10), a covenant with both the fathers (11:7) and the Israel and Judah of Jeremiah's day (11:9-10; 22:9-10) had broken in "the stubbornness of their evil hearts" (11:18). Hence, according to 31:32, the essential difference between the Sinai covenant and new covenant is that the latter will not be broken (though of course, God had remained faithful to *his* covenant commitments under the Sinai covenant, the problem was with the people; cf. 2:5-8). The new covenant is an everlasting covenant that will not be forgotten (50:5). Jeremiah 31:32 gives the reason for this confidence. In this new covenant God will place his law (LXX reads the plural "laws") within them ("in their minds") and "write in on their hearts."

In doing so, God will bring about a reversal of the present situation in which, instead of the law, "Judah's sin is engraved with an iron tool, inscribed with a flint point, on the tablets of their hearts" (Jer 17:1). In view of Jeremiah's emphasis on Israel's stubborn rebellion, beginning from the Exodus, this reversal of what is written on the heart implies that in the new covenant Israel's rebellious nature will be fundamentally transformed. As a result, her disobedience will be replaced by an open compliance with God's covenant stipulations in his law. In describing the law as written "on their hearts," Jeremiah is picturing a people who accepts God's law as their own and obey it willingly, rather than merely paying lip service to it, obeying it begrudgingly, or spurning it altogether (cf. Deut 6:4-5; 10:16; 11:18; Ps 40:8; Isa 51:7). In the words of the covenant formula, Yahweh "will be their God, and they will be [his] people" (Jer 31:33c).

**(3) The movement of thought from Jeremiah 31:32-33 reveals that the covenant relationship between God and his people, whether under the Sinai covenant or the new covenant to come, is maintained by keeping the law *in response to* God's prior act of redemption.** It must be emphasized that this is no truer of the new covenant than it was of the Sinai covenant before it (cf. Deut 6:2-25). Rather than suggesting that the law is somewhat negated or replaced by the new covenant, Jeremiah 31:31-33 emphasizes that it is the ability to keep the law as a result of having a transformed nature, not its removal, that distinguishes the new covenant from the covenant at Sinai. The contrast between the two covenants remains a contrast between two different conditions of the people and their corresponding different responses to the same law. The Israelites broke the Sinai covenant, being unable to keep it because of their stubborn, evil hearts, the people of the new covenant will keep God's law because of their transformed nature.

(4) Jeremiah 31:34 depicts the result of the transformation of God's people promised under the new covenant and its ultimate ground. As a result of having God's law written on their hearts, the people of the new covenant will *all* know him directly. Unlike the role played by the prophets and remnant within Israel,

they will no longer be any need to admonish others to "know the LORD." The call to repentance will no longer need to be issued within the community, but will go out instead from the covenant community to the world... It indicates as well that under the new covenant there will no longer be a distinction between those within the community who have a transformed heart and those who do not. By definition all those who belong to the new covenant community do so by virtue of their transformed nature.

**The people of the new covenant, in other words, are an extension of the faithful remnant within Israel who knew the Lord, not a continuation of the "mixed multitude" that constituted Israel's life as a nation and ethnic people (cf. Rom 11:1-24).** All of this based on the fact that despite Israel's past rebellion, God "will remember their sin no more" (Jer 31:34). The changed condition of God's people and their resultant obedience to the covenant, together with their renewed access to the knowledge of God, are based on their divine forgiveness that makes the new covenant possible.

**Consequently, in moving from Paul's day to our own, it is crucial to keep in view the covenant structure and promise of Jeremiah 31:34, both of which informed Paul's understanding of the gospel.** The foundation of the covenant is forgiveness, the provision of the new covenant is the Spirit, **the consequence of the covenant is obedience**, the promise of the covenant is to be in God's presence forever as his faithful people:

"I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me (Jer 32:40)." [emphasis mine]

**United Church of God's booklet *The New Covenant. Does it Abolish God's Law?* contains the following excellent interpretation:**

"As Paul explained, "He has *made us competent as ministers* of a new covenant—not *of the letter but of the Spirit*; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6, NIV).

**A major focus of the Sinai Covenant's "ministry" or priesthood —its service to the people on God's behalf—was to remind them constantly that God condemns both evil and evildoers. The New Covenant ministry is more focused on bringing sinners to heartfelt repentance so they can escape condemnation in the judgment to come (Acts 17:30-31).**

Paul describes the Sinai Covenant's approach as "glorious." He never belittles or berates it. God designed both covenants to gloriously fulfill their intended objectives. But the New Covenant is a better covenant that offers eternal forgiveness with eternal life, not just symbolic, temporary forgiveness within the community of Israel for the benefit of physical blessings only.

“If the [old] ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the [new] ministry that brings righteousness [by blotting out sins through the death of Christ and leading people to obedience and eternal life]!

“For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory [of the new administration of righteousness]. And if what was fading away [the Sinai Covenant’s physical reminders of the death penalty for sin] came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!” (2 Corinthians 3:9-11, NIV).

The Sinai Covenant’s glorious reminders of condemnation for guilt through symbolic sacrifices has been replaced by a more glorious and permanent administration of mercy and true righteousness through Jesus Christ as our new and permanent High Priest.” (p. 48)

### **What is "the letter" in 2 Corinthians 3:6 and what does it kill?**

<https://ebible.com/questions/14562-what-is-the-letter-in-2-corinthians-3-6-and-what-does-it-kill>

“Paul’s “letter vs. Spirit” teaching in Corinthians requires context derived from his other writings to fully appreciate its rich meaning. A direct answer to the question is that “letter” refers to the Torah (Law) but ONLY as it is read, and obedience attempted, WITHOUT eyes opened by the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit). **What it kills are those persons whose lives are revealed by the light of the Law (Rom 3:20, 7) to ultimately be characterized as unregenerate sinners (Rom 7:5).** The reason it “kills” the “old self” is because, as a “ministry of death” (2 Cor 3:7), this is one of its primary functions (cf. Rom 7:10). These meanings can be understood by reading a bit further down into the Corinthians passage (mouse over to read 2 Cor 3:14-18).”

