

In Defense of Paul

by Tricia Berg

Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.
2 Corinthians 4:1-2

Most of us have never even thought to question the validity of Paul's apostleship and writings. This article is for those who have. For the record, I would not recommend going down that road to anyone who hasn't already done so. Also for the record, God is our sure defense—which is good, since it's unlikely that I could convince anyone on my own. (2Tim. 4:16-18, Psa. 43:1)

For myself, I have always been very saddened when reading about how Paul had to defend himself and his ministry to the Corinthians. I was surprised and disappointed to recently realize that people are still doubting him today. That was not the attitude of the churches at Ephesus and Caesarea toward Paul as he journeyed to Jerusalem:

And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.
Acts 20:36-38 (Also read Acts 20:17-35.)

Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." Acts 21:13

In fact, rejecting the ministry of Paul goes against the rest of the apostles, who said this about him when they sent him (along with Silas, Barsabbas and Barnabas) with a letter from all of them to the Gentile believers:

Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, with the following letter: "The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from

*us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with **our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** Acts 15:22-26 (More on this meeting and letter later.)

+God's Servants

Paul preferred to present his message with gentleness, just as he exhorted us to do. (1Cor. 4:14, 12:25-26, 13:1-13, 16:14, 24, 2Cor. 1:23-2:4, 6:11-13, 7:2-4, 11:11, 29, Phil. 4:1, Gal. 6:1, Eph. 4:32, 2Tim. 2:24-26, Titus 3:1-3) However, he had no choice but to be firm when dealing with unrepentant sin, and also to defend against attempts to undermine his God-given ministry. (1Cor. 1:1-17, 4:1-5:13, 9:1-23, 2Cor. 3:1, 2Cor. 10-13) In a way, it seemed like the Corinthian believers wanted to claim equal authority to his, in a similar manner to what Miriam and Aaron did to Moses, and the sons of Korah did to Moses and Aaron. (Num. 12, Num. 16) The following instructions are for all of us to heed when dealing with one another in matters of freedom as to how to honor and serve the Lord (not regarding matters of sin):

Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. 10 Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. Romans 14:4, 10-12

Yet, Paul WAS shamefully judged by the Corinthians as to his service to God.

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God. I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. 1 Corinthians 4:3-6 (Again, we're not to judge one another's Christian service—this isn't about the "leaven" of hypocrisy, refusal to repent from sin, or false teaching—those are to be judged by exclusion from fellowship until

repentance, not by condemnation of the sinner—Matt. 18:15-17, 1John5:6-10, 1Cor. 5:11-13, 2Cor. 2:6-11.)

How would WE not be judging a servant of the Lord (Paul) to reject all of his writings and his entire ministry? To harden one's heart against Paul is to harden one's heart against God who called him to service. (Rom. 1:1, Gal. 1:15-16, Acts 13:2, 9:15 - remember, Acts was written by Luke.) Personally, I think it's very dangerous for us who live in the Church age to reject the one who was sent to teach us, through the Holy Spirit inspiring his words to write, what it means to be the Body of Christ. As he frequently discussed, Paul's ministry was to build up the Church (which would consist primarily of Gentiles, as a great many Jews were hardened of heart and blinded of sight - Rom. 11:25). (Acts 9:15-16, 13:46, 14:27, 18:6, 22:21, 28:28-30, Rom. 11:13, 15:16-18, 9-12, 2, 1Cor. 14:12, 26, 2Cor. 10:8, 13:9-10, Gal. 2:7-9, Eph. 3:7-10, 4:11-16, 29, 1Thess. 5:11, 1Tim. 2:7, 2Tim. 4:17)

Whoever feels free to judge God's servants on His behalf (as to their service to Him), is making a serious error. (1Cor. 4:3-5) Let's remember when we're living this out that the writers of the Bible were chosen by God and He inspired them as to what to say. (2Tim. 3:16-17, 2Pet. 1:19-21) If they're not ALL our brothers in Christ, then I don't know who is. (1John 3:14-15, Rom. 12:10, Eph. 4:1-3, 1Thess. 3:11-13, Phil. 2:3) We are ONE Body in Christ. (Rom. 12:3-9, 1Cor. 12:4-31, Eph. 4:4-16) How can a believing Gentile even consider rejecting the messenger sent specially TO the Gentiles? (Rom. 11:13, 1Tim. 2:7)

But there is a growing movement of people seeking to get in touch with their "Hebrew roots" who cast doubt on Paul's writings, if not rejecting him as an apostle altogether. It breaks my heart! Even some who claim to accept Paul say that his teachings are twisted, citing 2Pet. 3:15-18. However, it's not that there was a "failure to understand" that Paul was "teaching us to keep the law." On the contrary! That passage is explained in Rom. 3:8. Some had accused Paul of teaching the opposite of what he says in Rom. 6:1-2, 14-15. Shall we sin more because it will increase grace? No! But it would go against the entire New Testament to teach that Gentile believers are under the Old Covenant law.

Some proponents of keeping the law these days don't call it Hebrew Roots—some prefer to say "Torah observant," and there is a related movement called "Sacred Name." The movement (even when no name is given to it at all) consists mostly of non-Jews (Gentiles) who wish to become "more Jewish" by observing portions of the law, such as the Sabbath (Friday evening to Saturday evening literal rest), dietary restrictions and feast days.

+Who is a Jew?

They rightly point out that the earliest Church consisted of Jews—its “roots,” but Jesus Himself is the Root. (Rom. 11:18, 15:12, Isa. 11:10) Yes, He was born a Jewish male under the law so that He could perfectly keep that law in order to redeem those under the law. (Gal. 4:4-5, Heb. 2:17, 7:26-28) As our perfect High Priest, Jesus’ sacrifice of Himself was accepted to cleanse us from our sins, to redeem us, because He had none of His own for which to atone. (Heb. 4:15, 7:26-28, 9:15, Gal. 3:11-14, Rom. 3:25, 1John 2:2, 4:10, Rev. 5:9-10) Because of the rejection of the Jews of their Messiah (which God foreknew), salvation went out to the Gentiles, as prophesied in the Old Testament. (Rom. 11:11-12, Matt. 21:42-46, Acts 13:44-46, 47, 26:23, 28:28, 1Cor. 14:21, Isa. 42:6-7, 49:6, 60:1-3, Luke 2:29-32) One of the things that makes the Jews jealous is the very idea that Gentiles are saved without the law (in addition to Gentiles being a “foolish” nation that isn’t even an actual nation, and yet being brought into the family of God anyway). (Gal. 2:4-5, Acts 17:5, Deut. 32:21, Isa. 65:1-2, Rom. 10:19-21, 11:13-14) In the passage below, “all people everywhere” are to repent of unbelief, NOT convert to Judaism.

*The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has **given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.**” Acts 17:30-31*

*So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! **Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!** Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an **apostle to the Gentiles**, I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and **if the root is holy, so are the branches.** But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. Then you will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” That is true. **They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith.** So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the*

*kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, **provided you continue in his kindness**. Otherwise you too will be cut off. And even they, if they do not continue in their **unbelief**, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree. Romans 11:11-24*

We are not prohibited from honoring God in ways that we're convinced please Him, but we're not to pressure others to hold to our preferences themselves. (Rom. 14:1-15:7) We Gentile believers are not being grafted into Judaism, but into Christ. However, those promoting this movement don't acknowledge the fact that Gentiles were specifically NOT required to convert to Judaism. (This is not the same as modern-day Messianic Jews who were born Jewish, but have come to believe in Jesus as their Messiah.) They recognize that the early church was "more Jewish" than the church is today (because at first, all of them had been born Jews), but we know that God has a different definition of "Jew."

*For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the **precepts** of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will **condemn** you who have the **written code** and circumcision but **break** the law. For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one **inwardly**, and circumcision is a matter of the **heart**, by the **Spirit**, not by the **letter**. His praise is not from man but from God. Romans 2:25-29 (Also see Matt. 12:41-42, Luke 11:30-32.)*

The word translated "precepts" above is translated "requirements" in some versions, or "righteous deeds" in other usages of the same word (such as in Rev. 19:8—fine linen represents the righteousness, or righteous acts of the saints). It's not the law itself, since that would be redundant to say "keeps the law of the law." It is contrasted against having the written code. So in other words, it's keeping the spirit of the law—the concepts behind the rules.

Even though we Gentiles are not called to convert to Judaism in order to become children of God in this age, we ARE called to refrain from sexual immorality and other behaviors that harm our neighbor—and no, that does not ONLY mean unwanted advances, but it's ANY sexual relationship outside of God's plan for marriage between a man and woman. (More later.) Tempting

someone to sin is wrong, as is approving of sin. (Rom. 1:32, 1Thess. 4:6, Heb. 10:30, 1Pet. 4:17, 2Cor. 5:10, Gal. 6:1, Jude 1:23, 2Tim. 2:26)

*Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. **Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called.** 1 Corinthians 7:18-20*

As we'll see later, the above phrase "keeping the commandments of God" does not mean keeping the Old Covenant (Mosaic) law now that we have entered into the New Covenant. (1Cor. 11:25)

+New Covenant

No doubt Paul's extensive writings about the Church not being under the law are why he "must go" (according to the reasoning of those promoting the movement). He vehemently disapproved of anyone placing additional requirements on Gentile believers than believing (in truth and deed, like the wonderful examples given for us in Heb. 11 of how they exercised their faith, not with empty, meaningless words). (Gal. 3:2-3, 10, 4:10, 5:3-4, 12) We're led by the Spirit, to obey the spirit of the law, not the letter of it. (Gal. 5:1, 16, 18, 24-25, 2Cor. 3:6, 3:17, Gal. 2:4)

The law was a "tutor" (or "guardian") until this current age when the "paraclete" (a Greek word for the Holy Spirit) has come to guide us in our walk with Jesus, rather than being guided by a strict set of rules. (Rom. 7:4-6, 8:13-14, 13:14, John 14:26, 15:26, 16:13, Gal. 5:18, 25, Eph. 2:15)

*Now **before faith came**, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, **the law was our guardian until Christ came**, in order that we might be justified by faith. **But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.** For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son,*

*born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, **God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"** So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. **But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.** Galatians 3:23-4:11*

Contrary to what some say, the New Covenant is not merely a "renewal" of a previous covenant—Jesus said NEW wine must be put in NEW wineskins. (Matt. 9:17) If there was a way to "renew" the old wineskins, then there would be no need for new ones. The yoke of the Old Covenant was known to be heavy, yet Jesus said His yoke was light. (Acts 15:10, Matt. 11:28-30) Even when prophesied about as a future event, it was called the NEW Covenant, not the "renewed" covenant. (Jer. 31:31-32) It is not only new, but it's better.

*But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as **much more excellent than the old** as the **covenant** he mediates is **better**, since it is enacted on better promises. 13 In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. Hebrews 8:6, 13*

*Therefore he is the mediator of a **new covenant**, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the **first covenant**. Hebrews 9:15 (Also Heb. 12:24.)*

+Gentile Believers

The few restrictions for Gentile believers are listed in Acts, written by Luke, with Peter and James being the main speakers whose words were quoted at the meeting of the apostles (not only the twelve—Acts 1:26, but including Barnabas and Paul—Acts 14:14) and the church.

So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared

all that God had done with them. But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses." The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having **cleansed their hearts by faith**. Now, therefore, **why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?** But we believe that we will be **saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus**, just as they will." And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, "'After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.' **Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.** For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues." Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, with the following letter: "The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, **to the brothers who are of the Gentiles** in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it has seemed good **to the Holy Spirit** and to us **to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.** Farewell." Acts 15:3-29

Notice that part of the above discussion regarding this topic involved acknowledging that God did NOT desire an unbearable, heavy yoke and burden to be placed upon the Gentiles who turn to God. In fact, it was referred to as "putting God to the test!" Remember, Jesus said that His yoke was light and easy to bear. So the yoke that is being referred to above contradicts what Jesus said—that's not good! If the Gentile believers were still expected to keep the law, then why are we told below that Christ frees us from the slavery of it?

*Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in **to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus**, so that they might bring us into slavery—to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. Galatians 2:4-5*

*Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him **everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses**. Acts 13:38-39*

Please also notice that the following passage begins with Jesus praising His Father for revealing truths to "little children." We aren't required to pay anyone to explain it to us (by buying a book, DVD, seminar admission, etc.), or to get an official degree to understand what God wants to teach us. (Acts 4:13, Jam. 3:1, Psa. 19:7, 119:130)

*At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. **Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.**" Matthew 11:25-30*

*As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is **by faith**. The aim of our charge is **love** that issues from a **pure heart** and a good conscience and a **sincere faith**. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, **desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding***

either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions. Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that ***the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.*** 1 Timothy 1:3-11

The letter of requirements to the Gentile believers was recounted again later in Acts:

But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. Acts 21:25

When Jesus told the disciples that what they bound on earth would be bound in heaven (and the same with loose), I believe this "conference" is exactly what He was talking about (Matt. 18:15-17, 18-20—how to deal with sin in the Church)—they gathered together to discuss it, and after consulting the Holy Spirit, they came up with that short list. (Acts 15:6, 28-29) These prohibitions to be observed are in addition to the basic command to "love" (as taught by both Jesus and Paul, as well as James, John and Peter)—first God, then neighbor and brethren. (Mark 12:28-34, Matt. 22:37-40, John 15:12-17, 1John 2:7-11, 3:16-18, 2John 1:5, Col. 3:12-17, Eph. 5:1-2, Gal. 6:10)

I personally believe the reason for Acts 15:21 is that we have all been "tutored" in what God's standards are from having heard the law (the "guardian"). (Gal. 3:24-25, Ex. 20:3-17, Rom. 3:20, 7:7) How can we be judged by how we used our freedom if we have absolutely no idea what pleases or displeases God (or not)—not to mention how can we be judged as to how we used our freedom if we are NOT free? (John 8:29, Rom. 1:21, 8:8, 2Cor. 5:9-10, Eph. 5:10, Phil. 2:13, Col. 1:10, 3:20-25, 1Thess. 4:1, 4, 8, 2Thess. 2:12, 1Tim. 2:3-6, 5:4, 2Tim. 2:4, 3:4, Heb. 11:6, 13:16, 21, 2Pet. 2:13, 1John 3:22) People who are abiding IN Christ will NOT do things that they know displease Him. (John 15:1-21, 1John 3:6) His Spirit IN them will lead them to walk in righteousness, goodness and light. (Rom. 8:9, 11, 6:4-16, Titus 2:11-15, Eph. 5:8-10, Phil. 2:12-16, 2Pet. 1:3-4) We may have each achieved different levels of understanding at any particular point in time (Luke 6:40, 1Cor. 2:6, 14:20, Eph. 4:13, Phil. 3:15-16, Col. 1:28, 4:12, Heb. 5:14), but we all have consciences.

+God's People

Hopefully we know that children of God do not behave the same as heathens and pagans who commit sexual depravity, consult mediums, worship nature and idols, sacrifice their children, etc. (John 1:12-13, Eph. 5:3-6, 1John 2:15-17, Jam. 4:4-10, 2Cor. 6:14-7:1, 1Cor. 15:33-34, 2Tim. 2:19-23, Lev. 18:27-30—the context surrounding this passage elaborates on the behavior God either desires or despises, including sexual immorality—the very thing people in our modern society are the most likely to compromise on; also see Eph. 4:17-18, 19-24, 5:5, 22-26, 27-30, 31-33, 1Cor. 6:9-11, 1Pet. 4:3, 2Pet. 1:9.) In our society, Bibles are abundantly, freely available in print, audio and online, so there is no excuse for anyone to say they had no opportunity to find out what God desires from us. (Matt. 25:1-13, Luke 12:47-48)

The sojourners were under the same law as Israel while residing among them. (Num. 15:15-16, 29-30, Josh. 8:35) Another instance would be Lev. 24:15-23, which includes examples of both protections and penalties being applied to sojourners and natives alike. In Ex. 12:48-49 and Num. 9:14, 15:14-16, we see that sojourners living among the Israelites were not required to participate in feast days the same as natives, but if they desired to participate, then they were to follow the same rules as the natives, including circumcision. In Ex. 12:19, the instructions for removing leaven applied to ALL who reside in Israel. The prohibitions against eating blood also applied to both, and all became temporarily unclean by eating what was torn by beasts or died of itself. (Lev. 17:8-16, Acts 15:19-20, 28-29)

We believers in this age are being grafted into the blessings and inheritance of Israel (Rom. 11:17-25, 9:4-5—note that "the adoption" refers to heirs as children of God, and "according to the flesh" refers to the physical lineage of the patriarchs and Jesus). However, we are not converts to Judaism (Acts 13:39, 15:5, 10-11, Gal. 3:2-3, 4:9-11, Titus 1:10-11). NOR are we under the Old Covenant law ("Mosaic," i.e. as given through Moses), but under the royal law, the law of Christ, of liberty, of the Spirit, of love, of faith. These are all terms for the same thing, which is the spirit of the law. (Matt. 7:12, 22:36-40, Mark 12:29-31, Luke 6:31, Jam. 1:25, 2:8, 12, Rom. 3:27, 8:2, 13:8-10, Gal. 5:14, John 15:9-17, 13:34-35) Jesus fulfilled the LETTER of the law on our behalf. (Matt. 5:17)

Please note that when James refers to the "perfect law" and then calls it "the law of liberty," we KNOW that this is NOT referring to the Old Covenant. Common sense tells us that keeping the letter of the law isn't "liberty," but we can also learn this from the Scriptures themselves. (Rom. 7:6, Gal. 2:4, 3:23,

4:22-31) Not only that, but we can ALSO learn directly from the Bible that the Old Covenant was NOT "perfect."

