

Truth On Fire

The Christian & Mosaic Law

– A Gospel Primer for the Believer –

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Table of Contents

Introduction..... 3

The Believer and Mosaic Law..... 5

The Pauline View of Torah Compliance..... 10

The Biblical Covenants..... 15

 Adamic Covenant..... 15

 Noahic Covenant..... 15

 Abrahamic Covenant..... 16

 Mosaic Covenant..... 16

 Davidic Covenant..... 18

 The New Covenant in Christ's Blood..... 18

Subjection to Ordinances..... 21

An Apostolic Conference Call..... 24

The Simplicity in Christ Jesus..... 29

A New Creation in Christ Jesus..... 32

The Synagogue of Satan..... 35

Introduction

The Christian faith is firmly built upon several biblical facts. These would be: (1) The infallibility and inerrancy of the scriptures; (2) The incarnation of God himself in the person of Jesus of Nazareth; (3) The sinless life and substitutionary death of Jesus Christ on a cross outside of Jerusalem circa 33 A.D.; (4) The resurrection of Jesus from the dead; (5) Several post-resurrection appearances to hundreds of his disciples; (6) His ascension back to the Father's right hand where now serves as the one Mediator between God and men, and (7) His power to save to the uttermost those who come unto God by him.

The apostle Paul wrote about God's hidden wisdom in the death of his Son: "Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:8). If the princes of this world failed to realize they sealed their own fate by killing the Lord Jesus, it's clear that Satan himself, the god of this world and prince of darkness, was also ignorant of the eternal impact the death of Christ would have on him. For that reason Satan, for the last two thousand years, has formulated every attack possible on the gospel of Christ, whether it be the divinity of Christ or the propitiatory value of his atoning death. If Jesus is NOT God, he cannot save a single sinner. If the death of Jesus was NOT all-inclusive for ALL men, ALL their sins and ALL aspects of Mosaic Law, he cannot save a single sinner. Satan CANNOT change the gospel of Christ. The redemptive work of Jesus Christ is an accomplished fact for every one that believes. But what Satan CAN do is corrupt the minds of believers and blind the minds of unbelievers to the glorious simplicity of Christ and his gospel.

One method or device Satan has used for two thousand years is the LIE that Christ did not totally satisfy the demands of the Mosaic Law in his life and death. The propagation of this LIE is carried out by the ministers of Satan, who appear as ministers of light, advocating for some degree of compliance with Mosaic Law as a requirement for righteousness and salvation. It is a subtle attack on the total sufficiency of Christ for the believer and an attack on his atoning death. Paul wrote the entire epistle to the Galatians and other significant texts within the New Testament to combat this error. Christian theologians often refer to these heretics as Judaizers. In the modern era, this heresy has raised its ugly head under the name of Torah Compliance.

In 1 Timothy 4:1, Paul wrote: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." Torah Compliance, whether as a requirement for salvation or necessity for growth in grace (discipleship), represents a departure from the faith, spawned by a satanic spirit of seduction, a doctrine of devils inasmuch as it disavows the sufficiency of Christ for the believer. Advocates of Torah Compliance believe the current Church has had it wrong for the last two thousand years, teaching that the sufficiency of Christ as an end of the law for righteousness is a doctrine men. It's no surprise to see unbelievers and professing believers who buy into Torah Compliance: (1) abandon the local NT church, (2) adopt Hebraic lingo like 'Yahweh' and 'Yeshua' in their conversations about God, and (3) avoid mentioning 'Christ' or 'Jesus' in their conversation, using 'Father' instead. It is a distinctively Jewish mindset. The use of Hebraic names is not the problem. The problem lies in them thinking they're Jews when they are not and bringing Mosaic Law observances into the Christian faith in the name of discipleship, a mixing of covenants. They are convinced that this is pleasing to Yahweh and his Son Yeshua. The fact is it breaks God's heart when one of his children disavows the sufficiency of Christ by embracing the Law as a means to fulfill righteousness.

The purpose of this document is to examine NT testimony concerning the Christian and his

relationship to the Mosaic Law. It consists of a collection of documents, including the Pauline view of Torah Compliance, the simplicity of the gospel of Christ and a high-level view of the covenants. The believer who nails down his biblical relationship to Mosaic Law early on in his Christian experience will rejoice in the sufficiency of Jesus his Lord and possess the spiritual discernment necessary to avoid the seductive trap of Torah Compliance.

The Believer and Mosaic Law

I was born again by the grace of God in late 1959 at the age of twelve. It was a Sunday evening. Our pastor had preached on the Second Coming (Rapture) at church that evening. As I laid in bed looking out my window, I realized for the first time that I was not ready. I reached over, turned on my night light, picked up my Bible and read John 3:16. For the first time in my life, the Spirit of God applied the truth of that verse to me. As I read the word "whosoever", I heard the Spirit of God say "Don". All of a sudden the gospel became personal.

I closed my Bible, put it back in its place, turned off my night light and lay there in the dark for several minutes as the Spirit of God continued to convict me of my lost condition. A struggle was raging in my heart. I finally slipped to my knees, and prayed: "Dear Lord Jesus, I know I'm a sinner, and without you I will go to hell. Dear Jesus, please forgive me of my sins, come into my heart and give me eternal life. Thank you Jesus for dying for me. In Jesus' name, Amen!" Somewhere between "come into my heart" and "give me eternal life", the Lord lifted the burden of sin from my heart. I got back into bed with the peace of God in my heart.

As a twelve year-old boy, I had no comprehension of what had happened to me in that moment, other than the fact I was saved and that Jesus now lived in my heart. I have since learned that I was passed from death unto life, justified by faith, regenerated by the Spirit and the Word, redeemed by Christ's blood from the curse of Mosaic Law, sanctified (set apart) by virtue of my position in Christ, elected to serve God as part of a chosen generation, predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ, sealed by the Spirit (the earnest of my inheritance) until the day of redemption. Christ was in me, and I in him. Moreover, I came to realize I had been crucified with Christ and was therefore dead to the Law.

True discipleship is a multi-faceted and life-long task. In the course of discipleship, believers learn to walk by faith (daily dependence upon Jesus) in like manner as they were made spiritually alive by the same faith (Colossians 3:6). The walk of faith expresses itself in prayer, study of the scriptures and practical obedience to Christ as one continues to learn more about his Lord and acquire more light. The ultimate goal of discipleship is conformity to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). The apostle Paul described it as the quest to "win" Christ and "apprehend" that for which Christ had "apprehended" him (Philippians 3:8-14). It's the life goal of the believer to attain in practical righteousness (godliness) what God gave him in positional righteousness (justification). As the believer walks by faith and immerses himself in scripture, the Spirit of God changes (transforms) him "from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18). The goal of true discipleship is Christ Conformance, not Torah Compliance! The indwelling Spirit of God is the ONLY power that can make that happen. It's his job!

One of the first truths a believer in Christ must learn is his new relationship to Mosaic Law. Prior to his faith in Christ, a lost man is "under the Law" (obligated to keep it, liable for breaking it). He is a debtor to do "the whole Law" if he seeks to be justified by it (Galatians 5:3; James 2:10). Since no man is able to keep the Law perfectly, he is "guilty before God" when he breaks it (Romans 3:19). He is "under the curse" if he "continues not in all things" written in the book of the Law (Galatians 3:10). God "added" Mosaic Law alongside the Abrahamic covenant because of transgressions "till the seed [Christ] should come to whom the promise was made (Genesis 15:8-21; Galatians 3:19). As an addition, it served as a "schoolmaster" to bring lost men to Christ, that they might be "justified by faith" (3:24). A believer in Jesus is "no longer under a schoolmaster" once he is justified by faith in Christ (3:25). God reckons the believer, by virtue of his union with

Christ, to be in full compliance to Mosaic Law at all times.

So what exactly is the believer's relationship to Mosaic Law? In two key NT texts, the scripture says he is DEAD TO THE LAW (Romans 7:4; Galatians 2:19). In the Romans 7:1-4 passage, Paul employs the analogy of marriage to make the point. When God nailed "the body of Christ" to the cross, he nailed his sinless Son, who had completely fulfilled the Mosaic Law. The Father raised him from the dead for our justification (Romans 4:25). God imputes (reckons) to the believer the very righteousness of Jesus. He is therefore "complete in him" (Colossians 2:10). The Father made Jesus to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Corinthians 5:21). In Paul's marriage analogy, he represents the Mosaic Law as the surviving spouse who buried the believer. Jesus fulfilled the Law in full; he did NOT destroy it (Matthew 5:17).

The Mosaic Law is alive and well. God reckons a believer to have DIED TO THE LAW with the death of Christ inasmuch as God reckons the believer to have DIED WITH CHRIST (Galatians 2:19-21). The believer has been "CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST." The other side of that crucifixion coin is "CHRIST LIVETH IN ME" as God applies the effects of both the death and resurrection of Christ to the believer. These truths are fundamental to the gospel. If a man is ALIVE to Mosaic Law, he CANNOT have been crucified with Christ. He is still spiritually dead in his sins. If a man has been CRUCIFIED with Christ, he is ALIVE in Christ and DEAD to the Law. For a true believer to place himself afresh under Mosaic Law, to which he died by virtue of his death with Christ, is un-gospel-like, to say the least.

How many times does God need to say "DEAD TO THE LAW" to establish it as spiritual fact? While the Law is the surviving spouse in Paul's analogy, Christ himself becomes the new husband to whom the believer is now married! He is loosed from the bondage of the Law and free to embark upon the quest of conformity to the image of Christ, to which God predestinated him. When Jesus said: "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36), this is precisely what he had in mind. The same truth was iterated in Matthew 11:29: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me." This fundamental gospel truth leads to us to conclude that the Law, the yoke of bondage, CANNOT produce Christ-likeness! If that was possible, the believer could have remained married to the Mosaic Law. But since the Law, the believer's former husband, was incapable of generating either righteousness or spiritual life (Galatians 3:21), it was necessary for God to crucify the believer, raise him up with a new birth and wed him to Christ his Son, from whom life and righteousness abound. It is obvious how spiritually counterintuitive it is for a believer, who DIED to the Law and got MARRIED to Christ, to behave as if he is ALIVE to his old husband! Wouldn't that be grounds for spiritual adultery? Christ-likeness is the purview of the Spirit as he works in tandem with the Word, writes the truth of God in fleshy tables of the heart and empowers the believer to achieve increasingly greater degrees of godliness. Mosaic Law has no power whatsoever to accomplish this.

Whether one is a believer or an unbeliever, he CANNOT compartmentalize Mosaic Law. It's an 'ALL or NONE' proposition. One who is "under the Law" is obligated to keep and obey the ENTIRE Mosaic Law – Ten Commandments, Sacrifices, Sabbath days, Feasts and Dietary Laws. Some seem to believe that Christ in his death took care of the sacrificial aspects of the Law but left the other aspects in tact as the way for a believer to attain to God's righteousness. This falsehood is known as 'Torah Compliance.' It claims the Church went astray almost immediately after Pentecost by not carrying over these aspects of Mosaic Law into Church life, and for two thousand years has been teaching the doctrines of man.

This is a theological hybrid that denigrates Christ and diminishes his gospel (death and resurrection). It would have believers straddling the fence between Law and Grace. It is nothing more than convoluted, satanical nonsense. The scriptures teach unambiguously that one CANNOT be "under Law" and "under Grace" simultaneously. Christ either satisfied ALL of the Law's demands or satisfied NONE of them. If this compartmental approach to Mosaic Law is true, the believer might be BLESSED with Abraham at one moment and CURSED with Moses at another. In addition, the Lord who passed him from "death unto life" (John 5:24) would have to pass him from life back to spiritual death and condemnation. For as many as are of the works of the Law are under the CURSE of the law if they fail to continue in total compliance (Galatians 3:10). Scripture affirms that perfection is impossible. If the doctrine of 'Torah Compliance' is valid, Christ died in vain, there is no gospel of grace and Paul's epistles are fabrications.

