





Understanding Paul's Difficult Scriptures Concerning the Law and Commandments of God

Introduction

By Phil Neal

First-century Pharisaism was a *works based* religion that could only bring a *form* of “righteousness” to its followers (Rom. 10:3)—the “pseudo-righteousness” to which Jesus alluded in Matthew 5:20. Having lived much of his life as a Pharisee—the *strictest* sect of Jewish religion (Acts 26:5)—the apostle Paul was intimately familiar with Judaic “works of law.” (The Greek word for *strict* means *rigorous* and *exacting*, hence Jesus’ reference in Matthew 23:4 to Pharisaic “burdens.”) Years after his conversion, Paul found himself having to confront various “Judaizers”—those with Pharisaic beliefs who were intent on pushing traditional “works of law” on newly-converted Christians.

The churches of Galatia faced just such an affront. Scholars have long recognized that Paul’s epistle to the Galatians primarily addresses the issue of Judaizers who wanted the Galatian believers to adopt Jewish customs, become circumcised, and even follow the traditions of the Pharisees. However, by confusing Pharisaism with the “religion” of the Old Testament, such scholars have *assumed* that the Galatians were being pressured to adopt the “religion of Moses” as opposed to the so-called “enlightened” Gospel they had already learned from Paul. But such was not the case; the Judaizers were attempting to seduce the Galatians into practicing Pharisaic “works of law”—which, have *nothing* to do with the true “religion” of Moses and the Old Testament.

Because of this erroneous association of Pharisaism with Moses, the phrase “works of law” (especially in Galatians) is quite misunderstood in mainstream Christianity—particularly considering the Protestant belief that the Law has been somehow nullified by Jesus’ sacrifice. According to such skewed theology, on one side of the fence is Moses and the Torah—and, of course, the Pharisees, as representatives of that “Old Testament religion.” On the other side is Jesus, Paul and grace. The poor Galatians were caught in the middle. Teaching a “gospel of liberation,” Paul had supposedly *freed* the Galatians from the “yoke of bondage” to the Law, while the overzealous Pharisaic Judaizers were bent on bringing the converts squarely back “under the Law” of Moses.

But as we will see, the truth is far different. Paul had clearly taught the Galatians to carefully obey the laws and commandments of God—the true “religion” or *way of life* of the Old Testament—while living under the grace of God made possible by Jesus’ sacrifice. Expressing dismay at how easily the Judaizers had led them astray, Paul asks, “O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?... Did you receive the Spirit of God by **works of law**, or by the hearing of faith?” (Gal. 3:1-2). Clearly, such Judaizers were Pharisaic in origin and sought only to promote their brand of pseudo-righteousness based on *traditional*, ritual “works of law.” Understanding Paul’s use of the phrase “works of law” is the all-important *key* (Please see Appendix R, What Is Meant By Works of Law, p. 1343).

For example, in a vital passage generally misunderstood by mainstream Christians, Paul writes, “For as many as are **of the works of the law** are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the Book of the Law, to do them’ ” (Gal. 3:10; *NKJV*). Most people misunderstand this verse to say that those who keep the Mosaic Law are cursed. After all, did not Jesus come to free man from that *harsh* Old Testament set of laws?

But is God’s Law a curse? Stop and think. Could the same Law that David (a man after God’s own *heart*) called “perfect” and “sure” in Psalm 19:7 be a curse? David pronounced a *blessing* on those who keep God’s way: “*Blessed* are the undefiled in the way, **who walk in the Law [Torah] of the LORD**” (Psa. 119:1). Paul wrote that “the Law is indeed holy, and the commandment holy and righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12). The apostle James called the Law the “perfect Law of *liberty*”—because it

liberates one *from* curses.

Read Galatians 3:10 again carefully. It quotes Deuteronomy 27:26, which says, “Cursed is he who does not **confirm all the words of this Law to do them.**” The *curse* is on the one who *fails to obey* the Law—because obedience to God’s way of life *brings life*. This is why Jesus told the rich young man, “if you desire to *enter into life*, keep the commandments” (Matt. 19:17). Most assuredly, the phrase “works of law” in this passage cannot be referring to obedience to God’s laws and commandments—which clearly bring blessings, not curses. Thus, we must look for *another explanation* for Paul’s use of the phrase.

As a Jew who once practiced Rabbinic Judaism, Avi ben Mordechai has done extensive research into Paul’s use of such phrases as “works of law”—particularly in Galatians. In his book *Galatians—A Torah-Based Commentary in First-Century Hebraic Context*, he writes that the Gentile converts of Galatia were under considerable “internal pressure to submit to local Pharisaic decrees and traditions...” (p. 217). He argues that when the overall *context* of the book of Galatians is examined, the phrase *works of the law* “can be understood as a **false system of justification**, which was [based on] a **Pharisaic system of decrees and traditions.**” He adds, “*Works of the law*, as it was understood in the first century, produced a torah of false ‘righteousness’ [based on the oral law] replete with its many reforms [ostensibly] developed by using the [written] Law of Moses as a source text. *Works of the law* had become another torah [the Pharisees’ oral laws and traditions] added to the written Torah of Moses” (p. 216; emphasis added).

With this understanding, Paul’s use of the phrase “works of law” in Galatians 3:10 becomes quite clear. Those trying to achieve “justification” or “righteousness” through adherence to Pharisaic codes of law—“works of law”—were *cursed* because they would, of necessity, be in violation of the written Law. God’s Law and the Jews’ oral law are completely incompatible; one *cannot observe both*. Adhering to the Pharisees’ “works of law” meant the *rejection* of God’s written Law; thus one becomes *cursed* as he fails to “confirm all the words of this Law **to do them.**” This is why Jesus reproved the Pharisees, saying, “Did not Moses give you the Law, and [yet] not one of you is [actually] practicing the Law?” (John 7:19). Christ also stated, “Full well do you *reject* the commandment of God so that you may *observe your own tradition*” (Mark 7:7-9)—and that such traditions had a *nullifying effect* on the Scriptures (Matt. 15:6).

Jewish author David Stern also sees the error of insisting that the phrase “works of law” must always apply to the Law of God. He writes: “Most Christians ... suppose that *erga nomou*, literally ‘works of law,’ a [phrase] which appears three times [in Gal. 2:16], must mean ‘actions done in obedience to the Torah.’ But this is wrong. One of the best-kept secrets of the New Testament is that when [Paul] writes *nomos* he frequently does not mean *law* [in the sense of the Torah], but *legalism*” (*Jewish New Testament Commentary*, p. 536; “Gal. 2:16”). Stern describes *legalism* as the perversion of God’s Law into a mechanical set of rules devoid of their spiritual intent (p. 537), but declines to directly implicate Pharisaic “works of law.” Nevertheless, the principle is the same, as no humanly-devised “code of law” can bring justification or true righteousness.

Contrary to popular myth, Jesus did not come to annul God’s Law, but to *expand* and *magnify* it by emphasizing its original spiritual intent (Matt. 5-6). At the same time, Jesus fully discredited the Pharisees’ system of “works of law” that served only to corrupt the plain teachings of the Scriptures. Clearly, the Pharisees’ traditional “works of law” were incongruous with the true “religion” of Moses and the Old Testament.

It was within this framework that Paul had prefaced his corrective epistle to the Galatians by stating that “a man is **not justified by works of law**”—not justified by adherence to Pharisaic codes of law. He adds that even “we [converted Jews] also have believed in Christ Jesus in order that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by works of law; because **by works of law shall no flesh be justified**” (Gal. 2:16). He thus concludes, “I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness [and justification] is through [Pharisaic] **works of law**, then Christ died in vain” (verse 21). Mordechai puts it like this: “If the Pharisaic system of law and tradition was able to impart life (which only the written commandments can do), then the death of Yeshua was for nothing” (p. 227).

Mordechai concludes that the “foundation of Paul’s polemic was this: No amount of submission to the established traditions of men was (or is) able to justify (establish as righteous) one who wants to be joined to the ‘saved’ Torah community of Israel [the true church of God]”—for “**submitting to the Pharisaic oral law ... was to essentially nullify the teaching and work of [Jesus]**” (p. 218; emphasis added).

Mordechai notes that one of the reasons people often misunderstand Paul is that they approach his

writings concerning the Law as if they were the “primary authority” of the entire body of Scripture. He argues that “most Christians are [taught] to establish doctrine *first* from Paul’s words...” (p. 8). According to Mordechai, they use an upside-down methodology with the following (or a similar) structure (pp. 8-9):

Paul’s Epistles
Gospel Narratives
Apostolic Writings
Old Testament
Mosaic Law

Using this approach, all of Scripture is viewed through the “lens” of Paul’s writings. On the other hand, Mordechai contends that all of Scripture should be viewed ultimately through the written Torah. “From a Hebraic perspective, there is no body of law or philosophy among men that is greater than the divine revelation of teachings that were given to Moses at Mount Sinai” (p. 9). Paul’s writings—because they *are* somewhat complex and subject to being misunderstood or even deliberately distorted (II Peter 3:16)—should be considered only within the framework of the Law and the Prophets. A sound, right-side-up methodology would be:

Pentateuch (Torah)
Old Testament Prophets
Writings (“Wisdom Literature”)
Gospel Teachings of Jesus
Epistles of James, Peter, John, Jude
Epistles of Paul

This approach is based on the premise that God’s righteous laws and commandments are *eternal*—as seen in such basic passages as Deuteronomy 5:29: “Oh, that there were such a heart in them that they would fear Me and **keep all My commandments always**, so that it might be well with them and with their children **forever!**” In Matthew 5:18, Jesus plainly stated that as long as the heaven and earth remain (which will be *forever*), no part of God’s spiritual Law would ever be “done away with.” Thus, Paul’s writings must never be viewed as an attempt to alter, circumvent or annul God’s eternal Law; rather, Paul must be seen as an expert expositor of the Law, one who is uniquely capable of revealing its finer points.

Mordechai also explains that a key reason Paul’s writings are difficult to understand is that he typically employs an established scholarly style of writing based on the use of *ellipsis*—a sort of intellectual shorthand marked by the deliberate omission of words or phrases which requires the reader to make interpretive assumptions (*Galatians*, p. 49, footnote 1). This use of *ellipsis* can be found particularly in Romans chapters 10 and 14 as well as in Galatians chapters 2 and 3.

Mordechai’s research validates the conclusions of Fred R. Coulter, who has also extensively studied Paul’s use of the phrase “works of law.” Coulter’s research shows that in a few Pauline passages the phrase can refer to a basically *legalistic* approach to God’s Law; in other places the phrase can point to sacrificial or Temple ritual laws. Moreover, like Mordechai, Coulter has concluded that the “works of law” passages in Galatians (as well as in several other places) can *only* refer to Pharisaic works.

In *Understanding Paul’s Difficult Scriptures*, Coulter counters the popular misconception that Paul taught that God’s Law has been rendered obsolete by Jesus’ sacrifice. Coulter covers such topics as the “curse of the law,” “works versus grace,” “justification by faith,” and more—proving unequivocally that the laws and commandments of God are fully in force today. He thoroughly examines the issue of “works of law”—delving even into the Greek subtleties that affect the understanding of the phrase.

In order to give clarity to the overall subject of Paul, the Law of God and Pharisaic “works-righteousness,” Coulter’s work is reproduced below in its entirety.



Understanding Paul's Difficult Scriptures Concerning the Law and Commandments of God

by Fred R. Coulter

Because of a lack of knowledge concerning the first-century religion of the Pharisees (which would become Judaism), an erroneous foundational doctrine has developed in Evangelical Protestantism in which “born again” Christians are not required to keep the Law of God—especially the Sabbath and holy days as found in both the Old and New Testaments. Citing numerous “difficult-to-understand” passages from his epistles, they claim that the apostle Paul received a “superior revelation” that supersedes even the teachings of Jesus—and which gave him the authority to annul the requirement that a Christian is to keep the laws and commandments of God (which in some cases even extends to repentance and baptism).

How can that be?

In his book, *Sunday Fact & Sabbath Fiction*, Dr. Russell Tardo boldly declares, “Every bit of the law was nailed to Calvary’s cross, having been completed and fulfilled in the person and life of Jesus Christ” (p. 43). Sadly, this broad assertion is widely believed by the majority of Protestants today. Pointing to Colossians 2:14-16 and similar passages, they attempt to use Scripture to justify their belief that *all* Old Testament laws were nailed to the cross—especially the Sabbath and annual festivals, and the laws of clean and unclean meats.

Because of false, convoluted misinterpretations, coupled with poor or inadequate translations of the original Greek texts of the apostle Paul’s “hard-to-understand” writings—primarily those in Romans, Galatians and Colossians—Protestants typically believe that the laws and commandments of God are a curse, and unnecessary for salvation. It is claimed, therefore, that such laws were abolished by Jesus Christ—through His life, crucifixion and resurrection. But is that true? What are the correct explanations and correct translations of such difficult biblical passages?

Admittedly, some of Paul’s writings are complicated and difficult to understand. Peter himself said as much. But as we will see, the problem is *not* with Paul’s writings at all; the difficulty arises because some handle the Scriptures deceitfully (II Cor. 4:2), thus wrongly “dividing” the Word of God (II Tim. 2:15). Notice what Peter wrote: “And bear in mind that the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation, exactly as our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has also written to you; as *he has* also in all *his* epistles, speaking in them concerning these things; in which are **some things that are difficult to understand, which the ignorant and unstable are twisting and distorting, as they also twist and distort the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction**” (II Pet. 3:15-16).

Unfortunately, millions choose to believe the numerous “holier than thou” experts who twist and distort Paul’s writings. Thus, they fulfill Isaiah’s prophecy: “Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!... Who justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!” (Isa. 5:21, 23).

Does this not describe the state of government and religion today? God warns that judgment will come as a result of casting aside the Law of God and replacing it with false interpretations and beliefs. Isaiah further proclaims: “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil; who put darkness for light and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!... Therefore as the fire devours the stubble, and the flame burns up the chaff, their root shall be like rottenness, and their blossoms shall go up like dust **because they have cast away the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the Word of the Holy One of Israel**” (Isa. 5:20, 24).

Peter further warned that such teachers would deliberately blaspheme God and cast away the Law of the Lord through their false teachings: “But there were also false prophets among the people [of Israel], as indeed **there will be false teachers among you, who will stealthily introduce destructive heresies**, personally denying *the* Lord who bought them, and bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And **many people will follow as authoritative their destructive ways; and because of them, the way of the truth will be blasphemed**. Also, through insatiable greed they will with enticing messages exploit you for gain; for whom the judgment of old is in *full* force, and their destruction is *ever* watching” (II Pet. 2:1-3).

Is the Law of God a Curse?

