

Did Paul Do Away With God's Law?

Jesus Christ Himself left us a *warning*: “For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will *deceive many*” (Matt. 24:5). And, just as He foretold, many *have* come in Christ’s name---professing to be His ministers---and, yet, *by* their distorted teachings, have *deceived* many! “For such are false apostles, *deceitful* workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For *Satan himself* transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if *his ministers* also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness...” (II Cor. 11:13-15).

Yes, Satan is very powerful. He “deceives the *whole world*” (Rev. 12:9). And he has his own ministers---ministers who *help him* spread his deceit, by preaching things that are *contrary* to your Bible.

Christ said that if you and I *accept* false teaching, then we worship Him in vain! (Mark 7:7). He said, “you reject the **commandment** of God, that you may keep your tradition” (verse 9).

One such deceitful “tradition” that has long permeated so-called Christianity, is the false and vile teaching that the crucifixion---and/or the teachings of Paul---“did away with” God’s spiritual law!

It is undeniable that Jesus Christ led a life of *obedience* to God’s spiritual law---and that He taught that *we too* must strive to obey God’s law. Yet, “clever theologians have devised a scheme that effectively does away with Jesus’ example and teaching about obedience to God’s law. They state that since Jesus’ entire human life and ministry were before the cross, His example and doctrine is not for us today. In other words, they agree that Christ upheld the law. But they claim that when the Apostle Paul came on the scene, he---with God’s guidance and blessing---abolished the law and replaced it with *grace*, thereby ‘liberating’ us.”¹

Yet, ask yourself this: “Does it make sense that Jesus would set a particular example all His life, tell those that He had trained to teach all that He had taught them to **all** nations (Matthew 28:20), then a few years later bring in Paul and have him start teaching very different doctrines? *Absolutely ridiculous!*”²

“Paul... emphasized that there is only *one* true Gospel (Galatians 1:6-7) and *one* true faith (Ephesians 4:5). [Paul] declared, ‘I have done **nothing against** our people or the customs of our fathers...’ (Acts 28:17). If Paul had *disregarded* the Sabbath, the laws of clean and unclean meats, and other biblical injunctions, he could **not** have made such a statement.”²

Now notice what author Roderick C. Meredith has to say:

For a long time, Paul's writings have been seen by many groups as doing away with the law. That's because this apostle, with his rabbinical training, wrote in a lawyer-like style that was a bit difficult to read. And people have been quick to take what he wrote out of context, twisting and distorting it. No doubt anticipating this, Almighty God inspired the Apostle Peter to WARN us about *this very thing!* Notice this passage from Peter's last epistle: "His [Paul's] letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people DISTORT, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of LAWLESS MEN and fall from your secure position" (3:16-17 NIV). **Thus, it is people advocating "lawlessness" who have twisted Paul's message!**¹

...even in his own day, he [Paul] was slandered by some who said he was teaching that since we are under grace, we don't have to keep God's law (cf. Rom. 3:8). The Apostle

James told him, "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs" (Acts 21:20-21). So James encouraged him to prove them wrong by taking a Nazirite vow and presenting offerings at the Temple so "that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but **that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law**" (v. 24). *And Paul did all that James said!* (v. 26).¹

If Paul had in fact been teaching *against* God's Law in ANY way—especially the SPIRITUAL LAW containing the Ten Commandments—he most certainly would NOT have gone through this ceremony of the Law of Moses! That particular ceremony—probably a thanks offering at the conclusion of the Nazirite vow—was NOT necessary for a New Testament Christian. But it was not "sinful" either! And Paul's deep respect for God's Law, for the original mother church and the pattern of OBEDIENCE to God's Law—all this guided Paul in his decision to go ahead and participate in this ceremony. By guiding Paul in this—and putting this example in the Bible—God is showing ALL of us that Paul's approach was one of OBEDIENCE to law, NOT one who tried to do away with or "reason around" God's spiritual laws as so many Protestant theologians teach!³

Notice also that in the scripture quoted above, James describes members of the headquarters church in Jerusalem as being "zealous **for the law**"! And he made that statement even though it was now almost 30 years *after* Christ's crucifixion. These members of Christ's church were zealous for the law!