One who is "under Grace" (dead to the Law and alive unto Christ) is under no obligation whatsoever to comply with Mosaic Law. At first blush, that sounds like heresy, as if we're teaching lawlessness for the Christian. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The believer who DIED with Christ and is DEAD to the Law is now ALIVE in Christ and subject to the Law of the Spirit of life (Romans 8:2). Rather than being subject to carnal ordinances carved in stone, the believer is now subject to the Christ who lives within him. This is the power and glory of the gospel! The Spirit of Christ WITHIN the believer empowers him to fulfill the righteousness of the Law (Romans 8:2). This is grace, pure and simple. For those who say grace is the equivalent of lawlessness, how can that be when the believer is now spiritually alive and subject to the AUTHOR of Mosaic Law? Is not the Lawgiver greater than his Law? Again, this is fundamental to the gospel of grace and its power!

Consider this word from Jesus when a lawyer asked about 'the great commandment' of the Law: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40). Jesus taught that if a man complied with these Two commandments, he would find himself in compliance with all Ten. The first and foremost fruit of the Spirit is love (Galatians 5:22-23), a love that is "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost" (Romans 5:5). As the Spirit bears fruit in the believer's life, he fulfills the righteousness of the Law. In addition to love, the Spirit produces a whole cluster of spiritual fruit – joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. The Law is incapable of producing any of these Christ-like attributes. Bearing the fruit of the Spirit in abundance is the goal of discipleship.

Is there any benefit in Mosaic Law for the believer? There certainly is! While the believer in Jesus is no longer under the schoolmaster of Mosaic Law, it does provide a sort of baseline for spiritual and moral rectitude. We must remember, however, that the fruit of the Spirit, when produced in the believer's life, will EXCEED exponentially the righteousness of mere compliance to the Law. It's why Paul referred to Mosaic Law and efforts to comply with it as "mine own righteousness" and "dung" (Philippians 3:8-9). He said the Law, if chosen by a believer as the means of righteousness, was: another gospel (Galatians 1:6), perversion of the gospel of Christ (1:7), bondage (2:4), frustration of God's grace (2:21), seeking to be made perfect by the flesh (3:3), the weak and beggarly elements (4:9), a covenant that breeds bondage (4:24), the yoke of bondage (5:1), making Jesus Christ unprofitable (5:2,4), debtor to do the whole Law (5:3), fallen from grace (5:4), disobedient to gospel truth (5:7), a little leaven (5:9), a cessation of the offense of the cross (5:11), vain glory (5:26) and the ministration of condemnation (2 Corinthians 3:9). The believer who embraces compliance to Mosaic Law as the means of attaining true

righteousness is “bewitched” (3:1). As Paul articulated so well, there is a “righteousness which is of the Law.” But it is nothing more than self-righteous “dung” (Philippians 3:8-9).

In contrast, scripture describes the work of the Spirit as: Christ formed in the believer (Galatians 4:19), putting on the Lord Jesus Christ (3:27; Romans 13:14), transformation into Christ's image by renewing of the mind (12:2), changed from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:18), filled with the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:4; 4:8,31; 9:17; 13:52), filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), being filled with all the fulness of God (3:19), filled with the fruits of righteousness (Philippians 1:11), filled with the knowledge of God's will (Colossians 1:9), Christ in me, the hope of glory (1:27), Christ living in me (Galatians 2:20), bringing every thought unto obedience to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). This is genuine, practical righteousness, which is of God by faith, also described as “winning” Christ (Philippians 3:9). The work of the Spirit in the believer is DYNAMIC whereas Mosaic Law is STATIC. The Spirit of God in the believer is insulted and grieved when the Mosaic Law is credited with producing holiness of life that only he has the power to produce.

In the interest of balance, let's consider what scripture says about Law. Paul wrote: “Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Romans 7:12). The law is holy, no admixture of error. It's just in every way, reflective of spiritual and moral rectitude. It is good, intrinsically as well as beneficially to those who observe it. But it CANNOT save a sinner by imparting spiritual life or producing righteousness simply because it is weak through the flesh (8:3). For that reason, the Law is a sin exacerbator (7:13). With the advent of Christ, the purpose of the Law is firmly established (3:1). In the same epistle, Paul said: “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (15:4). Paul is referring to the entire OT – the Torah, Poetic Books and Prophets. What we learn from these writings are the origins of man, the consequences of sin, the nature of God, how God has dealt and does deal with men, the history of Israel, the covenants and prophetic glimpses of Messiah, many of them embodied in the Torah. Jesus told the Jews: “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). That is why Christians do not observe the OT feasts. They were merely shadows that prefigured the glories of the coming Messiah. Once the believer is in possession of Jesus Christ, the substance of the shadows, there is no longer a need for the shadow. In Genesis through Malachi, we are afforded an encyclopedic look at the God of redemption, from which we derive patience, comfort and hope!

There are a few more advantages to the Mosaic Law. One of those is the Dietary Laws. There are many (e.g., Seventh-Day Adventists) who pattern their dietary habits after Mosaic Law, believing God gave these to Israel for their physical well-being. While the believer is under no obligation to adhere to the Dietary Law, the wisdom of so doing as it pertains to health benefits is indisputable. The NT balance to Mosaic Dietary Law is: (1) “nothing is unclean of itself” as it pertains to food (Romans 14:14), and (2) food “received with thanksgiving” passes spiritual muster (1 Timothy 4:3-4). The overriding principle between believers, however, is that no man judge another for following his or her conscience in terms of dietary intake (Romans 14:1-23). “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (14:17). Whether weak or strong, no believer should do anything that causes his brother to stumble. A believer sins against Christ his Lord when he engages in conduct that either offends a brother or is done apart from a confidence that God is pleased with it (14:23).

Another advantage is the Sabbath. While the believer is under no obligation to observe the Sabbath (or Seventh) Day of the week, Jesus taught: “The Sabbath was made for man, and not

man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). A man acts in his own best interests when he sets aside a day to rest from his labors, allowing the Sabbath to serve him, not him the Sabbath. It might well be the seventh day of the week (i.e., Saturday). But it could be the first day (i.e., Sunday). I don't like to think of Sunday as the Christian's Sabbath. If you examine the book of Acts, the early Church met "daily" in the temple and from "house to house" (Acts 2:46). But as time passed, the frequency of their gathering appears to have diminished. In the NT, one cannot find ANY instruction for the Church to meet on Sunday. The habit of Sunday assembling is probably due to several factors: the resurrection of Jesus on the first day of the week (Mark 16:9); a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to the disciples on "the first day of the week" as they were assembled together (John 20:19); the seven days Paul spent in Troas wherein the disciples had come together "upon the first day of the week" to break bread, receiving a preaching session that lasted until midnight (Acts 20:5-7); Paul's instruction to the Corinthian church to lay aside "upon the first day of the week" (a clear reference to their day of corporate assembly) an offering for his ministry (1 Corinthians 16:2). When John was in the spirit "on the Lord's day" and received the Revelation of Jesus Christ, it's clear to me it was Sunday, the first day of the week (Revelation 1:10). While there is no NT instruction for the disciples (local church) to assemble on Sunday, the preponderance of biblical evidence suggests that meeting on the first day of the week became the accepted practice. In the book of Hebrews, we are admonished not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together with a recommendation for assembling more often as we see the day of Christ approaching (Hebrews 10:25). In a technical sense, Sunday isn't the Sabbath for the Church. But if Christ's disciples can kill two birds with one stone, assembling plus resting, by meeting on Sunday, it would seem to be the perfect solution.

Let me briefly illustrate. In the summer of 1973, I traveled to Alaska for three weeks to help missionary Lindsey Williams, bush pilot and chaplain for the Alaska Pipeline, develop a youth camp. On a certain Sunday, we flew out from Kenai to Kalgin Island to attend Sunday services at a mission church. There were perhaps twelve people in the service, including the pastor's family and us. The work didn't seem to be too successful since the missionary had been there for years. Why the low attendance? We found out the main industry on the island was a salmon cannery. Roughly ninety percent of the village's adult population worked there. The cannery shut down one day a week – Saturday. When the missionary held services on Sunday, most adults in the village were at work. We marveled that this pastor was so locked into Sunday church that he couldn't do a church service on Saturday and expand opportunity for adults and their families to learn of Christ. It was a 'Sunday Sabbath' tradition that blinded this man to the full potential of his ministry. In the circumstances, having a church service on Saturday would have been a better option. If the cannery had been shut down on Thursdays, he could have done Thursday church.

We close by asking the question we asked previously: How many times does God have to say "DEAD TO THE LAW" in order to establish it as a spiritual fact? The Mosaic Law is a schoolmaster, a yoke of bondage. It was added to the Abrahamic covenant to exacerbate transgressions and lead men to saving faith in Jesus Christ. For the believer, who was crucified with Christ and in whom Christ now lives by the indwelling Holy Spirit, the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus is his new spiritual reality. The Lord replaces the old Mosaic covenant in his life with the new covenant in Christ's blood, which also connects him with the Abrahamic covenant inasmuch as Christ is the Promised Seed. As he walks by faith and bears the fruit of the Spirit, he pleases his Lord and grows in Christ-likeness. If he sins, he has an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous, who forgives his sin and cleanses him from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:7-2:2). This is NT gospel truth upon which every believer, both new and old alike, should have a firm grip.

The Pauline View of Torah Compliance

The apostle Paul, formerly Saul of Tarsus, perhaps more than any other man, lived and breathed Torah compliance. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees by his own admission. So fervent was his disgust for fellow countrymen that embraced Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah that he obtained legal authority to imprison and murder them. He gave consent to a Jewish mob to stone Stephen. Saul the Pharisee got the shock of his life when, on his way to Damascus to wreak havoc on the Lord's church, Jesus stopped him in his tracks with a blinding light. When he inquired as to who it was that had engaged him, he heard these words: "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest!"

The confrontation of Saul by Jesus took place circa 35 A.D. Saul afterwards changed his name to Paul, became apostle to the Gentiles and inspired author of gospel and church truth. His thirteen epistles set forth by revelation the unique relationship between Law and Grace. In 64 A.D., thirty years later, Paul wrote his epistle to the church at Philippi, which was established circa 53 A.D. with the salvation of a jailor and his family. In that epistle, Paul disclosed his perspective on his former life as a Pharisee and how his faith in Jesus Christ had transformed his life (Philippians 3:2-14).

What exactly is meant by 'Torah Compliance'? The Torah consists of the first five books of the Bible, or Pentateuch--Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Two of these, Genesis and Numbers, are primarily historical in nature. The other three--Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy--consist of the Mosaic Law handed down to Israel by Moses. By 'Torah Compliance' we are referring to the Mosaic Covenant. The Torah itself contains four covenants--Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic (revealed in Genesis) and Mosaic. We use the more general phrase 'Torah Compliance' as a specific reference to the Law of Moses even though the Torah itself includes multiple covenants.

One reason Paul shared his former thinking with Philippian believers was the constant opposition he and his converts endured from disciples of Moses, who felt that faith in Jesus neither precluded nor nullified the need for Torah observance. These 'Judaizers' were a problem for the church in Paul's day as they remain today. The mantra of 'Torah compliance' is not new. There are a number of publications and other media that advocate Torah compliance and the 'restoration' thereof as integral to a life that pleases God. The text of Philippians 3:2-14 is the death knell of the Torah compliance mentality.

Paul begins by juxtaposing the words "concision" (3:2) and "circumcision" (3:3). The word 'concision' means "to cut up, mutilate." It's a reference to physical circumcision, which disciples of Moses deemed a necessity for salvation. Paul clearly uses it here as a code word for those who embrace Mosaic Law. The word 'circumcision' is a reference to spiritual circumcision of the heart, a spiritual reality for the believer in Jesus without regard for physical circumcision or the lack thereof. In the church at Philippi, there were no doubt many uncircumcised Gentiles. But they were circumcised in heart. Paul identifies three characteristics of this group: they (1) worship God in the spirit as opposed to carnal ordinances, (2) rejoice in Christ Jesus as their total sufficiency, and (3) have no confidence in the flesh in terms of Torah compliance.

