

Why Keep The Commandments?

The Christian world is sadly unaware that it is held in the grasp of the 'god of this world' and totally deceived, 2 Corinthians 4:4, *'In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.'* Revelation 12:9, *'And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth **the whole world**: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.'*

It is by no accident that you have visited this site, because God reaches out to those who are being called out of the world, recognising their need of the Lord, Romans 2:4, *'Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?'* ESV.

The result of Satan's deception is spiritual darkness and it is far from easy to come out of darkness into light, John 3:19, *'And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.'* This is because our human nature naturally fights against exterior authority, as we all desire our own will. Consequently, you could be just at the beginning of a battle, and Jesus explains that few actually escape from Satan's dominion at this time, Luke 12:32, *'Fear not, **little flock**, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom,'* Matthew 7:14, *'Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.'*

At this point as I wrote, I was interrupted by a knock at the door from two 'Jehovah's Witnesses'. I had seen them before and they had come back with two verses which to them meant that we are no longer under any obligation to keep God's Commandments and Laws. Those verses are – Romans 7:5-7.

Now, even the Apostle Peter had difficulty understanding some of Paul's writing, 2 Peter 3:16, *'as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures,'* ESV., so it is hardly surprising that many have misunderstood Paul's intent and been led astray.

The first principle of Bible Study is to *begin with those clear and specific verses* which cannot be misunderstood, and then use that knowledge to help us comprehend the more difficult passages. I was able to give them a copy of a part of the letter I was writing, quite coincidentally, about just that subject. It contained these scriptures, and though they went away promising to read, just as I promised I would answer their question about Romans 7:5-6, I wondered if that was the last time I would see them, I hope not!

THOSE CLEAR AND SPECIFIC VERSES

Matthew 7:21-23, *'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that **doeth the will** of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work **iniquity**.* (Greek : anomia 'violation of the law' or 'lawlessness')

Matthew 5:17-18, *'Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to **fulfil**. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.'* ('fulfil'- Greek - pleroo 'to make replete' or 'fill to the full' - to expound *the full spiritual intent* of the law as in the Sermon on the Mount.)

Matthew 16:27, *'For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall **reward** every man according to his **works**.'* (Greek - ergon, toil; by impl. an act)

1 John 1:8, *'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.'*

1 John 3:4, *'Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for **sin is the transgression of the law**.'*

Romans 6:23, *'For the wages of sin is death.'*

Acts 2:38, *'Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the **remission of sins**, and [then] ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'*

Acts 8:17, *'Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit'.*

Acts 5:32, *'And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Spirit whom God hath given **to them that obey him**.'*

Romans 2:13, *'For not the **hearers** of the law are just before God, but the **doers of the law** shall be justified.'*

Romans 6:1-2 *'What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?'*

1 John 5:2-3, *'By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and **keep his commandments**. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.'*

1 John 2:3-4, *'And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. **He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him**.'*

Romans 8: 7, *'Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.'*

1 John 3:22, *' And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.'*

James 2:14, 17, *'What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?'17 'So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.'*

James 2:19-20, 24, *'Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that **faith without works is dead**?24, 'Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.'*

Revelation 22:14, *'Blessed are they that **do his commandments**, [Greek - 'Wash their robes, i.e. repent of their sin, their failure to keep God's Law] **that they may have right to the tree of life, and***

may enter in through the gates into the city.'

1 Peter 2 :21, *'For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an **example**, that ye should follow his steps.'*

2 Timothy 4:3-4, *'For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.'*

Jude 3, *'Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the **faith which was once delivered unto the saints.**'*

THE ANSWER TO ROMANS 7

In preparing to answer *their* question about Romans 7:5-7, I wrote the following:

It is wise to first understand the context of any individual verses. In this case the context is set by the previous chapter, Romans 6, by the new man or woman who emerges from baptism. How should we live? What part is God's Law to play? And the importance of Christ's sacrifice in our salvation.

Romans 7:5-7, *'For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by **the law**, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that **we should serve in newness of spirit**, and not in the oldness of the letter.*

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.'

