

Was the LAW of God *"Nailed to the Cross"?*

Were the Ten Commandments "nailed to the cross" when Jesus died for our sins? Was the Sabbath commandment one of those "laws" of God which was ABOLISHED at the cross? Is the Sabbath no longer binding upon Christians? What is the real meaning of Colossians 2:14-17? What was really done away with at the death of Jesus Christ? It is time we faced this question -- your salvation itself could be at stake!

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The apostle Paul wrote many things which became Scripture, but some of them are difficult to be understood unless we have the right background and experience. For this reason, the apostle Peter wrote in his second epistle, "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which IGNORANT AND UNSTABLE PEOPLE DISTORT, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction" (II Pet.3:15-16, NIV).

Some of the writings of Paul have been misinterpreted by many, today, who claim that the laws of God, including the Sabbath day, are abolished and done away with!

How strange! Notice what Paul actually had to say about the laws of God. To the Romans he wrote, "All who sin [that is, break the law -- see I John 3:4 where John writes, "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin IS lawlessness"] apart from the law [that is, not having or understanding the codified law], and all who sin under the law will be judged BY THE LAW. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who OBEY the law who will be declared righteous" (Rom.2:12-13).

Did the apostle Paul really teach that the laws of God were done away? Not at all; he taught that merely observing the law, apart from faith in Christ, will not save a single soul. But obeying the laws of God, combined WITH FAITH in Christ, is the way to salvation! Paul wrote, also to the Romans, "Do we, then, NULLIFY the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we UPHOLD THE LAW" (Rom.3:31).

Now, that doesn't sound to me like a man who taught that God's law was abolished. Rather, it sounds to me like the apostle Paul had the same attitude towards the law of God that the apostle James had. James similarly wrote, "If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whosoever keeps the WHOLE LAW and yet stumbles at just ONE POINT is GUILTY of breaking all of it. For he who said, 'Do

not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a **LAWBREAKER**."

James went on, "Speak and act as those who are going to be **JUDGED BY THE LAW** that gives freedom" (James 2:8-12).

James goes on to show that mere faith, apart from deeds, works, or obedience to the **LAW** of God, is empty nothingness -- a useless vapor. He declares unequivocally, "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, **FAITH BY ITSELF**, if it is not accompanied by **ACTION**, is **DEAD**" (James 2:14-17).

James reiterates, "You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he **DID** when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working **TOGETHER**, and his faith was made complete by what he did" (verses 20-22). James concludes this argument, pointing out that even the harlot Rahab was spared because she gave lodging to the Israelite spies who came to Jericho -- not just because of her "faith." Says James, "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead" (vs.25-26).

How clear that both Paul and James taught the same gospel -- the same truth! Both knew that God's law was **STILL IN FORCE**! It is not "nullified" by faith at all! Rather, faith must work together with the deeds of the law, for us to be righteous in God's sight!

Is the Law of God "Sin"?

Some in their hatred of the commandments of God go so far as to say the law of God was "sin." They call the Sabbath day and holy days of God evil. But would a just and righteous God give to His people, whom He Himself chose from among all the nations, a law that was evil or sinful? That makes no sense whatsoever!

God inspired Moses to write the exact opposite. Moses declared, "See, I have faithfully taught you decrees and laws as the **LORD** my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your **WISDOM** and **UNDERSTANDING** to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the **LORD** our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?" (Deut.4:5-8).

The laws of God are **WONDERFUL**! David was so impressed by them that he, a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), wrote:

"I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands" (verse 10).