Paul continues with a list of 'in-the-flesh' credentials from his Saul of Tarsus days. He endured physical circumcision on the eighth day of his life. His parents saw to it he was Torah compliant before he even had a chance to consider it for himself. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Pharisee as touching the Law. In other words, he was a zealot for Torah compliance, who had few if any peers. As touching the righteousness which is in the law, he was blameless (fully

compliant). As a Pharisee, Paul considered these credentials as "gain" (3:7). The word 'gain' is *kerdos*, signifying "lucre, advantage." Paul felt his religious credentials as a Torah-compliant Hebrew would produce an advantage Godward. But after he met Christ Jesus face-to-face, all of these gains turned into losses. The word 'loss' is *zemia*, signifying "damage" (as the result of violence). All of Paul's Torah-compliant credentials, in his thinking, became damaged goods. This is what the cross of Christ does to the works of the Law and human pride.

Paul uses the word "count" three times in 3:7-8. It's the Greek *hegeomai*. Its root means "to lead." But it can have a variety of meanings depending on contextual usage. In this context, it means "to account, deem or consider." In 3:7, Paul employs the perfect tense (completed action, abiding result). In 3:8, he uses the present tense twice (ongoing action). Paul had come to the settled conclusion that all his pre-conversion efforts at Torah compliance were damaged goods, and kept on considering that to be true.

What was it that replaced these damaged religious goods? It was "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (3:8). The word 'excellency' is *huperecho* (*huper*="above", *echo*="to have"). It means "to have above, to be superior in rank, to excel." Paul deemed the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord superior to his efforts at Torah compliance. Paul is referring to a personal, intimate knowledge of Jesus; heart knowledge as opposed to mere head knowledge. In comparison to his knowledge of the Lord Jesus, Paul considered his former efforts at Torah compliance no better than "dung" (refuse) that he might win Christ (i.e., a deeper knowledge of and conformity to the image of Christ). He continues: And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (3:9). Torah observance, at its very best, is self-righteousness—nothing more, nothing less—born of the Mosaic Law. And as such, it CANNOT please the God for whom it's allegedly rendered.

The righteousness with which God IS pleased is that which is produced in a believer's life by the Spirit of God as they walk in dependence upon Christ. When a man believes on Jesus, the Lord justifies him (makes, declares him righteous). This imputed righteousness becomes his permanent standing in Christ, never to be lost. When the believer walks in daily dependence on Jesus, God sanctifies him (builds IN him Christ's righteous character). This imparted righteousness (the fruit of discipleship) can vary according to one's steadfastness in faith or lapses thereof. Spiritual awakening, or revival, is the move of God's Spirit among his people to cleanse from sin, reignite faith and reinvigorate the sanctification process. Torah compliance has no power whatsoever to impart righteousness or build Christian character. That's the purview of the Spirit of Christ as the believer walks in humble dependence upon his Lord.

Paul reiterates his desire "to know him, and the power of his resurrection" (3:10). It is the power of the resurrection that produces the new birth. That same resurrection power, now WITHIN the believer and unleashed by faith, is what Paul and every other true disciple desires. Again, there is NO resurrection power available in Torah compliance. The schoolmaster is able to BRING a man to Christ, but is NOT able to SAVE the man or FORM Christ in the man (Galatians 3:24-25; 4:19). At the "resurrection of the dead" (3:11), God will transform believers in the twinkling of an eye to a state of perfect righteousness in a glorified body like unto Christ's. Paul desired to "attain" this state before the resurrection and thus "apprehend" that for which Christ had "apprehended" him (3:12). Perfection in righteousness was NOT something Paul had attained to or apprehended. But the "one thing" (3:13) that had become the focus of his life was to "press [chase, pursue] toward the mark [goal] for the prize [reward] of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (3:14). The high

calling of God is holiness, as in Christ-likeness, not something as rudimentary, weak and beggarly as Torah compliance! The verb 'press' is present tense, signifying an ongoing effort. The goal is Christ-like righteousness, which itself becomes the reward for a life of humble dependence upon Jesus.

The predicate 'I press' has two present participles in nominative case as modifiers. Paul lived his life both "forgetting" those things which were BEHIND (his past) and "reaching forth" to things that were BEFORE (his future). Paul was literally "one who kept on putting out of mind" the past and "one who kept on stretching himself out" toward the future. If there is a formula for success in pursuing Christ-likeness in this life, one would be hard pressed to improve upon these two activities. In forgetting the things of his past, Paul likely had in mind both his successes and failures. The context demands that we include in that past ALL his efforts as a Pharisee to be Torah compliant, which he later understood to be a futile exercise in self-righteousness.

The gospel of grace in Christ Jesus is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes it. The gospel believed puts the believer IN Christ and Christ IN the believer by the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is the enabling power of the Spirit—resurrection power—that makes for the formation of righteousness in the believer's life. It is God working IN a believer to will and to do of HIS good pleasure that allows that believer to work OUT his own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12-13). The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made him free from the law of sin and death so the righteousness of the law can be fulfilled IN him (Romans 8:2, 4). Torah compliance is external and can do NOTHING to improve the inner man. But faith in Christ Jesus causes the indwelling Spirit to write the Law of God in fleshy tables of the heart, resulting in righteous character-conduct from the INSIDE to the OUTSIDE of the believer's life (2 Corinthians 3:3).

The Christian is NOT lawless or without Law. He is "under the Law to Christ" (1 Corinthians 9:21). He is DEAD to the Mosaic Law, having died with Christ, so he can live by a superior, more excellent Law—the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. Christ is resurrection power. Christ is our righteousness. Christ transforms the believer. It is Christ who apprehends the believer to attain to HIS righteousness. This living dynamic of grace is IMPOSSIBLE through Torah compliance. Paul discovered this truth after his encounter with Jesus Christ. It was transformative. All his achievements as a Torah-compliant Jew he counted as DUNG, that he might win Christ!

Let's step back for a moment. For those who insist upon Torah compliance, what is the goal? It cannot be for the purpose of eternal life, for "Christ is our life" (Colossians 3:4). It cannot be in the hope of future glory, for it is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 127). It cannot be for the purpose of being part of Christ's bride, for the believer is already married to Christ (Romans 7:1-4). It cannot be for the purpose of finding acceptance, for the believer is "accepted in the beloved" (Ephesians 1:6). It cannot be for redemption, for "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law" (Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 1:19; Revelation 5:9). It cannot be for the purpose of achieving righteousness, because the Law can bring neither righteousness nor spiritual life to those who seek to be compliant (Galatians 3:21). It cannot be for the purpose of finding peace with God, for the believer, having been justified by faith, has "peace with God" through the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). Christ is made unto us who believe "righteousness" (1 Corinthians 1:30). He is the "end of the law for righteousness" to all who believe (Romans 1:4). The believer is "complete in him," which means Torah compliance can add NOTHING to a believer's standing before God (Colossians 2:10).

If one studies the NT phrase "in Christ," he will discover that the believer, by virtue of his position

“in Christ” and “Christ in him”, enjoys a wealth of benefits—redemption, no condemnation, freedom from the law of sin and death, no separation from God's love, membership in Christ's body, sanctification, wisdom, hope, created unto good works, reconciliation, redemption, liberty, election, acceptance, predestination, a seat with the risen Christ in heavenly places, consolation, eternal security, fellowship, and many more. They are ALL part of ONE salvation package. NONE of them can be obtained through Torah compliance. God bestows them simultaneously upon a believer of the gospel, one who has been crucified and resurrected with Christ as well as passed from death unto life (John 5:24). So again we must ask: Why Torah compliance?

It's evident at this point that the huge problem with the Torah-compliance doctrine is its attack on Christ himself and the gospel. The NT teaches us that Christ is all-sufficient, that his death on the cross was a complete propitiation (satisfaction) for transgressions of the Law, that his death and resurrection provide a clear line of demarcation between Law and Grace. Those who embrace the doctrine of Torah compliance make themselves “enemies of the cross of Christ” (Philippians 3:18). The doctrine implies that (1) Christ's death on the cross was insufficient to atone for all of our transgressions, and (2) Christ's righteousness, which God the Father imputes to those who believe on his Son, is insufficient to give a sinner a righteous standing before God. It is the height of spiritual folly to believe that adding the filthy rags of “MINE OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS” (3:9) to Christ's righteousness can in any way improve my standing with the Father. But such is the spiritual folly of Torah compliance!

In fairness to some that may have drifted into a Torah observance mentality as the result of listening to silver-tongued false teachers with clever-sounding biblical arguments, they clearly don't understand what they've done. They may be well intentioned. But good intentions are no excuse for bad doctrine. One purpose of this article is to help them unentangle themselves from the yoke of bondage (Galatians 5:1).

Men pursue Torah compliance for one of two reasons. The first is due to a BLINDED mind, which Paul described in 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.” God created the FIRST Adam in his own image and likeness. Sin marred that image. Christ, the LAST Adam, is the image of God as well. The big difference is the LAST Adam was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection. Whereas the FIRST Adam was created in innocence, the LAST Adam was raised in perfect righteousness. The “glorious gospel of Christ” is the good news that the risen Christ, in response to child-like faith, takes up permanent residence in the heart of a believer and becomes his Righteousness. Satan blinds the minds of unbelievers to this simple truth. That's why Torah compliance is so alluring to a carnal, unregenerate man. It allows self to think he is a contributor to his salvation rather than a humble recipient of God's saving grace.

The second is a CORRUPTED mind, as Paul warned believers at Corinth: “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him” (2 Corinthians 11:2-4). The gospel is a straightforward proposition. It's the good news that (1) Jesus died (atoned) for our sins and rose again, and (2) faith in an all-sufficient Christ puts the believer IN Christ and Christ IN the believer.

The entire NT message can be summed up in three words: CHRIST IS ENOUGH! Torah compliance is just one satanic device among many to corrupt the believer's mind into behaving like Christ is NOT enough. Torah compliance is ANOTHER gospel promoted by ANOTHER spirit that presents ANOTHER Jesus other than the One who saved him in the first place. For the lost man with a blinded mind, the doctrine of Torah compliance will lead to the Lake of Fire. For a saved man, whose mind Satan has corrupted, Torah compliance leads to the frustration of God's grace and spiritual adultery. To use Paul's words, the person Satan deceives into Torah compliance, whether lost or saved, will live in a spiritual DUNG heap until they discover (or rediscover) grace and the all-sufficiency of Christ.

It's worth noting that Paul listed "zeal" in "persecuting the church" as one of his religious credentials. It is no surprise that those who have confidence in the flesh (Torah observers) persecute those who have no confidence in the flesh (Christ's disciples). It's the difference between those who mind "earthly things" and those whose "conversation is in heaven" (3:19-20). Those who have confidence in the flesh are the "enemies of the cross of Christ" (3:18). In my youth, Herbert W. and Garner Ted Armstrong were the most popular proponents of Torah compliance. In the current day, Torah Restoration Ministries led by Evangelist Daniel John Lee is a classic example. According to his teachings, the apostle Paul will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire for disavowing Torah compliance as essential to salvation.

Salvation is in Christ and in Christ alone. Anything that seeks to replace or augment Christ, including Torah compliance, is pure DUNG! Early on in scripture we learn that there are only two basic types of religion: the way of Cain (works) and the way of Abel (faith). Torah compliance represents the way of Cain. Faith in Christ represents the way of Abel. God rejected the former and accepted the latter. Daniel John Lee is nothing more than a Dungmaster. One who visits his website will find all manner of high-sounding Hebrew lingo. But to those versed in the gospel of grace, they'll recognize Torah Restoration Ministries as a Dungheap, the religion of Cain on display. One wonders why he calls himself an evangelist since there is no gospel to be found on his website. Paul warned Timothy: "From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm" (1 Timothy 1:6-7). This is a perfect description of Daniel John Lee and every other advocate for Torah compliance, who have turned aside from the gospel of Christ to vain jangling. They are self-proclaimed teachers of the Law who have bastardized the gospel!

Let's review what the circumcised in heart, including Paul, have in common. They worship God in the spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. This is the heart and soul of the local NT church—one that truly represents Christ. At the risk of oversimplification, a genuine church can be found WORSHIPING God the Father and REJOICING in and WINNING Christ the Son. In that blessed mix, there is absolutely NO room whatsoever for confidence in the flesh. That's why you'll NEVER find a genuine NT church, one that pleases the Father and honors the Son, teaching Torah compliance as an essential to salvation. These kinds of God-honoring, Bible-based churches have been in existence since the days of the apostles even though they might not have been mainstream.