Faced with such verses, and many others that could be brought to bear, a number of modern Protestant teachers say Paul was a hypocrite. In a footnote to verse 24 just mentioned, the *Ryrie Study Bible* says that the actions he took in going along with James indicated that Paul "was, after all, a 'middle-of-the-road' Jewish-Christian." Another work characterizes these acts by its title, *Five Blunders of Paul*. How amazing it is that some of those who proclaim Paul to be the champion of their lawless doctrine turn around and attack him for not following or teaching it! Of course, Paul was not a hypocrite. The grace he spoke of was to be *within* the framework of God's law. But obeying the Almighty did not negate the need for His mercy and forgiveness, since no one obeys perfectly. After all, we've *all* earned the death penalty for breaking God's law (Rom. 6:23).¹

In reading Paul's writings, many people focus on certain scriptures, while ignoring how those scriptures relate to the *rest* of what Paul wrote. Yet, the real test of doctrinal soundness is agreement with *all* the scriptures on a given subject--not just a few scriptures taken out of context.

Let's now consider scriptures written by Paul which clearly show his strong *endorsement* of God's law:

"...the **doers of the law** will be justified," said Paul (Rom. 2:13).

"Do we then make *void* the law *through faith*? **Certainly not!**" said Paul (Rom. 3:31).

"...*by the law* is the knowledge of sin," said Paul (Rom. 3:20).

"...**the law is holy**, and the commandment holy and just and good...**the law is spiritual**," said Paul (Rom. 7:12, 14).

"For **I delight in the law of God** according to the inward man," said Paul (Rom. 7:22).

"...with the mind **I myself serve the law of God**," said Paul (Rom. 7:25).

“Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but **keeping the commandments of God is what matters**,” said Paul (I Cor. 7:19).

“For the mystery of **lawlessness** is already at work,” warned Paul (II Thess. 2:7). And why would Paul warn about lawlessness, if he thought that the law had been done away?!

“Imitate me, *just as I also imitate Christ*,” said Paul (I Cor. 11:1). Yes, Paul---Apostle to the **Gentiles---imitated Christ**, and instructs us to do *likewise!* So, since we are to imitate Christ---and Christ lived in *obedience* to God’s law---then **that clearly means that we too are to obey God’s spiritual law.**

Paul likewise said, “Let this *mind* be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philip. 2:5). And he continues, in verse 8, explaining what *kind* of mind Christ had---a mind that was “**obedient** to the point of death.”

Paul speaks of those who *break specific commandments in God’s law*, and says that they who (unrepentantly) commit such acts will *not* “inherit the kingdom of God” (I Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21).

As we’ve already seen, Paul was accused by some of being *anti-law*. So, James told Paul to do certain things “that all may know... **that you yourself** also walk orderly and **keep the law**” (Acts 21:24).

Paul told young Timothy that “*from childhood* you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation” (II Tim. 3:15). Here, Paul was referring to the Old Testament, since that was the *only* scriptures that Timothy had *known* from childhood. So, now, thirty some years *after* the crucifixion, Paul was referring to the Old Testament as “scripture,” and he said that those scriptures make one “wise for salvation”---and he told Timothy to “...*continue* in the things which you have learned and been assured of” (verse 14). “Paul saw no conflict between Old Testament scripture and Christian faith and practice, and confirmed that ALL Scripture (including the Old Testament) is profitable for *doctrine* and for *instruction in righteousness*. These are not the words of someone teaching that God’s Old Testament laws have been done away!”³

“So when they had appointed him [Paul] a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets [i.e., **from the Old Testament**], from morning till evening” (Acts 28:23). So, here we see that Paul preached the kingdom of God *and Jesus from the Old Testament*.

Let’s now focus on some scriptures which prove that Paul kept the seventh day Sabbath, as well as the annual holy days of God (as summarized in Leviticus chapter 23):

“And he [Paul] reasoned **in the synagogue every Sabbath**, and persuaded both Jews **and Greeks**” (Acts 18:4).

“There remains, then, a **Sabbath-rest** [‘sabbatismos’] for the people of God,” said Paul (Heb. 4:9, NIV).

Acts chapter 13 also shows that Paul kept the Sabbath.

