

What commandments should Christians keep?

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After the introduction, the first topic is what Jesus taught. Then in the book of Acts we read about Peter's vision and the Council at Jerusalem. We study scriptures from the epistles of Paul and others. We look at the Ten Commandments and some prophecies in the Old Testament.

Then conclusively we tackle the following questions: (i) What is fornication? (ii) How does God think about the Sabbath? (iii) How about eating pork? (iv) What are our financial obligations and do we have to tithe? We conclude with a short summary.

Introduction

When we live in the New Covenant, we don't keep commandments or laws to become righteous; because we have received God's righteousness solely by believing in Jesus Christ (see e.g. Rom 3:21–24). We should never be tempted to think that through our deeds or our works we could contribute to our redemption even a little bit.

Should we now continue to live as before and continue to sin if faith is sufficient? No (Rom 6:15), but...

...now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. (Rom 6:19)

Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. (Hebr 12:14)

Jesus said:

Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them. (Jn 14:21)

In his first epistle, John wrote about Jesus:

³ We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. ⁴ Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. ⁵ But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did. (1 Jn 2:3–6)

In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, (1 Jn 5:3)

If we know Jesus and live in him, then we obey his word and also keep his commands (see also Rev 14:12).

But what are the commands of Jesus? You are certainly familiar with Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and many more of his teachings from the four Gospels. Jesus and the Father are one (Jn 10:30); so there is no difference between the commands of Jesus and the ones of our Heavenly Father. Does this mean that we should keep the Ten Commandments and maybe other Mosaic Laws?

A psalmist praised God with the following words:

The sum of your word is truth... (Ps 119:160 ESV)

That is why we want to read all the relevant scriptures so that we are not led to premature conclusions.

I invite you to pray with me the following prayer: "Father in heaven, you eternal and almighty God, I would like to get to know you and your son Jesus Christ better; please reveal yourself to me. I open my heart to you; put your will into me and write your guidance into my heart. Holy Spirit, spirit of truth, please teach me to understand God's word correctly and guide me into all truth. In the name of Jesus. Amen."

The biblical citations are from the New International Version (NIV) unless stated otherwise. Accentuations were added and omissions marked with "...".

What did Jesus teach?

Let's start with what Jesus said about the Mosaic Law:

¹⁷ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Mt 5:17–20)

Jesus did not abolish the Mosaic Law, but he fulfilled it. The Pharisees and teachers of the law will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, because they have nullified God's commands for the sake of their tradition and taught accordingly (Mt 15:5+6; Mk 7:11–13). Jesus emphasized that everyone who practices and teaches the commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven; that means there is a blessing in keeping the commands. Do we now have to keep the Mosaic Law? No, that would even be impossible, particularly because the temple is destroyed where sacrifices needed to be made.

How can our righteousness surpass that of the Pharisees? Because Jesus has fulfilled the law on our behalf and we have been made righteous through his blood and by faith in him.

Immediately following the Bible text just quoted, Matthew wrote about Jesus' teaching on the subjects of murder / anger, adultery, oaths, revenge / love for enemies, almsgiving, praying, forgiveness, fasting, treasures, worrying and judging (Mt 5:21 to Mt 7:6). We will deal with the subjects of adultery and finances in detail later.

When Jesus was asked by a rich young man how to get eternal life, he answered as follows:

¹⁷ "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments." ¹⁸ "Which ones?" he inquired. Jesus replied, "'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, ¹⁹ honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Mt 19:17–19; see also Mk 10:17–19; Lk 18:18–20)

It is interesting that Jesus did not refer to the entire Mosaic Law, but quoted a few commandments only.

Jesus repeatedly emphasized the importance of loving your neighbor:

¹² So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. ¹³ “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. (Mt 7:12–14)

³⁶ “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ Jesus replied: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Mt 22:36–40)

³⁴ “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (Jn 13:34+35)

Also the Mosaic Law contains a command to love one’s neighbor:

Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord. (Lev 19:18)

Jesus’ command goes far beyond the Old Testament, because we should not just love our neighbor as ourselves, but our brothers and sisters in Christ as Jesus loved his disciples (Jn 13:34).

It is also important that Jesus did not break the Mosaic Law; otherwise he would not had been without sin and could not had borne our iniquities (see 2 Cor 5:21). But he and his disciples did not follow some teachings of the Pharisees that went beyond:

- Jesus’ disciples picked some heads of grain on the Sabbath (see Mt 12:1; Mk 2:23; Lk 6:1).
- Jesus healed on the Sabbath (see e.g. Mt 12:12+13).
- Before eating Jesus’ disciples did not wash their hands according to the tradition of the elders (see Mt 15:2; Mk 7:2).

When Jesus defended that his disciples did not wash their hands before eating as expected by the Pharisees, he said, among other things:

Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats? (Mk 7:19 KJV)

In many other translations you may read at the end of this verse “Jesus declared all foods clean.” which is wrong. The Greek word for “purging” stands here as a participle and the literal translation of the end of this verse is “purging all the food”. This refers to the digestion described before. The point is that if you eat with dirty hands, by the digestion the food is cleaned of dirt. But the digestion does not remove the spiritual impurity of unclean animals. Jesus has by no means declared unclean animals being clean or eatable. If he had done so, he would have violated the law of Moses and thereby sinned, because it explicitly prohibits taking anything away from it (Deut 12:32); in addition, the Pharisees would certainly have accused Jesus of this; but they could not find anything (Mk 14:55; Mt 26:59+60; 1 Pet 2:22; Isa 53:9).

Jesus also answered the Pharisees and teachers of the law:

⁷ You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ⁸ “ ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁹ They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.’ ” (Mt 15:7–9)

³ ... “Haven’t you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? ⁴ He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. ⁵ Or haven’t you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent? ⁶ I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. ⁷ If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent. ⁸ For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” (Mt 12:3–8; see also Mk 2:25–28; Lk 6:3–5)

The consecrated bread was the bread that had been lying in the tabernacle and that had been replaced by hot bread (1 Sam 21:6). The priest gave David this bread after he declared that he and his companions were clean (1 Sam 21:5). Jesus referred to a verse in a prophetic scripture:

For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings. (Hos 6:6)

Jesus emphasized that God looks at the heart and the motivation more than the formal superficial or ostensible observance of the law.

What’s written in the Book of Acts?

There are two reports in the book of Acts that are of particular interest regarding our topic: Peter’s vision and the Council at Jerusalem.

Peter’s vision

After Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension, his disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4). Later, Peter had the following vision:

⁹ About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹ He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹² It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. ¹³ Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.” ¹⁴ “Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” ¹⁵ The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.” ¹⁶ This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven. ¹⁷ While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon’s house was and stopped at the gate. ¹⁸ They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there. ¹⁹ While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you. ²⁰ So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.” ...

²⁸ He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.” ²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection...” (Acts 10:9–29)

In this vision, Peter was told to eat unclean animals. He did not immediately understand the vision and was thinking about it (verse 19). Its meaning is documented in verse 28, namely that the Gentile believers cleansed by God are no longer unclean. This is exactly how Peter understood it – being taught by the Holy Spirit. If we were concluding from this vision that unclean animals would be allowed to eat, then we would need to assume that the interpretation given in the Bible would not be complete and that God would have cleansed also unclean animals according to verse 15. Then Jesus would have died also for unclean animals or God would have cleansed them somehow in a different way, but in the Bible there is not any piece of evidence for this.