True Christianity is Christ living in his people through the power of the indwelling Spirit, who alone is the power behind true righteousness, holiness and godliness. Men can NEVER please the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ by their attempts to comply with the Torah. True Christianity operates by a higher Law, the Law of the Spirit of life. This is the Pauline view of Torah compliance.

The Biblical Covenants

Have you ever been involved in a covenant? Most all of us have at some point in life. If you're married, you entered into a covenant with your spouse. The words "until death do us part" make that covenant an unconditional one that only death can disannul. If you have ever purchased a home with a standard 30-year mortgage, you entered into a covenant with the lender to make regular payments until you paid off the loan. The mortgage covenant is conditional. In the event you fail to make payments on time, the lender has the right to repossess your home.

The Bible is a book defined by its covenants: Old Testament and New Testament. Within the pages of these testaments, scripture identifies several covenants. Some are conditional, others are unconditional. For the most part, they are not covenants between men and women, borrowers and lenders. They are covenants – sacred agreements – between a holy God and sinful men. The purpose of this document is to provide a high-level summary of these biblical covenants.

Adamic Covenant

The first of these is the Adamic covenant. The terms of this covenant between the LORD God and the first couple, Adam and Eve, were rather simple. They could "freely eat" of every tree except one. They would "surely die" if they transgressed that one prohibition (Genesis 2:16-17). The Adamic covenant was conditional in nature, contingent upon Adam and Eve walking in compliance with God's directive. The disobedience of Adam brought into play the "surely die" provision of the covenant. Spiritual death was immediate; physical death came 930 years later (5:5).

The Adamic covenant has a prominent place in the NT revelation. In Romans 5:12-14, scripture says: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come." The entire human race was in the loins of Adam when he sinned. Thus the whole human race sinned and died spiritually with Adam.

Paul made reference to the Adamic covenant in 1 Corinthians: "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (15:21-22). As he concluded his resurrection argument, he added: "And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit: (15:45). Jesus Christ is the last Adam, single-handedly providing the life solution for the spiritual death incurred by the first man Adam and us his co-transgressors.

Noahic Covenant

The second is the Noahic covenant as recorded in Genesis 9:1-17. The post-flood world would bring a dread of man by the animal world (9:2) and the institutionalization of capital punishment (9:5-6). It included God's promise never again to flood the earth (9:11). As a token (sign) of his intent to honor this covenant, God set his bow in the cloud (9:13). The Noahic covenant was both "everlasting" (9:16) and unconditional. It was not contingent upon any future behavior in Noah, his sons or descendants. It was also universal, meaning that all men, whether saved or lost, would be benefactors of God's unconditional covenant. To this day, the rainbow is a reminder of God's faithfulness in honoring the Noahic covenant.

Abrahamic Covenant

The third is the Abrahamic covenant as revealed in Genesis 12:2-3; 15:1-21. God promised to make of Abram a great nation with innumerable seed, including the Messianic seed, which was Christ (see Acts 13:23; Galatians 3:16, 19; Hebrews 2:16). Abraham "believed in the LORD; and he counted it unto him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). Abraham is the model for how God EVER saved a sinner – by faith! Paul wrote: "So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham" (Galatians 3:9). If there is any OT covenant that directly impacts the NT believer, it's the Abrahamic covenant, because Christ is the seed of Abraham in whom all believers are justified. Paul explained this in detail in Romans 4:1-25 and Galatians 3:1-29. Every OT saint who has ever been justified (Abel, Noah, Samuel, David, Isaiah, etc.) had the righteousness of God imputed to them by faith. The Law of Moses has never saved and will never save anyone!

The Abrahamic covenant was unconditional in nature. It was not contingent upon the future behavior of Abraham or his descendants. Genesis 15:9-10 describes the manner in which Abraham prepared animal sacrifices to seal the covenant. After Abram had laid them out as God prescribed, a "deep sleep" fell on him (15:12). Then this transpired: "And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (15:17-18). The furnace and lamp were clearly God the Father and God the Son. They made an unconditional blood covenant with each other. The benefactors would be (1) Abram, (2) his seed, and (3) every believing sinner from all the nations of the earth who would follow Abram's example of faith. This covenant was made four-hundred thirty years before God gave his Law to Israel. In terms of NT salvation, the Abrahamic covenant is the model, not the Law.

Mosaic Covenant

The fourth is the Mosaic covenant as revealed in the Torah. The Ten Commandments are enumerated in Exodus 20:1-17, written with "the finger of God" on tablets of stone (31:18). In the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, the Lord added many ordinances, tabernacle instructions, priesthood and sacrificial requirements, etc. The Mosaic covenant was conditional in nature. If Israel complied with its statutes, they would experience God's blessing. If they forsook the Law, God would withhold his blessing.

The benefits of Law compliance were largely temporal, not spiritual. We know this from several NT statements. "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Galatians 2:16). And again: "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" (3:21). Law compliance CANNOT justify a sinner. It CANNOT produce a righteousness that God will accept. It CANNOT impart spiritual life to the compliant. But it can bring a better quality of life in temporal terms: "And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them" (3:12).

The context of Galatians 3 demands that the "life" the Law cannot give be interpreted as spiritual life and that the "live in them" reference be interpreted as a better quality of life. Otherwise we have Paul contradicting himself in the same context. Paul intertwined life and righteousness

(3:21). The source of both is faith in Christ rooted in God's promise to Abraham. The Law CANNOT disannul the Promise: "And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect" (3:17).

What then is the purpose of the Mosaic covenant if not to bring righteousness and impart spiritual life? First, it is a schoolmaster: "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster" (3:24-25). Saved men no longer need a schoolmaster. Secondly, it brings an awareness of sin: "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). Thirdly, it makes sin exceeding sinful: "Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful" (7:13). Paul summed it up this way: "Wherefore then serveth the law? It was ADDED because of transgressions, TILL the seed [Jesus of Nazareth] should come to whom the promise was made" (Galatians 3:19). The words "added...till" are the equivalent of a time stamp. The Law was an ad hoc provision, designed by God to lead sinners to Christ, the promised seed of the Abrahamic covenant. Believers who have come under law to Christ are no longer under Mosaic Law in any way, shape or form.

The Law is holy, just and good (7:12). It's purpose is not nullified by the law of faith, but established: "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law" (3:21). When the Mosaic covenant accomplishes its established purpose in a lost man's life, causing him to embrace the promise of life and righteousness by faith in Christ, its work is done in that man's life. Paul painted this contrast: "Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?" (2 Corinthians 3:6-8).

Paul describes the Mosaic covenant as the letter that killeth, the ministration of death and as fading in glory. Contrariwise, Paul describes the new testament as a life-giving spirit, the ministration of the spirit and more glorious than the old. The words of Jesus are eminently applicable: "No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved" (Matthew 9:16-17). There is no mixing possible of the new testament in the blood of Christ and the old testament written in tables of stone, between the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus and the ministration of death. There is zero compatibility between them. The old and new testaments are mutually exclusive although God intended the old to point sinners to the new.

Paul taught that the believer in Christ is "dead to the law." But that didn't mean the Law had failed in its divine purpose: "For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God" (Galatians 2:19). Those two prepositional phrases modifying 'dead'—THROUGH the Law and TO the Law—encapsulate in six little words the whole relationship between the Law and the NT believer. He continued with: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me,

and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain" (2:20-21). The believer who has died with and lives in Christ is beyond the reach of the Mosaic covenant. "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become DEAD TO THE LAW by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God" (Romans 7:4). Any believer that gets married to Christ by faith and subsequently mixes his faith in Christ Jesus with the Mosaic covenant is guilty of spiritual adultery.

Davidic Covenant

The fifth is the Davidic covenant. Isaiah stated it as follows: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this" (Isaiah 9:6-7). The covenant is both unconditional and earthly in its scope. Jesus will one day reign as King from Jerusalem. Christ inherited the throne of David legally at birth and ultimately by his triumphant resurrection from the dead. The relevance for the NT believer is that we will one day rule and reign with him. O what grace to think the King of heaven and earth would share his authority with his servants!

The New Covenant in Christ's Blood

Our sixth covenant is the New Testament. During the Last Supper, Jesus said: "This cup is [represents] the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you" (Luke 22:20). Paul reiterated this truth: "After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:25). The blood of Christ secured his role as Mediator: "And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance" (Hebrews 9:15). In addition: "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). In Galatians 3:20, we find this profound gospel truth: "Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one." In other words, the incarnation produced the God-Man, combining into one person a function that usually required two. Moses (party #2) was a mediator between Yahweh (party #1) and Israel (party #3). Jesus the God-Man became the mediator of the new testament by virtue of his own blood, uniting the roles of Yahweh and Moses in himself. When a sinful man (party #2) comes to Christ (party #1), he finds both God and Mediator in one person. Christ is all a sinner needs!

How important is the blood of Christ? Jesus purchased the church of God with his blood (Acts 20:28). The blood was a propitiation Godward for our sins (Romans 3:25). God justifies believing sinners by the blood (5:9). We have redemption and forgiveness through Jesus' blood (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14). His blood made peace and reconciliation possible (Colossians 1:20). The blood of Jesus has the power to purge the conscience from dead works to serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14). The blood of Jesus affords the believer boldness to enter into the holiest (10:19). The blood cleanses believers from all sin as they walk in the light (1 John 1:7). The blood of Jesus will be an eternal theme of praise for the redeemed in heaven (Revelation 5:9). Hebrews 9:12 sums it up: "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." The ONLY Old Testament covenant

that has any working relationship to the New Testament in the blood of Christ is the Abrahamic covenant inasmuch as Christ is the promised Seed.

There are some who think the Law (Mosaic covenant) is still applicable to the NT believer. There are several problems with this doctrine. First, one CANNOT be 'under Law' and 'under Grace' at the same time (Romans 6:14). They are mutually exclusive. Calling it 'covenant + grace' rather than 'law + grace' is an intellectually-dishonest distinction. Secondly, it requires putting new wine in old wine skins; theological disaster! Thirdly, it's a fatal exercise that mixes the ministration of life with the ministration of death. Fourthly, it deludes the practitioners into believing they can compartmentalize the Law. If ANY part of the Mosaic covenant is applicable, then ALL parts are applicable. One CANNOT chose which parts of the Mosaic covenant he wants to embrace. If one thinks the Ten Commandments are still applicable as a means of winning the favor of Yahweh, he should be prepared to arrange for a Levitical priesthood and animal sacrifices. Paul said: "For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the WHOLE law" (Galatians 5:3). In doing so, he must remember that all his efforts to comply with the Decalogue will NOT result in spiritual life or righteousness. Fifthly, the idea that observance of the Law is able to generate a single spiritual benefit Godward defies a 3,500-year track record of abject failure. Sixth, it fails to take into account the new testament dynamic whereby the indwelling Spirit writes the Law of God in fleshy tables of the heart and transforms believers into living epistles of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:3). Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, it counts the blood of Jesus, the believer's path into the holiest, as inadequate and Christ himself as insufficient.

Dealing with a False Accusation

The next logical topic of discussion is the false charge Satan and his cohorts have leveled against the proponents of NT grace for the last two thousand years. The LIE goes like this. One who believes he or she is no longer 'under Law', but 'under Grace', is lawless by default. This LIE is called antinomianism; that is, one who is 'against' Mosaic Law lives without law. Nothing could be further from the truth. The proponents of grace live under a higher law. Paul identified it as "the LAW of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" that makes the born-again believer "FREE from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2). Paul continues: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (8:3-4). What the Law CANNOT do is provide freedom from sin! Why? Because the flesh is weak, unable to comply in total with the Law's demands. God's design for the NT believer is fulfillment of the Law IN US by the power of the indwelling Spirit. The Law of the Spirit of life supersedes the Mosaic Law. I heard a little rhyme years ago that goes like this: "Do this and live that Law commands, but gives me neither feet nor hands. A better word the Gospel brings, it bids me fly and gives me wings!"

