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# *Paul Taught Torah*

Understanding Paul's Teachings  
Within the Context of His Lifestyle

Ron Ammundsen

Let's look at one example of how the bias of the translators has affected the meaning of our English translations of the New Testament.

Christ is the **end** [*telos*] of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

(Romans 10:4)

In this verse the word '**end**' is translated from the Greek word *telos*, which often means **end**, but also can mean **aim** or **goal**, as it does in 1 Timothy 1:5, "**The goal** [*telos*] of this command is love ..."

If the Bible translators had chosen to use '**goal**' instead of '**end**' when translating Romans 10:4, the verse would say, "**Christ is the goal of the law ...**" which would make sense in the context of what Paul was teaching in Romans 10. It would also agree with what the Old Testament prophets wrote about the law and about the Messiah. Paul himself testified that he believed everything that agreed with the Law and the Prophets (Acts 24:14), so we should expect all of Paul's writings to agree with the Old Testament.

Instead, the scholars chose to translate *telos* as '**end**' (**Christ is the end of the law...**), which gives the impression that the law is no longer a reliable guide for Christian living. That idea agrees with the religious traditions of the translators, but it disagrees with numerous passages in the Law and the Prophets. That would not have been Paul's intent, unless Paul intended to deceive us when he testified, "**I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets.**" (Acts 24:14)

By choosing to use the word '**end**' instead of '**goal**' in Romans 10:4 the translators have not only made Paul contradict what he said he believed, but they have also led people to think that the Law has been abolished, even though Jesus explicitly instructed, "**Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; ...**" (Matt. 5:17-19)

Peter warned us that in his day Paul's writings were already being distorted. (2 Peter 3:16) Since people have been twisting the meaning of Paul's writings for such a long time, how can we tell whether a passage has been misinterpreted? We can use the same test that the Bereans used. (Acts 17:10-11) Paul's true teachings will still agree with the Old Testament Scriptures just as they did at Berea nearly 2000 years ago.

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On the other hand, if Paul actually did intend to exempt adult Gentile converts from circumcision, that exemption was not created by Paul's own authority. Paul's teaching about circumcision agreed with the decision reached by the Jerusalem elders in Acts 15. And that decision was based on the precedent set by God himself when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the uncircumcised Gentile believers at the house of Cornelius in Acts 10. All of Paul's comments against circumcision pertain to adult converts – nowhere does he speak against the circumcision of 8-day-old boys.

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**16. Paul's writings are often misinterpreted when they are separated from the context of Paul's own Torah-observant lifestyle.**

When we read Paul's writings we should look for interpretations that agree with Paul's lifestyle, rather than adopting the interpretations that agree most conveniently with our own lifestyle or religious traditions.

Some passages of Paul's epistles may seem at first to be incompatible with Paul's Torah-observant lifestyle. Contributing to this problem are the basic theological differences between the men who originally wrote the New Testament and the scholars who later translated it into English. It is evident from the lifestyles of the Bible translators that nearly all of them have chosen to disregard many of the instructions God gave in the Torah. By their example and words they teach others to do the same. In the sense that they influence people to disregard the Law of Moses, the Bible translators are "anti-Torah" – especially when compared to the Jewish men who wrote the New Testament.

That anti-Torah bias of the translators works its way into our English translations of the New Testament as the translators choose which of the several possible shades of meaning will be rendered from Greek into English, and which English words and connotations will be used to make the translation clear and understandable. The translators inevitably choose the meanings that agree most closely with their own theological biases and lifestyle choices. That works fine when the translators share the same beliefs as the Bible author. But when the translators disagree with the original author on something as fundamental as the purpose and value of following the instructions of the Old Testament, it leads to confusing translations that can make it appear as if Paul disagreed with his own lifestyle.

## INTRODUCTION

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In 1994 our family moved to a 10-acre island off the north coast of British Columbia where I worked as a lighthouse keeper. Although we greatly missed having the fellowship of other Christian believers, being out of the rat-race and away from the busyness of church life gave us more time for Bible study than we'd ever had before. In the absence of organized religion, we had to accept full responsibility for our own spiritual lives. With that in mind I began to examine our beliefs to see which ones were based solidly on Scripture and which ones were merely the teachings and traditions of men.

Many of our beliefs were easily confirmed in Scripture. However, in 1998 we began to find clues that some of our beliefs were not in agreement with the practices of the original New Testament apostles and believers. Further study has uncovered what seems to be extensive and conclusive evidence that mainstream Christianity has misunderstood the New Testament's message regarding the purpose and value of God's Old Testament laws.

I have prepared this paper in order to share a portion of what we have found, and to seek the counsel of other Christians, especially those who know us and may be concerned about where our studies are leading.