## Appendix. Do the Words of Christ hold more weight than other portions of the Bible?

Antinomians have to minimise the words of the other inspired writers – especially those of the Old Testament – because, how else can they bring forth their antinomian ideas? How else can they emphasise the words of Christ as replacing that of the rest of the Bible rather than being based on the Old Testament teachings? They take what they want of Christ's and Paul's statements and attempt in some way or other, to reorient them to, in effect, undermine adherence to the law.

Of the mental gymnastics some of them go through is to agree that the Law is not done away but fulfilled in Christ Who, through the indwelling of the holy spirit, sort of acts out the moral code within you. The Sabbath becomes a rest in Christ, for example.

Nothing could be further from the truth. A good article on this is **Are Jesus Words More Important Than the Bible Writers? By Eric Lyons:**

<https://apologeticspress.org/are-jesus-words-more-important-than-the-bible-writers-5532/>

“Occasionally, Christians will make the statement that “Jesus’ words are more important than the words of the Bible writers.” Allegedly, the words of Christ deserve greater attention, allegiance, and admiration than the inspired words of Paul, Peter, James, and every other Bible writer. Some even go so far as to say, “Jesus’ teachings must be obeyed, while the teachings of the Bible writers could be overlooked.” After all, **Jesus** is the Son of God (Acts 9:20). **He** died for our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3). **He** saves us (Luke 19:10). The Bible writers were merely men—fallible men who made numerous mistakes in their lives, and whose salvation, like ours, comes only through Jesus Christ (John 14:6). So why should we consider their teachings on par with the teachings of Christ?

It clearly needs to be established that **no one is equal to God**. The Creator and Sustainer of the Universe is infinite in all of His glorious attributes. He **alone** is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. The Son of God is the only accountable person never to sin (Hebrews 4:15). It has always been wrong to attempt to put men, even Bible writers, on par with God (cf. Genesis 3:5; Ezekiel 28:1-8). Only the wicked try to elevate themselves to the status of deity. King Herod, for example, flirted with self-deification—and died in a horrific manner as a result (Acts 12:21-23). This incident stands in stark contrast to the reaction of a Bible writer, Paul, when the heathen at Lystra attempted to worship him. Rather than accept worship that is reserved only for God (Matthew 4:10), Paul and Barnabas refused it and rebuked those who attempted such worship (Acts 14:8-18).

Jesus, as God in the flesh (John 1:1-5,14,17), rightly accepted (and still accepts) His followers’ worship (John 9:35-38; Luke 24:52; Revelation 5:8-14). However, the fact that the words of the Bible writers deserve the same level of attention and allegiance as the words of Christ has nothing to do with attempting to put weak,

finite, sinful humanity on par with God. To say that **all** of the words of the Bible deserve our utmost respect and attention is actually in harmony with what the Bible itself teaches.

First, the only reason we have the words of Christ is because God used **men** to write them down. Jesus did not write the gospel accounts; Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all wrote about the life and teachings of Christ years after His death, resurrection, and ascension back into heaven. The apostle Paul also quoted Jesus occasionally (2 Corinthians 12:9; 1 Timothy 5:18; Acts 20:35; 22:7-21). To say that the words of Christ deserve man's ultimate respect, while the words of the Bible writers warrant less appreciation, is to ignore the fact that God gave us the teachings of Christ **through** inspired **men** (Galatians 1:12; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; John 17:20).

Second, at times in the gospel accounts there is no clear way to know for sure if the Bible writers were quoting Jesus or simply narrating the inspired story. As commentator Leon Morris concluded:

All are agreed that from time to time in the Gospel [of John—EL] we have the meditations of the [e]vangelist, but **it is difficult to know where they begin and end**. In the first century there were no devices like quotation marks to show the precise limits of quoted speech. The result is that we are always left to the probabilities and **we must work out for ourselves where a speech or quotation ends**.<sup>1</sup>

For example, we cannot say for sure if John 3:16—arguably the most frequently quoted Bible verse in the world—is a direct quotation of Jesus or a comment by John. The great thing is, we do not have to know this in order to know the teachings of God. Whether John 3:16 is a direct quote from Jesus or not, **it is from God**, and thus divinely authoritative.<sup>2</sup>

Third, consider also the fact that Jesus quoted from the Old Testament numerous times throughout His ministry. He quoted from Deuteronomy (6:13,16; 8:3) when tempted by Satan in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). When the conniving Pharisees asked Jesus a question about divorce (Matthew 19:1-10), the master Teacher directed their attention to God's plan for marriage as recorded in the first book of the Bible (Genesis 1:27; 2:24; 5:2). When dying on the cross (Matthew 27:46), Jesus quoted from Psalm 22:1. Genesis, Deuteronomy, and the book of Psalms did not **become** authoritative **when Jesus quoted from them**; they were already authoritative, **because they came from God**. After quoting from the relatively obscure words in Psalm 82:6, Jesus said, "the Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). That is, it is impossible for Scripture to be annulled, for its authority to be denied, or its truth to be withstood.<sup>3</sup> "It cannot be emptied of its force by being shown to be erroneous."<sup>4</sup> Why? Because it was the authoritative, inspired, inerrant Word of God, even before Jesus quoted from it.

