

# The Laws of God

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## Introduction

There is widespread confusion today about which, if any, of God's laws given to ancient Israel are necessary for Christians to keep. Over the centuries, Christians have traditionally believed that the Ten Commandments represented God's moral law that is still binding. More recently, the notion that the Ten Commandments as a written code was nailed to the cross and either replaced by the law of love, by grace, or by some other spiritual principle has surfaced among some Protestant Christians.

Beyond God's moral law, there has been nearly universal agreement among Christians that they no longer need to observe the ceremonial or health laws given to Old Testament Israel. Usually, the reasons given to justify this conclusion center around the idea that they were intrinsically tied to the animal sacrificial system, which Jesus abolished when He became the Lamb of God at Calvary, and that God forbade the eating of certain animals because ancient ovens could not be heated sufficiently to kill harmful bacteria that are more inherent in their flesh.

At the same time, some have viewed the Ten Commandments as of continual validity because it is the Law of God, and have rejected part or all of the remaining laws by declaring that they are the Law of Moses. It is true that the Ten Commandments occupied the highest position among God's Laws, at least partly by virtue of having been written by God's own finger and placed inside the ark of the covenant (Exodus 25:16, 21; 40:20; Exodus 30:6; 31:18; Deuteronomy 10:3-5; I Kings 8:9), in contrast to the *Book of the Law* having been placed *beside or in the side of* (KJV), the ark, perhaps in some specially made pocket. [NOTE: The *Book of the Law* was apparently Deuteronomy, or perhaps the entire Pentateuch (the five books of Moses); see Joshua 1:8 and 8:34-35.] However, a radical distinction between the Law of God and the Law of Moses cannot be justified for the obvious reason that it was God who gave Moses *all* of His laws; Moses did not originate any of the laws he directed Israel to keep. Moreover, Moses is not to be so quickly thrust aside, for the New Testament reveals that Jesus and His apostles still gave him great respect (Matthew 8:4; 17:3-4; 23:2-3; Luke 2:22; 16:31; 24:27; John 5:46; Acts 7:20, 35; 15:21; 26:22; 28:23; I Corinthians 9:9; Hebrews 11:23-24). As we will see, the determination of which laws are still valid requires more analysis than this particular approach offers.

In this paper we attempt to briefly examine the different laws of God. They are divided into the following five categories:

- Moral Law
- Ceremonial Law: (a) Typical and (b) Untypical
- Health Law
- Civil Law
- Miscellaneous Laws

## Moral Law

The moral law of God is expressed in the Ten Commandments, first recorded as a body of law in Exodus 20 when the nation of Israel entered into a covenant relationship with God. God’s Ten Commandments are valid for at least the following seven reasons:

- They were written by God Himself.

Exodus 31:18 tells us that *God gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God* (cf. Exodus 24:12; 32:15-16), defined as the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 4:13). The only other time in Scripture that God wrote anything was when Jesus wrote something in the dirt to the accusers of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:6). So when God writes something down, we should pay very close attention.

- They were written in Stone.

The fact that God wrote the Ten Commandments in stone is significant because of all the ancient materials used to write on—papyrus, leather, parchment, vellum, clay, and stone—stone was the most enduring. Even today, we sometimes say that something is written in stone, meaning that it is *permanent*.

- They are a reflection of God’s Eternal Character.

<u>God</u>	<u>Character Trait</u>	<u>Ten Commandments</u>
Isaiah 5:16	Holy	Romans 7:7, 12
Deuteronomy 32:4	Just	Romans 7:7, 12
Luke 18:19	Good	Romans 7:7, 12
I John 4:8, 16	Love	Romans 13:8-10
John 4:24	Spiritual	Romans 7:7, 14
Malachi 3:6	Unchangeable	Matthew 5:18

Every character trait that describes God also describes the Ten Commandments. Since God’s character never changes (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8; James 1:17), His Ten Commandments—as

a transcription of His character—cannot change either.

- Jesus upheld them.

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared, *till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or tittle will by no means pass from the law* (Matthew 5:18). Then He illustrated His point with two of the Ten Commandments (vv. 21-22, 27-28) so He meant the Ten Commandments when He referred to the *law*. In fact, in His references to both of those Ten Commandments, Jesus *amplified* their meaning rather than reduced their meaning.

- The existence of Sin proves they are valid.

In Romans 7:7 the apostle Paul says that he would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet,’ which proves he was talking about the Ten Commandments. Therefore, the Ten Commandments show us what sin is (Romans 3:20). The fact that we all agree that there is still sin in the world means that the Ten Commandments are still valid.

- The existence of the Gospel proves they are valid.

In our paper entitled “Righteousness by Faith Alone” we have already learned that Jesus became our Substitute, lived a perfect life for us, and died the death we deserve to die. This is the heart of the gospel. He had to do this in order to save us precisely because God’s character and His Ten Commandments are immutable (cannot be changed). Thus, the gospel proves that the Ten Commandments are still valid.

- The existence of Grace proves they are valid.

In our paper entitled “Righteousness by Faith Alone” we have already shown that salvation is by grace through faith alone. Grace refers to a *gift* that we do not deserve and cannot earn. When a traffic judge dismisses a violation against a person, he gives you grace. But he does not thereby abolish the traffic law that the person violated. In fact, you would not need grace if the law had been abolished. Therefore, the existence of grace also proves that the Ten Commandments are still valid.

### Objections to the Ten Commandments

There have been at least ten major arguments given by various Christian leaders to teach that the Ten Commandments as a specific code or body of laws has been abolished and replaced by love or the spirit of the law instead. We examine and refute those ten objections in this section.

*Objection #1:* The Ten Commandments were given to the Nation of Israel in the Old Testament. God made a covenant with the nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 20) because He was making them a nation for the first time. But note that the principles of the Ten Commandments were known to God's people long before Israel existed in the book of Genesis, as shown by the chart below:

<u>Ten Commandments</u>	<u>Genesis References</u>
First Commandment	Genesis 35:1-4 (cf. Joshua 24:2)
Second Commandment	Genesis 31:19-35; 35:1-4
Third Commandment	Genesis 12:3 (cf. Hebrews 12:14-17)
Fourth Commandment	Genesis 2:1-3
Fifth Commandment	Genesis 9:20-27
Sixth Commandment	Genesis 4:8-11, 23-24; 9:5-6
Seventh Commandment	Genesis 20:5-9; 34:1-2, 31; 38:24; 39:7-9
Eighth Commandment	Genesis 27:35-36; 30:33; 31:19, 30, 32, 39; 44:8
Ninth Commandment	Genesis 27:12, 17-24
Tenth Commandment	Genesis 3:6 (must be broken before 8 <sup>th</sup> one can be)

*Objection #2:* The New Testament teaches that the Ten Commandments as a single codified unit were nailed to the Cross. Therefore, only those individual commandments that are repeated in the New Testament are valid for Christians.

The two New Testament passages employed to teach this view are Ephesians 2:15 and Colossians 2:14.

Ephesians 2:15 declares that Jesus *abolished in His flesh...the law of commandments contained in ordinances*. First, the context of verses 11-22 is about creating one new people by reconciling Jews and Gentiles into one body-temple, the Christian Church (vv. 19-22). To do this, Jesus *has broken down the middle wall of separation* (v. 14), defined in verse 15 as *the law of commandments contained in ordinances*. Second, the literal *middle wall of separation* was the wall in the Court of the Gentiles, beyond which Gentiles could not go in Herod's Temple, a wall that God never instructed to be built. Thus, the Jews had used *the law of commandments* to separate themselves from Gentiles to erect an unbiblical barrier to God, something God never intended. Therefore, we must conclude that it was the Sanctuary Law that Jesus abolished at the cross.