Verse one of chapter seven also helps establish the context, *'Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that **the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?**'* This refers back to chapter six verse one, and its following verses, eg. verse 4, *'Therefore we are buried with him in baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so **we also should walk in newness of life.**'*

Those verses tell us that Christ died to deliver us from sin and that by His death we are freed from its penalty, death. We are told in 1 John 3:4, *'Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.'* We are told in Romans 6:23, *'For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.'* Jesus Christ, by His sacrificial death paid the penalty of death for all mankind!

Thus in verse 4 of chapter 7, we have become dead to that penalty and raised out of baptism to walk in newness of life, which is the fruit mentioned in that verse, *'Wherefore, my brethren, you also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that you should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that **we should bring forth fruit unto God.**'*

Romans 7:5 tells us that when we were in the flesh, before baptism, we were heading for death, which was the fruit of our sin, *'For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.'*

Romans 7:6 tells us that we are now delivered from the law of death for our sins – the penalty of our breaking God’s commandments, in order that we should serve in ‘newness of spirit’ - the full spiritual intent of the law and not just its letter.

‘But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.’

So, Romans 7:7, What does this mean? Is the law evil? God forbid, for it reveals sin to us - *‘What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.’* Without the law we would have no guide, no path to follow, in our walk with God. We need the law!

Romans 7:12. So, the law is holy, just and good, *‘Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.’*

In conclusion, in answering their question, the clear implication from Romans chapters 6 and 7 is found in Romans 6:12, *‘Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.’* In order to avoid sin we must avoid breaking God’s Commandments, even in their deeper spiritual intent, as Jesus Christ taught, for Romans 6:1, *‘What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? Verse 2, ‘God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?’* i.e. we must endeavor to keep the commandments Jesus Christ amplified – keep the spiritual intent of the law, not just its letter. As our Saviour himself said, Matthew 19:17, *‘if you wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.’*

Romans 7 also reveals that, no matter who we are, the Apostle Paul included, we all stumble from the path in our walk with God, and sin, despite our best efforts, but thanks to Jesus Christ, He is able to return us to that path, and to our walk with Him, verse 15 and 24-25, *‘For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I....O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.’*

OVERCOMING PRESENT MISUNDERSTANDING

To understand this subject there are other points we need to understand. While we have seen that without Christ’s sacrifice we would still be under the penalty of the law, which is death, it has to be understood that Paul’s writing seems almost designed to be difficult to understand for the less than diligent Bible student.

There exists God’s eternal law which changes not and was taught to Adam and Eve from Genesis 2:16-17 onwards. *‘And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.’* They of course rebelled against God’s commandment, Genesis 3:22 – 23, *‘And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.’*

Though some of Adam’s descendants kept God’s laws, almost all men soon followed the example of our first parents – Genesis 5:22, *‘And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters,’* but Genesis 6:5 and 12, *‘And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart*

was only evil continually....And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.'

After righteous Noah, we are told that Abraham also kept God's eternal laws, Genesis 26:5, *'Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.'*

During Israel's later captivity in Egypt, the Israelites, Abraham's descendants, were not free to keep those laws, and God reintroduced them at Sinai as the Old Covenant to which Israel agreed, Exodus 24:7-8, *'and he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words.'* Here, the Old Covenant was complete, but even before it was agreed, even before Exodus 20, God's law had existed and was known, e.g. Exodus 16:28, and 18:16: *'When they have a matter, they come to me; and I [Moses] judge between one and another, and I do make them know the statutes of God, and His laws.'*

What was the purpose of this law? Galatians 3:19, *'Why, then, was the law given? It was given alongside the promise [To Abraham] to show people their sins.....'* New Living Translation. The first part of this verse is clearer than the King James Version which is, *'Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, til the seed should come to whom the promise was made'* (The word 'added' in the King James Version is the Greek word 'preostithemi' Strong's 3469 – to place additionally, i.e. 'lay beside') So, more accurate still would be, *'It was placed alongside [The promise to Abraham, v16] for the purpose of [Defining] transgressions until the seed should come of whom the promise had been made.'*

Galatians continues, verse 21, *'Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.'* i.e. the law is not *contrary* to those promises to Abraham. It is *subservient* to the promises made to Abraham, which were of faith.

Verse 22, *'But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.'* The law cannot gain us righteousness for we all sin, but we can gain righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ's sacrifice as our Saviour.

