

The Apostle Paul Commandment Keeper or Commandment Breaker?

A recent two-part British TV programme illustrating Paul's journeys put forward the supposition that he taught contrary to God's law. What does the New Testament reveal?

Among the last words the apostle Peter wrote just before his martyrdom were: 'Consider that the longsuffering of our Lord [Jesus Christ] is salvation – as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given unto him, has written to you' (2 Peter 3:15). The subject Peter addresses here is our very salvation, our entrance into the Kingdom of God.

Peter continues with these thoughts: *'As also in his [Paul's] epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the other Scriptures'* (verse 16, emphasis added throughout).

We are warned here in the New Testament that some things Paul has written can be difficult to grasp. We should, therefore, avoid leaping to conclusions and misunderstanding their meaning. Elsewhere the apostle Paul himself wrote that 'to be carnally [naturally] minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind [or natural mind] is

enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither can be' (Romans 8:6-7). Verse 8 concludes that the unconverted cannot really please God. We need the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit to be a Christian – to be truly converted (verse 9; compare Acts 3:19).

So even without even fully realising it, our natural minds – our human nature, automatically searches for excuses not to obey God's law. Continuing with Peter's stark warning about misunderstanding Paul, 'You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked' (2 Peter 3:17). The wicked naturally break the laws of God.

If we misunderstand parts of the Bible (and not only Paul's writings), thereby neglecting our salvation (Hebrews 2:3), our eternal lives could be endangered. The stakes are very high here!

Paul prized obedience

Although 1 and 2 Thessalonians

and Galatians were composed before Romans, the latter was placed first in the New Testament order of Paul's epistles. Most of his letters to Churches were written to address particular difficulties that had emerged in various congregations. Romans remains the outstanding exception. It encompasses the basic theology that had been initially revealed to Paul by the living Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11-12).

From early on in the book of Romans, the apostle Paul provides us with a positive approach to obeying God's law. He sets the tone of the book by clearly stating: God *'will grant eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good [lives marked by obedience] seek for glory, honour and immortality. But to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, to every soul of man who does evil . . . but glory, honour and peace to everyone who works what is good . . .'* (Romans 2:7-10).

How is this truth biblically defined?

Recall Psalm 119:142: ‘Your law is truth.’ And consider Psalm 119:172: ‘All your commandments are righteousness.’

Later on in Romans Paul repeats his basic attitude and approach to God’s law. ‘What shall we say then? Is the law sin? *Certainly not!* On the contrary, I would have not known sin except through the law, for I would have not known covetousness unless the law had said, “You shall not covet” . . . *Therefore the law is holy and the commandment holy, just and good*’ (Romans 7:7, 12).

Dealing with difficult passages: a proper approach

A great principle in understanding the Bible is to comprehend difficult and unclear scriptures in the light of the plain passages on the same subject. People who wish to find an excuse to disobey God’s law sometimes do the opposite. They understand the plain scriptures in the light of difficult-to-grasp, enigmatic biblical passages.

Paul’s three Pastoral Epistles, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, instruct the ministry on how to conduct Church affairs and how to approach the Bible. In 2 Timothy he sets out his basic view of the Hebrew Scriptures or the Old Testament. (The New Testament had not *yet* been completely written, nor were the books set in final order.)

Paul told the young evangelist Timothy: ‘From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in *righteousness* [recall Psalm 119:172] that the man [or woman] of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work’ (2 Timothy 3:15-17). Does this New Testament passage

really convey the popular thought that Paul wanted to do away with the Old Testament? Certainly not!

Earlier in this pastoral epistle, Paul had urged Timothy: ‘Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, as a worker who does not need to be ashamed, *rightly dividing the word of truth*’ (2 Timothy 2:15). Some of the difficulties sceptics have with Paul’s letters involve striving about words. Instead we are to ‘rightly divide the word of truth.’ Other translations use more modern English such as ‘correctly handling.’

The King James version says: ‘Study to show yourself approved unto God’ (2 Timothy 2:15). This early



The Ten Commandments

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translation constitutes a commentary on a basic biblical principle. It militates against hastily drawing conclusions about the meaning of difficult passages without patient and proper study and without considering the other plain scriptures on the same subject.