In Colossians 2:13-14, the apostle Paul states that *God has made us alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us...And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross*. First, the context of the chapter is a warning against *philosophy, empty deceit, the tradition of men, the commandments*

*and doctrines of men, and the basic principles of the world* (vv. 8, 20, 22). So whatever Paul meant, he certainly cannot be including any part of God's Law. Second, the immediate context just prior to verse 14's phrase *having wiped out the handwriting* is how God forgives. Abolishing any law is never the means to forgive someone. Finally, the Greek word for *handwriting* appears only here in the Scriptures, but it was frequently used in the Jewish literature of Paul's day to describe a certificate of indebtedness (an IOU) or a record book of sins. *Arbitrarily* removing evidence against someone is not the means of forgiving them anymore than abolishing a law forgives someone. But this record book of sins describes them as our debt or IOU. We owe the debt of perfect righteousness because the Law points out sin. Jesus could nail this IOU to the cross because He lived a life of perfect righteousness and then paid our debt at the cross as our Substitute. Therefore, this is a beautiful example of the gospel, not the abolition of God's Law. Note: Reference to II Chronicles 33:8's *ordinances by the hand of Moses* as being the *handwriting* in Colossians 2 is a weak argument. Besides, how is it that the ceremonial law is *against us* (Colossians 2:14)?

Besides, James 2:10 declares that if a person violates just one of the Ten Commandments (v. 11 quotes from two of the Ten Commandments), *he is guilty of all*. Thus, the Ten Commandments are considered as a single, indivisible unit in the New Testament, and the entire theory behind this objection is shown to be false.

Furthermore, the implied objection that the New Testament does not repeat all of Ten Commandments is simply and factually wrong, for nine of the commandments are directly taught in those Scriptures. The only one not referred to is the Third Commandment that prohibits taking the name of the Lord in vain, although no believer believes that this commandment can be disregarded. This is illustrated in the following chart:

<u>Ten Commandments</u>	<u>New Testament References</u>
First Commandment	I Corinthians 8:4-6
Second Commandment	I Corinthians 8:4; 10:14
Third Commandment	None
Fourth Commandment	Hebrews 4:9-10
Fifth Commandment	Matthew 15:4-6; Mark 7:9-13
Sixth Commandment	Matthew 5:21-22; Romans 7:9
Seventh Commandment	Matthew 5:27-28; Romans 7:9
Eighth Commandment	Romans 7:9
Ninth Commandment	Acts 5:4; Romans 7:9
Tenth Commandment	Romans 7:9

We conclude therefore that the only things the New Testament says were abolished at the cross

were (1) the sacrificial system with its earthly sanctuary and (2) our statement of debt to God because of our sins.

*Objection #3:* Under the new covenant Christians no longer need to keep the Ten Commandments because they were given under the old covenant with national Israel.

II Corinthians 3 is the major passage that is used to teach this objection because it contrasts *tablets of stone* and *tablets of...the heart* (v. 3) as representing the old and new covenants respectively (v. 6) and calls the former *the ministry of death* (v. 7). As a result, the argument says that under the new covenant, those Ten Commandments (written on tablets of stone) have passed away (v. 11).

However, after contrasting the two different tablets, Paul refers to the fact that Moses' time with God on Mt. Sinai caused his face to shine with the reflected glory of God so that he had to cover it with a veil (v. 7). He then figuratively applies the Israelites as having been blinded ever since to the gospel (vv. 14-15; 4:3-4). In other words, Paul teaches that the old covenant is the Jewish misunderstanding of the one covenant that God intended for Israel all along—that the Ten Commandments would lead them to recognize their need of a Substitute. But since it did not do that, it killed them spiritually because of their insistence upon seeing only the letter of the law and thus keeping it in an external way.

The new covenant experience, however, allows God's true people to have the Holy Spirit write the same Ten Commandments on their hearts, where it is internalized as an expression of love for God. This was God's desire for national Israel, for the new covenant was first promised to it as the writing of His Law on their hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-33). It is the same Ten Commandments, but the issue concerns where they are written—only externally on tablets of stone or internally on the heart. Therefore, the Ten Commandments are upheld under the new covenant. In other words, the new covenant does not affect the *terms* of the covenant relationship with God, which are His Ten Commandments, but allows Him to write them on our hearts, to internalize them and make them spiritually deeper in meaning.

*Objection #4:* Since the New Testament teaches that we are under grace and not under the law, we no longer have to keep the Ten Commandments.

Romans 6:14 declares that *sin shall not have dominion [power, authority] over you, for you are not under law but under grace*. Christians are indeed under grace and not under the law. But that does not mean we do not need to keep the Ten Commandments. Paul also wrote that *You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace...But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law* (Galatians 5:4, 18). The passage in Galatians 5 makes clear that being *under the law* is attempting to be *justified by law*, which is the opposite of being under grace. Since the law points out sin (Romans 3:20; 7:7), it condemns

us. Being under grace, then, means allowing Jesus to save us by His life, death, and resurrection. Paul teaches that when we are under the law we were slaves to sin (Romans 6:17). But now being under grace makes us slaves to righteousness (Romans 6:18).

In another metaphor, Paul teaches that being under grace delivers us from a marriage to sin so that we are free to marry Jesus (Romans 7:4). In this way *we have been delivered from the law* [that bound us in marriage to sin] so that we are now married to Jesus and *serve in the newness of the Spirit* (v. 6). In the same context, Paul also declares that the Ten Commandments (v. 7) *are holy and just and good* (v.12). So he is not saying that we had been previously married to the Ten Commandments but that the Law bound us to be married to sin. Therefore, the apostle is stating that the Ten Commandments were a drudgery when we were married to sin, but it is now a delight when we are married to Jesus. It is the same Ten Commandments, but our attitude is different.

As we stated earlier, we would not even need grace if it were not for the fact that the Law is still in effect.

*Objection #5:* Galatians 3 tells us that since we are justified in Jesus we no longer have to keep the Ten Commandments.

The major passage for this teaching is Galatians 3:24-25, which states, *Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.* The Greek word for *tutor* here refers to a family servant who, among other things, was responsible for taking the children to school. So Paul's point is that the Law was partly designed to take us to Jesus, where we would be justified by faith in Him. Once justified, we no longer need the Law to function in that particular way. However, the Law leads us to a Savior precisely because it condemns our violations of it as sin and worthy of death. By condemning our violations of the Law's demands, the Ten Commandments are thereby shown to still be valid *as showing us the way to live.*

*Objection #6:* Since the Ten Commandments are associated with spiritual bondage, we no longer need to keep them as Christians.

In Galatians 4:21-31, Paul associates Mt. Sinai with the old covenant, bondage, Jerusalem, and the bondwoman (Sarah's Egyptian servant Hagar, with whom Abraham conceived Ishmael, Genesis 16). In contrast he praises the free woman (Sarah), the new covenant, and Jerusalem above (in heaven). Because Mt. Sinai was the place from which God spoke the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19:11; 20:1-18), it is alleged that the apostle was saying that Christians are not associated with the Ten Commandments as a codified body of Law.