Indeed, the fact that **Jesus** quoted extensively from the Old Testament, appealing to it as the authoritative "**Word of God**" (Mark 7:13; John 10:35), is further proof that **all** of the Scriptures—not just the words Jesus spoke while on Earth—deserve our utmost respect. It is illogical and without biblical backing to suggest that the

“Word of God” (whether the book of Genesis or the book of James) is somehow inferior to the “words of the Son of God.”<sup>5</sup>

Fourth, Jesus and the Bible writers even referred to narrational comments, and not just direct quotations from God, as being God’s Word. For example, when Jesus reminded His hypocritical hearers of God’s original design in marriage (Genesis 1-2), He quoted from **Moses** in Genesis 2:24. Yet Jesus explained that “He [God] who made them at the beginning...said” the words (Matthew 19:4-5). How could **God** have “said” this statement when Moses was not directly quoting God? Answer: **If it is in Scripture, it is “God’s Word”** (i.e., it was given by inspiration of God). When the writer of Hebrews quoted from the words of the psalmist (95:7-11), where nothing was said about this psalm being inspired by God, the Hebrews writer noted that these words were from “the Holy Spirit” (Hebrews 3:7-11). Why? Because the Holy Spirit guided the psalmist in what he wrote.

**To treat the words of Moses, Paul, Peter, and other inspired penmen as “second class” Scripture is equivalent to saying that “God’s Word is not as important as God’s Word.”** The fact is, “**All Scripture is given by inspiration of God**” (2 Timothy 3:16). Paul quoted from Jesus and the God-inspired prophet Moses when writing to Timothy and elevated both as “Scripture” (1 Timothy 5:18; cf. 2 Peter 3:15-16). Therefore, whether we are reading a direct quotation from God the Father (Matthew 3:17), or a statement made by God the Son, or a truth revealed by God the Spirit through one of His inspired spokesmen or penmen (1 Corinthians 2:10-16; 2 Peter 1:20-21), **all** of Scripture should be respected and rightly divided (2 Timothy 2:15). “I love Your commandments more than gold, yes, than fine gold!... Consider how I love Your precepts... My heart stands in awe of Your word. I rejoice in Your word as one who finds great treasure... I love your law... My soul keeps Your testimonies, and I love them exceedingly” (Psalm 119:127,159-163,165,167).

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris (1995), *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), revised edition, p. 202, emp. added.

<sup>2</sup> A person should be careful not to assume that red-letter Bibles have all of (and only) Jesus’ direct quotations printed in red. Judgment calls must be made by publishers as to which words they put in red and which words they do not. The fact is, whatever color publishers make the words of Jesus and the Bible writers, **all of them** deserve our utmost respect because **all of them** come from God. As the psalmist proclaimed: “The **entirety** of Your word is truth, and **every one** of your righteous judgments endures forever” (Psalm 119:160).

<sup>3</sup> See Benjamin Warfield (1970 reprint), *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian & Reformed), pp. 138-140.

<sup>4</sup> Morris, p. 468.

<sup>5</sup> Since Jesus fulfilled the Old Law (Matthew 5:10,125 in7), taking “it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross,” God’s people have been amenable to the New Law (Colossians 1:14;

Hebrews 8:7-13). Regardless of what law man is under, however, it is still proper to acknowledge that **all** Scripture should be respected because it is all **God's** Word.

## Appendix. Did Christ Approve Profaning of the Sabbath?

Some feel that because Christ is our rest and Sabbath, therefore we should worship Him on His resurrection day (supposedly Sunday morning). As such they interpret Matthew 12:5 as if He was really advocating the doing away with the Sabbath. It certainly opens up a proverbial Pandora's box of commandment obedience.

Here are two helpful quotes to assist in understanding what this means:

"Profane the Sabbath - He referred them to the conduct of the priests also. On the Sabbath days they were engaged, as well as on other days, in killing beasts for sacrifice, Numbers 28:9-10. Two lambs were killed on the Sabbath, in addition to the daily sacrifice. The priests must be engaged in killing them, and making fires to burn them in sacrifice, whereas to kindle a fire was expressly forbidden the Jews on the Sabbath, Exodus 35:3. **They did that which, for other persons to do, would have been "profaning" the Sabbath. Yet they were blameless.** They did what was necessary and commanded. This was done in the very temple, too, the place of holiness, where the law should be most strictly observed." (Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Whole Bible* online)

In other words, they were not really profaning the Sabbath any more than the armies of Israel were guilty of murder when God ordered them to slay pagan tribes, otherwise they would have been guilty of sin and literally profaning. It must be the use of sarcasm, irony or tongue in cheek again by Christ (a figure of speech).

"The Jews were so superstitious, concerning the observance of the Sabbath, that in their wars with *Antiochus Epiphanes*, and the *Romans*, they thought it a crime even to attempt to defend themselves on the Sabbath: when their enemies observed this, they deterred their operations to that day. It was through this, that *Pompey* was enabled to take Jerusalem." (Adam Clarke, *Commentary and Critical Notes* online)

What they regarded as profaning and what God does, are two different things.

Given the biblical sense of this Scripture and the above, perhaps the verse (Matt 12:5) should be translated:

"Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple '**profane**' the Sabbath and are guiltless?" (ie inverted commas to indicate sarcasm - see also *Three Times Jesus used Sarcasm to Make a Point* by Jayson Bradley, <https://relevantmagazine.com/god/4-times-jesus-used-sarcasm-to-make-a-point/>)

## Appendix. Ancient Biblical Concepts and Modern Interpretations

Concerning Old Testament symbols, figures of speech and typologies, **D. Brent Sandy and John Walton** in *The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority*, warn:

“... we frequently need to put the brakes on and ask whether we’re reading the Bible in light of the original culture or in light of contemporary culture. While the Bible’s values were very different from ancient cultures, it obviously communicated in the existing languages and within cultural customs of its days” (p. 13).

