

The Problem with Paul

Or

**Why the Epistles of the Apostle Paul *Cannot* be Used to
Justify the Non-Observance of the Torah**

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Complete Jewish Bible, David H. Stern,
Messianic Jewish Resources International Copyright © May 2007

¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, ¹⁵ and regard the patience of our Lord *as* salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, ¹⁶ as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. ¹⁷ You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, ¹⁸ but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

2 Peter 3

Fore Word

This book is written to our Christian friends.

Please forgive me if the following statement sounds arrogant or patronizing; it is not meant to be. It is meant only to state a fact:

For centuries in the Body of Christ we have been lied to.

We have been told that as believers in Jesus that since Jesus “fulfilled” the Law as found in the “Old Testament” and “did away with the Law” that we don’t have to keep it.

We probably didn’t realize it, since it was handed to us ever since we were new to the faith.

Most pastors are unaware of the lie when they teach against the Law; some professors are unaware of the lie when they teach in our Bible Colleges and Seminaries. Most believers are unaware of the lie, since their pastors and professors do not teach the truth about the Torah in the lives of believers in Jesus.

As a result, we are told, we don’t have to observe the Biblical feasts or the Sabbath (Leviticus 23), or the dietary laws (Leviticus 11) or *any* of the laws found in the Old Testament, *except* the Moral Law, the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20).

But even if we were to concede that we are to observe only the Ten Commandments, we still fudge it by not observing the Sabbath on the correct day of the week! So, we only observe the 9 ½ commandments of the Ten!

I don't like being the bearer of bad tidings, but I'll go further by saying that we (in the Body of Messiah) have not only *disobeyed* the commandments as found in the Torah of God, we have *flaunted* that disobedience under the guise of "liberty" from the Torah!

So, with all that, where *do* we get this anti-Law (anti-nomian) attitude in the Body of Christ? It is mostly quarried from the writings of the Apostle Paul.

The purpose of this book is to share with believers in Jesus that we need to seriously reconsider what we have been taught and insure that what we have been taught by our pastors, professors, and fellow believers is indeed true and solidly in line with all of Scripture – or we may one day realize we have lived much of our Christian lives in opposition to God.

We will first consider Jesus' position on the subject and then look at authority: first of Jesus to Paul, then of Moses to Paul.

Who has the greater authority? And if Paul is contrary to either Jesus or Moses, who wins?

We need all to "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15)

We can't simply point to our pastors, professors, and fellow believers on judgment day and say, "They made me believe this!"

No, we chose to believe it ourselves and we shall answer for what we do. You can't simply point a finger at someone else without three fingers pointing back at you from your own hand!

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Chapter One – Jesus’ position on the Law and the Prophets

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill (restore). "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter [yud] or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."
Matthew 5:17 – 19

David Bivin and Roy Blizzard, Jr. in their book, *Understanding the difficult words of Jesus*, seek to address a misunderstanding in the body of Messiah regarding the terms “abolish” and “fulfill”:

In Matthew 5:17, Jesus claims he has no intention of abolishing or suspending the Mosaic Law. For most Christians, this comes as a shock. After all, did not the Apostle Paul say, “Christ is the end of the Law” (Romans 10:4)? Jesus’ statement seems such a contradiction that many Christian commentators have tried to explain it away by suggesting that his words do not really mean what they seem to mean. Their attempts are futile.

The meaning of Jesus’ words is clear. As long as the world lasts, he goes on to say in verse 18, the Law will last. Here Jesus is in complete agreement with the Rabbis: “Everything has an end heaven and earth have an end except one thing which has no end. And what is that? The Law” (Genesis Rabbah 10:1); “No letter will ever be abolished from the Law” (Exodus Rabbah 6:1), “Should the world unite to uproot one word of the Law, they would be unable to do it” (Leviticus Rabbah 19:2).

... Undoubtedly, in trying to understand this passage, everything hinges on the meaning of the words “destroy”

and “fulfill” In verse 17. What does Jesus mean by “destroying the law” and “fulfilling the Law?”

“Destroy” and “fulfill” are technical terms used in rabbinical argumentation. When a rabbi felt that a colleague had misinterpreted a passage of Scripture, he would say, “You are destroying the Law!” Needless to say, in most cases his colleague strongly disagreed. What was “destroying the Law” for one rabbi, was “fulfilling the Law” (correctly interpreting Scripture) for another.

What we see in Matthew 5:17ff is a rabbinical discussion. Someone has accused Jesus of “destroying” the Law. Of course, neither Jesus nor his accuser would ever think of literally destroying the Law. Furthermore, it would never enter the accuser’s mind to charge Jesus with intent to abolish part or all of the Mosaic Law. What is being called into question is Jesus’ system of interpretation, the way he interprets Scripture.

When accused, Jesus strongly denies that his method of interpreting Scripture “destroys” or weakens its meaning. He claims, on the contrary, to be more orthodox than his accuser. For Jesus, a “light” commandment (“Do not bear hatred in your heart”) is as important as a “heavy” commandment (“Do not murder”). And a disciple who breaks even a “light” commandment will be considered “light” (have an inferior position) in Jesus’ movement (Matthew 5:19).

“Never imagine for a moment,” Jesus says, “that I intend to abrogate the Law by misinterpreting it. My intent is not to weaken or negate the Law, but by properly interpreting God’s written Word I aim to establish it, that is, make it even more lasting. I would never invalidate the Law by effectively removing something from it through misinterpretation.

Heaven and earth would sooner disappear than something disappear from the Law. Not the smallest letter in the

alphabet, the yod, nor even its decorative spur, will ever disappear from the Law.”¹

Furthermore He warns us against anyone who nullifies even the least of the commandments and so teaches others. **“If anyone disobeys the least of these mitzvot,”** He says, **“he will be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches others will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.”** (Matthew 5:19 - *Complete Jewish Bible*, David H. Stern)

If there is any New Testament passage that wholeheartedly supports what was written in the Law in the lives of believers, this is it. This means that no one (short of God Himself) has the authority to annul, abolish, destroy, change, or set aside the Law – not Peter, not Paul, not James, nor any other man! And since Jesus didn’t do it, then no one else has the authority to do it either!

Those who say that Paul’s writings support an anti-Nomian (anti-Law) stance have only to look back to Jesus’ statement in Matthew 5. If Paul *was* against the keeping of the Law in the life of a New Testament believer, then he *is* least in the kingdom of heaven! (I personally do not believe that he is anti-Law, nor least in the Kingdom.)

We need stop here to ask an IMPORTANT question: “Weighed on the scale of authority: ‘who is greater: Jesus or Paul?’”

If you believe that Jesus is greater than Paul, then why don’t you listen to Him?

¹ *Understanding the difficult words of Jesus*, David Bivin & Roy Blizzard, Jr., CENTER FOR BIBLICAL ANALYSIS, Division of DESTINY IMAGE PUBLISHERS, Shippensburg, PA, Copyright 1984, pages 154-155

Jesus said, “Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord’ if you do not what I say?” (Luke 6:46)

It was Jesus who gave the Law on Sinai in Exodus 19-23!

How do we know this?

If you turn in your Bibles to Exodus 24, after God gives the Laws and regulations on the mountain, we see that God calls up Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel to eat a covenant meal:

³ Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!" ⁴ Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵ He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the LORD. ⁶ Moses took half of the blood and put *it* in basins, and the *other* half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. ⁷ Then he took the book of the covenant and read *it* in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" ⁸ So Moses took the blood and sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

⁹ Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, ¹⁰ and ***they saw the God of Israel***; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. ¹¹ Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and ***they saw God***, and they ate and drank.

Twice in this passage the Scripture says, "...they saw God!"

The thing we must ask is: Which Person of the Tri-Una Nature of God did they see?

The answer is given by Jesus:

"And the **Father** who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at **any time** nor seen His form." (John 5:37)

So, it was NOT God the Father! No one has seen the Father at any time or heard His voice.

We can be fairly certain that it wasn't the Spirit, since the only time we see the Spirit in any form was at the baptism of Christ.

Thus, the *only* person of the Trinity of God that ever manifested in form was Jesus.

This means it was Jesus that gave the Law on Sinai!

Many Christian theologians make a distinction between the Torah given on Sinai and what Jesus did and taught. They call the law that was to be observed post-Christ by believers is the "Law of Christ."

The Law of Christ is an undefined phrase found in the Pauline Epistles of the New Testament. Supersessionists and Dispensationalists believe this *replaces* or *completes* the previous Law of Moses of the Hebrew Bible. In a letter from Paul of Tarsus to a number of Early Christian communities in the Roman province of Galatia in central Anatolia, in the Epistle to the Galatians, he wrote: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the **law of Christ**." (Galatians 6:2, NKJV). In a letter to the Early Christians of Corinth, Greece, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul of Tarsus wrote: "To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under **Christ's law**), so as to win those not having the law." (1 Corinthians 9:21, NIV).

Several times the Hellenistic Jew Paul of Tarsus mentioned adhering to "the Law", such as Romans 2:12–16, 3:31, 7:12, 8:7–8, Gal 5:3, Acts 24:14, 25:8 and preached about Ten Commandment topics such as idolatry

(1 Cor 5:11, 6:9–10, 10:7, 10:14, Gal 5:19–21, Eph 5:5, Col 3:5, Acts 17:16–21, 19:23–41).²

Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology

Law of Christ

The phrase "the law of Christ" appears only in Galatians 6:2, although it is implied by the wording of 1 Corinthians 9:21 as well. In both places, its precise meaning is difficult to fix. In Galatians, Paul argues vigorously that the law given at Sinai makes no claim on those who believe in Christ, whether Gentile or Jew (2:15-21; 3:10-14, 23-26; 4:4-5; 4:21-5:6). He then appeals to the Galatians to engage in ethical behavior by walking in the Spirit (5:16), being led by the Spirit (5:18), and fulfilling "the law of Christ" (*ho nomos tou Christou*) through bearing one another's burdens (6:2). In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul demonstrates how Christians should, out of love for the weaker brother or sister, refrain from demanding their rights. By way of illustration Paul says in verses 19-23 that he adopts certain Jewish customs when among Jews, although he is not under the Jewish law, and that he adopts some Gentile customs when among Gentiles, although he is not without the law of God but rather "in the law of Christ" (*ennomos Christou*).

It seems fairly clear from these two texts that Paul uses the phrase to mean something other than the law given to Israel at Sinai and considered by most Jews to be their special possession.

Help is found in the prophets. In Isaiah 42:1-4 we read that God's chosen servant will one day establish justice throughout the earth and that "the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law" (NASB). If we take this passage to refer to the Messiah, then we could paraphrase it by saying that the Christ, when he comes, will teach God's law to the Gentiles ("the coastlands"). Jeremiah 31:31-34 similarly predicts the coming of a time in which disobedient Israel will receive a new covenant, consisting of a law written on the heart and therefore obeyed (cf. Ezek 36:26-27).

Jesus' teaching, although standing in continuity with the law given at Sinai, nevertheless sovereignly fashions a new law. In some instances Jesus sharpens commandments (Matt 5:17-48) and in others considers them obsolete (Mark 7:17-19). On one occasion, having been asked to identify the greatest commandment, Jesus concurs with the Jewish wisdom of his time (Mark 12:32-33) that the greatest commandments are to love God supremely and to love one's neighbor as oneself (Mark 12:28-31). He

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Law_of_Christ

breaks with tradition, however, by defining the term "neighbor" to mean even the despised Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37).

Paul believed that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ marked the beginning point of God's new covenant (2 Cor 3:1-18; Gal 4:21-31; cf. Rom 8:2). Like Isaiah, he believed that this covenant included the Gentiles (Gal 3:7-20), and like Jeremiah he believed that it offered Israel a remedy for the curse that the old Sinaitic covenant pronounced on Israel's disobedience (Gal 3:10-13). In light of this, Paul may have understood the teaching of Christ as a new law. If so, then the correspondence between the ethical teaching of Jesus and Paul on many points (e.g., 1 Cor 7:10-11/Mark 10:2-9; 1 Cor 9:14/Luke 10:7; Rom 14:1-23/Mark 7:18-19) is a matter of Paul's intention rather than happy accident. Paul's own admonition to fulfill the law of Christ by bearing one another's burdens provides both a pithy restatement of Jesus' summary of the law and an indication that Jesus' teaching fulfills prophetic expectations. Frank Thielman.

Bibliography. C. H. Dodd, *More New Testament Studies*; R. N. Longenecker, *Paul, Apostle of Liberty*; W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*; S. Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith*.³

What is stated from most Christian sources is that there is a distinctive between what Christ instituted with His teachings as pertaining to the "Law" and what was given by Him on Sinai.

Here is where we need to focus our studies in this book. Did Jesus *change* His Law, the very one that He gave on Sinai – as already stated, or did He show us how to *walk out* the Law He gave on Sinai?