Check the context

Reading the context, before and after, becomes essential in evaluating puzzling biblical passages. For instance, Romans 5:20 states: ‘The law entered that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.’ Does this verse then mean that it would be perfectly

okay to continue sinning because God’s grace will automatically cover our transgressions of God’s holy law? Continue reading the context into the next chapter. ‘What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? *Certainly not!* How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? (Romans 6:1-2). Further: ‘Do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey it in its lusts’ (verse 12).

Then in verse 14 Paul introduces another concept that could easily be misunderstood if we only read or quoted this one passage. ‘For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law, but under grace.’ But Paul again explains what he does not mean in verse 15. ‘What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law, but under grace? *Certainly not.*’

Yet as Peter had warned, some in Paul’s day had already drawn erroneous conclusions about his writings. ‘And why not say, let us do evil that good may come – as we slanderously reported and some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just’ (Romans 3:8). The apostle Paul minces no words in condemning such uncalled-for slander.

Sometimes Paul addresses a subject in

one epistle and then adds a different dimension to it in a later letter. An example can be found in his early book of Galatians. ‘For in Jesus Christ, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation’ (Galatians 6:15). But at a later time when composing 1 Corinthians he wrote: ‘Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, *but keeping the commandments of God is what matters*’ (1 Corinthians 7:19). We should understand that the problems that confronted the congregations in Galatia were different in character from the ones that the brethren in Corinth

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A Pilgrimage Beyond Jerusalem

A spiritual journey is required for you to fulfil your purpose as a human being created in God's image. Your salvation depends on your taking a pilgrimage beyond Jerusalem.

In London's Westminster Abbey there is a private area which is off-limits to the public. Called the Jerusalem Chamber, its name is derived from tapestries depicting scenes from the life of the Hebrew patriarch Abraham. This medieval chamber had just been finished in 1413 when King Henry IV was about to embark on an expedition to Jerusalem.

As he entered the Abbey, Henry fell gravely ill. His aides rushed him into the nearby Jerusalem Chamber. When he regained consciousness the king was told that he was in a chamber called Jerusalem. His face lit up and he said: 'Laud be to the Father of Heaven! For now I know that I shall die in this chamber, according to the prophecy made of me beforesaid, that I should die in Jerusalem' (*The Official Westminster Abbey Guide*, by Dean and Chapter of Westminster, article 'The Jerusalem Chamber'). Shortly thereafter Henry IV expired.

The king's crime

There was a pressing reason why the king was determined to visit the Holy City. He believed it would atone for a wicked deed that had plagued his conscience throughout his reign.

This was the killing of an anointed king of England, Richard II. Killing 'the Lord's anointed' was considered a most heinous crime.

But that wasn't what was called for. Such an endeavour wouldn't actually have wiped away his sins.

In order to atone for sins, a spiritual 'pilgrimage' is needed. That spiritual

journey requires a change of heart, a transformation of the mind.

But the Bible makes it clear that there is only one atonement for sins, and that is Christ's sacrifice. Peter was inspired to write: 'Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name given among men by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:12). If we want to receive everlasting life, Jesus Christ must be the focal point.

No individuals – be they kings or commoners – can have their sins forgiven without genuine, heart-felt repentance, a recognition that Jesus Christ atoned for their sins, and a commitment to base their lives on God's Word.

The proper focus

The Bible makes it clear that 'all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23). In verse 10 the apostle Paul stated, 'There is none righteous, no, not one.' Jesus Himself states: 'I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance' (Matthew 9:13). The apostle Paul stresses this point: 'But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Romans 5:8).

Each of us has to humbly acknowledge personal responsibility in the death of God's very own Son. Putting the blame on the Romans who carried out the crucifixion, or the Jewish leaders of the day who incited the people to condemn Him, deflects from the stark reality that each of us is also implicated in Christ's death. The fact is that Christ atoned for the sins of every human being who

comes to genuine repentance and accepts Jesus Christ as personal Saviour.

