

Did the Apostle Paul Teach Gentiles To Avoid God’s Sabbath and Holy Days?

*In Galatians four, Paul admonished Gentile converts about observing “days, months, times and years.” In Romans 14 he refers to esteeming “one day above another.”
What is the correct explanation of these enigmatic statements?*

Orthodox Christianity categorically rejects God’s weekly Sabbath and annual holy days. In their biased determination to retain their “Christianized” *pagan* Sunday worship, religious leaders and theologians have carelessly misinterpreted the writings of the apostle Paul to suit their own agendas, rather than seeking the truth of God’s Word. These misleading interpretations give the impression that Paul had taught Gentile Christians to abandon the biblical Sabbath and holy days of God—to reject anything “Jewish.” To such theologians, “Jewish” means the *entire* Old Testament, viewed as the embodiment of Judaism. According to their way of thinking, the Old Testament is to be fully rejected or dismissed as though it had been entirely fulfilled or abolished. As a result, millions of professing “Christians” assume that Paul, in his writings, denounced any observance of God’s Sabbath and holy days as “heretical”! **Galatians 4:8-10** and **Romans 14:1-6** are two key examples; both passages have been twisted by so-called scholars to read as if Paul had abrogated God’s commands concerning His Sabbath and holy days.

What did the Apostle Paul Clearly Teach? There is no question that Paul taught both Jews and Gentiles to observe the weekly Sabbath, as evidenced by the correct translation of Hebrews 4:9: “There remains, therefore, Sabbath-keeping for the people of God.” Furthermore, when we examine Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles, we find that he taught them **on the Sabbath**, not on Sunday. At the beginning of his first evangelistic tour, Paul and Barnabas began preaching to the Jews and the Gentile proselytes **on the Sabbath** in a synagogue in Antioch. After preaching the gospel of Christ, those Gentiles who had been listening “entreated *him* that these words might be spoken to them **on the next Sabbath**.... And **on the coming Sabbath**, almost the whole city was gathered together to hear the Word of God” (Acts 13:42-44).

From this account we learn several important truths about Paul’s teaching of the gospel:

1) If Paul’s purpose was to teach Gentiles that they no longer needed to keep the laws and commandments of God—especially the Sabbath and holy days—why did he not simply encourage them to assemble on the next day, Sunday? Rather, **they assembled on the next Sabbath** to hear Paul and Barnabas preach the words of God.

2) Paul told them to “continue in the grace of God,” which is not a repudiation of the laws and commandments of God. Grace is the operation of God to *forgive sins*, and put one in right standing—justified—through the blood of Jesus Christ from **past** sins. On the other hand, sin is the transgression of the law (I John 3:4). Once forgiven and justified, one is to cease living in sin (John 5:14; 8:11; Rom. 6:1)—cease breaking the law.

3) Faith in Jesus Christ and forgiveness of sin **does not abolish the law**. Paul wrote to the Romans, a Gentile church, “Are we, then, abolishing law through faith? **MAY IT NEVER BE!** Rather, **we are establishing law**” (Rom. 3:31; see Matt. 5:17). This is accomplished as true Christians have the laws and commandments written into their hearts and minds (Heb. 10:16-17). Paul also taught, “What then shall we say? Shall we continue in sin, so that grace may abound? **MAY IT NEVER BE!** **We who died to sin, how shall we live any longer therein?**” (Rom. 6:1-2).

Galatians 4:8-10—The Background: The gospel of Jesus Christ that Paul taught to the Galatians included keeping the laws and commandments of God. The Galatians, however, were confronted by those who were teaching “another gospel.” Because of such false teachers, Paul emphatically wrote, “I am astonished that you are so quickly being turned away from Him Who called you into *the* grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which *in reality* is not another *gospel*; but **there are some who are troubling you** and are desiring to pervert the gospel of Christ. But if we, or even an angel from heaven, should preach a gospel to you that is contrary to what we have preached, LET HIM BE ACCURSED!... But I certify to you, brethren, that the gospel that was preached by me is not according to man; because neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught *it by man*; rather, *it was by the* revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:6-12).

The book of Galatians is one of the most universally misinterpreted and misconstrued books of the New Testament. Without a thorough grounding in the Scriptures (Old and New Testament) and a knowledge of the traditions of Judaism, it is most difficult to properly interpret the book. Four pressing problems in Galatians two and three should be briefly addressed:

First, the Jews had imposed specific circumcision requirements—before the advent of Christianity—upon Gentile proselytes in order for them to attend a synagogue. Jesus, however, revealed that *true* circumcision was spiritual, accomplished through conversion and the receiving of the Holy Spirit. This circumcision “of the heart” superceded the requirement for physical circumcision (Acts 15; Rom. 2:25-29). Therefore, physical circumcision was no longer a requirement imposed upon Gentile converts to Christianity.