Furthermore, we need to ask: "Since Paul is unclear as to what the 'Law of Christ' really is, is he really talking about the repudiation of the Sinaic Law in favor of a more liberal walk of a believer in Christ?"

If that is the case, is he not contradicting Jesus' reaffirmation of the Sinaic Law in Matthew 5:17-21?

³ Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology. Edited by Walter A. Elwell, Copyright © 1996 by Walter A. Elwell. Published by Baker Books, a division of Baker Book House Company, PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49516-6287.

And if *that is* the case, *IF* Paul *is* contradicting Jesus and *IF* he *is* teaching others not to keep even the least of the commandments, then is he (Paul) the *least* in the Kingdom of Heaven?

And, IF he *is* the least in the Kingdom of Heaven – WHY should we listen to him?

Chapter Two – The Supremacy of Moses



I have to express a debt of gratitude here for the ministry of *First Fruits of Zion* for bringing this to my attention at a “*Trembling at the Word*” seminar. Sometimes we find ourselves at a loss of words to express a concept from Scripture.

Though I had understood for quite some time that the Torah was foundational to all that followed after it, I did not put words to it in quite the same way until I heard it expressed this way at the seminar. That is, “the Supremacy of Moses.”

This concept was introduced at the seminar from the passage that speaks of the time that Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses after he married a Cushite woman. After all, they said, “Aren’t we prophets, too? Hasn’t God spoken to us as well?” Well, God became very angry at them and spoke to them (Numbers 12) saying:

⁶ He said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. ⁷ "Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household; ⁸ With him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings, And he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?"

In other words, God said that *all* other prophets following Moses (except, of course, Jesus) would be spoken to in visions and dreams. *Only* with Moses did God speak “**mouth to mouth,**” meaning He spoke to him *exactly* what He wanted him to say.

This means that Moses (Torah) is foundational to ALL other Scripture that follows him, since to no other prophet did God speak face-to-face. All other words from God through anyone else would be lesser in revelatory power. Only Jesus, who would be a prophet like unto Moses is greater in revelatory power.

Torah is the foundation for all the rest of the Scriptures. If any book of Scripture—or any prophecy of any prophet—did not agree with Torah, (i.e. the words of God through His servant Moses), then there would be a serious problem. That particular writing could not be canonized or considered Scripture. This has implications for how we understand the New Testament (Apostolic Scriptures). If we take verses from an epistle Paul wrote to a specific congregation and then use those few verses to nullify the Torah, we have things backwards and upside down! Paul would be shocked. Paul does not trump Moses; he quotes him and relies on Torah for proof-texts.⁴

In conclusion, Moses (Torah) is *superior* to all other prophets, save Jesus Himself. No other prophet after Moses spoke with God face-to-face as did Moses (Deuteronomy 34:10) – and no other prophet ever would – save Jesus, who IS the Messiah. Apart from the words and example of Jesus, no other words are its superior: not Paul’s epistles, nor Peter’s, and none other’s. *All* other prophets and writers of Scripture were compared with the Torah and if they didn’t measure up – they were thrown out.

Paul is *inferior* to Moses (since he is tested by him, Acts 17:10-11). NONE of Paul’s writings would ever have stood as Scripture *unless* they withstood the test of comparison with Moses. To place Paul’s (or any other) writings *above* the Torah is treading on dangerous ground. Torah tests *everything* that *follows* it: not the reverse. Paul does not test Moses; Moses tests Paul!

⁴ First Fruits of Zion, Copyright 2004, <http://www.ffoz.org/> USED BY PERMISSION

So, if it looks as though Paul seems to be against the Torah, or is doing away with the Torah, or is nullifying even a small part of the Torah, we'd better start looking for another explanation. [Paul confirms under oath that he isn't doing that: Acts 24:14.]

Therefore, those who say he *is* doing so fall into the category that Peter describes in 2 Peter 3:15-16; they are distorting the writings of Paul, as they do the rest of Scripture. Even more frightening: are they not guilty of doing the *very* thing that Miriam and Aaron were doing when they speak against the Torah: speaking against Moses? Should they not also fear, for God could say to them: **“Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?”**

Finally, as stated in the first chapter of this book, Jesus *affirmed* the perpetuity of Moses and the Prophets in Matthew 5: 17-19, saying that until heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or tittle shall pass from the Law or the Prophets. He said that those who annul even the least of the commandments found therein are least in the kingdom of heaven.

They may not be *lost*, but they *will be least*.

Chapter Three – Paul and the Law: Liar, Hypocrite, “Least in Kingdom of Heaven,” or Misunderstood?

The anti-Nomian (anti-Law) bias in the church stems mostly from the Apostle Paul’s writings on the subject. Yet, the *majority* position of all Biblical Scriptures as pertaining to God’s commandments, statues and laws speak of *keeping* them.

Did a single prophet of God say, “Oh, we can have a perfectly acceptable relationship with God even if we don’t keep His commandments?” If he did, he would have been regarded as a false prophet by the Jewish people, since the Scripture abundantly makes it clear otherwise. Why should the New Testament writers be treated any differently? If a New Testament writer said that it is possible to live contrary to God’s Law and still be fine with God, should he be treated as a true prophet of God? No! But in fact, we will not find a single apostle, Paul included, saying that we can have a perfectly acceptable relationship with God and still be disobedient to His commandments.

Then what about the examples below of passages in Paul’s writings that seem to *lend* themselves to the interpretation of his being *against* the keeping of God’s Laws?

“For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace” (Romans 6:14).

“Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God” (Romans 7:4).

“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2).

“And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law” (1 Corinthians 9:20-21).

“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Romans 10:4).

“All things are lawful, but not all things edify” (1 Corinthians 10:23).

“Now the Lord is Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Corinthians 3:17).

“Nevertheless, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified” (Galatians 2:16).

“This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain if indeed it was in vain? Does He, who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the law, or by hearing with faith?” (Galatians 3:2-5).

“Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:24-26).

“Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law?” (Galatians 4:21).

“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law” (Galatians 5:18).

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23).

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works that no one should boast” (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

“For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by having put to death the enmity” (Ephesians 2:14-16),

“But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that the Law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers and mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted” (1 Timothy 1:8-11).

As we read these passages and others like them we can see how easy it is to put together a systematic theology [**Systematic theology** is the study of Christian theology organized thematically (as opposed to historically, as in Historical Theology or Biblical Theology)] that speaks of “**the end of the Law,**” “**law of sin and death,**” “**law of bondage,**” etc. The question is - is that the real message Paul intends to convey in his epistles?

The reason I posit this question is because his actions seem to speak a different message. For instance, Paul portrays himself as, “**not being myself under the Law...**” in 1 Corinthians 9:20. A similar vein of thought extends from himself to fellow believers in Galatians 5:18 when he says, **If you are led by the Spirit you are not under the Law,** and in the Romans 14:14 passage which says, **For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under the**

law, but under grace. It would seem, then, that not only he but *all* believers are exempt from following the commandments of the law.

Yet his actions in Acts 21:19-26 speak otherwise. As proof to the “**zealous**” Jews for the law and to the other Disciples, he carries out the Nazirite vow (Numbers 6) to make a statement that he “**walks orderly, keeping the Law.**”

In addition, in Acts 24 we see Paul testifying before Governor Felix as to why he was in Jerusalem and what he was doing taking the Nazirite vow:

¹⁰ When the governor had nodded for him to speak, Paul responded:

"Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my defense, ¹¹ since you can take note of the fact that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. ¹² "Neither in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city *itself* did they find me carrying on a discussion with anyone or causing a riot. ¹³ "Nor can they prove to you *the charges* of which they now accuse me. ¹⁴ "But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets; ¹⁵ having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. ¹⁶ "In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience *both* before God and before men. ¹⁷ "Now after several years ***I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings;*** ¹⁸ in which they found me *occupied* in the temple, having been purified, without *any* crowd or uproar.

It must be reminded to the casual Bible reader that at the end of the Nazirite vow there are sacrifices offered in the Temple (Numbers 6):

¹³ `Now this is the law of the Nazirite when the days of his separation are fulfilled, he shall bring the offering to the doorway of the tent of meeting. ¹⁴ `He shall present his offering to the LORD: one male lamb a year old

without defect for a *burnt offering* and one ewe-lamb a year old without defect for a *sin offering* and one ram without defect for a *peace offering*,¹⁵ and a basket of unleavened cakes of fine flour mixed with oil and unleavened wafers spread with oil, along with their *grain offering* and their *drink offering*.¹⁶ `Then the priest shall present *them* before the LORD and shall offer his *sin offering* and his *burnt offering*.¹⁷ `He shall also offer the ram for a sacrifice of *peace offerings* to the LORD, together with the basket of unleavened cakes; the priest shall likewise offer its *grain offering* and its *drink offering*.¹⁸ `The Nazirite shall then shave his dedicated head *of hair* at the doorway of the tent of meeting, and take the dedicated hair of his head and put *it* on the fire which is under the sacrifice of *peace offerings*.¹⁹ `The priest shall take the ram's shoulder *when it has been* boiled, and one unleavened cake out of the basket and one unleavened wafer, and shall put *them* on the hands of the Nazirite after he has shaved his dedicated *hair*.²⁰ `Then the priest shall wave them for a wave offering before the LORD. It is holy for the priest, together with the breast offered by waving and the thigh offered by lifting up; and afterward the Nazirite may drink wine.'

²¹ "This is the law of the Nazirite who vows his offering to the LORD according to his separation, in addition to what *else* he can afford; according to his vow which he takes, so he shall do according to the law of his separation."

In short, Paul is *willing* and *able* to offer *sin offerings* (Leviticus 4), *drink offerings*, *burnt offerings* (Leviticus 1), *peace offerings* (Leviticus 3) and *grain offerings* (Leviticus 2) in the Temple *after* fulfilling the vow of separation with these four other men under the Nazirite vow!

Remember, this event occurred over 20 years (AD 58) AFTER the death and resurrection of Jesus! Paul has already written Galatians (AD 57), 1 Corinthians (AD 57), and 1 & 2 Thessalonians (AD 52 and 53 respectively) with their respective passages seemingly speaking against the Law.

If Paul was against the keeping of the Law, what in the world is Paul doing observing the sacrificial system AFTER he has written these seemingly anti-Law Epistles?

Furthermore, when Paul testifies before Felix what does he *gain* in his testimony confirming his *willingness* to offer *sacrifices* in the Temple?

Nothing!

Therefore, the only conclusion we MUST come to about Paul is that what he is testifying to is true! He WAS being obedient to the Torah – even willing to carry out sacrifices in the Temple!

In addition to this, we have other passages which also indicate his obedience to the Law.

In Acts 20:16, Paul is in a hurry to get to Jerusalem on Pentecost – in obedience to Exodus 23:16 and Deuteronomy 16:10. Observing the Feast of Unleavened Bread – in obedience to Exodus 23:15, the **fast** of Yom Kippur in Acts 27:9 – in obedience to Leviticus 16:3 1, and in other examples of faithfulness such as observing the Jewish Sabbath in Acts 13:14, 44; 16:13; 17:1, 2, 10, 17; 18:7, 8.

So, with all this, how can we reconcile Paul’s obvious **“keeping the Law”** with his apostolic statements seemingly contrary to the law? Is Paul a “people-pleaser” or a spiritual chameleon – being one thing to one group of people and another to some other group of people?

As stated in the title of this chapter, several possibilities exist concerning his apparent contradictions between his words and his actions. The first two are obvious: lying and hypocrisy. What do we call a person who says one thing and yet does the opposite? Of course, we call him a hypocrite! However, considering that he stood up to Peter for his hypocrisy in Galatians 2:11-15, I would call him worse than a hypocrite if this is true. Hypocrisy is the same as lying, and that’s a sin. I seriously doubt that Paul would stoop that low as he shared the Gospel.

Another possible answer is perhaps in spreading the Gospel; he was annulling the Law and so teaching others. However, that would subject him to the Matthew 5:19 injunction and place him as “least in the kingdom of heaven,” according to Jesus! However knowing of Paul’s desire to finish the race, so as to win “**the upward call of Christ**” (Philippians 3:14), I can’t imagine Paul deliberately wishing to violate Jesus’ injunction and seeking to be “**least in the kingdom of heaven.**”

This leaves us with another possible solution to our question, and perhaps the most likely: he has been misunderstood; perhaps it is possible to be obedient and keep the Law, while not being “**under the Law.**”

When Paul speaks disparagingly of being “*hupo nomos*” – “**under the law,**” could he not be speaking of “legalism” instead of being in obedience to the Laws and commandments of God due to a heart-felt love relationship with Him? There exists a big distinction here, yet Paul has no way to differentiate between them in *Koine* Greek – more about that in Chapter Five. This is why it is so dangerous to solely use Paul’s writings in justifying the flaunting, negating or ignoring of God’s Laws.

Furthermore, an additional area of misunderstanding Paul’s writing exists: Since in the Jewish mind there is a written Law and an Oral Law, could not Paul be speaking disparagingly about the Oral Law versus the Written Law?