Acknowledging one's personal involvement marks the beginning of that spiritual pilgrimage.

The biblical definition of 'knowing Jesus'

How well do you really know Jesus Christ? How well are you acquainted with Him – with what He actually taught? In searching for the true Jesus, God's Word shows us that 'knowing Jesus' is more than just verbally acknowledging Him. Genuine acquaintance must be based on true knowledge of what He expects from all those on this spiritual journey. Jesus warned His listeners, 'Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven' (Matthew 7:21; compare Luke 6:46). So there is far more to it than just believing.

Shortly before Christ began his three and a half year ministry, John the Baptist preached repentance and focused people's attention on Jesus of Nazareth. 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29). John told his listeners not only to repent of past sins but to transform their lives as well: '*Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance*' (Matthew 3:8, emphasis added throughout). Repentance means an about face, a turning around. It's the first step in the spiritual pilgrimage when a person accepts that his or her sins have caused Jesus Christ to die.

The Bible defines sin as ‘the transgression of the law’ (1 John 3:4, KJV).

Followers of Jesus Christ are called saints in the Bible and are described as ‘those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus’ (Revelation 14:12). Remember that Abraham ‘obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws’ (Genesis 26:5). This biblical patriarch was a man of faith who kept God’s laws. Both were required in Old Testament times and both are required in New Testament times.

The Messiah identified

The prophet Isaiah addressed the words of the Almighty to every human being, ‘*Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow*’ (Isaiah 1:18). On account of God’s abundant mercy toward His creation, all sins will be forgiven if they are repented of. No matter how sinful a person has been, Christ’s atoning sacrifice can wash all sins away. A journey to the Holy City will not suffice. What is required is a pilgrimage of the heart and mind.

But there is a very important condition to this promise: ‘*If you are willing and obedient . . .*’ (Isaiah 1:19). It is living by God’s laws given at Mount Sinai and embracing Christ’s spiritual application of the Ten Commandments in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5, 6 and 7; compare Isaiah 42:21).

Christ’s central teaching opens the door to the gift of life beyond the grave. If we live by God’s moral standards and yet on occasion fall short of those

Recommended Reading

We have two free booklets that discuss repentance and water baptism from a biblical perspective. They are *The Road to Eternal Life* and *Transforming Your Life*. These publications will show you how to undertake the necessary spiritual journey in your quest for attaining everlasting life.

standards, Christ’s atoning sacrifice will cover our shortcomings, as we remain in a repentant frame of mind (see 1 John 1:7-9). The prophet Isaiah recorded God’s very own promise to help those who are ‘of a contrite spirit and . . . tremble at My word’ (Isaiah 66:2).

Each of us has to come to the place where we ask ourselves, ‘Am I willing to humble myself and allow Jesus Christ’s sacrifice to atone for my sins?’ He offered: ‘Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest’ (Matthew 11:28). This is God’s invitation through His Son to those who do humble themselves before their Creator and willingly accept His calling.

What biblical steps are required?

The apostle Peter told a group of worshippers who had come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost that they needed to accept Jesus of

‘Am I willing to humble myself and allow Christ’s sacrifice to atone for my sins?’

Nazareth as Messiah and as their personal Saviour, ‘*Repent, and let everyone of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*’ (Acts 2:38). Genuine repentance for our own personal part in Christ’s death should be followed by water baptism where the person is fully immersed, symbolic of the ‘old self’ dying (Romans 6:6) – being replaced by ‘the new man’ – and experiencing a new, transformed life (Ephesians 4:23-24).

This spiritual transformation requires God’s Holy Spirit to permeate the mind of the repentant individual, enabling the ‘new person’ to see things from a spiritual perspective. Yet we are warned in Acts 5:32 that the Holy Spirit is given only to those who begin to obey God. Once a person is willing to live by His standards, the receiving

of His Spirit will allow that person to bear the fruits of love, joy, peace and others listed in Galatians 5:22-23.