- "I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches" (v.14).
- "Open my eyes that I may see WONDERFUL things in your law" (v.18).
- "My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times" (v.20).
- "Your statutes are my delight; they are my counsellors" (v.24).
- "I have chosen the way of truth; I have set my heart on your laws" (v.30).
- "I run in the path of your commands; for you have set my heart free" (v.32).
- "Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart" (v.34).
- "Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight" (v.35).
- "I delight in your commands because I LOVE them" (v.47).
- "I remember your ancient laws, O Lord, and I find comfort in them" (v.52).
- "I will hasten and not delay to obey your commands" (v.60).
- "At midnight I rise to give you thanks for your righteous laws" (v.62).
- "Teach me knowledge and good judgment, for I BELIEVE in your commands" (v.66).
- "The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold" (v.72).
- "If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction" (v.92).
- "To all perfection I see a limit; but your commands are boundless" (v.96).
- "Oh, how I LOVE your law! I meditate on it all day long" (v.97).
- "I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on all your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts" (vs.99-100).
- "I have not departed from your laws, for you yourself have taught me" (v.102).
- "Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart. My heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end" (vs.111-112)
- "I hate double-minded men, but I love your law" (v.113).

"My flesh trembles in fear of you; I stand in AWE of your laws" (v.120).

"It is time for you to act, O Lord; your law is being broken" (v.126).

"Because I love your command more than gold, more than pure gold, and because I consider all your precepts right, I hate every wrong path" (vs.127-128).

"Your statutes are wonderful; therefore I obey them" (v.129).

"Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed" (v.136).

"Your righteousness is everlasting and your law is true" (v.142)

"Those who devise wicked schemes are near, but they are far from your law" (v.150).

"Long ago I learned from your statutes that you established them TO LAST FOREVER" (v.152).

"All your words are true; all your righteous laws are ETERNAL" (v.160).

"I hate and abhor falsehood but I love your law " (v.163).

"Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws" (v.164).

"Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble" (v.165).

"I wait for your salvation O Lord, and I follow your commands. I obey your statutes, for I love them greatly" (vs.166-167).

"May my tongue sing of your word, for all your commands are righteous" (v.172).

"I long for your salvation, O Lord, and your law is my delight" (v.174).

"I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant, for I have not forgotten your commands" (v.176).

Did you read each one of these verses carefully? It would be very profitable for you to read the entire 119th Psalm. It is a precious treasure trove of priceless gems concerning the laws, statutes, and commandments of Almighty God -- the precious Law He gave mankind for our eternal good and everlasting welfare.

Make no mistake! God's Law is not "sin," as some wicked and malevolent men and false ministers have maintained. The apostle Paul said, "What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? CERTAINLY NOT! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law" (Rom.7:7). In other words, the Law of God is what tells us WHAT SIN IS! IT IS NOT SIN,

BUT THE *DEFINER* OF SIN!

Paul went on, "For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'Do not covet.' But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead" (vs.7-8). In other words, without the law of God, we would not even recognize sin, or know what it is. It is seemingly "dead." It is only through the looking glass of the law of God that we can recognize the hideous monster of sin for what it really is.

The law, you see, tells us exactly what is and is not "sin." However, it does not give us the POWER to overcome sin, or to master our human impulses. It merely tells us the difference between right and wrong. In order to OBEY God's righteous, holy law, we must have an inner POWER or strength given to us, an enabling power -- the power and might of the Holy Spirit of GOD!

Paul went on to write, "So then, the LAW IS HOLY, and the commandment is HOLY, RIGHTEOUS and GOOD" (Rom.7:12). He added, "We know that the law is SPIRITUAL; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin" (verse 14). Paul saw how holy was the law of God, and how weak and unregenerate his human flesh was. Of himself, he knew that he could not obey the holy laws of God. He cried out in anguish:

"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God -- through Jesus Christ our Lord!

"So then, I myself in my mind am a SLAVE TO GOD'S LAW, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin" (Rom.7:24-25).

As followers of Christ, we strive to obey God's law, in our minds, even though our human flesh pulls often in the opposite direction, seeking its own desires, fulfillment of its lusts, and fleshly appetites.

Paul went on to show HOW we overcome this downward pull of our own human nature, and become obedient to the laws of God. He declared, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law [of God] was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be FULLY MET in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the SPIRIT" (Rom.8:1-4).