Indeed he could! Remember, Jesus experienced the same difficulty with the Pharisees regarding the Sabbath observance in the Gospel accounts. His problem was not with the Written Law, but with the Oral Laws! Hence, the negativism being expressed in the Pauline epistles of being “**under the Law**” could just as likely be the referencing of a legalistic observance of the law in order to

obtain justification by it, or it could have been relative to the burdens of the Oral Law.

I am bringing up these various other possibilities than those taught by the leaders in the church throughout the centuries so that you will see the need to seek out the truth for yourself. In so doing we will be like the Bereans in Acts 17:10, 11 who examined what Paul said to the standard of the Old Testament to validate if what he said was true.

So, why then do we have such confusion when comparing Paul's writings with all the rest of Scripture? Probably the greatest reason is that the Apostle's epistles are *one-sided letters*, meaning that we are reading Paul's *response* to local problems in the various congregations he is involved with. We often have to try to deduce the context from his epistle as to what the subject matter that he is responding to is (and sometimes that is just not possible – as in the case of the 1 Corinthians 11:4 head-covering: exactly *what* head-covering is Paul saying that a man should *not* wear while praying or prophesying?)

The danger of using these one-sided letters of Paul is in trying to create a *systematic theology* from them – which many theologians and believers do! They have made Paul say things that he really didn't say! So we really need to be very careful when using Paul's writings to justify the negligence of keeping the Torah! Paul himself says that we as believers do not nullify the Torah, we establish the Torah (Romans 3:31).

The best thing to do is to temper what we *believe* Paul says with what he *does* (acts). This is why the Book of Acts is so helpful. It shows us the lives of such men as Paul. If Paul *says* one thing, but *acts* in a totally opposite manner, we could say he was a hypocrite! If Paul *was* anti-Torah, the Bereans would have *rejected* him (Acts 17:10, 11).

Nevertheless, Paul did testify, under oath, that he believed *everything* that is in *accordance* with the Law and the Prophets (Acts 24:14). Was Paul lying here? If he was, we should not believe *anything* in any of his epistles. If he was not, we should *not* believe that he would *contradict* the Law or the Prophets in *any* of his epistles. We can't have it both ways. Either he believes the Law and the Prophets and writes in accordance with them, or he does not.

If he is truly imitating Messiah (as he says he is in 1 Corinthians 4:16 and 1 Corinthians 11:1), then we have to take his word that he is walking like Messiah, who *was* Torah observant. [By the way, Paul is telling his non-Jewish Corinthian readers to imitate him as he imitates Messiah!]

In addition, both Paul and James in their writing say to be "doers," not merely "hearers" of the Word (Romans 2:13; James 1:22). The only Word at that time, (and for quite some time after Jesus) was the Older Covenant Scriptures – the TANAKH. What writings does Paul tell Timothy is the inspired Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16, 17)? The TANAKH! The "New Testament" was just then being written. What Word did the Bereans test Paul with (Acts 17:10, 11)? The TANAKH! What Scripture does Paul quote from in *all* his epistles? The TANAKH!

Paul the Apostle speaks of his teachings as authoritative interpretations and application of the Hebrew Scriptures. Paul uses the Greek word “peradosis” when speaking about his oral or written teachings. This is the same word that is used when referring to the authoritative oral law of the Pharisees (see Matt 15:2-3, 6; Mark 7:3, 5, 8-9, 13; Galatians 1:14 for authoritative oral law - the teachings of the Pharisees on the Torah, and then 1 Corinthians 11:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:15 & 3:6 for the authoritative teachings of the Torah from Paul's perspective). Paul did not see

his teachings as Scripture, but saw the TANAKH (Old Testament writings) as Scripture (2 Timothy 3:15-16).

In conclusion, it is possible to understand Paul's perspectives and harmonize it with the Law of God if we do so from a Hebrew perspective. By so doing we will understand that Paul was not a hypocrite, a liar, nor the **"least in the kingdom of heaven."** We'll see he not only keeps the Law himself, but he also quotes from it for the Gentiles in all his epistles. In short, he is a believing Jew desiring all people to realize that salvation is by faith alone, not through the keeping of the Law and that after the salvation issue is resolved, walking a holy walk is expected.

Chapter Four – *Context, Context, Context*

Back in the early 1980s, I was a student of the now late Dr. Walter Martin as he taught at *Melodyland* in Anaheim, California on Sundays. One of the things he hammered home to me was this: “Text, without context, is pretext.”

This has stuck with me ever since.

Taking isolated verses out of their immediate context – and out of the overall context of the entirety of Scripture – can be a path into error, false doctrine, and even trying to find ways to circumnavigate clear teachings of Scripture in order to gratify the flesh.

Here’s an example of taking passages from the Bible out of their context and putting them together to form false and even deadly doctrine:

“And Judas went out and hung himself.” (Matthew 27:5)

“Jesus said, ‘Go, do thou likewise.’ (Luke 10:37)

“And what thou doest, doest thou quickly.” (John 13:27)

With these three passages taken out of context and put together in a singular statement, we are now able to formulate the Biblical doctrine of quickly going out and hanging oneself!

Right? Of course not!

Anyone can see this for the fallacy it is!

Yet, we allow it quite well in the Christian Church for proving an anti-Law position in the New Testament writings! We do exactly that with the Apostle Paul’s writings on the Law!

To quote out of context is to remove a passage from its’ surrounding matter in such a way as to distort its meaning. The

context in which a passage occurs always contributes to its meaning, and the shorter the passage the larger the contribution. For this reason, the “quoter” must always be careful to quote enough of the context not to misrepresent the meaning of the quote.

Great men have endured great persecution to defend a literal, historical-grammatical interpretive approach to Scriptures. That is, we ought to interpret Scriptures according to the historical context and the grammatical meaning rather than simply the context of our modern felt need. Paul admonished young Timothy to be very careful to “rightly divide the word of truth.”

What frustrates me most is when Christians take the Apostle Paul’s writings and throw them at me as if that out of context text proves the point. It proves nothing, because if the quoter would have simply looked at the entire context of the passage they are quoting, they could see it doesn’t speak of what they believe it does!

Thus, I believe it important to bring out some of these passages in this book in the later chapters in their context to prove that those passages shouldn’t be used in an anti-Law polemic.

As a surgeon with a delicate procedure, so preachers must approach every sermon as though eternal life depended on it for some lost soul. It is a grave offense to utilize Scripture in a haphazard way. We must handle the word of life carefully. God wants to speak to us today through His word, which is always fresh and always relevant, but we need not help Him out in the task of making it more relevant than it already is.

Chapter Five - Led by the Spirit, not “Under the Law”

In the Pauline Epistles, we see a lot of this phrase, “Under the Law:”

“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not **under the Law.**” Galatians 5:18

“For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not **under law** but under grace.” Romans 6:14

“Tell me, you who want to be **under law**, do you not listen to the law?” Galatians 4:21

“And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are **under the Law**, as **under the Law**, though not being myself **under the Law**, that I might win those who are **under the Law**; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but **under the law** of Christ, that I might win those who are without law” 1 Corinthians 9:20-21

When Paul speaks disparagingly of being “*hupo nomos*” – “**under the law**,” could he not be speaking of “*legalism*” instead of being in obedience to the Laws and commandments of God due to a heart-felt love relationship with Him? There exists a big distinction here, yet Paul has no way to differentiate between them in *Koine* Greek. This is why it is so dangerous to solely use Paul’s writings in justifying the flaunting, negating or ignoring of God’s Laws.

“...the Greek language used by Paul had no word-group to denote ‘legalism’, ‘legalist’, and ‘legalistic’ In view of this, we should, I think, be ready to reckon with the possibility that sometimes, when he appears to be disparaging the law, what he really has in mind may be not the law itself but the

misunderstanding and misuse of it for which *we* have a convenient term.”⁵

In other words, Paul did not have the words that speak of legalism that he could conveniently use to describe that act: not in First Century *Koine* Greek, and not in First Century Hebrew or Aramaic. Therefore, he “coined” a phrase, “*hupo nomos*” (under the law) to express that concept.

We “coin” phrases, too! Try “back seat driver,” or “ride on a rail,” or “tar and feather,” and many other such phrases and idioms. One thing about idioms and coined phrases, you cannot take them literally! They are used to express a concept which often cannot be expressed in a literal sense.

Thus, in any of the passages of Paul’s Epistles where you see the phrase, “under law,” or “under the law,” remember this - it could be speaking of legalism, legalist, or legalistic behavior!

It is very likely NOT Paul speaking *against* the observance of God’s Laws – this considering the evidence of Paul’s own observance of the Law in the Book of Acts! Otherwise, Paul is either a liar, a perjurer, a deceiver, a hypocrite or confused!

I personally believe that it is none of the above!

Paul was an observer of Torah as was the Master, Yeshua and he is not inconsistent in his testimony and his life.

This means that it is, as Peter says (2 Peter 3:14-18), that “untaught and unstable” “unprincipled men” are distorting Paul, “as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.”

⁵ C.E.B. Cranfield, “St. Paul and the Law,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 17 (March 1964): 55

Peter here affirms Paul's letters as on par with the rest of Scripture which, as you see in his personal obedience to the Law, affirms the continuity and observance of the Law. Yet Peter *confirms* that Paul's writings are hard to understand.

Since it stands to reason that Paul's writings are virtually the only passages quoted that are seemingly at odds with regard to the Law and the Church today is overall at odds with the Law, is it possible that the church today is following in the traditions of the "**uninstructed**," and "**unstable**" men that Peter was writing about?

I believe so... for how could a believing community that was entirely Jewish and observant of the Law of Moses as depicted in Acts 21 change to the non-Jewish, non-observant one as it is today? To understand this transformation, we need to look a moment at history.

Originally a sect within Judaism, the Messianic community considered herself a reform movement within the Jewish community at large. They met in synagogues to worship (Acts 15:21), offered sacrifices in the Temple and in many ways acted as their non-Messianic counterparts; with one notable exception: they believed in Jesus (Jesus) as the long-awaited Jewish Messiah.

Then, when the First Jewish Revolt occurred in 66 CE, Nero sent Vespasian to put down this revolt. By spring 67 CE, with 60,000 legionaries, auxiliaries, and allies under his control, Vespasian set out to subdue Galilee and then to cut off Jerusalem. By October all of the Galilee had been pacified and plans for the strategic encirclement of Jerusalem were soon formed.

Then in 68 CE, Rome suddenly went through a civil war because of the mismanagement of Nero. Such unrest in the provinces, coupled with intrigue at Rome among the praetorians, provided

Nero's enemies, especially within the Senate, with their chance to depose him. Nero committed suicide in June, 68 CE, thereby ensuring chaos for the next eighteen months, when at first **Galba** and then **Marcus Salvius Otho** and **Aulus Vitellius** acceded to power. Because each lacked broad-based military and senatorial support; each would be violently deposed in turn.

It was during this time of chaos in Rome that a brief opening occurred in the siege of Jerusalem and the Jewish believers were able to escape the city. According to Eusebius (Bishop of Cæsarea in Palestine) the Jewish believers of Jerusalem, forewarned by their Master (see Luke 21:20), escaped the horrors of the last siege, by escaping to Pella, east of the Jordan.

Tacitus, a Roman historian, records that by December 22, CE 69, Vespasian became emperor of Rome. Once again, Jerusalem was in the focus of Rome, having now put the chaos of the last year and a half behind. Due to the financial condition of the empire, Vespasian needed all the money that he could get, including the treasure of the Temple in Jerusalem.

So, in 70 CE, the Temple was destroyed by Titus, Vespasian's son, and the treasures carted off to Rome.

In addition, one of Vespasian's financial measures against the Jews was the creation of tax that had to be paid by those who were still free: the *fiscus Judaicus*. While accepting the state religion was a vital part of Roman identity and loyalty to the state, the Romans were also pragmatists. They had learned by the Greek experience that Jews could not be forced to worship idols. And they saw for themselves that the Jews were not like other pagan peoples - they were not going to conform. So the Romans granted the Jews an official status of being exempt from Roman state religion. "You want to be exempt from the state religion? Okay, so long as you pay for the privilege."

In fact, this was not a completely novel tax: every Jewish man between 20 and 50 had paid a sum of two drachms -or eight sesterces- to the temple (cf. Matthew 17.24-27). Now that the Temple was destroyed, this tax flow was redirected to Rome, where it was spent at the reconstruction of the temple of Jupiter *Optimus Maximus* at the Capitol, which had been destroyed during the civil war.

Now, this tax did not just apply to the Jews. Gentile believers in Jesus were also ostracized for associations with Jews and a “Jewish oriented” faith; for Vespasian determined “Jewish” households as those who worshipped after the “Jewish” manner. Therefore, even Gentile believers in Jesus could be taxed along with the Jews!