The believer in Jesus Christ LOVES God's Law because it is a reflection of his holy character. Grace does NOT give him a license to sin, that grace may abound. He desires to please his heavenly Father by obedience. The born-again believer who operates in Spirit power will find himself complying with the Law of God PLUS bearing the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance—against which there is no Law (Galatians 5:22-23). This is why Paul admonished the Galatians against turning back to the "weak and beggarly [powerless] elements" of the Mosaic Law, which engenders to bondage (4:9). The Law is holy, just and good, but has no power at all to produce fulfillment of the Law. The Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, the Law that supersedes the Mosaic, is God's solution for producing IN US

the righteousness of God's Law. The man who has experienced the saving grace of God has no problem understanding the doctrine of grace. It is the unregenerate crowd who never seems to 'get it' because they've never experienced it.

The Issue of Guilt

Now a final word regarding guilt. If and when a man takes upon himself Torah compliance as a means of winning God's favor, he is obligated to live in sinless perfection. No man since God gave the Law through Moses, including Moses himself, has ever accomplished that feat. Being 'Under the Law' carries with it serious consequences. Paul wrote: "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become GUILTY before God" (Romans 3:19). James adds: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is GUILTY of all (James 2:10). The glory of grace through faith in Christ is that Jesus, who DID live a sinlessly perfect life, bore our guilt on the Cross. He offers the guilty sinner who believes in him the forgiveness of sins, imputation of Christ's righteousness and eternal life! God reckons the believer as having done the whole law inasmuch as he is clothed in Christ's righteousness and accepted in the Beloved. This is the glory of the gospel. It is impossible to be 'under Grace' and 'under Law' at the same time. Moreover, a life of sinless Torah compliance, even if possible, CANNOT get a man to heaven. He would still lack God's righteousness and eternal life, which are ONLY obtainable through faith in Christ Jesus, the promised Seed of the Abrahamic covenant.

Conclusion

A document of this length cannot possibly deal with all aspects of covenant. But it is my prayer that it has been sufficiently informative to provide a healthy perspective on God's dealings with men. As we have seen, there are many covenants with unique applicability. Some are conditional, like the Adamic and Mosaic covenants. Others are unconditional-eternal—the Noahic, Abrahamic and Davidic. The New Covenant in the blood of Christ is also unconditional and eternal. The one condition upon which it rests is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is able to save to the uttermost those who come unto God by him (Hebrews 7:25). Once a man is in Christ and Christ is in the man, the new covenant in his blood is irrevocable!

Subjection to Ordinances

Have you ever found yourself in violation of or in conflict with a city ordinance? An ordinance is any law, regulation or directive put in place by a municipality for compliance by both government officials and citizens. An ordinance can cover anything from using parking meters to wearing seat belts to hiring practices for city contracts to posted speed limits. Ordinances are enacted for the public welfare. Those who live in compliance with local ordinances are considered good citizens.

Ordinances were and are part of God's kingdom with both Israel and the Church. In the Old Testament, the word "ordinance" is the Hebrew choq, meaning "statute, limit, something prescribed." In the KJV, it is variously translated, the most common being "statute" (87x). Its first usage is Exodus 18:20: "And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do." These were the words of Moses' father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, which he spoke to Moses regarding his leadership of Israel.

The Mosaic Law is an amalgam of ordinances, consisting of the Ten Commandments, the Passover and prescribed sacrifices, Sabbath days, feast days, festivals et al. The Lord directed Israel, custodians of that Law, as follows: "Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 18:4). These ordinances applied as well to divine service rendered in the Tabernacle (Hebrews 9:1). They were also "carnal" ordinances (Hebrews 9:10), which means they were fleshly, earthly, natural as opposed to supernatural.

It was the Lord's sovereign prerogative as Israel's Redeemer to demand compliance to his ordinances. When Israel was in compliance, they experienced God's blessing and protection. When they deviated from and forsook the ordinances, God brought his chastening hand. Every OT prophet brought stern and often cataclysmic messages for a non-compliant Israel. God's last prophet delivered these words: "Even from the days of your fathers ye have gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 3:7).

No matter how bad things got on a national level, there was always a fellowship of the compliant. Four hundred years after Malachi concluded OT prophecy, Luke said this about Zacharias and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist: "They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" (Luke 1:6). Elizabeth was the cousin of Mary, who would bear Jesus the Christ. It's safe to say that Mary and Joseph were in that compliant fellowship as well. It's not within the scope of this article to discuss parenthood. But suffice it to say that parents who desire for their children to walk in God's paths must first walk aright themselves. Zacharias, Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph were justified by faith as was Abraham. God imputed righteousness to them in response to faith. Compliance to God's ordinances was an outgrowth of that faith.

This distinction is critical because the Mosaic Law could bestow neither forgiveness nor life (Galatians 3:21). Even if we assume that the natural man could one day achieve perfect compliance to the Law, he would still be spiritually dead and in need of forgiveness for sins past. The Law was our schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24-25). Its divine design is to expose our spiritual destitution, prompt us to look outside ourselves, come to Jesus Christ by faith with empty hands and trust the Lord to save us. This is the lawful use of the Law (1 Timothy 1:8). The Law is holy, just and good (Romans 7:12).

Jesus came into this world to fulfill the Law. He lived a life of perfect righteousness and compliance to every ordinance. As the God-Man, he went to the Cross as the perfect satisfaction (propitiation) for our sins. In Ephesians 2:15, the apostle Paul wrote: "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." The word "ordinances" is the Greek dogma (Eng. 'dogma', a degree, doctrine, judgment). The 'dogma' of the Law was abolished by Jesus in the process of bringing Jew and Gentile into one body. The verb "having abolished" is an aorist active participle of *katargeo*, meaning "to render useless, to cause a person or thing to have no further efficacy, abolish"). Literal translation: "One having rendered the Law useless."

The theme of the epistle to the Colossians is the total sufficiency of Christ for the believer. As Paul traveled throughout Asia Minor, he constantly encountered Judaizers, some of whom followed him from city to city, who sought to ill-affect the minds of believers regarding salvation. Their contention was that the Law was still binding, that faith in Jesus was not enough for a righteous standing before God. While Paul encountered these loyalists to Moses in nearly every place, he took the occasion of writing to the Colossians to address the problem directly with inspired text.

In Colossians 2:16, we find some clues about what the Judaizers thought were essential ordinances that believers at Colosse were NOT observing (ordinances concerning food, drink, holy days, new moons and sabbaths). An alarming trend in Christendom today is a renewed compliance to Torah ordinances by some as an expression of righteousness. It's Colosse all over again. God nailed every OT ordinance to the Cross of Jesus Christ, including sabbaths (2:14). The trio of verbs is instructive. "Took it out of the way" is a perfect tense, indicating permanent results. It's modified by two past participles: "Having blotted out (erased) the handwriting of ordinances" and (2) "having nailed it to his cross." Notice the "it" is singular. The "it" represents the totality of Mosaic Law as one unit. Paul said all the ordinances as outlined in the Torah are a "shadow" or mere shade (2:17). Spiritual nourishment and increase come as a result of "holding the Head" (2:19), NOT the shadow. There is neither spiritual substance nor sustenance to be found in Torah shadows. Paul NEVER intended a co-mingling of Christ and shadows.

In Colossians 2:20, Paul asks a rhetorical question: "Why are you subject to ordinances when you died with Christ and to everything God nailed to his Cross?" This is the relevant question for every person who tries to make Torah compliance ancillary to Christ. The believer is "complete" in Christ (2:10), his head. This was Paul's whole purpose in writing this epistle. Interpreting the judgment of 2:16 as proof that the Colossian believers were being criticized for observing shadows is a total misread of the verse in its context. The Colossians, in accordance with Paul's teaching, left the shadow (Torah) on the Cross, where God nailed it. Judaizers criticized them for it. Why then resurrect what God erased in Christ, and call it righteousness? Being subject to Christ and subject to ordinances (shadows) at the same time is spiritual duplicity and a departure from apostolic doctrine. What is a Torah follower expecting to get from a shadow that he cannot get from Christ?

Another verse needs clarification. In 1 Corinthians 11:2, Paul wrote: "Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you." "Ordinances" here is the Greek *paradosis* (a giving over, tradition handed over from one person to another, either orally or in writing). What were these ordinances delivered by Paul? In comparing scripture with scripture, we can conclude with certainty that NONE of them pertained to the Torah. They probably included water baptism by immersion, the Lord's Supper (11:23-31), use of spiritual gifts (12:1-31) and the gathering of offerings on the first day of the week, the post-Pentecostal standard for Church worship (16:1-2).

A false doctrine floating around these days is Replacement Theology, which teaches that the Church inherited from Israel all its privileges because of its rejection of Christ. This may or may not be a factor in worship driven by the Torah. That doctrine is false on its face. God has two distinct programs: Israel and the Church. When the Church Age ends with Christ catching away his Church, his program with Israel will resume (Daniel's Seventieth Week). One of God's major purposes for the Great Tribulation will be to draw Israel to himself in advance of his kingdom on earth. Failure to make this distinction between Israel and the Church opens the door to all manner of biblical error.

Consider Hebrews 10:19, which reads: "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus." Entrance into the holiest, the very presence of God once reserved for the high priest alone behind the veil of the tabernacle/temple, is now the reality for every believer by the blood of Jesus Christ. This is the highest and holiest privilege for a believer, and ONLY the blood of Jesus makes this access possible. It's what the Cross of Christ was all about. Question: Does reaching back into the Torah and augmenting the Christian experience with OT sabbaths and holy days (shadows) improve or better facilitate entry into the holiest? Absolutely not! What then does a believer think he or she gains by adherence to OT ordinances? When a believer adopts the shadows that God nailed to the Cross of Christ as part of their Christian experience, he or she is like the owner of a Rolls Royce with gold-plated bumpers purchasing a \$1.00 bumper sticker, affixing it to gold plating and thinking the bumper sticker has improved the value of their Rolls Royce. It's an insult to the blood of Christ.

Finally, the scripture proclaims: "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Romans 10:4). The word "end" is telos ("termination, the limit at which a thing ceases to be, that by which a thing is finished"). As far as scripture is concerned, at the moment God clothes a believer with the righteousness of Christ, the law ceases to have ANY relevance whatsoever other than for instructive purposes. For a believer to add Torah-based practices (sabbaths, feasts, et al) to his or her life as a way of 'fulfilling righteousness' is in fact a practical denial of Christ's sufficiency.

For the believer who thinks he or she is really on to something with compliance to Torah ordinances, including worship on the Sabbath, they MUST be prepared to answer the following questions: (1) Why are you subjecting yourself to the ordinances that God nailed to the Cross? (2) What do you as a believer expect to get from a shadow that you cannot get from the blood and righteousness of Christ? (3) What part of "end" don't you understand?

An Apostolic Conference Call

The conference call is a staple of American business. It serves as a means whereby different company entities, often separated by hundreds or thousands of miles, stay on the same page in terms of company policies and projects. It's where the right hand stays up to speed on what the left hand is doing. Without the same-page communication that the conference call provides, businesses would be preoccupied with fixing mistakes rather than selling products and services.

The apostles did not have the conference call technology we have today. Yet there were occasions when a meeting of minds was required to get them on the 'same page' and maintain gospel integrity. Such an occasion is recorded in Acts 15, a record of the Jerusalem Council. It took place circa 50-51 A.D. and closely approximates Paul's authorship of Galatians. Some scholars believe Galatians was the first NT book written. If one compares the text of Acts 15 with Galatians 2, an argument could be made that (1) Galatians was written shortly after the Jerusalem Council, and (2) the Jerusalem Council precipitated the writing of Galatians to codify, in a manner of speaking, what the Council had concluded. In the first twenty years of Church history, Jerusalem had become the Jewish center of Christianity while Antioch of Syria had become the same for Gentiles. The Jerusalem Council was crucial for getting both Jewish and Gentile believers on the 'same gospel page' as the Kingdom of God expanded.