God's Holy Spirit gives us the POWER to obey the laws of God, and to subdue and subjugate and overcome the pulls of the sinful flesh! Paul wrote, "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God." Those who do not have the Spirit of God, therefore, are condemned to sin

-- cannot truly obey God's laws. But, Paul continues:

"You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ" (Rom.8:7-9). True Christians, or believers in Christ, are not under the sway of their sinful human nature any more. They have been delivered -- set free! They are now under the control of God, and His Spirit, and have the enabling power to obey the laws of God by means of the Spirit of God within them!

Does this sound as if God simply created a law too hard for man to obey, and then thought better of it, and destroyed the law itself?

Does this sound as if God decided to drastically LOWER HIS REQUIREMENTS for salvation by abolishing His holy, perfect, righteous law? Will God now accept sinning men, sinners, those under the sway of their human nature, as wicked as they are, into His divine KINGDOM?

Not at all!

Rather, God has made a way whereby sinful man can OVERCOME his sinful nature, through repentance from sin, acceptance of Christ as Saviour, and reception of the Holy Spirit of God to dwell within us, empowering us to OBEY the laws of God!

The law is not done away with. Rather, now we write the laws of God -- not on tables of stone - but in our hearts and minds through the Spirit of God within us! As Paul wrote to the Hebrews, "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will PUT MY LAWS IN THEIR MINDS and write them ON THEIR HEARTS. I will be their God, and they will be my people" (Heb.8:10).

But why, then, if all this is true, do some of the writings of Paul "seem," at first glance, to indicate that the laws of God are abolished and done away?

Let's take a look at the verses customarily used by those who seek to do away with the righteous requirements of God.

The Colossian Error

In the book of Colossians, the apostle Paul wrote these mysterious sounding words:

"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross"

(Col.2:13-14).

What was it, exactly, that was "cancelled," that was "against us," that "stood opposed to us," that was finally "nailed to the cross"?

Was Paul by any stretch of the imagination talking about the law of God, which elsewhere he described as "holy," "righteous," "spiritual," and "good"? Was Paul all mixed up, crazy in the head, confused by his much learning, like an addle-pated professor?

Did Paul temporarily have a lapse of memory, and forget himself?

Not at all!

Ancient Colossae was a city in the Roman province of Asia, in the western part of what is now Turkey, located about ten miles from Laodicea. The population was a mixture of Jewish, Greek and Phrygian elements, a fertile ground for speculative type of heresies. Paul met the challenge confronting the Colossian brethren by positive teaching, rather than a point-by-point refutation. The heretics disturbing the Colossian church were demeaning the position of Christ and actually worshipping angels. Paul wrote to the brethren, exclaiming, "DO NOT LET ANYONE who delights in false humility and the WORSHIP OF ANGELS disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen [probably demonic visions], and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head [Christ], from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow" (Col.2:18-19).

These heretics were philosophizers. Paul warned, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive PHILOSOPHY, which depends on HUMAN TRADITION and the basic principles of THIS WORLD rather than on Christ" (Col.2:8).

Paul, in his frequent usage of such terms as "gnosis" (knowledge), "epignosis" (higher knowledge), "sophia" (wisdom), "synesis" (understanding), and "mysterion" (mystery), was countering a false philosophical teaching of an early form of Gnosticism. This false teaching prided itself on asceticism. This is clear from Paul's statement, "Since you died with Christ to the BASIC PRINCIPLES OF THIS WORLD, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its RULES: 'Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!?' These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on HUMAN COMMANDS and teachings." Notice! He is not talking about the commands of God at all, but "HUMAN commands"!

Paul goes on, "Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence" (Col.2:20-23).

Paul was clearly attacking man-made ordinances, doctrines, and commandments of MEN! These were Gnostic-like, ascetic rules and regulations, which, Paul declared, appeared good on the outside, but were bogus, empty, and useless when it came to ruling human passions. Paul was fighting against a form of

Hellenistic syncretistic beliefs and practices which incorporated Jewish, Asian, and Greek strains of philosophies.

In this context, then, what was the "written code, with its regulations, that was against us and stood opposed to us"? What was really "nailed to the cross" of Christ?