Similarly, **John Walton** wrote in *NIV Application Commentary. Genesis*:

“... when we read a text written in another language and addressed to another culture, we must translate the culture as well as the language if we hope to understand the text fully...”

“One of the greatest obstacles we face in trying to interpret the Bible is that we are inclined to think in our own cultural and linguistic categories. This is no surprise since our categories are often all that we have, but it is a problem because our own categories often do not suffice and sometimes mislead” (pp. 9, 67-68).

**Daniel Block**, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 25-48, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, pp. 371, 587:

“... R. Bartelmus recognizes the problem of imposing modern Western standards of logic on ancient literature...”

“The prophetic charge **consists of a series of clauses whose sense is not always clear and whose arrangement is certainly not logical by Western standards.**”

**Anchor Bible, “Exegesis,” by Douglas Stuart**:

“In all lexical study, it is imperative that the meaning in the present context be given precedence over all other considerations. The fact that a word may be used 99 percent of the time it is found in ancient writings to mean one thing is essentially irrelevant if in the context of the biblical passage under study it is used to mean something else. Any author may choose to use even a common word in an unusual way. Thus the final question must always be “How is it used here?””

Interestingly he asserts that the primary question in lexical analysis is “the question of meaning in its immediate context.”

**John Oswalt in "Recent Studies in Old Testament Eschatology and Apocalyptic," *Journal of the Evangelical Society*, vol 24, 1985, p. 295 notes:**

"If apocalyptic represents a development, one would expect the earlier stage to fall by the wayside.... [Instead] **the NT, while clearly availing itself of the expanded imagery and thought forms of apocalyptic, equally clearly retains a point of view fully consonant with OT prophecy....** [Thus] the [Biblical] apocalyptic view did not replace the prophetic one but rather existed beside it, enriching and expanding it, but never supplanting it" ("Recent" 301). Cf. G. Ladd's significant contribution to the study of Biblical apocalyptic, "Why Not Prophetic Apocalyptic?", JBL 76 (1957) 193-200." [JBL = Journal of Biblical Literature]

**Craig Broyles, *Psalms. New International Bible Commentary***

"It is characteristic of Hebrew literary style to state a preference of one thing over another in terms that sound like an absolute dichotomy to our Western ears..." (p. 192).

Thus figures of speech and chiasms are important to study for the interpretation and understanding of Scripture.

**In *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, Ed Sanders wrote:**

"God has chosen Israel and Israel has accepted the election. In his role as King, God gave Israel commandments which they are to obey as best they can.

Obedience is rewarded and disobedience punished. In case of failure to obey, however, man has recourse to divinely ordained means of atonement, in all of which repentance is required. As long as he maintains his desire to stay in the covenant, he has a share in God's covenantal promises, including life in the world to come. The intention and effort to be obedient constitute the condition for remaining in the covenant, but they do not earn it." (p. 180.)

**Mark Nanos, *Paul's Relationship to Torah in Light of His Strategy "to Become Everything to Everyone" (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)* for *New Perspectives on Paul and the Jews: Interdisciplinary Academic Seminar*, Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven, Belgium, September 14-15, 2009:**

**"Where NT scholarship is concerned, the literature can now be read as Jewish correspondence, written by and for Jews and gentiles concerned with the Jewish context of their faith in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah- Simply put, we can now read the NT as Jewish book."** Namos further says: "The very Jewish Paul whom Luke portrays in Acts can be seen also in Romans." Namos, *Mystery*, 4. 72 op cit. 18."

***Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle* by Mark D Nanos.**

**Description:**

“In these chapters, a group of renowned international scholars seek to describe Paul and his work from “within Judaism,” rather than on the assumption, still current after thirty years of the “New Perspective,” that in practice Paul left behind aspects of Jewish living [ie Pharisaical traditions] after his discovery of Jesus as Christ (Messiah). After an introduction that surveys recent study of Paul and highlights the centrality of questions about Paul’s Judaism, chapters explore the implications of reading Paul’s instructions as aimed at Christ-following non-Jews, **teaching them how to live in ways consistent with Judaism [ie Biblical law] while remaining non-Jews.** “

As one person wrote of this work:

“As important a development in New Testament studies as "the new perspective on Paul" and "Paul and Empire," the more recently defined perspective of "Paul Within Judaism" has finally, with this invaluable collection of essays, been articulated in an accessible way for a more broad audience. The Jewish and Christian scholars represented in these pages present compelling and persuasive arguments that even scholars working from the (now not so new) new perspective haven't yet fully worked through the implications that Paul, as a second-Temple Jew, did not see himself as creating a new religion. **Their case for a stronger continuity between Paul and Judaism [ie abiding by God's commandments] merits serious consideration.**” (Mark Mattison on March 7, 2015)