This devious approach, described by Isaiah, causes most Protestants to completely misunderstand such critical passages as Galatians 3:13: “**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’).” Typically, they violate this verse, **misreading** it as if it meant, “Christ has redeemed us from the law which is a curse.” **Such an absurd reading is completely incorrect and without foundation—because THE LAW OF GOD IS NOT A CURSE!**

The truth is that **the perfect law of God is a wonderful blessing—not a curse!** Sin is the curse! Obedience to the laws and commandments of God results in numerous blessings (Deut. 28:1-14; Lev. 26:1-13). Sin—the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4)—**results** in curses (Deut. 28:15-68; Lev. 26:13-45). Christ has not redeemed us from the law itself, but from the **curse of breaking the law**—the very curse we brought on ourselves because of our sins. He provides forgiveness and redemption through His perfect sacrifice and shed blood—redeeming us from the *death penalty*, which is the *curse* of breaking the Law. **He has not redeemed us from keeping the Law of God**—as if one no longer has an obligation to keep the laws and commandments of God.

The Purpose of God’s Laws and Commandments: Before we can grasp what Paul actually wrote, we need to understand God’s view of His own law and why He gave it to Israel and mankind. After wandering in the wilderness for forty years—because of Israel’s lack of faith and their sins against God—Moses was inspired by God to write this concerning His Law: “And now, O Israel, hearken to the statutes and to the judgments which I teach you, in order to **do them, so that you may live** and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers gives to you. **You shall not add to the word which I command you; neither shall you take away from it, so that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you**” (Deut. 4:1-2).

The children of Israel were to keep the commandments of God so that they might *live* with God’s blessings. Thus, God’s laws are obviously not a curse. How can Protestants possibly believe that Jesus abolished the entire Law—“nailing it to the cross”—when God commanded the children of Israel not to *add* to it or *diminish* anything from it? (Also see Deuteronomy 12:32 and similar references.)

God is a God of love. He gave His laws and commandments to be a *blessing* for Israel and a *benefit* to all mankind. “Therefore, know this day and fix it in your heart that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath. There is none other. Therefore, you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I command you this day, so **that it may go well with you** and with your children after you, and so **that you may prolong your days upon the earth**, which the LORD your God gives you forever.... And you shall be **careful** to do as the LORD your God has commanded you. You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. You shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God has commanded you **so that you may live** and that **it may be well with you, and you may prolong your days** in the land which you shall possess.

“Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments which the LORD our God commanded to teach you so that you might do them in the land where you go to possess it, that you might fear the LORD your God, to **keep all His statutes and His commandments** which I command you, you, and your son, and your son’s son, **all the days of your life**, and **so that your days may be prolonged. Hear therefore, O Israel, and be diligent to observe it, so that it may be well with you**, and that you may greatly multiply, as the LORD God of our fathers has promised you, in the land that flows with milk and honey” (Deut. 4:39-40; 5:32-33; 6:1-3).

With these Scriptures in mind, we need to ask: What is a converted person’s attitude toward the laws and commandments of God? Does the Lawgiver reject, despise, ridicule and abrogate His own laws? Absolutely not! Since truly converted people have the laws and commandments written in their hearts and minds (Heb. 10:16), they will love God’s laws, think on them and live by them in the spirit of the Law (Rom. 7:6), as did King David. Notice his attitude toward the laws and commandments of God which he exalted and praised as perfect: “**The law of the LORD is perfect**, restoring the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: **the commandments of the LORD are pure**, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether, more to be desired than gold, yea, much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

“**Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.** Who can understand his errors? Oh, cleanse me from my secret faults; and keep back Your servant also from



presumptuous sins; do not let them rule over me; then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression” (Psa. 19:7-13).

David never once called the Law a curse! He fully understood that God gave His laws to mankind to **define** righteousness and sin. If we obey, the Law is not a curse, but a blessing. If we disobey, we bring the curse of the Law upon ourselves because of our own disobedience.

We also find much spiritual understanding about God’s laws and commandments in Psalm 119. Notice the following key verses:

- Psa. 119:142 “Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and **Your law is the truth.**”
Psa. 119:151 “**All Your commandments are truth.**”
Psa. 119:160 “**Your word is true** from the beginning.”
Psa. 119:172 “**All Your commandments are righteousness.**”
Psa. 119:97 “**O how love I Your law!** It is my meditation all the day.”
Psa. 119:113 “I hate those who are double-minded, but **Your law do I love.**”
Psa. 119:119 “You destroy all the wicked of the earth like dross; therefore **I love Your testimonies.**
Psa. 119:127 “Therefore **I love Your commandments above gold**—yea, above fine gold.
Psa. 119:140 “**Your word is very pure; therefore Your servant loves it.**”
Psa. 119:159 “Consider how **I love Your precepts**; O Lord, according to Your lovingkindness give me life.”
Psa. 119:163 “I hate and despise lying, **but I love Your law.**”
Psa. 119:167 “My soul has kept Your testimonies, and **I love them exceedingly.**”

David’s solemn, converted attitude of love toward God and His laws—as evidenced throughout Psalm 119—is undoubtedly prophetic of Jesus Christ’s attitude and **love** of God’s laws and commandments which He had during His ministry in the flesh when He “magnified the law and made it glorious” (see Isaiah 42:21) revealing its spiritual intent and purpose. An in-depth study of the entirety of Psalm 119 should be undertaken by the reader for a more comprehensive understanding of the laws and commandments of God.

Quoting Scripture, Jesus expounded on the greatest commandment of all: “ ‘You shall love *the* Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ **This is *the* first and greatest commandment**; and *the* second *one* is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ **On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets**” (Matt. 22:37-40). Reflecting on what Jesus said, the apostle John wrote that love and commandment-keeping go together like a hand and glove: “By this *standard* we know that we love the children of God: when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God: that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome” (I John 5:2-3).

Jesus Christ Did Not Abolish the Law

Why do so many people—especially religious leaders—have so much defiant contempt for the laws and commandments of God? Paul gives the answer: “Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God; neither indeed can it *be*” (Rom. 8:7). Lawless minds do not like to be constricted or constrained by “law.” It “cramps” their style of living, exactly as Proverbs says: “All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes.... **There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof is the way of death**” (Prov. 16:2, 25). Satan desires that “his children” be “happy” in their rebellious behavior—hence, lawless generations.

On the other hand, when we understand these Scriptures and the fact that “all the Law and the Prophets” are under-girded by the love of God, how can anyone possibly believe that Jesus came to abolish the Law? What did Jesus Himself proclaim concerning “the Law and the Prophets”? He emphatically declared, “**Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets**; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, **until the heaven and the earth shall pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the Law** until everything has been fulfilled” (Matt. 5:17-18).

As Jesus said, we are not even to think, or suppose—let alone teach in His name—that He came to abolish the Law or the Prophets! Furthermore, He established the heavens and earth as perpetual

witnesses that the laws of God will not pass away—not even one seemingly insignificant *jot* or *tittle*! **Therefore, since heaven and earth still exist, Jesus has not abolished the Law or the Prophets!** Perfection is timeless.

Before Jesus came in the flesh, born of the virgin Mary, He was the Lord God of the Old Testament. He was the One Who spoke the Ten Commandments to Israel. Jesus is the Lawgiver in both the Old and New Testaments.

Indeed, when Jesus defeated Satan the devil during His temptation in the wilderness, He clearly stated, “It is written [in the Law], ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but **by every word** that proceeds out of *the* mouth of God’ ” (Matt. 4:4; Luke 4:4; Deut. 8:3).

Compare those words of Jesus to this ignorant statement: “The law is a unit of 613 commandments and all of it has been invalidated.... It has ceased to function as an authority over individuals” (*Sunday fact & Sabbath Fiction*, Dr. Russell Tardo, p. 31).

If the law was abolished, there would be no sin, because as Paul wrote, “[W]here no law is, *there is* no transgression” (Rom. 4:15). Likewise, if there is no transgression, the penalty for sin or the need for forgiveness vanishes. Consequently, there would be no need for a Savior, and Jesus would have died in vain. Ultimately, such anti-law reasoning leads to the conclusion that man is completely sufficient unto himself, which is nothing less than satanic humanism—the end result of *lawless* grace.

Notice what Jesus said about those who teach others to break even the “least” of God’s commandments: “Therefore, whoever shall break one of these least commandments, **and shall teach men so**, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever shall practice and teach *them*, this one shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:19).

Christ continued: “For I say to you, unless your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way *that* you shall enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:20). Jesus’ statement here is enigmatic to say the least, since the scribes and Pharisees were *well known* for their “righteousness.” Yet, the Pharisees’ “righteousness” was not derived from the laws and commandments of God, but from their *own* traditions and laws as found in the codes of Jewish law. Jesus denounced the scribes and Pharisees for keeping their *own* laws and commandments—which were actually *contrary* to the laws and commandments of God: “Well did Isaiah prophesy concerning you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from Me. **But in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men.**’ For leaving the commandment of God, you hold fast the tradition of men, *such as* the washing of pots and cups; and you practice many other things like *this*.” Then He said to them, “**Full well do you reject the commandment of God, so that you may observe your own tradition.... [Thus you are guilty of] nullifying the authority of the Word of God by your tradition which you have passed down; and you practice many traditions such as this**” (Mark 7:6-8, 9, 13).

Here, Jesus is making it clear that we are not to follow in the footsteps of the Jewish religious leaders, but to walk in God’s way as taught by Jesus Christ Himself. Indeed, this is how one’s righteousness can *exceed* that of the scribes and Pharisees.

The key is understanding how Jesus “fulfilled” the Law (Matt. 5:17). To “fulfill” means “to fill to the full” or “to make complete.” That is quite the *opposite* of abolishing the Law. **Indeed, Jesus “fulfilled” the Law by revealing its spiritual meaning and application in human behavior**—in how humans relate to one another and to God the Father and Jesus Christ. The scribes and Pharisees thought they were quite adept at keeping the letter of the Law—but in their corrupt hypocrisy they completely missed the spirit and intent of the Law. (See Appendix H, “How Did Jesus Christ Fulfill the Law and the Prophets?,” page 1273.)

The Gospels reveal that Jesus focused on the spirit of the law throughout His ministry. As evidenced in Matthew 5-7, Jesus specifically established this new spiritual standard of the application of the spirit of the Law for New Testament Christians, as compared to the letter of the Law required under the Old Testament.

Two examples are sufficient to show how Jesus “fulfilled” the Law by revealing its deep spiritual meaning: “You have heard that it was said to those *in ancient times*, ‘You shall not commit murder; but whoever commits murder shall be subject to judgment.’ But I say to you, everyone who is angry with his brother without cause shall be subject to judgment. Now *you have heard it said*, ‘Whoever shall say to his brother, “Raca,” shall be subject to *the judgment of* the council.’ But *I say to you*, whoever shall say, ‘*You fool*,’ shall be subject to the fire of Gehenna” (Matt. 5:21-22).

“You have heard that it was said to those *in ancient times*, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I

say to you, everyone who looks upon a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:27-28).

These examples clearly illustrate the spiritual application of the laws and commandments of God as taught by Jesus Christ and found throughout the New Testament.

Over ten years after Jesus’ death and resurrection, the apostle James, the “brother of the Lord,” defined the true Christian approach to the Law of God, which he calls the “**Royal Law.**” Notice how his writings agree exactly with Jesus’ teachings in Matthew 5-7: “If you are truly keeping *the* Royal Law according to the scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well. But if you have respect of persons, you are practicing sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors; **for if anyone keeps the whole law, but sins in one aspect, he becomes guilty of all.**”

“For He Who said, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘You shall not commit murder.’ Now if you do not commit adultery, but you commit murder, you have become a transgressor of *the* law. In this manner speak and in this manner behave: as those who are about to be judged by *the* law of freedom” (James 2:8-12).

Finally, notice how God praised Abraham’s faithful obedience when He passed the covenant promises on to Isaac: “And I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and will give to your seed all these lands. And in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because **Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws**” (Gen. 26:4-5). Abraham is not only the father of Isaac and Jacob and the children of Israel in the Old Testament, He is also called the father of the New Testament faithful: “And if you *are* Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to *the* promise” (Gal. 3:29). This means that if we are truly Christ’s, then we will do as Abraham did. We will obey the voice of God, keep His charge, His commandments, His statutes and His laws. We will never believe that Jesus did away with the Law—or called the Law a curse.

Paul’s Easy-to-Understand Scriptures

Before going on to examine Paul’s more difficult writings, it is prudent that we first look at his easy-to-understand Scriptures—which unmistakably demonstrate Paul’s attitude toward the Law of God. For example, he wrote the following to the Corinthians: “*For* circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; rather, **the keeping of God’s commandments is essential**” (I Cor. 7:19). He further explained how he reached out to everyone, Jew and Gentile alike, in preaching the gospel. **But never at any time did he proclaim that the laws and commandments of God were no longer in effect for himself or the believer:** “Now to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain *the* Jews; to those who are under law, as under law, that I might gain those who are under law; to those who are without law, as without law (**not being without law to God, but within law to Christ**), that I might gain those who are without law” (I Cor. 9:20-21).

Later, after Paul was brought from Jerusalem to Caesarea to stand trial, he stood and defended himself before the Jewish authorities and Felix the governor emphatically declaring that as an apostle of Jesus Christ he believed *all things* written in the Law and the Prophets: “Neither can they prove *the things* of which they now accuse me [abolishing the laws and commandments of God]. But I confess to you that according to the way which they call heresy [his teachings that Jesus was the Messiah, the Savior of mankind], **so serve I the God of my fathers, believing all things that are written in the Law and the Prophets**” (Acts 24:13-14). Paul also declared, “Therefore, the law *is* indeed holy, and the commandment holy and righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12).

Because a true believer is indeed justified by faith, Paul also answered those who believed in a “lawless grace” and claimed that justification through Christ’s sacrifice eliminated the need to keep the laws and commandments of God. Notice what Paul wrote: “Since *it is* indeed one God Who will justify *the* circumcision by faith, and *the* uncircumcision through faith. Are we, then, abolishing law through faith? **MAY IT NEVER BE! Rather, we are establishing law**” (Rom. 3:30-31).

Far from having received some “greater revelation” that supersedes Christ’s teachings, Paul’s statement here is in full harmony with what Jesus taught: “**Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets.**” Under the New Covenant, true believers will lovingly obey Jesus Christ and God the Father from the heart. Notice Jesus’ teachings concerning commandment-keeping—teachings which Evangelical Protestantism conveniently ignores: “**If you love Me, keep the commandments**—namely, My commandments.... The one who has My commandments and **is keeping them**, that is the one who loves Me; and the one who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will manifest

Myself to him.... If anyone loves Me, he will **keep My word**; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. **The one who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word that you hear is not Mine, but the Father's, Who sent Me**" (John 14:15, 21, 23-24). Notice that Jesus does not say that commandment-keeping is for the Jews only—but that it is required of everyone.