I expect that few people will agree with everything in this study. Nevertheless, I pray that you will find food for thought and some ideas that will prompt you to study the Scriptures prayerfully for yourself.

Please share your comments, ideas, or concerns with us.

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## SUMMARY

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### Hypothesis:

Paul taught the Gentile believers to follow the Law of Moses (the Torah).

### Premises:

1. The vast majority of Paul's teaching was not recorded because it was done verbally, in person, face to face.
2. Most of Paul's basic instruction for new believers was not included in his letters.
3. According to Paul, all of his unrecorded verbal teachings agreed with his own lifestyle.
4. Paul, along with the other Jewish believers, continued to follow the laws of Moses after accepting Jesus as the Messiah. Paul lived a Torah-observant lifestyle.
5. Paul taught the Gentiles to follow his own lifestyle and example.
6. By his own Torah-observant lifestyle, and by specifically teaching the Gentiles to follow his own example (and the example of Jesus), Paul was teaching the Gentiles to follow the laws of Moses.

### Supporting Evidence:

7. Paul affirmed the whole law.
8. Paul used the Old Testament as the textbook for instructing all believers.
9. The New Testament contains examples where Paul instructed the Gentiles to follow specific Old Testament laws.
10. Paul taught that the Gentile believers became united with the Jewish believers as fellow citizens of Israel (the descendents of Jacob). In Christ, there was no difference between Jewish and Gentile believers.
11. Under the new covenant, God writes his Torah on the hearts and in the minds of His people.
12. Paul defines a "spiritual Jew" as a person who keeps the law's requirements.
13. Jesus taught that the law would not be changed until the earth passed away.
14. Jesus commissioned his disciples to teach both Jews and the Gentiles everything that He had taught his disciples.
15. Paul did not specifically exempt the Gentiles from any Old Testament laws (except maybe one).
16. Paul's writings are often misinterpreted when they are separated from the context of Paul's own Torah-observant lifestyle.

In that situation, it would have been Greek ascetics who were judging the believers, and Paul's real intent in this passage was to encourage the believers to continue being faithful to the Old Testament Sabbaths and feasts which still teach realities about Jesus and about future events.

When we re-examine the rest of Paul's writings within the context of Paul's lifestyle, we find there are no passages that clearly support the idea that some of God's Torah instructions have been rendered obsolete.

The one possible exception is circumcision for adult Gentile converts, an issue which Paul wrote about in the strongest terms. Yet the issue of circumcision in Paul's writings is not a simple one. In one place Paul wrote, "If you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all" (Gal. 5:2). But then he also wrote, "What is the benefit of circumcision? Great in every respect." (Rom. 3:1-2) Paul himself was circumcised as an infant (Phil 3:5) and Paul also circumcised Timothy as an adult (Acts 16:3).

In the New Testament the term *circumcision* is used in several different ways. It can refer to the basic rite of circumcision as found in the Old Testament, or to the condition of one who has been circumcised, or to the Jewish people in general, or specifically to people belonging to the "circumcision group" which held certain beliefs about converting Gentiles. The term may also have been used as a shorthand label referring to the whole system of teaching and rituals used by the "circumcision group" to turn a Gentile into a Jew.

Some of the Jews in Paul's day believed that only Jews could be saved. So if a Gentile wanted to be saved, he had to become Jewish through the rituals the rabbis had created for proselytes, with circumcision being the prominent event in that process. Proselytes were taught that in order to properly follow God's written Torah they must also follow the extra man-made laws of the rabbis. If a Gentile man had been previously circumcised, but not according to the ritual requirements of the rabbis, the "circumcision group" would still consider him "uncircumcised" and would require him to be circumcised again using their rituals.

So when Paul spoke against circumcision, it is quite possible that he was speaking only against the system of ritual circumcision done according to the doctrine of "salvation by Jewishness" or "salvation by ritual circumcision", which was contrary to both the gospel and the Old Testament teachings.

- that “*not under law*” actually means “*not obedient to the Torah nor guided by it*”.
- that we are better off without God’s law.
- that obedience to the law is in some way opposed to being led by the Spirit.

Paul’s life shows that these assumptions are false. Paul was led by the Spirit and was not “under law”, yet he was still obedient to the Torah and he urged others to follow his example. So in this passage “*not under law*” can not mean “*not following the Torah*”.

In Scripture, being led by the Spirit is closely linked to careful obedience to God’s law, a result of a changed heart: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put **my Spirit in you** and move you to **follow my decrees** and be careful to **keep my laws.**” (Ezek. 36:26-27)

In that context “*you are not under law*” may mean “you do not perceive the law as a burden” or “you do not rely on the law to give you status with God.”