Lurking spiritual dangers

There are, however, very real dangers that can hinder and even prevent this spiritual transformation. Jesus Christ gave a parable to illustrate the pitfalls, the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3-9). In verses 18-23 Jesus explains the prevalent dangers, including those who are confused when first hearing the truth and then don’t know where to turn to next. Others are excited when they are first made aware of the truth, but don’t continue studying God’s Word to establish their progress.

Still others let wrong worldly pursuits get in the way. Some allow persecution to stand in the way of fulfilling their calling and they give up. But in verse 23 Christ told His disciples: ‘He

who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears much fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.’ Elsewhere God’s

Word tells us to ‘Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’ (2 Peter 3:18).

Studying God’s Word helps us to produce the spiritual fruits that a true Christian must manifest in his or her life (2 Timothy 2:15; 3:15-17). Bearing spiritual fruit requires God’s Spirit, which is freely available to those who answer God’s call to truly acknowledge their sinful nature and accept Jesus Christ as personal Saviour.

Travelling to a geographical area of the world to have your sins atoned for is unnecessary. The only pilgrimage that does absolve a repentant person of his or her sins is a pilgrimage of the heart and mind. It’s a spiritual journey that has the correct destination – Jesus Christ, the very Son of God who atoned for the sins of all mankind. And that includes you.

Gerhard Marx

Why Did God Allow the School Shootings?

Christians struggle with the question of why God allows horrible tragedies such as the recent murderous killings in Newtown, Connecticut. How does the Bible address this dilemma?

How do we as Christians process senseless tragedies? How do we square them with a loving God? Why would He allow the tragic murder of 20 school children? Why didn't He prevent it?

Can we really blame God for all of the many problems in this troubled world? Is another spirit being directly responsible?

Who is really responsible?

The Bible says that Satan is 'the god of this age' (2 Corinthians 4:3-4), who has been a liar and murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). He is the ultimate one to blame (Ephesians 6:12).

Humans are often unwitting victims of Satan's hatred of God's plan. On occasion the devil takes out his anger and frustration on mankind in the form of senseless killings. He takes advantage of human beings with severely troubled minds, using them to carry out evil schemes through his baleful influence.

But why doesn't God stop Satan? Why has He allowed Satan to be present all this time, causing so much pain, suffering and grief?

To even begin to address these questions, we should understand God's long-term plan. His awesome plan and purpose extends beyond this physical life into eternity. Our Creator had everlasting life in mind for mankind even before time began (Titus 1:2).

Free moral agents

He created mankind in the image of God, but as free moral agents who have to make choices in life. He wants us to

choose to obey Him from the heart (Deuteronomy 5:29; 30:19-20). God wants us to enthusiastically love and cherish His values and standards, which are based on two overriding commandments – loving Him with all our hearts and loving others as much as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:35-40).

Ever since our first parents Adam and Eve we have continually made wrong choices. We've sought to live our own way instead of God's way. So our Creator has progressively backed off and allowed mankind to suffer the consequences of turning their backs on Him. Still from time to time He has intervened

We can know that those little children will live again and grow up in a better world.

in our affairs to keep His plan and purpose on track. God's greatest intervention was to send His Son to this earth to die for our sins (John 3:16-17).

Yet we insist on learning spiritual lessons the hard way. Often the inevitable effects and hard knocks have to be bad enough for these lessons to really sink in. Otherwise, some could say, 'It isn't really that bad.'

That doesn't mean that victims of violence are evil people that God has singled out for special punishment. Jesus Christ made this point: 'Jesus was informed that Pilate had murdered some people from Galilee as they were offering sacrifices at the Temple. "Do you think those Galileans were worse sinners than

all the other people from Galilee?" Jesus asked. "Is that why they suffered? Not at all! And you will perish, too, unless you repent of your sins and turn to God"' (Luke 13:1-5, New Living Translation).

Since the beginning of history many innocent victims – including Christians – have died as martyrs. Their shed blood documents the evils of this world under Satan's influence (Genesis 4:10; Matthew 23:34-35; Revelation 12:9).

In the famous Olivet prophecy, Jesus said that world conditions would eventually become so bad that no one would be left alive 'unless those days were shortened,' but He promised that 'for the elect's sake those days will be shortened' (Matthew 24:22).