*For if that first covenant had been **faultless**, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. For he finds fault with them when he says: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." Hebrews 8:7-12 (Also see Heb. 10:15-17.)*

+Saved by Grace Through Faith

We Gentile believers today come into God's family (enter into the New Covenant based on God's promise; become grafted in as "wild olive branches" to Israel's "natural tree") by grace through faith. (Heb. 6:17-20, Gal. 3:18, 29, 4:28) The "good works" referred to below are NOT law keeping, but are elaborated upon in the rest of the Scriptures. (Jam. 2:14-26—act upon the professed faith by deeds not with empty words; Heb. 11—many of those commended lived before the law was even given; Gal. 6:6-10—share what you have—sow to the spirit and not to the flesh; Isa. 1:10-20—God desires mercy and justice, not the sacrifices by the letter of the law given by people whose hearts are far from Him; Heb. 13:16—the sacrifices that please God are doing good and sharing what we have; Heb. 10:24, 6:10-12—show love to one another; Titus 3:8-14—lists are given of behaviors that we used to do and should now abstain from, because they are NOT good fruits—we're to be courteous and gentle, to help in cases of need and thus, not be unfruitful.)

*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is **not your own doing**; it is the gift of God, **not a result of works**, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:8-10*

*Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by **the law of faith**. Romans 3:27*

Now to the one who **works**, his wages are **not** counted as a **gift** but as his due. And **to the one who does not work but believes** in him who justifies the ungodly, **his faith is counted as righteousness**, Romans 4:4-5 (Also Rom. 11:6.)

who saved us and called us to a holy calling, **not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace**, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, 2 Timothy 1:9

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'" When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered **according to the law**), then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." **He does away with the first in order to establish the second.** And by that will we have been **sanctified** through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Hebrews 10:5-10

When we believe Jesus, the Son of God, died for our sins and rose again, our faith is counted as righteousness—the precious blood of His sacrifice of Himself on our behalf washes us clean of our sins. (1Cor. 15:1-4, John 10:17-18, 1John 1:9, 4:10, Rev. 5:9, 1Pet. 1:18-25, Heb. 9:22, 26)

Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would **justify the Gentiles by faith**, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the **nations be blessed**." So then, those who are **of faith** are **blessed** along with Abraham, the man of **faith**. For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." Now it is evident that **no one is justified before God by the law**, for "**The righteous shall live by faith.**" But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them." **Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law** by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the **Gentiles**, so that we might **receive the promised Spirit** through **faith**. To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. Now **the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring**. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to **one**, "And to your **offspring**," who is **Christ**. Galatians 3:7-16

+The Temple of God/Body of Christ

What would be "new" about the New Covenant if it requires keeping the law just like the Old Covenant did? It wouldn't and it doesn't. What is NEW is that Jesus fulfilled the law by keeping it perfectly FOR us, and sacrificed Himself as our High Priest for our sins, once for all. (Matt. 5:17, John 19:30, Heb. 4:15, 7:27, 9:12, 26, 10:10) What else is NEW is "the hope of glory, Christ IN you," for Jew and Gentile believers alike, in the Body of Christ. This is HUGE! We've been given the power from above to overcome the sinful nature and instead, to be slaves to God. (1Tim. 1:7, 2Pet. 1:3-15)

*Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory.** Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all **his energy that he powerfully works within me.** Colossians 1:24-29*

*When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. **This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.** Ephesians 3:4-6*

*For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does **the church**, because we are **members of his body**. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." **This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.** However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Ephesians 5:29-33*

The above passage is made more clear by the following one (and the context explains what is particularly grievous about the sin of sexual immorality):

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with

her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." But **he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.** 1 Corinthians 6:15-17

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 18 **For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being **joined together**, grows into a **holy temple in the Lord**. In him you also are being built together into a **dwelling place for God by the Spirit.** Ephesians 2:8-13, 18-22

Notice that these profound truths are referred to as "mysteries" (unlike the man-made "mysteries" promoted by certain denominations and cults). These mysteries are revealed to everyone in the Bible, not only to certain "special" people, and not found only in materials outside the Bible. AVOID gnosticism ("special knowledge") or mysticism (attempting to obtain "knowledge" by forbidden means), which are both unbiblical. (1Tim. 6:20-21, Deut. 18:10-12)

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, **having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.** For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with **love.** For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or **unfruitful** in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever **lacks these qualities** is so nearsighted that he is **blind**, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you **practice these qualities** you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly

provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. 2 Peter 1:3-12

*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, **training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age**, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us **from all lawlessness** and to **purify** for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you. Titus 2:11-15*

Remember, lawlessness is sin (1John 3:4)—it is not defined in this age as the failure to keep the letter of the Old Covenant law. It's not "lack of the (letter of) the law." The point is that believers will fail in their Christian walk on occasion, but they will not make a regular, sustained practice of rebelling against God by exhibiting the fruits of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21) instead of those of the Spirit—the first of which is love. (Gal. 5:22-24)

The Old Covenant (Mosaic) requirements regarding physical separation and purity were foreshadows and types of the true, spiritual purity under the New Covenant. (Col. 2:17) Now both believing Gentiles and Jews can become God's children. (John 1:12-13, Gal. 3:24-29, Eph. 3:6, Acts 11:15-18, 15:7-29, Rom. 11:17-25—the "natural branches" being "grafted back in after being broken off," and the "grafted-in, wild branches" are being formed into one new man—Eph. 2:15.) Some try to apply these same symbolic principles to sexual immorality, but as we have seen, that prohibition still applies to believers today.

+Defiling God's Temple

As mentioned earlier, the bodies of believers in this age are now the temple on earth. (1Cor. 3:16-17, John 4:20-26, Eph. 2:20-22, 1Pet. 2:4-5, Col. 1:27, Rom. 8:11-23) We defile God's temple, which is our bodies, by doing the things prohibited for all believers (including Gentiles): sexual immorality, drinking blood, eating foods sacrificed to idols and eating strangled animals. We keep ourselves pure by refraining from those things. (1Cor. 6:18-20, 1John 3:3, 9, 4:13, 2Tim. 2:21-22, Jam. 1:27, Eph. 5:2, Heb. 7:26-28)

Showing genuine love and refraining from ungodly behaviors are how we believers set ourselves apart from the world as God's people in this age, not

by law-keeping. (John 13:34-35, Rom. 12:9-21, 1Tim. 1:5-7, 1Pet. 1:22-23, 2Cor. 6:14-7:1, Eph. 5:7-17, 1John 2:15-17, Jam. 4:4-10, Rev. 2:14, 20-23, 1Pet. 4:3-5) Isn't it ironic that one sin that many believers today support wholeheartedly (or at least ignore) is sexual immorality (of most kinds, with more being added to the "acceptable" list as the culture declines into depravity)? That's because the devil KNOWS what God hates and so he focuses on influencing believers to dishonor God that way.

We need to understand that it's not "loving" to approve of sexual sin (which is often a twisting of "do not judge"—Luke 6:42, John 8:11). By approving of such actions by believers, we approve sinning against God's temple, the Body of Christ. (Rom. 13:13-14, 1Cor. 5:9-13, 6:9-20, 9:25-37, 10:8, 2Cor. 12:21, Gal. 5:19-21, Eph. 4:19-20, 5:3-12, Col. 3:5-10, 1Thess. 4:3-8, 1Tim. 1:8-11, Heb. 12:14-17, 13:4, 1Pet. 4:3-5, 2Pet. 2:2-3, 2:9-10, 18-22, Jude 1:7, Rev. 2:14-16, 2:20-23) We are indwelt by God's Spirit—our spirit becomes one with His just as a married man and woman become one physically. (Eph. 5:22-33, 1Cor. 6:15-20) Marriage is to be according to God's design, not according to any new definition put in place by a declining culture that's going faster downhill every day that passes.

Jesus answered more than the specific question than what was asked when discussing divorce in Matt. 19:3-10 and Mark 10:2-12. He answered unasked questions about homosexuality and the "gender spectrum" at the same time. He quoted from Gen. 1:27 and 2:24 that God made only TWO genders, and marriage is between a man and a woman who become one, and that the man should not put his wife aside (Also see Mal. 2:13, 14-15, 16).

For anyone who thinks that God didn't anticipate today's issues concerning gender (and also easy divorce), or He would have made accommodations for it in the Scriptures, that is turning things around and making man into God. (Isa. 29:16, 45:9, Rom. 9:20—again, God made only TWO genders, not a spectrum, nor any "hybrids.") He knows it all from the beginning to the end, and He has made his will perfectly clear. (Isa. 46:9-10, 55:8-9, Psa. 139:4, Jer. 32:27)

Paul said that each man should have his own wife and discussed faithfulness in marriage, quoting Gen. 2:24 as well. (1Cor. 7:2, 10-16, Eph. 5:31) They both discussed abstinence as well. (1Cor. 7:1, 6-9, Matt. 19:11-12) That option is always available, not frowned upon at all, but even noble if the purpose is to serve God better. In fact, it appears that Paul may have a special reward coming, according to the Old Testament, for CHOOSING to remain unmarried (which is to remain celibate) in order to serve God better. (Isa. 56:3-4, 5, 1Cor. 7:32-35)

Sexual immorality is contrasted against walking in love. Such acts are NOT fruits of the Spirit, but of the old sinful flesh that was to have been “put off” when Christ was “put on.” (Rom. 13:14, Col. 3:9-12, Gal. 3:27, Rev. 19:7-8, 22:14-15) “Walking” naturally carries the meaning of continuing, not merely a moment in time—just like a “race” carries the meaning of putting forth effort until the finish line. (1Cor. 9:24-27, Heb. 12:1-4, 2Tim. 2:5, 4:7)

*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And **walk in love**, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But **sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints**. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. **For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.** Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.* Ephesians 5:1-12

*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” **This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.** However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.* Ephesians 5:22-33

*Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? **Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the***

greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything. "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"—and God will destroy both one and the other. **The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.** And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." **But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.** Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. 1 Corinthians 6:9-20

If we understand the unimaginable privilege of belonging to the Creator of the universe, of being His temple, then we wouldn't take sexual immorality (in all forms) lightly as many "tolerant" *believers do today. (1Cor. 3:16-17, 6:19-20) (*They're tolerant of sin, but not of fellow believers who try to speak the truth in love—Eph. 4:15-32.) We're told MANY times in the Scriptures that God is HOLY—so perfectly holy that it's not even possible for us to fully grasp—but we can at least "get it" that we're not to defile His temple, can't we? (1Thess. 4:7, 2Tim. 2:21, Heb. 12:14, 2Cor. 6:16-18, 7:1, 1Pet. 1:15-16, Rev. 4:8, 22:11) What do we suppose it means to be a royal priesthood, the dwelling place of God? (1Pet. 2:4-5, 9-12, Eph. 2:21-22)

If we're going to be serving God with reverence and awe for eternity, shouldn't we start by loving and showing respect for Him and His ways now? (Rev. 3:12, 5:9-10, 7:15, John 14:1-15:21, 2Cor. 5:14-15, 1Pet. 1:8-9, 2Cor. 5:8-9, 1Cor. 16:22, Eph. 5:10, Phil. 2:12-16, Col. 1:10, 1Thess. 2:4, 4:1, 2Tim. 2:4, Heb. 11:6, 13:16, 21) By "starting now," I do NOT mean that we should "build a house" for God, complete with a man-made altar, and imitate the Levitical robes and rituals, etc. (Rom. 12:1, Heb. 8:5, 9:1, 11-12, 23-24) Our priesthood is royal because it's in the Order of Melchizedek ("King of Righteousness") over which Jesus is High Priest, the King of kings. (Heb. 7:11-25 - NOT Levitical; 1Tim. 1:17, 6:15, Rev. 17:14, 19:16, Isa. 45:23, Rom. 14:11, Phil. 2:10, Psalms 24:7-10)

Jesus said the kingdom of God does NOT come with signs to be observed (such as a particular place to worship, special garb, etc.), but is within us—referring to the Holy Spirit. (Luke 17:20-21, John 3:3-8, 4:21-24, 18:36-38) Paul also taught frequently about the kingdom of God. There WILL be a future, literal earthly kingdom presided over by Jesus, but it's not our job to set that up.

+Abiding in Christ

See John's words about how those who continue practicing deliberate sin while claiming to be believers are insincere and do NOT actually know God—genuine faith results in “works” of obedience out of genuine love, gratitude and respect for God. (1John 2:1-6, 3:4-10)

Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. 1 John 2:7

“From the beginning” refers to the command Jesus gave them the night He was betrayed by Judas and went on to finish the work of redemption, beginning the age of grace—notice He repeated it three times for emphasis:

*A **new commandment** I give to you, that you **love one another**: just as I have loved you, you also are **to love one another**. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you **have love for one another**.” John 13:34-35*

Jesus told them they were to obey HIS words. If He meant keeping the strict rules of the Mosaic law, then there would be nothing new about it.

*Whoever 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 14:24*

*If you abide in me, and **my words** abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. John 15:7 (Also see 1John 5:14.)*

Remember, whoever does not have His Spirit does not belong to Him. (Rom. 8:9-12, 1Cor. 15:23) The evidence of having His Spirit is the fruits of the Spirit, the first of which is LOVE. (Gal. 5:22-23, 1John 4:7, 5:1)

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of

God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because **God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.** For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. Romans 5:1-11

Jesus is not looking to see if the Mosaic law is written on our heart, but whether our spirits have been made one with His—it's a marriage. Like all marriages, faithfulness in both the heart/affections AND the body/physical fidelity are expected. Remember that the chief complaints against Gentile believers were that they were either being led back into the bondage of the Mosaic law (Gal. 3:1-11, Rom. 8:1-8, Titus 1:10-16), or they were forgetting that they were STILL forbidden to practice sexual immorality. (Acts 21:25, Rom. 13:13, Gal. 5:19-21, 1Thess. 4:3-8, Col. 3:5-25, 1Cor. 5:11, 10:8, 2Cor. 12:21) Eve was under ONE "law"—don't eat from one particular tree. (Gen. 3) If she had loved God first, she would have been satisfied with what she had been given rather than seeking more than was granted to her (both the fruit of that tree, and to be "more like God.") She would not have believed that God had lied to her as the serpent claimed.

*I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I **betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.** But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be **led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.** For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. 2 Corinthians 11:1-4*

+Walking as Jesus Walked

"Walking as Jesus walked" (1John 2:6) does NOT mean keeping the Mosaic law as He did. To suggest that we even COULD walk as Jesus walked by keeping the law might even be considered blasphemous, since ONLY He could perfectly keep it—because He is the ONLY begotten Son of God, born without the sinful nature that we all inherited from Adam, the forefather of mankind. (Matt. 1:20, Luke 1:35, Rom. 5:12, 17)

Jesus was a Jewish male born under the law. (Gal. 4:4) Our state of [ceremonial] "circumcision" (for males) determines whether we were physically born a Jew or a Gentile. (Rom. 3:30) We have been told to remain as we were when we came to faith (circumcised or uncircumcised—we can consider this "code" for a Jew or a Gentile). (1Cor. 7:18-24, Acts 15:19-20—these instructions are to the Gentiles who have believed.) We Gentile believers were "the uncircumcision," but have now become "the circumcision," because we're made righteous by faith, NOT by the Mosaic law. (Phil. 3:3)

The commandments expressed in ordinances have been abolished. (Eph. 2:11-12, 13-14, 15-22) We live now by the commandments expressed by the SPIRIT. (Rom. 7:4-6, 8:13-16—we're not to fall back into slavery—whether to the letter of the law, or to the control/enslavement of our flesh to live contrary to the spirit of it.) God spiritually circumcised our hearts when He brought us to awareness of our need for a Savior due to our sin, and granted us the gift of faith. (Rom. 2:28-29, Col. 2:11-22, Eph. 2:8-10, Rom. 3:27-28) We are no more expected to obey the letter of the law than we are to expect God to physically circumcise our hearts.

The fruit of the Spirit is evidence that we are abiding in Jesus by walking in LOVE. (Gal. 5:16, 22-25, John 13:34-35, 15:1-9, 10-11, 12-17, Eph. 5:2) That is what "in spirit and truth" means. (John 4:23-24) If the Old Covenant law were meant to be kept under the New Covenant, Jesus would not have told the woman at the well that there would no longer be a requirement to worship in Jerusalem when she asked Him about it. (John 4:20-26) After all, the temple stood until 70AD.

When Jesus said to teach disciples "to observe all He commanded," He is not sending people backward to the former covenant. (Matt. 23:19-20) In Matt. 5:17-48, He taught about the spirit of the law, which was actually a higher standard than the letter required. Murder now included murderous thoughts; adultery now included the lust of the eyes. How would He expect them to attain such perfection (Matt. 5:48) when they struggled under the burden of the law as it was?