After this vision, the Holy Spirit fell also on believers from the nations (Greek “*éthnos*”) that were also baptized (Acts 10:48), i.e. the Holy Spirit fell on people who were not Jews, often translated as “Gentiles” (Acts 10:45).

Some people taught these Gentile believers that they should be circumcised according to the Mosaic Law. This caused a strong conflict between them and Paul and Barnabas, whereupon they traveled to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem (Acts 15:1+2) – to the so-called Council at Jerusalem.

The Council at Jerusalem

In Jerusalem they reported on the events. Some of the Pharisees who believed in Jesus were thinking that they should keep the law of Moses and be circumcised (Acts 15:4+5). The apostles and elders met to consider this question (Acts 15:6). After much discussion, Peter explained that the law of Moses would be a yoke that neither they nor their ancestors could bear and that the Gentiles, like them, believe that they are saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus (Acts 15:7–11). Then the following happened:

¹² Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. ¹³ And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: ¹⁴ Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. ¹⁵ And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, ¹⁶ 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: ¹⁷ That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. ¹⁸ Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. ¹⁹ Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: ²⁰ But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. ²¹ For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day. ²² Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: ²³ And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: ²⁴ Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: ²⁵ It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one

accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶ Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. ²⁸ For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; ²⁹ That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well. (Acts 15:12–29 KJV)

This decision was taken by the apostles and elders together with the whole church (verses 22+25). The Holy Spirit also concurred (verse 28); the word translated here as “seemed good” is in Greek “dokeó”; that means that everyone had the same opinion. So these things are of great importance!

Interestingly, the Ten Commandments were not mentioned, but these four things were repeated another time a few chapters later:

As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication. (Acts 21:25 KJV)

The Gentile believers should abstain from these four things:

1. Pollutions of idols / things offered to idols
2. Blood
3. Things strangled
4. Fornication

Let’s look at these four things in detail:

First, believers should not pollute themselves with idols; particularly, they should not participate in offerings to idols. We will explain this in more detail later.

Second and third, they should not drink blood or eat meat of animals that were killed by strangling them, i.e. they should not eat anything that is not completely exsanguinated. Heathens killed animals by strangling them before their meat was eaten; in contrast, the Jews perform kosher butchering so that they exsanguinate completely. When strangling animals, they cannot exsanguinate properly, so blood is consumed by eating them.

The command not to eat blood is documented several times in the Old Testament (see in particular Lev 19:26, Deut 12:16+23–25, Deut 15:23), for the first time when God spoke to Noah:

³ Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. ⁴ But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. (Gen 9:3+4 ESV)

The reason for this command is that in the blood there is the life (Hebrew “nephesh”, which also means soul; see also Lev 17:11).

Fourth, they should abstain from fornication. We will answer what fornication is in a separate section later.

Who should observe these four things?

Are they still applicable nowadays? In order to answer these questions, let us consider the background: The reason for the Council at Jerusalem was that men from Judea (Acts 15:1) came to Antioch (Acts 14:26) and taught the Gentile believers that they would need to

circumcise themselves according to the Mosaic Law. The fundamental question under discussion at this Council was whether the Gentile believers must keep the Mosaic Law (verses 1+2, 5, 10, 24). The consultation was not focusing on the believers in Antioch, because the believing Pharisees did certainly not only ask the believers in Antioch to keep the law of Moses and to circumcise themselves (verse 5) and during the consultation reference was always made to the Gentile believers in general (verses 7, 12, 19). The letter which was sent to Antioch was also not only addressed to the believers in Antioch, but also to the brothers in Syria and Cilicia (verse 23) which are the surrounding landscapes. The third piece of scripture where these four things are documented is also about Gentile believers in general (Acts 21:25). Therefore, it is clear that these are fundamentals for all Christians.

Let us now particularly consider the last sentence with which James finished his speech:

For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath. (Acts 15:21)

Because this verse is given as a reason, some people think that Gentiles should be taught these four things in the beginning and then little by little to keep the entire Mosaic Law. Please remember that the dispute regarding circumcision was the reason for the Council (Acts 15:1+2) and that the decision not to impose the law of Moses onto them was taken in unison (Acts 15:25) including the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28); see also Gal 5:1–12. There is also no similar remark in the letter to the Gentiles (Acts 15:23–29) and also not when repeating the four things later (Acts 21:25).

I think that this remark may be understood in the following way: Because the law of Moses is regularly preached and read in the synagogues, it should be clarified that the believers do not need to keep it except for the four things.

What's written in the Epistles?

Romans

Paul wrote in chapters 3 to 5 of the epistle to the Romans a lot about faith in Jesus and the law of Moses, in particular:

²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— ²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. ²⁷ Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith. ²⁸ For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. (Rom 3:21–28)

We are not justified by keeping laws or commands, but only by believing in Jesus and his sacrifice of atonement; see also Rom 10:4–13, in particular:

Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. (Rom 10:4)

The Greek “telos” was translated here as “culmination”. This word often means “end”. That’s why some translate “Christ is the end of the law” (ESV, KJV). The word “telos” also means “aim” and “goal”; in this sense it was used in 1 Timothy 1:5: “The aim of our charge is love...” (ESV) or “The goal of this command is love...” (NIV). It also means “custom”, “toll” and “tax” (used in this sense in Mt 17:25 and Rom 13:7). The verb “teleo” derived from the noun “telos” also means “fulfill” (in this sense used in Luke 22:37 that it about fulfilling prophecies). – So this verse is about Christ having fulfilled the law for us and having payed the atonement fee for our sin.

Paul also wrote the following to the Romans:

¹ Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives? ² For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him. ³ So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man. ⁴ So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. ⁵ For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death. ⁶ But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code. (Rom 7:1–6)

So we do not have to keep the Mosaic Law, but we should obey the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Paul also wrote:

⁸ Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁰ Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Rom 13:8–10)

Like Jesus before, Paul emphasized the importance of loving one’s neighbor.

In the following chapter we read:

² One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. ³ Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. ⁴ Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. ⁵ One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. (Rom 14:2–6 ESV)

Paul encouraged to tolerate certain behavior and not to despise or judge. In this section, Paul presumably answered specific questions that were addressed to him or referred to certain problems that he was aware of.

The word “anything” (Greek “pas”) in verse 2 should not be understood literally, because otherwise it would also be allowed to eat blood or meat not exsanguinated. Paul probably referred to meat sacrificed to idols; more on that later. In the following verse there is another piece of evidence that this Greek word is not to be understood literally:

But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. (Acts 3:18)

Not really “all” (Greek “pas”) prophets foretold that the Messiah would suffer, for example not the prophet Haggai. Also Jesus said on the one hand:

² The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. ³ So you must be careful to do everything they tell you... (Mt 23:2+3; “everything” = “pas” in Greek)

On the other hand, Jesus strongly criticized the teachers and Pharisees, explaining that they taught human rules that contradicted God’s commandments (Mk 7:5–13). So when we read the words “all”, “anything” or “everything,” they are referring only to the totality of things that are at issue in the specific context.