Chapter 15 begins: "And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, 'Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved'" (15:1). Why was this even an issue? These men were operating in a gospel vacuum. God introduced circumcision with Abraham, not Moses. The practice was carried over into the Mosaic Law several hundred years after. Abraham was a saved man, having been justified (made righteous) by faith before he was circumcised (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:10-12). God introduced circumcision as a 'sign' or 'seal' of the faith Abraham had while being uncircumcised. God's order of salvation with Abraham was justification first, then circumcision as a 'sign' of saving faith. This was a matter of biblical record that every Jew should have understood. But they were blinded by tradition. These disciples of Moses took a position that was biblically untenable. The rite of male circumcision never guaranteed the salvation of a single recipient. If it did, how could Jewish females ever be saved?

The Holy Ghost had separated Paul and Barnabas in the church at Antioch of Syria to embark upon the first missionary journey. This took place circa of 44 A.D. (Spring). After a time of prayer, fasting and laying on of hands, the church sent them on their way (Acts 13:1-3). Chapters 13-14 record the cities they visited, their preaching activities and some key journey events, including the stoning of Paul in Lystra (Acts 14:19). Historians set the time of their return to Antioch circa 46 A.D. (Fall), making the duration of the first missionary journey about 2-2½ years. Scripture adds: "And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode long time with the disciples" (14:27-28). The "long time" they spent with the church at Antioch would be 2-3 years.

It is important for us to establish this historical perspective. It tells us the gospel of grace, as preached by Paul, was thoroughly embedded in and understood by the church at Antioch as well as every church he and Barnabas planted. It is no wonder Paul and Barnabas had "no small dissension and disputation" with these men (15:2), because "the truth of the gospel" was at stake (Galatians 2:5; 2:14; Colossians 1:5), a truth for which they had hazarded their lives! Defending the gospel of grace can be and often is a life and death proposition!

The church at Antioch, which sent Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey, was now minded to send them and "certain other of them" (15:2) to Jerusalem for the purpose of resolving this question. One of those others was Titus, an uncircumcised Gentile (Galatians 2:3), who was likely brought along to make a point about the gospel, a living illustration of it. The church at Antioch funded their 300-mile trip to Jerusalem. Based upon a calculation of 24-30 miles as a day's journey, it would have taken about 10-12 days to make the journey plus the time spent with churches in Phenice and Samaria to declare the conversion of the Gentiles—a cause for "great joy" (15:3). After 2-3 weeks of travel southward, they arrived in Jerusalem where the apostles and elders received them (15:4). It was time for the conference call to begin.

It didn't take long for the "question" of mandatory circumcision to take center stage. Certain of the sect of the Pharisees made their position known: "That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses" (15:5). Our text says these Pharisees had "believed." But in comparing the reference to "false brethren" in Galatians 2:4, we must ask whether these Pharisees were born again believers or just nominal believers with no real comprehension of grace. In any case, it's clear the early church had its challenges with the transition from Law to Grace and comprehending the relationship, if any, between Mosaic Law and the Church. The primary purpose of this conference call was to define that relationship, once and for all. For a house divided against itself would not be able to stand!

The apostles and elders came together to consider the matter (15:6). There was the same "disputing" in Jerusalem as took place in Antioch. The word "disputing" signifies a mutual questioning, a discussion based on reasoned arguments. It was no doubt a visceral exchange of thought, not necessarily what we might call a knock down drag out affair. What I find interesting is that Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, seems to have deferred to Peter, the apostle to the Jews (Galatians 2:7-8). After a season of disputation, Peter took control of the conversation and addressed the brethren (15:7).

Peter reminded them of his experience with the centurion Cornelius, a Gentile, circa 41 A.D., some 9 years earlier (Acts 10:1ff). It reminds us once again that the question of circumcision should have long since been resolved based on what God did in Caesarea. It was an historical milestone in the life of the Church. Cornelius heard the gospel of Christ, and believed. God validated the faith of Cornelius and his associates by "giving them the Holy Ghost" as he did Peter and the disciples at Pentecost (15:8). It was a faith whereby God purified their hearts (forgave their sins), a display of divine approval that signified "no difference" between Jew and Gentile (15:9). The Lord granting forgiveness of sins and giving his Spirit to both Jew and Gentile alike on the same basis—faith in Jesus—had no connection with Mosaic Law. This was Peter's argument...an argument that was unassailable!

Peter furthermore concluded that putting a yoke—an unbearable yoke—upon the neck of the disciples, including circumcision or any other aspect of Mosaic Law, would constitute a tempting of God (15:10). The word "tempt" means to try or put to the test. Depending on its context, the word "tempt" can have an positive connotation (an ascertainment of quality) or negative connotation (provocation or malicious distrust). Acts 15 is a context that demands a negative meaning. Peter's use of "tempt" is both strategic and brilliant. The mention of "tempting God" would have brought to the mind of every biblically astute Jew in that Council the many OT references to Israel "tempting God" (Exodus 17:7; Numbers 14:22; Deuteronomy 6:16; Psalm 78:18; 106:14, et al). How did Israel provoke the Holy One? Psalm 78:41 provides light: "Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel." Israel "limited" their God

doubting (maliciously distrusting) his sufficiency to provide for them according to his promises. For Israel to exhibit such disbelief in the Lord's ability to deliver on his promises was a provocation, a malicious distrust.

In terms of the gospel and total sufficiency of Christ, attempting to place the yoke of Mosaic Law upon the necks of believers, according to Peter, would be a malicious distrust of Christ and his sufficiency to save to the uttermost and by his grace all who believe (15:11). In writing to the church at Corinth, Paul issued this warning: "Neither let us tempt [maliciously distrust] Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents (1 Corinthians 10:9). Teachers of Mosaic Law (Torah) compliance for believers in the present age have either rejected or failed to learn the truth of Acts 15. Their insistence on Mosaic Law compliance is nothing more than a provocation—a malicious distrust—of Christ. Yet they seem to have no clue as to the seriousness of their error!

Paul and Barnabas then took the floor, declaring the miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them (15:12). It goes without saying that the demonstrations of Holy Ghost power through Paul and Barnabas had nothing to do with Mosaic Law. Their experience was consistent with that of Peter and Cornelius, both of which involved God giving of his Spirit. When the Spirit of God attests to the gospel of grace in Christ Jesus without Mosaic Law, no other opinion matters! James then arose and added some prophetic insight. His comments were similar to that of a trial lawyer delivering his closing arguments to a jury (15:13-21). James affirms that Peter's testimony about God taking out from among the Gentiles a people for his name was in agreement with OT prophecy (15:14-15).

James shared a bit of keen prophetic insight. He said: "After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up" (15:16). There are a few OT texts to which James could have been referring, such as Isaiah 16:5, Amos 9:11. What exactly was the tabernacle of David to which James referred? It could NOT have been the tabernacle in the wilderness, for Christ on the cross ended any further need for a sin offering. It could NOT have been the temple that Solomon built for the same reason. The tabernacle of David refers to the temporary structure David constructed for the Ark of the Covenant when moving it from the house of Obed-edom back to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:17). Now, if the Lord was to build again the tabernacle of David—James argues he did—how would that rebuilding manifest itself? James cited the salvation of Gentiles as evidence it had happened (15:17). This assertion by James can lead to only one conclusion. The tabernacle of David was a foreshadowing of Christ, who was made flesh and dwelt (tabernacled) among us (John 1:14). He was "fallen down" in his death, "built again" with his resurrection and "set up" with his ascension to the right hand of the Father, where he is now the one Mediator between God and men (1 Timothy 2:4). The "tabernacle of David" of 15:16 is "the Lord" of 15:17.

James introduced his verdict as follows: "Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God" (15:19). The word "trouble" means "to disturb, annoy or further harass." This is what Mosaic Law—an unbearable yoke of bondage—does when placed upon the neck of a believer. It sounds familiar to the "trouble" Paul said Galatians believers were experiencing at the hands Law teachers. The word "troubled" in Galatians 1:7 is a different word, meaning "to agitate, cause inward commotion, render anxious or distressed." In either case, the Mosaic Law, when imposed upon believers as a requirement for either life or righteousness, is double trouble. The recommendations of James in 15:20 were practical measures for their testimony's sake, not soteriological. They were: (1) avoidance of things connected with idolatry,

(2) avoidance of all sexual impurity, and (3) avoidance of meats from strangled animals and improperly drained blood. In keeping themselves from these things, they would “do well” (15:29). These guidelines would come under the larger testimonial umbrella of 1 Thessalonians 5:22: “Abstain from all appearance of evil.”

James gave his reason for these measures: “For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day” (15:21). The Gentiles that experience the saving grace of God bear a responsibility to evangelize Jews and live a life that places no cause of stumbling in their path. The guidelines of James—less than a handful—would help to avoid accusations from lost Jews that Christianity was lawless or disrespectful. It was a matter of testimony, not a partial imposition of the Mosaic Law. His judgment “seemed good” to every member of the Council as well as the Spirit of God (15:25, 28). They agreed to compose and circulate an open letter to Gentile churches in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia that set forth these handful of recommendations (15:23).

In 15:24, the apostolic letter employed the words “troubled” and “subverting” in describing the effects of these Mosaic Law teachers. The word “troubled” is the same Greek word Paul used in Galatians 1:7. The believer who imposes Mosaic Law upon himself or attempts to do so with others is setting himself against Christ, the Holy Spirit and apostolic doctrine. He is an instigator of malicious distrust in Christ and the gospel of grace. The word “subverting” is the Greek *anaskeuazo*. It literally means “to pack up baggage in order to carry it away to another place.” Figuratively, it means “to turn away violently from a right state.” The imposition of Mosaic Law upon a believer is an act of subversion. James attests that a commandment for Gentile believers to keep (comply with) Mosaic Law did NOT originate with the apostles. In other words, there is NO APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY behind any attempt to bring Mosaic Law to bear upon the Church! Acts 15 puts to rest the Satanic falsehood that the Church should have carried Mosaic Law over into Church life and, as a result, has gotten it wrong for the last two thousand years. The Jerusalem Council got the gospel right! If Mosaic Law has no ability to save a sinner, then it has no wherewithal whatsoever to grow a believer in grace...EXCEPT as it reveals the truth of Christ's glorious Person and character, a truth that the indwelling Holy Spirit can now build into the life.

A few observations are in order. First, Peter's mention of Mosaic Law as a “yoke” that neither they nor their fathers were able to bear (15:10) proves that “my yoke” of Matthew 11:29-30, which Jesus invited his hearers to take upon themselves, could NOT have been a reference to Mosaic Law as some heretics claim. Jesus himself is the yoke of rest, redeeming believers from the curse of the Law. There are fewer bastardizations of scripture more flagrant than interpreting Jesus' “yoke” in Matthew 11:29-30, a yoke he said was an “easy” and “light” burden, as a reference to Mosaic Law. They were already under the Mosaic Law. In comparing scripture with scripture, one can only conclude that those that “labored” and were “heavy laden” were under the same ‘unbearable’ yoke that Peter cited. Think about it! If Jesus was offering Torah compliance as his yoke, he was essentially inviting his hearers to lay down the yoke of Mosaic Law, then turn right around and pick up the same yoke. Does this make sense? If Jesus saw the “heavy laden” as those laboring under sin's bondage, which means they HAD to be under Mosaic Law already, then what ability would Torah compliance—which has no power to deliver from sin—have to relieve them from the burden of sin?

Secondly, there are voices in the religious world that claim the Church was ‘hijacked’ way back when by failing to bring Mosaic Law into Church life as a matter of discipleship (Sabbaths, Feasts, etc.). If that bogus allegation is true, the apostles in concert with the Holy Ghost were the ones

who hijacked it. These same heretical voices claim to be on mission to 'retake' Christian churches by convincing them of their historic error and 'teach' Torah compliance as an essential part of Church life. Question: How should we who know the truth describe efforts on the part of Law-mongering heretics to reinstitute in Church life what God soundly rejected? Answer: A FOOL'S ERRAND! If God the Father intended for Mosaic Law to play ANY part in the life of a Christian or the Church, the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 would have been the perfect time to set the record straight. But the verdict of the apostles in agreement with the Holy Spirit was: THE GRACE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IS SUFFICIENT TO SAVE A SINNER TO THE UTTERMOST, whether Jew or Gentile!