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. (Col. 3:16)

At first glance, this verse sounds as if Paul was inferring that it didn’t matter whether or not the Sabbaths and other regulations were observed. But this interpretation relies on the assumption that some believers in the congregation were disregarding the Sabbaths and other Torah laws, and that it was Jews who were causing trouble by teaching the Torah and condemning those who did not follow it. The context of the passage shows that this was not the case. Instead of teaching the Scriptures, those who were causing trouble were teaching “**deceptive philosophy**”, “**human tradition**”, “**idle notions**”, and “**human commands**”. In clear contrast to that, the Sabbaths, feasts, and the Torah diet were created by God himself (Lev. 11 & 23) and were part of the Scriptures that Paul endorsed as “**useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.**” (2 Tim 3:16)

As far as we know, the Gentile believers were following Paul’s example by feasting on the Sabbaths and biblical holidays with the Jewish believers. That would have brought them into conflict with friends and relatives who were influenced by Greek asceticism, a popular philosophy which taught that people should deprive their physical bodies in order to enhance their spiritual lives. Ascetics promoted fasting and would have viewed God’s appointed Sabbaths and feasts as occasions of gluttony.

# Paul Taught Torah

## HYPOTHESIS

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### Paul taught the Gentile believers to follow the Law of Moses (the Torah).

Paul did not teach people to observe the law in order to be saved or justified. That was not the purpose of the law. He taught them to observe the law in order to honor God as they walked out the Christian life in the footsteps of their Lord Jesus.

We received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. (Romans 1:5)

Paul did not teach people to follow all the extra man-made laws that the Jewish rabbis had invented as “fence laws” in order to guard the laws of Moses, but which were not part of the written Torah (the first five books of the Bible).

Paul did not teach people to offer animal sacrifices in their backyards. The Torah actually forbids that. The commands concerning animal sacrifices could be legally carried out only at the temple in Jerusalem, and then only by the descendants of Aaron.

Paul did not teach people to punish rebellious teenagers and Sabbath-breakers by stoning them to death. Penalties like that could be imposed only by properly appointed judges within the theocracy of Israel, whose constitution was the Torah.

Jewish scholars have identified 613 distinct commands in the Torah. Of those, fewer than 200 commands apply to the average person. Many of the other laws applied only to priests or to the other Levites who assisted at the temple. Some laws applied only to men, some only to women. Other commands applied only to kings, or to farmers, or to slave owners.

Paul taught the Gentile believers to follow the laws of Moses that could be followed in their own situation.

## PREMISES

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1. **The vast majority of Paul's teaching was not recorded because it was done verbally, in person, face to face.**
2. **Most of Paul's basic instruction for new believers was not included in his letters.**

From the decades of Paul's teaching ministry we have available only a small collection of letters which can be read completely through in just a few hours. All but two of Paul's letters were written to congregations and individuals who had been taught previously by Paul in person. The two exceptions, Romans and Colossians, were written to congregations whose leaders knew Paul and were already acquainted with his teachings.

In several of the congregations Paul had remained for more than a year teaching from the Old Testament Scriptures.

Finally, brothers, **we instructed you how to live in order to please God**, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For **you know what instructions we gave you** by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

(1 Thessalonians 4:1,2)

So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to **the teachings we passed on to you**, whether by **word of mouth** or by letter.

(2 Thessalonians 2:15)

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live **according to the teaching you received from us**.

(2 Thessalonians 3:6)

**What you heard from me**, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.

(2 Timothy 1:13)

**And the things you have heard me say** in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

(2 Timothy 2:2)

and take note of those who live according to **the pattern we gave you**.

(Philippians 3:17)

would have been teaching "others" to break the laws, which would have been contrary to what Jesus taught.

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15. **Paul did not specifically exempt the Gentiles from any Old Testament laws (except maybe one).**

When God gave essential instructions to his people in the Old Testament, he always used language that was clear, direct, and detailed. God did not leave people confused and wondering about what he wanted them to do. When the Torah was given at Sinai, it was accompanied by an overwhelming display of God's glory and power. If God wanted to overturn those instructions, shouldn't we expect that God would do it in his characteristic way – using language that is direct, clear, and detailed? If he intended to overturn the Torah, God certainly could have inspired the New Testament authors to explain the changes with the same detail and clarity that had been used by Moses. But he didn't. Neither Paul nor any other New Testament author comes right out and says directly that God does not expect New Testament believers to follow this or that specific Old Testament instruction.

Instead of demanding a clear "Thus saith the Lord" showing that God changed his mind between the Old Testament and the New Testament, many theologians have simply assumed that God's previous guidelines are obsolete. And they have used that assumption as the foundation for interpreting the New Testament.