The original Greek translated "written," or "handwriting," in various English translations, is actually "cheirographon" and literally means -- "a (hand-written) document, specif. a document of INDEBTEDNESS, BOND" (Arndt-Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*). This lexicon translates Colossians 2:14 as "the bond that stood against us."

Paul went on, "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ" (verses 16-17).

It should be noted that Paul's condemnation of a perverted use of a religious observance, such as the Sabbath, does not constitute a valid ground for concluding that the apostle hereby releases all Christians from the observance of that day!

What, then, is the meaning of these verses?

First of all, the Greek term for "law" is conspicuously absent from this whole controversy! The problem at Colossae, therefore, was not one involving the LAWS of God at all, or some form of Jewish legalism, but rather some form of syncretistic rules, ascetic and cultic regulations, and spurious religious dogmas, which undermined the true position of Christ as the Head of the Church and our only Redeemer and Mediator.

The term "cheirographon" was an ancient Greek term referring to a "written document" or "certificate of debt." It did not refer to God's moral code. If it had been destroyed, mankind would have been left without moral principles, with no standard of conduct against which to measure himself. Guilt is not removed by simply destroying the law that defines guilt.

Writes Samuele Bacchiocchi in *From Sabbath to Sunday*:

"Most commentators interpret the cheirographon either as the 'certificate of indebtedness' resulting from our transgressions or a 'book containing the record of sin' used for the condemnation of mankind. Both renderings, which are substantially similar, can be supported from rabbinic and apocalyptic literature" (p.348-349).

In Judaism, the relationship between man and God was often described as that between a debtor and his creditor. A Rabbi once said, "When a man sins, God writes down the debt of death. If the man repents, the debt is cancelled. If he does not repent, what is recorded remains genuine."

In the Apocalypse of Elijah there is a description of an angel holding a book, explicitly

called a "cheirographon," in which the sins of the prophet are recorded.

Says Samuele Bacchiocchi:

"On the basis of these and similar examples, it is quite obvious that the *cheirographon* is either a 'certificate of sin-indebtedness' or the 'record-book of sins' but not the law of Moses, since the latter, as is wisely pointed out by Weiss, 'is not a book of records.'

"What Paul then is saying by this daring metaphor is that God has 'wiped out,' 'removed,' and 'nailed to the cross' through the body of Christ (which in a sense represents mankind's guilt) the *cheirographon*, the instrument for the remembrance of sin. The legal basis of this instrument was the 'binding statutes -- *tois dogmasin* (2:14), but what God destroyed on the cross was not the legal ground (law) for our entanglement into sin, but the WRITTEN RECORD of our sins. By destroying the record of sins, God removed the possibility of a charge ever being made again against those who have been forgiven" (p.349-350).

The Greek translated "he took it away" in Colossians 2:14 literally means "taken out of the midst" (Englishman's Greek New Testament), or "removed out of the middle." The "middle" was the position occupied at the center of the court of law or assembly by the accusing witness. The cheirographon is, in a sense, the "accusing witness" against the sinner, the record book of his sins. Christ has erased it and removed it out of the court, out of the witness chair of the accuser. Not only is this record of our sins removed, but it is also "nailed to the cross" in the sense that Jesus Christ took our sins upon Himself, and paid the penalty for them. "God made him who had no sin to be SIN FOR US, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (II Cor.5:21). Jesus, our Passover Lamb, bare our sins on the cross. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree" (I Pet.2:24).

By destroying this "evidence" of our sins, God has destroyed any case that any witness or accuser can bring against us. In this whole matter of Colossians, therefore, the laws of God are not at issue at all. Says Bacchiocchi:

"Any attempt therefore to read into the cheirographon a reference to the Sabbath or to any other Old Testament ordinance is altogether unwarranted. The document that was nailed to the cross contained not moral or ceremonial laws, but rather the record of our sins" (p.351).

Thus the "cheirographon" is a certificate of debt or book of debt acknowledging our transgressions. Even today, in the prayer "Abinu Malkenu," a prayer for the ten penitential days that begin the Jewish new year, the Jews pray: "On account of thy great mercy erase all the documents that accuse us."