Thirdly, Law-mongering heretics allege the Church makes a huge error by focusing on New Testament truth (the 'back of the book') and neglecting Old Testament truth (the 'front of the book'). This is clearly NOT the case. It is the New Testament that reveals the new covenant in Christ's blood and explains the Old Testament. One cannot fully appreciate the Old Testament without knowing the New Testament. It is the New that puts the Old in proper perspective. Imposition of the Old upon the New, commingling the Law and Grace, is a disastrous hermeneutical approach to scripture. It is the seedbed for all manner of antichristian heresy.

Fourthly, there is NO evidence that ANY of the apostles either observed Mosaic Law after Pentecost or taught others to do so. It is abundantly clear that God NEVER inspired Paul to write ANY instruction to ANY church where he recommended Torah compliance of ANY kind as an integral part of discipleship or growth in grace. Colossians 2:16-17 is clear evidence that Paul taught churches they were under NO obligation to observe Sabbaths and Holy Days. He said they were "shadows" of things to come. In Acts 18:18, Paul shaved his head because of a vow. Whatever reason Paul had for doing this, it was strictly personal, not a pattern for the churches. In Acts 12:3, Luke makes historical reference to "the days of unleavened bread." But citing this reference as proof Peter observed the feast as a Torah-compliant act is an untenable stretch. Even if he and other believers were observing it, it's clear the apostles NEVER codified it as Church doctrine or practice. This is what happens when one attempts to find 'proof texts' to support his heresy. It inevitably involves a 'reading into' the text a meaning the writer never intended.

Fifthly, the Law-mongering heretics of our day, who insist on Torah compliance, are the ones attempting to 'hijack' the Church as did the sect of the Pharisees at Jerusalem and the false teachers at Antioch of Syria. They were defeated in A.D. 51. They will ALWAYS be rejected by the Spirit of God and those who know gospel truth!

The apostolic conference call of Acts 15 definitely put the predominantly Jewish and Gentile churches respectively on the same gospel page. It reaffirmed Paul's contention that the believer is COMPLETE in Christ, having been justified by faith, clothed with HIS righteousness and spared the need for ANY embellishments of Mosaic Law. It's the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ that the Jerusalem Council clarified unambiguously in their historic conference call!

The Simplicity in Christ Jesus

Most of us like things that are simple, easy to understand, easy to use. Inventors and entrepreneurs have made billions of dollars developing products that make simple the complex. The Microsoft empire, for example, was built upon an Excel program, which allowed corporations and small businesses alike to develop spreadsheets with built-in formulas that could perform complex financial computations with the simple entry of numerical data into a spreadsheet. The Excel program itself is extremely complex, requiring years of development by software engineers. On the user side, that complexity is harnessed by a simple act of data entry. The WD40 product is another example. 'WD' stands for 'Water Displacement'. It took forty attempts by its developers to get the formula right; hence WD40. The complex chemical formula of WD40, which displaces moisture and applies penetrating lubricant in its place, is harnessed by the user with the simple push of a spray nozzle.

In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul wrote: "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." One of the prime objectives of Satan is to complicate gospel simplicity in the minds of sinners. He successfully corrupts a mind when he convinces a sinner that something more than Christ is required for salvation. Satan is not primarily about ALTERNATIVES to Christ, even though he'll gladly take it. Satan is all about ADDITIVES to Christ (i.e., 'Jesus plus something'). The word "simplicity" is haplotēs ("singleness, sincerity, mental honesty"). The name 'Jesus' means salvation. Salvation is in Christ alone, plus nothing, minus nothing! Satan corrupts this simplicity by adding something to Christ (e.g., baptism, works, church membership and attendance; OT Law, Ordinances and Covenants; sacraments, etc.). Satan really doesn't care WHAT he gets men to add to Christ as long as he adds something. In doing so, he corrupts the mind from the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus.

The verb "beguiled" is **exapatao** (**ek**=out + **hapatao**=to seduce). The prefix **ek** intensifies the verb. The first temptation was out-and-out seduction. The word "subtilty" signifies cleverness, craftiness. The point of Satan's pitch to Eve was: "There's more to the simple 'Thou shalt not eat!' prohibition than meets the eye. There is something good to be gained from violating the prohibition. God is withholding that good thing from you!" The devil uses the same cleverness with sinners today, not only where the pleasures of sin are concerned, but where the gospel is concerned. He convinces them there's got to be MORE to full salvation than Christ alone through faith alone. Once he corrupts the mind of a man, he cares not what 'something' a man adds to Christ to blur the simplicity of the gospel.

As with our Microsoft and WD40 examples, the simplicity of salvation in Christ on the sinner's side is based on an infinitely complex operation on God's part. Consider the many genealogical requirements and the providential preservation of life from Abraham to David, culminating with Joseph and Mary. In the womb of that virgin maiden, the Spirit of God fused the eternal Son of God with an embryo, which began the process of Incarnation. From his miraculous birth to vicarious death, the God-Man traversed this earth in sinless perfection. His resurrection from the grave validated every word he ever uttered as true and every promise he ever made as certain of fulfillment. Perhaps the greatest promise where the sinner is concerned is the promise of forgiveness and eternal life for a simple look of faith to the One who died for them and rose again (John 3:14-15). All the complexity of the gospel took place on God's part. On the sinner's part, it is as simple as "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

Let's lay a little groundwork. At the root of gospel simplicity is the role of God as Creator. "All things were MADE by him; and without him was not any thing MADE that was MADE" (John 1:3). John attributes the creation to Christ. "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, MADE of a woman, MADE under the law" (Galatians 4:4). "For he hath MADE him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be MADE the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). We believers are MADE the righteousness of God because Christ was MADE sin for us. The righteousness of God is NEVER earned. "To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath MADE us accepted in the beloved" (Ephesians 1:6). "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is MADE unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30). Even David of old understood this truth: "Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath MADE us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture" (Psalm 100:3). Can you see the pattern?

For the believer in Jesus Christ, God reckons to his account the merits of Christ, including complete compliance to EVERY OT law, sacrifice and ordinance. God nailed them ALL to the Cross of Christ. We are therefore COMPLETE in him (Colossians 2:10, 14). That's why there's not a single NT scripture requiring a believer in Christ to obey OT ordinances of any kind. Christ is the believer's wisdom. Christ is the believer's righteousness. Christ is the believer's sanctification and redemption. Christ is become the believer's Sabbath rest! The corruption of the mind that Satan seeks is 'Christ plus something' to make a believer wise, righteous, sanctified, redeemed and accepted. Satan corrupts the mind when he successfully convinces a man of salvation's complexity (i.e., 'Christ plus something'). But salvation, in all its biblical simplicity, is 'Christ plus nothing'. When a man adds ANYTHING to Christ and simple faith in him as the way of salvation and acceptance, his mind is corrupted.

Paul wrote two inspired epistles, Galatians and Colossians, to combat this error. In almost every place where he planted a church, Paul and the congregations he established were harassed by Judaizers who insisted that faith in Jesus did not preclude obedience to Moses. Paul claimed it did! According to Paul, Christ was the END of the Law for righteousness to everyone that believes (Romans 10:4). Whether one prefers the word 'Covenant' to 'Law' is irrelevant. If it's OT in nature, Christ fulfilled it. A believer needs nothing more than Christ to be reckoned 'complete' in the sight of God! When the believer embellishes his life with OT ordinances to attain what he thinks is a greater degree of righteousness, he insults the Christ whose righteousness is sufficient! Paul wrote to Timothy regarding such teachers who had "swerved" from the faith unto "vain jangling; desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm" (1 Timothy 1:6-7). Even so today there are articulate false teachers who corrupt the minds of believers with persuasive arguments about mixing the grace in Christ Jesus with some level of OT covenant compliance. These modern-day Judaizers are NOT the ministers of Christ. For why would an all-sufficient Christ need to add anything to himself?

In Galatians 5:4, Paul wrote these words: "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." Many have misinterpreted Paul's words here to teach that a believer would-could lose salvation by reverting back to OT Law with a view to being justified. A believer, once justified, can NEVER be unjustified! The phrase "fallen from grace" means to remove oneself from grace as an operating principle. For the lost man who seeks to be justified by keeping the Law, it means he will never experience the saving grace of God. He will remain lost. For a saved man, whose mind Satan has corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ, it means he has forfeited grace as an operational principle in his spiritual life and growth. Nothing quenches and grieves the Spirit of God in a believer's life more than the embrace (or 're-

embrace') of 'Christ plus something' as the means of finding favor with the Father. That's why Paul wrote to the Colossians: "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him" (2:6).

The simplicity that is in Christ Jesus is apostolic doctrine. The early church embraced it as did EVERY local church Paul ever planted. The Catholic church corrupted it, but the Reformation rediscovered it. Every church I have ever belonged to or pastored has believed it. The colleges and seminary I attended taught that simplicity. The church we now attend believes it in like fashion as did the Jerusalem church of Acts 2. Such is the gospel simplicity that is in Christ Jesus. Please do not complicate it!

A New Creation in Christ Jesus

It is critical for the growth of a new believer to understand what happened to him when he believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel is "the power of God unto salvation" to all who believe it (Romans 1:16). But exactly what kind of power is it that saves a believer? Jesus taught that the man or woman who believes in him is passed from death unto life (John 5:24). The kind of power to do that, as we learn from the gospel, is resurrection power! It's the same power that breathed the breath of life into Adam's nostrils (Genesis 2:7) and the same power that made something out of nothing when God said: "Let there be light!" (1:3). The creative power of Omnipotent God doubles as resurrection power! It is nothing less than the power that brought the heavens and earth into existence and raised Jesus from the dead that passes the believer from spiritual death unto eternal life.

The verb "passed" is the perfect tense of the Greek **metabaino** (**meta**="across" + **baino**="to go"). It means "to pass over from one place to another." The perfect tense signifies a permanent transfer. Once a believer moves from spiritual death to spiritual life, he enjoys eternal life in Christ, never again to see death. The apostle Paul stated it like this: "Who [God the Father] hath delivered [rescued] us from the power [authority] of darkness, and hath translated [transported, transferred] us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Colossians 1:13). The verbs "passed" and "translated" both speak of a fundamental transfer of existence from death to life, from a kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. God accomplishes this great creative work in response to heart-felt faith in Jesus, not mere mental assent to a set of facts.

It is no surprise to find the new birth in scripture associated with God's creative power. When a man is born again, and passed from death unto life, God's creative power performs it. As the Spirit of God, the agent of regeneration (new birth), applies the effects of Christ's death (dead to the Law, crucified with Christ) and resurrection (Christ liveth in me) to a believer, a NEW MAN is created. The creative power of the gospel changes a believer at his core. The apostle Paul said: "And that ye put on the NEW MAN, which after God is CREATED in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:24). The Lord's saving grace clothes the believer with the righteousness and holiness of Christ. Again: "And have put on the NEW MAN, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that CREATED him" (Colossians 3:10). Jesus exercises creative power in regeneration, creating a new man fashioned in his own image inasmuch as he now lives in the believer.

Paul also wrote these familiar words: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new CREATURE: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). In the context, the fact that Christ died for ALL who were spiritually dead means ALL who are reconciled to God by the death of his Son and made alive by the gospel are new creatures in Christ. Old things are passed away! One of the 'old things' that passes away is the relationship to Mosaic Law. He's no longer under its dominion because he died to the Law and is now married to Christ (Romans 7:1-4). He now lives under Kingdom authority where he is clothed with Christ's righteousness and subject only to Christ. Some protest here, arguing that a man who is no longer 'under Law' can no longer sin since "sin is the transgression of the Law." The problem with this objection is that being 'dead to the Law' does NOT mean that a believer is without law to God. He is "under the law to Christ" (1 Corinthians 9:21). The believer who lives under the Law to Christ is under a higher standard than Mosaic Law. When he violates the righteousness and holiness of Christ, whether by attitude or act, he sins against his Lord. It is perfectly conceivable that a believer could sin against Christ and still be in compliance with Mosaic Law.