That's the bad news. The good news is that God plans to bring all of mankind back to life in a world free of the suffering, wars and violence that are rampant in today's world. Those little children that were savagely murdered will live again and have the opportunity to be reunited with their parents and then live a full life in peace and safety in a utopian world where war and crime no longer exist.

Condensed from an Internet article by Larry Walker, Elder, United Church of God

Recommended Reading

To better understand the intriguing implications of the basic points raised in this article, ask for or download our free booklets *Why Does God Allow Suffering?*, *Is There Really a Devil?* and *What Happens After Death?*

Commandment Keeper?

(Continued from page 2)

had to face. Those two letters emphasise somewhat different concepts.

Another apostle helps

Paul was the most prolific of the New Testament letter writers, although Peter and John also made important contributions to God's word. In fact the order of the New Testament sandwiches the epistles of Paul in-between the four gospels and the seven general epistles which follow, all of which emphasise obedience to God's law.

John lived to a very old age and wrote the final books that completed the New Testament canon. John does help clarify what Paul really meant in his numerous passages on the law, sin, grace and salvation. One part of the Bible often sheds light on another part. We are to understand the Bible as a whole entity, 'rightly dividing the word of truth' (2 Timothy 2:15). We should never neglect this basic biblical principle!

Here is John's contribution: 'These things I write to you, so that you may not sin [that you sin not, KJV], and if anyone sins, we have an Advocate [High Priest] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the whole world' (1 John 2:1-2).

Christ's sacrificial death is so effective and all-encompassing that it covers all of our sins once we have really repented of breaking God's law, having been fully forgiven. But that does not mean that we are then delivered to wilfully continue sinning.

The context makes this clear in the verses which follow. 'Now by this we know that we know Him [God], *if we keep His commandments*. He who says, "I know Him and does not keep His commandments is a liar and the truth is not in Him' (verses 3-4). After

true conversion (repentance, water baptism and the receiving of God's Spirit – Acts 2:37-39), our whole way of life and practice has to be one of obedience to God's law.

But that does not mean we suddenly become perfect, all at once. No, the apostle Peter concludes his second epistle by writing, 'Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' (2 Peter 3:18). Inevitably after real conversion, we will be caught off guard, most likely by foolishly neglecting prayer and Bible study, and fall into some sin again.

Earlier in his first letter John reveals the proper perspective. 'If we say that we have fellowship with Him [God] and walk in darkness [sin], we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us [we Christians] from all sin. If we say we have no sin [ie, that we are now perfect], 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' (1 John 1:6-9). God graciously administers His grace because of what His Son did for us.

Don't underestimate the power of sin

Our Saviour Jesus Christ remains the only human being who never sinned, not even once (1 Peter 2:21-23). But without exception we have all succumbed to sin. Hebrews 12:2 speaks of 'the sin which so easily ensnares us' (verse 1). The King James Version translates this phrase, 'so easily besets us.' Either rendering is correct. Sin remains a formidable and implacable enemy which must be overcome (Revelation 2:26; 3:21).

It may even take a lifetime to fully

overcome and conquer some stubbornly addictive sin that we may have acquired in very early youth, sometimes as a direct result of the abuse of others. A prominent Christian once said that he had struggled with one particular problem for 60 years. But you may not have that long. Don't put off overcoming! God, Jesus Christ and your fellow Christians are there to help you. Don't procrastinate! Seek help. Deal with your particular spiritual nemesis. We've all got at least one. Your salvation may be nearer than you first believed.

The living Christ knows how to help you because He was also sorely tempted to sin (see Hebrews 4:14-16). He is our ever-serving High Priest. (To understand further, see pages 52 and 53 of our free booklet *Who Is God?*)

Difficult scriptures yet to be addressed

Sceptics and critics come up with many arguments concerning keeping God's law (many in Paul's epistles), wresting and twisting certain passages in order to justify their disobedience. Lack of space prevents us from addressing all of them in just one article.

But we have published a comprehensive booklet to help you deal with these difficult scriptures.