It is unknown what day is referred to in verses 5 and 6. It could be the new moon, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) or a day during Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles, the Purim or the Feast of Lights (Hanukkah).

A few sentences later, Paul wrote regarding food:

I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. (Rom 14:14 ESV)

The Greek word “koinos” has been translated as “unclean”. It is the same word that was used in the Gospel of Mark where it is written that Jesus’ disciples ate with unclean, that is, unwashed hands (Mk 7:2+5).

A few verses later, Paul added:

... All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. (Rom 14:20 KJV)

This verse is related to the one cited before. Thus, in this context “pure” means the opposite of dirty (“koinos”).

When the New Testament refers to impurity in the eyes of God (e.g. impure spirits), then a completely different word is used in the Greek for “impure”, namely “akathartos”. Paul did not declare that animals like pigs would be clean, which are unclean according to the Mosaic Law. Presumably he referred to meat which was sacrificed to idols; more on that in the first epistle to the Corinthians.

Corinthians

In the first epistle to the Corinthians Paul pointed out that as a Christian you should not get circumcised but keep God’s commands (1 Cor 7:18+19). He also stated:

²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. (1 Cor 9:20+21)

Paul was no longer under the Mosaic Law, but under Jesus' law.

In the further course of this epistle Paul wrote:

²⁵ Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, ²⁶ for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." ²⁷ If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. ²⁸ But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience. ²⁹ I am referring to the other person's conscience, not yours. For why is my freedom being judged by another's conscience? ³⁰ If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for? (1 Cor 10:25–30)

This text is about meat which has been offered in sacrifice to idols; this becomes clear in verse 28. In principle, this meat may be eaten, but the conscience of others should be considered. The "anything" in verse 25 has to be understood in this context; if it were understood literally, then also non-exsanguinated meat could be eaten, but this was clearly not permitted according to the decision at the Council at Jerusalem, with which also Paul concurred.

Verse 28 contains the Greek word "eidólothutos", here translated with meat "offered in sacrifice". This is the same word that was used in the repetitions of the decision at the Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15:29 and Acts 21:25) and can also be found in Revelation in the letter to the church in Pergamum (Rev 2:14). At first glance, it might look like Paul disregarded the decision at the Council at Jerusalem. But let's look at this in more detail:

The Council at Jerusalem and the text in Revelation are about not being defiled or polluted by idolatry. There was the custom to eat meat offered to idols during pagan rituals at the "table of demons" (1 Cor 10:21). This is forbidden and Paul also vehemently railed against it (1 Cor 10:14–22). Subsequently, he stated in the text quoted above, what on the other hand is permitted (1 Cor 10:23–33).

Nowadays, Muslims still slaughter ritually and when slaughtering they call the name of Allah. Christians may buy and eat such meat.

In the second epistle to the Corinthians Paul wrote:

² You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. ³ You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. ⁴ Such confidence we have through Christ before God. ⁵ Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. ⁶ He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Cor 3:2–6)

Paul referred to a prophecy of Jeremiah (Jer 31:33; more on this later) and emphasized that we should be led by the Holy Spirit. In the sentences following this text he stated that the New Covenant is even more glorious (2 Cor 3:7–11).

Galatians

Paul explained:

¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me... (Gal 2:19+20)

So we have been “crucified with Christ” and “died to the law” so that we have been “released from the law” (Rom 7:6).

¹⁰ For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.’

¹¹ Clearly no-one who relies on the law is justified before God, because ‘the righteous will live by faith.’ ¹² The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, ‘The person who does these things will live by them.’ ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.’ ¹⁴ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. (Gal 3:10–14).

So the “curse of the law” no longer affects us, but we have the blessing of Abraham. God blessed Abraham “in all things” (Gen. 24:1). So God also blesses us in all things because of our faith in Jesus.

Paul further pointed out:

¹⁹ Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator...

²⁴ So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. ²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (Gal 3:19–27)

Paul mentioned that the Mosaic Law had a temporary validity and that we are God’s children through faith.

In the fifth chapter Paul wrote:

¹ It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. ² Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. ³ Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. ⁴ You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. ⁵ For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. (Gal 5:1–6; see also Gal 6:12+13)

Paul strongly warned that we should not try to be justified by the law, i.e. we should not try to be made right with God by obeying the law or by good deeds. A few verses later he wrote:

¹³ For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Gal 5:13+14 ESV)

Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. (Gal 6:2 ESV)

Paul strongly urged that we should not abuse our freedom that we don’t have to keep the Mosaic Law. In particular, our freedom should not serve as an excuse to indulge in our sinful flesh desires.

He also explained in chapter 5 that it is important to be led by the Holy Spirit so that the fruit of the Spirit can thrive. (Gal 5:16–25).

Ephesians

Paul wrote about Jesus:

Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances... (Eph 2:15 KJV)

The Greek verb “katargeó” translated as “abolish” also means “make idle (inactive)” or “make of no effect”. What is meant is that Jesus has made the law of no effect. Jesus made it inactive by fulfilling it for us so that we don’t need to fulfill it anymore in order to be justified.

Timothy

Paul addressed the following to Timothy:

¹ The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. ² Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. ³ They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. ⁴ For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵ because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. (1 Tim 4:1–5)

Paul warned again of heresy. The food in question is food that “God created to be received with thanksgiving” (verse 3). God did not create pigs and other unclean animals for human consumption, as we will see below.

Hebrew

Jesus became a high priest forever in the order of Melchizedek (Hebr 6:20). The seventh chapter is about the new priesthood of Jesus and the comparison to the previous Levite priesthood of the Mosaic Law. The priest of the Christians is not a Levite, but Jesus and a different law applies in his priesthood:

¹¹ If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood—and indeed the law given to the people established that priesthood—why was there still need for another priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? ¹² For when the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also. (Hebr 7:11+12)

In Hebrews 8:10 and Hebrews 10:16 there are explanations of the new law. These are related to Jeremiah 31:33. More on that later.

James

James wrote:

But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do. (Jam 1:25)

A few verses later, James again referred to the law:

⁸ If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. ⁹ But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. ¹¹ For he who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. ¹² Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, ¹³ because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment. (Jam 2:8–13)

Does James think all of the law of Moses should be kept? Note: (i) James wrote about the “law that gives freedom”. (ii) James addressed the epistle “to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations” (Jam 1:1). (iii) James was the one (Acts 15:13) who said during the Council at Jerusalem that the Gentiles who turned to God should not be troubled about the law of Moses, but that it should be written to them to abstain from the four things.

John

In John’s first epistle we read:

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love...

¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. ¹³ This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit...

²⁰ Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. ²¹ And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister. ¹ Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. ² This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. ³ In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, (1 Jn 4:7 – 1 Jn 5:3)

It is very important that we love our brothers and sisters and keep God’s commands, which are remarkably described as “not burdensome”. But the law of Moses was a yoke that no one except Jesus could bear (Acts 15:10).

The Ten Commandments of the Mosaic Law

The Mosaic Law is documented in the Pentateuch (Torah). We do not want to quote the hundreds of commands of the Mosaic Law but focus only on the Ten Commandments. These are part of the Mosaic Law and are of outstanding importance. They are the only commands that God himself wrote with his finger in stone tablets (Ex 31:18; Deut 5:22; Deut 9:10). They are also the only commands which were kept in the ark of the covenant, in which there were only very few additional things, namely the golden pot that had manna and Aaron’s rod that budded (Hebr 9:4). The tabernacle with the ark of the covenant were copies and shadows of heavenly things (Hebr 8:5).