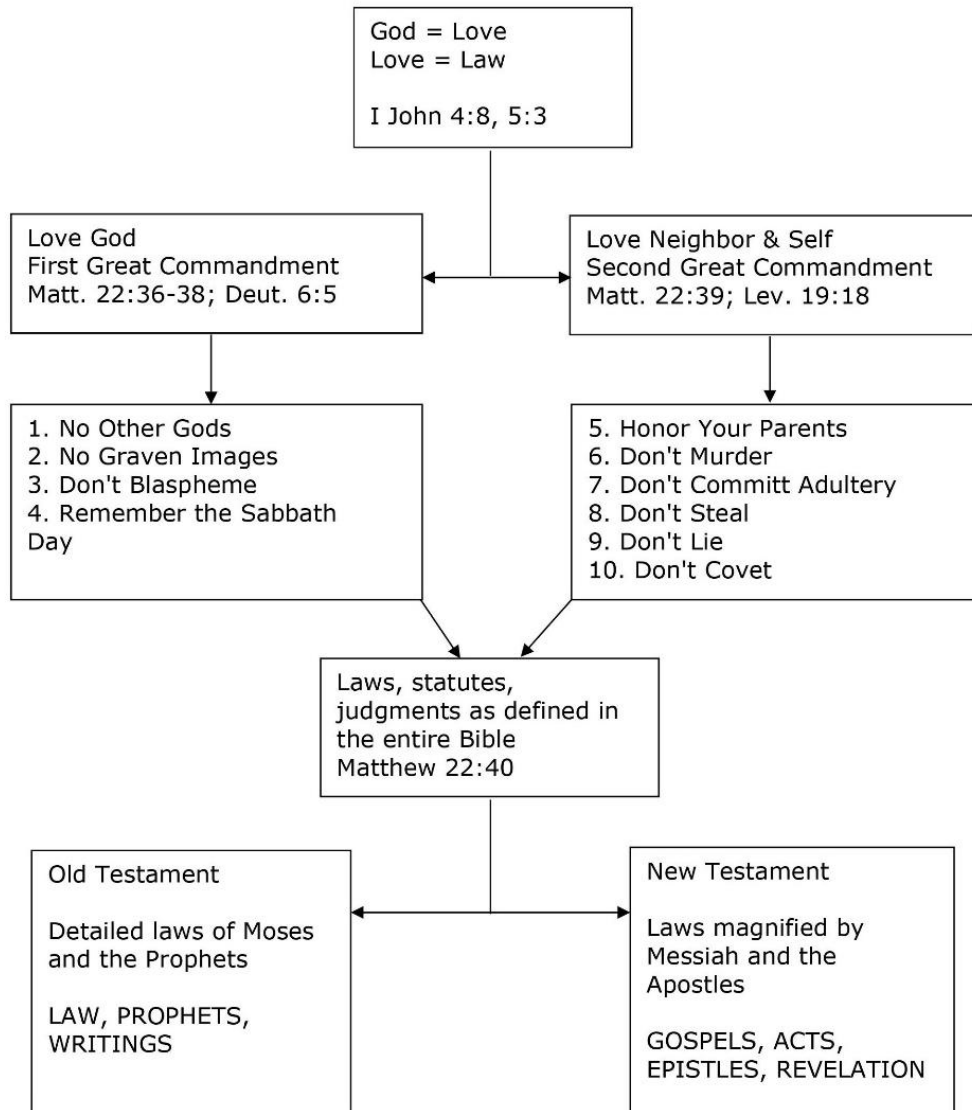
Another wrote:

“This book of essays opened my eyes to a new understanding of Paul within his own historical context of Second Temple Judaism in the Diaspora instead of from anachronistic interpretations from later centuries. **Mark Nanos has convinced me that Paul never left Judaism [ie the commandments] but was seeking a way to incorporate non-Jewish believers in Christ into the people of God, as non-Jews. I recommend this book for all who are in ministry, or graduate biblical studies.**” (Susan on June 15, 2015)