The title is: *The New Covenant: Does It Abolish God's Law?* You can request a free copy in print or download it from the Internet – www.GNmagazine.org/booklets. Aside from patiently reading through its pages, you need access to this publication as a reference work whenever the need may arise. This particular booklet is well-indexed and contains many sidebars that address specific passages of scripture. Why not request your copy today?

John Ross Schroeder



Q Some suggest that the apostle Paul claimed that the weekly Sabbath and biblical Holy Days had been abolished. However if Christmas and Easter weren't introduced until several centuries after his death, what Holy Days did Paul observe?

S H, Cheshire

A Before his conversion, Paul had been a strict Pharisee (Acts 22:3), severely persecuting Christians. Following the dramatic events on the road to Damascus, Paul became a true Christian. Contrary to what many have believed, he kept the biblical Holy Days.

Some of Paul's contemporaries accused him of teaching Jews to 'forsake Moses' (Acts 21:20-21). Paul repeatedly refuted this contention (Acts 24:14; 28:17). Perhaps his commitment toward the Holy Days could best be summed up by Acts 18:21: 'I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem.' In addition, Acts 20:16 mentions Paul's determination to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost. He had intended to be there for Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, but circumstances required him to observe them locally (verses 1-6). That made him even more determined to be in Jerusalem for the next Holy Day. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* admits: 'Having been unable to get to Jerusalem for Passover, Paul remained at Philippi to celebrate it and the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread' (Vol. 9, p. 507).

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to the predominately Gentile Church at Corinth during the Days of Unleavened Bread. Most scholars agree upon this fact because of the internal evidence, especially chapter 5, where Paul uses the analogy of leaven to make impor-

tant spiritual points about sin.

Analogies and metaphors are effective only if the audience is familiar with the illustration. Paul's mention of leaven without explanation clearly implies the congregation understood the process of putting out leavening during the Days of Unleavened Bread, an annual biblical festival.

In their classic work, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, Conybeare and Howson conclude: 'There seems no difficulty in supposing that the Gentile Christians joined with the Jewish Christians in celebrating the Paschal feast after the Jewish manner, at least to the extent of abstaining from leaven at the love feasts. And we see that Paul still observed the 'days of unleavened bread' at this period of his life' (p. 390, emphasis added).

Paul also gives a command regarding the correct manner of observing the Feast: 'Let us keep the Feast [of Unleavened Bread], not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth' (1 Corinthians 5:8). The construction of the Greek verb translated 'let us keep the feast' is used "to urge someone to unite with the speaker in a course of action upon which he has already decided" (Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p. 464).

Some go to great lengths to attempt to sidestep this clear command to 'keep the feast' by alleging that the expression is in some way figurative, since Paul uses other figurative language in this section of Scripture. But the reason he gives to 'keep the Feast' is because

'Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us.' Christ's sacrifice was a literal event; so is keeping the festival that relates to His sacrifice. And a cardinal rule of interpreting the Bible is to prefer "the simple, obvious meaning" (Edward W. Goodrick, *Do It Yourself Hebrew and Greek*, p. 12:1).

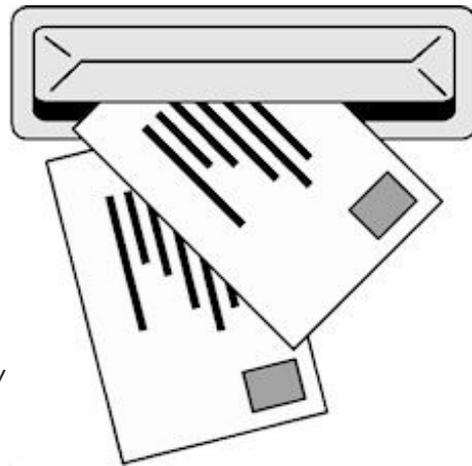
What about the other festivals listed in Leviticus 23? Did Paul observe only those mentioned in the New Testament? A similar line of reasoning asserts that only the commandments repeated in the New Testament are still valid. This careless assumption is based on an 'argument from silence.' Do widely known and practiced truths need to be repeated? David Stern asserts, 'The New Testament does not repeat truths already evident from the Tanakh [Old Testament]; it assumes them. Sha'ul [Paul] assumed them, too' (*Jewish New Testament Commentary*, p. 303). In Colossians 2:16-17 Paul upholds the Holy Days as 'a shadow of things to come.' In Galatians 4:10 he condemns pagan, astrological superstitions, which are also condemned in the Torah (Deuteronomy 18:10-14).