Through the Holy Spirit of God—which God gives to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32)—the Law is not abolished, but *established* by love and grace so that the laws and commandments can be written into one's heart and mind. The New Covenant is not for Israel and Judah alone, but is for all converts: "'This *is* the covenant that I will establish with them after those days,' says *the* Lord: 'I will give My laws into their hearts, and I will inscribe them in their minds; and their sins and lawlessness I will not remember ever again.' Now where remission of these *is*, *it is* no longer *necessary to offer* [animal] sacrifices [at the Temple] for [the justification of] sin" (Heb. 10:16-18). As we will see, at the heart of the controversy over the Law is this: **Does justification come by rituals and works, or by faith through grace?**

Christ was raised from the dead so that we may be justified by faith through grace and put into **right standing** with God the Father. Paul shows that faith *and* belief are required for God to impute righteousness to us: "And he [Abraham] was fully persuaded that what He had promised, He is also able to do. As a result, **it was also imputed to him for righteousness**. But it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; rather, *it was also written* for our sake, to whom it shall be imputed—to **those who believe in Him Who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, Who was delivered for our offenses, and WAS RAISED FOR OUR JUSTIFICATION**" (Rom. 4:21-25).

Once we have been justified to God the Father—through the death and resurrection of Christ, having our sins forgiven by faith in Jesus—we are under the grace of God. Let us understand the true meaning of "grace."

Grace as defined in the New Testament comes from the Greek word *charis*, which means "favor, grace, gracious help or care, goodwill, the gracious intention of God or gift; the practical application of goodwill, a favor, gracious deed or benefaction, a store of grace, a state of grace, a deed of grace and a work of grace; to be grateful, gratitude or thanks." Moreover, grace denotes **the state of the relationship** between God and the believer through Jesus Christ. When Paul uses the word "grace" as part of an opening greeting or closing salutation, it is used to confer "divine grace" upon the one who is reading the Epistle.

Grace is the free and undeserved gift of God the Father through Jesus Christ. The grace of God is the greatest expression of God the Father's love and all-encompassing mercy. Grace is more than the forgiveness of sins. To be "**under grace**" means to *continually* be receiving God's divine love, favor, blessing, gracious care, help, goodwill, benefits, gifts and goodness. God the Father is the source from which grace comes to the believer. Furthermore, the **ONLY MEANS** by which grace is granted to the believer is through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the perfect sacrifice of God the Father. The believer enters into the grace of God through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of his or her sins. God the Father grants His grace to each believer upon repentance of sins and baptism by immersion, which is our "covenant death" into Christ's death and is the outward manifestation of our repentance. Through grace, the believer's sins are forgiven and the righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed to him or her.

Grace establishes a **new spiritual relationship** between the believer and God the Father and Jesus Christ. Through the unearned and unmerited gift of grace, the believer is not only called, chosen, forgiven and accepted by God the Father through His Beloved, but is also begotten with the Holy Spirit, making him or her a child of God and an heir of eternal life. From this point forward, the spiritually begotten believer begins a new life under grace. As the Scriptures reveal, living under grace requires the believer to **live by every Word of God** with complete love and devotion to God the Father and Jesus Christ. **Grace does not grant one license to practice sin by ignoring or rejecting the commandments of God**. Only those who keep His commandments can abide in His love and remain under His grace. Every believer who receives the grace of God has a personal obligation to God the Father and Jesus Christ to forsake his or her old, sinful thoughts and practices and to **live a new life, daily growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ**. For every believer who lives under grace, Jesus Christ acts as Redeemer, High Priest and Advocate. If a Christian commits a sin, then Jesus—upon the believer's repentance—intercedes before the Father to obtain His mercy and grace, thus becoming the propitiation for such sins.

Far from abolishing the laws and commandments of God, this personal relationship between God the Father, Jesus Christ and the true believer *establishes* the Law through love and obedience.

In summary, there are *five keys* to understanding how through grace we are to obey the full spiritual intent of God's laws and commandments under the New Covenant as magnified by Jesus Christ and taught in the New Testament:

1. One must have the Holy Spirit. This comes by repentance, baptism by full immersion in water and the laying on of hands to receive the impregnation of the Holy Spirit from God the Father into the spirit of one's mind. This is called circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2:28-29).
2. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God writes His laws into one's heart and mind: " 'This is the covenant that I will establish with them after those days,' says *the Lord*: 'I will give My laws into their hearts, and I will inscribe them in their minds' " (Heb. 10:16). This is what Paul meant when he wrote: "**Are we, then, abolishing law through faith? MAY IT NEVER BE! Rather, we are establishing law**" (Rom. 3:31).
3. Since it is through faith and the grace of God that we are establishing law—by having them written in our hearts and minds by the power of the Holy Spirit—we are to no longer live in sin. Sin is the transgression of the Law (I John 3:4). Paul made this perfectly clear. "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? Or are you ignorant that we, as many as were baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into His death?" (Rom. 6:1-3).
4. This means one will obey in the *spirit* of the Law and not in the letter of the law only, as Paul wrote, "so that we might serve in the newness of the spirit and not in *the oldness of the letter*" (Rom. 7:6).
5. Under the New Covenant, obedience to the laws and commandments of God is part of the operation of the *grace* of God that leads to eternal salvation.

With this background we can now begin to understand the true meaning of Paul's difficult Scriptures. We will first examine the seventh-day Sabbath question, because it is at the heart and core of the dilemma of understanding Paul's difficult passages. Our study will begin by looking at Paul's teaching concerning Sabbath-keeping in Hebrews 4:9.

The True Meaning of *Sabbatismos* in Hebrews 4:9

"There remaineth therefore a **rest** to the people of God" (Heb. 4:9, *King James Version*). As we will see, this is an incorrect translation, rooted in Orthodox bias against the holy Sabbath day of God.

Because of this erroneous translation—due largely to Protestant hostility against the seventh-day Sabbath and their preference for Sunday—this verse is almost universally misinterpreted and misunderstood. In fact, the true meaning of Hebrews 4:9 is the *very opposite* of the false interpretation assumed and taught by many churches, ministers and theologians.

Today, mainstream "Christianity" teaches that Christians are no longer required to observe the seventh-day Sabbath. They misconstrue Hebrews 4:9 to mean that Christ has given them "rest" (or, as some say, a "release") from commandment-keeping. This false claim feeds the premise that Jesus has "fulfilled the law" *for* them. As a result, people are told, the Christian has entered into a "spiritual rest" from sin, and that Jesus Himself is their "spiritual Sabbath," because Jesus kept the Sabbath in their stead.

Such absurd reasoning is completely contrary to the Word of God. Jesus Himself said that He did not come to abolish or "do away with" the laws and commandments of God (Matt. 5:17-18). Nor did He fulfill any commandment in order to release Christians from their obligation to keep God's laws. Indeed, He set the perfect example for us to *free us* from committing sin, which is the transgression of the Law (I Pet. 2:21-22; I John 3:4). Jesus did not come to keep the commandments *in our stead*. Years into his ministry, the apostle Paul said that he was still *zealous* for the laws of God (Acts 22:3)—which would certainly include the Sabbath commandment.

When we understand and absorb the full meaning of the Greek text of Hebrews 4:9, there is no question that the New Testament upholds the authority of the Fourth Commandment. The Greek word used here for “rest” is *sabbatismos*, which means “Sabbath rest, Sabbath observance” (Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*).

This definition is confirmed by other historical works: “The words ‘sabbath rest’ are from the [Greek] noun *sabbatismos*, [which is] a unique word in the NT. This term appears also in Plutarch (*Superset. 3 [Moralia 166a]*) for sabbath observance, and in four post-canonical Christian writings which are not dependent on Heb. 4:9” (*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 5, p. 856). This is historical evidence that true Christians continued observing the seventh-day Sabbath long after Emperor Constantine declared in 325 AD that Sunday was the “Christian” day of worship.

While *sabbatismos* is a noun, the verb form of the word is *sabbatizo*, which means, “to keep the Sabbath” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*). This definition of *sabbatizo* is confirmed by its use in the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament dating from the third century BC. Jews used the Septuagint in synagogues throughout the Roman Empire; Greek-speaking Jewish and Gentile converts to Christianity used this translation throughout the early New Testament period. This is why the apostle Paul quotes extensively from the Septuagint in his epistle to the Hebrews, which went to all the true churches of God—Jew and Gentile.

When Paul used *sabbatismos* in Hebrews 4:9, he did so knowing that its meaning was **well known** to the Greek-speaking believers of that day. After all, its verb form (*sabbatizo*) is widely employed in the Septuagint—which, as a translation, was as familiar to the Greek-speaking Jews and Gentiles of the early Church as the King James Bible is to Christians today.

For example, the use of the verb *sabbatizo* in Leviticus 23:32 in the Septuagint substantiates its meaning. *The Greek English Lexicon of the Septuagint* defines *sabbatizo* as “to keep [a] sabbath, to rest” (Lust, Eynikel, Hauspie). The English translation of this verse in the Septuagint reads: “It [the Day of Atonement] shall be a holy sabbath [literally, a Sabbath of Sabbaths] to you; and ye shall humble your souls, from the ninth day of the month: from evening to evening **shall ye keep your sabbaths**” (*The Septuagint With the Apocrypha*, Brenton).

The phrase “shall ye keep your sabbaths” is translated from the Greek, *sabbatieite ta sabbata*—which literally means, “you shall **sabbathize** the Sabbaths.” The form of the Greek verb *sabbatizo* is the second person plural *sabbatieite*, which means, “you **all** shall keep”—meaning *everyone* is to keep the Sabbath. Throughout the entire Septuagint, the verb *sabbatizo* is never used except in relation to Sabbath-keeping. Understanding this definition, the *KJV* translators translated *sabbatieite* as “shall ye celebrate your sabbath.” However, they deliberately did not likewise translate *sabbatismos* in Hebrews 4:9—because of their Sunday-keeping bias in following the lead of the Roman Catholic Church. (See Appendix N, “Rome’s Challenge to the Protestants,” page. 1306.)

There is no question that the Greek verb *sabbatizo* in Leviticus 23:32 is specifically referring to Sabbath observance. This meaning equally applies to the noun form *sabbatismos* as used by Paul. Thus, the continuity of the Septuagint’s use of *sabbatizo* and the use of *sabbatismos* in Hebrews 4:9 confirms that Paul was upholding the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath for all true Christians.

The use of *sabbatismos* in Hebrews 4:9 directly contradicts any false teaching that the Fourth Commandment has been abolished. As the context of Hebrews 4 demonstrates, the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath as a day of rest and worship is as literally binding for the people of God today as it was since creation, or in the days of King David, or for Israel of old.

It becomes clear that Hebrews 4:9 does not mean that Christians have entered into some sort of “spiritual rest” which exempts them from their obligation to keep the Sabbath, or any other commandment of God. Rather, this verse must be taken as *instructive*—that Christians are indeed commanded to keep the Sabbath day. Consequently—in accordance with the original Greek—this verse should be translated: “**There remains, therefore, Sabbath-keeping for the people of God**”—Jew and Gentile alike.

The *true* meaning of Hebrews 4:9 is diametrically *opposite* the false misinterpretation of Orthodox Christendom. Paul is emphatically declaring that Sabbath-keeping—and this means the annual holy day Sabbaths as well—is *required* for true Christians. He is not “spiritualizing away” or eliminating the weekly Sabbath or the annual Sabbaths of God.

The True Meaning of Galatians 4:8-10— Did the Apostle Paul Abolish the Sabbath and Holy Days?

Orthodox Christianity views God's weekly Sabbath, annual feasts and holy days with considerable disdain. In their determination to retain their "Christianized" pagan Sunday and occult holiday worship, religious leaders and theologians have blindly and deliberately misinterpreted the writings of the apostle Paul to suit their own agendas, rather than seeking the "truth of God's Word." These misleading interpretations are designed to 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 religious leaders and 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 in Galatians 4:8-10 Paul denounced any observance of God's Sabbath and holy days as "heretical"!

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 day**, 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 day** in a synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia, in Asia Minor. After preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, His resurrection and the forgiveness of sins, Paul warned his listeners not to reject the words of God: "Therefore, be it known to you, men *and* brethren, that through this man **the remission of sins** is preached to you. And in Him everyone who believes is justified from all things, from which you could not be justified by the Law of Moses.

"Take heed, therefore, lest that which is spoken in the Prophets come upon you: "Behold, you despisers, and wonder and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work that you will in no way believe, *even* if one declares it to you." ' **And when the Jews had gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles entreated him that these words might be spoken to them on the next Sabbath.** Now after the synagogue had been dismissed, many of the Jews and the [Gentile] proselytes who worshiped *there* followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, **persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. And on the coming Sabbath, almost the whole city was gathered together to hear the Word of God**" (Acts 13:38-44).

From this account we learn several fundamental truths about Paul's teaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

- 1) If Paul's fundamental 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 wonderful 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).
- 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).
- 4) This is a perfect example of how Sabbath-keeping and the grace of God go hand-in-hand. They are not opposed to one another. The Gentiles continued in the grace of God and met on the next Sabbath.

The Gospel of Paul and Galatians: The Gospel of Jesus Christ that Paul taught to the Galatians included keeping the laws and commandments of God. Following Jesus' example and teachings, Paul never sanctioned or endorsed the religions or laws and commandments of men—Jewish or Gentile (Mark 7:1-13; Acts 17:22-31). Neither did he teach a lawless grace. Rather, he taught that *all* had to forsake their ways, repent of their sins and keep the laws and commandments of God, and worship Him in spirit and in truth (Acts 17:30; Rom. 7:6; John 4:23-24).

In combating those who were teaching a different gospel, Paul proclaimed in the opening of his epistle to the Galatians that He preached the *true* Gospel of Jesus Christ—the same one that Jesus taught! 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! As we have said before, I also now say again. If anyone is preaching a gospel contrary to what you have received, LET HIM BE ACCURSED!

“Now then, am I striving to please men, or God? Or am I motivated to please men? For if I am yet pleasing men, I would not be a servant of Christ. 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). If Paul had preached a gospel as distorted by theologians, past and present, he would have indeed been teaching *another* gospel.

In fact, the book of Galatians is one of the most universally misinterpreted and misconstrued books of the New Testament. While it is beyond the scope of this article to give a complete commentary on Paul's epistle to the Galatians, there are four pressing problems in Galatians Two and Three which should be 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” superseded 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 completely incorrect because THE LAW OF GOD IS NOT A CURSE!**

Without a thorough grounding in the Scriptures—Old and New Testament—the true laws and commandments of God, a knowledge of the oral traditional laws of Judaism, God's covenant with Abraham, God's covenant with Israel, and, finally, the New Covenant of the New Testament, it is not feasible to properly interpret Paul's epistle to the Galatians. This is why it is undoubtedly the most difficult book of the New Testament to comprehend.