This means that if you were a Gentile believer living in Corinth, you would have been attending a “Jewish” worship service on the “Jewish” day of worship and keeping “Jewish” feasts, such as Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7). Now, all of a sudden, your country was at war with the Jews. Though earlier you might have been labeled as “so-and-so, the Believer from Corinth,” subsequent to the revolt your friends and neighbors would have called you “so-and-so, the-Jew.”

With the new anti-Judaic climate in the Roman Empire, Gentile believers in Jesus now had financial, political and cultural incentives to distance themselves from the “mother faith” - Judaism – and distance themselves they did.

By the second century, anti-Jewish sentiment was running high in the Church. The Bar Kokba Revolt (135 CE) was not only the final break between Jewish believers and their non-believing Jewish counterparts, since the renowned Rabbi Akibah proclaimed Bar Kokba as the Messiah, it also finalized the break of the Gentile believers from their Jewish roots. No longer would the Church look toward Jerusalem (its Hebrew origins) in the same way as it once did. Instead, it would look toward the Gentile, Platonic

“Early Church Fathers” for the doctrines and practice of this once-Jewish faith.

Men such as Origen, Augustine, Justin Martyr, Eusebius, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Jerome and others who came into the faith overall espoused a non-Hebraic understanding of the Scriptures and by so doing distorted the original meanings of what were written by the hand of Hebrews.

To offer an example of this, in his dialogue with Trypho (a Jew) Justin Martyr said,

For the law promulgated on Horeb is now old, and belongs to you alone; but this is for all universally. Now, law placed against law has abrogated that which is before it, and a covenant which comes after in like manner has put an end to the previous one; and an eternal and final law – namely, Christ – has been given to us, and the covenant is trustworthy after which there shall be no law, no commandment, no ordinance.”⁶

But Justin is wrong, for according to Paul in Galatians 3:15-17:

“Brothers, let me make an analogy from everyday life: when someone swears an oath, no one can set it aside or add to it. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his seed. It doesn’t say, “and to seeds,” as if to many; on the contrary, it speaks of one – “and to your seed” – and this “one” is in the Messiah. Here is what I am saying: the legal part of the Torah, which came into being 430 years later, does not nullify an oath sworn by God, so as to abolish the promise.”

The later covenant does NOT abrogate, or nullify, the preceding covenant; instead, if one compares all the covenants of the Bible, the latter brings the Torah into its full application and enlightens

⁶ *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 1, Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, copyright 1987, W.M. B. EERDMAN’S PUBLISHING CO., page 200

the preceding covenant. This is why Jesus in Matthew 5 does NOT annul the Law; rather, He enlightens the already-given Law.

Whereas Justin may have erred (as we all do), others such as Eusebius were much more deliberate in their theological distortions. A student of Origen, Eusebius was careful to leave out of his history of the church that which did not fit into his theology:

In writing any book, an author chooses what to include and what to leave out. In writing history, a faithful historian will make these choices so as to present an accurate picture of the past. Eusebius was intentionally inaccurate. He had his own agenda.

No other source might [be] used that contradicted or convicted with the apostolic tradition as Eusebius conceived it. Eusebius ignored the sources that showed the apostolic tradition to be different from what he thought it should be. He was intent on creating an apostolic tradition that was different from what the apostles had actually believed and taught.

...Eusebius was the product of the Alexandrine school of theology [that of Origen]. To him orthodox tradition was primarily just the tradition preserved at Alexandria, in its entirety and without any contradictions.⁷

Others also came into the Church who had a significant influence towards the present Christian attitude toward the Law and things “Jewish.” Though regarded as a heretic in his day by the Church, a man named Marcion had such a strong influence that it stretches even to the present day.

Following the New Testament era, one of the first heresies that the Church faced was propounded by Marcion. He was a wealthy shipowner from Sinope (in what is now northern

⁷ THE CHURCH AND THE JEWS, *The Biblical Relationship*, Daniel Gruber, Copyright 1991, General Council of the Assemblies of God, page 9

Turkey) who came to Rome. About A.D. 138, Marcion began to argue that the Old Testament was inferior to the New and hence had no part of authoritative revelation. He therefore fought to have it removed from the canon.

To some degree, Marcion appears to have been influenced by the dualistic teachings of Gnosticism. Thus he held that the world, with its appalling evils, was created by a Demiurge (a term Gnostics borrowed from Platonism). This cruel god of battles and bloody sacrifices, so Marcion contended, was revealed in the pages of the Old Testament. He insisted that since an evil world could not be created by a good God, the Old Testament was really the Demiurge's book and hence of lesser status than the New. The Old was the great antithesis of the New and thus was demeaned as being imperfect, offensive, and unedifying.

But the New Testament, Marcion insisted, revealed the true God in the coming of Christ from heaven. Unlike the Demiurge, this God was a God of love. Marcion argued that the New Testament, being Christ's book (not that of the Demiurge), was unquestionably superior to the Old Testament. Furthermore, in his quest to demote the Old Testament from its recognized position of authority, he began to extol the writings of Paul, which held that Christians were "free from the Law" (cf. Gal. 5:1). He contended firmly that the church was wrong in attempting to combine the gospel with Judaism. Indeed, Marcion's principal goal was to rid Christianity of every trace of Judaism. Hence, Marion became known as the archenemy or the "Jew God."⁸

Though the Church rejected Marcion's view as heresy, it nonetheless had adopted much of his attitudes toward the Older Testament. As Dr. Marvin R. Wilson observes:

⁸ *Our Father Abraham, Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*, Dr. Marvin R. Wilson, copyright 1989, Wm. B. Erdman's Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, pages 108-109

Though often cunningly concealed, in today's Church rather strong vestiges of Marcionism have survived. But we are polite. Hardly aware of its subtle presence, we do not call it "Neo-Marcionism," "heresy," or "anti-Judaism." Nevertheless, in our concerted efforts to be "New Testament" believers, we have all too often unconsciously minimized the place and importance of the Old Testament and Church's Hebraic roots. At worst, many so called Bible-believing Christians have become de facto "quarter-of-the-Bible" adherents (the New Testament has 260 chapters compared to the Old Testament's 929 chapters); at best, they rely on a "loose-leaf" edition of the Old Testament (i.e., they select only a few portions of the Old Testament), in addition to the New Testament. This selectivity has had the effect of neglecting the totality of written revelation, severing the Hebrew roots of the Christian faith, and thus eroding the full authority of the Holy Scriptures.

In addition to relegating the Old Testament to secondary importance in preaching and teaching, Neo-Marcionism continues to plague today's Church in other ways. For instance, it is often found in those theological circles where the displacement or supersession theory is taught concerning Israel. This teaching is tantamount to saying that Israel has been permanently cast aside and thus has had no theological relevance for the last nineteen hundred years. In our opinion, this position fails to give satisfactory explanation to Paul's argument that "a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:25-26).

Neo-Marcionism is also manifested in Christian art which tends to downplay, whether consciously or unconsciously, the Jewishness of Jesus and the early Church. This tendency may be as subtle as an artist's depiction of the facial features of Jesus in a non-Jewish way.

Or artwork may overtly display – either ignorantly or deliberately – non-Jewish or anti-Jewish subject matter, for

example, the sculpturing of an uncircumcised infant Jesus, or the Last Supper scene with no common cup of wine or the disciples in a seated, rather than reclining, posture.

Neo-Marcionism also tends to be advanced when a church communicates to a nearby synagogue the impression, “We don’t have anything to learn from you and your dead, legalistic religion, but you’ve got everything to learn from us.”⁹

Due to the influences of these men how can we be certain that what we today hold to be of apostolic origin and interpretation is *truly* what the Messiah and the apostles taught? How do we know whether or not our practice isn’t from the traditions of men such as those cited?

We’re taught to observe Sunday as the Sabbath because “the Apostles observed the first day of the week as the new Sabbath since Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week.”

Says who – God inspired Scripture, or the traditions of men? Only two passages in the New Testament *specifically* refer to the first day of the week for any gathering: Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:2. Placed within the Jewish context, these do not refer to Sunday at all, but rather to the traditional Jewish Havdalah service observed on Saturday evening when the Sabbath ends. (The Hebrew day goes from sundown to sundown. On Friday evening at sundown, the seventh day [Shabbat] begins. On Saturday evening at sundown, the first day of the week begins). Compare that with the many references to the disciples’ observance of the seventh-day Sabbath in the Book of Acts, and it becomes clear from the Scriptures that the lives of the Apostles were lived out in observance to God’s commandments. Nevertheless, from traditional Christian doctrine we get an entirely different view.

⁹ *IBID.*, pages 109-110

Eerdman's Handbook to the History of Christianity says that when Constantine “converted” to Christianity in 312 CE, he continued to “feature some of the pagan gods” on his coinage, notably his own “favourite deity, the Unconquered Sun.”¹⁰

Retaining the pagan symbols was a necessary compromise with his pagan subjects; still very much in the majority....It is important to understand Constantine's previous religion. If the story of the cross in the sky is true, he may have interpreted the sign as his own special deity recommending the worship of the Christian God. Constantine continued to identify the sun with the Christian God in some way – a belief made easier by the tendency of Christian writers and artists to use sun imagery in portraying Christ. For them Christ is the source of light and salvation, and a mosaic from a third-century tomb found under St. Peter's, Rome, even shows him as the sun god in his chariot. When in 321 Constantine made the first day of the week a holiday, he called it ‘the venerable day of the Sun (Sunday).’¹¹

The Catholic Church claims the divine authority to change the observance of the Sabbath to Sunday, rather than on the Biblical day of the week: Friday evening to Saturday evening. Though the Protestant Church “protests” Catholic authority, it yet pays homage to that authority in observing the Sabbath on the first day of the week along with the Catholics. The Protestant cry, “Sola Scriptura” (“Scripture alone”) rings hollow when compared to the Biblical truth of the Sabbath as stated in the Scriptures.

As with the Sabbath, all issues need careful Biblical exegesis from a Hebrew perspective. The Body of Messiah must revisit her Jewish roots and leave man-made traditions to find safer haven in God's commandments. In my personal opinion, it would be better

¹⁰ Eerdmans' Handbook to the History of Christianity, Copyright 1977, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, page 131

¹¹ IBID, page 131

to err on the side of righteousness and keep God's commandments than to err on the side of those who say, "The law is fulfilled" and that "the death and resurrection of Jesus abolished the Law."

That brings me to ask a most important question: "Who do you believe: Paul, or these unprincipled, untaught, unstable men who have twisted Paul's writings?"

I would submit to you, my brethren that you walk away from, no: **RUN** from their false teachings, lest you be caught up in their sins!

For too long, ever since the "Early Church Fathers" we in the Body of Christ have listened to these men. We have been led away from the truth of what Jesus, Paul and the other writers of Scripture have taught us into an "anti-Law" Christianity!

This is not the Christianity of the First Century church where, as Acts 21 says:

²⁰ "...You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law; ²¹ and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. ²² "What, then, is *to be done*? They will certainly hear that you have come."

In the First Century church, there were myriads (tens of thousands) of Torah observant Jewish believers in Jesus! They are hearing all sorts of things about what Paul is saying!

So, Paul is asked by the other disciples in Jerusalem, including James, Jesus' brother, to go under the Nazirite vow so that "all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law."

Paul then proves not only his personal obedience to the Torah by going under the Nazirite vow, but he also proves that what people are saying that he is saying is NOT TRUE!

I think we should take note of this in our own walk as believers in Jesus. Could we have been taught WRONG things about what Paul is SAYING about the Law?

You bet!

Chapter Six – Released from the Law

“But now we have been released from the **Law**, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.” Romans 7:6

Paul’s view of the Law is probably the most debated topic in New Testament studies and Daniel Wallace notes that “[t]he problems and apparent contradictions in Paul’s view of the Law are legion.”¹²

Some commentators believe that Paul changed his view of the Law considerably between writing Galatians and Romans.¹³

However, a careful analysis of Paul’s statements about the Law in both letters will show that they are complementary, not contradictory. On the other hand, Sanders posited that Paul had no theology of the Law but merely responded in various ways to various circumstances which threatened his mission to the Jews and Gentiles. This is why he proclaimed the necessity of participation in Christ for salvation.¹⁴

However one views Paul’s understanding of the Law, it should be noted that neither Galatians nor Romans are formal, systematic discussions of the Law. Rather, they are *ad hoc* documents dealing with specific pastoral issues.¹⁵ Nowhere in the New Testament is

¹² D B Wallace, “Galatians 3:19-20: A Crux Interpretum for Paul’s View of the Law”, *Westminster Theological Journal* 52 (Fall 1990) 225.

¹³ G N Stanton, “The Law of Moses and the Law of Christ”, in *Paul and the Mosaic Law*, edited by J D G Dunn (Tubingen: J C B Mohr, 1996) 99.