We know that breaking one part of the law breaks ALL of it. (Jam. 2:10) Can anyone keep the letter of the law perfectly other than Jesus? No, ALL fall short of keeping the letter of the law (Rom. 3:23), and the spirit of the law can only be kept by the power of the Holy Spirit, who is received by faith. Even then we'll slip and get back up again, because we still dwell in weak bodies of flesh. (1John 1:5-10, Gal. 6:1, 2Tim. 2:24-26) We MUST walk according to the Spirit and not the flesh if we're to overcome. (Rom. 8:3-4, 13-14, Gal. 5:16, 25, 1John 4:4, 5:5)

It would be fair to say that during Jesus' ministry, the Jews (especially those in power at the time) preferred to rely on the works of the law rather than accepting their Messiah who would give them REST from those works by grace through faith. (Rom. 4:16, 5:2, 9:32, Gal. 5:4, Eph. 2:8-9) By refusing to believe in Jesus, the ONE way to be saved, they rebelled against God. (Heb. 4:1-10, 1John 2:23, John 3:36) Our strength not in ourselves and our deeds, but in yielding to Him, in humbling ourselves before Him. (2Cor. 12:10, Rom. 8:35-39, Phil. 4:12-13, Col. 1:29, Psa. 147:10-11, 149:4, Eph. 4:30, 1Thess. 5:19, Heb. 3:12-15, Jam. 4:10, 1Pet. 5:6, Zeph. 3:11-13, 2Sam. 22:26-28) He sets us FREE from the power of sin to control (make us obey its passions), and the death penalty for it. (Rom. 6)

*"Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name. When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and **show him my salvation.**" Psalms 91:14-16*

+Our Freedom in Christ

God will judge what we did with our freedom according to the true intentions of our heart. (Rom. 14:12, 2Cor. 5:9-11, Heb. 4:12-13, Prov. 21:2, Gal. 5:13, 1Thess. 2:3-4, 1Pet. 2:16, Rev. 22:12) We believers will be judged by the law of liberty. (Jam. 2:12) "Written on their hearts" is in contrast to the "tablets of the law," which are "expressed in ordinances," which is the "letter that kills." (2Cor. 3:3, Eph. 2:15 2Cor. 3:6, Rom. 7:10-11) "The work of the law" in this context is acting upon the spirit of it (doing the good deeds of it, not observing the letter)—this is similar to other passages where God's people are told to devote themselves to "good works." (Titus 3:8, 14, Matt. 5:16)

*There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality. **For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.** For*

it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. Romans 2:9-16

*What shall we say, then? That **Gentiles** who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is **by faith**; but that **Israel** who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. **Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works.** They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." Romans 9:30-33*

There is a difference between seeking to please God (even if that includes observing a particular day, by whether we eat meat, by whether we marry or CHOOSE to stay single in order to serve God more devotedly, etc.) and trying to SAVE ourselves by our actions. We're free to serve Him in a variety ways with the gifts He gives us (Rom. 12:6-8, 1Cor. 12:4-11, 1Pet. 4:10-11), but we're not to impose our own preferences on others. (Rom. 14:5-9, Col. 2:16-17) Nor are we to think less of others and more highly of ourselves for how we use our freedom in Christ compared to them. (1Cor. 12:14-26) But remember, this is about how we glorify and honor Jesus as Lord, not that we're "free" to dishonor Him and put Him to shame by our ungodly behavior. (1Tim. 5:20)

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. Romans 12:3

For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. For each will have to bear his own load. Galatians 6:3-5

This isn't about failing to keep the law, nor is it about slipping and getting back up (repenting—1John 1:5-10). It's about not being enslaved TO sin. As Paul said previously in Rom. 6:14—it's not to have dominion over us. (1Cor. 6:12)

*These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. They **promise them freedom**, but they themselves are **slaves of corruption**. For **whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved**. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and **overcome**, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire." 2 Peter 2:17-22*

+Good Fruit

And where else in the Bible (besides Rom. 6:21 above) can we find discussion about people's outward behavior being called "fruit" and showing us what they're like on the INSIDE?

*"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. **You will recognize them by their fruits**. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, **every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit**. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will **recognize them by their fruits**. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Matthew 7:15-21 (Also see Heb. 12:11.)*

Again, if Jesus was referring to keeping the law being "good fruit" in the above passage, then how could He be speaking about the law-keeping Pharisees and Sadducees? (Matt. 21:43-46) If the "will of the Father" is that we keep the letter of the law rather than the spirit of it, then why is Jesus criticizing them? (John 4:23) They were so hard of heart and reliant on the works of the law that they had no compassion for people who needed and received healing on the Sabbath! Their evil hearts were murderous inside. (John 5:15-18, 7:23-24, Mark 2:27-28, Matt. 26:3-4)

*"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is **known by its fruit**. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance **of the heart** the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth*

good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. Matthew 12:33-35 (Also see what John the Baptizer said to these same "law-keeping" people in Matt. 3:7-10.)

No, the following passage clarifies what "good fruit" means, especially to us in this age—but it's what God has always desired: obedience to the spirit of the law out of genuine love, gratitude and respect. That used to include keeping the letter of the law, but it no longer does in the NEW Covenant. (Rom. 7:4-6)

*For you were called to **freedom**, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through **love** serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. But I say, **walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh**. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But **if you are led by the Spirit**, you are **not under the law**. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. **I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God**. But the **fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And **those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires**. **If we live by the Spirit**, let us also **keep in step with the Spirit**. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Galatians 5:13-6:1 (Also see Col. 1:9-10, Jam. 3:17.)*

+Discipline

We do God's will, first by believing in His Son and then by abiding in Him so that our fruit is good (because it's of His Spirit in us). (John 1:12-13, Matt. 12:50, 13:23, John 15:1-10, Rom. 7:4-5, 6:20-23, Gal. 5:22-24) It's not that we just SAY our fruit is good, but because of the Holy Spirit, it IS visibly, noticeably good (just like you can see the effect of the wind even though you can't actually "see" wind.) (John 3:3-8, Luke 6:45)

We discipline our bodies for endurance in the face of persecution and temptation to indulge our flesh, bearing bad fruit instead of the fruits of the Spirit. We also endure the discipline of our Father for our good—to share His holiness. (Also see Rev. 3:19.) If we “get away with” deliberate sin, that’s a BAD sign—that would be an indication that we are NOT His true children. But there is a difference between keeping the letter of the law under the Old Covenant and sinning deliberately, which in the New Covenant is grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit who leads us to keep the Spirit of the law by walking in love.

*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the **testing of your faith produces steadfastness**. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:2-4*

*Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I **discipline my body and keep it under control**, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27*

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and **perfecter** of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. **And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons.** For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but **he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.** For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore lift your drooping hands and*

strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Hebrews 12:1-13 (Remember, we receive our "training" by the Spirit (Titus 2:11-3:8), not by the works of our own flesh in trying to keep the Old Covenant law—more later. This Hebrews passage is also continued later below.)

In the context surrounding 1Cor. 7:20, Paul also uses other examples such as married or unmarried, and bondservant or free, without commanding anyone to only be either one or the other. Our freedom is by the Spirit, not physical in the way a slave is set free—just as the lack of differences between believers referred to in the passage below is spiritual, not physical. Clearly, we DO still have males and females, etc., despite what the current opinion of "professionals" mutilating the bodies that some confused souls were born with, for a profit. We are slaves to righteousness due to the invisible "circumcision" of our hearts, which have been made alive in Christ—new creations. (2Cor. 5:17, Gal. 6:15) God doesn't physically restrain us, but He guides us by His Spirit.

*Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are **released** from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and **not** in the **old** way of the **written code**. Romans 7:4-6*

*And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a **new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life**. 2 Corinthians 3:3-6*

*Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision, who worship **by the Spirit of God** and glory in Christ Jesus and **put no confidence in the flesh**—though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of*

*the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, **not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.** Philippians 3:2-9*

Note that even though the topic above is circumcision, and the one below is about Jesus declaring Himself to be the Bread of Life, the same principles apply. We are NOT to consider that any physical thing we do has any power to save us. Faith alone saves, and God is the giver of faith—we don't appropriate it by our own actions or by those done on our behalf—not even by doing things that are commanded or by doing "spiritual" things. (Rom. 10:17)

*It is the Spirit who gives life; **the flesh is no help at all.** The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.* John 6:63

+Sanctification

We are "washed" when the Holy Spirit regenerates our spirit with the "water of the word," which is to redeem AND purify us. (Titus 3:5, Eph. 5:25-27) Water is often used to symbolize the Holy Spirit. (John 4:13-14, 7:37-39, Rev. 22:17) We become "clean" when we become part of His Body through genuine faith. (John 13:8-9, 10-11, 15:3, 1Pet. 1:22-25, Eph. 5:23-33)

Some teach that we are only justified (saved by the blood of Jesus from the penalty of our sins) by faith, but we must keep the law in order to be sanctified (being purified, made holy, set apart for God—perfected). Haven't they ever read this?

*O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? **Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?** Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"? Galatians 3:1-6*

*For by a single offering he has **perfected** for all time those who are being **sanctified.** Hebrews 10:14*

Jesus has not merely "gotten us off to a good start" by justifying us by His blood and then expecting us to do the rest. How would a belief that Jesus

"only" justifies us, but does not sanctify us be any different than the (recognizably erroneous) Mormon saying "after all we have done" (Jesus does the rest)?

We remain pure by abiding IN Him (who IS pure—Heb. 2:10-15). We don't turn back, which is to do the same things as those who do not bear fruit, as Jesus taught in the Parable of the Sower. What did He say? They loved the world and all it has to offer (being willing to "trade in" their immeasurably valuable future inheritance for worthless "treasures" now—Heb. 12:16-17, 1Cor. 3:14-15, Matt. 6:21-23), or they were afraid of persecution. (Matt. 13:3-23, Mark 14:51-52—this man fled away naked, 1John 2:15-17, Jam. 4:4-10, 2Tim. 3:12-17, 1Cor. 10:1-13—we learn from their example not to desire evil as they did—not by hoping to keep the letter of the law better than they did.) At what point did Jesus say the "unfruitful crops" turned back because they didn't keep the letter of the law? He didn't. He knows we couldn't if we tried, and He criticized those who thought they were doing so. (Luke 18:9-14, Matt. 23:1-4, 13) No, we bear fruit of the Spirit, not of the Mosaic law. (2Pet. 1:8, Titus 3:14, Eph. 5:11-12, Col. 1:10, John 15:1-6, Rom. 7:4-6, John 6:63)

+Mount Zion

We can be SURE in the light of the other Scriptures that God is NOT saying that we can be made holy by observing the letter of the Old Covenant law. That is actually an offense to Christ. (Eph. 5:25-27)

*And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, **righteousness and sanctification and redemption**, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." 1 Corinthians 1:30-31*

*But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through **sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.** 2 Thessalonians 2:13*

*Now if **perfection** had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the **law**), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? 18 For on the one hand, a former commandment is **set aside** because of its weakness and uselessness (for **the law made nothing perfect**); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. Hebrews 7:11, 18-19*

For since the law has but a **shadow** of the good things to come **instead of the true form of these realities**, it can **never**, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make **perfect** those who draw near. Hebrews 10:1

The contrast between our situation and those who were under the Old Covenant is illustrated for us in the following passage:

*Strive for peace with everyone, and for the **holiness** without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is **sexually immoral** or **unholy** like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. **For you have not come to what may be touched**, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." **But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.** See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus **let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.** Hebrews 12:14-29 (Also see Col. 3.)*

Keeping the Mosaic law is like going back to earthly Mt. Sinai instead of remaining at heavenly Mt. Zion. Why would anyone want to do that, and why would anyone think that would please God? Also remember, our "acceptable worship" is in the very way that we live our lives in holiness (set apart from the world), from the heart. Our "reverence and awe" is showing respect, love and gratitude to the One who made us for His good pleasure, remembering

that He sees and knows ALL. (Rom. 12:1-2, 6:17-19, Eph. 6:6, Heb. 3:12-15, 1Cor. 6:11, 13, 18-20, 1Pet. 1:22-23, 1Thess. 4:3, 7, 2Cor. 6:14-7:1, John 15:19, 1John 2:15-17, 3:13, Jam. 4:4-10, 2Tim. 3:12-13)

Side note: I am convinced that Paul wrote the book of Hebrews, which highly exalts Jesus and explains how His priesthood is far superior to that of the Levitical priesthood. (I hope to do an article on it with my observations on the authorship of Hebrews some time in the future.) In his writings, Paul quotes extensively from the Old Testament, having been educated by Gamaliel in the Torah. (Acts 5:34, 22:3) What Paul says does not contradict the rest of the New Testament.

+Clothed in Righteousness

I saw one website where they insisted on a dress code for worshipers, because "we're coming before the King of kings and Lord of the universe," so we need to be sure to wear our very best. That is TRUE, we are gathering to worship the one, true God—BUT we are clothed in CHRIST's righteousness, or we could not come before Him at all. (1Tim. 2:9-10—our "adornment" is inside, not outside—Luke 6:45) His Spirit in us testifies that we have been washed clean by our faith in Jesus. (Rom. 8:16, Eph. 1:13-14, 4:30, 2Cor. 1:21-22, 5:5, 1John 4:13)

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Galatians 3:27

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. Romans 13:14

*Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no **wedding garment**. And he said to him, 'Friend, **how did you get in here without a wedding garment?**' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' Matthew 22:8-13*

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Revelation 22:14

*For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be **further clothed**, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has **given us the Spirit as a guarantee.** 2 Corinthians 5:1-5*

When the Israelites were told to wash their clothes before appearing before the Lord at Mt. Sinai, that provided us with a foreshadow (an illustration, if you will, of a future event) of believers "putting on Christ" in this age. (Ex. 19:10-19, Heb. 12:18-29, Gal. 4:25-26, Phil. 3:20, Rev. 21:2) The third day of their "divine appointment" would seem to represent two thousand-year "days" from the year of the resurrection to His upcoming return. (But we don't set dates; also see Hos. 6:1-2, Psalms 90:4, 12, 2Pet. 3:8.)

Our "defilements" of body and spirit (2Cor. 7:1) aren't those according to the Mosaic law, but are set forth in Col. 3:5-11, for example. (Also 1Cor. 9:24-10:13, Heb. 12:1-17, 1Thess. 4:3-8, 1Cor. 6:18-20, 1Pet. 1:13-19.)

*But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: **"The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."** Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, **set apart as holy**, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. So **flee youthful passions** and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord **from a pure heart**. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:19-26*

The above passage does NOT say those who belong to the Lord should "turn to the law" or "ceremonially wash their hands" and "avoid unclean foods," but turn, flee from youthful lusts and pursue—notice those are fruits of the Spirit listed—from the heart (which was washed and regenerated by the Holy Spirit—Titus 3:5).

+Dietary Restrictions

Jesus declared all foods to be clean, and Paul teaches the same. (Mark 7:18-19, Col. 2:16-23, Rom. 14, 1Tim. 4:1-4, also see Gal. 3 about faith not the works of the law, as well as Gal. 4:9-11, 5:1-14.) As mentioned previously, the council in Acts recognized that the forefathers were not able to bear the yoke of the law, and it was not pleasing to God to cast a stumbling block before the Gentiles.

Some take issue with the fact that the question Jesus was asked in Matt. 15:1-20 and Mark 7:1-23 not being about what to eat, but about washing hands. However, it is VERY clear that Jesus gave them MORE information than they expected.

*Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.) And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, "**This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.**" You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men." And he said to them, "**You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!** For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' But you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, "Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban"' (that is, given to God)—then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do." And he called the people to him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: **There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.**" And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? **Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.)** And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out*

of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."
Mark 7:17-23

As usual, Jesus taught much more than one subject in the discussion. (Matt. 7:29) In that short talk, He taught on a minimum of three topics:

(1) God is not pleased with man-made traditions that add to the letter of the law and miss the spirit of it (Prov. 30:5-6, Deut. 4:2), often elevating minute details above the importance and meaning of His explicit instructions, and making people think highly of themselves instead of obeying out of love and respect for, and gratitude to God. That's how it was with the strict observance of hand-washing, but yet still feeling free to judge the Son of God, the LORD of the Sabbath, for healing on the Sabbath due to their hard hearts! (Mark 7:1-13, Matt. 12:7-21, Luke 13:11-16, 14:1-5, Mark 2:27-28, John 13:10, 15:3)

(2) Mere food does not have the power to defile anyone (nor does it or any other man-made work have the power to make anyone holy—John 6:63—faith saves, and we abide in the holy Body of Christ —1John 4:13, 3:23-24, John 15:9—read all of John 14-15, particularly which commands He gives there; and look at Acts 10 to find out what the dietary restrictions represented—the theme of Peter's vision was not coincidental; also see Heb. 10:1, 8:5, Col. 2:16-17, 20-23.) In the context of food and other gifts created for our benefit and enjoyment by God (but prohibited by some), Paul tells us that they are made holy through the word of God and prayer and they are to be received with thanksgiving by those who know and believe the truth. (1Tim. 4:1-11; also see Rom. 14, Col. 2:16-23)

I find it ironic that there's enough knowledge and wisdom contained in the Book of Hebrews to refute the Hebrew Roots movement. For example, chapters 9-10 explain in detail the ways in which the physical temple and ceremonies were temporarily symbols of the eternal, perfect reconciliation to God the Father accomplished by Jesus, His only begotten Son. Those regulations for the body, including food, drink, and various washings were in place for purification UNTIL Jesus came. He set us free. (Gal. 5:1, 1Cor. 15:56-57, 2Cor. 3:17, John 8:31-47, Rom. 6:12-23, 2Pet. 2:19, Matt. 11:28-30—remember, the law is referred to as a yoke in Acts 15:10.) He gained our entrance by the "curtain of His flesh" into the holy places, where previously only the Levites could enter, but we are a royal priesthood (1Pet. 2:4-12, spiritually, in the eternal order of Melchizedek, under our High Priest, Jesus—Heb. 7-8.) (Heb. 9:8-14, 10:19-23, Eph. 2:15) (Note for Roman

Catholics and Mormons: We are not told to imitate any physical priesthood here on earth. Any such teachings come from outside the Bible and are not trustworthy in any way.)