As for the annual holy days of Leviticus 23, the following scriptures show that these days were *observed* by Paul:

“but [Paul] took leave of them, saying, ‘I must by all means **keep** this coming feast [of Passover] in Jerusalem’” (Acts 18:21).

“But we sailed away from Philippi after *the Days of Unleavened Bread*,” said Paul. (Acts 20:6)

“For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the *Day of Pentecost*” (Acts 20:16).

“But I will tarry in Ephesus until *Pentecost*,” said Paul (I Cor. 16:8).

An Important Distinction

It is vital to understand this about Paul's writings: Whenever Paul speaks about *whether* we should keep God's law, he always says it *should* be kept---that the law is "spiritual"---that it's "holy, just and good." Yet, Paul also explains that one cannot be *saved* by law keeping---and that Christians are not "under the law"---i.e., not under *its penalty*.

Paul's Writings ONLY?

There are some who believe that the *only* writings in the New Testament that should be accepted by Christians are the writings of Paul. Yet, this could not possibly be a legitimate concept, since Paul himself considered *other* New Testament writings to be "scripture." In I Tim. 5:18, Paul said this: "For the **Scripture** says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,' and, 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.'" This quotation, "The laborer is worthy of his wages"---which Paul calls "scripture"---is found *nowhere* in the Old Testament. It is found *only* in Luke's Gospel (chapter 10, verse 7). Therefore, Paul plainly considered the gospel books to be "scripture." And Paul himself said that "**All Scripture** is given by *inspiration of God*, and is profitable for *doctrine*, for reproof, for correction, for *instruction in righteousness*" (II Tim. 3:16).

Conclusion

Paul did *not* teach a "new way"---a way that was *apart from* God's law. To say otherwise, one would have to explain the following:

- (1) Paul, as shown above, wrote *many*, plain scriptures that are in *support* of obedience to God's spiritual law.
- (2) Paul, as we've seen, **kept** the 7th day Sabbath---as well as God's *annual* holy days that are summarized in Leviticus chapter 23.
- (3) Jesus Christ **kept** God's spiritual law, and Paul said that he *imitated* Christ---and instructs us to do likewise!
- (4) Paul said, "I have done *nothing against*... the customs of our fathers..." (Acts 28:17).
- (5) If the theory of "Progressive Revelation" were true, then we should look primarily to the writings of **John**, *not* Paul---in light of the fact that John wrote his epistles (and the book of Revelation) years *after* Paul's death.

“Hard to Understand”

Speaking of *Paul's* writings, Peter said that there “**are some things hard to understand**” (II Peter 3:16). What was Peter specifically referring to?

Paul---as did the other writers of the New Testament---wrote *many* scriptures (as shown in the article above) that plainly *endorse* the keeping of God’s spiritual law! Therefore, it only makes *sense* that when Peter referred to certain statements by Paul that are “hard to understand,” he was referring to specific statements that might be *misunderstood* to be “anti-law”---and therefore in direct *opposition* to the teachings of Christ and the other disciples!

In fact, Peter continued in the verse that followed (verse 17) to *show* that this is what he meant---by stating that it is “*lawless*” men who “distort” and twist Paul’s writings! Notice the passage more fully: “...some things that are *hard to understand*, which ignorant and unstable people *distort*, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the *lawless* and fall from your secure position” (II Peter 3: 16-17, NIV).

Note: In verse 17, the term “the lawless” is used in many translations, such as the NIV, the RSV, the NRSV, Moffatt, etc. Yet, other translations render it as “the wicked” or “unprincipled men.” *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance* gives a definition of the original Greek that *favours* “lawless.” It says this for the Greek word “asthesmos”: “*lawless*, i.e. (by impl.) *criminal*;--wicked.” So *Strong’s* shows that “lawless” is the *main* sense of the word, and that only by “implication” does it mean “wicked.” (And, after all, the “lawless” *are* “wicked”---II Thess. 2:7-9.)

References

1. Roderick C. Meredith, *NOW REVEALED---Christianity’s Greatest Deception*, December 1997 booklet
2. John H. Ogwyn, *Tomorrow’s World* magazine, May-June 2003, p.18
3. Roderick C. Meredith, *Restoring Apostolic Christianity*, Nov. 2000 booklet