¹⁴ F Thielman, “Law” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by G F Hawthorne, R P Martin & D G Reid (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1993) 531

¹⁵ Snodgrass 97-98

there a complete discussion, so all we can do is make extrapolations from whatever Paul does say.¹⁶

In brief, Galatians 3:10-13, Paul states that anyone who relies on observing the Law in order to gain salvation is “cursed” because Deuteronomy 27:26 states: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.” This quotation clearly implies that it is simply impossible for someone to “continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.”¹⁷

The Law is an unattainable standard because no-one has the capacity to be completely obedient all the time. Because no human being is able to meet the Law’s requirements, all are unrighteous, and therefore deserve God’s condemnation and curse.¹⁸

The reason for this is that is that the Law is spiritual, as Paul says in Romans 7:14, “For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.”

In Romans 7:14-25, Paul shares his own personal struggles with the slavery that is brought about by the Law of sin. He finds himself in the predicament of doing what he does *not* want to do, and not doing what he *does* want to do. Paul asserts that this is caused by the Law of sin and death being at work in the members of his body, making him a prisoner of the Law of sin. In the realm of his body, Paul is a slave to the Law of sin.

It is reckoned by many Christians that the “law of sin and death” that Paul is fighting against is the Law of God or Torah. That is not the case.

¹⁶ Ibid 98

¹⁷ G N Stanton, “The Law of Moses and the Law of Christ”, in *Paul and the Mosaic Law*, edited by J D G Dunn (Tubingen: J C B Mohr, 1996) 110.

¹⁸ C E B Cranfield, *Romans* vol. II (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979) 848

Paul asks in Romans 7: ⁷ *What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be!* On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET." ⁸ But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin *is* dead. ⁹ I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; ¹⁰ and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; ¹¹ for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. ¹² *So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.*

The law of sin and death is NOT the Law of God! Instead, it is the **rebellious nature** that is built into our flesh due to our sinful nature.

This rebellious nature is accurately reflected in Paul's statement in Romans 8, where he says: ⁵ For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, ⁷ *because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so...*

The reason why we are not able to subject ourselves to the law of God is because our minds are not set on the Spirit of God.

If we wish to be more like Jesus, we must allow the Spirit to empower us, so that we could keep His laws!

In Galatians 5, Paul says:

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

In Ezekiel 36, God says: “²⁶ Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.”

If we walk in the power of the Spirit, He will empower us to keep His Laws – NOT violate them!

In short, through the Spirit we are not set free from the Law which brings life, we are set free from the law of sin and death which resides in the members of our bodies:

“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2).

**“To run and work the Law commands,
but gives us neither feet nor hands.**

**Better news the Gospel brings,
It bids us fly and gives us wings.”**

Author Unknown

Chapter Seven – The Law, Our Tutor

“But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.” Galatians 3:23-25

Yet, who shows that the Law continues to be a standard of behavior for all believers, including his non-Jewish readers!

The Law then becomes our tutor which leads us to the conclusion that righteousness can only come through faith, since it is impossible to keep all the Law always. Are we to forget the teachings of the tutor once we graduate from school? No, what foolishness!

Many of us have spent thousands and thousands of dollars on a college education. Are we going to say, “Now that I have graduated and received my degree, I don’t need any of the stuff I learned from my professors? That stuff just doesn’t apply to my life anymore”?

No. Hardly. We *still* need what we learned from our professors. The same holds true for the Law. The lessons are still pertinent and necessary for us to live Godly lives. So, we are to take what we learned from our tutor and use it as a basis in our lives. This is what the Law does in the lives of God’s people. This is the real nature of the New Covenant.

Chapter Eight – Christ, the End of the Law

“For Christ is the **end of the law** for righteousness to everyone who believes.” Romans 10:4

In Romans 10:4, Paul declares that “Christ is the end of the Law.” The word translated “end” (NIV) is *telion*, and could also be rendered as “goal” or possibly “fulfillment” and there has been much dispute in regard to how or in what way Christ is the end/goal/fulfillment of the Law.

Back to what we said in Chapter One. When Jesus spoke of the Law, He regarded it as permanent!

I would like to remind you that what David Bivin and Roy Blizzard, Jr. in their book, *Understanding the difficult words of Jesus*, seek to address is a misunderstanding in the body of Messiah regarding the terms “abolish” and “fulfill”:

In Matthew 5:17, Jesus claims he has no intention of abolishing or suspending the Mosaic Law. For most Christians, this comes as a shock. After all, did not the Apostle Paul say, “Christ is the end of the Law” (Romans 10:4)? Jesus’ statement seems such a contradiction that many Christian commentators have tried to explain it away by suggesting that his words do not really mean what they seem to mean. Their attempts are futile.

The meaning of Jesus’ words is clear. As long as the world lasts, he goes on to say in verse 18, the Law will last. Here Jesus is in complete agreement with the Rabbis: “Everything has an end heaven and earth have an end except one thing which has no end. And what is that? The Law” (Genesis Rabbah 10:1); “No letter will ever be abolished from the Law” (Exodus Rabbah 6:1), “Should the world unite to uproot one word of the Law, they would be unable to do it” (Leviticus Rabbah 19:2).¹⁹

¹⁹ *Understanding the difficult words of Jesus*, David Bivin & Roy Blizzard, Jr., CENTER FOR BIBLICAL ANALYSIS, Division of DESTINY IMAGE PUBLISHERS, Shippensburg, PA, Copyright 1984, pages

What does Jesus mean by “destroying the law” and “fulfilling the Law?”

“Destroy” and “fulfill” are technical terms used in rabbinical argumentation. When a rabbi felt that a colleague had misinterpreted a passage of Scripture, he would say, “You are destroying the Law!” Needless to say, in most cases his colleague strongly disagreed. What was “destroying the Law” for one rabbi, was “fulfilling the Law” (correctly interpreting Scripture) for another.

What we see in Matthew 5:17ff is a rabbinical discussion. Someone has accused Jesus of “destroying” the Law. Of course, neither Jesus nor his accuser would ever think of literally destroying the Law. Furthermore, it would never enter the accuser’s mind to charge Jesus with intent to abolish part or all of the Mosaic Law. What is being called into question is Jesus’ system of interpretation, the way he interprets Scripture.

When accused, Jesus strongly denies that his method of interpreting Scripture “destroys” or weakens its meaning. He claims, on the contrary, to be more orthodox than his accuser. For Jesus, a “light” commandment (“Do not bear hatred in your heart”) is as important as a “heavy” commandment (“Do not murder”). And a disciple who breaks even a “light” commandment will be considered “light” (have an inferior position) in Jesus’ movement (Matthew 5:19).

“Never imagine for a moment,” Jesus says, “that I intend to abrogate the Law by misinterpreting it. My intent is not to weaken or negate the Law, but by properly interpreting God’s written Word I aim to establish it, that is, make it even more lasting. I would never invalidate the Law by effectively removing something from it through misinterpretation.

Heaven and earth would sooner disappear than something disappear from the Law. Not the smallest letter in the alphabet, the yod, nor even its decorative spur, will ever disappear from the Law.”²⁰

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²⁰ *Understanding the difficult words of Jesus*, David Bivin & Roy Blizzard, Jr., CENTER FOR BIBLICAL ANALYSIS, Division of DESTINY IMAGE PUBLISHERS, Shippensburg, PA, Copyright 1984, pages 154-155

The Law is eternal, as is God.

Its purpose is to show those who are Gods' people how to walk holy lives (sanctification). This is as true of the New Testament as it was of the Old Testament.

Deuteronomy 28:9:

"The LORD will establish you as a **holy** people to Himself, as He swore to you, if you keep the **commandments** of the LORD your God and walk in His ways."

Deuteronomy 7:6:

"For you are a **holy people** to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a **people** for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

1 Peter 2:9

"But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A **HOLY** NATION, A **PEOPLE** FOR {God's} OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light..."

1 Peter 1:

¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, ¹⁵ but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; ¹⁶ because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."

For more information of this subject of holiness, please get my book, A Call to Holiness.

Chapter Nine – Any Day will Do; Anything you Eat is Fine...

“Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-- things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.” Colossians 2:16, 17

All I can say in opening up this chapter is: ***“Context, Context, Context.”***

We have a passage here that seems to say that we can eat and drink anything, observe any day with which to have a Sabbath and that no one can judge us for what we are doing!

Yet, we have to look at the context of these two verses here.

I believe it is important for us to provide an answer to anyone who asks us about our faith, not only about what we believe, but also why we believe it. This issue requires an answer just as much as any other issue in the Bible, especially in the light of the preceding chapter. So, it will be with as much care that we will answer this.

First, we must place the epistle in the historical context: Paul (probably about 61) addressed an epistle from Rome to the inhabitants of Colossæ. Colossæ was located 120 miles east of Ephesus in the Lycus River Valley in ancient Phrygia, part of the Roman territory of Asia Minor, now in modern Turkey. It was at one time the chief city of South-Western Phrygia, lying on the trade-route from Sardis to Celænæ.

Colossæ was in existence from the fifth century BCE to about CE 800. The people who lived there were a mixture of Phrygian natives, Greek colonists, and some dispersed Jews. Josephus tells

how Antiochus the Great moved 2,000 Jewish families from Babylonia and Mesopotamia into Lydia and Phrygia.

Colossæ was the home of Paul's companions, Archippus and Philemon of his very dear sister, Appia, and of Onesimus and Epaphras, who probably founded the Church of Colossæ. The gospel probably arrived in Colossæ with Paul's preaching in Ephesus (cp. Acts 19:10) on the Third Mission Journey. Perhaps Epaphras, the Lycus Valley's own evangelist heard Paul at Ephesus and returned with the message.

There were many Jews living there, and a chief article of commerce, for which the place was renowned, was the collossinus, a peculiar wool, probably of a purple color. In religion the people were specially lax, even worshipping angels. Of them, Michael was the chief, and the protecting saint of the city. It is said that once he appeared to the people, saving the city in time of a flood.

Now, the believers in Colossæ were, as in most cities of the time, in the minority group. Their non-believing Greek-oriented families, friends, co-workers and employers were in the majority. Those co-workers, friends and relatives, as indeed the believers themselves in their former practice, would have been influenced by not only Greek philosophy, but also by Greek religious practices. It would have been easy to blend in the previous religious practices and philosophical thought into their new-found faith. This is what Paul is dealing with in his epistle to these believers.

Consider that the cited passage (above) in Colossians (verses 16 and 17) falls between verses 8 and 20:

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

²⁰ If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ²¹ "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" ²² (which all *refer to* things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? ²³ These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, *but are* of no value against fleshly indulgence.

In context, Paul is writing against “**philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world,**” and “**the commandments and teachings of men.**” Evidently, they were also blending these things with the Biblical ordinances of their new faith. That’s the nature of the Colossian heresy that Paul was dealing with.

NEVER does God’s Word allow the blending of the commandments and statutes of God with worldly religion and philosophy! In fact, God’s Word always tells His people not to practice the religion of the pagan nations surrounding them. God does not want to be worshipped however we want to worship Him. He wants to be worshipped in the manner He established in His Word! To blend the Biblical observances with the worldly ones is literally an abomination before God.

That is the context of Paul’s writings here!

Now, on the judging aspect of this passage: when Paul warns the believers against other’s judging them, he is *not* writing about *fellow-believers* judging them for their observance of the Biblical dietary laws or holy days, but against their *pagan* friends, relatives and co-workers judging them for observing the Biblical laws! We are *not* talking about having a bunch of churches down the street from each other judging each other on Biblical practice. We didn’t have a bunch of churches in that day! So for believers to use this passage (as is done today) to stop other believers from “judging”

them for not observing a Biblical command is pure nonsense! That was *not* the situation Paul was addressing with the Colossians at that time. The ones doing the judging were the pagans against the believers!

Consider this: in the Book of Acts we see *many* non-Jewish people in the synagogues scattered through the known world at this time (13:43; 14:1; 18:4). They were either believers in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob or were considering Him as their God.

As they came to believe in Him, they left their old Greek or Roman gods behind and came to recognize that there was but one God. As related by the First Council (Acts 15:21) of what is now called the “church;” Gentile believers sat in the synagogue every Sabbath and who did they hear? They heard Moses (the Torah)!

What does Moses speak of? Of *many* things: *including* the Biblical dietary laws, the Moedim (Appointed times – holy days) of Israel, and the “new moons.” They would have learned that there was but “one law” for the native (Hebrew) and the sojourner (Numbers 15:16: **There is to be one law and one ordinance for you and for the alien who sojourns with you**). They would begin to observe the Biblical holy days, etc., adopting them as their own.

Now, in this context, who is judging them for observing a “Jewish” life-style and religious practice? Not their fellow believers! Rather, their *pagan* relatives, co-workers, and others!

It is interesting to note that the dynamic expressed by Paul in the First Century is still being played out in the Body of Messiah today! To this very day, when non-Jewish believers come into the Messianic synagogue and hear Moses and begin to observe the Biblical holy days, the Biblical dietary laws, and the Biblical commandments expressed in the Older Testament, they receive

criticism from their friends, family and co-workers for observing these “Jewish” religious practices!