(3) On the flip side of the previous numbered point, it's what is INSIDE of us that defiles. It reveals our rotten state inside when it works its way OUT, not food that goes IN (and comes out again). (Mark 7:14-23, Titus 1:15-16, Matt. 12:34-36, 23:25-28, Luke 10:21) That's why we work OUT our salvation with fear and trembling. (Phil. 2:12-16) We don't trod upon the grace of God by treating it as something common by our casual, worldly behavior, taking it for granted that God "understands" or "doesn't see" when we deliberately disobey (again, by doing what's on the list of fruits of the flesh, not by failing to keep the letter of the law). (Heb. 10:28-29, 12: 18-29, 1Pet. 1:14-19)

+Clean or Unclean

Some claim that the Jews didn't consider anything they couldn't eat to be "food," and so "all foods clean" doesn't include unclean foods (which makes perfect sense to someone grasping at straws to support their unbiblical position)—but notice that it doesn't say only "foods" don't defile you because they are expelled. It says "whatever goes into" a person. The answer is VERY clear. What DEFILES a person is NOT food, including that eaten with hands that are not ceremonially clean. It's what comes from INSIDE of a person, from their HEART, that defiles them—He even gives us a list for reference: evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness (remember, wisdom comes from God and is the opposite of foolishness—Prov. 1:7, Jam. 1:5).

Jesus indicated that Judas was unclean, unlike the rest of the twelve, even though he had been chosen like the others. (John 13:10-11, 15:3—Judas was not present when Jesus told the disciples they were clean in the Garden of Gethsemane.) The reason Judas was unclean wasn't that he didn't properly wash according to the traditions or that he ate unclean food (or any other reason for being outwardly unclean), but because he didn't believe in Jesus as his Messiah, despite having seen the same miracles and signs that those who believed saw.

*Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And **you are clean, but not every one of you.**" For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean." John 13:10-11*

Notice that the above statement is elaborated upon a short time later. (Also see Jam. 1:21.) Judas had not received that word into his heart like the others. (Rom. 10:17, 1Tim. 4:16)

*Already you are **clean** because of the **word** that I have spoken to you. John 15:3*

Judas was filthy on the inside, because he loved money more than God—therefore it WAS his “god.” (John 12:4-6, 13:2, Mark 14:4-11, Luke 22:3-6, Matt. 26:14-16, 1Tim. 6:10) Covetousness and greed are even named as forms of idolatry. (1Cor. 5:11, Eph. 5:5) Judas was even among those doing miracles in Jesus’ name (Matt. 10:1-16, Matt. 7:21-29), but he turned back from following and bore thorns and thistles instead of good fruit. (Luke 9:62, 22:22, 1John 2:19, Matt. 7:15-20, Heb. 6:4-8, Luke 8:7)

We follow Jesus by following His example of being willing to suffer for God’s sake and the sake of His kingdom. (1Pet. 2:21-23, 2Tim. 2:3-7, Matt. 10:38-39, 16:24-27, Mark 8:34-38, Luke 9:23-26)

*So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to **sanctify** the people through his own blood. Therefore let us **go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured**. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. Through him then let us continually offer up a **sacrifice of praise** to God, that is, the **fruit of lips that acknowledge his name**. Do not neglect to **do good and to share what you have**, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. Hebrews 13:12-16*

Before the flood, both animals and people were only to eat from plants yielding seeds and trees yielding fruits. (Gen. 1:29-31) After the flood, God allowed every living, moving thing to be eaten for food. (Gen. 9:2-4) (There were “clean” and “unclean” animals prior to the flood. Since they didn’t eat ANY animals at that time, we can assume this referred to their suitability for acceptable sacrifices to the Lord—Gen. 4:4, 7:2-3, 8:20) It wasn’t until after the exodus from Egypt that the list of clean and unclean animals for food was given as part of the law. (Lev. 11)

Jesus said in John 6:63 that ONLY the Spirit saves—the flesh profits nothing. Many in the Hebrew Roots movement deny that they observe parts of the law (though it’s impossible to observe all of it with no physical temple) with a goal of saving themselves, but then why revert to the Old Covenant?

+The Purpose of Clean and Unclean Foods

I've written other articles about the purpose of the food restrictions (and also prohibitions on mixing textiles, crops, livestock, etc.) As I said earlier, these represented the separation of God's people from non-Jews—but the Body of Christ is being built in this current age of BOTH believing Jews and Gentiles. (Gal. 3:28, Eph. 2:11-22, 3:6, Col. 3:11, Acts 11:18) (But I will reiterate that sexual immorality defiles the Body of Christ! (1Cor. 6:18-20) Don't put your trust in a paraphrase of the Bible that has changed what God said to make sexual sin sound acceptable so long as it's consensual. That is NOT true!)

*And now the LORD says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him—for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD, and my God has become my strength—he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; **I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.**" Isaiah 49:5-6 (Also see Matt. 12:21, Rom. 15:12.)*

Many people believe and teach that Peter's vision in Acts 10 dealt ONLY with the fact that salvation was about to go out to the Gentiles, as God had promised in the Old Testament. However, isn't this how we come to understand that the dietary restrictions represented the separation of God's chosen people, the Jews, from the Gentiles? If we think about these animals, how could they be taken up to heaven if they're unclean? The "unclean" animals that represented Gentiles no longer represent uncleanness, since Gentiles are now welcome in heaven through faith in Jesus. The reality of what it foreshadowed has come. There is no longer any need for that outward symbol of the former spiritual truth. (Col. 2:17)

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea." When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa. The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. And he became hungry

*and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." And the voice came to him again a second time, "**What God has made clean, do not call common.**" This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven. Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them." And Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?" And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say." So he invited them in to be his guests. The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. 45 And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because **the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.** Acts 10:1-23, 45*

I believe that the passage teaches BOTH that there are no longer any unclean foods OR people, so long as they believe—the food is made holy by prayer and the word. (1Tim. 4:3-5, quoted in context earlier) However, whoever has a weak conscience should not be judged for not eating what they consider to be an unclean food. (Rom. 14:14, 20) It does seem that those members of the early Church who were BORN as Jews (which applied to all of them in the beginning) may have continued to observe the dietary restrictions, but that doesn't apply to Gentiles, especially this far away from Jerusalem and this far removed in time from there having been a physical temple.

This is off topic, but it does seem that the Scriptures teach that there will be a temple built in Jerusalem before Christ returns, and that is where the antichrist will declare himself to be God (which is referred to as "the abomination that makes desolation.") (Dan. 8:12-13, 17, 11:31, 12:10-12, Matt. 24:15-16, 2Thess. 2:4, Rev. 13:12, 15) This is said to occur (perhaps at the midpoint) during "the time of Jacob's trouble" ("the great tribulation"). (Jer. 30:7, Matt. 24:21, Dan. 9:24-27—most scholars agree that one "week" of seven years remains.) The antichrist will be performing such great signs and wonders that everyone dwelling on the earth at that time whose name is

not in the Lamb's Book of Life will be deceived into worshipping him/it. (Rev. 13:8, 13-14, 2Thess. 2:11-12) If I am alive at the time this coming temple is built, I have no desire whatsoever to visit it!

+Free to Eat or to Abstain

Back to the discussion of our freedom in Christ, we are also free to refrain from eating certain foods—in fact, if our conscience bothers us, then we SHOULD refrain from "unclean" foods. (Rom. 14:23) If someone's conscience is weak, such that they think they're sinning to eat a particular food, then no one should compel them to eat it. (Rom. 14:14, 1Cor. 8:7-13) Concessions are to be made by those stronger in faith for those with weaker faith, with no one considering themselves more highly than another. (Rom. 12:3, 15:1-2) Paul reiterated what Jesus said—refraining from various foods does NOT make a person holy (and eating them does not make anyone defiled).

The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. 14 I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. 20 Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. **Everything is indeed clean**, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. Romans 14:6b, 14, 20

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—"Do not handle, Do not **taste**, Do not touch" (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? **These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.** Colossians 2:16-23

Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them. Hebrews 13:9

*Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and **require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.** For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. 1 Timothy 4:1-5 (Also see Titus 1:15.)*

We need to take careful notice of the last part of the above passage. "Everything created by God is good" (Gen. 1:31) and is to be "received with thanksgiving" (Rom. 14:6, 1Tim. 4:4-5, 1Cor. 10:30, Psa. 50:23) by those who "believe and know the truth." (Titus 1:15) It's "made holy by the word of God and prayer." This isn't to say that if we don't like peas, we're obligated to eat them. But it does mean that we believers are criticizing what God created if we refuse to eat anything for the reason that we think it's "unclean" and has the power to defile us. That might almost amount to superstition for Gentiles during this age, but we're each to be fully convinced in our own minds on way or the other. (Rom. 14:5, Col. 2:16-17)

*As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. **Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.** 15 For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. For **the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.** Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. 23 But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. Romans 14:1-3, 15-19, 23*

Generally, those in the early church who refrained from eating meat did so because they were worried that it had likely been sacrificed to an idol. (1Cor. 8, 1Cor. 10:19-33; We may once again face similar issues in our culture due to the demands of certain people who want "halal" meat. I suggest looking up what that entails online.) Or, a person who was born a Jew, who has never touched pork or shellfish due to their upbringing, might feel guilty if they were to begin eating it after becoming a believer in their Messiah, Jesus. No one should force them to eat it (or trouble their consciences by even by eating it

in front of them). (Rom. 14:20-22) The kingdom is not about eating and drinking. (Rom. 14:17, 1Cor. 8:11-13)

However, someone raised in Judaism in this age might be helped by realizing that not only didn't the law actually save (Heb. 7:18-19, 10:11, 14, 2Cor. 3:5-10, Rom. 3:19-28, 11:6, Gal. 2:16, 3:2-3, 18, 21), and that is very important for all believers to understand. Regardless, no one has been able to keep all of the law according to the letter, no matter how sincere the effort, since the temple was destroyed in 70AD (not that anyone was able to keep it perfectly before then, either). (Gal. 3:10-14, Jam. 2:10, Deut. 27:26, 12:13-14, Ex. 23:14-17)

*Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For **if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law.** But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the **promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.** Galatians 3:21-22*

+The Sabbath (and Feast Days)

In the same passages discussing the fact that the food restrictions are obsolete, Paul also pointed out that we're no longer required to observe special days or feasts, either. (Col. 2:16-23, Rom. 14:5-12) During His earthly ministry, Jesus Himself was accused by the Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes of not keeping the Sabbath properly! He pointed out that by their strict standards, then the priests who served in the temple on the Sabbath were breaking it! He also said that the Sabbath was made for man, not the other way around, and that He is LORD of the Sabbath. (Matt. 12:1-14, Mark 2:23-28, 3:1-6, Luke 6:1-10, 14:1-6, John 9:14-41)

One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. Romans 14:5-6a

*But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? **You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.** Galatians 4:9-11*

We are free to esteem one day more special than another, or not—and we are not to judge one another's choices (whether regarding special days or what

we eat or our service to God according to His, not others' calling - 1Pet. 4:10-11), so long as we're truly seeking to honor Him by our choices (of which GOD is the Judge, since each one of us is HIS servant.) (Gal. 6:3-5, Rom. 14, Col. 2:8-15, 16-23, Rom. 2:6-11, 1Cor. 3:8, 14-15, 4:3-5, Gal. 1:10, Rev. 11:18, Psa. 50:3-23, Heb. 10:30-39, 1Pet. 4:17-19) We're to be fully convinced in our own minds. (Rom. 14:5) Needless to say, we should consult the Scriptures when making our decisions.

It appears from the Bible that the early church kept the Sabbath (having all been born Jews). (Acts 13:13-15, 16:13, 17:2, 18:4, 21:24-25; also see 1Tim. 1:3-11) This would have obviously also provided them with an opportunity to evangelize their brethren who hadn't yet accepted the Gospel. References are ALSO made to their gathering on the Lord's Day (first day of the week, when Jesus rose from the dead—Mark 16:9) and DAILY. (John 20:19, Acts 2:1—this was Pentecost/Feast of Weeks, which was a "high day," Lev. 23:16, 21, Acts 2:46-47, 20:7, 1Cor. 16:2)

I have written in other articles about how Jesus IS our Sabbath—we should seek to serve Him by doing His will EVERY day as we rest IN Him, the Lord of the Sabbath—trusting in Him for our salvation and for everything else we need. (Col. 2:8-15, John 14:20, John 15, 17:23, 1John 4:15-16, Psa. 127:2, 37:4, Phil. 4:6, Matt. 6:31-34)

*For **he himself is our peace**, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so **making peace**, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached **peace** to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. Ephesians 2:14-17*

By entering into Him when we receive salvation by grace through faith, we enter into God's rest and the kingdom of God. (Col. 1:13-14, Matt. 11:12-15) The promised land, entered into through FAITH, was a foreshadow of the kingdom of God—including the invisible, the millennial and the eternal. (Heb. 4:6-10, Luke 17:20-21, John 3:3-8, 1Cor. 15:24-26, Heb. 2:8, Rev. 20:4-6) "Has also rested" in the passage below indicates that this is an accomplished event—we "rested" from our works when we "entered into God's rest." That is HOW we entered in—by resting from our own works and trusting God for salvation.

***For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on.** So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people*

*of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us **hold fast our confession**. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the **throne of grace**, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:8-16*

We can see by the context above that Joshua is mentioned as taking the people into the Promised Land because the point of the passage is entering into the Kingdom of God through faith for our rest, NOT about failing to keep the literal seventh-day Sabbath. If a literal Sabbath keeping were being referred to as their disobedience, then they would have all been DEAD, since that was the penalty for breaking that law—Ex. 31:14, note that the context in Num. 15:32-36 is that the man did know better, but did it anyway. (Also see Luke 12:47-48.)

No, they failed to enter into the promised land (representing/a foreshadow of the kingdom of God—Luke 17:20-21, Matt. 21:42-46) due to their disobedience in refusing to believe and in hardening their hearts against God. (Psa. 95:8-11, Num. 14:11) It was lack of faith in His provision for them, despite seeing all He had already done for them, as well as their lack of appreciation of and respect for His great power such that they didn't even believe that He saw and heard them doing evil—1Cor. 10:1-13, Zech. 7:11-14) Later, those who were under twenty years old at the time of the rebellion did follow Joshua into the promised land, by obedience stemming from faith in God, not by their own strength and works. (Num. 14:26-35, 32:10-13, 26:65, Josh. 3-4, Heb. 4:8)

*Therefore, while the **promise** of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united **by faith** with those who listened. For we who have **believed** enter that rest, as he has said, "As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest,'" although **his works were finished from the foundation of the world**. For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." And*

*again in this passage he said, "They shall not enter my rest." Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of **disobedience**, again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, **do not harden your hearts.**" Hebrews 4:1-7*

God rested from His works of creation on the seventh day, at which time the plan of redemption already existed—God has foreknowledge of everything. (Acts 2:23, Eph. 1:3-14, 3:9-12, Col. 1:16-23, 26, Rom. 8:19-23, 9:22-24, 2Tim. 1:9-10, Titus 1:2-3, Gal. 4:4-6, 1Pet. 1:20-21, Rev. 13:8, 17:8, 20:15, 21:27) At that time, the eternal kingdom was also already prepared. (Matt. 25:34, 20:23, Mark 10:40, 1Cor. 2:9, Heb. 11:16, 12:28-29) It remains for some to enter, not because they are failing to keep the literal Sabbath, but because of unbelief and disobedience. They are still not trusting God for their salvation, but trying to WORK for it. They are still disobedient, NOT because of failing to keep the Sabbath properly, but because they refuse to enter into His rest through faith in Jesus due to their hard hearts and lack of faith.