First, we agree that genuine Christians are not in bondage to the Ten Commandments. As we have

learned, such bondage enslaves us to sin's power and to a marriage with sin (Romans 6 and 7). Note that Paul begins his allegory in Galatians 3 by referring to those *who desire to be under the law* (v. 21), which we have learned is to attempt to be justified by one's law-keeping. But when you do that, you are condemned by the Ten Commandments into being in bondage. Second, here Paul argues that his own people—*Jerusalem which now is* (v. 25)—are in this state, as is anyone else who seeks salvation by his own works. Finally, when we accept the gospel promise that Jesus saves us, we are both the spiritual children of the promise and the free woman. Once again, this passage says nothing about ignoring the Ten Commandments as the standard of conduct.

*Objection #7:* The Law of Love has replaced the Ten Commandments for the Christian.

It is said that Jesus Himself taught this truth that Love replaces the Ten Commandments for His followers in Matthew 22:37-40, when He said that love for God and love for one's fellow man *hang all the Law and the Prophets* (v. 40). Paul says the same thing in Romans 13:9-10 when he says that to love your neighbor as yourself *is the fulfillment of the law* (v. 10). Therefore, it is argued that love replaces the Ten Commandments as the standard for Christian behavior.

First, when Jesus spoke those words in Matthew 22 He was quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18; Paul was quoting from Leviticus 19:18. There was therefore nothing new about the command to love God and one's neighbor, except that it was new to most of the people, who had little love in their hearts. Second, since the command to love in the Old Testament obviously did not abolish the Law then, it should not do so in the New Testament either. Finally, the New Testament never teaches that love replaces obedience to the Ten Commandments, but rather that love leads to *genuine* obedience. After all, Paul's statement in Romans 13 was in the very context of speaking of the Ten Commandments, telling us that love is the *manner* in which those commandments should be kept. This truth is reflected in Jesus' command that *If you love Me, keep My commandments* (John 14:15) and in the apostle John's statement that *By this 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* (I John 5:2-3). Therefore, the principle of love leads to keeping God's commandments and to keep them out of love for Him and for our fellow man.

*Objection #8:* Jesus is the end of the Law for Christians.

According to Romans 10:4, *Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes*. Although the Greek word for *end* can mean *goal* in the sense that the Law points to Jesus as the goal for righteousness, this statement here is qualified by the phrase *to everyone who believes*. The Law leads *unbelievers* to Jesus, not believers, who are already with Him. Therefore, Paul is saying that Jesus is the end of the believers' attempt to use the Law as a means to gaining righteousness. Therefore, the text says nothing about the Ten Commandments being abolished as the standard of right and wrong for the Christian.

*Objection #9:* Christian freedom means freedom from having to keep the Ten Commandments.

Jesus' words in John 8:34-36 are used to teach that believers have freedom from having to keep the Ten Commandments: *whoever commits sin [habitually and willingly] is a slave of sin...Therefore, if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.* In the context, Jesus plainly teaches that He can make us free from bondage to sin, which then enables the believer to freely serve and obey Him. Christian freedom is freedom from the control and domination of sin, not freedom from law-keeping.

In James 2:8-12 mention is made of the *royal law* (v. 8) and the *law of liberty* (v. 12). According to verse 8 the royal law is the law of love for one's neighbor because it quotes from Leviticus 19:18. It is a royal law because it expresses the supreme principle of God's kingdom. James then says that those who show partiality for certain people have violated the whole law (v. 9), and he illustrates this by referencing two of the Ten Commandments and says that he who violates one but not the other is actually guilty of breaking all of them (v. 11). Then he immediately adds, *So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty* (v. 12).

Technically, the royal law and the part of the Ten Commandments that deal with one's relationship with his neighbor (Commandments numbers 5-10) are distinguished from each other. However, the last six of the Ten Commandments apply the royal law in specific ways. Therefore, they are not in any way in opposition to each other. The law of liberty refers to the Ten Commandments because it is referenced immediately after two of the Ten Commandments are mentioned. It is a law of liberty because the believer finds his true freedom in obedience to God as an act of love toward Him once he has stopped using them as a means to righteousness. Therefore, there is no basis on which to argue that Christians keep the royal law but not the Ten Commandments.

*Objection #10:* Since God wants us to serve Him in Spirit and not in letter, Christians ought to keep the spirit of the Ten Commandments rather than the letter of that Law.

II Corinthians 3:6 does teach that the believer should keep the spirit of the Law rather than *merely* the letter. First, it is certainly possible to keep the letter of the Law without the spirit, as in doing so as an obligation rather than as a privilege to honor God by showing our love to Him through our keeping His Law. Second, however, one cannot keep the spirit of the Law (any law) if you ignore the letter of the Law. That would be like committing murder and justifying it by saying that he did it without malice in his heart. In fact, loving the Law-Giver will cause the person to go beyond the mere letter of the Law and obey it with both pleasure and in a deeper, loving sense, not limiting his obedience to the actual words of the Law.

## Typical Ceremonial Law

### Sanctuary Laws

The Sanctuary laws are an example of the Ceremonial Law because they describe specific religious ceremonies to be performed. They are sometimes divided by theologians into two kinds: (1) typical and (2) untypical. Typical ceremonial laws are those that have types that represent a future entity, event, or experience in relation to God's people. The Greek word for *type* means *a blow* or *a stamp* and therefore the impression made on a coin by stamping metal. The word *antitype* adds the prefix *anti*, which means *against* or *in place of*. Typical ceremonial laws therefore are types that are eventually fulfilled by a later event or experience (the antitype), just as a person can be a type of a later person (such as Adam as a type of Jesus, in Romans 5:14). Typology is the study of types in the Scriptures. Untypical ceremonial laws concern religious ceremonies that are not typical in nature; the law of circumcision and the various Old Testament rituals to rid a person of ritual uncleanness are untypical ceremonial laws.

Jesus is called the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). See also I Peter 1:19 (cf. Revelation 5:6-14). That means that all of the sacrificial animals in the Old Testament sanctuary system were types of Jesus. Therefore, when type met antitype in the events surrounding the death of Jesus, the types were no longer necessary, and they faded away as shadows fade in bright sunlight.

This conclusion is foreshadowed by Isaiah 53's Messianic prophecy, which uses the figure of a lamb being led to the slaughter to describe the Messiah (v. 7), a text quoted in Acts 8:32, where it is applied specifically to Jesus. It stands to reason since Jesus was the antitypical Lamb who was sacrificed for the sins of *the whole world* (I John 2:2), that His atoning death on Calvary would fulfill the entire sacrificial system. This inference is reinforced by the fact that the veil in the Jerusalem Temple between the Holy and Most Holy Place was torn from top to bottom (supernaturally) when Jesus died (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; cf. Luke 23:45), thus indicating that Jesus' death resulted in His followers having unrestricted access into the *heavenly* sanctuary (Hebrews 10:19-20), making the *earthly* Temple unnecessary since it was merely *the copy and shadow of the heavenly things* (Hebrews 8:5) and *not the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man* (Hebrews 8:2). This is the reason that the book of Hebrews explicitly teaches that the *law* of the priesthood was annulled (Hebrews 7:12, 16, 18-19, 28), for it *made nothing perfect* (7:19) since it was administered by imperfect priests (7:11-12, 23-28). Moreover, its animal sacrifices could not perfect, or save, anyone either because they were constantly repeated (Hebrews 10:1-4, 11). By contrast, Jesus was the perfect high priest (Hebrews 7:26) who *offered one sacrifice [Himself] for sins...[and] by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified* (Hebrews 10:12, 14). Therefore, it is quite clear that it was the Law concerning the earthly priesthood, earthly sanctuary, and animal sacrifices which was abolished by the death of

Jesus, the Lamb of God.