As we have seen, the truth of the matter is that **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 (1 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? The point needs to be considered that *if* the Law is a curse, and the Law has been abolished, then it would mean that God Himself is a curse and has abolished Himself. But such is not the case, because God is love, Lawgiver and Sustainer, and Jesus Christ is upholding the entirety of the universe through *Law*—by the Word of His power (Heb. 1:1-3). Indeed, such religious interpretations and fantasies have produced a lawless grace that pervades Evangelical Christianity today.

Finally, notice that God praised Abraham's faithful obedience when He passed the covenant

promises on to Isaac: “And I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and will give to your seed all these lands. And in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, **because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws**” (Gen. 26:4-5). Abraham is the father of the New Testament faithful as well: “And if you *are* Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to *the* promise” (Gal. 3:29). This means that if we are truly Christ’s, then we will obey the voice of God, keep His charge, His commandments, His statutes and His laws, as Abraham did. We will never believe that Jesus did away with the Law, nor call the Law a curse.

Galatians 4:8-10—The Background

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

In Paul’s epistle to the Corinthians, he made it crystal clear that the things he wrote to them were the commandments of the Lord: “WHAT? Did the Word of God originate with you? Or did it come only to you *and no one else*? **If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write to you are commandments of the Lord.** But if anyone *chooses* to be ignorant, let him be ignorant” (I Cor. 14:36-38).

What did Paul command them to observe? Was it Sunday and other pagan, occult holidays—or was it the Sabbath and God’s Passover and feasts? This is profoundly important because what Paul wrote were “the commandments of the Lord” for the New Testament Church—Jews and Gentiles. While Paul condemned their sins, he commanded the Corinthians—and thus the entire Church—to **keep the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread** in the right spirit and attitude: “Your glorying [in sin] is not good. Don’t you know that a little leaven [a type of sin] leavens the whole lump? Therefore, purge out the old leaven [the old sinful ways], so that you may become a new lump [truly converted in Christ], *even* as you are unleavened [in your homes]. **For Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us. For this reason, LET US KEEP THE FEAST**, not with old leaven, nor with *the* leaven of malice and wickedness, but with *the* unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth” (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. God is not hypocritical, nor is He 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).

Interwoven throughout the Scriptures, God condemns all pagan, occult practices. Notice particularly God’s warnings in Deuteronomy: “**Be careful to observe and obey all these words which I command you, so that it may go well with you** and with your children after you forever when you do *that which is* good and right in the sight of the LORD your God. When the LORD your God shall cut off the nations before you, where you go to possess them, and you take their place and dwell in their land, **take heed to yourself that you do not become ensnared by following them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not ask about their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods that I may also do likewise?’** You shall not do so to the LORD your God, for every abomination to the LORD, which He hates, they have done to their gods; even their sons and their daughters they have burned in the fire to their gods. **Whatever thing that I command you, be careful to do it. You shall not add to it, nor take away from it**” (Deut. 12:28-32).

God also commanded the children of Israel not to follow demonic, occult practices or observe pagan religious times: “[Y]ou shall not learn to do according to the abominations of those nations. There

shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that uses **divination**, or an **observer of times**, or a **fortuneteller**, or a **witch**, or a **charmer**, or a **consulter with familiar spirits**, or a **wizard**, or **one who seeks oracles** from the dead. For all that do these things *are* an abomination to the LORD. And because of these abominations, the LORD your God drives them out from before you. You shall be blameless before the LORD your God. For these nations whom you shall possess hearkened to observers of times and to diviners; but **as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you to do so**” (Deut. 18:9-14). Since Paul believed all things in the Law and the Prophets, we can be sure that he would never allow the Galatians to observe such pagan customs and holidays.

Galatians 4:8-10 Correctly Explained

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 worship God in spirit and in truth—which included keeping 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).

Next, Paul reminds them of their pagan past and their former occult worship of demons. Notice the comparison: “Now on the one hand, **when you did not know God, you were in bondage to those who are not gods by nature** [the pagan deities and demons]” (Gal. 4:8). Their former pagan worship had nothing to do with the biblical Sabbath and holy days—or any other commandment or law of God!

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 observing days, and months, and times and years**. I am afraid for you, lest somehow I have labored among you in vain” (verses 9-11). 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 and ministers claim. In fact, quite the opposite was happening, as we will see in the following analysis.

An Analysis of What Paul Wrote in Galatians 4:8-10

- 1) Paul speaks of the time *before* the Galatians were converted: “**Now on the one hand, when you did not know God, you were in bondage to those who are not gods by nature** [the pagan deities and demons]” (verse 8). Before they were converted they knew nothing about the true God—the Father and Jesus Christ. Therefore, we can conclude that before they were converted, they did not observe God’s Sabbath, feasts or holy days—**only after their conversion**.
- 2) Next, Paul speaks of their conversion and having come to know God: “...**after having known God—rather, after having been known by God...**” (Gal. 4:9). After they were converted, Paul taught them God’s way of life in the grace of God, including the keeping of the Sabbath, feasts and holy days. Paul taught the observance of God’s Sabbaths in *all* the churches.
- 3) Later—because they were beginning to accept a false gospel—the Galatians began leaving the true Christ and the true Gospel, and were returning to their former pagan religious practices and demon worship: “**How is it that you are turning again to the weak and impotent elements** [demon spirits of pagan religion]...” (verse 9).
- 4) In so doing, they were returning to the spiritual bondage of false, pagan gods and the accompanying religious days of worship: “...**to which YOU AGAIN DESIRE TO BE IN BONDAGE** [to Satan the devil as in the past]?” (verse 9).
- 5) Paul notes that rather than following the teachings of Jesus Christ, what they were doing was

of their own choice and determination: “**You are of your own selves...**” Paul uses a special middle voice verb, *paratereithe*, which shows that they were acting of their *own* volition in making such decisions—and were not doing so because of Paul’s teachings.

6) What were they reverting to? They were going *back* to “**observing [for themselves] days, and months, and times and years**” (verse 10). Again, before conversion they knew *nothing* of God, Jesus Christ or Christianity—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, feasts and holy days—or that they were following traditional Judaism. The phrase can **only refer to pagan days, months, times and years**, which they had formerly observed before they were converted.

Notice carefully that Paul did not use the words Sabbath, feasts 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, feasts or holy days of God, he would have used *those terms* instead of “days, months, times and years.” Therefore, there is no real question that such “days, months, times and years” can *only* refer to pagan times of worship, not to the biblically 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).

As we have seen, Orthodox Christendom’s interpretation and explanation of this complicated passage is entirely incorrect, and is only founded on bias against the Sabbath, feasts 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.

Romans 14:1-6 reads: “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.”

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).

Romans 14:1-6 Divided Into an A and B Pattern: Paul wrote these verses in an “A and B” pattern. When analyzed, this pattern shows that Paul 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. Rather, Paul is writing about those who eat meat and those who are vegetarians.

A. “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*;

B. “...but on the other hand, another one, who is weak, eats only vegetables.

A. “The one who eats *meat* should not despise the one who does not eat *it*.

B. “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.

A. “Again, on the one hand, someone may prefer one day above another day *for eating meat*;

B. “...but on the other hand, another may hold every day *to be alike*.

“Let each one be fully convinced in his own mind.

A. “...the one who regards the day *in his eating* is regarding *it to the Lord*;

B. “...and the one who does not regard the day is not regarding *it to the Lord*.

A. “The one who eats *meat* is eating *to the Lord* because he gives thanks to God;

B. “...and the one who does not eat *meat* is abstaining *to the Lord*, and is giving thanks to God” (Rom. 14:1-6).

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. Paul is simply writing about the problems between vegetarians and meat eaters—and the day on which some meat eaters chose to eat meat.

Colossians Two: Were the Ten Commandments Really Nailed to the Cross When Jesus Was Crucified?

Another example of misinterpreting Paul’s writings is found in Colossians 2:14, 16-17, and stems from an extremely poor translation of the Greek text. Unfortunately, this particular misunderstanding has led millions to believe that all the laws and commandments were nailed to the cross when Jesus was crucified. As in the case of Galatians Four, we will notice that the Protestants’ false interpretation is exactly the *opposite* of what Paul actually wrote and meant.

First, we will examine the *KJV* translation of each of these key passages, beginning with verse 14: “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.”

From this obscure translation, people presume that the phrase “handwriting of ordinances” constitutes the laws and commandments of God. Therefore, they conclude incorrectly that the Ten Commandments were nailed to the cross.

In the Greek, “handwriting of ordinances” is *chriographon tois dogmasin*—which literally means “handwriting in decrees or dogmas.” In the New Testament, *dogma* always refers to “decrees” written by men (Luke 2:1; Acts 16:4; 17:7; Eph. 2:15). Nowhere in the entirety of the Bible does *dogma*, “decrees,” refer to any part of the Law of God. Therefore, this phrase in Col. 2:14 has nothing to do with biblical Law.

But what does the expression “handwriting of ordinances” actually mean? As we will see, the phrase refers to a *written account* of one’s sins, called “a note of debt.” In his epical book *The Two*

Babylons, Alexander Hislop writes concerning this pagan, Greek religious practice, which the converts in Colosse had undoubtedly formerly practiced (the practice was also found in ancient Chinese religion): “A work of some note on morals, called *Merits and Demerits Examined*, [describes how] a man is directed to keep a [written] debtor and creditor account with himself of the acts of each day, and at the end of the year to wind it up [in summary]. If the balance is in his favor, it serves as the foundation of a stock of merits for the ensuing year; and if against him, it must be liquidated by future good deeds [justification by works]. Various lists and comparative tables are given of both good and bad actions in the several relations of life; and benevolence is strongly inculcated in regard first to man, and, secondly, to the brute creation. To cause another’s death is reckoned at one hundred on the side of demerit; while a single act of charitable relief counts as one on the other side” (page 147).

Thus, the phrase in Colossians 2:14 should be translated as “note of debt against us *with* the decrees of our sins”—or a symbolic listing of our sins against God. Our sins and the *debt* of our sins were nailed to the cross when Jesus Christ was crucified and died. Upon true repentance of sins to God the Father, Jesus Christ blots out the “note of debt” through the remission of our sins. Jesus Christ, Who knew no sin, was made sin for us. He was nailed to the cross as a sin offering for the sins of the whole world. **The “note of debt” of our sins was symbolically nailed to the cross, NOT the commandments of God which stand forever.**

When Col. 2:13 is included with the correct translation of verse 14, the true meaning of what Paul wrote becomes clear: “For you, who were *once* dead in *your* sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has *now* made alive with Him, having forgiven all your trespasses. He has **blotted out the note of debt against us with the decrees of our sins**, which was contrary to us; and He has taken it away, having nailed it to the cross.” Therefore, the actual meaning of these verses has nothing to do with nailing the Law to the cross, as falsely believed by millions of professing Christians.

The True Meaning of Colossians 2:16-17

The erroneous distortion of these two verses has caused Protestantism to denounce the observance of the biblical Sabbath, holy days and clean and unclean meats more than any other passage in the New Testament. Consequently, it has caused ministers and laymen alike to “rummage” through the New Testament in search of other Scriptures to substantiate this misinterpretation—resulting in a myriad of additional false interpretations and beliefs that appear to bolster their practices of Sunday-keeping and observing occult holidays. When one *casually* reads these verses, it does give the *appearance* that such an interpretation may be correct—but such is not the case.

In the *KJV*, Colossians 2:16 reads: “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*”—verse 17—“which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ.”

To add further confusion to this doctrinal puzzle, the *New International Version* savaged verse 17 with the following deliberate mistranslation: “These are a shadow of things that **were to come**.” In so doing, they reinforced the false idea that, since Christ has already come, the things that were “to come” have been fulfilled. Thus, they cling tenaciously to their mistaken belief that indeed “the life, death and resurrection terminated all these laws and commandments of God.”

However, the Greek preposition the *NIV* translators mistranslated as the English past tense phrase “were to come” is actually a **present tense**, articular active plural participle, *toon mellontoon*, which is impossible to translate as a past tense completed action. An honest translation can only reflect the present tense, continuous, ongoing meaning of “the things to come,” or “the coming things”—which can only mean the continuous unfolding of prophecy and the plan of God.

Importantly, we know the Colossian church was composed entirely of Gentile converts. Paul preached “the mystery among the Gentiles” (Col. 1:27), and refers to their spiritual circumcision of the heart through Jesus Christ—their conversion—in contrast to their physical condition of “uncircumcision” of the flesh (Col. 2:13).

As we find in Acts 19, Gentile converts forsook their pagan religion and worship of Greek gods and goddesses, when they were met with resistance and ridicule. And in the case of Paul, he was threatened with death because he gave up Judaism. Likewise, when the Colossians were converted, their lives were completely changed. They abandoned their past pagan religious practices, forsook the idol temples, and ceased to participate in pagan religious festivals and days of worship. Instead, they observed the seventh-day weekly Sabbath; and as Paul taught in all the churches, they were faithful to the holy days

and festivals of the true God.

This caused those *outside* the church to make judgments against the Colossian brethren for having abandoned their former religious philosophy and worship of angels. When we understand the circumstances with which Paul was dealing when he wrote Colossians 2:16-17, then the true meaning of the passage becomes clear.

An Analysis of Colossians 2:16-17

Here is an accurate translation from the original Greek of Col. 2:16-17: “Therefore, do not allow anyone to judge you in eating or in drinking, or with regard to a festival, or new moon, or *the Sabbaths*” —verse 17— “which are a foreshadow of the things that are coming, but the body of Christ.”

1) The first phrase—“**Therefore, do not allow anyone to judge you...**”—means that because they were now converted and had changed their lives to believe and obey the Gospel, and were now keeping the laws and commandments of God instead of their former pagan ways, **therefore**, they were not to let anyone *outside* the Church judge them because of their new way of life.

2) “**...in eating, or in drinking...**” When they were pagans they ate all meats—clean and unclean. After conversion they no longer ate unclean meats (I Tim. 4:1-5). Likewise, they no longer engaged in drunkenness as in the past, which was also part of their pagan religious practices. Now, because they had changed their ways, they were to ignore the judgments and criticisms of those outside the Church.

3) “**...with regard to a festival, or new moon, or *the Sabbaths*...**” Rather than showing that the Colossians were being judged for rejecting the festivals and Sabbaths of God, this phrase means the exact opposite. As in the case of the Galatians, as former pagans they had never observed any of the biblical festivals and Sabbaths before their conversion. Therefore, those outside the Church were not judging the Colossians because they were no longer keeping these things, rather they were judging them because after their conversion they were, indeed, keeping them. A word about “new moon.” Since this is in the singular, it refers to the calculated Hebrew Calendar, and must be referring to the Feast of Trumpets, a holy day, because the first day of the seventh month (a new moon) is the beginning date for the calculations of the Hebrew Calendar.