Solomon said that in the ark of the covenant there is the covenant that God made with their ancestors when he brought them out of Egypt (1 Ki 8:21). The Ten Commandments belong to the Old Covenant which was made on Mount Sinai (Ex 24:3–8).

Let's read the Ten Commandments:

	Exodus 20:3–17	Deuteronomy 5:7–21
1	You shall have no other gods before me.	
2	You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.	
3	You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.	
4	Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.	Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.
5	Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.	Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you.
6	You shall not murder.	
7	You shall not commit adultery.	
8	You shall not steal.	
9	You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.	
10	You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your	You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not set your desire on your

neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.	neighbor's house or land, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.
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Violation of commandments 1 to 4 and 6 and 7 was punishable by death; regarding the 1st and 2nd commandment see Deut 13:2–16, Deut 17:2–5; 3rd commandment: Lev 24:11–14; 4th commandment: Ex 31:14, Ex 35:2, Num 15:32–36; 6th commandment: Ex 21:12, Lev 24:11, Num 35:30; 7th commandment: Lev 20:10, Deut 22:22. Furthermore, in view of the 5th commandment anyone shall be put to death who strikes his father or mother (Ex 21:15) or curses them (Ex 21:17).

Loving God implies keeping commandments 1 to 3. Loving one's neighbor implies keeping commandments 5 to 10. The 7th commandment is implied by abstaining from fornication as imposed at the Council at Jerusalem (Acts 21:25; see also the separate section later).

Later we will answer the question whether the 4th commandment to keep the Sabbath should still be kept today.

Old Testament Prophecies

In this section we read prophecies related to the law.

Isaiah

Isaiah prophesied about the judgment to come:

¹⁶ For by fire will the Lord enter into judgment, and by his sword, with all flesh; and those slain by the Lord shall be many. ¹⁷ "Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go into the gardens, following one in the midst, eating pig's flesh and the abomination and mice, shall come to an end together, declares the Lord. (Isa 66:16+17 ESV)

In the eyes of God, eating meat of pigs and other unclean animals will be such an abomination that they will be consumed.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah prophesies about the New Covenant in which we live:

³¹ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jer 31:31–34 ESV)

This prophesy is about the New Covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Christians also belong by faith to the house of Israel or Judah; so in this way we are also Jews (Rom 11:11–24).

The Hebrew word “torah” was translated as law; it can also be translated as “direction” and “instruction”. This is what God wants to put within us and what he wants to write on our hearts.

This prophecy was referred to in the epistle to the Corinthians (2 Cor 3:3) and was quoted in the epistle to the Hebrews (Hebr 8:10; Hebr 10:16).

Conclusions and Additions

Christians do not need to keep the Mosaic Law, but according to what the apostles and the Holy Spirit decided instead, they need to...

...abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. (Acts 15:20 KJV)

Is everything else allowed, e.g. to murder and to steal? Please recall that the subject in question at the Council at Jerusalem was to keep the Mosaic Law or not. Of course, the decision to abstain from the four things is definitely not a comprehensive teaching of how to live according to God’s will.

God already gave commandments long before Moses. God said:

because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws. (Gen 26:5 ESV)

On the one hand, surely not all of these commandments, statutes and laws of God are documented in the book of Genesis. On the other, we don’t have to keep all commandments that were given before Moses; otherwise we would need to get circumcised, because circumcision was already in place since Abraham.

So what commands should we keep?

Nowadays, we live in the New Covenant. As Jeremiah prophesied, God wants to put his instructions within us, i.e. he wants to write them on our hearts (Jer 31:33). God wants us to love him, seek him and open ourselves to him so that he may put his direction into our hearts.

Jeremiah also prophesied the following about the New Covenant:

No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the Lord... (Jer 31:34)

How do we get to know God? He reveals himself to us, in particular when praying and reading his word in the Bible. As we study the four Gospels, we can have some of Jesus’ commands written on our hearts. The epistles contain a lot of wisdom and a lot of helpful explanations. Paul wrote to Timothy:

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:14–17)

The scriptures Paul wrote about here are the Old Testament. The Old Testament is able to make us wise about our new covenant. We should also study these scriptures so that we are not only partially, but thoroughly equipped.

Also consider:

I the Lord do not change... (Mal 3:6)

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Hebr 13:8)

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. (Jam 1:17)

God has not been changing his mind about what he likes. At the beginning a man could not divorce his wife, but the Mosaic Law allowed it because of their hearts were hard (Mt 19:8), even though God hates it (Mal 2:15+16). So there was a difference between what God allowed and what he liked or ideally wanted. So the idea is obvious that nowadays God may allow us more and command us less than what he would ideally wish or prefer.

I would like to invite you to study a few additional scriptures with me to get to know God better and to answer the following questions which are controversial among the Christians:

- (i) What is fornication?
- (ii) Do we have to keep the Sabbath?
- (iii) How about eating pork?
- (iv) What are our financial obligations and do we have to tithe?

What is fornication?

In the section on the Council at Jerusalem we saw that we should abstain from fornication. But what is fornication? The Greek word “porneía” is related to the word for prostitution; however, it refers not only to prostitution (see Mt 5:32; Mt 19:9; 1 Cor 5:1), but to any kind of sexual immorality. So what is sexually immoral? Please note that the apostles knew the Mosaic Law very well and therefore had a very specific definition of sexual immorality in their mind, namely that of the Old Testament. They meant nothing should be done which is sexual immoral in this sense.

In the following subsections, we specifically address the topics of adultery, divorce, sex before marriage, sex during menstruation, homosexuality, sex with relatives (incest) and sex with animals.

Adultery

Jesus said:

²⁷ Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:

²⁸ But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. (Mt 5:27+28 KJV)

The Greek verb “epithyméō” which is translated here with “to lust after” is sometimes translated with “to covet.” It is the same that was used when referring to the tenth commandment (Rom 13:9; Rom 7:7). Jesus interpreted the Ten Commandments in such a way that if one breaks the tenth commandment and covets his neighbor’s wife, he also breaks the seventh commandment.

Finding a woman beautiful or attractive is not a sin. It is about a passionate desire, that is, longing to have sex with her. Sin is not only the act itself, but already the intention.