The Sabbath will be kept forever (Ex. 31:16), and I believe (you can use what I have written as a start for your own study) that is because there will be no time kept after the millennial reign of Christ "ends" (but really, it continues forever after He hands it back to His Father—1Cor. 15:24-28). In the same way as we rest in Him now, we will rest in Him for eternity. God made the sun, moon and stars for times and seasons. In the eternal kingdom, there is no need of them. (Rev. 22:5) So therefore, there won't be different days or weeks. It's my belief that the "eighth great day" (a High Sabbath) of the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:34-36, John 7:37-39, Rev. 22:17) represents the eternal kingdom, which is the eighth thousand-year "day" that never ends—when God dwells ("tabernacles") with us. (Rev. 21:1-22:5, Ezek. 37:27-28)

+Work

In the Parable of the Two Sons (Matt. 21:28-32), I believe the work they were expected to do in their father's vineyard was to shine God's light on the Gentiles (to be "witnesses"). (Isa. 43:10-12, Acts 1:8, John 9:4) (I also encourage you to read the whole Parable of the Tenants (Matt. 21:33-46), which is the very next one after the Two Sons.) As Jesus illustrates (and the Pharisees understood, wanting to have Him killed!), they failed in their holy calling. (Isa. 26:18) Instead of being a light, they became corrupted by the practices of the pagan and heathen nations around them (that they were warned in advance not to partake of—Lev. 18:24-30, 20:23.) Instead of

recognizing the time for salvation had come, they sought to kill their Messiah. (Luke 13:34-35, 19:41-48, Matt. 16:1-4)

Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown," says the LORD. Thus says the LORD: "Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.' I set watchmen over you, saying, 'Pay attention to the sound of the trumpet!' But they said, '**We will not pay attention.**' Therefore hear, O nations, and know, O congregation, what will happen to them. Hear, O earth; behold, I am bringing disaster upon this people, the fruit of their devices, because they have **not paid attention to my words**; and as for my law, they have **rejected** it. Jeremiah 6:15-19

Those in charge resented it when John the Baptizer came to prepare the way for Jesus by calling people to repent from their sins rather than rely on the law to make them right with God. They rejected the Son of God as their Messiah, calling Him a blasphemer. Although they were instructed to keep the law, those "works" didn't save their souls by permanently washing away their sins. (Heb. 10:3-4) They were saved by faith—and that faith (and love of God) was evidenced by obedience to the law that they were under. (Deut. 12:28) We're told the same thing today about obedience out of love, except that we are NOT under the law as they were. (John 14:24, 15:10, Rom. 4:1-25, Gal. 3:2-3, 4:9-10, 5:7-12)

*Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since **you are not under law but under grace.** What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are **slaves of the one whom you obey**, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the **heart** to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, **having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.** I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you*

were free in regard to righteousness. But what **fruit** were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the **fruit** you get leads to **sanctification** and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:12-23

When we try to understand the above passage, we need to allow the Bible (not our own imaginations or preferences) to help us put it all into perspective. Where else have we seen discussions about sin enslaving people before?

*So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?" Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.** The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. John 8:31-36*

We are set free when we believe, when the Spirit of Jesus indwells us, leading us in the way of righteousness. (Titus 2:11-15, Rom. 8:13-14, 13:14, Gal. 3:2-3, 5:16, 24) No one EVER referred to keeping the law as "freedom." Jesus was telling the Pharisees that they were NOT free, because they didn't believe in Him. (John 8:33, 24—they will die in their sins due to unbelief, NOT, "unless they do a better job of keeping the law...") They actually seemed to think they had "improved" on it by adding minute details about which they had received no instructions from God. (Matt. 23:2-4, 24)

This should be a warning to us when we hear anyone say things like, "it might not actually SAY this, but..." (and then they go on about their own "logical" assumptions they have made about what God wants from us). I've read that besides the hand washing rituals referred to in the New Testament, rules are said to have been made concerning the number of allowable footsteps to be taken on the Sabbath, and the prohibition about not eating what was "torn by beasts" (Ex. 22:31, Lev. 17:15, 22:8—specifically regarding Aaron and his sons in this instance, Ezek. 4:14) was expanded to any meat "torn" (including by using a knife that was not sharp enough).

In looking at various sites promoting Hebrew Roots, I frequently saw the phrase, "they (or he/she) would have" to justify a belief that could not be supported biblically. Yet they claimed to NOT want to add to God's word? That

is not good doctrine. That is relying on our own understanding instead of being taught by God. (Prov. 3:5-8, Isa. 55:8-9)

*But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have **one teacher**, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for **you have one instructor, the Christ**. Matthew 23:8-10 (Also John 14:26, 16:13, 1Cor. 2:16.)*

***Not many of you should become teachers**, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with **greater strictness**. James 3:1*

One example of this would be "Noah would have only eaten clean animals" even though up until the flood, NO animals were to be eaten and afterwards ALL animals could be eaten. (Gen. 1:29, 9:3-4) They said "he wouldn't have eaten anything without offering it to God first," and that's how we "know" he only ate clean animals. The problem is that it does not say that. That's called "eisegesis" (reading our own interpretation "into"—"eis"—the Scriptures). Noah was not responsible for keeping laws that he was not under, and neither are we. The dietary restrictions were for those under the Mosaic law.

We would all do well to remember that we're not supposed to quarrel over words and get into vain discussions (as in "profit-less," and also those put forth by puffed-up people).

*But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and **quarrels about the law**, for they are unprofitable and worthless. As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned. Titus 3:9-11*

There are a lot of "if's" in the following passage, but none of them refers to those who are under the New Covenant keeping the Old Covenant law. (See Rom. 6 and 8 for "if we have died with Him, we will live with Him;" see 2Tim. 2:3-7, Phil. 3:8-21, Rev. 2-3, 20:4-6 for "if we endure, we will reign with Him;" see Mark 8:34-38, Matt. 10:31-42, Luke 9:23-26, 12:4-12, Rom. 1:16 for "if we deny Him, He will deny us;" and Rom. 3:3-4, Heb. 6:16-19, Num. 23:19 for "He remains faithful, He cannot deny Himself.")

*The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself. Remind them of these things, and **charge them before God not to quarrel***

about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. 2 Timothy 2:11-14

+Hypocrisy

Jesus told the Pharisees that they were blind because they claimed to see—they claimed to know the way to salvation (through works) and to be without sin, but they were WRONG—no matter how much they insisted upon being right. (John 9:39-41) Obeying the letter of the law has a tendency to foster an attitude of self-sufficiency rather than dependence upon God. (2Cor. 3:4-6) Rather than thinking of God's grace in forgiving their sins, they thought they themselves had done the work to erase them (or worse yet, that they had actually kept the law so well that they had not sinned—1John 1:10). A focus on the letter of the law often results in adding "clarifications" to it in order to be sure that everyone complies with the same standard, which feeds the egos of those who are hungry for control over others. (1Pet. 5:1-5, Prov. 30:6, Deut. 4:2, Rev. 22:18-19) As Jesus said, another problem with it is that we tend to notice infractions by others more easily than our own—which is hypocrisy. (Matt. 7:3-5, Rom. 2:1-11, Psa. 19:12-14, 139:23-24)

The Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes of Jesus' time had ALL of the above problems and were sternly criticized by Jesus for their attitude that they KEPT the law perfectly and even accused Him, the Son of God, of breaking it! (Luke 18:9-14, Matt. 23, 12:1-14, 9:11-15, 15:1-9, Mark 2:16-3:6, 7:1-13, Luke 5:30-6:11, 13:14-15, 14:1-6) Jesus told the crowd that unless their righteousness exceeded theirs, they would not enter the kingdom of God—but tax collectors and prostitutes would enter in before them, because the latter humbled themselves, believed and were baptized in repentance of their sins (not yet into the still future [at that time] death and resurrection of Jesus—Acts 19:3-5). (Matt. 5:20, 21:28-32, Luke 15:1-2; Matt. 3:2, 6-12—spoken by John the Baptizer.)

Thinking highly of oneself for keeping the letter of the law leads to a "works" mentality, which greatly displeased God—those things were only foreshadows of what was to come and didn't save, but they thought they did. (Heb. 8-10, Rom. 9:30-33) They enforced tiny details of the letter of the law (including their own additions to it) while disregarding the spirit of the law. (John 4:21-23, Rom. 7:4-6, Mark 7:6-9, Matt. 23, Luke 11:37-54, Deut. 30:6, Rom. 2:28-29) They didn't obey God out of LOVE, but out of legalism—even looking for loopholes. (Deut. 6:4-9, Luke 10:27, John 14:15-26, 1John 5:3, 2Cor. 5:14-15, Amos 8:4-6)

+Slaves or Free (Children of the Law or of the Promise)?

Why would we think it pleases God to want to go back to slavery after He has set us free? How is that different from the Israelites wanting to go back to slavery in Egypt when they found out that the promised land was inhabited by giants? God was NOT happy with their lack of faith in Him! (See again 1John 4:16-18.) Their reward for not trusting God was not to be able to enter in (and again, it's a foreshadow of the kingdom of God.)

Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" And they said to one another, "Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt." Numbers 14:1-4

*And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, "How long shall this wicked congregation grumble against me? I have heard the grumbings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against me. Say to them, 'As I live, declares the LORD, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you: your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me, not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. But your little ones, who you said would become a prey, I will bring in, and they shall know the land that you have rejected. But as for you, your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness. And your children shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years and shall suffer for your faithlessness, until the last of your dead bodies lies in the wilderness. According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, a year for each day, you shall bear your iniquity forty years, and **you shall know my displeasure.**' I, the LORD, have spoken. Surely this will I do to all this wicked congregation who are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall come to a full end, and there they shall die." Numbers 14:26-35*

*Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, **do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion**, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go **astray in their heart**; they have not known my ways.' "As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'" 15 As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, **do not harden your hearts** as in the rebellion." For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who*

sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were **unable to enter because of unbelief**. Hebrews 3:7-11, 15-19

I have already quoted parts of this LONG passage that follows, but it's important for us to get the whole picture instead of stopping after a particular verse or chapter and failing to connect the rest. (There were no chapters or section headings in the original texts.)

Tell me, **you who desire to be under the law**, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while **the son of the free woman was born through promise**. Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are **two covenants**. One is from **Mount Sinai**, bearing children for **slavery**; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But **the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother**. For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband." Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are **children of promise**. But **just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now**. But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman. 5:1 **For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery**. Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. **You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace**. For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. **For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love**. You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion is not from him who calls you. **A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is**. But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves! **For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use**

your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." *But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. Galatians 4:21-5:15* (Also see Col. 3:1-25, Phil. 3:17-21, Heb. 12:22-24 regarding the Jerusalem from above—Mt. Zion—and our proper response to being made citizens of heaven.)

Remember, this is NOT about there being anything wrong with being a Jew. We believers are "Jews" and "children of Abraham" by grace through faith, grafted into Israel's "olive tree." (Gal. 3:7, 3:28-29, 4:31, 1Pet. 3:6—children of Sarah, the "free woman"—Rom. 2:28-29, 4:16-17, 9:4-5, 11:17-25—note that the olive tree represents Israel as a whole, not only a particular tribe—everyone who descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—whose name was changed to Israel—Gen. 32:28, 35:10—the father of the twelve tribes—Gen. 49.) Jesus went around and around with the Pharisees, et al., about what it truly means to be a child of Abraham.

*I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father." They answered him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "**If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are doing the works your father did.**" They said to him, "We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God." Jesus said to them, "**If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here.** I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. **Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.** But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? **Whoever is of God hears the words of God.** The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God." The Jews answered him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.' Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets*

died! Who do you make yourself out to be?" Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.' But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. **Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.**" So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **before Abraham was, I am.**" So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple. John 8:37-59

+Walking in Abraham's Footsteps of Faith

The "works" of Abraham referred to by Jesus (above), were explained by Paul and James (below). Abraham's faith was evident because of what he DID because of his BELIEF (NOT by keeping the law, since it was given much later).

*This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. For **if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.** Galatians 3:17-18*

Abraham showed his faith (belief) by obeying God's instructions to HIM (not God's instructions to those who lived in other times, such as Noah, Moses, Joshua, Paul, etc.) We're meant to walk in Abraham's "footsteps of [genuine] faith." (Rom. 4:12—but see all of Rom. 4.)

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. ***For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.*** By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore. ***These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that***

is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. 39 And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that **apart from us they should not be made perfect.** Hebrews 11:8-19, 39-40

(Also see Heb. 12:18-29, Col. 3, 2Cor. 4:16-5:11, Phil. 3:20-21, 1Pet. 2:11-12. Our faith will also be tested, purified and refined. 1Cor. 10:13, Jam. 1:3-4, 1Pet. 1:6-9, 5:6-11, 2Pet. 1:10-12, Rev. 3:18)

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also **faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.** But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." **Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.** You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? **You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God.** You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? **For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.** James 2:14-26

+Genuine Faith in Truth and Spirit (Not by Rote and Ritual)

The kingdom was given to a people producing its fruits. (Matt. 21:43, 7:15-27, 12:33-35, 13:22-23, Col. 1:6, Eph. 5:9) The "fruits of the kingdom" are those of the indwelling Holy Spirit (John 14:15-26, 15:1-10, Gal. 5:19-24, Rom. 6:22, 7:4-5, Phil. 1:11, Col. 1:10, Heb. 12:11, 13:5), not according to a rigid set of rules. The more that is pre-defined, the less room for the leading of the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 8:14-15, Gal. 5:18, 25) Liturgical churches have stifled the leading of the Holy Spirit in the gathering of the called-out believers

(the Church) by their excessive control—not just “orderly,” but every minute detail of the worship service, effectively limiting the participation of the congregation to words printed in a hymnal or bulletin for them to repeat on cue. I understand that there have been despicable things done by some people claiming that their UNGODLY actions were manifestations of the Holy Spirit, but we shouldn’t throw the baby out with the bath water.

The business-like model of “operating” the church has several unintended results—among which, the pastor(s) tend to be overwhelmed with responsibility, while many capable members of the Body are not making use of their gifts from the Lord to serve Him. It’s a wonderful thing when someone is willing to do menial, perhaps even tedious tasks for the benefit of the congregation, but I don’t think God meant for ONLY those sorts of things to be allowed to be done by everyone except the degree-holding leader(s). We need discernment, but good intentions of not trusting “just anybody” can turn into the opposite of discernment if all of our trust is put in a seminary to train an individual correctly, such that we give them a “free pass,” letting questionable doctrine slip past us. Side note: Did you know that the words translated “pastor” and “elder” are the same? Whereas “apostle” means sent—as in to go out and evangelize and plant churches (missionaries).

Meanwhile, those in the Hebrew Roots movement probably reject the liturgy as being far removed from the practice of the early Church (1Cor. 14:26), yet they can’t see that they’re doing something similar by insisting that it’s necessary to follow the Old Covenant rules? If we insist upon following the old set of rules when our Master has replaced them, then we are insisting upon OUR way instead of HIS. It’s like refusing to leave after being released from prison. (Rom. 7:6, 8:2, Gal. 3:23, 5:1, John 8:36) It’s going back to the Levitical priesthood according to the flesh instead of the order of Melchizedek in which Jesus is High Priest forever.

Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. 18-19 For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. 22 This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. Hebrews 7:11-12, 18-19, 22

I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. Galatians 2:21 (Don't forget Gal. 3:3, Heb. 10:14, 1John 4:7-21.)

The point is not about law-keeping, but that "faith" consisting only of empty words has an end result of neither justification or sanctification. (2Cor. 13:5) If we make a practice of those behaviors on the lists above and elsewhere in the New Testament—sexual immorality, idolatry, adultery, homosexuality, theft, greed, drunkenness, reviling, swindling, lying, sorcery, etc.), it shows that we have NOT been washed and regenerated by the Spirit (or that we hardened our hearts against God and quenched His Spirit—Heb. 3:12-14, Eph. 4:30, 1Thess. 5:19, Heb. 6:4-8, John 15:1-2, 1John 5:18-19, Jam. 4:7, 1Pet. 5:8, 2:11, Eph. 6:11; also refer to the Parable of the Sower).

There is no mention in those lists of what we eat or the keeping of feasts, etc., since the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking. Restrictions such as those have no power to restrain the lusts of the flesh (which means they have no power to keep us from defiling God's temple). (Col. 2:23) The flesh (our physical deeds in our own power) cannot put to death the deeds of the flesh—only the Holy Spirit in us can do that (if we don't fight against Him—Eph. 4:30, 1Thess. 5:19).

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Romans 14:17

*For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, **not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.** Titus 3:3-7*

*For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if **by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body,** you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" Romans 8:13-15*

Why would we think that reverting to the letter of a set of obsolete rules would please Jesus, who criticized the religious leaders during the time of His earthly ministry for their legalism and unbelief in both Him and His teachings

about His being the Good Shepherd, the Way and the Truth, the Door, the Light of the World, and the Bread of Life? (Matt. 23, Luke 11:42-44, John 8:37-47, Heb. 8:13, 10:8-10, John 14:6, 6:35, 8:12, 10:11, 7, Matt. 7:13-14) Should we really try to emulate people who didn't understand at all what Jesus meant by "in truth and spirit"? (John 4:19-26, Isa. 29:13, Mark 7:6)

*But they flattered him with their mouths; they lied to him with their tongues. Their **heart was not steadfast toward him**; they were **not faithful** to his covenant. Psalms 78:36-37*

David understood, which is why he was a "man after God's own heart." (1Sam. 13:13-14, 16:7, Acts 13:22) He wasn't perfect, but he always repented when he grieved God by sinning against Him.