“Why are you doing these “Jewish” things? Don’t you know that when you practice these things that you are putting yourself back “under the Law?” “Don’t you know that Christ died to save us from the curse of the Law and that you no longer have to observe these things?”

Funny how much things change that they stay the same. We are *still* wrestling with the dynamic that the early Gentile believers dealt with when relating their new-found faith to their pagan friends.

To use the passage from Colossians to stop Torah Observant believers from “judging” the pagan observances of their fellow believers is simply wrong. We are called to judge within the Body, else how could Paul give up to Satan the man who was living in sin with his father’s wife (1 Corinthians 5:1)? If we cannot judge *anything* within the Body of Messiah, how can we use the Scriptures to *reprove* (2 Timothy 3:16) from sin (transgression of the Law – 1 John 3:4)? We can’t!

Instead, the Scriptures are there to allow us to judge within the Body. We need to be able to point out sin where sin is without our fellow brothers and sisters condemning us for judging them when they transgress the laws of God.

Chapter Ten – So, What about “Food?”

Let’s first establish our groundwork: In the Torah, a Biblical kashrui (*Kashrut* refers to the dietary laws. Food in accord with *halakha* (Jewish law) is termed **kosher** in English) was laid out. Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14:1-20 specifically state what foods are to be eaten and what things are not to be eaten.

In the Hebrew mind, what God has pronounced “clean” is classified “food.” Nothing outside of that category is considered “food”: bats are not considered “food,” centipedes, bees, snakes, ravens, eagles, vultures, eels, squid, octopus, shrimp, lobster, clams, crabs, or people (for you cannibals out there, sorry), are not considered “food.” In short, the Hebrew mind says that anything God said was unclean simply is *not* categorized as “food.”

It is implied, though not specified, that God laid out kashrui to Noah, since Genesis 7:2 speaks of “clean” and “unclean” animals. Note that there were seven pairs of clean animals brought on board versus *one* pair of the unclean. The reason for this is evident: first, the clean animals were accepted for use as sacrifice. (Note also that when Noah made landfall, he offered a burnt offering sacrifice of every clean animal and bird (Genesis 8:20). The second reason may be due to the fact that since man was now permitted to eat meat (Genesis 9:3, 4), having more “clean” animals than “unclean” allowed the clean to be used for “food,” since having more of them would increase the “clean” population faster and thus replenish the human food supply.

If nothing else, the point can be argued that from the beginning of Torah up until the time of Jesus, there was no question as to what was or was not to be eaten. Nowhere over nearly 1500 years do we find a contradiction of that understanding.

Now, as we come to what we call the “New Testament,” suddenly people start coming to the conclusion that since it is the “New” Testament the “Old” one is done away; we have a “New” set of rules to go by – what was not allowed in the older one is now allowed in the new. We now infer that Jesus pronounced all “foods” clean (Mark 7:19). We have Peter getting a vision pronouncing unkosher things as “clean” (Acts 10:11-16) and eating unkosher foods with Gentiles (Galatians 2:11-14). And, we have Paul saying, **“Don’t let any one act as your judge with respect to food or drink”** (Colossians 2:16). So, anything goes, folks.

Is God having trouble making up His mind as to what exactly is to be done in this “New Testament,” or are some people misinterpreting what’s going on here? Certainly not the former.

The Hebrew viewpoint of “food” is **that which God allowed to be eaten in the Torah**, as previously mentioned. Anything outside of the category of what is to be eaten isn’t even called “food!” Lobster, shrimp, pork, clams, crabs, oysters, bear, etc. are not “foods” in the Hebrew viewpoint, so no observant Jew is his or her right mind would have even *thought* to call them by such terminology in Jesus’ time.

So, when Jesus in Mark 7:19 declares all “foods” clean, he wasn’t declaring that what was “clean” per Torah was now “clean.” Rather, in the context of this passage He was saying that eating with ceremonially washed hands does not cleanse what God has already declared to be clean (i.e. “food”).

Paul, in Romans 14, is saying the same thing when he speaks of “food” being clean (verses 14, 15, 20). Colossians 2:16 isn’t condoning the eating of unclean things, rather that of the clean, since it too was being called “food.” [It should be stressed here that whenever an observant Jew speaks of “food” (and Jesus, Peter, Paul, and the early believers were all observant Jews), they are not,

I repeat NOT) speaking of anything unkosher Biblically. This was true two thousand years ago, and it is still true today!]

“Well, what about Peter’s vision,” I am asked? Simply this: *let Scripture interpret Scripture*. If an interpretation is given, don’t go looking for other meanings. When Joseph in Egypt gave the interpretation of their dreams to the chief cupbearer and the chief baker (Genesis 40), should we seek another interpretation? When he interpreted pharaoh’s dream in Genesis 41, should we seek another meaning? Or when Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Daniel 2), should we spiritualize the interpretation and come up with another that suits us better? To all these, when the Scripture gives a clear interpretation shouldn’t we be willing to *accept* the interpretation? Why can’t we do this with Peter’s vision?

Let’s place ourselves back in Peter’s time and mentality. You’ll note, long after the resurrection of Jesus (about 10 years), Peter was still observing a Biblical kashrui (Acts 10:14). Why? You’d think if Jesus was truly proclaiming unclean things as clean back in Mark, he would have already been eating bats, vultures, monkeys, and pork. Yet he remains consistent with Jewish thought and does not eat unclean things.

Now, after the vision, he is perplexed. Is God telling him to do that which was forbidden in the Law, or was there some other meaning to the vision? Looking back into the context of the passage, it must be remembered that in the time of Jesus, Gentiles were considered “unclean.”

Just as the vision is concluded and Peter is reflecting upon those words, a knock occurs downstairs and three men ask for Peter. The Holy Spirit says, “But arise, go downstairs, and accompany them without misgivings; for I have sent them Myself” (Acts 10:20). So, Peter then goes with them:

After arriving at Cornelius' house, Peter speaks to the people assembled with the message of salvation and explains the meaning of the vision to them:

“You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. That is why I came without even raising an objection when I was sent for...”
(Acts 10:28, 29).

The whole issue (and the only one) here in Acts 10 and Acts 11:1-8, as related by Peter, had nothing to do with eating unclean things. The context deals *solely* with Gentile believers being part of the covenant community of faith in Jesus. In Jewish tradition, being a part of the covenant community meant there was to be table relations with the other people within the community. [If you have noticed something about most of the Jewish observances, food is almost always considered a part of that observance.]

People outside of that covenant community were considered “cut off” from the community and unable to participate in table relations. Therefore, when Gentile believers were brought into the covenant community, groundwork was laid as to how they were to be brought into the table relationship with the Jewish believers. At the bare minimum, they were to observe the prohibition against the eating of blood, from things offered to idols and from things strangled so that the Jewish believers would eat with them.

The issue of table relationship (not of unkosher food) is the cause of the incident which Paul cites in Galatians 2:11-21. It was not that Peter was eating unkosher food with the Gentiles, as many Christians assume. Rather, that he was eating with Gentiles (verse 12) when the party of the circumcision (Jewish believers) were not present, yet he would hold himself aloof from the Gentiles when they came (verse 12). It seems that Peter was still struggling with

the traditional issue of the Gentiles and their being unclean. When in the presence of his fellow Jews, he would stand offish from the Gentile believers, and when they were gone, he was willing to eat with them, thus being hypocritical. This is why Paul was confronting him.

Finally, there is the issue of Acts 15, relative to the Gentiles. If *all* a Gentile had to do when coming to faith in Jesus was to follow these passages, then he or she must at least abstain from eating blood (verse 20, 29) following the Old Testament Noachide prohibition against the ingesting of blood (Genesis 9:4), or things offered to idols.

Once saved, however, since Moses is preached in the synagogue every Sabbath (Acts 15:21), a Gentile would come to know that there is more to being holy than the Noachide laws, and presumably would, out of love for God, begin to follow them.

The whole issue of Biblical kashrui, as far as God is concerned, is that of holiness. When we look at Leviticus 11, we see God concluding this chapter with:

For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy; for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth For I am the Lord, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, to be your God; thus *you shall be holy for I am holy* [Italics Mine]. This is the law regarding the animal and the bird, and every living thing that moves in the waters, and every thing that swarms on the earth, to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean, and between the edible creature and the creature which is not to be eaten (verse 44-47).

The obvious question is: what *does* eating have to do with God's holiness anyway? I believe God is speaking about a spiritual issue here, since He is Spirit (John 4:24). I believe that when He defines

something as unclean, it is *spiritually unclean* and when one eats something unclean, he or she becomes spiritually unclean, spiritually defiled. The issue isn't about food – processing, refrigeration or cooking – it is solely about *spiritual holiness*. I believe that there is no one in a better position than God to know what is clean and what is unclean, since He is omniscient!

How does what we eat defile us or make us unholy? Let me illustrate this with an example that is easier to relate to. Let me ask you a question: “How does having sexual intercourse with another person (other than our spouse) defile us (make us unholy)?”

Is it because there is something physically unclean about sexual intercourse? Physiologically speaking, there is no difference between the genitals of one man over another man, or one woman over another woman. Functionally, in sexual intercourse, the procedure is the same between one heterosexual couple and another. So, what *is* defiling about a heterosexual man having sexual intercourse with someone other than his wife? Is it physically or spiritually defiling? Of course, it is easy to see that it is *spiritually* defiling. I am sure the simplest person can answer that question, so I shouldn't have to spell it out further.

In the same way, what is so defiling about eating unclean meat? Is it the meat itself? Is there something physically wrong with the meat? Often, there is. Pork is often loaded with fat and worm eggs; proper cooking will kill the larvae; proper refrigeration will keep it from spoiling. Yet, assuming we prepare it correctly, will it become clean? Physically, that may happen. You may get every worm egg and every bit of fat out, but if we're talking about *spiritual* uncleanness here, proper preparation will not change its status. Nor will praying over it. It is still unclean.

Let me try another approach to make my point. “Physically, if I wore a prophylactic, and otherwise prepared properly, then prayed

to ask God to bless the act - will it then be ok for me to have sex with someone other than my wife?" I hope you can answer that one. Of course not! In summary, you may prepare properly and pray all you want, but if God declares something is defiling or unclean, it doesn't change it in the *spiritual* realm. If it's unclean, it's unclean!

Why is it so difficult to see this when it relates to something like eating, yet so simple in the example of sex? When God says by *eating* them **“Do not render yourselves detestable,** (Leviticus 11:41-43), the resulting *spiritual* defilement is exactly the **same** Hebrew word as the defilement caused by a male having sex with another male, or someone having sex with an animal (Leviticus 18:22).

Let's take a look at this from the Hebrew:

In Leviticus 11:4, the Scripture states:

Only, you may not eat these, of those bringing up the cud, and of those dividing the hoof: the camel, though it brings up the cud, yet it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean (Hebrew: “taw-may”).

The meaning of “taw-may” is **“to be foul especially in a ceremonial or moral sense (contaminated): defile (self), pollute (self), be (make, make self, pronounce) unclean X (multiplied utterly).”**²¹

This same word is used many times to describe unclean things throughout the Older Testament, but rather than going through each and every passage with you, I shall highlight two here to make my point. Leviticus 18:22-24 states:

²¹ *A CONCISE DICTIONARY of the words in THE HEBREW BIBLE with their renderings in the AUTHORIZED ENGLISH VERSION*, by James Strong, S.T.D., L.L.D., MACDONALD PUBLISHING COMPANY, McLean, VA, page 46

And you shall not lie with a male as one lies with a woman it is detestable. And with any animal, you shall not give your lying down with it for uncleanness (2930) with it. And a woman shall not stand before an animal, to lie with it; it is a shameful thing. Do not defile (2930) yourself with all these, for with all these the nations have been defiled (2930), which I am expelling before you and the land is defiled (2930) and I will visit its inequity on it.

In other words, by eating these unclean things, a person makes him or herself *as spiritually defiled* as if he or she were *having sex* with someone of the *same sex* or *having sex with an animal*. (Sort of changes ones perspective of things, doesn't it?)

Contextually speaking, if you want to make yourself abominable in the spiritual realm, have sex with a person not your spouse, or with someone of your own sex, or with an animal, or go have a ham sandwich. The resultant defilement is all the same according to God's definition.

Lest you believe that I have taken it out of context, I will conclude this chapter with the second passage found in Leviticus 20:25-26:

And you shall make a difference between the clean animal, the unclean (2931), and between the unclean (2931) fowl and the clean. And you shall not defile your souls (spiritual defilement, friends) by beast or by fowl, or by anything which swarms the ground, which I have set apart to you as unclean (2930) – and you shall be holy to Me, for I, Jehovah, am holy; and I have set you apart from the nations to become Mine.²² (A LITERAL TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE)

God says that He wants us to be holy people, as He is holy. A believer's desire should be to be holy as God is holy. God alone knows how we are to do this, and if we read His Word and obey it

²² A LITERAL TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE, Copyright 1985, by Jay P. Green, Sr.

we will learn how to be holy. This is as true in the realm of sex as it is in anything else, including in what we eat.