G. R. Beasley-Murray in "The Second Chapter of Colossians," published in *Review and*

Expositor 70 in 1973 wrote:

"The 'bond' is an I.O.U., a signed statement of indebtedness; if it applies to the Jew through his acceptance of the Law, it also applies to the Gentile who recognizes his obligation to what he knows of the will of God. It means, in the picturesque phrase of Moule, 'I owe obedience to God's will, signed Mankind'" (p.471).

Scholarly opinion now is in harmonious agreement that cheirographon describes the "celestial book" where sins are recorded.

Are the Holy Days Abolished?

How, then, are we to understand the admonition of Paul not to let anyone "judge" us by what we eat or drink, or in regard to religious festivals, New Moon celebrations, or the Sabbath? These things, Paul said, are a shadow of things to come, but the reality is found in Christ.

Can we by any stretch of the imagination conclude from this verse that the Sabbaths and festivals of God are abolished?

What precisely did Paul say here? Was it simply not to allow ANY MAN to sit in judgment of us? Paul himself did not allow men to sit in judgment of him. He wrote, "Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ" (Gal.1:20).

Further, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, i do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God" (I Cor.4:3-5).

Clearly, the opinions of men are not what really count. We should not be overly concerned with the opinions of men, or peers, concerning how or what we eat or drink, or in connection with how we observe the holy days, Sabbaths, new moons, and the like. Rather, it is only God's Word that counts, for it is the Word of God which will judge each one of us. As Paul wrote to the Romans, "You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat" (Rom.14:10).

Paul says in the beginning of this chapter, "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables" (Rom.14:1-2).

This is the same kind of thing Paul is addressing in Colossians 2:17.

Rather than disputing and arguing, over such mundane matters as food and drink, we should love and accept one another, leaving judgment to God. As Paul wrote, "For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (verse 17).

We should not be sitting in judgment of each other concerning our eating and drinking habits. Nor should we be judging one another in regard to disputable matters involving how we observe the annual festivals of God, new moons, or Sabbath days.

In no way do these verses remotely suggest or show that the festivals, new moons, or Sabbaths of God, are done away with -- any more than eating and drinking have been ABOLISHED!

The dietary prescriptions found in Colossians 2:26 do not refer to the laws of clean and unclean foods given in the Word of God (Lev.11; Deut.14). Rather, the context of Colossians shows that these food regulations are those prescribed by human philosophy and Gnostic asceticism or Hellenistic syncretism. These restrictions involve such rules as "Do not handle," "Do not taste," "Do not touch." These are ascetic formulas designed to promote the self-abasement of the flesh and severity toward the body. Such notions are foreign to the Scriptures, and are generally derived from the pagan concept of the flesh as being evil and the soul "immortal" and "pure." The "dualistic" concept of the soul and the body leads one to despise the body and the material world in order to attain a higher "fulfilment." Such ascetics also consider marriage as evil and promote celibacy, something God never commanded or designed (see I Tim.4:1-3). Writes Bacchiocchi:

"The pagan reasons for practicing asceticism and fasting were many. It was believed, for instance, that fasting preped a person to receive a divine revelation. The belief in the transmigration of souls apparently motivated abstinence from animal meat, since eating it was regarded as a form of 'cannibalism.' Others were led to asceticism by their dualistic view of the world. In the case of the 'philosophy' of Colossians, the dietary taboos and the observance of sacred times were apparently regarded as an expression of subjection to and worship of the 'elements of the universe' (Col.2:20, 18)" (p.354).

Pagan Asceticism and Taboos

These practices had nothing whatsoever to do with the laws and commandments of God, which were ordained forever. They involve the beggarly elements of the world, elemental spirits, a form of witchcraft and magic, taboos and prohibitions nowhere mentioned or sanctioned in the laws of God.

Says Bacchiocchi, "The most plausible conclusion held by most scholars is that the false teachings and practices at Colossae were of a SYNCRETISTIC NATURE, containing both pagan and Jewish elements. The Old Testament was apparently invoked to provide a justification for their syncretistic beliefs and practices" (p.355).