Some New Testament passages do seem to infer that some or all of the Old Testament guidelines are no longer relevant; and the doctrines and theories based on the evidence of those passages seem compelling – especially if you begin with the assumption that the Torah is no longer relevant. However, when we lay aside preconceived assumptions and re-examine those passages in the context of Paul's Torah-observant lifestyle, the evidence usually drawn from those passages turns out to be either faulty or flimsy. As examples, let's consider the two passages below.

**But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.**

(Gal. 5:18)

This text has traditionally been used to show that New Testament believers are not expected to follow Old Testament laws. That interpretation is based on several assumptions:

**teaches others to do the same** will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, **but whoever practices and teaches these commands** will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

(Matthew 5:17-19)

Did you notice that Jesus said that no part of the law would disappear “**by any means**”? If that is true (which it is), then even if the Law had been “nailed to the cross” (which it wasn’t), even that would not cause the law to disappear. (Did being nailed to the cross cause Jesus to disappear or become irrelevant?)

So then, what was “nailed to the cross” in Colossians 2:14? According to the gospel accounts of Jesus’ death, there were only two things nailed to the cross – Jesus himself and a handwritten placard that specified his “crime”. Think about that placard while reading Colossians 2:14 in the KJV or another fairly literal translation. Paul is talking about the placard that belongs on your own cross – the legal certificate that lists your guilt and your debt according to the law. By taking the placard listing your crimes and nailing it to his own cross, Jesus received the just punishment for those crimes under the law. Justice has been served. The law has been satisfied (not abolished). It’s awesome!

Therefore go and make disciples of **all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you**. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

(Matthew 28:19, 20)

Jesus did not give his disciples a separate curriculum for teaching Gentiles. Everything that Jesus had taught his disciples was to be taught to all nations. When Jesus taught his disciples, “**Anyone** who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches **others** to do the same... **whoever** practices and teaches these commands...”, he gave no indication that the words “**Anyone**”, “**others**”, and “**whoever**” referred only to Jews. Jesus expected his disciples to pass that same teaching on to the Gentiles, including the command, “**Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law.**” Although there would have been Gentiles present in the crowd while Jesus was preaching, he never said, “This teaching applies only to the Jews.”

As a faithful apostle of Jesus, Paul must have been teaching the Gentiles to practice the commands of the law. Paul often read publicly from the Scriptures. If after reading aloud from the Torah Paul had told people to disregard any of the commands in those passages, he

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### 3. According to Paul, all of his unrecorded verbal teachings agreed with his own lifestyle.

Therefore I urge you to imitate me. For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of **my way of life** in Christ Jesus, **which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.**

(1 Corinthians 4:16, 17)

Although we don’t have a written record of Paul’s basic instructions for new believers, the New Testament does contain significant information about Paul’s lifestyle. Understanding the lifestyle that Paul lived after he accepted Jesus is essential to understanding Paul’s basic teachings, which formed the foundation and provided the context for Paul’s written epistles. Paul’s lifestyle provides the key criteria that we can use to evaluate various interpretations of Paul’s writings - any interpretation that disagrees with Paul’s lifestyle is erroneous.

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### 4. Paul, along with the other Jewish believers, continued to follow the laws of Moses after accepting Jesus as the Messiah. Paul’s lifestyle was Torah-observant.

A man named Ananias came to see me. **He was a devout observer of the law** and highly respected by all the Jews living there.

(Acts 22:12)

Ananias was the Christian man that God selected as the agent to restore Paul’s sight, baptize him, fill him with the Holy Spirit, and commission him as an apostle.

When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: “You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and **all of them are zealous for the law.**”

(Acts 21:20)

Historical sources confirm that Torah-observance was the norm among the Jewish Christians. Paul’s lifestyle did not differ in that regard. The book of Acts contains ample evidence that Paul continued to faithfully observe the Old Testament laws.

To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. (1 Corinthians 9:20)

In the notes for this verse, the *NIV Study Bible* acknowledges, “For the Jew’s sake Paul conformed to the Jewish law.” That isn’t something that Paul could have done on a part-time basis.

Unfortunately, some people would rather portray Paul as a clever hypocrite – acting like a Christian when he’s with Christians, acting like a Jew when he’s with Jews, and acting like a Gentile when he’s with Gentiles – as if Paul might gain some missionary advantage by doing so. We know that Paul did not approve of that kind of hypocrisy because he had publicly rebuked Peter for such behavior. (In Gal. 2:11-14 Peter had reverted to following a man-made tradition.) We also know that there were very few times in Paul’s ministry when he was not in the company of Jews.

Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. **Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law.** (Acts 21:24)

The context of this passage refers to the Law of Moses. James and the apostles who were acquainted with Paul knew that Paul was Torah-observant. By joining in the purification rites it would become apparent to everyone that Paul had been living in obedience to the law. Paul did join in the purification rites, so today everyone should know that Paul himself was living in obedience to the Law of Moses. There was no truth in the rumors that Paul was teaching people to turn away from Moses.

Paul didn’t do this to appease the Jews. When he left Corinth earlier, Paul’s head was shaved as part of a vow that he had not yet completed. To fulfill that earlier vow it was necessary for Paul to participate in these purification rites in Jerusalem. (Acts 18:18, Numbers 6)

If Paul had been in the habit of disregarding the Law of Moses, it would have been deceitful for Paul to join in the purification rites knowing that everyone would think he had been living according to the law. It also would have been deceitful for James and the elders to recommend a course of action that would have intentionally misled the believers in Jerusalem. So it is apparent that Paul really had been living in obedience to the Law all along.

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## 12. Paul defines a “spiritual Jew” as a person who keeps the law’s requirements.

The term “spiritual Jew” does not occur in Scripture. The concept comes from Romans 2 where Paul was dealing with the controversy over circumcision for adult Gentile converts. In this passage the Jews (as defined by physical ancestry and circumcision) are contrasted with the Gentile converts (who are Israelites by faith, circumcised in heart by the Spirit, and have the Torah written on their hearts according to the new covenant).

Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. **If those who are not circumcised keep the law’s requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised?** The one who is not circumcised physically **and yet obeys the law** will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker. A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, **a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly**; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man’s praise is not from men, but from God. (Romans 2:25-29)

“Circumcision of the heart” is an Old Testament concept. (Lev. 26:41; Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:26; Ezek. 44:7-9) Paul is arguing against the arrogance of some Jews who thought their ancestry, circumcision, and knowledge of the law made them superior to Gentile believers. According to Paul, Gentile believers become Jews at heart, not in some nebulous way, but when the Spirit leads them to actually observe the laws that the literal Jews should have been obeying.

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## 13. Jesus taught that the law would not be changed until the earth passed away.

## 14. Jesus commissioned his disciples to teach both Jews and the Gentiles everything that He had taught his disciples.

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, **until heaven and earth disappear**, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by **any** means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. **Anyone who breaks** one of the least of these commandments **and**



'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For **I will forgive their wickedness** and will remember their sins no more."

By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging **will soon disappear**. (Hebrews 8:6-13)

Several things should be noted about the passage above. It says that the new covenant is founded on better **promises** - it says nothing about better **laws**. The only fault with the first covenant was that the people did not remain faithful. Under the first covenant the people were responsible for putting God's laws in their hearts (Deut. 6:6), which they failed to do. The new covenant fixes that fault because God promises to put his Torah in the hearts and minds of his people. Under the new covenant God promises to **forgive** wickedness - it says nothing about redefining wickedness by changing the laws.

At the time Hebrews was written, the first covenant had not yet disappeared - it "**will soon disappear**". Compare that with what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:31, "**For this world in its present form is passing away.**" And John says in 1 John 2:17, "**The world and its desires pass away.**" The New Testament authors expected an imminent end of the world, so what they wrote agrees with what Jesus said about the law remaining "**until heaven and earth disappear**" (Matt. 5:18).

The Greek word for *obsolete* means "be made old". The author of Hebrews used that same Greek word earlier in Hebrews 1:11 to describe the foundations of the earth and the heavens, which still exist today and are currently essential for our daily survival.

Part of the new covenant promise in this passage is not yet fulfilled - "**No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.**" This will happen sometime in the future. Will the first covenant disappear before the new covenant is fully implemented?

God promised to make the new covenant with the house of Israel. Part of the good news that Paul preached to the Gentiles is that they can have a part in the promises and covenants by becoming heirs with Israel by faith in Jesus (instead of by the laws regarding ancestry).

Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers, **I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.**" (Acts 23:1)

Many Christians today could say the same thing that Paul said. However, a few moments later Paul also stated that he was a Pharisee, which defines more clearly what he and the Sanhedrin understood as his duty to God.

Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "**My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead.**" (Acts 23:6)

Although Paul evidently said this in order to take advantage of the dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, it would not have worked if Paul had not been living in accordance with the Law of Moses. In that case, it would probably have been laughter, rather than a dispute, that broke out in the Sanhedrin when Paul claimed to be a Pharisee. Apparently there was enough evidence to show that Paul's claim to being a Pharisee was valid. Some of the Pharisees argued vigorously, "**We find nothing wrong with this man.**" (Acts 23:9) It is doubtful they would have said this about a man who was not following the teachings of Moses. Subsequent passages show how determined the Jews were to be rid of Paul, which makes this vindication of Paul by some of his enemies even more significant.