4) “**...which are a foreshadow of the things that are coming...**” This important phrase shows that true Christians—those obeying God’s way of life—will have an understanding of coming events in prophecy as the plan of God unfolds.

5) “**...but the body of Christ.**” This phrase can reflect two meanings. First, since the Colossian brethren were being judged by those *outside* the church for their new, converted conduct, any judging concerning these matters should only be done in and by the Church, which is “the body of Christ.” Second, this phrase can also mean that the *reality* of observing God’s Sabbath and holy days can be found only in the “body of Christ”—the Church—not from *outside* the Church. In other words, the true knowledge and meaning of such days can be found only in the churches of God. As Jesus said, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them [outside the body of Christ—outside the true Church of God] it has not been given.... But blessed *are* your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. For truly I say to you, many prophets and righteous *men* have desired to see what you see, and have not seen; and to hear what you hear, and have not heard” (Matt. 13:11, 16-17).

The entire chapter of Colossians Two is a contrast between the way of God through Jesus Christ and the way of pagans with their religious philosophies and worship of fallen angels. When the verses of this chapter are divided into these two contrasting elements, the true meaning and full intent of what Paul wrote becomes clear. Below, the verses of Colossians Two are divided into: **A.** Things relating to Christ and God the Father and the Christian way of life; and **B.** Warnings against paganism, religious philosophy and the worship of fallen angels.

Colossians Two Divided into Elements A and B

A. “Now I want you to understand what great concern I have for you, and *for* those in Laodicea, and as many as have not seen my face in *the* flesh; that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love unto all riches of **the full assurance of understanding**, unto *the* **knowledge of the mystery of God**, and of *the* Father, and of Christ; **in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge**” (verses 1-3).

B. “Now I say this so that **no one may deceive you by persuasive speech**” (verse 4).

A. “For though I am indeed absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. Therefore, **as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, be walking in Him; being rooted and built up in Him, and being confirmed in the faith, exactly as you were taught**, abounding in it with thanksgiving” (verses 4-7).

B. “Beware lest anyone takes you captive **through philosophy and vain deceit**, according to **the traditions of men**, according to the **elements of the world**, and not according to Christ” (verse 8).

A. “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and **you are complete in Him**, Who is the Head of all principality and power; in Whom you have also been circumcised with *the* circumcision not made by hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, by which you have also been raised with *Him* through the inner working of God, Who raised Him from the dead. For you, who were *once* dead in *your* sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has *now* made alive with Him, **having forgiven all your trespasses. He has blotted out the note of debt against us with the decrees of our sins**, which was contrary to us; and He has taken it away, having nailed it to the cross. After stripping the principalities and the powers, He made a public spectacle of them, *and* has triumphed over them in it [through His crucifixion and resurrection]” (verses 9-15).

B. “Therefore, **do not allow anyone to judge you** in eating or in drinking, or with regard to a festival, or new moon, or *the* Sabbaths, which are a foreshadow of the things that are coming, but the body of Christ. **Do not allow anyone to defraud you of the prize by doing his will in self-abasement and the worship of angels, intruding into things that he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his own carnal mind and not holding fast to the Head...**” (verses 16-19).

A. “[T]he Head from Whom all the body, being supplied and knit together by the joints and bands, is increasing *with* the increase of God. Therefore, **if you have died together with Christ from the elements [see Gal. 4:8-10] of the world...**” (verses 19-20).

B. “...**why are you subjecting yourselves to the decrees of men as if you were living in the world? They say**, ‘You may not handle! You may not taste! You may not touch!’ **The use of all such things leads to corruption. It is according to the commandments and doctrines of men**, which indeed have an outward appearance of wisdom **in voluntary worship of angels, and self-abasement, and unsparing treatment of the body**, not in any respect to the satisfying *of the needs* of the flesh” (verses 20-23).

When the chapter is taken as a whole—and one examines Paul’s contrasting admonitions—it becomes obvious that Paul did not abolish the dietary laws of clean and unclean meats, the annual festivals or the weekly Sabbath, or adopt a pagan calendar system. Moreover, none of God’s laws were nailed to the cross. Rather, Paul is clearly affirming that the Gentiles in Colosse were to continue to observe God’s laws and commandments as they had been taught. Paul was instructing the Colossians to disregard the criticisms and harsh judgments of those *outside* the Church, because the observance of God’s Sabbath and holy days are a continuous foreshadowing of events yet to occur in God’s plan. By being faithful and keeping these commandments of God, they would always be worshiping the true God, be built up in Jesus Christ and never lose the understanding of God’s plan. By true obedience to God the Father and Jesus Christ, they would never again be deceived by vain philosophies and decrees of men, nor would they be seduced into the worship of fallen angels—Satan and his demons. This is the *true* meaning of Colossians Two!

Ephesians 2:15-16: Did Jesus Abolish the Commandments?

Now that we have a clear understanding of Colossians Two, it will not be difficult to realize what Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:15-16. In these verses the *KJV* reads: “Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, *so* making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.”

The key phrase in this *inaccurate* translation—which has caused a great deal of confusion—is “abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances.” What is the “law of commandments contained in ordinances”? Are these actually the commandments of God contained in the Old Testament, as most assume?

The word translated “ordinances” comes from the Greek *dogma* (Col. 2:14, 20), which always refers to “decrees, ordinances, decisions and commands of men” (Arndt and Gingrich). Paul is not referring here to the commandments of God contained in the Law of God. Moreover, not once in the New Testament is *dogma* used in reference to the laws and commandments of God.

To what decrees or dogmas of men is Paul referring? Notice, the context clearly reveals that he was writing about the *traditional* dogmas, decrees or commands of Judaism. The harsh traditional laws of Judaism created great hostility and enmity between Jews and Gentiles—as well as among the Jews themselves. Of these Jesus said, “For they bind heavy burdens and hard to bear, and lay *them* on the shoulders of men; but they will not move them with *one of* their own fingers” (Matt. 23:4).

In Mark Seven, Jesus Christ strongly rebuked the Jewish religious leaders for adhering to their traditional laws and rejecting the commandments of God: “[T]he Pharisees and the scribes questioned Him, *saying*, ‘Why don’t Your disciples walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?’ And He answered *and* said to them, ‘Well did Isaiah prophesy concerning you hypocrites, as it is written, “This people honors Me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from Me. **But in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men.**” For leaving the commandment of God, **you hold fast the tradition of men, such as** the washing of pots and cups; and you practice many other things like *this*.’ Then He said to them, ‘**Full well do you reject the commandment of God, so that you may observe your own tradition.** For Moses said, “Honor your father and your mother”; and, “The one who speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death.” But you say, “If a man shall say to *his* father or mother, ‘Whatever benefit you might receive from me *is* corban (that is, *set aside as* a gift to God),’ he is not obligated to help his parents.” And you excuse him from doing anything for his father or his mother, **nullifying the authority of the Word of God by your tradition which you have passed down;** and you practice many *traditions* such as this’ ” (Mark 7:5-13; also see Matt. 23).

Not only were the traditional decrees of Judaism contrary to the laws and commandments of God, they were so strange and harsh that they bred hostility and enmity among the Jewish people. Such traditions especially caused Jews to look down on Gentiles with contempt and disdain. In Ephesians 2:11-16, Paul describes this hostile relationship that existed between Jews and Gentiles before the coming of Christ and the preaching of the Gospel of peace. He emphasizes that the enmity was primarily the result of the Jews’ nonsensical traditions.

For example, a major “thorn in the flesh” between the two groups was the Jews’ tradition—from their added oral law—that Jews were not to keep company with Gentiles, or even eat with them. This was most certainly not a Law of God. In order to prevent this Jewish bias against Gentiles from becoming rooted in the Church, God revealed to the apostle Peter early on that such traditions of Judaism were totally unacceptable—and that He was fully annulling those laws and decrees.

When God first began to call Gentiles, Peter was sent through a special vision from God to the house of Cornelius in Caesarea. Cornelius was a Roman Army Centurion who feared the true God and prayed to Him. Notice what Peter said to Cornelius: “**You know that it is unlawful for a man who is a Jew** [who practiced Jewish traditional law] **to associate with or come near to anyone of another race...**” (Acts 10:28).

Peter explained to Cornelius and those gathered in his house that God had moved him through a vision to proclaim that such hateful Jewish decrees had been made null and void by God as contrary to His laws and commandments. Peter said, “But God has shown me *that* **no man should be called common or unclean....** Of a truth I perceive that **God is not a respecter of persons, but in every**

nation the one who fears Him and works righteousness is acceptable to Him” (Acts 10:28, 34-35).

In order to demonstrate to Peter, and hence all the apostles, that God was calling the Gentiles to the same salvation that began with the Jews and Israelites at the temple on the day of Pentecost in 30 AD, He supernaturally poured out the Holy Spirit upon the uncircumcised Gentiles gathered in Cornelius’ house *before* they were baptized. Peter continued, “ ‘And He [Jesus] commanded us to preach to the people, and to fully testify that it is He Who has been appointed by God *to be* Judge of *the* living and *the* dead. To Him all the prophets bear witness, *that* everyone who believes in Him receives remission of sins through His name.’ **While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came upon all those who were listening to the message. And the believers from the circumcision were astonished,** as many as had come with Peter, **that upon the Gentiles also the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out;** for they heard them speak in *other* languages and magnify God. Then Peter responded *by saying*, ‘**Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized, who have also received the Holy Spirit as we *did*?**’ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they besought him to remain *for* a number of days” (Acts 10:42-48).

With this background—and an accurate translation of Ephesians 2:11-16—the true meaning of this difficult passage is crystal clear. We see that Paul was in no way abolishing the commandments of God—for no man can abolish the commandments of God any more than a man can destroy the heavens and earth (Deut. 30:16-20; Matt. 5:17-18; Mark 13:31).

Rather, God annulled the ridiculous, hateful, traditional laws of Judaism that were against Gentiles, as they had no place in the Church of God. Notice what Paul wrote: “Therefore, remember that you were once Gentiles in *the* flesh, who are called uncircumcision by those who are called circumcision in *the* flesh made by hands; *and* that you were without Christ at that time, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off are made near by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace, Who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition [created by Jewish traditional laws and decrees], **having annulled in His flesh the enmity, the law of commandments contained in the decrees of men, so that in Himself He might create both into one new man, making peace** [between Jews and Gentiles in the Church]; and *that* He might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross, **having slain the enmity** by it” (Eph. 2:11-16).

Romans 7:1-6—Are Christians “Released from the Law”?

An improper interpretation of this passage gives the appearance that Christians have been “released” from any obligation whatsoever to keep the laws and commandments of God. However, such teachings are, in reality, rooted in carnal-minded lawlessness and enmity against the laws of God (Rom. 8:7; I John 3:4). Those who believe and promote such blatant misrepresentations are lacking in scriptural knowledge and are unskilled in dividing the Word of truth—and thus make Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul lawless ministers of sin!

“Are you ignorant, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know law), that the law rules over a man for as long a time as he may live? **For the woman who is married is bound by law to the husband as long as he is living; but if the husband should die, she is released from the law *that bound her to the husband.***

“So then, if she should marry another man as long as the husband is living, she shall be called an adulteress; **but if the husband should die, she is free from the law *that bound her to the husband,*** so that she is no longer an adulteress if she is married to another man. In the same way, my brethren, you also were made dead to the *marriage law of the Old Covenant* by the body of Christ in order for you to be married to another, Who was raised from *the* dead, that we should bring forth fruit to God. For as long as we were in the flesh, the passions of sins, which were through the law, were working within our own members to bring forth fruit unto death. **But now we have been released from the law because we have died to *that* in which we were held so that we might serve in newness of *the* spirit, and not in *the* oldness of *the* letter”** (Rom. 7:1-6).

Clearly, the context of this passage is the *marriage law* which binds a husband and wife together—until death terminates their marriage covenant. Based on this law, Paul makes a comparison—because the covenant between God and the children of Israel was a *marriage* covenant. The Lord God was likened to the husband and Israel was likened to His wife. God confirmed this marital covenant relationship when He inspired Isaiah to write, “**For your Maker is your husband;** the LORD of hosts is His name; and your

Redeemer *is* the Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall He be called” (Isa. 54:5).

This marriage covenant between God and ancient Israel was based on physical promises of territory, long life, abundant material blessings, national wealth and greatness, and God’s protection in exchange for Israel’s obedience in the letter of His laws and commandments. Yet Israel was an almost completely unfaithful wife.

Since marriage is binding by law until the death of either the husband or the wife, how could God terminate His marriage with Israel—apart from destroying every Israelite from all twelve tribes? Remember, God keeps His own laws, as they are a reflection of His inherent spiritual righteousness. Indeed, He was bound to Israel by His own immutable law.

However, the Lord God of the Old Covenant was the One Who became the Lord of the New Covenant—Jesus Christ. Therefore, the Lord God Who became Jesus Christ in the flesh was able to terminate the marriage covenant with Israel through His death on the cross. He could not enter into a *new* espousal covenant relationship with the Church until He had died. This was one of the key reasons He became God manifested in the flesh, so He could release Israel and Himself through His own death from their Old Covenant marriage.

After Jesus’ death and resurrection, true Christians could then be espoused as chaste virgins to Jesus Christ as their future husband (II Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:22-33). The marriage of the Lamb, the Husband, and the Church, the wife, will take place shortly after the first resurrection (Rev. 19:7-9).

Consequently, the phrase “released from the law” means that through Jesus’ death (and the believer’s symbolic death by water baptism), Jewish Christians have been *released* from their marriage agreement that bound them to the Old Covenant. It does *not* mean that New Covenant Christians are released from the obligation to keep the commandments and laws of God (Matt. 5:17-20). Rather, they are to obey the laws and commandments of God in the **newness of the spirit** of the Law, and not just in the letter of the Law (verse 6).

“Justification by Faith”— Is the Righteousness of God Without Law?

In order to determine the actual meaning of the apostle Paul’s difficult passages concerning “law/the law” and “righteousness,” we need to first understand how Paul used these particular terms.

Paul’s Use of the Term “Law”: The English word “law” is translated from the Greek word *nomos*, “law” or “principle of law” or “rule of law.” *nomos*—it means in the strictest sense the law of Israel or to the Ten Commandments system. “The law,” *ho nomos*, *ho* is the definite article. Romans 7:23—“the law,” *ho nomos*, *ho* is the definite article. Romans 8:2—“the law,” *ho nomos*, *ho* is the definite article. Galatians 6:2—“the law,” *ho nomos*, *ho* is the definite article.

“Law” Without the Law: Paul uses the term *without the law* especially true where Paul reinterprets and understands *adding* the definite article “the” to the definite article. Moreover, the definite article—i.e., “*the*.” Thus, Omissions of the definite article cause misunderstandings caused by the English translation. However, in *The Holy Spirit* is *added* to the English translation. Thus, it is distinguished from the Greek. In such cases the article is *added*. A thorough study of this matter is helpful.