### Laws of the Annual Festivals

A few Christians advocate the observance of the Hebrew or Jewish annual festivals. There were seven different annual festivals or feasts given to ancient Israel in the Old Testament: (1) Passover, (2) Feast of Unleavened Bread, (3) Feast of the Firstfruits, (4) Feast of Pentecost (or Weeks or Harvest), (5) Feast of Trumpets, (6) the Day of Atonement, and (7) the Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths or Ingathering). See Leviticus 23 for a review of all seven of these feasts. See also Exodus 12 for the origin of Passover, Exodus 13 for the origin of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and Leviticus 16 for a more detailed description of the Day of Atonement. These are all outlined below.

- Passover

Passover was the first annual festival of each religious year and originated in association with the last plague in Egypt, when the angel of death passed over the houses with the blood of a lamb on its doorposts and lintel and spared the first-born male (Exodus 12:1-30). This was in the spring of the year, which began the religious year among the nation of Israel (Exodus 12:2). According to Jewish sources, the first month began on the new moon following the ripening of the barley crop. Passover was specifically dated as falling on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month of each year (Exodus 12:6; Leviticus 23:5). The people ate roasted lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs (Exodus 12:5, 8-9). Because of its close association with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, sometimes both feasts are designated as one and called Passover (Deuteronomy 16:1-8; Matthew 26:17; Mark 15:12; Luke 22:1, 7).

- Feast of Unleavened Bread

The Feast of Unleavened Bread began on the day after Passover, on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the first month (Leviticus 23:6). It lasted for seven days inclusively from the 15<sup>th</sup> through the 21<sup>st</sup> day of that month (Leviticus 23:6-8), during which the people would eat unleavened bread (Leviticus 23:6). In fact, all leaven was to be removed from the people's houses (Exodus 12:19). The first and seventh day of this festival was a ceremonial Sabbath in which no work was to be done and on which a holy convocation (or meeting) was conducted (Exodus 12:16; Leviticus 23:7-8). Because of its close association with Passover, this festival was sometimes called Passover (Deuteronomy 16:1-8; Matthew 26:17; Mark 15:12; Luke 22:1, 7).

- Feast of the Firstfruits

The Feast of the Firstfruits was a one-day feast that fell on the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (the 16<sup>th</sup> day of the first month), which in turn was *the day after the Sabbath* of the Passover (Leviticus 23:11). On that day, a sheaf of barley (the first grain harvest of the spring) was waved as a gesture of thanksgiving to God for the barley harvest by a priest (Leviticus 23:10-11).

- Feast of Pentecost (or Weeks or Harvest)

This festival was called the Feast of Weeks (Exodus 34:22; Numbers 28:26; Deuteronomy 16:9-10, 16; II Chronicles 8:13), the Feast of Harvest (Exodus 23:16), and the Feast of Pentecost (because it fell on the 50<sup>th</sup> day inclusively from the day of the Feast of the Firstfruits; *Pentecost* means *fiftieth*—see Leviticus 23:15-16). This festival celebrated the completion of the harvest of wheat (Exodus 34:22). Bread was made with this wheat and offered with several sacrificial animals as an offering to the Lord (Leviticus 23:19). It was also a ceremonial Sabbath and a time for a holy convocation (Leviticus 23:21).

- Feast of Trumpets

This festival was the first of the fall festivals and fell on the first day of the seventh month of the religious year, which was also the first month of the civil year in the Hebrew calendar. Trumpets would be blown (Leviticus 23:24; Numbers 29:1) and several sacrificial animals and a grain offering would be made at the tabernacle (Numbers 29:2-6). According to Jewish sources, the trumpets were blown to signify the beginning of the new civil year. It was also a ceremonial Sabbath and a time for a holy convocation (or meeting), according to Leviticus 23:24-25; Numbers 29:1.

- Day of Atonement

The Day of Atonement (Yom Kipper) fell on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the seventh month (Leviticus 23:27; Numbers 29:7). It was a day for a holy convocation (or meeting) and a ceremonial Sabbath (Leviticus 23:27, 31-32; Numbers 29:7). Leviticus 16 presents the ceremonies on that day in some detail. It involved different animal sacrifices, chiefly a goat and a ram, and involved the sprinkling of sacrificial blood in the Most Holy Place, the Holy Place, and the Altar of Burnt Offering in a process that symbolized the cleansing of the sanctuary—the symbolic removal of the forgiven sins of the people from the sanctuary. It was the holiest day of the entire year and the only day that anyone, namely the high priest only, entered into the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary. It was considered a judgment day in which all of those who professed to belong to God would be tested. Those who afflicted (humbled) themselves through fasting passed the judgment and were allowed

to remain with the covenant community of God, and those who refused to so humble themselves were cut off from the people of God (Leviticus 23:27, 29; Numbers 29:7). [Note: Acts 27:9 refers to *the Fast* in the fall season because they were searching for a place to winter a ship in (v. 12). This is universally understood to refer to the Day of Atonement, so that to *afflict* oneself was to fast on that day.]

- Feast of Tabernacles

The Feast of Tabernacles was also called the Feast of Ingathering (Exodus 23:16; 34:22) or even the Feast of Booths (by later Jewish custom) because the people gathered in the harvest of the fruits (Exodus 23:16; Leviticus 23:39) and the people lived in tabernacles or booths (Leviticus 23:42-43; Deuteronomy 16:13, 16) because they lived in these when they left slavery in Egypt. It was observed for seven days beginning on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the seventh month, or five days after the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:34). On the first day, a holy convocation (or meeting) was conducted and was regarded as a Sabbath (Leviticus 23:35, 39). It celebrated the completion of the harvest of fruits and olives in the fall (Leviticus 23:39's *fruit*; v. 39). Different animal sacrifices were required on each day (Numbers 29:13, 17, 20, 23, 26, 29, 32, 35-38).

Then the day after the Feast of Tabernacles ended is called the eighth day, although the feast only lasted seven days (Leviticus 23:34, 39). This so-called eighth day was also a Sabbath (Leviticus 23:36, 39) and a day for a *holy convocation* (v. 36). Since this so-called eighth day was not actually part of the Feast of Tabernacles, it apparently marked the official end of the religious calendar with its festivals.

On three of these annual festivals all males were required to go to the sanctuary (*appear before the Lord*)—later this was in Jerusalem—and participate in them there: (1) the Feast of Unleavened Bread or Passover (often referred to as one); (2) the Feast of Pentecost; and (3) the Feast of Tabernacles (see Exodus 23:14-17; 34:18-23; Deuteronomy 16:16).

There were a total of seven different annual Sabbaths in the Hebrew religious calendar as associated with the festivals above: (1) the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread; (2) the seventh day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread; (3) the Day of Pentecost; (4) the Feast of Trumpets; (5) the Day of Atonement; (6) the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles; and (7) the day after the Feast of Tabernacles ended (the so-called eighth day). Only on the Day of Atonement was *all* work forbidden (Leviticus 23:31), as it was on the weekly Sabbath (v. 3). On the other annual Sabbaths, only *customary*, *laborious*, (RSV, NASB), or *regular* (NIV) work was forbidden.