*Create in me a **clean heart**, O God, and **renew a right spirit within me**. Psalms 51:10*

*Search me, O God, and **know my heart!** Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! Psalms 139:23-24*

+Circumcised Hearts

We believers in this age have entered into the New Covenant ahead of those Jews (not all) who are still blinded and hardened of heart. (Matt. 13:13-17, Rom. 11:25-36, 2Cor. 3:14-17) Our hearts have been circumcised, along with our "dead flesh" (which is not physical circumcision of males like in the Old Testament, but still signifies that we are submitting to God's ways rather than our own.) (Deut. 10:16, Phil. 3:3, Eph. 4:22, Col. 3:9-11, Rom. 6:6-8)

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were **circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the**

cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. Colossians 2:8-15 (Please also see how this continues on in Col. 2:16-23 later below.)

*For thus says the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: "Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. **Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the foreskin of your hearts**, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds." Jeremiah 4:3-4*

Please take note of the above phrase about fallow ground and thorns. This is what Jesus was talking about in the Parable of the Sower—Matt. 13:3-23—and within that passage (Matt. 13:14-15), He specifically connects it to the following event:

*But **if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.** What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were **hardened**, as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day." And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them; let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever." Romans 11:6-10*

*Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: **a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.** Romans 11:25*

You can think of this time period we're in as a "pause" in the annual feast calendar while God is "bringing in the harvest" (the full "omer" of barley—Lev. 23:15-22—of which Jesus was the resurrected Firstfruits—1Cor. 15:20-23, Rom. 8:23, Jam. 1:18). He will then proceed to "harvest the wheat," which has its own firstfruits offering. (Rev. 14:13-16, Ex. 34:22) He will "unblind the eyes," "unstop the ears," and "unharden the hearts" of those Jews who still persist in their unbelief, and then He will "harvest the grapes (of wrath)." (Rev. 14:17-20)

*"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a **new covenant** with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: **I***

will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for **they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,** declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the LORD of hosts is his name: ?"If this fixed order departs from before me, declares the LORD, then shall the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever." Thus says the LORD: "If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below can be explored, then I will cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done, declares the LORD." Jeremiah 31:31-37

And the LORD your God will circumcise **your heart** and the heart of your offspring, so that you will **love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,** that you may live. Deuteronomy 30:6

According to their deeds, so will he repay, wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies; to the coastlands he will render repayment. So **they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun;** for he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the LORD drives. "And a Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression," declares the LORD. "And as for me, **this is my covenant with them,**" says the LORD: **"My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children's offspring,"** says the LORD, "from this time forth and forevermore." Isaiah 59:18-21 (Clearly this event is yet to come—also see Rev. 22:12-21, Rom. 2:6-11.)

+The Light of the World

Getting back to the Parable of the Two Sons, the "work" they were to show up and do there (and in Titus 2:14 above) doesn't refer to keeping the letter of the law. Even though they were to do that, it was meant to point the world to Him and to show them how uprightly the children of God behave (when they are obeying His will, which is wise, good and perfect—Rom. 11:33, 12:2). (Amos 2:6-8, Jer. 4:22, Ezek. 36:22, Isa. 26:18, Matt. 5:14-16, Ex. 25:37, Rev. 1:20)

But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the

*law; and if you are sure that you yourself are a **guide** to the **blind**, a **light** to those who are in **darkness**, an instructor of the **foolish**, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—you then who teach others, **do you not teach yourself?** While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? **You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."** Romans 2:17-24 (Also see Rom. 3:27, 4:2, 1Cor. 1:27-31.)*

The law provided instructions to those who were under it as to how to glorify God with their lives. It should have shown the world how wonderful our God is, just as our love for one another as disciples of Jesus should reflect His love, drawing people to Him and His beautiful, perfect ways. (John 13:34-35, 15:8-17, Eph. 4:1-6, 32, Col. 3:12-17, Isa. 55:8-9)

*And **what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?** "Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children—how on the day that you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, the LORD said to me, 'Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so.'" Deuteronomy 4:8-10*

Following Gods instructions for them is what made them DIFFERENT from the heathens and pagans around them who had vile practices and worshiped the celestial bodies, nature, demons, fallen angels, etc. (Deut. 4:15-19, Rom. 1:18-32) God's children do not esteem or put any trust in anyone or anything in place of Him. (Mal. 3:13-4:3, 1Pet. 2:4-10) To do such things would definitely NOT be "loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength," which is the greatest command. (Mark 12:28-34)

*"When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, **you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations.** There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD. And **because of these abominations the LORD your God is driving them out before you.** You shall be blameless before the LORD your God, for these nations, which you are about to dispossess, listen to fortune-tellers and*

*to diviners. **But as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you to do this.** Deuteronomy 18:9-14*

The above practices are NOT fruits of the Spirit. (Gal. 5:22-25) It's important to recognize that the list of sins that precedes the following passage involved sexual immorality—adultery, homosexuality, incest, bestiality, etc. (Lev. 18:6-22) Those are STILL on the list of prohibitions for Gentile believers (including fornication, which is sex outside of marriage). We STILL dishonor God if we refuse to glorify Him by the way we use our bodies. We don't have the death penalty for offenders today, but they are to repent or be excluded from the fellowship of the congregation until they do. (1Cor. 5, 6:9-20, 2Cor. 2:4-11, 7:8-12, 1Thess. 4:1-8, Col. 3:5-11, Matt. 18:15-17) ("Repent" means turn from the sin, not just to make excuses or apologize, but then continue doing it.)

*"Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you shall keep my statutes and my rules and **do none of these abominations**, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you (**for the people of the land, who were before you, did all of these abominations, so that the land became unclean**), lest the land vomit you out when you make it unclean, as it vomited out the nation that was before you. For everyone who does any of these abominations, the persons who do them shall be cut off from among their people. So keep my charge never to practice any of these abominable customs that were practiced before you, and never to make yourselves unclean by them: I am the LORD your God." Leviticus 18:24-30*

Note that prior to the following passage, the sins listed were again sexual sins AND child sacrifice to false gods (not that our God would desire that abhorrent practice—Jer. 7:31, 19:5), consulting mediums and dead people, and other idolatrous, evil practices. (Lev. 20:1-21)

*"You shall therefore keep all my statutes and all my rules and do them, that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out. And you shall not walk in the customs of the nation that I am driving out before you, for **they did all these things, and therefore I detested them.** Leviticus 20:22-23*

Through all ages, God's children are to glorify Him with lives of obedience, according to His will. (Gal. 4:6, 1Pet. 1:14-19, 2:15-16, 3:15-16, 4:2, Rom. 12:1-2, 16:19, 2Cor. 5:14-15, Eph. 5:15-17, 1Thess. 4:3, 6-8, 5:5-8, 14-22)

We're not meant to blend in with the world, which is blinded to God's ways. (2Cor. 6:14-7:1, Eph. 4:17-24, 5:7-21, Isa. 52:11, 2Tim. 2:19-26, Rev. 18:4-8, 1John 2:15-17, Jam. 4:4-10, 1Thess. 4:5, 1Pet. 4:3-5, Titus 3:3-8—again, the "good works" here and for example in Eph. 2:10 are not law-keeping, but doing good out of love for God and one another, with the help of the Holy Spirit (the "Helper"—John 14:16, 26, 15:26, 16:7)—e.g. Gal. 6:7-10, Eph. 4:25-32, Col. 3:12-25)

The "good works" that bring glory to our Father in heaven are behaving as children of God, because that's what we believers are, NOT in an attempt to become His children. (1John 3:1-10, John 1:12-13) We place 100% of our trust in HIM, not in ourselves or each other—beginning with salvation, and then also for provision, protection and everything else we need in life. He is the provider of all of those things to everyone. (Matt. 6:31-34, 5:44-48)

We "walk in the light" as Jesus did—He IS the Light. (John 8:12, 1John 1:5-2:6, John 1:4-5, 3:19-21—notice how Eph. 5:8-12 matches what Jesus said.) Jesus told us (and so did Paul) to shine our light, NOT to hide our lamp under a bushel. (Matt. 5:14-16, Col. 1:9-12, 13-14, 2Tim. 1:8-9, 10-14, 2Cor. 6:14) That means doing good to our neighbors and brethren and sharing the light of salvation, NOT keeping the law (or parts of it). (2Cor. 4:4-7, Mark 16:15, Matt. 28:19-20, John 13:34-35, 15:8-12, 8:31-36)

+The Spirit of the Law

The letter of the law doesn't result in love and life, but in fear and death. (Rom. 6:21, 7:5, 8:2, 15, 1Cor. 15:56, 2Cor. 3:7-11, 2Tim. 1:7, Heb. 2:15, 1John 4:18) But the person who is walking in love will not do wicked things to harm others, nor will they cause them to stumble or approve of those who do such things. (Rom. 1:32, 2Pet. 2:18-20, Jude 1:23, 2Tim. 2:24-26, Gal. 5:13, 6:1, 1Tim. 1:8-11, 1Thess. 4:1-8, Eph. 4:1-3, 5:1-7, 11-12, Matt. 18:7, Matt. 5:13-16, 2Pet. 3:17-18—grow in grace, in the knowledge of HIM, not in your practice of the letter of the law—His Spirit will do the rest from inside of us so long as we humble ourselves and submit to Him. John 15:4-5, Luke 6:43-49, Rom. 6:20-23, Heb. 4:16, 2:18, 1Cor. 10:13, 13:13, Jam. 1:12, 1Pet. 3:8, 5:5-7)

*Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for **the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.** For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the **fulfilling** of the law. Romans 13:8-10*

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: **"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."** Galatians 5:14

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are **in Christ Jesus**. For **the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death**. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the **righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit**. Romans 8:1-4

Remember, we first see this as being God's desire for His people already back in Leviticus. He has always desired the spirit of the law to be kept, but the letter was put in place as a tutor or guardian, and it revealed our need for a Savior, because we ALL sin. (Gal. 3:23-35, Rom. 3:20.)

"You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but **you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD**. Leviticus 19:17-18

Now we know that whatever the law says it **speaks to those who are under the law**, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. **For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin**. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God **through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe**. For there is no distinction: **for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus**, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be **received by faith**. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has **faith in Jesus**. Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. **By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law**. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law. Romans 3:19-31

Why isn't the law "overthrown" by what is discussed in the above passage? Paul goes on to explain in the following "chapter." It's because faith has always saved (just as the spirit of the law has always been love). "Love your neighbor as yourself" didn't symbolize or foreshadow something else (as other SOME other parts of Deuteronomy and Leviticus did)—it applies to all ages. (1Cor. 13:13)

*We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this **commandment** we have from him: **whoever loves God must also love his brother.** 1 John 4:19-21*

These commands are interconnected. As the above passage indicates, it's impossible to obey only one or the other—it's not multiple choice. Personally, I believe that the principle of "more being given to the one who has" also applies here. (Mark 4:25—also be sure to read the context surrounding it.) Those who believe and sincerely desire to obey God are indwelt by God's Spirit, who gives them the power they need to love others as He does (so long as we humble ourselves and submit to Him rather than quenching His Spirit). (Titus 2:11-15, Gal. 5:16, Rom. 8:13-14, 2Pet. 1:3-4, John 13:34-35, 14:15-26, 15:8-10, Heb. 3:12-14, Eph. 4:30, 1Thess. 5:19) Obeying the greatest two commands doesn't save anyone—they're the RESULT of being saved by grace through faith. (Eph. 2:8-10, Jam. 2:26)

As God's children, we refrain from doing evil (according to God's definition, not pop culture), and seek His glory in all we do. (Col. 3:23-25, Phil. 3:17-20, Heb. 6:11-12, 13:7, 1Thess. 5:22, Rom. 16:19, 1Cor. 14:20, 2Cor. 5:9-10, 1John 5:18) If we claim to believe (thus born from above, knowing God) and yet upon examining ourselves (2Cor. 13:5), we find that we match the list of rotten fruits of the flesh instead of the good fruits of the Spirit, there's a problem. (Gal. 5:19-21, Titus 3:3-8, Col. 3:1-2, John 3:3-8)

John's whole epistle has a theme of love for God and for our brothers and sisters in Christ, which is a summary of Jesus' "greatest two commands" (Luke 10:27), made perfectly simple—not complicated at ALL—LOVE God and neighbor. (Rom. 13:8-10) But we can all attest that this is easier said than done—due to the sinful nature we struggle against daily. We continually fight against selfishness, greed, unkind thoughts and words, and much more.

*No one has ever seen God; if we **love** one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that*

*Jesus is the Son of God, **God abides in him, and he in God.** So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and **whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.** By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. **There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.** We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this **commandment** we have from him: **whoever loves God must also love his brother.** 1 John 4:12-21*

John makes it clear above that any believer who lives in fear of punishment from God does not "get it." It's His Spirit IN us who gives us reassurance of our standing as His children, and His Spirit is the One who bears good fruit in us. (John 15:1-10, Gal. 5:16-26) That "fruit" is NOT letter of the law keeping (which is of the OLD covenant, NOT the new), but the spirit of it - LOVE. The one who loves God and others will not hate, murder, steal, lie, gossip, slander, cheat, covet, dishonor parents, commit adultery or other sexual immorality (which is to defile God's temple - 1Cor. 6:18-20, 3:16-17), etc.

+Do Not Be Deceived (Wise or Foolish?)

The inclusion of the trait "foolish" in Titus 3:3, Rom. 1:14, 29-31, Jam. 2:20, Eph. 5:4, 17, and Mark 7:21-23 gives us a clue as to how the five foolish virgins in the parable of Matt. 25:1-13 let their lamps go out. Jesus didn't know them, which we understand from the Scriptures that they did NOT have His Spirit IN them when He came to retrieve His bride. Since they were waiting for Him, they seem to have been deceived (or had deceived themselves) into thinking that they were following Him even though they had ceased to do so. They may have loved the world and its pleasures and treasures, not wanting to be set apart for Him, or perhaps they turned back due to persecution. (Mark 4:16-19, 1Cor. 15:33-34, 2Cor. 13:5, 1John 2:15-17, Jam. 1:21-27, 4:4-10, Matt. 5:10-16, 1Pet. 1:6-9, 2Tim. 3:12-17) We can't be sure, but one thing we do know—a lamp with no oil in it doesn't provide light as the church is meant to do. (2Sam. 22:29, Rev. 1:12-13, 20) Salt that has lost its saltiness is useless and thrown out. (Luke 14:34-35) The fruit of people who are not indwelt by the Holy Spirit will be bad, even if it might appear good at a glance. God knows the heart, and only the one where He dwells is "good." (Prov. 17:3, 21:2, 1Thess. 2:4, Heb. 4:12, Mark 10:18) We abide in Him by yielding to the control of the Holy Spirit, not by law-keeping. (1John 2:26-29)

*If we say we have no sin, we **deceive ourselves**, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. 1 John 1:8-10*

*Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. **Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.** James 1:12-16*

What trials? Not about whether we will keep the letter of the law that we are NOT under, but whether we will do what Jesus expects of us no matter what comes our way, whether temptations of the world or persecution, etc. as listed in Rom. 8:35-40—tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger or the sword; and in Matt. 13:20-22—tribulation, persecution, cares of the world, deceitfulness of riches. (Also 1John 2:16, 1Tim. 6:9-10, Matt. 10:28, Phil. 1:27-30.)

Our faith is not in words written on a page (which we can see), no matter how true, but in the Son of God, whom we have not seen. (John 20:29, Heb. 11:1, 1John 3:2, Rom. 8:19, Luke 20:34-36, Rom. 5:2, Col. 1:27, 1Pet. 1:8-9, 2Cor. 3:18) We're not abiding in the law, we're abiding in JESUS and in His love, as John says in 1John 2:27-28 and 1John 4:13, and Jesus said in 15:9-10. He is our Rest and our Life. (Col. 3:4, John 4:14, 5:21, 26, 6:35, 14:6, 1John 1:2, 5:11-12) The foolish virgins fit the description, along with others, who didn't love Jesus, nor did they abide in Him and His love—so they didn't keep the two greatest commands: to love Him and to love their neighbors as themselves (which is the entire spirit of the law). (John 14:15-26, Matt. 22:40, Rom. 13:8-14, Gal. 5:14) The church as Ephesus was criticized for letting their love wane and told to repent of it. (Rev. 2:1-7) (Note also that two churches were told to repent of sexual immorality—Rev. 2:18-3:6.) Failure to observe the written law was not among the negative comments made in Rev. 2-3, nor in 2Cor. 12:20-21.