Believers are said to be "in Christ" as well as Christ being "in them." For those who are IN CHRIST, the following is a spiritual principle: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new CREATURE" (Galatians 6:15). The Church of Jesus Christ, the habitation of God through the Spirit, consists of both Jews (circumcision) and Gentiles (uncircumcision), who've been born again. In Christ Jesus, the Jew is not advantaged; nor is the Gentile disadvantaged. The only thing that "avails" (exerts force or power) in Christ is the fact that every one who is in Christ has been made a new creature through the creative power of the risen Christ. It is that level of power that avails for the believer.

God created the heavens and the earth for a purpose. Revelation 4:11 declares: "For thy pleasure they are and were created." The 'pleasure' principle applies to born again believers as well. But we are given additional specifics: "For we are his workmanship, CREATED in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). An obvious observation here is that good works are goal of God's creative work, not the cause of it. That's grace. But these good works were "before ordained." Some would cite these good works to be a reference to Mosaic Law. I would agree to the extent the Ten Commandments represent a baseline for spiritual and moral rectitude. But since we're in a context involving the new birth with creation and resurrection power in play, the good works are more likely to be representative of Christ's character and conduct--the behavior of God--as the Spirit forms Christ-likeness in the believer's life. A believer can learn what these good works are by saturating his mind with scripture, learning of Christ from Genesis to Revelation! In like manner as being under the law to Christ is a far higher standard than being under Mosaic Law, so also do the good works that proceed from the Spirit of Christ far exceed those of mere compliance to Mosaic Law.

The Law demands no gods other than the true God, no sacrilege, keeping of the Sabbath, honoring of parents, no murder, no adultery, no lying, no stealing and no lust. But can the avoidance of evil works be considered the doing of good works? The indwelling Holy Spirit, in contrast to the prohibitions of the Law, enables the believer to love God and his fellow man--the two great commandments upon which the entire Law rests. In addition, the Spirit empowers the believer to offer unadulterated worship, praise and thanksgiving to his Lord, avoid every form of sacrilege, love and honor parents, respect the sanctity of life, maintain sexual purity, speak the truth at all times, respect the property of others and be content with what God gives him. To this basic 'good works' profile we can add the tangibles of Holy Spirit fruit--JOY in the Lord's salvation, being at PEACE with God, himself and his fellow man, LONGSUFFERING (even-temperedness) and GENTLENESS (kindness) in relationships with others, GOODNESS (displays of benevolence), FAITH (life lived in confidence), MEEKNESS (operating under Christ's rule) and TEMPERANCE (self-control in all aspects of life). This is what it means to be like Jesus, the believer's primary objective in life! We must always remember that the goal of the Holy Spirit in discipleship is Christ Conformance, NOT Torah Compliance.

These are the kinds of good works God predestinated a new creature in Christ to produce--a life littered with spiritual fruit that reflects the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). Good works serve as light to lost men so they might glorify the Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 2:12). Paul exhorted rich believers to be rich in good works (1 Timothy 6:18). Paul admonished Timothy, a young preacher, to be thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Timothy 3:17). Paul instructed Titus, another of his young proteges, to show a pattern of good works (Titus 2:7). Jesus redeemed believers to be a peculiar people, zealous of good works (2:14). Those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works (3:8; 3:14). God's people are admonished to consider one another so as to provoke unto love and good works (Hebrews 10:24).

The source of godliness in a believer as it manifests itself in good works is Christ living in his people through the enabling power—creation and resurrection power—of the Spirit. David understood the need for God's creative power as he prayed for restoration of fellowship after the sins of adultery and conspiracy to commit murder. He prayed: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). The resurrection power of Christ which makes the believer a new creation is the same power required to live a godly life filled with good works. It's a fool's errand to believe that the letter of Mosaic Law has a single iota of power to produce Christ-likeness. It is the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus that avails for a believer as he now lives in his new kingdom realm—dead to the Law and created anew IN CHRIST JESUS!

The Synagogue of Satan

The historical setting is the reign of Roman emperor Domitian (81-96 A.D.). The apostle John has been banished to the Isle of Patmos. If we estimate the writing of Revelation to be circa 90 A.D., the apostle Paul has been dead for twenty-five years. While the churches Paul planted in Asia Minor are still alive and well, they've been impacted by various heresies, many of which Paul wrote to combat and correct.

In Chapters 2-3, the Lord Jesus delivers individual messages to seven churches. In each message, Jesus informs them he has full knowledge of their spiritual condition (good and bad), what they're enduring, what actions they should take and a promise to the faithful. It's encouraging to see that while NONE of the churches passed muster in terms of a clean bill of spiritual health, all seven are LOVED by the Lord Jesus. There is nothing more precious to Jesus than local churches that assemble in HIS name and proclaim HIS gospel.

The churches at Smyrna and Philadelphia shared a common malady: the "synagogue of Satan." To the church at Smyrna, he said: "And I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan" (Revelation 2:9). To the church at Philadelphia, he reiterated: "Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee" (3:9). It is not clear whether members of this satanic group had infiltrated the church or were just a local presence in the city whose influence was felt by the church.

Before we seek to identify who these folks were and whether there is a modern-day equivalent, let us examine the words of Jesus to ascertain what we DO know to be true. The term "synagogue" sounds a little sarcastic but is, in fact, a statement of reality. These folks obviously claimed to have Jewish roots and practices. But Jesus said they were a synagogue with Satan at the helm. Perhaps they had a Jewish pedigree (physical component) but lacked the faith of Abraham (spiritual component). But I'm not sure that would constitute blasphemy. They were more likely to have been Gentiles who believed the Church was the new Israel and therefore considered themselves to be Jews with an obligation to bring elements of Mosaic Law into church life. Whatever they may have THOUGHT they were, Jesus said they were BLASPHEMERS and LIARS!

The overriding message here is our Lord's seriousness about his gospel and his divine indignation with those who augment it in any way. The apostle Paul taught that Mosaic Law had no capacity whatsoever to bring spiritual life or God's righteousness to a sinner dead in trespasses and sins (Galatians 3:21). He also affirmed that Christ becomes the believer's righteousness and life when he calls upon Jesus' name, believing he died for their sins and rose again the third day. This is the message of the gospel! Activity that seeks to alter this message—adding to or taking from—is satanic activity. The synagogue of Satan was no doubt engaged in the modification of the gospel with Jewish (Mosaic) elements.

The charge of blasphemy is a serious one. But how does one commit blasphemy? One blasphemes when he treats sacred things with contempt. Where the gospel is concerned, it all boils down to the doctrine of redemption and the blood of Christ. The shed blood of Jesus, the Seed of Abraham, is the basis for the new covenant that fulfills the Abrahamic covenant and connects the believer to the promises made to Abraham. The Mosaic covenant, which God added alongside the Abrahamic covenant to exacerbate the knowledge of sin, is the old covenant from which Christ redeems the believer. God has not done away with the old covenant. By virtue of his death with Christ, the believer dies to the old covenant and is made alive by the new covenant in Christ's blood. When

men mix the old and new covenants in some sort of gospel hybrid, they show contempt for the blood of Christ, deeming it unable, in and of itself, to secure our eternal redemption. In doing so, they become blasphemers and Jesus calls them exactly that!

In addition to the charge of blasphemy, Jesus accused the synagogue of Satan of lying! A lie is a false statement made with the intent to deceive. It misrepresents the truth. What exactly was the synagogue of Satan lying about? The gospel affirms the death of Christ on the Cross was the total satisfaction for our sins and the demands of the Law. It affirms that the blood of Christ was sufficient to redeem them that were under the Law from the curse of the Law. It affirms the believer of the gospel to be dead to the Law and alive unto the Lawgiver. The lie was likely two-fold in nature. First, Gentiles who claim to be Jews misrepresent the facts. Secondly, the risen Christ considers their claim the Church is Israel and therefore obligated to continue observing Mosaic Law to be a deliberate misrepresentation of gospel truth and the value of his Cross. It misrepresents the doctrine of redemption! Jesus is the final Judge. When he levels charges of blasphemy and lying against any people, there exists no higher court to which they can appeal their conviction!

Satan is in the business of blinding the minds of unbelievers to the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Corinthians 3:14; 4:4). He uses his subtility to corrupt the minds of believers from the simplicity that is in Christ (11:3). It is expected that his 'synagogue' would be engaged in both of these activities—blinding and corrupting minds. His ultimate objective is to persuade the unsaved and saved alike that the death of Jesus, his precious blood and his resurrection (the gospel) is insufficient, in and of itself, to secure eternal redemption on behalf of those who believe. The argument a synagogue of Satan propagates usually takes the form of old 'covenant' plus new 'covenant'—a mix of Law and Grace. The NT, however, affirms that unbelievers are 'under Law' and believers 'under Grace' and that no man can be 'under' both at the same time. Those who mix Law and Grace essentially despise the blood of Jesus and incur his displeasure in the form of a two-fold indictment—blasphemers and liars!

These synagogues of Satan were apparently claiming the higher 'gospel' ground. They considered their allegiance to Mosaic Law and their attempt to meld it with Christianity as the superior position. But the Lord said he would ultimately make the synagogue of Satan worship at the feet of the Church and know how much Jesus loves those who champion the gospel of grace and his precious blood. The synagogues of Satan were likely akin to the Judaizers against whom Paul warned the Galatians and Colossians. If a man believes and teaches that Mosaic Law can, in any way, contribute to life or righteousness, he is a Judaizer, a member of the synagogue of Satan. He may have a quiver full of bastardized proof texts he claims prove that Mosaic Law was always intended to be part of Church life. But in the final analysis, salvation hinges upon the efficaciousness of the blood of Christ to secure our eternal redemption, clothe us in Christ's righteousness and provide us a way into the holiest. The offering of the body of Christ—his death and precious blood—perfects forever the believer who is sanctified by faith in him (Hebrews 10:14). Adding so much as one requirement to the blood of Christ as necessary to achieve these ends is blasphemy and lying!

The synagogue of Satan through the ages has taken on different forms. But in the final analysis, it has at its core an alternative to redemption by the blood of Jesus Christ. A modern-day illustration is alleged Pastor Apollo Quiboloy, the self-appointed leader of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. He claims, however, to be "The Appointed Son of God." His ministry is one of the most blasphemous I've ever seen. I have taken the time to watch an entire TV broadcast. I heard him claim to be

head of the New Jerusalem and the end of the Church Age. He belittles the idea of "Jesus Christ the Saviour" as old Church dogma and the fruit of denominationalism. At the core of his message is repentance, a commitment to "do the will of the Almighty Father no matter what." While it has a ring of authenticity (the worst kind of error), it amounts to no more than "a shew of wisdom in will worship" (Colossians 2:23). A viewer will listen in vain to hear ANY mention of the true gospel—justification by faith in Christ or eternal redemption by his precious blood. The gospel of Christ, according to Quiboloy, was made obsolete by his advent. He actually claims Isaiah 53:10, a prophetic reference to Jesus the suffering Messiah, has been fulfilled in him inasmuch God "bruised" him over a five-year period in isolation on two Philippine mountains as he met with "The Father" and survived on a diet of bananas. You can't make this stuff up! What is truly sad is the many mind-numbed robots clothed in white assembled to hear this minister of Satan espouse his blasphemy and buy whole-heartedly into it. Every synagogue of Satan, regardless of the name under which it operates, will claim to have some connection with Israel and advocate some degree of adherence to OT Law, whether it be for salvation or discipleship, at the expense of NT Grace, the total sufficiency of Christ and the redeeming power of his precious blood.

These messages to the churches at Smyrna and Philadelphia should strike fear in the heart of every soul that seeks to add some aspect of Torah (Mosaic Law) compliance as necessary to the attainment of life and righteousness. The blood of Christ ALONE has the power to redeem, regenerate, justify, reconcile, cleanse from sin, empower and enable the child of God to walk in fellowship with his Lord. Those who champion any element of Mosaic Law as integral to the gospel are (1) the enemies of Christ, (2) the enemies of his Cross, (3) despisers of the blood of Christ, and (4) members of the synagogue of Satan. In the end, Jesus will expose them for the blasphemers and liars they are!