## Appendix. Law of God in Graphics

### BIBLICAL LAW

#### Relationship of Commandments & Law



# What is the Law?

**The Law is a Rewarder**

Psalm 19:11

**The Law is a Discerner**

Psalm 19:12

**The Law is a Keeper**

Psalm 19:11-13

**The Law is Protection**

Psalm 91:4/Psalm 119:165

**The Law is Freedom**

Psalm 119:45/James 1:25

**The Law Gives Peace**

Psalm 119:165

**The Law is Holy**

Romans 7:12

**The Law is Good**

Romans 7:12

**The Law is Just**

Romans 7:12

**The Law is Spiritual**

Romans 7:14

**The Law is Pure**

Psalm 19:8

**The Law Gives Understanding**

Psalm 119:169

**The Law is Knowledge**

Hosea 4:6

**The Law is Love**

Mathew 22:38-40

**The Law is Healing**

Deut. 7:16/Ex. 15:26

**The Law is Prosperity**

Deut. 28:8

**The Law is Wisdom**

Psalm 19:7

**The Law is Perfect**

Psalm 19:7

**The Law is Right**

Psalm 19:8

**The Law is Radiant**

Psalm 19:8

**The Law is Truth**

Psalm 19:9/119:142,151

**The Law is Right & Righteous**

Psalm 19:8-9

**The Law is Pure**

Psalm 19:9

**The Law Endures Forever**

Psalm 19:9

**The Law is Firm**

Psalm 19:9

**The Law is More Precious Than Gold**

Psalm 19:10

**The Law is Sweeter Than Honey**

Psalm 19:10

**The Law is a Warning**

Psalm 19:11

**IS YOUR UNDERSTANDING BASED ON SCRIPTURE?**



**So God's Sabbaths, Feasts & Dietary instructions have been done away with?**

**Then why do we see these things in the New Millennium?**

**The Sabbath – ref. Isaiah 56, 58, 66:23, Ezekiel 20:12 & 20, 44:24, 45:17, 46:1-3 & 12.**

**The Feasts – ref. Isaiah 33:20, Ezekiel 45:17-25, 46:9-11, Zechariah 14:16-21**

**Dietary instructions – Isaiah 65:3-5, 66:17-18**

<p>† <b>First Commandment: You shall have no other gods before Me</b> Matt. 4:10; 6:24; 22:37-38; Luke 4:8; Rev. 14:7.</p> <p>† <b>Second Commandment: Thou shalt not worship Idols</b> Acts 15:20; 17:16; 29; 1 Cor. 5:10-11; 6:9; 10:7, 14, 19; 12:2; 2 Cor. 6:16; Gal. 5:20; Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 1:9; 1 Peter 4:3; 1 John 5:21; Rev. 2:14; 9:20; 21:8; 22:15.</p> <p>† <b>Third Commandment: Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain</b> Matt. 5:33-34; 1 Tim. 6:1; James 2:7.</p> <p>† <b>Fourth Commandment: Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it Holy</b> Matt. 12:8, 12; 24:20; Mark 1:21; 2:27-28; 6:2; Luke 4:16, 31; 6:5; 23:56; Acts 13:14, 42, 44; 15:21; 16:13; 17:1-2; 18:4; Heb. 4:4, 9-10 (See also Amplified, ASV, BBE, NASB, NIV, RSV and NRSV.)</p> <p>† <b>Fifth Commandment: Honor your Father and your Mother</b> Matt. 15:4; 19:19; Mark 7:10; 10:19; Luke 18:20; Rom. 1:30; Eph. 6:1-2; Col. 3:20; 2 Tim. 3:2.</p> <p>† <b>Sixth Commandment: Thou shalt not Murder</b></p>	<p>Matt. 5:21-22; 19:18; Mark 7:21; 10:19; Luke 18:20; Rom. 1:29; 13:9; Gal. 5:21; 1 Tim. 1:9; James 2:11; 1 Peter 4:15; 1 John 3:15; Rev. 9:21; 21:8; 22:15.</p> <p>† <b>Seventh Commandment: Thou shalt not commit Adultery</b> Matt. 5:27-28; 19:18; Mark 7:21; 10:11-12, 19; Luke 16:18; 18:20; Acts 21:25; Rom. 1:29; 2:22; 7:3; 13:9; 1 Cor. 5:11; 6:9, 18; 10:8; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; 1 Thess. 4:3; Heb. 13:4; James 2:11; 2 Peter 2:14; Jude 1:7; Rev. 2:14; 2:21-22; 9:21.</p> <p>† <b>Eighth Commandment: Thou shalt not Steal</b> Matt. 19:18; Mark 7:22; 10:19; Luke 18:20; Rom. 2:21; 13:9; 1 Cor. 5:10-11; 6:10; Eph. 4:28; 1 Peter 4:15; Rev. 9:21.</p> <p>† <b>Ninth Commandment: Thou shalt not bear false witness</b> Matt. 15:19; 19:18; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20; John 8:44; Acts 5:3-4; Rom. 1:29; 13:9; Eph. 4:25; Col. 3:9; 1 Tim. 4:2; 2 Tim. 3:3; Rev. 21:8; 22:15.</p> <p>† <b>Tenth Commandment: Thou shalt not Covet your neighbor's things</b> Mark 7:22; Luke 12:15; Acts 20:33; Rom. 1:29; 7:7; 13:9; 1 Cor. 5:10-11; 6:10; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3, 5; 1 Tim. 6:10; 2 Tim. 3:2; 2 Peter 2:14; Heb. 13:5.</p>
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All so - called Gentiles, who have made YahShua the Sovereign of their lives, is Israel. Therefore, you are required to live as your Messiah did – a Covenant-keeping Israelite.

HOLY BIBLE

“One law and one custom shall be for you, and for the Gentile who lives with you.”  
(Numbers 15:16)

“Let no Gentile who is bound to Yahweh say, ‘Yahweh has separated me from His people.’” (Isaiah 56:3)

“Let...your people be my people and your Elohim my Elohim...May Yahweh deal with me...” (Ruth 1:16, 17)

Messiah YahShua said: “If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love.” (John 15:10)

www.agudatbris.com

Dear Pastor,

When you say "the Law was a burden and needed to be done away with by Christ", you are saying these instructions are a burden that we needed Jesus to free us from:

- Love your neighbor as yourself.
- Don't bear a grudge against your neighbor.
- Don't curse the deaf.
- Don't place a stumbling block before the blind.
- Honor and respect the elderly.
- Be holy.
- Don't have intercourse with animals.
- Don't commit incest.
- Don't engage in witchcraft.
- Don't eat things God didn't create to be food.
- Have good hygiene.
- Don't oppress your neighbor.
- Treat the foreigner with you as one of your own.
- Don't engage in child sacrifice.
- Don't curse your parents.
- Don't commit homosexuality
- Don't drink blood.
- Be honest in business practices.

This is just a small portion of the incredible instructions given to us in the book of Leviticus. The commandments I've listed can be found in chapters 15 through 20, along with many more. Before you decide the book of Leviticus is no longer important for those in Christ, you may want to read it first. This book is full of wise and perfect instruction from our Father, and His Son Jesus quoted from it constantly. Our Father gives us GOOD instruction, and we should not forsake it.