So, verse 24, *'Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.'* So, the law was our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we too might be justified by faith.

That faith in the ability of Christ's blood to forgive our sins upon our repentance and baptism is under discussion in Colossians 2:13, together with the ordinances and religious decrees of the Gentile Colossians, verse 14, and verses 21-22, *'(Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?'* Thus we can safely conclude that verse 14, which is often used to do away with the eternal law, is referring to the list of our sins against God, the debt paid for us by the sacrifice of Christ, a fact made clear by modern translations. First, Colossians 2:14 in the King James: *'Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross,'* but in for example, the ESV., we find, *'by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross,'* or NIV, *'having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.'* Once again we can see how easy it is with Paul's writing to be led into

misunderstanding.

We should also understand that the sacrificial Levitical laws were **not** part of the Old Covenant made at Sinai, Jeremiah 7:22-24, '*For I spake **not** unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that **I have commanded you**, that it may be well unto you. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward.*' As a result the sacrificial laws were introduced to reveal man's need of a *real* Saviour who through faith can deliver the grace which saves. The rituals and sacrifices were thus a Saviour substitute picturing Christ until His coming.

Now that we have our Saviour, those laws, separate from God's eternal law, are quite defunct. Also defunct are the many *man made* ordinances, rituals and traditions of the Jews which often fell under Christ's condemnation, and with these Paul also included the pagan philosophies and religious laws of the Gentiles which he encountered.

Though they are defunct, people still confuse them with God's eternal law. For example, in Ephesians 2:15, as the context reveals, the commandments referred to are the laws contained in the ordinances of the Jews which this verse refers to, separating the Gentiles from the Jews. '*Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments **contained in ordinances**; for to make in himself **of twain** one new man, so making peace;*' These decrees and traditions of men are brushed aside now by the blood of Christ, verse 13, '*But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off [Gentiles] are made nigh by the blood of Christ,*' and verse 16, '*And that he might **reconcile both** [Jews and Gentiles] unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.*'

Paul referred to all these *man made* laws as 'works of law' but they are distinct from the one and only correct translation of '**the** works of **the** law' which we see in Romans 2:14-15, '*For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew **the work of the law** written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)*

There, it is quite clear that Paul is referring to God's Commandments, which under the New Covenant in God's Kingdom will be written upon the hearts of God's people, Israel. Jeremiah 31:32-33, '*Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, **I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.***' (Read the whole chapter for the context, remembering that the Gentiles, now grafted into the stock of spiritual privilege, can also, secondarily, be counted as *Spiritual* Israel. See Romans 9:6-8).

Apart from that one correct translation of 'the works of the law' in Romans 2:14-15, with its reference to God's Commands, elsewhere the translators have *incorrectly* inserted the two definite articles 'the', because they mistakenly confused Paul's 'works of law' with 'the works of the law' - God's Laws (eg. Romans 9:31-32,, Galatians 2:14-16, Galatians 3:2,5,10)

The works of **the** law are the laws which Abraham kept and which were confirmed again to Jacob (Israel) at Sinai, forming the Old Covenant, to which the people agreed in Exodus 24:7, '*And he*

took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient.'

It should also be understood that where Paul uses *'the law'* it mostly does refer to God's Commandments and also rarely to the Covenant made with Israel, except in the book of Hebrews where he uses it to refer to the temple sacrifices.

Finally, we should look at Romans 3:21, *'But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;'* Many have read **'without the law'** as 'in the absence of the law', but 'without the law' is an incorrect translation of the Greek word 'choris' which actually means **'apart from the law'** (Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words) or 'separately' (Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, 'Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament'). Once again many have by this false translation been led astray.

Sadly, we can see why so much misunderstanding has afflicted Christianity, which is why it is vitally important for faithful Christians to believe those clear and specific words of our Saviour Jesus Christ, rather than to rely upon mistranslations and Paul's difficult writing. How can New Covenant Christians, in all conscience, ignore the following? Hebrews 10:16, *'This is the [New] covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them.'* Looking always to Christ's words and Christ's example as we should (1 Peter 2:21) means that those who then reject Christ's words will be without excuse in the Judgement, John 12:48, *'He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day,'* said Jesus Christ.

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