+The Greatest Commands

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is

like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. **On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.**" Matthew 22:36-40

"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the **gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' Everyone then who hears **these words of mine** and does them will be like a **wise** man who **built** his house **on the rock.** And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been **founded on the rock.** And everyone who hears **these words of mine** and does not do them will be like a **foolish** man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it." And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes. Matthew 7:12-29*

What foundation, what rock? JESUS is the Foundation and the Rock, NOT the Mosaic law. (1Cor. 3:10-11, 10:4, Matt. 21:42-46, Mark 12:10-12, Luke 20:17-19, Acts 4:11-12, Eph. 2:20-22, 1Pet. 2:4-12) To which "words of His" was Jesus referring? Here is more context from Luke:

"But I say to you who hear, **Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And **as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.** If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you,**

what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. **But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High,** for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you." He also told them a parable: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye. For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person **out of the good treasure of his heart produces good**, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears **my words** and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and **laid the foundation on the rock.** And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground **without a foundation.** When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great." Luke 6:27-49

Notice Jesus' reference to blindness—see also John 9:40-41—they only understood the letter of the law and were blind to the spirit of it. Their hearts were not clean—not because they failed to give proper attention to outer ("whitewashed") appearances, but because their hard hearts brought forth bad fruit from inside of them. (Matt. 23:25-28, Jer. 4:3-4, Hos. 10:12, Isa. 6:10, 29:13-14, Matt. 15:8, Mark 7:6, Deut. 10:16, 30:6)

+Overcomers

When Jesus refers to the one who "overcomes" (or "conquers") in each of the letters to the churches in Rev. 2-3 and in the passage below, as well as when

John discusses how those who are born of God overcome the world by faith, this doesn't mean by keeping the letter of the law.

*The one who **conquers** will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.* Revelation 21:7-8

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. *By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the **love** of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are **not burdensome**. For **everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world.** And this is the **victory** that has **overcome** the world—our **faith**. Who is it that **overcomes** the world except the one who **believes** that Jesus is the Son of God? This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever **has the Son has life**; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who **believe** in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have **eternal life**. 1 John 5:1-13*

As mentioned previously, the Mosaic law WAS burdensome. (Acts 15:10-11, Matt. 11:28-30) When we "have the Son," that refers to those who genuinely believe being indwelt by His Spirit. (Rom. 8:9) That is what "those who live by the Spirit" (are no longer spiritually "dead" in their old flesh, but alive in Christ) refers to as well. (Gal. 5:16, 24-25, Rom. 8:5, 11, 13, 6:4, 1Cor. 15:22, Eph. 2:5, Col. 2:13; Jam. 2:26, Rev. 3:1—the last two are opposite instances.)

+Overcoming Objections to Paul

Something that apparently bothers some people is that Paul didn't quote Jesus (except for what he received directly from Him). However, Paul wasn't with

Jesus when He said the things reported by the writers of the Gospels. Those things were quoted by those who were with Him like Matthew and Mark (and Luke said he "followed these things closely," when he wrote to Theophilus the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles—Luke 1:1-4, Acts 1:1-2). Those words and events were reported to us by actual witnesses. (2Pet. 1:16, Acts 1:8, 21-22, 2:32, 3:15, 5:32, 10:39-43)

How would (or why should) Paul quote sayings he didn't hear himself? The Gospels were written down sometime before the destruction of the temple in 70AD, and Paul received his calling directly from the risen Jesus much earlier than that—so Paul quoted what Jesus said to Him by direct revelation (when he was taken into heaven to receive his special ministry and later as well—Acts 9:3-17, 26:13-18, 1Cor. 15:8, 2Cor. 12:1-4, Acts 20:24, 26:19, 18:9-10, Rom. 2:15-16, 16:25-27, 11:13, Gal. 1:11-12, 2:2, Eph. 3:1-12).

What's important is not whether or not Paul directly quoted Jesus (although that might be reason to be suspicious, for the reasons given above), but that nothing he says contradicts the rest of the Scriptures. God gives us information in stages. For example, first He gave Adam and Eve ONE rule to follow, and then much later He gave Moses the entire law. First He told us that Jesus will also be a light to the Gentiles (Isa. 42:6-7, 49:6, Luke 2:32, Acts 13:47), then much later He tells us through Paul the mystery of the Jew and Gentile being made one new man in Christ (Eph. 2:11-22—this topic was covered in more detail earlier in this article). Without Paul, we pretty much have only the instance of Cornelius and his family being saved among the Gentiles by Peter's preaching in Acts 10. From Paul, we understand that we haven't "replaced" Israel, but are grafted in, and that most Jews are temporarily blinded and hardened of heart until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in. (Rom. 11:17-24, 25, Isa. 6:8-10, Matt. 13:13-17, John 12:37-50)

We would not know that the Church ("ekklesia" - "out-called" - 2Cor. 6:14-7:1) is the Body of Christ if not for the "mysteries" illuminated Jesus Himself to Paul. (Eph. 5:23, 5:29-30, 4:12, 1:9-10, 3:1-12, 1Cor. 12:27, Rom. 12:5, 16:25-27, Col. 1:18, 24-29) Paul is the one through whom God teaches us about the deep spiritual relationship between believers and Jesus that is symbolized by our physical marriage to our spouse. (Eph. 5:22-33) Jesus referred to Himself as the Bridegroom in Matt. 9:15, 22:2, 25:1-13, Mark 2:20, Rev. 19:7-9, as Paul does in 2Cor. 11:2. Paul stresses the fact that Jesus' Spirit indwells believers, just like Jesus said would happen in John 3:3-8, 4:13-14, 7:37-39, 14:15-26, 17:23, Rev. 22:17. (1Cor. 3:16-17, 6:19-20, 2Cor. 6:16, Eph. 2:21-22, 3:16, 5:18, 1Thess. 4:8, Rom. 8:9-11, 2Tim. 1:14)

Jesus illustrated how the former rituals were passing away when He turned the water (used for ceremonial cleansing) into wine (representing His blood washing us clean—Matt. 26:27-29, 1John 1:7—and the Holy Spirit who give life—John 6:63, Rom. 8:3-9, 1Cor. 11:25). Jesus indicated that He was NOT continuing with the old, just as Paul also said. (Matt. 9:16-17, Mark 2:21-22, Luke 5:36-38, Heb. 8:13, 2Cor. 3:5-11, 5:17, Jer. 31:31-34) (Much more has already been covered above.)

We wouldn't have the reassurance of glorified bodies (though John touches very briefly on this in 1John 3:2, and Jesus introduced it in Luke 20:34-36) and escaping God's wrath if it weren't for Paul's revelations from Jesus. (1Thess. 5:9-10, 1Cor. 15:49-53, 15:45-48, 2Cor. 3:18, Rom. 5:9-10) Paul's explanation of the rapture (dead in Christ first, then those still alive) matches the order of Jesus' statement to Martha below:

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world." John 11:25-27

For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18

Paul talks about our belonging to Jesus, just as Jesus said in John 6:37, 17:2, 6. (Rom. 7:4, 8:9, 1Cor. 15:23, Gal. 5:24) He affirms what Jesus said about abiding IN Him/being found IN Him because He has made us His own-bearing FRUIT—which we know from Paul is that of the indwelling SPIRIT. (John 15:1-10, Matt. 3:8-10, 7:15-29, 12:33-35, 13:18-23, 21:43, Mark 4:18-19, Phil. 3:8-21, Gal. 5:22-25, Rom. 6:20-23, 7:4-6, Titus 2:11-15, 3:14, Eph. 5:7-12, Phil. 1:11, Col. 1:10, Heb. 12:11)

Paul elaborates on what Jesus said in John 8:31-36 about what it means to be set free from sin—we're to be enslaved to righteousness, NOT sin. (Rom. 6) He explains that we're to live for Christ who died for us, just as Jesus said that we're to FOLLOW Him and IF we love Him, we'll obey Him. (2Cor. 5:9-10, 14-15, John 10:27, John 14:15-26, Matt. 10:37-39) Paul spoke against

hypocrisy as did Jesus. (Luke 6:42, 12:1, 13:14-17, Matt. 6:1-7, 12:34, 15:7-9, 23:27-39, 23:13-26, Rom. 2:1-5) In fact, Peter (Cephas/Simeon) approved of Paul in 2Pet. 3:14-18 (also the whole apostolic council in Acts 15:25) and validated his ministry despite being rebuked by him for being hypocritical when he refrained from eating with Gentiles (Gal. 2:11-14).

Paul warns us (as does Jesus in the letters to the Churches—Rev. 2-3) that we will answer to Jesus if we're willfully disobedient—judgment begins with God's house, which we are IF we hold fast, and Jesus is Head of that House. (Heb. 3:5-6, 12-14—also see Zech. 3:6-10—1Thess. 4:1-8, Heb. 10:30, Rom. 2:9—also see 1Pet. 4:17, Ezek. 9:6; Rev. 2:5, 2:16, 2:22-23, 3:2-3, 3:15-19) As I briefly mentioned a moment ago, Jesus talked about sons of the resurrection/sons of God in Luke 20:34-36, and Paul elaborates on the sons of God in Rom. 8:14-18, 19-23. He warned us, as does Jesus in Rev. 2:14-16, 20-23 and Rev. 3:4, that Jesus will avenge transgressions by believers against others in the matter of sexual purity. (1Thess. 4:1-8, Heb. 10:30-31, 13:4) Paul explains to us that God disciplines His children, which Jesus said in His letter to the church at Laodicea. (Heb. 12:5-7, 9-10, 11, Rev. 3:19)

Paul also exhorts us all to run a good race until the end in 1Cor. 9:24-10:13, 2Tim. 2:5 and Heb. 12. He explains that there is a "first resurrection from out of the dead" ("firstborn inheritance"—Heb. 12:15-17, 22-24) of which we must be worthy to partake in that great honor. This agrees with what Jesus said in Rev. 20:4-6 and 17:14—"called, chosen and faithful." That explains why Paul would say that he was striving to attain to it—to be counted worthy as Jesus said in Luke 20:34-36. It's not a matter of merely believing (let alone merely claiming to believe), but of persevering to the end—just as Jesus said through His angel to John in Rev. 2-3. (Phil. 3:8-21, 1:29-30, 1Thess. 2:14, 2Thess. 1:5, Acts 5:41, 9:16, 14:22, 2Tim. 1:8, 2:3-7, Rom. 8:16-18, 1Cor. 2:9, Heb. 3:12-14, 10:32-39, 12:3-4, 13:12-14, Jam. 5:10-11, Matt. 5:10-12, 13:20-22, Luke 6:22-23, Rev. 3:11, 2:25, 1Pet. 2:19-23, 3:17, 4:12-19, 5:6-11, Jam. 1:12, 2:5)

Paul lists the behaviors that will keep a person from inheriting the kingdom of God in Gal. 5:19-21, Eph. 5:5-6, and 1Cor. 6:9-10—if they make a practice of them rather than repenting and behaving as a child of God should. Rather than exhibiting fruit of the indwelling Spirit, they prove they are actually unregenerated children of the devil who lie when they say they know God. (1John 1:5-2:6, 2:26-3:10, Titus 2:11-3:8) Paul's list agrees with that of Jesus in Rev. 21:8 and 22:15—which also match the kinds of things Jesus said "give us away" as being defiled on the INSIDE. (Matt. 15:19, Mark 7:21-22) NOTE: We're not instantly perfect, but we make progress toward Christ-likeness with God's help. (Gal. 5:24, Rom. 8:13, 29, 13:14, 12:1-2, 2Pet. 1:3-

15, Eph. 3:16, 4:20-24, Col. 1:29, 3:9-10, Phil. 2:12-16, 2Thess. 1:11-12, 2Tim. 1:7)

Paul warns about false teachers and prophets, as did Jesus. (Matt. 7:15, 24:11, 24:24, Mark 13:22, Acts 20:29-30, 2Cor. 11:13-15, 1Tim. 4, 2Tim. 3, 4:3-4) What Paul says to the church at Thessalonica about the anti-Christ matches what Jesus said in Rev. 13:13-14 and 19:15, 21 (through His angel—Rev. 22:16). (2Thess. 2:3-4, 8, 9-12) In fact, the details of Paul's explanations of what is to come also echo those of Jesus. (1Thess. 5:2-4, Matt. 24:3-7, 8, Rev. 6:2, 4, 6, 8, 12:1-2—woman in labor, like a thief—WITH the called, chosen and faithful—Rev. 16:15—also Rev. 3:3—note that the "thief" will come against those in the church at Sardis who fail to repent—also see 2Thess. 2:2-8, Rom. 13:11-14 and Rev. 2:16—since all of the churches were to read all of the letters, these words are also for us—Rev. 1:11, Heb. 10:29-39—Matt. 24:42-44, 25:1-13, Mark 13:35-37, Luke 12:35-40, 1Thess. 5:6-7)

But remember, Paul wasn't there when Jesus said that, and the Gospels were not yet written. Moreover, his time spent with the other apostles wasn't to "catch up on what he missed," but to coordinate their ministries as fellow servants of God. (Gal. 2:1-10) (Also, I believe that most scholars agree that Revelation was written last of all of the New Testament books.) Further, Jesus talks about His searching hearts and minds, as does Paul. (Heb. 4:12-13, Rom. 2:15-16, Rev. 2:22-23—those at the church of Thyatira who refuse to repent will be thrown into great tribulation). NOTE: Anyone who thinks that it's "loving" to "undo" God's warnings is gravely mistaken.

The same goes for the mentality of those who say that "their God" (the one they make up in their heads) would "never cast anyone into hell," but instead, everyone is on various paths to heaven (despite God saying there is ONE way—John 3:18, 36, 1John 2:23, Acts 4:11-12, Rev. 20:11-15.) Teaching "another gospel" (2Cor. 11:4, Gal. 1:6-9) is idolatry—worse than the sin of sexual immorality, although the two are often used interchangeably—for the reason that we become one spirit with Jesus when His Spirit indwells ours—1Cor. 6:17-20, Eph. 5:31-32, and God was the "husband" of Israel—set aside temporarily—Isa. 50:1, 54:4-10, 49:15-16, 18, Jer. 2:2, 31:31-37—for any who think this is fulfilled through the Church having entered into the New Covenant, see the rest of the chapter. God is NOT finished with, nor has He replaced Israel. Those who truly LOVE God simply cannot wait to see Him fulfill these prophecies, for His glory.

As far as apostleship, Paul was a true apostle, but not one of the twelve. Matthias replaced Judas. (Acts 1:26) It had to be someone who could give eye

witness to all that Jesus said and did, and particularly to His resurrection. (Acts 1:8, 21-25, 2:32, 5:32, 10:39-43, Luke 24:48-49) Apostle means "sent." They were what we consider missionaries today, whereas shepherds, pastors and elders are all the same thing (stationary) and below them were deacons (whereas most churches today have a pastor, then elders and then deacons).

+Teaching Traditions

Many of the people in the Hebrew Roots movement (or whatever they want to call it, if anything) borrow traditions from the ancient rabbinical writings. (I suppose that when everything Paul wrote has been discarded by them, they feel the need to replace it with something...) The problem with these writings (whether the Talmud or others) is that they were passed down (first orally and eventually written) by people who REJECT Jesus as the Messiah. Much of it constitutes additions to God's law. (Prov. 30:5-6, Deut. 4:2, Rev. 22:18-19)

Further, the rabbis themselves tend to contradict one another—how reliable can that be? The words in the Bible were inspired by GOD. (2Tim. 3:16-17, 2Pet. 1:21) Jesus came against many of these very traditions and their hypocritical application to the masses by an elite class of priests and scribes lording it over the people. (Covered abundantly above.) The people recognized that Jesus taught with authority instead of the way the leaders of the time did. That says a lot about whether or NOT we should esteem their writings today. (Matt. 7:28-29) Their scribes often said things like "we have no way of knowing," and oftentimes they didn't even agree with each other. They questioned what the Scriptures said, contradicting both the Scriptures and each other.