Second, Paul’s rebuke of Peter, Barnabas, and the circumcision party from Jerusalem centered around *traditional* laws of Judaism which forbade Jews from keeping company with or eating with Gentiles. This instance was not a question concerning God’s laws and commandments, because the Old Testament never commanded such separation of Jews and Gentiles.

Third—in reference to “the law” in Galatians three—Paul was comparing God’s covenant with Abraham and New Covenant justification by faith through grace *to* the “works of law” required under Judaism and its temple rituals.

Fourth, in Galatians three, most Protestants completely misunderstand verse 13, which reads, “**Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law**, having become a curse for us [to save us from our sins] (for it is written, ‘Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree’).” They *misread* it as follows: “Christ has redeemed us from the law **which is a curse**.” Such a reading is totally absurd and because **the law of God is not a curse!** The law of God is perfect—not a curse! *Sin* is a curse! Obedience to the laws and commandments of God results in blessings! (Deut. 28:1-14; Lev. 26:1-13). *Sin*—the transgression of the law (I John 3:4)—*results* in curses (Deut. 28:15-68; Lev. 26:13-45).

How can a law that is perfect and righteous—given by a perfect, righteous God—be a curse? Indeed, such religious interpretations and fantasies have produced a *lawless grace* that pervades Evangelical Christianity today (Jude 4).

Galatia a Gentile Church: In order to determine the correct meaning of Galatians 4:8-10, we need to realize first that the churches of Galatia were composed mainly of Gentile converts who, as former pagans, had served Greek and Asian gods and goddesses. They were not Jews, and had never followed the traditional practices of Judaism or the Old Testament Scriptures.

Moreover, Galatians four must be considered in the overall context of *all* of Paul’s teachings in *all* of his fourteen epistles. Without a doubt, Paul taught *all* Gentile converts in every church he established to observe the same things (I Cor. 7:17). For example, in Paul’s epistle to the Corinthians, he taught them to keep the holy days of God, such as the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (I Cor. 5:6-8). The church in Corinth was also mostly Gentile. Paul would never have commanded them to observe Passover and Unleavened Bread and then condemn the churches of Galatia for observing God’s Sabbath and feasts! That would only be construed as

hypocrisy and create confusion—and God is not the author of confusion (I Cor. 14:33).

Those who accept the false premise that Paul taught *against* the Sabbath and holy days of God—and that he instead taught the churches to observe Christianized pagan Sunday and occult holidays in their place—fail to realize that before any of the Galatian Gentiles were converted, they **worshiped pagan gods and observed occult holidays** (“days, months, times and years”). However, upon conversion, they repented of their sins and forsook all their pagan occult religious practices (Acts 19:8-27). Indeed, God condemns all pagan, occult practices (Deut. 12:28-32; 18:9-14). Since Paul believed all things in the Law and the Prophets (Acts 24:14), we can be sure that he would never allow the Galatians to observe such pagan customs and holidays.

Galatians 4:8-10 Correctly Explained: As we carefully examine what Paul wrote, it will become clear that he did not condemn the Galatians for observing the Sabbath and holy days of God as most theologians and Sunday churchgoers casually assume.

Interestingly, the question of Sabbath and holy day observance was not the real issue in Galatians four. After their conversion, the Spirit of God led the Galatians to worshipping God in spirit and in truth—which included the keeping of the Sabbath and holy days. Paul wrote that they had become the children of God: “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, ‘Abba, Father.’ So then, you are no longer a servant, but a son. And if a son, *you are* also an heir of God through Christ” (Gal. 4:6-7).

Later, Paul reminds them of their pagan past and their former occult worship of demons. Notice the comparison: “Now on the one hand, [prior to your conversion] **when you did not know God** [and knew nothing of His Sabbath and holy days], **you were in bondage to those who are not gods by nature** [pagan deities and demons]” (verse 8). Their former pagan worship had nothing to do with the biblical Sabbath and holy days—or any other commandment or law of God! But after they were converted, Paul taught them God’s way of life *including* the keeping of the Sabbath and holy days—as he did in *all* the churches.