Below is a listing of the

1) There is *no* definite article in the Greek in these passages—simply *nomos*. If a definite article

is *added*, it should be italicized—“*the* law.” Rom. 2:12, 14, 23, 25, 27; 3:20, 21, 27, 28, 31; 4:12, 14, 15; 5:13, 20; 6: 14, 15. In Rom. 7:1-6, all uses of “law/the law” are referring to the principal of “law” and the “law” of marriage as it pertains to God’s covenant with Israel. Rom. 7:7, 8, 9, 23, 25; 9:31, 32; 10:4; 13:10; I Cor. 9:9, 20; Gal. 2:16, 19, 21; 3:2, 5, 10, 11, 13, 18, 21, 23; 4:4, 5, 21; 5:4, 18, 23; 6:13; Phil. 3:5, 6, 9; I Tim. 1:9; Heb. 7:12, 16; 8:10; 9:19; 10:16

2) These passages already *include* the definite article as part of the original Greek—*ho nomos*. Thus they appear as “**the** law.” Rom. 2:13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 23, 26, 27; 3:19, 21; 4:16; 7:12, 14, 16, 22, 23; 8:2, 3, 4, 7; 10:5; I Cor. 9:8, 9; 14:21, 34; 15:56; Gal. 3:10, 12, 13, 17, 19, 21, 24; 4:21; 5:3, 14; 6:2; I Tim. 1:8; Heb. 7:5, 19, 28; 8:4; 9:22; 10:1, 8

Paul’s Use of the Word “Righteousness”: In addition to Paul’s use of “law/the law,” we need to understand the meaning of the word “righteousness” and how he used it. In the New Testament, “righteousness” is translated from the Greek word *dikaisune* (δικαιοσύνη), which is used to bring out *nine* different aspects of “righteousness.”

1) The **righteousness of the law** is obedience in the letter of the law (Deut. 4:1-8; Luke 1:6; Rom. 2:27; Phil. 3:6, 9).

2) The **righteousness of law** refers to receiving **justification** of one’s sins through Old Covenant sacrifices, rituals, oblations and washings at the temple (Lev. 1-7; 12-15).

3) The **righteousness of law** refers to a work of law in obedience to the traditional laws of Judaism—including any law of another religion (Mark 7:1-13; Acts 10:28; 11:3; Gal. 2:11-16; Rom. 9:32; Gal. 2:16).

4) The **righteousness of God** means the personal righteousness of God the Father and Christ—the pure, holy, spiritual conduct of God.

5) The **righteousness of God** also refers to God’s **justification** of a repentant sinner’s past sins—which is a unilateral action of God through His grace that is separate from the Law and the Prophets (Rom. 2:21-24).

6) The **righteousness of faith** is faithful obedience to the laws and commandments of God in their spiritual intent and meaning (Rom. 2:27; I Cor. 7:19; Phil. 1:11; 2:12-13; 3:9; I John 2:3-6; 5:2-3; II John 2-6; Heb. 10:16; Rev. 22:14).

7) The **righteousness of faith** also means God’s **justification** of one’s past sins through **faith** and **belief** in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and His shed blood for the forgiveness of sins by grace (Rom. 2:14; 3:21-31; 4:2; 3:31; 5:1; Gal. 3:8-10; 5:4-5; Eph. 2:4-10).

8) The **imputed righteousness of God** means the righteousness that God imputes to a believer when he or she believes God and acts upon what He commands with a willing heart (Gen. 15:6; 26:5; Rom. 4:3-5; James 2:14-26).

9) The **imputed righteousness of God** also refers to righteousness imputed by God upon repentance—because the believer’s sins have been forgiven and removed through belief in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and His shed blood. This imputed righteousness does not mean that Jesus has kept the commandments *for* a person. Neither does it remove one’s obligation to keep the commandments of God (Rom. 4:6, 11, 22-23). Indeed, it demands that one keep the commandments and laws of God in their full spiritual intent (Rom. 7:6).

In order to understand what Paul wrote in Romans 3:20-31, we will focus on the “righteousness of God”—meaning God’s justification of a repentant sinner’s past sins.

The KJV Translators' Great Errors in Romans

In the book of Romans, the *KJV* translators *added* the definite article “the”—though it was not in the original text—when translating the Greek phrase *ergon nomou* into “**the** works of **the** law.” Also, they did not make the word “the” *italic* when writing “the works” or “the law” to show that it was their own addition. The correct translation, a “work of law,” is vastly different in meaning from “the works of the law.” Many religions require “good works” in order for one to achieve salvation. These are a “work of law.” On the other hand, “the work of the law” is commandment-keeping (Rom. 2:14). Usually, Paul talks about a “work of law”—which is far broader than commandment-keeping, and included the traditional laws of Judaism which Christ condemned.

In order to fully understand what Paul is saying in this critical passage in Romans Three, we need to examine the context in which it was written. In so doing, we will come to realize that Paul is talking about how one receives justification by *faith*, as opposed to justification by a *work of a law*—whether by temple ritual or justification through a traditional law of Judaism. He is not proclaiming the elimination of the laws and commandments of God as millions claim and believe.

Romans 3:20-31 Examined

Citing these verses, Evangelical Protestants make the claim that it is not necessary for a person to keep the commandments of God—especially the Sabbath and holy days—in order to have salvation. Moreover, they assert that if one keeps the Sabbath and holy days of God, they are attempting to be *justified* by commandment-keeping rather than by the grace of God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Are such claims true? Why should Sunday-keeping—a man-made tradition contrary to the Word of God—not be justification by works as well?

We need to ask, What did Paul actually mean in Romans 3:20-31? Does he really advocate the elimination of the laws and commandments of God?

In the *KJV*, Romans 3:20-21 reads: “Therefore **by the deeds** [works] **of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight**: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin. But now **the righteousness of God WITHOUT THE LAW is manifested**, being witnessed by the law and the prophets.”

This translation *seems* to indicate that there is no need to keep the laws of God, and that one can obtain righteousness “without the law”—that is, in the complete absence of law-keeping. But how can one who is “living in sin” also be righteous? Is that not a complete impossibility?

Furthermore, how can one be righteous *without* Law when the Bible specifically declares, “All Your commandments are righteousness”? (Psa. 119:172). Complicating matters even more, Romans 2:13 says, “The hearers of the law *are* not just before God, but the **doers of the law shall be justified.**” What does Paul mean by this?

Romans 3:20-31 is indeed one of the most difficult-to-understand passages that Paul wrote. Did Paul actually mean that one could be righteous *without* commandment-keeping? How is it possible that “by the deeds of the law no one is justified,” yet, “the doers of the law shall be justified”? What are the answers to these perplexing questions?

The Works of the Law: This phrase, “**the** works of **the** law” (*KJV*), is perhaps one of the most misunderstood phrases in the epistles of Paul. The confusion originates from an inaccurate translation of the Greek *ergon nomou* (), which literally means “works of law.” It does not mean “**the** works of **the** law.” In the *KJV*, as well as in other versions, translators have inserted two definite articles into this phrase that are not found in the Greek text. One definite article, “the,” has been inserted before the word “works” and the other before the word “law,” making it incorrectly read “**the** works of **the** law.” The definite articles were added to help clarify the meaning because translators thought that *ergon nomou* referred exclusively to the laws and commandments of God. Consequently, it has been assumed that keeping the commandments of God is not required for salvation because “**the** works of **the** law” cannot justify anyone with God. While it is true that “works of law” can refer to the laws of God, Paul undoubtedly intended a far broader application of the phrase *ergon nomou*.

If the apostle Paul had intended the phrase to read “**the** works of **the** law,” he most certainly would have written it that way in Greek. In fact, there is one verse, and one verse only, where Paul actually did write the entire phrase “**the** work of **the** law”: “For when *the* Gentiles, which do not have *the* law, **practice by nature the things contained in the law**, these who do not have *the* law are a law unto

themselves, who show **the work of the law** written in their own hearts, their consciences bearing witness, and their reasonings also, as they accuse or defend one another” (Rom. 2:14-15).

The Greek phrase in verse 15 is *to ergon tou nomou* () which, when translated into English, reads “**the work of the law.**” Here it is quite evident that Paul was indeed talking about the laws of God.

In all places where *ergon nomou* appears, it should be translated as “works of law” rather than “works of **the** law.” Paul used *ergon nomou*—without the definite articles—in seven places, which all can be translated “works of law”:

1) Rom. 9:31-32: “But Israel, although they followed after a law of righteousness, did not attain to a law of righteousness. Why? Because *they did not seek it* by faith, but by **works of law**; for they stumbled at the Stone of stumbling.”

2-4) Gal. 2:14-16: “But when I saw that they did not walk uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in the presence of them all, ‘If you, being a Jew, are living like the Gentiles, and not according to Judaism, why do you compel the Gentiles to judaize? We who are Jews by nature—and not sinners of *the* Gentiles—knowing that a man is not justified by **works of law**, but through *the* faith of Jesus Christ, we also have believed in Christ Jesus in order that we might be justified by *the* faith of Christ, and not by **works of law**; because by **works of law** shall no flesh be justified.’ ”

5) Gal. 3:2: “This only I desire to learn from you: did you receive the Spirit of God by **works of law**, or by *the* hearing of faith?”

6) Gal. 3:5: “Therefore *consider this*: He Who is supplying the Spirit to you, and Who is working deeds of power among you, *is He doing it* by **works of law** or by *the* hearing of faith?”

7) Gal. 3:10: “For as many as are *relying* on **works of law** are under a curse, because it is written, ‘Cursed *is* everyone who does not continue in all things that have been written in the book of the law to do them.’ ”

The True Meaning of “Works of Law”: It is evident in these passages that Paul is including the ceremonial laws of Judaism in the phrase “works of law.” In Galatians Two, Peter and the others were not observing a law of God in eating separately from Gentiles, but were observing a traditional law of Judaism. Peter knew the Jews’ traditions because fifteen years earlier he said to Cornelius, “You know that **it is unlawful for a man who is a Jew to associate with or come near to anyone of another nation.**” (Acts 10:28). Peter was referring to a **man-made** traditional law of Judaism. Therefore, Paul’s use of the phrase “works of law” includes all humanly-devised religious decrees, traditional laws of Judaism (Mark 7:1-13), as well as the ritual and sacrificial laws followed by Gentiles in worshipping their gods (Acts 14:8-18).

In addition, the phrase “works of law” can include all the rituals and sacrifices under the Old Testament. Paul wrote that it was impossible for those rituals and sacrifices to atone for sin before God the Father in heaven: “For the law, having *only* a shadow of the good things that are coming, *and* not the substance, of those things, with the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, is never able to perfect those who come *to worship*. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered? For once those who worship had been purified, *they would* no longer be conscious of sin. On the contrary, in offering these *sacrifices* year by year, *there is* a remembrance of sins; because *it is* impossible for the offering of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb. 10:1-4).

In summary, “works of law” refers to the works of *any* law—the laws of God, the laws of man, and the laws of pagan religions. Clearly, Paul used “works of law” in the broadest sense—which included *all* religious works of law.

Concerning keeping the laws of God in the spirit, Paul wrote to the Romans that they “might walk in newness of *the* spirit, and not in *the* oldness of *the* letter.... [For] the law *is* indeed holy, and the commandment holy and righteous and good.... For we know that the law is spiritual...” (Rom. 7:6, 12). In these verses, Paul is referring to the spiritual intent of the commandments of God, known as “the law of the law.” True Christians will obey the laws and commandments of God in newness of the spirit.

Not only will their obedience come from their hearts, it will be manifest outwardly in their actions.

After a person has been converted, he or she is to walk in *newness* of life and do the “good works” of loving God and keeping His commandments. Commandment-keeping in the spirit of the law keeps a person from sinning, because “by the law is the knowledge of sin.”

Justification by Faith: When a person is living in a state of sin, he or she is cut off from God. Thus, the sinner is in a completely helpless condition—because no work of any kind or of any law can forgive sin and remove sin from his or her life. No one can justify himself from sin. It is impossible, even as the proverb declares, “**Who can say, ‘I have made my heart clean; I am pure from my sin’?**” (Prov. 20:9).

Only God, Who is the Heart-knowing God and Lawgiver, can—through His mercy and steadfast love—forgive sins and transgressions of His laws and commandments. No man, minister, rabbi, priest or pope, or any other religious potentate, or any law or work of law can forgive sin, because all sin is against God. Therefore, only God Himself personally can forgive sin: “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits; **Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases....** For as the heavens are high above the earth, so is His mercy toward those who fear Him. **As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us**” (Psa. 103:2-3, 11-12).

God grants forgiveness only upon the sinner’s genuine repentance toward God, which is accomplished privately through heartfelt prayer, and is evidenced by a broken heart and a contrite spirit. Notice King David’s ancient prayer of repentance after He had grievously sinned: “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, **blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin, for I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.** Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done evil in Your sight, that You might be justified when You speak and be clear when You judge.... Behold, **You desire truth in the inward parts;** and in the hidden part You shall make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which You have broken may rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. **Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me**” (Psa. 51:1-4, 6-10).

In order to be made right with God and have sins forgiven and removed, the sinner must repent to God the Father and accept the sacrifice of the blood of Jesus Christ as full payment for his or her sins. Notice how Paul expressed it: “[We, as called, true Christians, are] to *the* praise of *the* glory of His grace, wherein He has made us objects of *His* grace in the Beloved *Son*; **in Whom we have redemption through His blood, even the remission of sins, according to the riches of His grace**” (Eph. 1:6-7).

Again, in writing to the Colossians, Paul shows God’s operation of justification through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and His shed blood. It is God the Father “Who has personally rescued us from the power of darkness and has transferred *us* unto the kingdom of the Son of His love; **in Whom we have redemption through His own blood, even the remission of sins....** And, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things to Himself; by Him, whether the things on the earth, or the things in heaven. **For you were once alienated and enemies in your minds by wicked works; but now He has reconciled you in the body of His flesh through death,** to present you holy and unblamable and unimpeachable before Him; if indeed you continue in the faith grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which you have heard, *and* which was proclaimed in all the creation that is under heaven” (Col. 1:13-14, 20-23).

The apostle John writes: “If we confess our own sins, He is faithful and righteous, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:9).

This is how God the Father justifies the repentant sinner *separate from* commandment-keeping. No one can be justified in the sight of God by *any* work of *any* law. Rather, justification is graciously granted to the believer based on repentance and faith in the sacrifice and shed blood of Jesus Christ. This *state* of justification is called the “gift of righteousness,” or the “gift of justification,” which God the Father freely imputes to the repentant believer (Rom. 5:17).