Divorce

Jesus continued to say:

⁸... “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. ⁹ I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.” (Mt 19:8+9; see also Mt 5:31+32)

¹¹... “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. ¹² And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.” (Mk 10:11+12)

Jesus also called divorce, which was tolerated under the Mosaic Law, adultery. Jesus urged people to act according to what pleases God. It is already written in the Old Testament:

¹⁵... So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth. ¹⁶ ‘The man who hates and divorces his wife,’ says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘does violence to the one he should protect,’ says the Lord Almighty. [or: ‘I hate divorce,’ says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘because the man who divorces his wife covers his garment with violence,'] So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful. (Mal 2:15+16)

Premarital sex

If a man seduces a virgin who is not pledged to be married and sleeps with her, he must pay the bride-price, and she shall be his wife. (Ex 22:16)

²⁰ ...if ... evidence of virginity was not found in the young woman, ²¹ then ... the men of her city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has done an outrageous thing in Israel by whoring... (Deut 22:20+21 ESV)

Sex during menstruation

If a man has sexual relations with a woman during her monthly period, he has exposed the source of her flow, and she has also uncovered it. Both of them are to be cut off from their people. (Lev 20:18; see also Lev 18:19)

Homosexuality

If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads. (Lev 20:13; see also Lev 18:22)

The Greek word “arsenokoites,” describing sexual intercourse between men, was used by Paul in the following two scriptures:

⁹ Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor 6:9+10)

⁸ We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. ⁹ We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, ¹⁰ for the sexually immoral, for those practising homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers – and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine ¹¹ that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me. (1 Tim 1:8–11)

In the epistle to the Romans, Paul described that people neither honored God nor gave thanks to him, but instead practiced idolatry (Rom 1:21–23). This had the following consequences:

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is for ever praised. Amen. ²⁶ Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. (Rom 1:24–27)

Verse 24 refers to men, whose wives are referred to in verse 26. This verse 26 is the only one in the Bible on the subject of sexual intercourse between women. Homosexuality is described here as a consequence of sin.

According to the above, it is obvious that sex among men is fornication and therefore sin. But what about sex among women? Is unnatural behavior always sin?

Paul also wrote:

Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, (1 Cor 11:14)

Long hair is therefore an unnatural disgrace for men, although in all Israel there had been not a man so highly praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom, who had very long hair (2 Sam 14:25+26); his hair was even so long that his hair got caught in a tree so that he was left hanging in mid-air (2 Sam 18:9).

According to God's creation a man leaves his parents, lives together with his wife, both of them have sex with each other (Gen 2:24) and they get children (Gen 1:22+28; Gen 9:1+7). So it is natural to marry, and yet Paul pointed out as positive and even worthy of imitation that he was unmarried (1 Cor 7:7–9).

God did not always command men and women to comply with the same rules; for example, only men had to travel to the temple in Jerusalem for the highest feasts (Ex 23:17; Ex 34:23; Deut 16:16). Therefore, we cannot conclude that a behavior that is sinful for men is automatically also sinful for women.

In everything, one should be guided by what pleases God.

Sex with relatives (incest)

No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations. I am the Lord. (Lev 18:6; see also Lev 18:7–18 and Lev 20:11–17+19–21; Deut 27:22–23)

Sex with animals

Anyone who has sexual relations with an animal is to be put to death. (Ex 22:19; see also Lev 18:23; Lev 20:15+16; Deut 27:21)

Do we have to keep the Sabbath?

First, we study how the Sabbath was established as a day of rest and why God commanded to keep it and what promises are related to it. Then we read scriptures about the future of the Sabbath and we address the question about celebrating Sunday as Sabbath.

How was the Sabbath established?

The Bible reports on the very first day of rest:

² By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³ Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. (Gen 2:2+3)

After six days of creative work, God rested on the seventh day, hereby he sanctified it.

For the first time the word “Sabbath” appears in the sixteenth chapter of Exodus; there we read:

Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where they are on the seventh day; no-one is to go out. (Ex 16:29)

God spoke the following to the prophet Ezekiel:

¹⁰ Therefore I led them out of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. ¹¹ I gave them my decrees and made known to them my laws, by which the person who obeys them will live. ¹² Also I gave them my Sabbaths as a sign between us, so they would know that I the Lord made them holy. (Ezek 20:10–12)

God led the Israelites out of Egypt and gave them the law of Moses, in particular the Ten Commandments (verse 11). And to them God gave also the Sabbaths, that is, to those whom he had led out of Egypt. So the Sabbaths did not exist before, because if they had existed before, then God could not have given them anymore.

The book of Jashar¹ reports in detail about the introduction of the Sabbath as a day of rest during slavery in Egypt:

⁴¹ And the day arrived when Moses went to Goshen to see his brethren, that he saw the children of Israel in their burdens and hard labor, and Moses was grieved on their account. ⁴² And Moses returned to Egypt and came to the house of Pharaoh, and came before the king, and Moses bowed down before the king. ⁴³ And Moses said unto Pharaoh, I pray thee my lord, I have come to seek a small request from thee, turn not away my face empty; and Pharaoh said unto him, Speak. ⁴⁴ And Moses said unto Pharaoh, Let there be given unto thy servants the children of Israel who are in Goshen,

¹ The book of Jashar (or “Jasher” or “Yashar”) is an apocryphal history book. The Hebrew adjective “yashar” means straight, right or upright. The Book of Jashar is referred to twice in the Bible, in Joshua 10:13 and 2 Samuel 1:18.

one day to rest therein from their labor. ⁴⁵ And the king answered Moses and said, Behold I have lifted up thy face in this thing to grant thy request. ⁴⁶ And Pharaoh ordered a proclamation to be issued throughout Egypt and Goshen, saying, ⁴⁷ To you, all the children of Israel, thus says the king, for six days you shall do your work and labor, but on the seventh day you shall rest, and shall not preform any work, thus shall you do all the days, as the king and Moses the son of Bathia have commanded. (Jashar 70:41–47; “The Book of Jasher” J.H. Parry & Co. 1887)

Prior to this, the pharaoh had enslaved the Israelites with the help of a trick (Jashar 65:9–13+19–30): The Israelites initially worked voluntarily with the Egyptians and got paid. Then all the Egyptians gradually withdraw from their work. Later, the Israelites were paid no wages and were forced to continue their work. In contrast to the other tribes, the Levites did not work for the Egyptians from the beginning and were not forced to do so later (Jashar 65:20+32–34). Therefore, we may assume that the Israelites initially worked voluntarily without a day off; it would be absurd to assume that they were forced to do so later, because the Levites were not forced to work at all.

There is not any command in the Bible to rest on the Sabbath before Moses. Perhaps the seventh day of the week was celebrated or sanctified in a similar way to the new moons on which the shofar was blown and offerings were made (Num 10:10; Num 28:11–14). The Mosaic Law does not command to rest at new moons, nevertheless to some extent they were held as days of rest (Am 8:5).

The fourth of the Ten Commandments forbids working on the Sabbath and the Mosaic Law also commands:

There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a day of sabbath rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a sabbath to the Lord. (Lev 23:3)

So the Israelites were supposed to attend divine service every Sabbath. Further, people working on the Sabbath should be put to death (Ex 31:14+15; Ex 35:2).

Why did God command to keep the Sabbath?

Several reasons are given in the Bible. Let’s start with the following:

For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Ex 20:11)

It will be a sign between me and the Israelites for ever, for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed. (Ex 31:17)

Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and so that the slave born in your household and the foreigner living among you may be refreshed. (Ex 23:12)

God rested and refreshed himself after six days of work. He is the example. God gave the day to rest.

Furthermore, we read:

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day. (Deut 5:15)

¹³ ... You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so that you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy.