## Suggested readings – Bible Law

- “Does Mark’s Jesus Abrogate Torah?: Jesus’ Purity Logion and its Illustration in Mark 7:15-23,” *Journal of the Jesus Movement in its Jewish Setting*, No. 4 (2017), pp. 21-41 by John van Maaren
- “How is the Christian to Construe Old Testament Law?” *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, Vol. 12 No. 2 (2002), pp. 199-216 by Elmer Martens
- “Leviticus 18:5 and the Law’s Call to Faith: A Positive Reassessment of Paul’s View of the Law,” *Themelios*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (2020), pp. 43–57 by Etienne Jodar
- “Love is the Fulfillment of the Law” – Towards and Understanding of Paul’s Use of Torah for his *Paraklesis* in the New Testament Church: A Study on Romans 13:8-10. A thesis for the degree of Master of Arts by Benjamin Marx
- “Paul and the Torah According to Luke,” *Kesher. Journal of Messianic Judaism*, Issue 14, Winter (2002), pp. 61-73 by David Rudolph
- “Should the Local Church Resist Texts in Scripture that Clash with Western Culture? The Test Case of Leviticus 21:16–24,” *Themelios*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (2020), pp. 32–42 by Katherine Smith
- “The Ethics of the Old Testament,” by William Greene, Jr, *Princeton Theological Review*, XXVIII (1929), pp. 316-66
- *An Eye for an Eye* by Christopher Wright
- *An Introduction to Biblical Law* by William Morrow
- *Are the Mosaic Laws for Today?* by Francis Lee
- *Biblical Law and its Relevance* by Jo Sprinkle
- *Biblical Law. A Text of the Statutes, Ordinances, and Judgments of the Bible* by H Clark
- *Breaking One Means Breaking Ten* by Edwin Webster
- *By this Standard. The Authority of God’s Law Today* by Greg Bahnsen
- *Digest of the Divine Law* by Howard Rand
- *God is Just: A Defense of the Old Testament Civil Laws* by Steve Halbrook
- *Graded Holiness. A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* by Philip Jensen
- *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* by G K. Beale
- *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes. Cultural Studies in the Gospels* by Kenneth E. Bailey
- *Leviticus as Literature* by Mary Douglas
- *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* by Christopher J. H. Wright
- *Old Testament Law for Bible students, classified and arranged as in modern legal systems* by Roger Galer
- *Old Testament Law for Christians* by Roy Gane
- *Old Testament Use of the Old Testament* by Gary E Schnittjer
- *Our Lost Legacy. Christianity’s Hebrew Heritage* by John Garr
- *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle* by Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm
- *Studies in Biblical Law* by Harold Wiener
- *The 10 Commandments. What They Mean, Why They Matter, and Why We Should Obey Them* by Kevin DeYoung
- *The Decalogue in the Sermon on the Mount* by Dan Liroy

- *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Vol. 1) by Rousas Rushdoony
- *The Pauline Paradox: What did Paul teach about the Law?* by 119 Ministries
- *The World Under God's Law* by T. Robert Ingram
- *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* by Greg Bahnsen
- *To Heal the Nation* by J. Franklin Snook
- *Toward Old Testament Ethics* by Walter Kaiser

## Suggested Reading – Bible Law Indexes

Click on the titles below to access these articles and papers at [www.friendsofsabbath.org](http://www.friendsofsabbath.org)

- [\*A Handbook of Bible Law\*](#) by C. A. Weisman
- [\*Bible Law Course\*](#)
- [\*Bible Law Index of the Laws, Statutes and Judgments of God\*](#) by P. M. Raymond
- [\*Bible Law Index of the Laws, Statutes and Judgments of God\*](#) by W. & J. Fennell (edited by R. C. Nickels)
- [\*Bible Law Index of the Laws, Statutes and Judgments of God\*](#) by W. & J. Fennell (edited by R. C. Nickels) (HTML version)
- [\*Bible Law Index of the Laws, Statutes and Judgments of God\*](#) by W & J Fennell (original version)
- [\*Digest of Divine Law\*](#) by H. Rand
- [\*God's Law. A Blessing and a Curse\*](#)
- [\*Guide to the Laws of the Bible Given to Israel\*](#) by B.I.W.F.
- [\*History of Biblical Law from Israel to America\*](#)
- [\*Institutes of Biblical Law\*](#) by R. J. Rushdoony (over 1,000 pages of analysis of the 10 Commandments)
- [\*Laws of God lists\*](#) by J. Prock
- [\*Laws of the Bible\*](#) by Sovereignty, Education and Defense Ministry
- [\*Old Testament Law\*](#)
- [\*Primer on Biblical Law\*](#) by R. C. Nickels
- [\*The Laws of the Bible\*](#) by F. K. Farr
- [\*The Laws of the Bible\*](#) contained in the Open Bible Expanded Edition
- [\*The Owner's Manual. The Law of Moses... What is it, and what are we supposed to do with it?\*](#) by L. Power

## Suggested Reading – The Old Testament in the New

- *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* by G. Beale and D. Carson (eds)
- *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* by G. Beale
- *Parallel Passages in New Testament Quoted from Old Testament*  
<https://www.blueletterbible.org/study/misc/quotes.cfm>
- *The Old Testament in the New: An Introduction* by S. Moyise



## Suggested Reading – *Understanding Biblical Law: Skills for Thinking With and Through Torah*

*Understanding Biblical Law: Skills for Thinking With and Through Torah*

Author: Dru Johnson, Baker Academic, 2025.

This book addresses a common modern disconnect with biblical law, often viewed as a rigid set of rules with severe penalties. Johnson invites readers to re-enter the ancient Israelite worldview, where laws (Torah) were celebrated for their beauty and wisdom, as seen in the Psalms. He argues that approaching biblical law through contemporary legal lenses obscures its sophistication, theological depth, and practical function as a tool for moral reasoning rather than mere rule-following.

### Key Themes and Approach

- **Deconstructing Myths:** Johnson dismantles misconceptions by contrasting biblical law with both modern Western law and ancient Near Eastern codes. For instance, he shows how Torah emphasizes communal wisdom, rituals, and narratives over individualistic punishment.
- **Skill-Based Interpretation:** The book equips readers with practical skills for engaging Old Testament law, including:
  - Discerning literary and historical contexts.
  - Applying laws to real-life scenarios (e.g., via an interwoven "ancient murder mystery" narrative that illustrates Israelite reasoning).
  - Thinking *with* Torah (using it as a framework for ethical decision-making) rather than just *about* it.
- **Broader Implications:** It explores Torah's influence on Hellenistic Judaism, the New Testament, and contemporary ethics, making it relevant for scholars, students, and lay readers.