Just as a believer in Jesus is commanded not to take away the members of Messiah and make them members of a harlot (1 Corinthians 6:15-20) because they will literally be making the Messiah a partaker of their sin with them, so I believe a believer should avoid all unclean or unholy contact – even with things we eat. As believers, our bodies no longer belong to us, but to Him; for we have been purchased with a price and are His temple. So then, we literally have to ring our appetites under His control and not simply yielding to our own pleasures.

As a result, if we defile the temple of our bodies with unclean or unholy things or behavior, we are corrupting that which Messiah so dearly paid for. The question is: are we truly His? Does He truly own us? Or does He only own the parts of us we allow Him to be?

Perhaps He owns us on our day of worship and not the rest of the week? Perhaps He owns us in whatever money we choose to give, but not in our tithe, or in the other areas of our finances? Perhaps He owns us in our area of sexuality and not only in what we eat? Perhaps He owns a very little of our lives?

We need to seriously evaluate what we are giving up to His ownership in our lives and then see if we are truly His. We may find that He owns very little of what He paid so dearly for ...

Chapter Eleven – What’s the “New” of the New Testament?

The first mention we have in Scripture about a “New” Covenant or Testament is found in Jeremiah 31:31:

³¹ "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah..."

Who is this New Covenant made with?

“...the house of Israel and with the house of Judah...”

The New Covenant will be made with the House of Israel. That is, the descendants of Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham.

There were twelve sons of Jacob and we are talking about all the tribes, including the tribe of Judah!

But Israel is greater than simply the physical descendants of Jacob! Those who join themselves to Israel from the nations, who are grafted into her (Romans 11) are a part of Israel, too!

Ephesians 2 says, “¹¹ Therefore remember that *formerly you, the Gentiles* in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," *which is* performed in the flesh by human hands-- ¹² *remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.* ¹³ *But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.* ¹⁹ So then *you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens* with the saints, *and are of God's household,* ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone,* ²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

In short, you who are non-Jewish have been brought into the commonwealth of Israel because of what Jesus did! You are part of Israel, not only of the promises, but also of the covenants!

The “New” Covenant applies to you, too!

Now, Judah is mentioned separately here as well! This means that the New Covenant is made with the Jewish people too!

So, no matter which stock or ethnicity you are from, you are now grafted, as Paul would say in Romans 11, to Israel!

Moving on: What’s this “New” Covenant going to be?

Well, let’s first talk about what it is NOT going to be (Jeremiah 31:32):

³² not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD.

The problem with the Old Covenant made at Sinai was that the people broke it. That’s why God needed a New Covenant (Hebrews 8):

⁷ For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. ⁸ For finding fault with them, He says, "BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT..."

The reason why the people broke it, according to Paul in Romans 8 was that the Law could not empower us to keep it: ³ ***For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did:*** sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

The Older Covenant did not empower us to be able to keep it, therefore, the people broke it, which displeased God.

So, what's the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant? Let's look: Here is what the characteristic of the "New" Covenant is (Jeremiah 31):

³³ "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

The New Covenant WILL be God placing His Laws within us on our heart and minds! Why do you think God will write His laws within us? So that we could keep it!

Not only that, He gives us His Spirit to empower us to keep it!

In Ezekiel 36, God says: ²⁶ "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ ***"I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances."***

Thus, believers in Jesus should be the most Torah observant people on all the Earth! We not only have the Torah written on our hearts and minds, but we have the Holy Spirit within us to empower us to keep it!

When God internalizes the law within His believers, he or she follows His commandments naturally –because we now have within us a new nature (Ezekiel 11:17-20; 36:24-27; 2 Corinthians 3:3-18).

"But, Bruce, we're not 'under the Law.'"

My response: "True, exactly!"

Another way to look at Paul's "*hupo nomos*" statements is: "How can we be "under" something that is *within* us?" We can't.

We CANNOT possibly be UNDER something that is INSIDE of us!

With the Law being written *inside* us we are empowered to keep it. We should obey, not for salvation or justification before God, rather because of our love for God (1 John 5:2, 3). We show what kind of believer we are in how, and more importantly why, we keep God's commandments.

Chapter Twelve - One Law for All

There will be some believers who will concede at this point that the Law is still valid, but only for the Jews who has put himself or herself **“under the law.”**

The Scripture, however, paints a different picture. The Law given at Sinai was given to Jews and to **“sojourners”** (Hebrew: “gerim” – Gentiles who left Egypt along with the Israelites and attached themselves to the Hebrew people) – eventually to be known as “converts” or “proselytes,” Exodus 12:49; Leviticus 24:22; Numbers 15:14-16). Anyone who joined themselves to Israel was subject to the same Law, and since Gentile believers are grafted into Israel (Romans 11), they technically are **“sojourners.”** [See my book, *Who is Israel?*]

Acts 15 says that Gentiles are to **“abstain from things polluted by idols, from fornication, from what is strangled and from blood.”** But that does not mean that is all that is non-Jewish believers will have to follow. Verse 21 of that chapter states that Moses is preached in the synagogue, where, by the way, the early Gentile believers went (Acts 17:4, 17; 18:1-4) every Sabbath. There were no Catholics, Methodists, Baptists or other denominations at that time. This means that since non-Jewish believers (sojourners) were there in the synagogue, they heard Moses speak through Torah and learned what it meant to be holy.

The question answered in Acts 15 is this – Do Gentiles have to first become Jews – observing the Laws of Moses – before they can be saved? The answer is a resounding, **“NO!”** Rather, Gentiles are to follow the principles of an earlier covenant than the covenant given at Mount Sinai. Once they are saved, they are to begin by following the covenant God made with mankind through Noah, known as the Noachide Laws (Genesis 9).

This is not to say that Gentiles are not required to learn from the complete Word, which at that time was solely the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament, so that they can move from a paganistic state of life to a holy life. The implication of Acts 15:21 is that since Moses (the Law) is read every Sabbath in the Synagogue, and since believing Gentiles had nowhere else to study the Word but the synagogue, they would hear the Law and begin to apply its principles in their lives. How far they went depended upon them and their relationship with God.

It is obvious from Acts Chapter 10 that Cornelius, the first convert to the believing community of Messiah, observed many Jewish customs and practices in his life. He gave many alms to the Jewish people, and he prayed continually. Verse 2 says he was a devout man, a **“God-fearer.”**

The **“God-fearers,”** as they were known, identified with the Jewish faith, but did not necessarily subject themselves to circumcision (which was a requirement should a male choose to join himself totally as a convert to Judaism).

What makes Acts 10 interesting is verse 3, where Cornelius was praying at the ninth hour of the day. This was the time of the Temple sacrifice, and currently is the time when Jews pray in memorial to the sacrificial offering of the Temple. In other words, Cornelius was doing a very “Jewish” thing, though he was not Jewish. God never stopped a Gentile from observing “Jewish” things, nor, by the way, from going all the way into Judaism.

If the Acts 15 injunction were *all* there was for a Gentile believer to observe, why did Paul put even *one* single verse of the Torah, the Writings, or the Prophets in *any* of his writings to the Gentiles? For instance, in Romans 4:3 he cites Genesis 15:6; in Romans 3:10 he cites Psalm 53:3; in Romans 11:26 he cites Isaiah 59:20; in 1 Corinthians 9:9 he cites Deuteronomy 25:4; in 1 Corinthians 15:32

he quotes Isaiah 22:13; in 1 Corinthians 3:20 he cites Psalm 94:11. Get the point? If *all* a Gentile believer had to do was found in Acts 15, he or she wouldn't need to *know or do* anything more.

But just as Ruth, the Moabitess said to Naomi, **“Your people shall be my people and your God shall be my God”** (Ruth 1:16); so Gentiles throughout the centuries have joined themselves to the people of God, worshipping Him as He desires to be worshipped, keeping His commandments alongside the Jewish people. God especially blesses the full convert to Judaism saving him separately from the **“God-fearer”** like Cornelius in the first outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Shavuot, or Pentecost (Acts 2:10). The full proselytes (alongside full-fledged, believing Jews) were baptized with the Spirit a full 10 years before Cornelius and others like him.

It is important to remember here that the intention of the Law was never to make one righteous (hence the sacrificial system). Instead, its teaching was two-fold: *it taught how one became a part of the covenant community of God through grace* (Deuteronomy 7:7-9; cf Ephesians 2:8-9) and *how a person was to behave within this covenant community*.

Both Jew and Gentile alike are brought into covenant community by *grace alone* and not by works, yet, it is through a person's obedience to the commandments found within the covenant that he proves he is part of the covenant community. How many commandments a covenant person keeps or ignores does not make him more or less righteous than another covenant person. It is by faith alone that righteousness is imputed (Genesis 15:6; cf Romans 4:3, 9; Galatians 3:6, James 2:23).

The Jew is made righteous by the same standard as the full proselyte and non-convert: by the standard of faith found in Romans 9:30-33. Yet, obedience to God's commandments is *assumed* of the faithful (Genesis 26:5; cf James 2:14-26). All

should be desirous of being faithful to God's commandments due to a sense of gratitude and love for Him (Deuteronomy 10:12-13). All should desire to move from a less holy behavior to a more holy behavior. This can only be accomplished by following God's commandments as laid out in the whole Bible.

Even the New Testament teaches that we were created for **good works** (Ephesians 2:10). What standard did they go by (remembering that no "New Testament" was available at this time)? Of course, it was the standard found within the Law.

Chapter Thirteen - How'd we ever get This Way?

The first believers in Jesus after His resurrection were either Jewish or full proselytes (Acts 2:10). It was **not** until roughly 10 years *after* Pentecost that the first non-proselytic gentile (Cornelius-Acts 10) came into the faith. And, not until the middle of the second century, that the “church” as it has come to be known, became a predominantly Gentile body.

Up until that time, all early Christian theology was Jewish; and the concepts it used were quarried chiefly from the Old Testament. The believers in Jesus were not considered to be outside the stream of Judaism, but rather another sect of Judaism called “**the Nazarenes**” (Acts 24:5-15).

“**Devout**” (Acts 22:12) and “**zealous for the Law**” (Acts 21:20), these early believers kept the seventh-day Sabbath (Acts 13:14, 44; 16:13; 17:1, 2; 18:4), observed Shavuot (Pentecost - Acts 2:1; 20:16), Yom Kippur (Acts 27:9), the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Acts 12:3-20:6), and worshiped in the Temple and synagogues (Acts 2:46, 3:1-3; 5:20-25; 9:20; 13:14, 43:14:1; 17:1,2; 18:4-8; 19:8).

As mentioned earlier, the Apostle Paul even offered the sacrifice of the Nazirite (Numbers 6) in the Temple (Acts 21:23-26) many, many **years** *after* the resurrection of Jesus. In effect, what we are seeing is a Torah-abiding group of believers, led by a believing, Jewish leadership of that day.

Today, we basically have a non-Torah-abiding group of believers, led by believing Gentile leadership in the context non-Jewish Christianity, having little or no resemblance to the practices of first century “Christianity.” In essence, the Christianity that came into the “church” from the paganistic practices of the Gentiles (a repeat of the Colossian heresy) is foreign to that of the Apostles’ practice.

Many Christians are totally unaware of how anti-Law, paganistic attitude crept into the Body of Messiah. In fact, most believers think that the faith they practice is the very one of the first century believing community of Messiah. They believe that the Apostles celebrated Christmas as Jesus' birthday, and that they celebrated Easter (oops!) "Resurrection Day."

They didn't. And if today's pastors and/or teachers are aware of this, either they think it irrelevant, or they are afraid that they'll lose their congregations if they "rock the boat."

Yet, God, in His word, *expressly* forbids His people from following the paganistic customs of the nations! Many in the Body of Messiah are quick to point out how Israel fell into paganism throughout the Old Testament writings, but are blind to the paganistic practices in today's Body of Messiah.

We often continue to practice these customs because they have become the standard in our churches. We accept these practices as if they were instituted from God without realizing that when we do the same, we're as guilty as the Pharisees in Matthew 15, whose traditions invalidated God's commandments. As an example, in the church Christmas is observed (which God in no way commanded) and the Feast of Tabernacles (which God did command) is neglected. Easter is celebrated and Pesach (Passover) is neglected. The Sabbath is observed on the first day of the week and not on the specified seventh day.

"But Jesus fulfilled these feasts, so we don't have to keep them."