Such a teaching was no doubt part of the original Simon Magus conspiracy. This heretic

was at first baptized by the apostles, when he professed belief in Christ. He was a Samaritan, of a syncretic religious community, which had combined elements of the Old Testament with their Oriental, pagan Babylonish beliefs (II Kings 17). This man had been a clever magician and sorcerer.

Simon Magus, the Heretic

We read in the book of Acts, "Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, 'This man is the divine power known as the Great Power.' They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw" (Acts 8:9-13).

This artful crook and seducer of the people professed repentance and was baptised. But he never really forsook his former profession. When he saw Peter and the apostles laying hands on people, so they would receive the Holy Spirit, "he offered them money and said, 'Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit'" (verses 18-19).

Peter saw the desperately wicked condition of Simon's heart, and rebuked him sternly. "Peter answered: 'May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!' You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin" (Acts 8:20-23).

History reveals that Simon Magus, the "magician," never repented. He became a very powerful heretic, and even went to Rome with his clever magic, and his consort Helen, his mistress. He began to use the name of Christ to mask his teachings, and claimed to be Christian, but combined the syncretism of the Samaritans and religions of the east with the name of Christ and the Old Testament.

The early church historian Eusebius wrote that Simon "slipped in; he actually received baptism in his hypocritical pretence of belief in Christ" (*The History of the Church*, p.74). Eusebius quotes Justin who wrote about Simon Magus as follows:

"After the Lord was taken up into heaven the demons put forward a number of men who claimed to be gods. These . . . were actually the objects of worship -- for example, Simon, a Samaritan from a village called Gittho, who in Claudius Caesar's time, thanks to the art of the demons who possessed him, worked wonders of magic, and in your imperial city of Rome was regarded as a god, and like a god was honoured by you with a statue in the river Tiber, SIMONI DEO SANCTO. Almost all

Samaritans, and a few from other nations too, acknowledge him as their principal god, and worship him. And a woman named Helen, who travelled around with him at that time and had previously lived in a brothel, they call the First Emanation from him" (p.86).

Eusebius goes on in his *History of the Church*:

"Simon, we are given to understand, was the PRIME AUTHOR OF EVERY HERESY. From his time to our own those who follow his lead, while PRETENDING to accept that sober Christian philosophy which through purity of life has won universal fame, are as devoted as ever to the IDOLATROUS SUPERSTITION from which they seemed to have escaped: they prostrate themselves before pictures and images of Simon himself and his companion, the Helen already mentioned, and give themselves to worshipping them with incense, sacrifices, and libations. Their more secret rites, which they claim will so amaze a man when he first hears them that, in their official jargon, he will be wonderstruck, are indeed something to wonder at, brim-full of frenzy and lunacy, and of such a kind that not only can they not be put down in writing; they involve such appalling degradation, such unspeakable conduct, that no decent man would let a mention of them pass his lips. For whatever could be imagined more disgusting than the foulest crime known has been outstripped by the utterly revolting heresy of these men, who make sport of wretched women, burdened indeed with vices of every kind" (p.86-87).

Eusebius says that Simon and his followers were unable to form an "organized body in those apostolic days," because of the light and truth coming from the apostles themselves. However, his clandestine and secret "mystery of iniquity" was already at work underground, and springing up in Rome and Colossae and other cities throughout the Roman Empire, where the true gospel was also being preached. As Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "For the secret power of lawlessness is *ALREADY AT WORK*" (II Thess.2:7). It was only being held back in those days by the very apostles themselves (v.6).

Simon Magus' successor in the heresy he spawned, was Meander, another Samaritan. Says Eusebius of this impostor:

"He too was a Samaritan, and having risen to the same heights of imposture as his master, he poured out a stream of still more marvelous tales. He actually claimed to be the saviour sent down from somewhere aloft to save mankind from invisible aeons, and taught that there was no way by which a man could get the better even of the angels who made the world, unless he had first been taken through the magical skills transmitted by himself and the baptism which he bestowed: those who were admitted to this baptism

would share in everlasting immortality in this present world, no longer subject to death but destined to continue here for ever, ageless and immortal" (p.135-136).