The evidence of the scriptural record leaves two basic questions for those who consider the Holy Days obsolete: 1) Why would Paul teach against observing the Holy Days when he was himself a devoted Holy Day keeper? 2) Where does the Bible record such teaching?

The replacement of biblical injunctions with customs from other religions is seldom questioned today. Long ago, God inspired Moses to command the nation of Israel not to adopt the religious customs of other nations to worship God (Deuteronomy 12:29-32). Jesus warned that it is possible to worship God in vain by following humanly devised traditions (Matthew 15:9). It is clear that Paul and the apostolic Church observed the Holy Days of the Bible.

For more information please request our free booklets, *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind* and *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?*

Letters from our readers



Lamenting the state of the nation

The teachings we have received over the years and the *Bible Study Course* have encouraged me once again to 'seek the Lord while He may be found.' In this day and age we see the 'god of this age' at work in the hearts and minds of men and women with their selfish acts and wanton exhibitions of greed. Our leaders would rather pander to the machinations of the secular without regard for God and His laws. No wonder as a nation we languish. I thank God for the hope renewed through true teaching, even when it hurts. We all need to be encouraged never to give up hope.

C B, Norwich

I look at things around me like how taxes are spent, how organisations 'help,' and how diseases seem to have no cure, and many more. Some kind of force seems to control everything around us. It takes the grace of God for humans to believe in Him. We hardly ever see any reminders of God in our daily activities. But what we do see are fashions, politics, bank adverts, mobile phone adverts — all taking our attention away from the things of God. I pray for every true man and woman of God to reach out in Jesus' name.

M E, Dartford

We appreciate all you do to assist getting God's Word to many of us. We need to draw closer and closer to Him. The enemy is moving around seeking to deceive God's children. Our Lord

Jesus, is the only constant in our lives. We dwell on His word and have been humbled by His faithfulness.

J & D H, Marlow

Please continue to send *The Good News* magazine, and keep up the good work. The night is closing in fast.

Mr & Mrs R A, Northern Ireland

In need of God's commandments

I welcome the truth of the Bible, after being told in church that we don't need the commandments. Some of us are finding compromise and a soft gospel. Although I believe in God-given grace, I cannot accept not acknowledging the consequences of sin. I cannot ignore what He clearly warns us about if we continue in sin. I do not want to leave my church, but I don't want to stay where there is false teaching. Should I leave and find another fellowship where the truth is accepted in its totality? We are truly troubled.

M W, Wigton

• *We have posted The Church Jesus Built, other related literature, and the contact information of our nearest elder to help you make a wise decision.*

I would like to ask you a question as the church I now attend believes in the doctrine of 'once saved, always saved.' I do not believe that they are right.

S L, Wirral

• *The apostle Paul wrote: 'I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified' (1 Corinthians 9:27). Other passages clearly mandate endurance, overcoming and growth to the very end of our Christian lives (Matthew 24:12-13; Hebrews 2:1-3; 2 Peter 3:17-18). But as long as we remain faithful to God, 'He will never leave us or forsake us,' through thick and thin (Romans 8:31-39).*

Bible Study Course

Thanks be to God for giving us His word called the Holy Bible. Thanks be to God for helping the United Church of God to reach out to the lost souls of this generation. I am also happy to discover that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, identifies with our plight and the sorrows and sufferings of mankind. He is always there to see us through.

I A, County Cavan, Ireland

I'll put it this way. I have loved my Bible and the Messiah, the Lord God of Israel since the age of 7. I'm a sinner, yes, but I have always wanted to be part of God's Family.

J M, Dundee, Scotland

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