Tell that to the Disciples, who kept them faithfully, as already noted earlier in this chapter. Tell that to the early believing community who observed them faithfully until Constantine gained control of it. In fact, the early believing community observed Passover until the Council of Nicea (325 A.D.). Daniel Gruber in

his book, *The Church and the Jew – The Biblical Relationship* notes:

Jesus had celebrated Passover on the fourteenth day of Nisan because that is the Biblical date. He observed all the Levitical holy days on the days when God had decreed and designed them to be observed. The Apostles and the First century Church did much the same.

At first, the Christian Passover was celebrated at the same time as the Jewish. This simultaneous observance was preserving the Jewish ritual in the Christian festival and strengthening the bonds between Christianity and Judaism. The date must be changed. In some quarters the Church attempted to restrict the celebration to a single day – 14 Nisan and this became the prevailing custom – she had Holy Week the week in which fell 14 Nisan (the day when the Jewish feast began), and removed the festival, which had already changed its character, to the Sunday following Holy Week. In all these cases there was a dependence on the Jewish calendar, a humiliating subjection to the Synagogue which irked the Church

The issue...was finally settled by the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. There it was decided that all the churches should celebrate Passover, or actually Easter, on the ecclesiastically chosen Sunday rather than the Biblical date. All the churches were thus informed. The Emperor Constantine sent his personal exhortation to all the churches concerning the decision of the Council

In this letter, Constantine officially establishes an anti-Judaic foundation for the doctrine and practice of the Church, and declares that contempt for the Jews and separation from them is the only proper Christian attitude.”²³

²³ *THE CHURCH AND THE JEWS*, The Biblical Relationship, pages 25-31

Daniel Gruber articulates another important question that should be weighed carefully by every believer in own practice of the faith goes. “When did God give such authority over the Church to Constantine?”

It was Constantine who decreed that the Sabbath be changed from the seventh day to the first day of the week, *not the Apostles*. The Christian Sunday was not made a “day of rest” until Constantine decreed it so in A.D. 321, when he called it **“the venerable day of the Sun (Sunday).”**²⁴

Why did he do this? He did it because his previous religion was the worship of the “Unconquered Sun.” Retaining the pagan symbols was a necessary compromise with his pagan subjects, still very much in the majority.

The Christian church took over many pagan ideas and images. From sun-worship, for example, came the celebration of Christ’s birth on the twenty-fifth of December, the birthday of the Sun, Saturnalia, The roman winter festival of 17-21 December; provided the merriment, gift-giving and candles typical of later Christmas holidays.²⁵

The first mention of Christmas as a festival of the church on 25 December refers to A.D. 336. It comes in the Philocalian Catalogue (354), a civil and religious calendar compiled at Rome. In the East, 6 January, known as Epiphany, was favoured as the anniversary of Christ’s birth and baptism. The Western date was introduced into the East by John Chrysostom near the end of the fourth century.

Subsequently the birth of Christ was celebrated by both East and West on 25 December.²⁶

²⁴ EERDMAN’S HANDBOOK TO THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY, Copyright 1977, WM. B. EERDMAN’S PUBLISHING CO., Grand Rapids, MI, pages 122-131

²⁵ *IBID.*, page 131

²⁶ *IBID.*, page 147 79

By 600 A.D. the believing community had acquired virtually all the paganistic practices that it was to incorporate from many of the religious practices that it was to incorporate from many of the religions practiced in the Roman Empire. Through compromise, the Believing community had adopted as a tradition that which was forbidden to the Jewish people.

It must be remembered that the Jewish people were to destroy the peoples, in the land that were coming into so that they would not compromise the standards God had given them. Yet, they did not, and so fell into the paganistic practices of the people they were to conquer, just as God warned.

It is so easy to follow after the practices of the world, which practices are anti-God and anti-holy. God knew this. That is why those anti-God, anti-holy people were to be destroyed when Israel entered the Land, so God's people would not become corrupted.

Will God excuse the believing community for following the paganistic practices of the nations it embraced when He did not excuse His chosen people? I think not. I think as believers we need to be true to God and ourselves. How much paganism in our faithwalk is acceptable and how much is not? Do Protestants have the right to criticize Catholics for some of their paganistic practices when we have so many of our own?

I wish to exhort believers in every denomination to come out from these pagan practices in all forms and go back to the God-given, Biblically commanded Holy days and practices. I pray that all believers stop compromising with the world and seek to do God's things in His way. In so doing, we will truly come back to the form of worship found in the First Century believing community.

Chapter Fourteen - WWJD? What Would Jesus Do?

Over the last several years, a popular item among Christian children (and some adults, I might add) has been a wrist band with the initials “WWJD?” This acronym stands for the words, “What Would Jesus Do?”

While I am not being critical of the practice of wearing things like these to remind us to live holy lives (in fact, I wear one myself), I think that people who promote the wearing of these items sometimes often fail to realize the scope of what they are saying.

It must be remembered that Jesus was *totally* obedient to the commandments as pertained to an Israelite (a citizen of Israel). As believers in him, we are all made part of that same commonwealth (Ephesians 2:11-22) whether we are Jew or non-Jew. Because of this, all the laws of this community apply to all within the community. The sojourner follows the same laws as the native. There are no separate laws for Jews and another set of laws for non-Jews; we are all one.

Since Jesus showed us by his life how an Israelite is to live, the acronym “WWJD” is quite appropriate. When confronted by various situations in life, we *should* ask “WWJD?” What Would Jesus Do? When examining the Scripture, what day would the Lord rest on? WWJD? Where would He be on the Sabbath day? WWJD? What kind of things would He eat? WWJD? Would Jesus celebrate the pagan practices of the Caananites or other peoples surrounding Israel? “WWJD?”

If we didn’t know the answer, where would we turn to find it? Of course, we would go to the “Old Testament,” the TANAKH, since that was all He had.

Having now found the answer in Scripture, the person wearing the “WWJD” band implies that they will follow what He would have done in the *same* situation.

Now, I realize that we will *all* fall short of what Jesus would have done (that is what sin is) and won’t always do what He did. Yet, having said that, we often excuse ourselves in our sin by saying, “I’m just human...” or, as the saying that was popularized by Flip Wilson goes, “The Devil made me do it...” and we go on sinning anyway as if we have no choice.

Well, Scripture says we *have* a choice: the choice to do good; the choice to do what He did. This choice is the choice to be free from the bondage of sin. There was a time in our lives before we became believers in Him that we had no choice. We were in bondage to sin (Romans 6) and sin reigned over us, but now we are freed from sin (verse 18). We have a choice to do as Jesus did!

When we ask the question “WWJD?” we are saying that our choice is to do what He would have done in the same situation. What we need to do is to broaden the question to see if there are areas in our lives that do not live up to “WWJD?”

When we consider the implications of the question “WWJD?” we find that it is greater and deeper than we first realized. The question goes to the essence of what He was and what we should be: holy. The answer to the question speaks to us and says:

The one who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same manner as he walked (1 John 2:6)

When we say that we are believers in Him, we are saying that we will walk as He walked. Not only must we walk His walk in the more obvious ways, but we must learn to walk His walk in those

less obvious ways that are just as important to holy living. If we don't, we are making the Messiah a partaker in our sin.

When we became believers in the Lord, we became one spirit with Him. Our body members became members of the Messiah and His Holy Spirit dwells in us.

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Messiah? Shall I then take away the members of Messiah and make them members of a harlot? May it never be!

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:15, 19)

When we sin, He is in us; He is partaking with us: we are defiling His temple. I am sure He doesn't like that, though He realizes as believers we will sin from time-to-time. We often ignorantly sin because we don't know the Scriptures as we ought or were mis-told.

Sometimes, we do it deliberately; even though we know what the Scripture says. But when we truly repent of our sin (turn around from our sin), ask forgiveness for our sin and choose to do what is right, God will forgive us and heal us.

Since He dwells in us, the Lord expects us to live holy lives. We should *care* what we do with Him living inside of us. We should ask the question "WWJD?" and search the Scriptures diligently to find the answer. To do that, we must put human tradition and doctrine aside in favor of the Scripture's position and seek to walk as He walked.

Chapter Fifteen - Where do we go From Here?

When all is said and done, it is up to the individual to choose what to do when presented with the facts. Perhaps it will be decided that he or she will continue on with their current practice, unaffected. Perhaps it will be that there will be a complete renunciation of pagan practices in their life.

Regardless, we will all have to account before God for what we did with the light we were given. For those of you reading this who have decided to do nothing, you will not have to go any farther in this book; it will not make a difference in your life anyway.

For those of you who decide to make partial or complete changes in the relationship expression of your faith in Jesus, I will attempt to help you get some direction of possible things that can be done. I will assume that the reader wishes to make a complete change in their practice of faith, which will require a necessary change in lifestyle.

Anyone wishing to stop short of any of these suggestions may do so, remembering that it is not me they have to answer to, but the Lord. With that in mind, here are some things which may guide you:

1. Stop observing the “obvious” pagan practices found within the Body of Messiah. Those practices incorporated into the Body of Messiah from very early on with pagan origins have no place in the Body of Messiah: Christmas, Easter, Lent, Good Friday, Halloween (or All Saints’ Day), and the Sunday “sabbath” are all pagan in orientation and origin. They subvert the purity of the faith and contaminate its practitioners. [Once again, I would like to reiterate that one may worship ANY DAY, for in the Temple, worship occurred EVERY DAY. You may worship on Sunday, or Monday, or whatever day you choose, but Sabbath means “rest,”

and one is to REST on the SEVENTH day of the week. I would also like to add another fact: the Hebrew reckoning of the names of the days of the week were, and still are, the numbers of the day – *except* the Sabbath (Shabbat). In other words: Saturday at sundown starts not Sunday, but “yom rishon” - “day one.” At sundown on what we now call Sunday, “day two” starts. Thus, reckoning of the days goes: “day one,” “day two,” “day three,” “day four,” “day five,” “day six” and finally “Shabbat.” For the Disciples to change the Shabbat is ludicrous, even if they could, because then you would have two days called “Shabbat” in the Hebrew “Christian” community! How would they distinguish which day is the “real” Sabbath, especially since they still used the term, “the first day of the week” as evidenced by the Book of Acts? It could get very confusing.]

2. Begin to observe the clearly Biblical commandments that can be seen in the Scripture such as: observing the Biblical kosher laws, not committing forbidden sexual practices, not eating blood, and regarding the period of time from Friday evening to Saturday evening as the true Sabbath in which work is not to be performed, as clearly specified. Then, as you read the Word, the Holy Spirit will bring to your attention other commandments and will show you sin in other areas of your life. As He does so, understand that He does this for your benefit and blessing.

3. Begin to learn how to observe the Biblical feasts and Holy Days and begin to incorporate them into your life to replace all the pagan traditions. You can do this by preferably visiting a Messianic Jewish synagogue, because of their belief in Jesus as the Messiah. If one is not available, call a local rabbi and find out how they’re celebrated. Perhaps they may let you observe their practice and you can go from there. (Remember, they may be observing these out of a legalistic perspective in keeping the Law. The Law is NOT to be kept this way, rather, out of love for the Lord). May I

suggest reading Messianic Jewish books on God's appointed feast days and times to help you?

4. Begin to learn about the Jewishness of the faith and go back to the Jewishness of the First Century believing community. If believers don't insist upon this, their Pastors will continue the pagan traditions of the believing community; it is so much easier to "keep on doing things as usual." "Tradition, Tradition, TRADITION!" (So the song goes...).

Expect persecution from fellow believers. The believing community is the only group that seems to kick, beat or shoot its wounded and hurting. Those who have lived righteously have always been misunderstood, stoned, or otherwise maligned for doing what God wanted them to do. 2 Timothy 3:12 speaks to the fact that **all who desire to live godly lives will be persecuted**. Sadly, it too often comes from our brethren in the faith. Stand firm and hang in there! Don't give up on what the Bible says to do to show your love for God. You'll probably not receive a pat on the back for keeping the Biblical kosher laws; instead you'll find other Christians deliberately setting traps for you to break it. Don't be surprised; this has happened to me and many others at times. When all is said and done, it is better to err on what the Word says than what man-made traditions say. Remember, they *won't* be standing there along side you when you are accounting for your deeds before Almighty God.

Finally, begin to use spiritual gifts as outlined in Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:11-16. I believe these gifts will become much more pronounced and effective once the garbage of paganism is removed from your life. As we truly become more holy (separate) from the worldly practices, we will be more of an unlogged conduit for God's power to flow through. I believe the final Revival will be marked by a great outpouring of God's power that was not equaled, even by the early Believing community.

The most important question to ask at this point is: “Do we want to be used by God this way? If not, we can continue just as before and let Egypt, Babylon, Greece, and Rome rule our religious practices. We’re comfortable with these traditions; they’ve been around a long, long time; and we’re doing okay (so we think).

On the other hand, if we choose to get our lives cleaned up, and we, as the “Bride making herself ready for the Bridegroom,” go back to the Biblical principles outlined in the whole Bible, we will see God making manifest His love, grace and power in the lives of millions. The choice is not an easy one...choose wisely.

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