Eusebius says that Satan the devil used these impostors; they "*USURPED* the NAME OF CHRISTIAN," and misrepresented the great mystery of religion, making a mockery of the teaching of the truth. That is, they called themselves "CHRISTIAN"! Yet they were very far from the original, true teachings of Jesus and His apostles!

It was this very same kind of devious deception and intrigue that Paul ran head-on into at Colossae. These false teachers were combining their pagan ascetic practices and teachings, with the Old Testament and the truths of God. They were imposing dietary restrictions, days of fasting, and perverting the proper celebration of the holy days and Sabbaths of God. As the apostle Jude warned, "Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion. These men are BLEMISHES AT YOUR LOVE FEASTS, eating with you without the slightest qualm -- shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted -- twice dead. They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever" (Jude 11-13).

Paul was not condemning the feasts of God, or the Sabbath days, in this passage in Colossians 2. Rather, he is simply reminding the Colossian brethren not to let other men, who are perverting the truths and days of God, sit in judgment of them. These holy days, Paul says, are a "shadow" of things to come (v.17). What does this mean?

What Is a "Shadow"?

A shadow is something that stands for or represents a greater reality. It is cast by a larger reality. Even so, the holy days of God and Sabbaths picture awesome events in the plan of God.

The Passover, with the slaying of the lamb, pictured the death of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ (I Cor.5:7). The seven days of Unleavened Bread picture the putting of sin out of our lives (I Cor.5:8). The firstfruits of Pentecost picture those converted and called into the Church of God, as God's "firstfruits" during this age (James 1:18). The feast of Trumpets pictures the seven trumpets which will sound just before the return of the Messiah, and the seventh trumpet which will be blown at His coming. The feast of Tabernacles pictures the great fall harvest and the Millennial reign of Christ. The Last Great Day pictures the culmination of God's Plan, and the Great White Throne Judgment, when God will pass final judgment on all the peoples who ever lived, who did not qualify to be in the first resurrection at the coming of Christ (Rev.20:11-14).

The weekly Sabbath itself is a shadow picturing the Millennial reign of Christ, which will last one thousand years (Rev.20:4). Simply because Paul calls these days, and the new moons, which introduce new months according to God's Calendar, "shadows," is this necessarily a term of disrespect and a reproach? Nonsense! As E. F. Scott remarks:

"Himself a Jew, Paul cannot admit that the most sacred ordinances of Judaism are worthless shadows. His thought is rather that of the writer to the Hebrews, who finds a value in all the ancient ceremonies in so far as they POINT FORWARD, in a sort of PICTURE-LANGUAGE, to the great consummation (e.g. the Sabbath typifies the perfect rest of God. Heb.4:11)"
(The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians, 1948, p.52).

Asserts Bacchiocchus, along this same line of reasoning, "The most plausible conclusion is that Paul is not disputing about the origin, form or legitimacy of these observances, but rather that he acknowledges their value, apparently because he recognized them to be expressions of noble and sincere -- though misguided -- spiritual aspirations. What the apostle does, however, is to place these observances in their proper perspective with Christ, by means of the contrast 'shadow -- body.' In this perspective Paul sees that not only the observance of holy days, but that even dietary scruples can serve as a shadow, preparing Christians for the realities of the world to come. Old Testament festivals have a message for Christians" (*From Sabbath to Sunday*, p.357).

Too often, however, people begin to focus on rituals, and ceremonies, and the physicals, and forget the SPIRITUAL. They have made much to-do about tithes, and even tithing on mint and cummin leaves, as Jesus Himself said, and have "neglected the more important matters of the law -- justice, mercy and faithfulness" (Matt.23:23). They become guilty of straining out gnats, and swallowing camels (verse 24)!

Observing the laws of God, and the holy days, and the Sabbaths, are very important in the sight of God. These are HOLY in God's sight. But they are not the most important thing -- the most important thing of all is JESUS CHRIST, and His payment for our sins, and His living His life within us through the Holy Spirit of God!