¹⁴ Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you... (Ex 31:13+14)

Moreover, I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them. (Ezek 20:12 ESV)

and keep my Sabbaths holy that they may be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God. (Ezek 20:20 ESV)

By bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, God sanctified them. (See also the note on the first cup at the Passover meal in my article “The Lord’s Supper – The Meal of the New Covenant”.) They should remember and realize on the Sabbath that it is God who sanctifies them. They should especially know that the Lord is their God (Ezek 20:20); they should know the Lord as their God, so they should know the Lord. The Hebrew verb “yada” translated as “to know” is also found, for example, in the following scripture:

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived... (Gen 4:1 ESV)

Knowing the Lord means more than having superficial knowledge. God wants to have a love relationship with us and wants us to know him very intimately and very closely. The Sabbath rest is also for this purpose.

God promised the following:

¹³ ‘If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord’s holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, ¹⁴ then you will find your joy in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.’ For the mouth of the Lord has spoken. (Isa 58:13+14)

Keeping the Sabbath (i.e. the “Lord’s holy day”, verse 13) with joy results in a special blessing, in particular to find our joy in the Lord (see also Isa 56:2 and Isa 56:6+7). When do we find our joy in the Lord? When we have a warm and intimate fellowship with Him.

It is written:

...the joy of the Lord is your strength. (Neh 8:10)

Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. (Ps 37:4)

The Hebrew word translated here as “strength” means “place or means of safety, protection.” Often it is translated as “stronghold” or “fortress.”

“To take delight” (Ps 37:4) and “to find joy” (Isa 58:14) in the Lord is the same; in Hebrew there is the same verb “anog” used in both verses. So by joyfully keeping the Sabbath, we get (i) joy in the Lord and by this intimate fellowship with him and (ii) strength and (iii) we get what our heart desires!

On the future of the Sabbath:

Jesus said in speaking of the great tribulation before his return:

Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. (Mt 24:20)

So the Sabbath has a special importance also before Jesus' return. Moreover, Isaiah prophesied:

²² "As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the Lord, "so will your name and descendants endure. ²³ From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me," says the Lord. (Isa 66:22+23)

In future, when God will have created the new heavens and the new earth, the new moons and the Sabbaths will be sanctified – in particular by worshipping God.

Zechariah's following prophecy is also still to be fulfilled:

¹⁶ Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles. ¹⁷ If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, they will have no rain. (Zech 14:16+17)

In future, the Festival of Tabernacles will also be celebrated particularly by worshipping God. This Festival is one of the three annual feasts to which one had to travel to the temple in Jerusalem; the Passover and the Festival of Weeks are the other two (Deut 16:16). The Passover and the Festival of Weeks in the spring got an additional meaning related to Jesus' lifetime on this earth; because at the beginning of the Passover, Jesus was crucified and at the Festival of Weeks the Holy Spirit came (Acts 2). I expect that the Festival of Tabernacles in autumn will get an additional meaning in future, perhaps also the Festival of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement.

I would like to encourage you to ask God if he might would like you to sanctify the Festivals or to celebrate them somehow. We can celebrate the Festivals in spring out of gratitude for what Jesus did for us and the Festivals in autumn in anticipation of the future.

On each weekly Sabbath the Israelites had to come together for a sacred assembly or a holy convocation (Lev 23:3). At several feasts they had to make offerings in addition to the sacred assembly (Lev 23:1–44; Num 28:9–31; Deut 16:2–17). I think God enjoys it when we worship him at his Sabbaths and other feasts in church services and offer him thanksgiving as a sacrifice:

The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me... (Ps 50:23 ESV, see also Ps 27:6, Jer 33:11, Jonah 2:9, Hebr 13:15)

There are not any commands to rest on the weekly Sabbath or other feasts apart from the Mosaic Law. There is none regarding the time before Moses and the prophecies about the future earth do not mention people would be resting at these days. So we shouldn't teach others that they would not be allowed to work on the Sabbath. The Sabbath is important to God and I recommend everyone to ask God what to do on this day and how to sanctify it.

How about celebrating the Sunday as the Sabbath?

In several languages the weekday name "Saturday" goes back to the Jewish Sabbath (French "samedi", Greek "Σάββατο" ("sábbato"), Italian "sabato", Polish "sobota", Portuguese

“sábado”, Russian “суббота”, Spanish “sábado”). Various calendar reforms over the millenniums have not changed the sequence of weekdays and the Jews have been continuously celebrating the Sabbath on Saturday. Thus, the divine Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, is on Saturday and not on Sunday.

To begin the week on Monday is a rather new development in course of Saturday and Sunday being days off; it follows an ISO recommendation from 1976 (ISO 2015:1976). In the past the week had begun on Sunday (for example in Germany according to DIN 1355). Sunday is still the first day of the week in the USA and other countries.

Let's read what happened when Aaron's sons didn't follow the divine order:

¹ Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command. ² So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. (Lev 10:1+2)

Aaron's sons died when they defied God's order as to how they should sacrifice.

Daniel prophesied about a king:

He will speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people and try to change the set times and the laws... (Dan 7:25)

God doesn't like it when we try to change his orders and the timings of his feasts.

In the fourth century, emperor Constantine I decreed Sunday as the day of rest, namely the day of the “sun god”, that is, a day to worship a pagan idol. Christianity had initially celebrated the Sabbath, but also used the non-working Sunday for church services later. Christianity was influenced by paganism and eventually the Sabbath was replaced by Sunday as the day of rest.

But God wants us to be holy and to worship him in the spirit and in truth (Jn 4:23+24), and without pagan influence, because he is a jealous God (Ex 20:5; Ex 34:14; Deut 4:24; Deut 5:9; Deut 6:15; Jos 24:19; Jam 4:4+5).

How about eating pork?

In the Bible clean and unclean animals are mentioned for the first time where God said to Noah that he should take seven pairs of every kind of clean animal and one pair of every kind of unclean animal onto the ark (Gen 7:2). Only clean animals could be sacrificed (see e.g. Gen 8:20, Lev 27:11). The Mosaic Law prohibits eating unclean animals and explains which animals are clean and which are unclean (Lev 11:1–47; Lev 14:3–19). God's reasoning is also interesting:

⁴³ Ye shall not make yourselves abominable with any creeping thing that creepeth, neither shall ye make yourselves unclean with them, that ye should be defiled thereby.

⁴⁴ For I am the Lord your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. ⁴⁵ For I am the Lord that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy. (Lev 11:43–45)

Does it still apply to us today that we'd make ourselves abominable by eating unclean animals (verse 43)? Are the animals that were unclean in those days still unclean today? Neither Jesus, nor the epistles, nor the prophets said otherwise (see above). Jesus died for the sin of mankind; there is not any indication that he could have died also for unclean animals. Isaiah

prophesied that people will come to an end who eat meat of unclean animals, because it is such an abomination (Isa 66:17); this prophecy has not yet been fulfilled and is still in the future. Revelation prophesied about the new Jerusalem:

And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Rev 21:27 KJV)

The bible clearly states that eating unclean animals had been and will be an abomination. This is also applicable today, because God does not change (Mal 3:6; Hebr 13:8; Jam 1:17); eating unclean animals is an abomination in God's eyes.

At the time of Moses it was normal to be temporarily unclean, because for example even marital sex made people unclean (Lev 15:18). Doing something abominably is something completely different, because according to the law of Moses this sometimes had even to be punished with death (Lev 20:13).