However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. **I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets,** (Acts 24:14)

When Paul appeared, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many serious charges against him, which they could not prove. Then Paul made his defense: "**I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar.**" (Acts 25:7-8)

I thank God, **whom I serve, as my forefathers did,** with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. (2 Timothy 1:3)

"**The Jews all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child,** from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that **according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee.**" (Acts 26:4-5)

Notice that Paul says, "our religion" instead of "their religion". Paul still thought of himself as a part of the Jewish religion. Apparently Paul's behavior had been

fairly consistent ever since he was a child. It's not likely that Paul would have invited the Jews to testify that he lived as a Pharisee unless he was still living essentially as a Pharisee because the Jews would have been eager to challenge, rather than verify, Paul's testimony.

Three days later he called together the leaders of the Jews. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: "My brothers, although **I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors**, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. (Acts 28:17)

In the New Testament, it was the enemies of the Christians who falsely accused the believers of breaking the Law of Moses and teaching others to disregard it too. (Acts 6:11-14; Acts 18:13; Acts 21:21-24; Acts 21:28-29) Today, it is Christians themselves who sometimes repeat those same assertions about Paul.

If Paul were in the habit of disregarding the Torah instructions, then we would expect to find recorded in the New Testament at least one instance where Paul disobeyed the Torah. However, no such record exists. Should we assume that Paul is guilty of law breaking until someone proves him innocent? Not according to Scripture. Two or three truthful witnesses are required before we can find a person guilty of transgressing the law. (Deut. 19:15, 1Tim. 5:19) Through his words and actions Paul repeatedly led people to believe that he was living according to the Law of Moses (see above). It should be safe to assume that Paul's testimony about his own lifestyle is true. Or will we choose to affirm instead the same assertions that Paul's enemies directed against him?

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##### 5. Paul taught the Gentiles to follow his own lifestyle and example.

**Join with others in following my example**, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. (Philippians 3:17)

**Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice.** And the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:9)

**Therefore I urge you to imitate me.** For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. **He will remind you of my way of life** in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church. (1 Corinthians 4: 16, 17)

Gentiles who are grafted in become identified with the actual descendants of Jacob.

Christians who think that the Torah is only for the Jews have failed to realize that according to Paul, believers can not separate themselves from the Jews without pruning themselves from the olive tree.

**For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him,** (Romans 10:12)

There is **neither Jew nor Greek**, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then **you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.** (Galatians 3: 28,29)

The congregation in Thessalonica took this message to heart and used the Jewish churches as an example to follow.

For you, brothers, **became imitators of God's churches in Judea**, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, (1 Thessalonians 2:14)

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##### 11. Under the new covenant, God writes his Torah on the hearts and in the minds of His people.

The promise of the new covenant from Jeremiah 31 is quoted in Hebrews 8 (and 10).

But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is **founded on better promises**. For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. **But God found fault with the people** and said :

"The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, **because they did not remain faithful to my covenant**, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. **I will put my laws [torah] in their minds and write them on their hearts.** I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying,

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10. **Paul taught that the Gentile believers became united with the Jewish believers as fellow citizens of Israel (the descendants of Jacob). In Christ, there was no difference between Jewish and Gentile believers.**

Therefore, remember that **formerly** you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men)-- remember that **at that time** you were separate from Christ, **excluded from citizenship in Israel** and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. ... Consequently, **you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens** with God's people and members of God's household.  
(Ephesians 2:11-13, 19)

This mystery is that through the gospel **the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel**, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.  
(Ephesians 3:6)

Here **there is no Greek or Jew**, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, **as God's chosen people**, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.  
(Colossians 3: 11,12)

In Jeremiah 11:16 the Lord calls the nation of Israel an olive tree and predicts that branches would be broken from it. Paul uses that metaphor of the olive tree to explain how the Gentile believers are grafted into the root of Israel.

If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been **grafted in among the others** and now share in the nourishing sap **from the olive root**, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but **the root supports you**. ... After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted **into their own olive tree!**  
(Romans 11:17-18, 24)

That olive tree could not represent Jesus or the Christian church because those original Israelite branches that are cut off can be grafted back into the same tree from which they originally sprouted (which was not Christianity).

because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know **how we lived among you** for your sake. **You became imitators of us and of the Lord**; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so **you became a model to all the believers** in Macedonia and Achaia.