In a severe admonition Paul warns them that they were in dire spiritual danger, because instead of obeying God, they were *reverting back* to their former pagan ways and blending their former pagan observances with their newly learned Christian way of life. In so doing, they were beginning to turn their backs on God the Father and Jesus Christ. Paul strongly rebukes them: “But on the other hand, after having known God—rather, after having been known by God—how *is it that you are turning again to the weak and impotent elements* [demon spirits of pagan religion], to which you again desire to be in bondage [to Satan the devil as in the past]? **You are of your own selves** [of your own volition] [once again] **observing** [pagan] **days, and months, and times and years**. I am afraid for you, lest somehow I have labored among you in vain” (verses 9-11).

Again, before conversion they knew *nothing* of God or of the laws and commandments of God. Therefore it is not possible to take this phrase to mean that they were returning to the observance of God’s Sabbath and holy days. The phrase can **only refer to pagan days, months, times and years** which they had formerly observed before they were converted.

It is readily apparent that the problem was *not* that the Galatians were forsaking Sunday and holiday-keeping and reverting back to keeping the Sabbath and holy days, as Orthodox theologians claim. In fact, quite the opposite was happening. Notice carefully that Paul did not use the words “Sabbath” or “holy days” in describing how the Galatians were reverting back to their former ways. If Paul was actually writing to them about the Sabbath or holy days of God, he would have used *those terms* instead of “days, months, times and years.” Therefore, such “days, months, times and years” can only refer to *pagan* times of worship, not to the biblically ordained and commanded days of worship. This is why Paul finished his admonition to the Galatians with this warning: “I am afraid for you, lest somehow I have labored among you in vain” (Gal. 4:11).

Orthodox Christendom’s interpretation and explanation of this complicated passage is

entirely incorrect, and is only founded on bias and hostility against the Sabbath and holy days of God. Orthodoxy rejects the truth of God so that they may continue in their observance of a “Christianized” Sunday and the various occult holidays of this world.

Romans 14:1-6—Esteeming “One Day Above Another”: In the *KJV*, Romans 14:1-6 is poorly translated. The key passages universally misunderstood are verses five and six, which read: “One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it.”

Unfortunately, for hundreds of years these verses have been used as justification for traditional Sunday-keeping and the rejection of the Sabbath and holy days of God. Protestantism boasts that these verses grant authority to observe Sunday. However, with a more accurate translation beginning with verse one, the context will show that the discussion is not about which day to keep as a day of religious observance. Rather, it has to do with vegetarianism versus eating meat, as well as the eating of meat on certain days.

“Receive the one who is weak in the faith, but not for divisive arguments. Now on the one hand, one believes he may eat all things *that are lawful*; but on the other hand, another one, who is weak, eats only vegetables. The one who eats *meat* should not despise the one who does not eat *it*. And the one who does not eat *meat* should not condemn the one who eats *it*, for God has received him. Who are you to be judging another man’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he shall be made to stand because God is able to make him stand.

“Again, on the one hand, someone may prefer one day above another day *for eating meat*; but on the other hand, another may hold every day *to be alike*. Let each one be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who regards the day *in his eating* is regarding *it to the Lord*; and the one who does not regard the day is not regarding *it to the Lord*. The one who eats *meat* is eating *to the Lord* because he gives thanks to God; and the one who does not eat *meat* is abstaining *to the Lord*, and is giving thanks to God” (Rom. 14:1-6).

To further substantiate that the problem was vegetarianism versus eating meat, Paul continued to explain: “But if, **because of meat**, your brother is offended, you are no longer walking according to love. **With your meat**, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.... For the kingdom of God is not a *matter of* eating and drinking; rather, *it is* righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because the one who serves Christ in these things *is* well pleasing to God and acceptable among men.... **Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of meat**. All things *that are lawful are* indeed pure; but *it is* an evil thing for someone to cause an occasion of stumbling through his eating. ***It is better not to eat meat, or drink wine, or anything else by which your brother stumbles, or is offended, or is made weak.*** Do you have faith? Have *it* to yourself before God. Blessed *is* the one who does not condemn himself in what he approves” (verses 15, 17-18, 20-22).

It is obvious that Paul, in this passage, did not give people license to pretentiously choose any day of the week as a holy day of worship. That is God’s prerogative alone—not man’s. There is not one word in these verses that can be used to justify Sunday-keeping, or any other day, as a day of worship. Throughout the Bible, God has always commanded and upheld the seventh-day Sabbath as the weekly day of worship, and His holy days as annual days of worship. Here, Paul is simply writing about the problems between vegetarians and meat eaters—and the day on which some meat eaters chose to eat meat.