The function of the laws and commandments of God is to show men *how* to live, as well as to show them *what* sin is. No law can forgive sin. No law can give eternal life. That is not the function of law. Only God the Father can justify a person from sin through Jesus Christ’s sacrifice and blood, which is *separate from* works of law and commandment-keeping. Finally, justification of past sins does *not* do away with the law or the good works that God requires of true believers. This is what Paul meant when he

wrote: “The hearers of the law *are* not just before God, but **the doers of the law shall be justified**” (Rom. 2:13).

The Righteousness of God: The righteousness of God is shown by His grace in forgiving sin through the blood and sacrifice of Jesus. This righteousness places the forgiven sinner in right standing with God. Paul wrote: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; *but* are **being justified freely by His grace** through the redemption that *is* in Christ Jesus; Whom God has openly manifested *to be* a propitiation through **faith in His blood**, in order to demonstrate **His righteousness**, in respect to the remission of the sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; *yes*, to publicly declare **His righteousness** in the present time, that He might be just, and the one Who justifies the one who *is* of the faith of Jesus” (Rom. 3:23-26). The righteousness of God that Paul wrote of is the expression of God’s love, mercy, forgiveness and justification through Jesus Christ. In a sense, in this context, the word “justification” could be freely substituted for the word “righteousness” because the righteousness of God means the justification that He freely gives to the repentant sinner.

“Without the Law”: The phrase “without the law” in the *King James Version* (Rom. 3:21) is also misunderstood because “without” gives the impression that there is no law at all. In English, “without” conveys “the absence of.” Shamefully, too many believe that Christians can disregard the laws and commandments of God. However, in Romans 3:21, “without” is an incorrect translation of the Greek *choris* (), which means “separately, apart from, by itself, without” (Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 1974). The correct translation of *choris* is “**separate from**”—thus the phrase should read, “separate from law.” Since the laws and commandments of God have not ceased to exist, the phrase “separate from law” is more precise because it shows that the function of the law is **separate from** the function of justification by faith—which is accomplished through repentance and belief in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The entire operation of justification is separate from and in addition to law and commandment-keeping. **Forgiveness and justification of one’s past sins can only come through the life, crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. NO LAW-KEEPING OF ANY KIND OR ANY ACTION INITIATED BY ANYONE CAN ACCOMPLISH THAT!** *This* is what Paul is writing about—he is not writing about the abolition of God’s Law!

Here is the full, correct translation of Romans 3:20-31. It shows that “the righteousness of God” is actually the *justification* of God through the operation of the forgiveness of a person’s sins:

“Therefore, by works of law there shall no flesh be justified before Him; for through *the* law *is* the knowledge of sin. But now, **the righteousness of God that is separate from law has been revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets; even the righteousness of God that is through the faith of Jesus Christ**, toward all and upon all those who believe; for there is no difference. For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; *but* are being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that *is* in Christ Jesus; Whom God has openly manifested *to be* a propitiation through faith in His blood, in order to demonstrate **His righteousness** [justification], **in respect to the remission of sins that are past**, through the forbearance of God; *yes*, to publicly declare His righteousness in the present time, that He might be just, and the one Who justifies the one who *is* of *the* faith of Jesus.

“Therefore, where *is* boasting? It is excluded. Through what law? *The* law of works? By no means! Rather, *it is* through a law of faith. Consequently, **we reckon that a man is justified by faith, separate from works of law. Is He** the God of the Jews only? *Is He* not also *the* God of the Gentiles? YES! *He is* also God of the Gentiles, since *it is* indeed one God **Who will justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith.**

“Are we, then, abolishing law through faith? MAY IT NEVER BE! Rather, we are establishing law [or making it to stand].”

Once a person has been justified of past sins through the righteousness of God as described by Paul—and one has received the Holy Spirit—then God begins to write His laws and commandments into his or her mind and heart, **thereby truly establishing the law**, not abolishing it. “For by one offering He has obtained eternal perfection *for* those who are sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after He had previously said, ‘This *is* the covenant that I will establish with them after those days,’ says *the* Lord: ‘**I will give My laws into their hearts, and I will inscribe them in their minds; and their sins and lawlessness I will not remember ever again**’ ” (Heb. 10:14-17).

Romans 6:14—The True Meaning of the Phrase, “Not Under Law, But Under Grace”

This single verse, Romans 6:14—because it is typically taken out of context—has caused a great deal of confusion among nominal “Christians.” Read in isolation, it gives the *appearance* that Christians are no longer required to keep the laws and commandments of God: “For sin shall not rule over you because you are not under law, but under grace.”

But Romans 6:14 cannot be understood in isolation; the entire context of Romans Six must be examined if we are to understand Paul’s intent. In fact, the key is actually given in the first two verses of the chapter. Paul asks and answers the question: “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?” (verses 1-2).

Remember that *sin* is the transgression of the Law (I John 3:4). Obviously, then, if Christians are *not* to continue living in sin, they must be keeping the commandments and laws of God. However, God’s laws are now kept in the spirit—under the grace of God!

Paul goes on in Romans Six to explain that the operation of baptism pictures the “death and burial” of the old sinful man—which justifies one to God the Father and brings forgiveness of past sins. He explains it this way: “Or are you ignorant that we, as many as were baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into His death [since Jesus died for our sins]? Therefore, we were buried with Him though the baptism into the death; so that, just as Christ was raised from *the* dead by the glory of the Father, in the same way, we also should walk in newness of life [now with the Holy Spirit of God—in spiritual obedience].

“For if we have been conjoined together in the likeness of His death, so also shall we be *in the likeness* of His resurrection. Knowing this, that our old man was co-crucified with *Him* **in order that the body of sin might be destroyed, so that we might no longer be enslaved to sin; because the one who has died to sin** [through repentance and water baptism] **has been justified from sin** [through the blood of Jesus Christ].

“Now if we died together with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from *the* dead, dies no more; death no longer has any dominion over Him. For when He died, He died unto sin once for all; but in that He lives, He lives unto God. In the same way also, you should indeed **reckon yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God through Christ Jesus our Lord.**

“Therefore, **do not let sin rule in your mortal body by obeying it in the lusts thereof.** Likewise, do not yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin; rather, yield yourselves to God as those who are alive from *the* dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God.

“For sin shall not rule over you because **you are not under law** [for forgiveness and justification], **but under grace** [for forgiveness and justification]. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law [for forgiveness and justification], but under grace [for forgiveness and justification]? **MAY IT NEVER BE!** Don’t you realize that to whom you yield yourselves *as* servants to obey, you are servants of the one you obey, whether *it is* of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But thanks *be* to God, that you were *the* servants of sin, but you have obeyed from *the* heart that form of doctrine which was delivered to you” (verses 3-17).

Keep in mind that from Romans 3:20 to 6:23, Paul’s entire explanation of justification of past sins by *grace* through the sacrifice and blood of Jesus Christ is contrasted with the absolute inability of any *law* to bring true spiritual justification to the sinner. That is the context in which Romans 6:14 was written. When Paul writes that Christians are “not under law, but under grace,” he means that we are not trying to achieve justification through law—which is in fact impossible—but through God’s grace. This, then, is the true, scriptural meaning of Romans 6:14.

The apostle John further explains the *continuous* justification and forgiveness of sins that believers have through faith in the sacrifice and blood of Jesus Christ: “If we proclaim that we have fellowship with Him, but we are walking in the darkness [living in sin], we are lying to ourselves, and we are not practicing the Truth [‘Your Word is the Truth,’ (John 17:17)]. However, if we walk in the light [of God’s Word, in love and obedience], as He is in the light, *then* we have fellowship with one another, and **the blood of Jesus Christ, His own Son, cleanses us from all sin.**

“If we say that we do not have sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **If we confess our own sins, He is faithful and righteous, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.** If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us.

“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And *yet*, **if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father; Jesus Christ the Righteous;** and He is *the* propitiation [continual source of mercy and forgiveness] for our sins; and not for our sins only, but also for *the sins* of the whole world” (I John 1:6-10; 2:1-2).

John then follows his explanation of forgiveness of our sins through the blood of Jesus Christ with the admonition that we are likewise required to keep God’s commandments. This again substantiates that God’s merciful grace does not allow anyone to continue to *live* in sin. Notice: “And by this *standard* we know that we know Him: if we keep His commandments. The one who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. On the other hand, **if anyone is keeping His Word, truly in this one the love of God is being perfected. By this means we know that we are in Him.** Anyone who claims to dwell in Him is obligating himself also to walk even as He Himself walked” (I John 2:3-6). **This is the full, true meaning of living in the grace of God.**

Romans 10:4—How is Jesus Christ “the End of the Law”?

In the *KJV*, Romans 10:4 reads: “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” If this verse is read in isolation—without considering the context and historical background, or the underlying Greek—it does indeed give the impression that Christ brought the law to an end. But is that what it really means? If so, *which* law did Jesus end?

Because of this one verse, numerous people assume that all the laws and commandments of God have come to an end. But is this true? Is it possible for a man to *end* any law of God? Try ending the law of gravity. It can’t be done. All things are subject to law and all men are subject to God’s Law. Would Christ, Who is the Lawgiver, actually end all of God’s law, so that people may freely sin without consequence? Absolutely not! But that’s what millions of Protestants embrace from reading this one verse.

Rather than read this verse in isolation, let us examine the context in which Paul wrote the passage. Remember, men divided the Bible into chapters and verses. The context of Romans 10:4 actually begins not with verse one, but with Romans 9:30. Paul wrote: “What then shall we say? That *the* Gentiles, who did not follow after righteousness, have attained righteousness, even *the* righteousness [justification] that *is* by faith” (Rom. 9:30).

After one has been justified from past sins, they are to keep the commandments of God in the “spirit of the law.” Paul wrote, “Since *it is* indeed one God Who will justify *the* circumcision by faith, and *the* uncircumcision through faith. **Are we, then, abolishing law through faith? MAY IT NEVER BE! Rather, we are establishing law**” (Rom. 3:30-31). And again, “So that even as sin has reigned unto death, so also might **the grace of God reign through righteousness** [justification] unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. 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. 5:20-21; 6:1-2).

Additionally, the Jews who rejected Jesus Christ and continued with their temple rituals and observation of the traditional laws of Judaism did not attain to the justification of God by their works of law. **True** spiritual justification can only come through the grace of God and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins: “**But Israel, although they followed after a law** [In the Greek text there is *no* definite article “the” before “law”] **of righteousness** [justification], **did not attain to a law of righteousness** [justification]. **Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but BY WORKS OF LAW** [In the Greek text there is *no* definite article “the” before “works” or “law”]; for they stumbled at the Stone of stumbling, exactly as it is written: ‘Behold, I place in Sion a Stone of stumbling and a Rock of offense, but everyone who believes in Him shall not be ashamed’ ” (Rom. 9:31-33).

It is important to note that in the above passage there is no definite article before “law” or “works of law.” Therefore, Paul is not referring to the Ten Commandments. Paul is actually writing about a “justification by works of law”—that is, through the operation of temple rituals and/or traditional laws of Judaism. Anyone who rejects Jesus Christ can **never** obtain justification of past sins through rituals or Jewish traditional laws, or laws of any other religion. This is why Paul said the Jews stumbled; Jesus was that “Rock of offense”—Whom they rejected. While the Jews attempted to obtain justification of sins

through temple rituals and other laws, true spiritual justification of past sins can only come from God the Father through the sacrifice of Christ. This is only obtainable through repentance of sins and water baptism with true faith and belief in Jesus' shed blood—all through the operation of God's grace. This spiritual justification by faith—or “the righteousness of faith”—cannot be obtained by any “work of law.”

Notice how Paul explains this in Chapter Ten: “Brethren, the earnest desire of my heart and my supplication to God for Israel is for salvation. For I testify of them that **they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge**. For they, being ignorant of the righteousness [justification] *that* comes from God, and seeking to establish their own righteousness [justification], have not submitted to the righteousness [justification] of God. **For Christ is the end of works of law for righteousness [justification] to everyone who believes**” (Rom. 10:1-4). In other words, *for those who believe*, true justification comes through Christ—thus putting an **end** to futile attempts at justification through ritual works.

So the actual meaning of Romans 10:4 is that Jesus Christ, through His sacrifice for sin, once for all time, ended the temple ritual laws and the traditional laws of Judaism for justification. By writing this, Paul did not unilaterally terminate all the laws of God as millions want to assume. He was emphasizing that true spiritual justification from God the Father is uniquely received through faith in the sacrifice and blood of Jesus Christ, which is the operation of faith and grace combined, and cannot be procured by any work of any law.

Paul's Teachings on Justification by Faith vs. Works of Law in the Book of Galatians

As we delve into the apostle Paul's writings in Galatians involving “justification by faith” and “works of law,” keep these key background points in mind:

1) Paul instructed Christians in Rome that once we have been justified from past sins, we cannot continue to live in sin as a *way of life*—because sin is the “transgression” of God's Law (1 John 3:4, *KJV*). He wrote: “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).

2) As Jesus Himself taught, it is *sin* to observe *any* humanly-devised, traditional religious law—be it Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, or of any other religion—in place of God's laws and commandments (see Mark 7:1-13).

3) Before Paul's conversion, he was, as Saul, one of Judaism's leading Pharisees. At the behest of the high priest, Saul executed orders to persecute, arrest, imprison and even martyr true Christians (Acts 8:1; 9:1-2; 22:3-5).

In his opening remarks to the Galatians, Paul enumerated how he was “advancing” in Judaism: “For you heard of my former conduct when I was in Judaism, how I was excessively **persecuting the church of God** and was destroying it; and I was **advancing in Judaism** far beyond many of my contemporaries in my *own* nation, **being more abundantly zealous for the traditions of my fathers**” (Gal. 1:13-14).

Galatians Two: Paul wrote that he was forced to rebuke Peter, Barnabas and other Jews publicly for their hypocrisy in reverting back to a traditional law of Judaism that forbade Jews from eating with Gentiles. Peter knew better, as God first used him to preach the Gospel and repentance to Gentiles, beginning with Cornelius and his household (Acts 10).

As will be seen, the account in Galatians Chapter Two does not involve any law or commandment of God—only traditional laws of Judaism, *which are sin*. Observing such traditional Jewish laws can never bring justification—or put one in “right standing” with God the Father. Let us scrutinize the entire account verse by verse:

“But when Peter came to Antioch, I withstood him to *his* face because he was to be condemned; for before certain *ones* came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles. However, when they came, he drew back and separated himself *from the Gentiles*, being afraid of those of *the* circumcision party. And the rest of *the* Jews joined him in *this* hypocritical act, insomuch that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

“But when I saw that they did not walk uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in the presence of them all, **‘If you, being a Jew, are living like the Gentiles, and not according to Judaism, why do you compel the Gentiles to Judaize?** [That is, to eat separately as do unconverted Jews.] We who are Jews by nature—and not sinners of *the* Gentiles—knowing that **a man is not justified**

by works of law, but through *the* faith of Jesus Christ, we also have believed in Christ Jesus in order that we might be justified by *the* faith of Christ, and not by works of law; because **by works of law shall no flesh be justified** [before God from past sins].