Writes Bacchiocchi:

"We frown upon this perverted sense of priorities, yet this problem has constantly afflicted Christianity. All too often religion has been made into rituals and rules to obey. . . .

"We conclude therefore that Paul in Colossians 2:16 is not condemning abstinence from food and drink or the use of sacred days such as the Sabbath, but the wrong motive involved in their observance. What Paul attacks is the promotion of these practices as auxiliary aids to salvation, and as means to gain protection from the 'elements of the universe'" (p.358).

Among the pagans Saturday was regarded as an unlucky day due to its association with the planet Saturn. It was the day of "Nimrod," the "hidden one," who sought refuge and went into hiding, to escape from the judgment of Shem. The early Roman Catholic Church

generally fasted on this day, although the Jews never fasted on the Sabbath as it was a "feast" day according to God's commandment.

Those who were going off into apostasy from the truth of God in Colossae may have been turning the Sabbath itself into a day of fasting and penitence, as happened in Rome, rather than observe it as God originally commanded and intended -- as a festival, and as a delight (see Lev.23:1-3; Isaiah 58:13-14). Says Bacchiocchi:

"In view of the prevailing astral superstitions which influenced the observance of days among both Jews and pagans, it seems plausible to assume that any Sabbath observance advocated by the Colossians' ascetic teachers -- known for their promotion of the worship of the elements of the universe -- could only have been of a rigorous and superstitious type. A warning against such a type of Sabbath-keeping by the apostle would have been not only appropriate but also desirable. But in this case Paul would be attacking not the principle of Sabbath-keeping but its PERVERSION" (p.364).

When we sift through all the evidence, it becomes clear that Paul's discourse in Colossians relative to the holy days and Sabbaths of God in no way abrogates, annuls, or abolishes the laws and commandments of God. God's Law is eternal. It will never be abolished or rescinded or annulled. Rather, it will be our JUDGE!

The Law of God and YOU

What about you? Are you going through life oblivious to the laws and commandments of God, assuming they have been done away with? Are you ignoring and neglecting the great law of "liberty" which God ordained for our welfare?

What does the Law of the Almighty God mean to *YOU*?

God nowhere in the Scriptures ever abolished His Law, which is spiritual, and therefore eternal. His law defines His very character. To abolish the Laws of God, He might just as well abolish the sun, and the moon, and the stars themselves, and abolish planet earth, on which we dwell!

If God were to do away with the Ten Commandments, there would be no laws against idolatry, dishonoring parents, stealing, adultery, murder, falsehoods, lust and covetousness. The gates of wickedness would be flung wide open. A torrent of murder would ensue, with no punishment possible -- as it would not be contrary to the law. The Universe would become a jungle, with the "law of the wild" prevailing, every man or woman out for himself or herself! It would be "root hog or die, and the devil take the hindmost!"

Can you imagine such a world? How long could such a perverted, twisted, abnormal,

heinous society exist, before it would collapse and self-destruct from its own frenzied madness?

Anarchy would reign! Chaos would ensue. All life would cease to exist ultimately, as wars destroyed nations, and races, and finally the last two individuals would face off in bitter conflict, to see who would rule over . . . who would be the ultimate survivor of . . . the last war.

The world left to such a lone survivor would be lonely indeed, bereft of friends, sweetheart, children, community. He could look off into all directions, and see nothing -- no life. His bitterness would be monumental, and his tortured anguish unbearable.

And finally, that sole survivor himself would perish, and die. And human life itself would be obliterated from existence. The planet earth would be desolate, empty, waste, devoid of all life. Why? Because there was *NO LAW!*

If God had not created a just, righteous, holy Law, that leads to LIFE, then man would be obligated to create one himself, in order to protect society from nihilism and collapse and Armageddon!

Why do so many people seem to HATE the wonderful laws of God? Why do so many "Christians" seem to hate the Sabbath days, the annual festivals, and the commandments of God?

May God help us all to learn to LOVE His law, and commandments, as David, and Paul himself, did!