

Did the Apostle Paul Teach Against the Laws and Commandments of God?

Some of Paul's writings are admittedly difficult to understand, but numerous other passages unambiguously demonstrate the apostle's support for God's law.

A foundational doctrine of modern Evangelical Protestantism is that a “born-again” Christian is not required to keep the law of God—especially the Sabbath and holy days as found in both the Old and New Testaments. Citing numerous “difficult-to-understand” passages from his epistles, they claim that the apostle Paul received a “superior revelation” that supersedes even the teachings of Jesus, and which gave him the authority to do away with the requirement that a Christian is to keep the laws and commandments of God—which in some cases even extends to repentance and baptism. How can that be?

In his book, *Sunday Fact & Sabbath Fiction*, Dr. Russell Tardo boldly declares, “Every bit of the law was nailed to Calvary’s cross, having been completed and fulfilled in the person and life of Jesus Christ” (p. 43). Sadly, this broad assertion is widely believed by the majority of Protestants today. Pointing to Colossians 2:14-16 and similar passages, they attempt to use Scripture to justify their belief that *all* Old Testament laws were “nailed to the cross”—especially the Sabbath and annual festivals, and the laws of clean and unclean meats.

Because of false, convoluted misinterpretations—coupled with poor or inadequate translations of the original Greek texts of the Paul’s “hard-to-understand” writings, primarily those in Romans, Galatians and Colossians—Protestants typically believe that the laws and commandments of God are a curse, and unnecessary for salvation. It is claimed, therefore, that such laws were abolished by Jesus Christ—through His life, crucifixion and resurrection.

But is that true? Did Paul teach that the commandments of God are obsolete? Did Jesus Himself abolish the laws of God?

Admittedly, some of Paul’s writings are complicated and difficult to understand. Peter himself said as much. But many of Paul’s writings are quite clear—and they clearly teach that the commandments of God are fully in force.

Paul’s Positive Outlook on the Law: Paul’s writings unmistakably demonstrate his positive attitude toward the law of God. For example, he wrote the following to the Corinthians: “*For* circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; rather, **the keeping of God’s commandments is essential**” (I Cor. 7:19). He further explained how he reached out to everyone, Jew and Gentile alike, in preaching the gospel. **But never at any time did he proclaim that the laws and commandments of God were no longer in effect for himself or the believer:** “Now to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain *the* Jews; to those who are under law, as under law, that I might gain those who are under law; to those who are without law, as without law (**not being without law to God, but within law to Christ**), that I might gain those who are without law” (I Cor. 9:20-21).

Later, after Paul was brought from Jerusalem to Caesarea to stand trial, he stood and defended himself before the Jewish authorities and Felix the governor emphatically declaring that as an apostle of Jesus Christ he believed *all things* written in the Law and the Prophets: “Neither can they prove *the things* of which they now accuse me [abolishing the laws and commandments of God]. But I confess to you that according to the way which they call heresy [his teachings that Jesus was the Messiah, the Savior of mankind], so serve I the God of my fathers, **believing all things that are written in the Law and the Prophets**” (Acts 24:13-14). Paul also declared, “Therefore, **the law is indeed holy, and the commandment holy and righteous and good**” (Rom. 7:12). Without a doubt, there is nothing ambiguous about these statements.

Because a true believer is indeed justified by faith, Paul also answered those who believed in a “lawless grace” and claimed that justification through Christ’s sacrifice eliminated the need to keep the laws and commandments of God. Notice what Paul wrote: “Since *it is* indeed one God Who will justify *the* circumcision by faith, and *the* uncircumcision through faith. Are we, then, abolishing law through faith? MAY IT NEVER BE! Rather, **we are establishing law**” (Rom. 3:30-31).

Jesus’ Teachings on the Law: Far from having received some “greater revelation” that supercedes Christ’s teachings, Paul’s approach to the law is in full harmony with what Jesus taught. He emphatically declared, “**Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until the heaven and the earth shall pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the Law** until everything has been fulfilled” (Matt. 5:17-18).

As Jesus said, we are not even to think, or suppose—let alone teach in His name—that He came to abolish the Law or the Prophets! Furthermore, He established the heavens and earth as perpetual witnesses that the laws of God will not pass away—not even one seemingly insignificant *jot* or *tittle*! **Therefore, since heaven and earth still exist, Jesus has not abolished the Law or the Prophets!**

Before Jesus came in the flesh, born of the virgin Mary, He was the Lord God of the Old Testament. He was the One Who spoke the Ten Commandments to Israel. **Jesus is the Lawgiver in both the Old and New Testaments.**

When Jesus defeated Satan the devil during His temptation in the wilderness, He clearly stated, “It is written [in the Law], ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but **by every word** that proceeds out of *the* mouth of God’ ” (Matt. 4:4; Luke 4:4; Deut. 8:3).

Compare those words of Jesus to this ignorant statement: “The law is a unit of 613 commandments and all of it has been invalidated.... It has ceased to function as an authority over individuals” (Tardo, p. 31).

If the law was abolished, there would be no sin, because as Paul wrote, “[W]here no law is, *there is* no transgression” (Rom. 4:15). Likewise, if there is no transgression, the penalty for sin or the need for forgiveness vanishes. Consequently, there would be no need for a Savior, and Jesus would have died in vain. Ultimately, such anti-law reasoning leads to the conclusion that man is completely sufficient unto himself, which is nothing less than satanic humanism—the end result of *lawless* grace.

Notice also what Jesus said about those who teach others to break even the “least” of God’s commandments: “Therefore, whoever shall break one of these least commandments, **and shall teach men so**, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever shall practice and teach *them*, this one shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:19).