(1 Thessalonians 1: 5-7)

**Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.** I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the **teachings** [or *tradition* – NIV footnote], just as **I passed them on to you.**

(1 Corinthians 11:1-2)

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For **you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example.** We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but **in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow.**

(2 Thessalonians 3:6-9)

Paul set himself up as a model for Gentile believers to follow. So when Paul rested on Sabbaths and during the annual Sabbaths of the Biblical feasts, resting on those days would have become part of the work ethic that the Gentiles were supposed to follow.

Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?” Paul replied, “Short time or long--**I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.**”

(Acts 26:28)

Notice that Paul's prayer was for everyone listening to become, not only a Christian as Agrippa suggested, but a Christian specifically like Paul himself. Paul believed that he was an appropriate role model for all Christians, whether they were Gentiles or not.

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6. **By his own Torah-observant lifestyle, and by specifically teaching the Gentiles to follow his example (and the example of Jesus), Paul was teaching the Gentiles to follow the laws of Moses.**

When I first started to realize the implications of this, my initial reaction was to be repulsed by the specter of legalism. I thought that observing the Old Testament laws would rob a person of the joys of the Christian life, and that anyone who chose such a lifestyle would soon become repulsive to others. The fallacy of such thinking slowly became obvious as I realized that all of the Bible authors and heroes from Moses to Paul had honored the Torah without being legalistic. Jesus himself observed the Torah perfectly, while teaching emphatically against legalism and drawing crowds of ardent followers.

In our modern culture people adopt all sorts of lifestyles just for the fun of it. People fancy themselves as cowboys, athletes, great outdoorsmen, or rock stars. They work religiously to acquire the clothes, equipment, vocabulary, and skills to accompany their dreams. So why is it that when someone suggests that Christians could adopt the lifestyle of our Lord Jesus – the same lifestyle as the founding apostles of Christianity – we find the idea is repulsive or even heretical? Couldn't we do it just for the fun of it?

Apparently the Christianity that has been handed down to us from the time of Constantine contains a payload of subtly ingrained prejudices against the Torah, and against the Jews themselves. Perhaps it is time to examine those prejudices in the light of Scripture.

passage Paul used that common life experience (preparing for Passover) to teach an important spiritual lesson. If Paul had not actually intended for the Corinthians to observe the Passover feast, he could have easily avoided using the imperative, “**Therefore let us keep the Festival,**” by saying instead something like, “**Therefore let us purify ourselves from the old yeast of malice and wickedness.**”

What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.” “**Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.**” “I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” **Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.**

(2 Corinthians 6:16 - 7:1)

The command, “**Touch no unclean thing,**” which Paul quotes from Isaiah 52:11, is a condition of the promises Paul is urging the Corinthians to lay hold of. To fulfill that condition they have to be familiar with the Old Testament instructions regarding unclean things. Paul restates the command in his own words, “**Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit.**” Where would the believers learn about what contaminates the body, and how to purify themselves? Paul would have taught that from the Old Testament Scriptures while he was in Corinth.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “**Honor your father and mother**”--**which is the first commandment with a promise**-- “that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”

(Ephesians 6:1-3)

By pointing out that this is the first commandment with a promise, Paul confirmed that this commandment and the promise are valid for Gentile believers, and also that this commandment holds a specific position in a particular list of other valid commandments which had previously been taught to the Gentile believers in Ephesus. Paul was quoting from the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5, where the commandment to “**Honor your father and mother**” follows in order immediately after the commandment to observe the seventh-day Sabbath.

had been their intention, their list of requirements surely would have included, “**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength**” (Deut. 6:5) and “**Love your neighbor as yourself,**” (Lev. 19:18) which are from the Law of Moses and were endorsed by Jesus as the greatest of commandments. Also, most Christian leaders agree that tithing applies to Gentile believers even though the elders in Jerusalem neglected to include it in the list of four requirements given to the Gentile believers.

If Peter had said that the Law of Moses was an unbearable yoke (which he didn't), it would have been a lie because every Jewish believer in the Jerusalem congregation where Peter was speaking was zealous for the law. (Acts 21:20) The Old Testament describes the law as a delight and something to rejoice about. (Psalm 119) To say that the Law of Moses was an unbearable yoke would be to accuse God of choosing a special people to bless, but saddling them instead with an unbearable yoke for dozens of generations, and furthermore imposing punishments and curses on the people whenever they failed to follow unbearable laws. What kind of a god would do that?

The decision of the elders in Acts 15 applied only to the Gentile believers, not to the Jewish believers. How would they have maintained unity in the churches if some members were exempted from the Torah while others were zealously observing it? How well would that work in your church? Would the observant Jewish believers want Gentile believers as role models and associates for their children? Would the Gentile believers be excluded from leadership positions? If a Gentile believer married a Jewish believer, would their children be exempt from following the Torah? What if the Gentile believers bring pork and leavened bread to the Passover potluck? How could Paul claim there was no difference between Jewish and Gentile believers if they were actually expected to live by different rules?

**Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast--as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.** (1 Corinthians 5: 6-8)

During Paul's ministry in Corinth he celebrated the Passover at least once with the believers there. In this

## SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

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### 7. Paul affirmed the whole law.

**We know that the law is good if one uses it properly.** (1 Timothy 1:8)

Proper use of the law was the primary issue in many passages of Paul's writings.

**For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.** (Romans 2:13)

**Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.** (Romans 3:29-31)

**So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.** (Romans 7:12)

**We know that the law is spiritual;...** (Romans 7:14)

**For in my inner being I delight in God's law;** (Romans 7:22)

**Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts.** (1 Corinthians 7:19)

How do we know if Paul was referring to the whole law, or just to the moral or ceremonial law? In his writings Paul never mentions a distinction between *moral law* and *ceremonial law*. Those terms are not used anywhere in the Scriptures and none of the Bible writers used any distinction like that in regard to God's instructions.

The Israelites viewed the whole Torah as one set of instructions, with the Ten Commandments serving as a summary or 'Table of Contents' for the rest of the Torah. For example, the commandment says not to worship idols, and the rest of the Torah tells how to avoid idolatry by honoring the true God. The commandment says to work six days and to rest on the Sabbath, and other parts of the Torah contain guidelines for how to do your work and how to rest.

It was long after Paul had died that the artificial distinction between moral and ceremonial law was invented by theologians who no longer followed Paul's example regarding God's law.

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## 8. Paul used the Old Testament as the textbook for instructing all believers.

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and **examined the Scriptures** every day to see if what Paul said was true. **Many of the Jews** believed, as did also a number of prominent **Greek women** and many **Greek men**.

(Acts 17:11-12)

The New Testament had not yet been written, so the Bereans were using the Old Testament Scriptures to evaluate whether or not Paul's message was true. It is evident from this passage that the message which Paul preached did not contradict the Old Testament in any way; otherwise those noble Bereans would have rejected Paul's teachings. Neither the Old Testament nor Paul's message has changed since that time, so today we should be very cautious of any interpretation that makes Paul's message contradict the Old Testament Scriptures.

**As his custom was**, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them **from the Scriptures**, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. Some of **the Jews** were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of **God-fearing Greeks** and not a few prominent women. (Acts 17:2-4)

Until I come, **devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture**, to preaching and to teaching.

(1 Timothy 4:13)

But as for you, **continue** in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how **from infancy** you have known the **holy Scriptures**, which are **able to make you wise for salvation** through faith in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 3:15)

For **everything that was written** in the past was written to teach us, so that through **endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures** we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

In all of these passages Paul is referring to the Old Testament. Paul did not teach that any part of the Old Testament Scripture was irrelevant for believers.

**All Scripture** is God-breathed and is useful for **teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness**, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. **I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen--**that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles. (Acts 26:22-23)

Did Moses and the Old Testament prophets say that God's people would stop following the Torah when the Messiah arrived? No. According to Moses, the Gentiles who were associated with Israel would be taught to carefully follow all of the instructions God gave to Israel. (Deut. 31:10-13, Josh 8:31-33) This was to happen especially at the Feast of Tabernacles -- which is the same feast all the Gentiles will be required to attend when Jesus reigns in Jerusalem as King over the whole earth. (Zech. 14:16-19) If Paul was teaching only what Moses and the prophets said would happen, then we should expect him to teach the Gentile believers to follow the Torah.

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## 9. The New Testament contains examples where Paul instructed the Gentiles to follow specific Old Testament laws.

As they traveled from town to town, they **delivered the decisions** reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem **for the people to obey**. (Acts 16:4)

Paul taught the Gentiles to obey the requirements that the elders in Jerusalem had listed in their letter to Antioch (Acts 15:29). Two of those requirements are found directly in the Law of Moses and two of them are logical interpretations of the Law of Moses which were part of the "fence laws" taught by the rabbis:

- **abstain from food polluted by idols** – The Jews interpreted the command in Leviticus 17:8-9 as also prohibiting the eating of any meat that had been offered in a prohibited manner. Jesus endorsed that interpretation in Revelation 2:14, 20.
- **from sexual immorality** – from Leviticus 18:6-26.
- **from the meat of strangled animals** – The Jews interpreted Leviticus 17:13-15 as prohibiting the eating of strangled animals.
- **and from blood** – from Leviticus 17:10, 12.

Although the issues at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 deserve more extensive study, let's look briefly at a few points.

It is apparent that the elders did not intend to exempt the Gentiles from all the rest of the Law of Moses. If that