## Should We Keep the Hebrew Festivals?

With this overview we return to the question of whether or not Christians should observe these annual festivals or at least the seven annual Sabbaths associated with them. There have been several arguments put forward as to why they should be kept. One is that if you accept the weekly Sabbath, you should naturally accept the annual festivals since the weekly Sabbath is classified among them as a festival (Leviticus 23:2-3). Second, there is the matter of the annual, or ceremonial, Sabbaths associated with several of those festivals; after all, each one of them is also called a Sabbath or a day of rest. Third, the apostle Paul appears to have kept the festivals, for he is mentioned as wishing to go to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 20:16; cf. I Corinthians 16:8). Fourth, God's Christian Church is spiritual Israel, suggesting a continuity with the nation of Israel. Finally, the annual festivals have significant meaning for Christians, indicating that their symbolisms were not exhausted by the symbols that gave it meaning to the Jewish people.

Although there are some elements of truth in some of what the advocates for keeping these festivals teach, we reject them as *requirements* for Christian believers. First, they were instituted and given to the nation of Israel and specifically reflect their history and their agricultural seasons in the context of their earthly sanctuary system with its priesthood and animal sacrifices. By contrast, the weekly Sabbath, although identified as one of their festivals (Leviticus 23:1-3, 44), was given to all mankind at Creation week, quite apart from the nation of Israel which did not exist at that time. The weekly Sabbath is also different from all the annual Sabbaths except one (the Day of Atonement) in that it prohibits *all* work and six of the annual Sabbaths only prohibited regular or laborious work (see two paragraphs above).

Second, the fact that God's people today constitute spiritual Israel does suggest some continuity with literal Israel. However, there is also discontinuity with literal Israel. The Christian Church is a spiritual rather than a literal nation (II Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6, 9). Physical circumcision is no longer the sign of the covenant relationship with God (Acts 15; I Corinthians 7:19; Galatians 5:6; 6:15). The Christian sanctuary that counts is the one in heaven, where Jesus ministers as our only priest (and high priest) and also was the once-for-all sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 7:11-10:25). Finally, the Jerusalem that Christians identify with is the New, or heavenly, Jerusalem, not the one on earth (Hebrews 12:22-23; Revelation 3:12; 21:2). By contrast, the annual festivals with their Sabbaths focused most of their celebrations on the earthly sanctuary in Jerusalem, with its earthly priesthood and animal sacrifices. These contrasts strongly suggest that believers do not necessarily identify with literal Israel's annual festivals.

Third, the apostle Paul almost certainly did keep the Feast of Pentecost, which probably means he kept all of the annual festivals, in a Christian way of course. However, remember that Paul said *to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the*

*law, that I might win those who are under the law* (I Corinthians 9:20). By itself therefore, Paul's observance of the annual festivals does not constitute a requirement for all Christians.

Fourth, God's Christian people, like His former people for that matter, are scattered among all the nations of the earth and make travel to Jerusalem three times a year as required in the Old Testament for three of the festivals unaffordable and impractical for most believers. Furthermore, those living in the southern hemisphere experience the seasons in very different months than those living in the northern hemisphere (like modern Israel). When it is spring in the northern hemisphere, it is fall in the southern. And when it is winter in the northern hemisphere, it is summer in the southern. Therefore, there is no way that the global Church could observe the annual festivals in the Biblical manner at the same time; any efforts to keep them in their respective different seasons would tend to disrupt the unity of the Church. In this way, we can know that God intended the annual festivals for the nation of Israel, who live in the same general geographical location and experience the seasons and agricultural productions at the same time.

Finally, the institution of the Holy Communion service for the Church serves as a pattern by which to evaluate the validity of all of the annual festivals. We know the Holy Communion service was given as a replacement for the Passover festival because, as we said earlier, Jesus instituted it via His formal presentation of the bread and wine at or near the close of the Passover meal that He ate with His apostles (Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-20) and that the apostle Paul tells us that this service is a memorial of Jesus' death (I Corinthians 11:26). Second, the New Testament sets no date or frequency for the observance of Holy Communion, only declaring that when we celebrate it we *proclaim the Lord's death till He comes* (v. 26). From these facts, we deduce that the New Testament does not mandate an annual celebration of the Lord's death or of His resurrection. Holy Communion is not the manner that Christians celebrate Passover, but it is a replacement for Passover.

In the annual Hebrew festivals, Passover was the feast that set the pattern for all the other festivals. By being the first one, all others followed in a logical sequence from it according to the agricultural calendar. It is true that the New Testament speaks favorably of Passover in I Corinthians 5:6-8. But that passage interprets it spiritually to mean that Christians should keep that *feast not with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth* (v. 8). All of this, therefore, means that a literal Passover is not required of God's Christian people. And if Passover is not required, neither should any of the others.

In summary, they are not still binding because (1) they were given to national Israel, not to humanity in general; (2) they were partly given in the context of Israel's history; (3) they were given in the context of Israel's agricultural economy; and (4) they were given in the context of Israel's sanctuary system with its earthly priesthood and animal sacrifices. Even though they were typical ceremonies, typifying major events associated with the first coming of the Messiah-Jesus

(spring festivals) and with the Second Coming of Jesus (fall festivals), their unique Israelite identity means that Christians are not required to observe them.

### Certain Benefits of the Christian Themes of the Festivals

Having rejected the annual Hebrew festivals as being required for Christians to observe, we nevertheless concede that they do contain themes applicable to Christianity. By interpreting them in a broader and spiritual sense, we can understand this truth. The following subsections briefly outline the Christian truths typified by the annual Hebrew festivals.

- *Passover*

In the spiritual sense, Passover typifies the death of Jesus as the paschal Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36; I Corinthians 5:7; I Peter 1:19; Hebrews 7:27; 9:28; 10:10,12; Revelation 5:8-9, 12). In His death, He made it possible for those who trust Him to be delivered from the bondage to sin, as typified by Egyptian bondage (Romans 6:7, 11-14, 17-19), and to eventually enter the heavenly Canaan, as typified by the earthly Canaan (Hebrews 11:16, 22-23).

- *Feast of Unleavened Bread*

The eating of unleavened bread during the seven days of this festival illustrates that the Christian is to live a life apart from willful sin, for Paul used Passover language to indicate that the leaven associated with this festival represented *malice and wickedness* (I Corinthians 5:7-8). The fact that the Feast of Unleavened Bread followed immediately after Passover reflects the Christian understanding that Christ's death made it possible for the believer to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-11). We are saved first; then we act like it by walking with Jesus. Note that Jesus died on Passover (Matthew 26:17-27:50; Mark 14:12-15:37; Luke 22:7-23:46; John 13:1-19:30).

- *Feast of the Firstfruits*

The firstfruits in this festival represent Jesus as the *firstfruits* of the resurrection (I Corinthians 15:22-23), which means His resurrection was the guarantee that the dead in Him will be raised at the Second Coming of Jesus (cf. I Thessalonians 4:16-17). Firstfruits occurred two days after Passover (Leviticus 23:5-7, 11). Note that Jesus was resurrected on the Feast of Firstfruits, two days after Passover (Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:1-6; Luke 24:1-6; John 20:1-7).