Christ continued: “For I say to you, unless your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way *that* you shall enter into the kingdom of heaven” (verse 20). Jesus’ statement here is enigmatic to say the least, since the scribes and Pharisees were well known for their “righteousness.” The question is, *How could one’s righteousness exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees?*

The answer to this question is found in how Christ “fulfilled” the law (Matt. 5:17). To “fulfill” means “to fill to the full” or “to make complete.” That is quite the *opposite* of abolishing the law. **Indeed, Jesus “fulfilled” the law by revealing its spiritual meaning and application in human behavior**—in how humans relate to one another and to God the Father and Jesus Christ. The scribes and Pharisees thought they were quite adept at keeping the letter of the law—but in their corrupt hypocrisy they completely missed the spirit and intent of the law. Though they were religious, they did not have the “eyes to see” or the “ears to hear” in order to understand the spirit of the law.

The Gospels reveal that Jesus focused on the spirit of the law throughout His ministry. As evidenced in Matthew 5-7, Jesus specifically established this new spiritual standard of the application of the spirit of the law for New Testament Christians, as compared to the letter of the law required under the Old Testament and Judaism.

Two examples are sufficient to show how Jesus “fulfilled” the law by revealing its deep spiritual meaning: “You have heard that it was said to those *in ancient times*, ‘You shall not commit murder; but whoever commits murder shall be subject to judgment.’ But I say to you, everyone who is angry with his brother without cause shall be subject to judgment. Now *you have heard it said*, ‘Whoever shall say to his brother, “Raca,” shall be subject to *the judgment of the council*.’ But *I say to you*, whoever shall say, ‘*You fool*,’ shall be subject to the fire of Gehenna” (Matt. 5:21-22).

“You have heard that it was said to those *in ancient times*, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you, everyone who looks upon a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:27-28).

These examples clearly illustrate the spiritual application of the laws and commandments of God as taught by Jesus Christ and found throughout the New Testament.

Over ten years after Jesus’ death and resurrection, the apostle James, the “brother of the Lord,” defined the true Christian approach to the law of God, which he calls the “**Royal Law.**” Notice how his writings agree exactly with Jesus’ teachings in Matthew 5-7: “If you are truly keeping *the Royal Law* according to the scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well. But if you have respect of persons, you are practicing sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors; **for if anyone keeps the whole law, but sins in one aspect, he becomes guilty of all.**

“For He Who said, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘You shall not commit murder.’ Now if you do not commit adultery, but you commit murder, you have become a transgressor of *the law*. In this manner speak and in this manner behave: as those who are about to be judged by *the law of freedom*” (James 2:8-12).

Why, then, do so many people—especially religious leaders—have so much defiant contempt for the laws and commandments of God? Paul gives the answer: “Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God; neither indeed can it *be*” (Rom. 8:7). Lawless minds do not like to be constricted or constrained by “law.” It “cramps” their style of living, exactly as Proverbs says: “All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes.... **There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof is the way of death**” (Prov. 16:2, 25). Satan desires that “his children” be “happy” in their rebellious behavior—hence, the lawless generation we have today.

On the other hand, when we understand these passages and the fact that “all the Law and the Prophets” are under-girded by the love of God, how can anyone possibly believe that Jesus came to abolish the law—or that Paul abrogated the commandments of God?

Under the New Covenant, true believers will lovingly obey Jesus Christ and God the Father from the heart. Notice Jesus’ teachings concerning commandment-keeping—teachings which Evangelical Protestantism conveniently ignores: “**If you love Me, keep the commandments**—namely, My commandments.... The one who has My commandments and **is keeping them**, that is the one who loves Me; and the one who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will manifest Myself to him.... If anyone loves Me, he will **keep My word**; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. **The one who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word that you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s, Who sent Me**” (John 14:15, 21, 23-24). Notice that Jesus does not say that commandment-keeping is for the Jews only—but that it is required of everyone.

Paul’s Difficult-to-Understand Passages: As we have seen, Paul’s teachings are in com-

plete harmony with Jesus' teachings—for both uphold the commandments of God. A diligent, *honest* study of Paul's more difficult passages will show that the problem is *not* with his writings at all; the difficulty arises because some—mostly so-called “scholars”—handle the Scriptures deceitfully (II Cor. 4:2), thus wrongly “dividing” the Word of God (II Tim. 2:15). Notice what Peter wrote: “And bear in mind that the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation, exactly as our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has also written to you; as *he has* also in all *his* epistles, speaking in them concerning these things; in which are **some things that are difficult to understand, which the ignorant and unstable are twisting and distorting, as they also twist and distort the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction**” (II Pet. 3:15-16).

Unfortunately, millions choose to believe the numerous “holier than thou” experts who twist and distort Paul's writings. Thus, they fulfill Isaiah's prophecy: “Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!... Who justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!” (Isa. 5:21, 23).

Does this not describe the state of government and religion today? God warns that judgment will come as a result of casting aside the Law of God and replacing it with false interpretations and beliefs. Isaiah further proclaims: “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil; who put darkness for light and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!... Therefore as the fire devours the stubble, and the flame burns up the chaff, their root shall be like rottenness, and their blossoms shall go up like dust **because they have cast away the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the Word of the Holy One of Israel**” (Isa. 5:20, 24).

Peter further warned that such teachers would deliberately blaspheme God and cast away the law of the Lord through their false teachings: “But there were also false prophets among the people [of Israel], as indeed **there will be false teachers among you, who will stealthily introduce destructive heresies**, personally denying *the* Lord who bought them, and bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And **many people will follow as authoritative their destructive ways; and because of them, the way of the truth will be blasphemed**. Also, through insatiable greed they will with enticing messages exploit you for gain; for whom the judgment of old is in *full* force, and their destruction is *ever* watching” (II Pet. 2:1-3).