May we eat pork nevertheless, because we have been justified by believing in Jesus Christ? Let's read what Peter wrote to "those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion" (1 Peter 1:1 ESV):

¹⁴ As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; (1 Peter 1:14+15)

So we should be holy in every way; this includes our bodies. The following sentences by Paul are also relevant:

¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies. (1 Cor 6:19+20; see also 1 Cor 3:16+17; 2 Cor 6:16)

Assuming you are a Christian, the following applies: (i) Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. (ii) Your body is owned by God. (iii) You should glorify God in your body.

Let me ask you: Are you holy in all you do and do you glorify God when you commit an abomination in a temple of the Holy Spirit that is owned by God?

Which animals are clean and which unclean?

The following table provides an overview of the most relevant clean and unclean animals (see Lev 11:2–47 and Deut 14:4–19):

Clean Animals	Unclean Animals
Animals that have divided hoofs <u>and</u> chew the cud, e.g. ox, sheep, goat, deer, gazelle, ibex, antelope.	Animals that do not have divided hoofs (or feet) or do not chew the cud, e.g. pig, rabbit.
Fish that have fins <u>and</u> scales.	Aquatic animals that do not have fins and scales, e.g. crab, scampi, shrimp, crayfish, lobster, mussels.
Birds that are not on the list of unclean birds, e.g. chicken, goose, turkey, duck, pigeon.	Eagle, vulture, black vulture, red and black kites, raven, owls, gull, hawk, cormorant, osprey, stork, heron, hoopoe, bat...

What are our financial obligations?

First, we answer the question of tithing. Then we explain the principle of firstfruits and that we should support the poor and God's servants. We close this section with general notes.

Do we have to tithe?

According to the Mosaic Law the tenth was to provide for the Levites, who themselves had no land and who performed sacrificial service (Lev 27:30–32; Num 18:21–32; Deut 14:22–29; Hebr 7:5). The Levite priests do not exist anymore. Therefore, it is no longer possible to tithe according to the Mosaic Law. Burnt offerings are not required anymore, because Jesus died for us. We Christians are all priests (Rev 1:6; Rev 5:10) and Jesus is our high priest (Hebr 5:10; Hebr 6:20; Hebr 7:21).

However, is there beyond the law of Moses a command regarding tithing? The tithe is mentioned for the first time in the Bible where Abraham gave Melchizedek a tithe:

¹⁸ Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, ¹⁹ and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. ²⁰ And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. (Gen 14:18–20)

From this, there is no requirement to tithe today: there is no indication in the Bible that Melchizedek would have asked anything of Abraham; probably Abraham gave him the tithe of his own free will. There is nothing in the Bible about Abraham tithing again; it was probably something unique.

The only other text in the entire Bible where tithing is mentioned without reference to the Mosaic Law is where Jacob made a vow after his dream:

²⁰ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear ²¹ so that I return safely to my father's household, then the Lord will be my God ²² and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth." (Gen 28:20–22)

Nothing is mentioned that God commanded to tithe; Jacob probably voluntarily vowed to tithe. Even if there had been a command for Jakob, it would not be possible to conclude that this would also be applicable to his descendants. And even if it had been applicable to his descendants, then this would still not mean that we would have to keep it today, because Abraham and his descendants needed to be circumcised, but we don't.

Thus, on the one hand, there is no biblical basis to teach (neither in the Old nor New Testament) that we would have to tithe; on the other, we have seen that tithing had some significance even before Moses.

Let's read a well-known text from Malachi:

⁷ Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,' says the Lord Almighty. 'But you ask, "How are we to return?" ⁸ 'Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. 'But you ask, "How are we robbing you?" 'In tithes and offerings. ⁹ You are under a curse –

your whole nation – because you are robbing me. ¹⁰ Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,’ says the Lord Almighty, ‘and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. ¹¹ I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe,’ says the Lord Almighty. ¹² ‘Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,’ says the Lord Almighty. (Mal 3:7–12)

The point here was that the Mosaic Law was not followed; tithes and offerings were not brought to the Levites according to the Mosaic Law (verse 8). Because of this, the curse of the law came upon them (verse 9; cf. Deut 28:15–68).

Malachi prophesied that if they keep the law, they will be blessed (verses 10–12). This is a summary of the blessings promised to those who keep the Mosaic Law (Deut 28:1–14). In particular, Malachi prophesied to those who tithe “so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it” (verse 10).

Verse 11 contains a confirmation that the curse of the law does not come to rest. The curse includes the crops being eaten by locusts and the grapes by worms (Deut 28:38+39). Paul wrote:

¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.’ ¹⁴ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. (Gal 3:13+14)

Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the law; that’s why we don’t have to tithe to have protection from the pests. We have the blessing of Abraham; therefore, we are blessed in every way (Gen 24:1). And that includes financial prosperity, because Abraham was very wealthy (Gen 13:2; Gen 24:35).

The principle of firstfruits (firstlings):

⁹ Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; ¹⁰ then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine. (Prov 3:9+10 ESV)

A special blessing is given to those who honor God with their possessions and the firstfruits of all their income (cf. Ezk 44:30). This blessing is very similar to the blessing that Malachi prophesied concerning tithing (Mal 3:10).

According to the Mosaic Law, the firstfruits had to be offered (Ex 23:19; Ex 34:26; Deut 26:2). The firstfruits are the first fruits of everything (Num 18:13), especially all the best of the oil, must (wine) and grain (Num 18:12). The firstfruits include a sheaf of the first grain harvested (Lev 23:10) and a loaf from the first flour (Num 15:20+21). The firstfruits of planted trees are the fruits of the first four years (Lev 19:23–25). The firstlings of the cattle are the firstborns (Num 18:15) and the first wool (Deut 18:4).

The offering of firstfruits existed even before the Mosaic Law. Firstfruits are already mentioned at the beginning of the Bible:

³ In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. ⁴ But Abel also brought an offering – fat portions from some of the firstborn of

his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering,⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor... (Gen 4:3–5)

The reason why God did not like the offering of Cain is written in the book of Jasher:

And unto Cain and his offering the Lord did not turn, and he did not incline to it, for he had brought from the inferior fruit of the ground before the Lord... (Jasher 1:16; "The Book of Jasher" J.H. Parry & Co. 1887)

God was pleased that Abel offered him "of the firstborn," that is, of the best; but Cain offered only "inferior fruit." The firstfruits are the best that we can offer to God.

Offerings were often brought in the morning (Ex 36:3; Lev 9:17; 1 Chr 16:40; 2 Chr 13:11; Job 1:5; Ezek 46:13–15; Am 4:4), so people served God already at the beginning of the day and did other things afterwards.

A psalmist wrote:

I rise before dawn and cry for help; I have put my hope in your word. (Ps 119:147)

It is a fundamental principle that we should always put God's matters first:

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Mt 6:33)

When we honor God with our firstfruits, it is a sign that we put God first. We thank him for his provision and we are more than abundantly blessed. That is why I recommend doing this regularly out of gratitude. A firstfruits offering is really not much and you will see how God works.