- *Feast of Pentecost*

The Feast of Pentecost celebrated the giving of the Ten Commandments to Israel in the time of Moses at Mt. Sinai. This became a memorial observance of that event because the Jews associated

it with the actual event at Mt. Sinai. This calculation went like this: Exodus 19:1-2 states that the Israelites arrived at Mt. Sinai on the third month *on the same day*. That would refer to the very first day of that month. Exodus 12:2, 4 instructed Israel to kill the Passover lamb on *twilight* of the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month. The word *twilight* can refer either to the faint light of the early morning before sunrise or of the early evening after sunset. Here the word refers to the latter because verses 8-10 instructed them to eat the lamb that very night and leave none of it until *morning*. Since twilight before sunrise is immediately before morning, the twilight of the Passover must refer to the time just after sunset. Exodus 12:31, 42 tell us that the Israelites left Egypt that very night after midnight (vv. 29-30). This would be the night of the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the first month.

From the 15<sup>th</sup> of the first month to the first day of the third month was a period of 46 days reckoned inclusively (which means you count the 15<sup>th</sup> day as the first day). [Remember that the Hebrews alternated between months of 30 and 29 days so that the first month had 30 days and the second month had 29 days.] Exodus 19 describes an initial conversation Moses had with God on Mt. Sinai (vv. 3-6) and then a second conversation (vv. 8-13). In the latter conversation, God told Moses that He would make an appearance to the people on the third day—the third day from that conversation, not the third day of the month (v. 11). Apparently God spoke the Ten Commandments to the nation on that third day, for verses 16-19 refers to the Lord's presence as represented by thunderings, lightnings, a thick cloud, smoke, and the sound of trumpets, which did not end until after God spoke the Ten Commandments (20:18).

Unfortunately, we are not told how much time elapsed from Moses' initial conversation with God (vv. 3-6) and his second conversation. But it is reasonable that the time between them could have been two days. If so, then the Lord spoke the Ten Commandments to the nation on the 50<sup>th</sup> day after they left Egypt. According to Leviticus 23:15-16 (cf. vv. 6-7), the counting of the 50 days to the Feast of Pentecost began on the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which would make it two days after Passover, although as stated earlier, the term *Passover* sometimes referred to Passover itself and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Since Israel had no agricultural system of its own as slaves in Egypt, then the 50<sup>th</sup> day after Passover would be 50 days after Passover day. Thus, the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai could well have been on the 50<sup>th</sup> day after Passover, which would then be reckoned as the time of Pentecost.

As explained in this paper, the Ten Commandments are also part of the new covenant and thus significant and applicable to Christians. Moreover, the Feast of Pentecost is associated with the inauguration of the Church on the Day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2, a day on which the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Church (Acts 2:1-4, 16-18). Just as literal Israel was officially inaugurated as a literal nation at the giving of the Ten Commandments, so spiritual Israel was officially inaugurated as God's spiritual nation (I Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6, 9) at the giving of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, both the Ten Commandments and the Holy Spirit are associated by Christians as important events in association with the Feast of Pentecost.

We have seen from the evidence thus far that the spring festivals all typified events associated with the first coming of Jesus—His death (Passover), His resurrection (Firstfruits), and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It is then to be expected that the fall festivals would typify events or experiences associated with the Second Coming of Jesus. That is exactly what we find as illustrated below.

- *Feast of Trumpets*

In light of the Christian significance of the last two fall festivals and that all of the fall festivals occur at the end of the religious calendar, we can safely infer that they concern the end-time people of God. Therefore, this Feast of Trumpets typifies the end-time call announcing the soon return of Jesus in glory, for the sound of a trumpet will accompany His Second Coming (Matthew 24:31; I Thessalonians 4:16-17). The end-time significance points more specifically to the proclamation of the Three Angels' Messages in Revelation 14:6-11, which preach the everlasting gospel and warn against end-time Babylon and the mark of the beast just before the Second Coming of Jesus as typified by the harvest of verses 14-20.

- *Day of Atonement*

As described earlier, the Day of Atonement (Yom Kipper) was an annual judgment day in Israel in which their forgiven sins symbolically recorded in the sanctuary throughout the year were cleansed. This typifies the final cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary through its judgment that occurs in heaven just prior to Jesus claiming His kingdom at His Second Coming (Daniel 8:14). Note that Daniel 7 portrays an investigative judgment as occurring in heaven before His reception of the literal kingdom (7:9-10, 13-14, 22, 26-27). It is investigative in nature because of the reference to books in this judgment (v. 10). Therefore, it is this pre-advent investigative judgment in heaven that the Day of Atonement must typify.

We learned earlier that the Day of Atonement concerned only the professed people of God to determine who among them actually had humbled themselves before the Lord. Those who did not do this were cut off from the covenant community. Therefore, we should expect that God's end-time people will proclaim this pre-advent investigative judgment as part of its call to get ready for the Second Coming of Jesus.

- *Feast of Tabernacles*

The Feast of Tabernacles is also called the Feast of Ingathering because the ingathering of the fruit and olive crops had just been completed. This typifies the ingathering of the fruit of God's people's labors in proclaiming the gospel because Zechariah 14:16-19 describes the gathering of those survivors among the nations that had been destroyed in judgment (vv. 3-15) as a gathering to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. Thus the fruit typifies those converted to God in the end-time and the

gathering together to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles as the gathering together of all of God's people to worship Him in His millennial kingdom.

It is also sometimes called the Feast of Booths because Israel lived in booths made from the branches of trees (Leviticus 23:40-43) during the seven days of the festival. This reminded Israel of God's protection of them during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness (v. 43). In Isaiah 4:6, the same Hebrew word for *tabernacle* is used to describe the shade from the heat, storm and rain. Psalms 27:5; 31:20 translate the same Hebrew word as *pavilion*, the place where God would protect His people during the time of trouble. Therefore, the tabernacles they lived in typified God's protection for His people while they proclaim the end-time messages concerning the soon Second Coming of Jesus.

This is the reason that on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter inquired as to whether he should make a tabernacle for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah that he, James, and John saw on that mount (Matthew 17:1-4; Mark 9:2-5; Luke 9:28-33). Peter was desiring the unity of those in heaven with those of God's people on earth as typified by the Feast of Tabernacles.

It is, then, quite clear that the annual Hebrew festivals contain much symbolism that points to Jesus and His followers' actions in response to or anticipation of the events concerning Him, both events that point back to His first advent and that point forward to things associated with His Second Advent. Although it is impossible to observe these festivals as they were Biblically mandated for literal Israel, the Church could create a liturgical calendar based on the Hebrew one and celebrate these occasions in a Christian manner. However, since Scripture does not require observance of these festivals for Christians, the Church should not require them for its own members either. It should be left up to each local church whether to participate in these festival occasions or not. Local churches that choose to participate should not say or do anything to belittle those individual members who choose not to participate. The only concern with this approach is that it would leave the Church divided over whether to participate or not, thus perhaps resulting in division within the global Church. If that should begin to occur, the practice should be stopped. But theoretically there is no theological reason that the Church could not create such a liturgical calendar for voluntary participants.

## **Untypical Ceremonial Law**

### Circumcision

In Genesis 17:1-14, when God called Abraham to enter into a formal covenant with Him, He commanded that Abraham be circumcised and that all males be circumcised on the eighth day of their lives.