The structure includes:

- **Part 1:** Entering the ancient legal world and addressing "WEIRD" (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) biases.
- **Part 2:** Core skills for interpretation.
- **Part 3:** Advanced thinking with biblical law, including ancient context and literary analysis.
- Interludes: Fictional episodes demonstrating practical application.

### Praise and Endorsements

- "Johnson clears the modern fog surrounding ancient legislation, guiding readers to see Torah not as a harsh legal code but as a profound moral vision." — Joshua Berman, Bar-Ilan University
- "Short and sweet but nuanced and insightful, this is the introductory textbook I've been seeking." — Michelle Knight, Wheaton College.

## Suggested Reading – *The Cambridge Companion To Law in the Hebrew Bible*

**The Cambridge Companion To Law In The Hebrew Bible**

**Edited by Bruce Wells**

**Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2024**

This volume is a major new scholarly resource that brings together leading experts in biblical studies, ancient Near Eastern law, and legal theory to examine the legal materials in the Hebrew Bible (primarily the Torah/Pentateuch, but also prophetic and wisdom literature). It replaces or significantly updates older works like the 1990s *Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* sections on law or the brief treatments in anchor bible dictionaries.

The book is divided into four main parts with 19 chapters plus introduction/conclusion.

### **Part I – Contexts and Comparisons**

Places Israelite law within its ancient Near Eastern environment.

1. The Legal Heritage of the Ancient Near East – Sophie Démare-Lafont
2. Law in the Persian Period – Anselm C. Hagedorn
3. Law in Second Temple Judaism – Hannah K. Harrington
4. Law in the Dead Sea Scrolls – Molly M. Zahn

Key takeaway: Biblical law is neither wholly unique nor simply derivative; it engages creatively and polemically with Mesopotamian (e.g., Hammurabi), Hittite, and Egyptian traditions.

### **Part II – Legal Texts and Collections**

Detailed studies of the major biblical law corpora.

5. The Covenant Code (Exodus 20:22–23:33) – Bruce Wells
6. The Priestly/Holiness Legislation (esp. Leviticus 17–26) – Jeffrey Stackert
7. The Deuteronomic Law Code (Deuteronomy 12–26) – Bernard M. Levinson & Jason A. Staples
8. Narrative Case Law and the So-Called “Goring Ox” Laws – Pamela Barmash
9. Casuistic and Apodictic Law – Jonathan Vroom

Emphases: Multiple redactional layers, ideological rewriting (especially Deuteronomy reworking earlier codes), and the blending of casuistic (“if a man...”) and apodictic (“you shall not...”) forms.

### **Part III – Substantive Areas of Law**

Topical treatments across the biblical codes.

10. Property and Contract – Sandra Jacobs
11. Family Law and Inheritance – David Caleb Williams
12. Slavery and Social Death – Ryan P. Bonfiglio
13. Criminal Law and Punishment – Tracy L. Lemos
14. Torture, Execution, and the Lex Talionis – Andrew J. Scherer
15. Warfare and Treaty Law – Melissa Ramos
16. Ritual and Sacrifice as Legal Institutions – William K. Gilders

Notable points: Strong evidence of debt slavery rather than chattel slavery as the dominant form; the famous *lex talionis* (“eye for an eye”) is almost certainly monetary compensation in practice, not literal mutilation; women and non-elites have more agency in some areas than traditionally assumed.

**Part IV – Interpretation and Reception**

17. Rabbinic Interpretation of Biblical Law – Christine Hayes
18. Law in the New Testament and Early Christianity – Lutz Doering
19. Medieval and Modern Jewish Interpretation – Yishai Kiel

Shows how the originally “dead” legal texts of the Hebrew Bible were reactivated and transformed in later Judaism and Christianity.

**Overall Theses and Contributions of the Volume**

- Biblical law is not a unified legal system but a composite literary anthology shaped by centuries of editing and ideological conflict.
- It is deeply embedded in ancient Near Eastern legal culture but often subverts or transcends it (e.g., humanitarian motives, covenant theology, concern for the poor and marginal).
- Many supposedly “primitive” or harsh laws (cities of refuge, levirate marriage, slavery regulations) are better understood as attempts to limit abuse or provide social welfare within the constraints of an agrarian society.
- Modern categories (religious vs. civil law, criminal vs. tort) do not map neatly onto biblical categories; ritual, ethical, and civil obligations are intertwined.
- The volume consciously moves away from older Christian supersessionist readings that portrayed biblical law as inferior or merely preparatory, and also from maximalist Jewish apologetic claims of total uniqueness.

## Suggested Reading – Select Church of God Literature

- *And Lawlessness will abound* by Church of the Eternal God
- *Are Christians under the Law?* by Intercontinental Church of God
- *Are Christians under the Law?* By Church of God International
- *Biblical Principles of Health* by Living Church of God
- *God's Law ... or God's Grace?* by Church of the Eternal God
- *How Did Jesus Christ Fulfil the Law and the Prophets?* by Christian Biblical Church of God
- *Old Testament Laws - Still valid today?* by Eternal Church of God
- *The New Covenant. Does it Abolish God's Law?* by United Church of God
- *The Ten Commandments* by Living Church of God
- *The Ten Commandments* by Worldwide Church of God
- *The Ten Commandments. Are they required today?* by Eternal Church of God
- *Was God's Law in force before Sinai?* by Intercontinental Church of God
- *What is meant by Works of Law?* by Christian Biblical Church of God
- *Why the Clean and the Unclean?* by Eternal Church of God

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119 Ministries. (c2010).	<i>FAQ - Galatians 4:9 – Is the “Law of God” Actually “Weak and Beggarly Elements?”</i> , <a href="http://www.TestEverything.net">www.TestEverything.net</a>
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# ***Law of God Resources and Handbook of Quotes***

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