“Now then, if we are seeking to be justified in Christ, *and* we ourselves are found to be sinners, *is* Christ then *the* minister of sin? **MAY IT NEVER BE!** For if I build again those things that I destroyed [the adherence to the laws of Judaism], I am making myself a transgressor. For I through law [since the wages of sin is death] died [in the operation of baptism] to law [that is, to Judaism’s traditional laws], in order that I may live to God [in love and obedience]. I have been crucified with Christ [by baptism], yet I live. *Indeed*, it is no longer I; but Christ lives in me. For *the life* that I am now living in *the* flesh, I live by faith—that *very faith* of the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness [justification] *is* through *works of law*, then Christ died in vain” (Gal. 2:11-21).

The whole purpose of repentance, baptism and justification by faith in the sacrifice and shed blood of Jesus Christ is to receive the Holy Spirit of God, which is our begetting from God the Father and the “earnest” (pledge or down payment) of our salvation (I John 3:9; Eph. 1:13-14). Paul wrote nothing in this passage that can be construed to mean he was abolishing the laws and commandments of God—for **NO MAN CAN DO SO!**

Galatians Three: Paul continues in Chapter Three, making it clear that any work of any law is not able to bring about justification for past sins. While God requires Christians to keep His laws and commandments in their full spiritual intent, no law has the power to forgive sin, justify a person to God spiritually, impart the Holy Spirit, or bestow eternal life. The function of God’s laws and commandments is to *define sin*: “O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you *into* not obeying the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ, crucified, was set forth in a written public proclamation? This only I desire to learn from you: **did you receive the Spirit of God by works of law, or by *the* hearing of faith?** Are you so foolish? Having begun in *the* Spirit, are you now being perfected in *the* flesh [through obedience to carnal laws of Judaism]?... Therefore, *consider this*: He Who is supplying the Spirit to you, and Who is working deeds of power among you, *is He doing it by works of law or by *the* hearing of faith?*” (Gal. 3:1-5).

Concerning the laws and commandments of God, Paul demonstrates that they are **not contrary** to God’s promises of eternal life—which can only come through loving obedience and faith in Jesus Christ. “*Is* the law then contrary to the promises of God? **MAY IT NEVER BE! For if a law had been given that had the power to give life, then** righteousness [justification] would indeed have been by law. But the Scriptures have shut up all things under sin, so that by *the* faith of Jesus Christ the promise [of eternal life] might be given to those who believe. Now before faith came, we were guarded under law, having been shut up unto the faith that was yet to be revealed [at Christ’s first coming]. In this way, the law was our tutor *to lead us* to Christ that we might be justified by faith. But since faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Gal. 3:21-25).

After repentance, baptism and the laying of hands, God gives the Holy Spirit—which unites with the spirit of man within the believer (I John 3:9) bringing conversion (John 14:17). God, then begins to write His laws and commandments in the mind of the new believer (Heb. 10:16). Instead of the *external* tutoring of the law, the believer now begins to develop the mind of Christ by the Holy Spirit through faith (Phil. 2:5). This is the *internal* working of the Holy Spirit to lead the believer in all righteousness (Rom. 8:14).

Galatians Five: Judaism required that Gentile proselytes be circumcised in the flesh before they could enter the synagogue. They were then required to keep the whole law—meaning all of God’s laws, as well as all the traditional laws of Judaism. False teachers were causing converts in Galatia to revert back to those teachings, which were mixed with pagan gnosticism derived from Hellenistic Judaism. This was the “yoke of bondage” of which Paul wrote. On the other hand, the laws and commandments of God were *never* a “yoke of bondage”—even when kept in the letter of the Law, as required under the Old Covenant (Deut. 4:1-8, 39-40; 5:1-21, 32-33; 6:1-25).

This is the reason Paul admonished the Galatians to remain unyielding in the *true* faith, warning them not to revert back to “works of law” of Judaism for justification: “Therefore, stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and do not be held again in a yoke of bondage. Behold, I, Paul, tell you that if you become circumcised [in the flesh, rather than in the heart by the Spirit (Rom. 2:25-29; Col. 2:13)], Christ shall profit you nothing! Again, I am personally testifying to every man who is being [physically] circumcised that he is a debtor to do the whole law [all the Old Testament laws and the traditional laws of Judaism, thereby eliminating repentance, faith and baptism].

“You who are attempting to be justified by *works of law*, you are being deprived of any *spiritual* effect from Christ. You have fallen from grace! For we through *the Spirit* are waiting for *the hope of righteousness by faith*” (Gal. 5:1-5). This is also the meaning of Galatians 5:18. “But if you are led by *the Spirit*, you are not under [*works of*] law.”

I Timothy 4:1-5— Did Paul Teach That All Meat Is Good for Food?

There is no question that the apostle Paul believed—and thus taught—“all things that are written in the Law and the Prophets” (Acts 24:14). This certainly included God’s commands concerning clean and unclean meats (as found in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14). But mainstream Christianity insists that Paul relaxed the biblical injunction against unclean meats. They often cite I Timothy 4:1-5, which is misleading in the *KJV*: “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and *commanding* to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. **For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.**”

Here, Paul warns Timothy of an apostasy to occur in the end times—which would involve various “doctrines of demons.” One such “doctrine” commands abstinence from certain meats—which Paul counters by *apparently* saying that *all* meat is good for food, that nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving. But is this really what Paul is saying? Is Paul upending centuries of Jewish adherence to Old Testament food laws?

Note first that this particular “doctrine” refers specifically to abstaining from meat that was “created to be received.” Conversely, this substantiates that there are *other* meats which were *not* “created to be received.” Indeed, God created meats which were never designed to be food—thus they are termed *unclean*. But *clean* meats were created to be received as food with thanksgiving. Thus, the passage is not dealing with meat in general, but only with *clean* meats—those “created to be received with thanksgiving.”

Next, note that the meat being discussed has been “*sanctified* by the word of God.” Where in the Bible is meat particularly sanctified—*set apart*—for human consumption? Why, obviously, Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, which lists meats to be avoided and those to be eaten. Thus, Paul did not say that *every* kind of meat was created by God for food—but that every *clean* meat was created by God for food.

Without question, Paul upheld the laws of clean and unclean meats as a requirement for Christians. He described the meats that Christians are permitted to eat as those which God has “created to be received with thanksgiving.” Paul was actually condemning a false doctrine that prohibited the eating of *clean* meats. The correct translation helps resolve the matter:

“Now the Spirit tells *us* explicitly that in *the* latter times some shall apostatize from the faith, *and* shall follow deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons; speaking lies in hypocrisy, their consciences having been cauterized *with a hot iron*; forbidding to marry; *and commanding to abstain from meats, which God created to be received* with thanksgiving by the faithful, even *by* those who know the truth. For every creature of God *designated for human consumption* is good, and nothing to be refused, *if* it is received with thanksgiving, because it is [already] sanctified [set apart] by the Word of God [in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14] and prayer.” (Please note how *The Holy Bible In Its Original Order—A Faithful Version* incorporates **inserted words and phrases** in *italic type* in the appropriate places to make the intended meaning clear. All such insertions are based fully on the contextual meaning of the passage.)

Paul adds that clean meats are also set apart by *prayer*. Indeed, we have Christ’s own example of asking for God’s blessing on our food (Luke 9:16; 24:30; etc.). This further sets the food apart as approved and even enhanced by God—but in no way can prayer make unclean meat clean.

Mark 7:1-5—Did Jesus Declare All Meats Clean?

It is a widely held conception of modern “Christianity” that Jesus set aside the laws and commandments of God—including those which prohibit certain meats as “unclean.” An incident recorded in Mark Chapter Seven is often used as a proof-text for such a view. In this case, Jesus’ disciples were criticized by the Jewish leadership for eating without first washing their hands. This dispute had nothing

to do with clean and unclean meats. Rather, it revolved around Jewish tradition of ritual purity, such as ceremonial hand washing.

“Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes from Jerusalem came together to Him. And when they saw some of His disciples **eating with defiled hands (that is, unwashed hands)**, they found fault. For the Pharisees and all the Jews, **holding fast to the tradition of the elders**, do not eat unless they wash their hands thoroughly. Even *when coming* from the market, they do not eat unless they *first* wash themselves. And there are many other **things that they have received to observe**, *such as the* washing of cups and pots and brass utensils and tables. For this reason, the Pharisees and the scribes questioned Him, *saying*, ‘Why don’t Your disciples walk according to the **tradition of the elders**, but eat bread with unwashed hands?’ ” (Mark 7:1-5).

Drawing a sharp distinction between the Jews’ traditions and the commandments of God, Jesus accused the scribes and Pharisees of invalidating the Word of God by their traditions.

“And He answered *and* said to them, ‘Well did Isaiah prophesy concerning you hypocrites, as it is written, “This people honors Me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, **teaching for doctrine the commandments of men.**” For **leaving the commandment of God, you hold fast the tradition of men**, *such as* the washing of pots and cups [and ritual hand washing]; and you practice many other things like *this*.’ Then He said to them, ‘Full well do **you reject the commandment of God**, so that **you may observe your own tradition**’ ” (verses 6-9). Jesus sternly rebuked the Jews for “nullifying” the authority of the Word of God by their countless and restrictive traditions (verse 13).

Notice that Jesus’ primary response was to defend and *fully support* the laws and commandments of God. In no way have God’s laws been abrogated. Having made that point, He went on to deal with the question of eating with “unwashed hands.” Addressing the multitude, He said, “Hear Me, all of you, and understand. There is nothing that enters into a man from outside which is able to defile him; but the things that come out from *within* him, those are the things which defile a man. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear” (verses 14-16).

Obviously, unwashed hands will not particularly defile a person. But Jesus said there was “nothing that enters into a man from outside which is able to defile him.” Does that mean unclean meats were no longer prohibited by God’s law—that literally *nothing* can defile a person? What did Jesus mean?

It is important to realize that the dietary laws of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 deal with health and cleanliness—not with spiritual holiness. Eating unclean meats can harm one physically, but they will not defile one spiritually. (However, a careless attitude toward any of God’s laws can defile one spiritually.) Jesus is referring to one being spiritually *defiled*—not by anything eaten but by the thoughts and attitudes a person accepts into one’s heart and mind.

Knowing that His disciples did not understand, Jesus said, “Don’t you perceive that anything [food, germs] that enters into a man from outside is not able to [spiritually] defile him? **For it does not enter into his heart**, but into the belly, and *then* passes out into the sewer, purging all food.” Food is simply processed, purged from the body. Jesus was talking *spiritually*, making the point that even the dirt on one’s unwashed hands cannot defile the heart or make a person unholy.

The defilement of which Jesus spoke comes from *within*: “That which springs forth **from within a man, that defiles the man**. For from within, **out of the hearts of men**, go forth evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickednesses, guile, licentiousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness; all these evils go forth from within, and *these* defile a man” (verses 20-23).

The disputed phrase, “purging all meats” (verse 19, *KJV*), simply means that all foods are ultimately purged from the body. **Clean and unclean meats are nowhere discussed in this passage**. The *New International Version* and a few other translations spuriously add to verse 19, “In saying this, Jesus declared all foods ‘clean’ ” (*NIV*, 1984). This is a deliberate, exaggerated disparity reflecting the translators’ anti-law bias, **as no such phrase** exists in the original Greek texts.

What *if* Jesus had actually meant to abrogate the laws of clean and unclean meats? Such a position would have easily created one of the biggest controversies of His ministry. Imagine how the Pharisees would have pounced upon such a reversal had Jesus said that swine’s flesh was good for food. But there is not so much as a *hint* in the account that the Jews took Jesus to be nullifying the Old Testament food laws. Quite the contrary. And Jesus’ point was not at all missed by the Jewish leadership: Ritual washings are ineffective and unnecessary in preventing spiritual defilement; rather, true spiritual purity is a matter of the heart and mind.

Acts 10—Was Peter Shown that Unclean Meats are Clean?

Obviously, too many assume that the apostle Peter's vision in Acts 10 represents a reversal of God's laws prohibiting unclean *meats*. However, nowhere in the passage is it ever suggested that God had cleansed unclean meats. Rather, this is something "read into" the section by those with a predisposition against God's laws. When the passage is read properly, it becomes obvious that Peter's vision in no way authorized a change in the laws of clean and unclean meats. In fact, Peter's vision had nothing at all to do with clean and unclean meats.

While staying in Joppa, Peter went up on the housetop about noon to pray. In a vision from God, he saw heaven open and what appeared to be a great sheet descending toward him full of unclean wild beasts, creeping things and unclean birds. A voice came to Peter, saying "Rise, Peter, kill and eat" (verse 13).

Peter did not automatically assume that it was suddenly okay to eat unclean meats. He *knew* that Christian's were to continue living according to God's Law. His response shows that he obviously did not consider the laws concerning clean and unclean foods to be obsolete.

"In no way, Lord," he replied, "for I have never eaten anything *that is* common or unclean." The voice from heaven added, "What God has cleansed, you are not to call common" (verses 14-15).

The sheet of unclean animals went up and down *three* times. Again, Peter never indicated that he believed it was now permissible to eat unclean meat. Finally, he awoke, wondering what the vision actually meant. But without question, he knew what the vision did *not* mean—that it in no way reflected a change in the laws concerning unclean foods.

Subsequently, Peter was led by God to the home of Cornelius, a Gentile. Peter understood that he was to preach the gospel to Cornelius and to his household—and that they would be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit. Peter began to realize that God was opening the door of salvation to Gentiles. Suddenly, the meaning of the vision became clear. Talking to Cornelius, Peter said, "You know that it is unlawful for a man who is a Jew to associate with or come near to anyone of another race. **But God has shown me** [in the earlier vision] **that no man should be called common or unclean**" (verse 28).

Jewish tradition—based on a perversion of God's laws regarding what is clean and unclean— forbade Pharisaic Jews to have a close association with Gentiles. Jews considered Gentiles to be unclean, unsuitable for physical contact. Peter was quite familiar with these traditions of Judaism.

God was showing Peter and the New Testament Church that Gentiles were being offered salvation—that they could become *spiritually* circumcised. Thus, the subject matter of Acts Ten has nothing to do with clean and unclean meats. God simply used the vision of unclean animals to emphasize a point to Peter—that when God has spiritually cleansed a Gentile, he is not to be deemed common or unclean.

Ultimately, Peter understood that "God is not a respecter of persons, **but in every nation the one** [Jew or Gentile] **who fears Him and works righteousness is acceptable to Him**" (verses 34-35).