God created circumcision, the surgical removal of the foreskin of the male sex organ, to be the sign, or symbol, of His covenant. The covenant relationship that God desires with His people is somewhat analogous to a marriage. God sees Himself as being *married* to His people (Jeremiah 3:14; cf. Isaiah 61:10; 62:5). This is the reason that when God's people spiritually backslid from Him, God accused them of playing the harlot and going after other lovers (Jeremiah 2:20, 32; 3:1, 6-14; Ezekiel 16:15-43; 23; Hosea 2).

### *Terms and Symbols of the Covenant*

Every covenant relationship consists of terms and symbols. The terms that define the marriage relationship are the marriage vows and those behaviors based on their principles. In God's covenant with us, the terms are the Ten Commandments and those practices based on their principles. They are so vital to the covenant relationship that God even calls the Ten Commandments *the covenant* itself in Deuteronomy 4:13.

On the other hand, the symbols in a marriage relationship are the house, car, bank account, and other things they both share which serve as signs or symbols that they are married to each other. Those may change (new house, car, or bank account), but the *terms* of the marriage never change as long as the two people are married to each other. That is to say, each of them has a moral obligation to keep their marriage vows, or promises. Likewise, God's people still have a moral obligation to keep the Ten Commandments because they are part of the terms of God's covenant. The symbols of God's covenant with His people under the old covenant were circumcision and the entire sacrificial system. We have already seen that the sacrificial system was abolished at the cross. What about circumcision? Even though circumcision is a symbol and not a term of the covenant, only God can change it since He was the One who gave it in the first place.

### *New Testament Evidence*

There is powerful evidence in the New Testament that God indeed abolished the requirement of circumcision because He changed the primary symbol of His covenant. First, please note that physical circumcision was always meant to remind God's people that they also needed to be spiritually circumcised, a circumcision of the heart (Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; cf. Jeremiah 9:26; Romans 2:28-29). Second, in Colossians 2:11-13, Paul speaks of spiritual circumcision as *the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism*. Thus, the apostle made a very close association of spiritual circumcision and baptism. Elsewhere, in Galatians 3, Paul explicitly declares that in baptism a believer has *put on Christ* (v. 27) and thus becomes *Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise* (v. 29). Taken together, these two chapters plainly teach that baptism is the visible sign and door of entry into the Abrahamic covenant relationship with God. In other words, Christian baptism is the new symbol of the covenant with God. If true, then

physical circumcision no longer is required.

Our conclusion is confirmed by a number of direct statements made in the New Testament about circumcision. In Acts 15, certain Jewish Christians were demanding that all male Gentile converts be physically circumcised in order to enjoy the fellowship of the Christian faith and church (vv. 1, 5). Peter argued against that demand, and he did so by insisting that the Holy Spirit had already fallen on the Gentile converts and purified their hearts (vv. 8-9). In other words, Peter's argument implicitly rested on the notion that spiritual circumcision made physical circumcision unnecessary, at least for *Gentile* converts. The Jerusalem Council rejected the requirement of Gentile circumcision.

Some modern advocates of circumcision insist that the issue before the Council was whether circumcision was necessary *before* one could belong to the covenant community of faith. And since justifying *faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness while uncircumcised* (Romans 4:9-10), the decision of the Council could not have been otherwise. But, it is argued, they should be circumcised after their acceptance into the community of faith. This argument misses the obvious point. Concerning Abraham, God later told him to get circumcised. But in Acts, the Council not only said nothing about the Gentile converts eventually being circumcised; it went out of its way to specifically require only the same four basic things of them that God had required of Gentiles living among the Israelites. In other words, the Council's decision clearly made the point that Gentile converts do not have to become Jews in order to *continue* in the fellowship of the faith and church with their Jewish colleagues.

The apostle Paul weighed in on this issue elsewhere as well. In three different places, Paul wrote almost the same thing: *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation* (Galatians 6:15; cf. Galatians 5:6; I Corinthians 7:19). However, it is in the I Corinthians passage that he gave more thorough counsel on this matter. Here is the passage from I Corinthians 7:17-20:

But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches. Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.

We know from outside historical sources that Jewish men who wished to renounce their Jewishness had surgery to try to undo the effects of circumcision. Their motivation meant they also rejected all other distinctively Jewish ceremonies as well, which means that Paul's comments here have a wider application than merely to circumcision. Paul warns Jewish believers not to

have this surgery and for Gentile believers not to feel that they must be circumcised (to become Jewish). Moreover, he explicitly declared that *circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters*. Therefore, even Jewish believers did not have to be circumcised, although Jewish males would already have been circumcised before their conversion to Christianity, and they should then feel no need to renounce their Jewishness in order to be good Christians.

### *Ceremonial Cleanness and Uncleanness*

The Old Testament system of ceremonial cleanness and uncleanness concerned those occasions when people or objects that were inherently clean acquired uncleanness by contact with the carcass of an animal or a corpse of a person, including a clean animal who died naturally (Leviticus 11:24-40; Numbers 19:11-22); through bodily emissions from sex organs (Leviticus 15); by the acquiring of skin diseases, usually called leprosy; and through contact of leprous skin by a garment (Leviticus 13-14). Acquired uncleanness had to be removed through the use of some ritual ceremony, the passing of time, or the healing of the leper himself, in addition to a cleansing ritual and certain sacrifices. These rituals are discussed in Leviticus 13-15 and Numbers 19:11-22. In Leviticus 10:10, cleanness is associated with holiness and uncleanness with defilement. Therefore, the Lord gave Israel all the regulations concerning cleanness and uncleanness in order to emphasize the distinction between that which is holy and that which is unholy.

There are certainly valuable lessons of physical health and cleanliness to learn from some of these laws. But the ritual nature, including the animal sacrifices associated with some of those rituals, would certainly be included in Paul's teaching in I Corinthians 7:19. After all, if physical circumcision, originally designed to teach the need for a spiritual circumcision of the heart, is no longer required, then how could purely ritual cleansing ceremonies still be valid? Since the principle in both cases is the same, then our conclusions should also be the same. In any case, the sacrificial system, often associated with these rituals, has been abolished at the cross.

### **Health Law**

I Corinthians 6:19-20 applies the stewardship principle to the Christian's physical body as *the temple of the Holy Spirit*, so that we must *glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's*. It is also significant that Romans 12:1 calls for believers to *present your bodies a living sacrifice...which is your reasonable service*. In other words, the New Testament teaches that God is as concerned about our bodies as He is about our spiritual condition. This is why the apostle Paul prayed that God would *sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ* (I Thessalonians 5:23). It is also the reason that the apostle John prayed that *you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers* (III John 2).

Since the Bible teaches that God is concerned for our physical health, and Jews and Gentiles have the same physical constitution, it is self-evident that any health laws would apply to everyone, even if they are found in the Old Testament. Of course, if there were any ritual uncleanness ceremonies associated with them, those ceremonies are no longer necessary, as we saw above. In our paper entitled “The Christian Lifestyle” we examine those health laws and answer specific objections to them.

## **Civil Law**

The various civil laws in ancient Israel, apart from the categories outlined in this paper, were mostly specific applications and penalties for violations of the moral law of the Ten Commandments. Specific civil laws are scattered throughout the books of Moses. For example, premeditated murder of another human being was punished by execution of the guilty person (Exodus 21:14). Even a child who struck or cursed either of his parents was to be put to death (Exodus 21:15, 17). A kidnapper would also be executed (Exodus 21:16). If the owner of an animal knew that it had a tendency to kill, and he did nothing about it so that it did kill a person, then the animal *and* the owner were to be executed (Exodus 21:29). There were also numerous laws for lesser crimes in Israel. Experts in criminal justice recognize the basic principle that the punishment must fit the crime in the Old Testament criminal laws. The Biblical expression for this was an *eye for eye, tooth for tooth* (Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; cf. Deuteronomy 19:21). Most of the modern Western nations have adopted the same principle with some variations.