Support for the poor:

Jesus said:

Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. (Mt 5:42)

It is also written:

Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God. (Prov 14:31)

Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward them for what they have done. (Prov 19:17)

The generous will themselves be blessed, for they share their food with the poor. (Prov 22:9)

Those who give to the poor will lack nothing, but those who close their eyes to them receive many curses. (Prov 28:27)

⁶ "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? ⁸ Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. ⁹ Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.' If you

take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, ¹⁰ if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. ¹¹ And the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. (Isa 58:6–11 ESV)

Whenever you support the poor, you honor God and you are blessed – even with healing (Isa 58:8) and your bones are made strong (Isa 58:11). This is promised to those who do not hide themselves from their own flesh (Isa 58:7), that is, who provide for the needs of their own family (NIRV). At his return Jesus will answer the question of the righteous when they have fed him, given him drink, sheltered him, clothed or visited him:

... Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me. (Mt 25:40)

Jesus' brothers and sisters are the other believers (Mt 12:50; Lk 8:21). It is especially important to do good to them. Paul wrote on this matter:

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (Gal 6:10)

Additional scriptures on providing for the poor: Deut 15:7–11; Ps 112:5+9; Prov 14:21; Prov 21:13; Mt 6:4; Lk 10:25–37; Lk 12:33; Acts 10:4+31; 2 Cor 9:9; Gal 2:10; Eph 4:28.

Supporting God's servants:

Jesus said to his disciples before he sent them out to proclaim the gospel and heal the sick:

⁹ Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, ¹⁰ no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the laborer deserves his food...

⁴⁰ Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. ⁴¹ The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. ⁴² And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward. (Mt 10:9–42 ESV; see also Lk 10:7)

We ought to support the brothers and sisters who serve us, and for this we are even rewarded. Paul wrote:

But those who are taught the word should share all good things with their teacher. (Gal 6:6 NIRV)

Elsewhere, Paul explained that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel (1 Cor 9:1–14; see also 1 Tim 5:17–18; 3 Jn 1:5–8). The principle is that instead of doing normal work, the servant of God is ministering their brothers and sisters and therefore should be supported by them.

Remember this:

⁶ ... Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Cor 9:6+7)

In the book of the prophet Haggai we can read that the Jews were doing badly because they cared only about building their own houses and not about the temple (Haggai 1:2–11). Also regarding our finances we should listen to God and follow his direction diligently, i.e. we should obey God's instructions which he gives us personally. And if, for example, he would ask us to sell all our property and give it to the poor, then we should do the same (see Mt 19:21; Mk 10:21).

It is written:

The blessing of the Lord brings wealth, without painful toil for it. (Prov 10:22)

The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life. (Prov 22:4 ESV)

God wants us to be well and to live in prosperity (see also Deut 28:8+11–12; Ps 112:3; Prov 14:24; 2 Cor 8:9). In the Bible we can also read that rich people have many friends (Prov 14:20; Prov 19:4) and that money provides safety (Eccl 7:12). Some famous men of God were very rich: Abraham (Gen 13:2; Gen 24:35), Isaac (Gen 26:12–14), Job (Job 1:3) and Solomon (1 Ki 10:23).

The Bible warns us:

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. (1 Tim 6:10)

Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless. (Eccl 5:10)

...though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them. (Ps 62:10)

Being rich is a blessing of God, but love of money is bad. It is important that we do not serve money but God (Mt 6:24; Lk 16:9–13). Jesus warned against greed (Lk 12:15) and encouraged us to trust Him and seek His kingdom (Lk 12:31). He provides for us and we should not put our trust in our possessions (Lk 12:15–34). This was also the problem of the rich young man whom Jesus told to sell all his possessions and give to the poor (Mk 10:17–27). He put more trust in his riches than in Jesus (Mk 10:24 KJV; see also Prov 11:28; Jer 48:7; 1 Tim 6:17).

Jesus said:

¹ Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. ² So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Mt 6:1–4)

Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property and pretended to donate all the money from the sale, although they kept part of it for themselves. Therefore they had to die. They wanted to look good in the eyes of the people (Acts 5:1–11). In everything we do, it is very important that we do it to honor God and not to be honored by people. And this does not only apply to giving, but also to everything else like praying (Mt 6:5–6), fasting (Mt 6:16–18), singing, preaching, helping people in practical matters and so on. Paul wrote:

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (1 Cor 10:31)

I would like to close this section on finances with the following thought:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. (Rom 12:1)

¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. ¹⁶ For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.

¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. ¹⁸ Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem; ¹⁹ then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar. (Ps 51:15–19 ESV)

you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1Pet 2:5 ESV)

³⁰ I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving. ³¹ This will please the Lord more than an ox, more than a bull with its horns and hooves. (Ps 69:30–31)

To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice. (Prov 21:3)

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. (Hos 6:6 ESV; see also Mt 12:7; Joel 2:13; Am 5:22)

More important than financial offerings is that we give ourselves completely to God! Because...

...to obey is better than sacrifice... (1Sam 15:22)

Closing Remarks

God has revealed a great deal of wisdom in the Mosaic Law; observance of the Mosaic commands implies a blessing (Mt 5:19). For example, eating kosher has health benefits.

But let us not fall into false piety and not trying to contribute to our righteousness through our deeds, because we are righteous solely by our faith in Jesus Christ. We should not try to impress God with good deeds on our own initiative, but we should ask him to show us what he wants us to do with him.

God rewards us when we diligently seek him (Hebr 11:6). In order to get to know him better, we should study his entire word (Ps 119:160). We should ask him to reveal himself to us and to put his will into us and write his instructions in our hearts (Hebr 8:10; Hebr 10:16; Jer 31:33). I want to encourage you to study the entire word of God, in particular to read all parts of the Bible.

James wrote:

²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

²⁵ But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do. (Jam 1:22+25)

Let's put God's word into action and not just hear or read it. If we keep the perfect law, i.e. God's law, it follows that we will be blessed in what we do.

James wrote in addition:

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. (Jam 2:26)

James wrote this in the context that not obeying God is a sign of unbelief. If Abraham had refused to sacrifice his son Isaac on the altar, then he would not have heard the word of God, but would not have acted accordingly; Abraham would not have doubted God, so he would not have fully trusted or believed him (Jam 2:21). Because if you believe in someone, then you also trust him.

Let us follow Jesus wholeheartedly so that we may receive the crown of life (Jam 1:12). Let us not be lukewarm because Jesus said in the Revelation of John:

¹² And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. ¹³ I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. ¹⁴ Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. (Rev 22:12–14)

Summary

The Mosaic Law does not have to be kept, but we should abstain from idolatry, from eating blood or meat that is not exsanguinated and from fornication. Fornication includes adultery, divorce, sex before marriage, sex during menstruation, sex among men, incest and sex with animals.

We should ask God how we should sanctify the “Lord’s holy day” (Isa 58:13), i.e. the Sabbath. Like other feasts, it will be of importance to God in the future. God promised a special blessing if we keep the Sabbath with joy, namely especially to have (i) joy in the Lord and by this intimate fellowship with him and (ii) strength and (iii) we get what our heart desires! Sunday originally is a pagan day and sanctifying it is not God’s will.

Eating pork or other unclean animals is an abomination in God’s eyes. But we should glorify God with our body which is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

We do not have to tithe, but we should honor God with our possessions and the firstfruits of our income. We should also support the poor and God’s servants.

We should always be aware that we cannot become righteous by our deeds, but only through faith in Jesus Christ. We should study the entire word of God and let God write his commands in our hearts and obey them. We should be doers of the word; for faith without works is dead.

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