The very people who observed and passed down historical traditions, for which Jesus criticized them, hated Him, calling for His crucifixion for claiming to be who He WAS, even after all of the miracles they saw Him perform (and yet demanded more). (Matt. 15:7-9, 26:63-68—by the way, the high priest was NOT to tear his robe—Lev. 21:10, Mark 7:6-9, John 11:47, 12:37, 42-43) So why would believers today want to follow those unnecessary traditions? Jesus said they refused to enter into the kingdom of God themselves and prevented others from doing so as well. (Matt. 23:13-15, John 5:39-40) They loved (hypocritically) exercising power over the people by enforcing the law. (Matt. 23:4-7)

Did you know that some say that people who study the Talmud receive a greater blessing than those who study the Torah? (It reminds me of how the Roman Catholics used to discourage everyday people from reading the Bible,

and even KILL people for doing so, but see Rev. 1:3, 22:7.) How on earth can anyone claim to know God and think that He would exalt the words of mere men above those of His Son (which include those of the inspired Scriptures)? (Heb. 1:1-2, John 10:32-33, 36-39) And for that matter, how can ANYONE deny that God HAS a Son, when He is mentioned repeatedly even in the Torah? (Prov. 30:4, Psa. 2:7-11, 12, Isa. 9:6-7)

Without Paul, we would have no guidelines for orderly gatherings of the Church and qualifications for those who are called to lead. (1Tim. 1-6, Titus 1-3, 1Cor. 11, 1Cor. 14) Paul reaffirmed the observance of the Lord's Supper as told to Him by Jesus. (1Cor. 11:23-26) He also reminds us to be charitable (2Cor. 9:5-12, Gal. 2:10, 6:6-10, Rom. 15:25-27, Eph. 4:28, 1Tim. 6:17-19, Heb. 13:16), just as Jesus and John the Baptizer told us to store treasure in heaven, not on earth. (Matt. 6:19-34, Luke 3:10-14, 12:13-34)

Returning to rabbinical writings for guidance in the Church is simply erroneous. In Ecc. 12:11-12, Solomon warned against going beyond God's written words (which are like goads—Jesus also mentioned goads in Acts 26:14-18). "Goads" keep the sheep going in the direction that the Master desires them to go. Examples of "going beyond" would be those found in extra-biblical sources including the Book of Mormon and their other writings, such as the Pearl of Great Price, etc., the writings and "visions" of Ellen G. White (Seventh Day Adventists), the Quran and Hadith, the Talmud (Jewish rabbinical oral traditions reduced to writing), the Roman Catholic traditions (held by them to have equal authority to Scripture, even when contradicting or adding to it)—and sadly I'm sure the list could go on—commentaries are one thing and memorizing/teaching as doctrine the writings of the founder of a denomination are another. (Also see Gal. 1:6-9, 2Cor. 11:2-4, Prov. 30:5-6, Rev. 22:18-19). I would say that "special" translations of the Bible spun with an agenda could also fall into this category. (e.g. Jehovah's Witness New World, The Message, Passion)

I find it interesting that most groups can pinpoint where others went astray, but they can't recognize the same sorts of errors within their own denomination, sect, cult, false religion, etc. I guess it's similar to being able to see the splinter in our brother's eye, but not the log in our own. (Matt. 7:3-5, Psa. 19:12) For example, most of us know that it's wrong to forbid marriage, but some can't see that it's the same with foods? (1Tim. 4:1-3, 1Cor. 7:6-7) Another example would be understanding it's wrong for "priests" (but all believers are part of the priesthood, of which Jesus, the ONE mediator between man and God, is High Priest—not the pope, Mary or ANYONE ELSE—1Tim. 2:5, Rom. 8:34, Heb. 7:25, Mark 3:31-35, Luke 11:27-28, Psa. 49:7-9) to be called "Father" despite being told NOT to do that, but not being

able to see that Jesus said the same thing about accepting undue honor as a "Rabbi" (or teacher, not merely in a functional way, but as a term of honor).

As was already discussed, the oral traditions which were ADDED to the law given to Moses were the VERY things that Jesus went AGAINST during His earthly ministry. (e.g. Legalistic things such as counting one's steps on the Sabbath, forbidding Jesus Himself to HEAL on the Sabbath, rituals such as hand washing before eating, etc., and also obeying the letter of the law, but not the spirit of it.) That is not to say that the people Jesus criticized were personally responsible for all of those traditions, but they adhered to them, placed burdens on others that they hypocritically did not carry themselves, and exalted the traditions above God's own words, adding to them. (Matt. 5:20, 9:10-17, 15:1-20, 16:12, Matt. 23, Luke 11:37-44, Mark 7:1-23, Acts 15:10-11)

They enjoyed the attention and power they received from being the "go-to" person on how to please God, but they thought He wanted rituals instead of truth and spirit (who else does that remind you of?) (Matt. 23:5-7, Luke 12:1, 15:1-2, 16:14-15, John 12:19, 12:42-43, Luke 18:9-14, Deut. 30:6, Rom. 2:29, Isa. 1:10-23, 29:13, 66:2, Mark 7:6-9, Matt. 15:7-9, Amos 5:21-27, Hos. 6:6, Matt. 9:13, 12:7, Psa. 51:17, John 4:23-24, 6:63, Titus 1:10-16, 1Tim. 1:3-11, Rom. 10:1-13) God does NOT want rote and ritual (but He DOES desire orderliness), NOR does He want mysticism (but it isn't "mysticism" to yield to the leading of the Holy Spirit, whose "voice" we recognize from studying the BIBLE under His guidance—He will not contradict Himself. John 14:26, 15:26, 16:13, 1John 2:26-29)

I saw a very popular YouTube video where a young man claimed to have gone to heaven and been told that he would get "points" for doing as he should—such as wearing his kippah. Seriously?! (But we know that our deeds do not justify us before God—Rom. 4:2, and also that men should NOT pray with their heads covered—1Cor. 11:4.) This young man was also told in his "visit to heaven" that a particular popular (dead) rabbi would intercede for him. Did you know that some teach that the spirits of dead rabbis intercede for faithful Jews? That sounds a lot like people praying to Mary or angels for "help"! (Col. 2:18-19, Luke 8:19-21, 1Tim. 2:5—there is NO "middleman" between mankind and Jesus, who is the ONLY way to God the Father—Heb. 1.)

Rabbis do NOT have authority to go against the Scriptures—NO ONE DOES. Jesus said that we have ONE Teacher ("Rabbi"). (Matt. 23:8-10, John 13:13, John 14:26) We're not meant to devour one another over differences, but if there is leaven (sin, false teachings and hypocrisy), it's to be

removed/repented of. (Gal. 5:15, 26, 1Cor. 5:6-13, 2John 1:9-11, Gal. 1:6-9, 1Cor. 12:3, Eph. 4:11-14, 2Cor. 11:2-4)

The Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes (lawyers/teachers of the law) tried repeatedly to "trip up" Jesus, the Son of God, and to have Him killed. (Matt. 12:14, 19:3-9, 22:15-32, Mark 3:6, 10:2, Luke 6:11, John 11:57) These were people who felt that their traditions trumped God's written word as well as His Son's spoken words. They recognized that He was talking about them in the Parable of the Tenants, but instead of repenting, they grew more determined! (Matt. 21:33-44, 45-56, Mark 12:1-11, 12-13, Luke 20:9-18, 19-20) They even sought to kill Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead—and what about Stephen? (John 12:9-11, Acts 7:54-60) I'm not suggesting any sort of anti-Semitism against today's Jews. (Psa. 122:6, Gen. 12:3) I'm saying that we should not follow "blind guides" by keeping the traditions of people who reject Jesus to this day. (Matt. 15:14, Luke 6:39)

*As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are **beloved for the sake of their forefathers.** Romans 11:28*

+Study the Bible for Yourself

It's a slippery slope when we start cutting out the parts of the Bible that we don't like (or for whatever reason). If you "don't like" Paul, then what about Acts, written by Luke, which completely agrees with Paul's teachings and gives a summary of the history of his ministry? If rejecting Luke's Acts of the Apostles, then what about his Gospel, which agrees with the rest of the Gospels? Do you see what I mean? Where does it stop? How could anyone be so arrogant as to feel qualified for such an undertaking? Not me! And I advise you to be wary of those who think that highly of themselves!

Luther is widely reported to have considered the book of James to be "an epistle of straw," because it mentions works, but apparently he failed to understand that those were the evidence of salvation, not the means to it—a sincere faith, not merely empty words. Abraham believed and because of that belief, he acted upon it. (Jam. 2:17-26, Heb. 11:8, 17, Rom. 4:12—"walk in his footsteps," just like we do with Jesus—1John 2:6, 1Pet. 2:21. Please refer back in this article for what "walking as Jesus walked" entails.)

And we know that Abraham's "works of obedience" were NOT keeping the Mosaic law that came centuries later. (Gal. 3:17-18, Rom. 4:11-12) We are Abraham's "offspring," "children of the promise" that was made TO Abraham, with no conditions upon Abraham because he truly believed. (Gen. 15, Gal. 4:21-31) Likewise, Noah received a promise FROM God after the flood. It was

not conditioned upon anything, and it is still in effect today and forever. (Gen. 9:12-17)

Clearly in each of those covenants, God made the promise to men He had found to be faithful in what He expected of them. However, they each demonstrated faithfulness by doing what they themselves were told. Noah was instructed to build an ark and gather the wildlife and his family into it. (Gen. 6:13-22) Abraham was instructed to leave his father's house and land, and go to the place God showed him. (Gen. 12:1-4) So the common "Hebraic roots" teaching that if something was "once true" it is "still true" is flawed. It's an oversimplification. An easy example would be that it was "once true" that Rebekah was pregnant with twins, but it is not "still true" that she is. That would be absurd. Or how about how the Gentiles were ONCE alienated from God, but no longer? (Eph. 2:12-13, Col. 1:21-23)

God does NOT change. (Mal. 3:6, Heb. 13:8) However, since the very beginning, He has had a plan of redemption that progresses according to His will for each age. We are not at liberty to change His plan by applying instructions from one age to another. Wouldn't that be like telling us each we cannot be saved unless we build an ark? That was for Noah before the flood, not us. The next destruction of the earth will be by fire, and we prepare to be saved out of it by doing what God instructed us to do. (2Pet. 3)

Twisting the Scriptures as some do, denying that Jesus did what He said He came to do—to fulfill the law—is wrong. (Matt. 5:17) The rest of the New Testament affirms and expounds upon the accomplishment of this awesome reality. To say otherwise is to put a "veil" over one's eyes whenever Moses is read. (2Cor. 3:14-16) We do NOT have the authority to make doctrine that contradicts what God has said in the Scriptures—the "ministry of condemnation" as given in the Mosaic law—has ended. Those who can "see" this are able to do so because the "veil" was lifted through faith in Christ.

*Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the **ministry of the Spirit** have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory. Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. But their minds were hardened. **For to this day, when they read the old***

covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But **when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.** Now the Lord is the Spirit, and **where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.** And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:7-18

Getting back to Luther, he also said that people could “do whatever they wish” with Revelation (but he apparently had no use for it—I know from personal experience that they generally avoid it to this day, since they think that it all has either already happened or is happening “invisibly”). So it’s not surprising that NO Lutheran denominations (nor the majority of other denominations stemming from the reformation) believe in the literal millennial reign of Christ (and some even mock others who do); and they believe that God has given all of the promises made to Israel to the Church (as they say, “true Israel”).

Nor is it a surprise that the ELCA (along with a growing number of other popular denominations and non-denominational mega-churches) has gone completely astray in pretty much every possible way—turning grace into a license to sin, etc. (Rom. 6:15, Jude 1:4, Gal. 5:16, 1Pet. 2:16, 2Pet. 2:19, John 8:34) But then I’m not sure how any denomination came to be at all after Jesus’ words in John 17:11, 20-23 and Paul’s in 1Cor. 1:12-13—people of many denominations identify by the name of their denomination rather than simply “Christian,” as if their denomination is somehow superior to JESUS’ name?! And what about all of these man-made buildings being referred to as “churches”? I’ve said this before—the reformation did not go far enough!

There are some who say we should ONLY pay attention to what Paul says, but I strongly disagree with them as well. The Church, which is the Body of Christ, is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus being the Cornerstone. (Eph. 2:19-22, Heb. 3:6, Rev. 21:12-13, Isa. 28:16) We imitate Paul, because he is imitating Christ. (1Cor. 11:1, 4:16, Eph. 5:1, Phil. 3:17, 1Thess. 1:6, 2Thess. 3:7-9, Heb. 6:11-12, 13:7, 3John 1:11) We don’t ignore Paul altogether, and we don’t listen ONLY to Paul—NOR do we reject water baptism (biblical baptism of believers, by submersion).

Paul reprimanded the Corinthians for considering themselves “followers” of the one who had baptized them. That is the reason given for why he was glad he hadn’t baptized very many believers. (And we know he’s referring to water baptism, because he references how these are NOT done in the name of the person performing the physical baptism, but presumably in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, or in the name of Jesus.) (1Cor. 1:12-16, Matt.

28:19, Acts 19:5) Many who hold the position of "Paul only" seem to think Jesus has NO expectations of us whatsoever, but Paul NEVER said we should ignore the spirit of the law and embrace immorality—to the contrary! (Rom. 16:18-19, 2Cor. 12:20-13:2) BOTH extremes ("no Paul" or "only Paul") are incorrect.

The Corinthians in particular were ALSO reprimanded, NOT for failing to keep the letter of the law, but because of behaving in ways that do not honor God (which is breaking the spirit of the law). (1Cor. 5-6) But there is forgiveness and washing upon acknowledgment to God of the sin and repentance from it. (Matt. 18:21-22, 1John 1:9—the letter was/is addressed to people who already believe—1John 5:13, exhorting them to walk in the light, not only to come into the light for the first time; John 3:19-21.)

Regarding which books of the Bible "apply" to us, we can't understand the New Testament without the Old Testament's history and perspective. We don't "live" in the Old Testament, but we don't discard it either. Some false teachers advise us to "unhitch" from the Old Testament, as if there was one God who was wrathful in the OT and a different "God of grace" in the NT. (That would be idolatry—again, there is ONE God.)

To anyone who thinks that we can get by just fine without Paul, I would suggest that they probably are discounting the number of his writings that they already have hidden in their heart. Without those treasures, many things that are clear to them would not be nearly so. The Scriptures speak of "witnesses" to the truth. (Deut. 17:6, 19:15, Matt. 18:16, 26:59-60, 1Tim. 5:19, 2Cor. 13:1, Rev. 11:3) Jesus even sent out the disciples in pairs. (Mark 6:7, Luke 10:1) We have those "witnesses" when we find more than one passage with the same message so that its proper meaning can be verified—often some will be found in the Old Testament and some in the New Testament. This gives us confidence in our interpretations. Anyone who discounts part of the Bible as applying to them is missing out on a LOT, and it's a rejection of part of what God Himself inspired to be written for our benefit. (1Cor. 10:11)

I once ran into a YouTube channel where a man (who was an overzealous believer) was absolutely scathing towards those who esteem the Bible. He said that since Jesus is the Word, it's idolatrous to call the Bible "God's word" and that we can get all we need directly from Jesus, through His Spirit. I reached out to him, suggesting that since he had said he had the benefit of taking a lengthy Bible course in the past, then much of what he knew came from that study. Further, we can easily be misled by our own imagination and so forth if we don't compare what we "hear" with the Bible. God doesn't "download"

the Scriptures into the brain of each person upon belief. In his curt reply, this man said, "talk to my boss" (meaning he disagreed with me and felt he was doing God's will to call people who treasure the words inspired by God to be recorded for us in the Bible "idolaters"). (Gal. 5:15, 26, 2Cor. 2:11)

I still say that we need to follow Jesus' example to avoid the temptations of the devil (and of "YouTube prophets") by accurately knowing Scripture, and answering false accusations and teachings accordingly. (Matt. 4:3-11, Luke 4:3-13, Deut. 8:3, 1Cor. 10:11-13, 2Tim. 2:15) We show our regard and love for God by wanting to get to know Him better through His word (the Bible) and THE Word (Jesus, who abides in us and in whom we abide). (John 1:1, Rom. 8:9)

*I write these things to you about those who are **trying to deceive you**. But **the anointing that you received from him abides in you**, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as **his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him**. 1 John 2:26-27 (Remember, John is the "Apostle of Love.")*

+In Conclusion

I hope this article helps anyone who has been wondering about all of this. I'm not trying to tell anyone they can't honor God in ways that they personally are convinced will please Him. I'm saying to be careful not to impose those things on others, and not to think of them as contributing to salvation. I personally find it very enriching to the growth of my knowledge of God to study the feasts (in the Bible, not oral traditions handed down—we know what happens to those over time). The feasts belong to God, and are intimately connected with His plan of salvation and the ages (i.e. prophetically). (Lev. 23:2)

I believe that most people who are attracted to this particular movement sincerely desire to please God. They may be repelled by the current "cheap grace" (i.e. "anything goes in the name of 'love'") that is being taught in many mega-churches and many denominations these days, and because of that, they may wish to go further in the opposite direction—toward legalism. We "walk in danger all the way," as the old hymn goes. The path is narrow, and on either side of it is working for salvation or taking it for granted such that it becomes (an unbiblical) license to sin, which is a perversion of grace. (Jude 1:4, 2Pet. 2:2)

Why would I do this in depth study and write this long article? Is it because I just don't want to keep the law and it makes me feel guilty if anyone does? No—I've answered the question about why we don't keep the law to the best

of my ability above. But what harm is there in keeping the law if someone wants to? The problem is when people think that it contributes to their salvation, and when they teach others that it does. If any reader already knows all of this, the article may be helpful for them to refer to if they meet someone who has been caught up in this movement. As I said, they often think it's a good way to please God, but haven't considered that God is not calling us to revert to the Old Covenant. We're free in Christ so long as we abide in Him in faith and love. As for rejecting Paul, I believe that enough evidence has been given that doing so is neither the way to please God, nor to build up one's faith in and knowledge of God under the New Covenant.

As I OFTEN say, read your Bible for yourself—and not a paraphrase or a “special” version with an agenda to promote. It's helpful to compare a few solid translations. I usually start with the ESV, comparing it with other versions and often looking up the Hebrew or Greek as well. Read the context and ignore headings and chapter breaks (and often you would do well to ignore paragraph breaks as well). Look up related passages and other occurrences of words. The more you learn, the more you'll want to learn. The more you acquire a taste for the solid, nutritious “food” of the Bible, the less you'll want to consume “junk.” (1Pet. 2:2-3, Heb. 5:14) Jesus is the Bread of Life—don't be satisfied with a meager diet that won't help you grow. KNOW your God. (Jer. 2:8, 4:22, 9:5-6, 23-24, 31:33-37, 1Cor. 1:18-31, 2Cor. 1:12, Job 36:11-12, Hos. 4:6, Dan. 11:32, 12:3) To know God is to LOVE Him. Guaranteed.

But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh. Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. Jude 1:20-25

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