Moreover, Numbers 15:30-31, in context, teaches that the death penalty was also required for a presumptuous violation against any of God’s laws, including for willfully doing unnecessary work on the Sabbath (Exodus 35:2; Numbers 15:32-36). Many have stumbled over the fact that severe penalties were meted out to those who violated religious laws. It is sometimes argued that since we do not criminalize religious violations today, the Old Testament laws that had criminal penalties must also no longer be valid. However, Old Testament Civil Law that provided criminal penalties for religious violations did so precisely because Israel was a theocracy, a nation that was theoretically ruled by God. But the language describing ancient Israel in the Old Testament is applied by the New Testament to the Christian Church, who is now God’s *holy nation* (I Peter 2:9).

It is crucial to understand the major difference between the Old Testament nation of Israel and the *nation* of the Christian Church. The former was a political nation that occupied a particular geographical territory. The Christian Church is a spiritual, non-political *nation* whose members are scattered throughout the world. In other words, the Church is not a theocracy. And because Civil Law, by its very nature, is political, it cannot exist in the spiritual nation of the Church. At the same time, the lack of civil penalties for violating God’s Law does not mean that His Law itself is no longer binding on individual believers. After all, there will come a judgment day, and all

will be held accountable for their behavior at that time, with the severe penalty of eternal death being meted out to those who are found to be in rebellion against God's authority and His valid laws.

### **Miscellaneous Laws**

God prohibited certain practices in His laws to ancient Israel that are difficult to classify or understand. Two examples commonly mentioned, usually by critics of the Mosaic Law in general, are (1) the prohibition against mixing different breeds of animals, sowing different kinds of seeds together, and mixing more than one type of material in clothing, and (2) the prohibition against certain cutting of a person's hair.

The prohibition against mixing things is found in Leviticus 19:19, which reads: *You shall keep My statutes. You shall not let your livestock breed with another kind. You shall not sow your field with mixed seed. Nor shall a garment of mixed linen and wool come upon you.* Compare this verse with Deuteronomy 22:9-11. It is probable that the prohibition against mixing livestock *partly* reflects the fact that God *made the beast of the earth according to its kind* (Genesis 1:25). In order to respect God's wisdom in Creation, man must not do anything that would tend to confuse the clear distinctions that God created in nature. However, mules—a cross between a horse and a donkey—are mentioned several times in Scripture with no condemnation. Of course, the argument from silence does not necessarily mean that God approved of those who bred those mules.

In both passages in the Torah (Pentateuch), it seems clear that all three statements of the so-called Law of Mixtures are tied together in some way. The passage in Deuteronomy helps lead us to that connection. In Deuteronomy 22:9, we are told that a person who sowed different kinds of seed in the same vineyard would have the fruit of his vineyard *defiled*. But the Hebrew word usually translated *defiled* in this verse is actually the word for *holy, consecrated*, and the like—which is the opposite of *defiled*. The Jewish translators of the Hebrew Torah (Pentateuch) likewise understood the meaning of the Hebrew and translated it with a standard Greek word for *holy*. In this context, the verse actually means that the fruit of this man's vineyard would be forfeited to the sanctuary, that is, it would be consecrated to holy use by the priests associated with the sanctuary.

This conclusion gives us the clue to solve the connection among the three elements in the Law of Mixtures. Regarding the mixing of materials in one garment or piece of cloth, several verses in Exodus inform us that more than one item in the earthly sanctuary were made from fine linen (a product made from flax) and unknown threads of blue, purple, and scarlet color (Exodus 26:1, 31, 36; 35:23, 25). The frequent use of the word for *and* between these threads and fine linen compel us to conclude that they were made of different material; otherwise, they should have been identified as blue, purple, and scarlet *linen* threads.

The weaving into some of those same mixed curtains or veils of cherubim (Exodus 26:1, 31), and the use of two gold cherubim over the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:18-20) point us to Ezekiel 1:5-12 and 10:8-22, where the prophet saw in vision representations of the cherubim as having multiple sides, faces, and wings (along with feet like calves' feet). This was a vision, so it is not necessary to conclude that the real cherubim surrounding God's throne actually look like that. But the point is that the picture in vision is associated with the cherubim in heaven.

All of this information tells us that the common connection among the elements of the Law of Mixtures is the sanctuary except for the breeding of animals, where mixtures are acceptable. Obliquely related to this truth is that the formulas used in the making of both the oil and the incense used in the sanctuary were not to be used outside that sanctuary context because they are holy oil and holy incense (Exodus 30:22-38). Therefore, we conclude that the Law of Mixtures served the primary purpose of preserving the earthly sanctuary special and unique, allowing mixtures in the sanctuary but forbidding them outside the sanctuary. In the Christian Era, there is no earthly sanctuary, and even if a Third Temple is built, it will have no spiritual significance for Christians. Without an earthly sanctuary, there is no need to keep the Law of Mixtures.

The prohibition against certain cutting of a person's hair, given in Leviticus 19:27, is much easier to understand. The verses surrounding verse 27 make references to known pagan practices, thus requiring the interpretation that the cutting of hair was of a special nature that marked the person as belonging to a specific pagan cult. Therefore, this verse definitely does not prohibit the normal cutting of a person's hair or shaving of a man's beard.

## **Conclusion**

There are four major categories of God's Law in Scripture (other than the Miscellaneous Laws): (1) Moral Law; (2) Ceremonial Law, both typical and untypical; (3) Health Law; and (4) Civil Law. Each type of Law is outlined below, with a brief summary of why it is or is not valid for Christians today.

- *Moral Law*—This is the Ten Commandments, and it is still binding on Christians for at least two very basic reasons. First, it was known and followed by God-fearing individuals before being formally given in written form to the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai. Second, it reflects the holy character of God, whose eternal nature means that His Moral Law cannot be changed either.
- *Ceremonial Law*—There are two types of Ceremonial Law, those which typify events and/or conditions by pointing forward in time to their fulfillment, and those which do not typify but simply symbolize an eternal spiritual truth. Both types of Ceremonial Law are not still binding on Christians, primarily because they were given in connection with

Israel's unique history, agricultural economy, and were closely connected to its national identity. The New Testament also provides sufficient evidence that they no longer apply in the Christian Era.

- *Health Law*—Numerous health laws, such as the distinction between clean and unclean animals for meat, are still binding on Christians because God is just as concerned about our bodies as He is about our eternal destiny. And there is no basic difference in physical constitution between a Hebrew and a Gentile. Therefore, what is healthful for a Jew is healthful for a Christian, and what is harmful for a Jew is also harmful for a Christian.
- *Civil Law*—The criminal and other civil laws of Israel are not binding on Christians because they were given in the context of a theocracy, a political, territorial nation at least nominally ruled by God. The fact that the Christian Church is now God's holy nation and is of a non-political, non-territorial nature means that religious laws cannot legitimately be criminalized. Furthermore, the ordinary criminal laws of political nations are the responsibility of those nations, which are not directly answerable to God *as nations*. Rather, only the individuals in such nations are answerable to God, and they will ultimately do so on judgment day.