

# What commandments should Christians keep?

Martin Zahn

## 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. (Heb 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:

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

In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, (1Jn 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? And if we keep Jesus' commandments, are we living according to his will? Or do God's commandments only partially reflect His will?

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; write your guidance into my heart and reveal your will to me. 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 following section is about 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 Mosaic Law with 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.

The biblical citations are from the New International Version (NIV) unless stated otherwise. All notes on the Hebrew and Greek are taken from the Bible Hub: [www.biblehub.com/interlinear](http://www.biblehub.com/interlinear)

### **What did Jesus teach?**

Jesus said:

<sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations... <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you... (Mt 28:19-20)

So we should teach to keep Jesus' commandments.

To answer the question of Jesus' teaching, let us first consider what Jesus said about the Mosaic Law:

<sup>17</sup> "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. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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:

<sup>17</sup> “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.” <sup>18</sup> “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, <sup>19</sup> 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:

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

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

<sup>34</sup> “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup> 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 2Cor 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 “katharízō” 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; 1Pet 2:22; Isa 53:9).

Jesus also answered the Pharisees and teachers of the law:

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

<sup>3</sup> ... “Haven’t you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> Or haven’t you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent? <sup>6</sup> I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. <sup>7</sup> If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent. <sup>8</sup> 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 (1Sam 21:6). The priest gave David this bread after he declared that he and his companions were clean (1Sam 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 is 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:

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

to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you.”<sup>20</sup> So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.”...

<sup>28</sup> 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*.”<sup>29</sup> 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 it and he 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. Those are the believers from the nations (Greek “*éthnos*”), often translated as “Gentiles”. This is exactly how Peter understood it – being taught by the Holy Spirit.

Later, Jews in Jerusalem reproached him because he had been in the house of an uncircumcised and had even eaten with them (Acts 11:2-3). That is why Peter told them this vision and that he then went to the Gentiles, where the Holy Spirit fell on them (Acts 11:4-17). This convinced the Jews and they agreed with him (Acts 11:18).

Peter was not to call anyone “impure or unclean” (verse 28) and in Greek these are exactly the same adjectives he used to describe the animals (verse 14; the same in Acts 11:8). The unclean animals stand for the Gentiles. This may seem somewhat strange to us. For Jews, however, it was not so weird. Even Jesus himself referred to a pagan woman as a dog (Mt 15:26; Mk 7:27) and in Revelation, dogs also stand for ungodly people (Rev 22:15).

This vision may seem very drastic to us and some may wonder why God has given us this dramatic vision. The reason may be that for Peter there had to be a paradigm shift. Previously, as a Jewish believer, he thought that he was even forbidden to visit a Gentile (verse 28). And now Gentiles were suddenly his brothers in faith. That’s why the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were “astonished” (Acts 10:45), they were “amazed” (Acts 10:45 ESV).

Why was Peter even told to eat the unclean animals? When you eat something, you take it in, nothing comes closer to you than your food. Peter was to give up all barriers and obstacles and any distance to the Gentiles who had become believers and become close to them, cultivating the same warm and loving relationship with them as he did with his Jewish fellow believers.

If we were concluding from this vision that we should eat unclean animals, 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.

Some people taught the 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:

<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: <sup>14</sup> Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. <sup>15</sup> And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, <sup>16</sup> 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: <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. <sup>19</sup> Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: <sup>20</sup> But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. <sup>21</sup> For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day. <sup>22</sup> 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: <sup>23</sup> 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: <sup>24</sup> 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: <sup>25</sup> It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, <sup>26</sup> Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>27</sup> We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. <sup>28</sup> For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; <sup>29</sup> 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 “dokéō;” 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)

In the following subsections, we first explain these four things and then which laws were replaced by them. We then ask ourselves whether the rules of the Apostolic Council also apply to us today. The last subsection deals with the reasoning with which James concluded his words (Acts 15:21).

What are the rules?

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 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:

<sup>3</sup> Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. <sup>4</sup> 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. There are several other warnings about this in the New Testament (1Cor 5:1+11; 1Cor 6:9+18; 2Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:3; Col 3:5; 1Thess 4:3; 1Tim 1:10; Heb 12:16; Heb 13:4; Rev 2:21; Rev 9:21; Rev 14:8; Rev 17:4; Rev 21:8; Rev 22:15). We will answer in a separate section later what fornication is.

Which laws do not need to be observed?

The dispute was triggered by circumcision (Acts 15:1). However, the consultation in Jerusalem was then about the following request:

... The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses. (Acts 15:5)

The Mosaic Law is then referred to as a "yoke" (Acts 15:10), which would "make it difficult" and "burden" the Gentiles (Acts 15:19+28). In the letter they wrote:

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... (Acts 15:24 KJV)

When the four things are repeated a few chapters later, reference is again made to the law of Moses (Acts 21:20-25).

The subject of discussion at the Council at Jerusalem was therefore not only certain regulations such as circumcision or other parts of the law like offering, feast or dietary regulations. The directive is about the entire law of Moses, the content of which we will discuss in a separate section later.

To whom do the regulations apply?

The trigger 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 be circumcised according to the law of Moses. During the consultation in Jerusalem, however, no mention was made at all of the believers in Antioch, but instead general reference was made to the “Gentiles” (Acts 15:3+7+12+14+17). In addition, James specifically recommended:

...that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.  
(Acts 15:19)

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 (Acts 15:23) which were the surrounding landscapes.

The third Bible passage, where the four things were repeated, is also generally about...

...the Gentile believers... (Acts 21:25)

Therefore, the instructions outlined at the Council at Jerusalem are very fundamental things that are also valid for us Christians nowadays.

How about the reason given by James?

Let us now 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 trigger for the Council (Acts 15:1) and then, together with the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28), they came to the consensual conclusion (Acts 15:25) not to impose the law of Moses on them (see also Gal 5:1-12). Such a teaching therefore contradicts the New Testament. 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).

This remark may be understood in the following way: Because the law of Moses is regularly preached and read in the synagogues, on the one hand, it should be clarified that the believers do not need to keep it except for the four things. On the other hand, if while reading the law of Moses the Holy Spirit then speaks to you to do one thing or another, then of course you should obey God's voice. The big difference is that the apostles did not – and we also should not – teach which Mosaic rules the others should keep (except the four), but that all believers are entrusted to the further guidance of the Holy Spirit.

## **What is 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:

<sup>21</sup> But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup> This righteousness is given through faith in



Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. <sup>25</sup> 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— <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith. <sup>28</sup> 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 “télos” 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 1Timothy 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 “teleó” 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:

<sup>1</sup> 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? <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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:

<sup>8</sup> Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup> 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.” <sup>10</sup> 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 14 we read:

<sup>2</sup> One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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. He presumably answered specific questions that were addressed to him or referred to certain problems that he was aware of. Towards the end of this chapter, Paul encouraged people not to eat meat or drink wine if their brothers and sisters felt disturbed (verse 21). And this despite the fact that Christians are allowed to do both and that eating meat is not only expressly permitted by God (Gen 9:3-4), but was even commanded at the Passover (Ex 12:8).

The word “anything” (Greek “pás”) 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 “pás”) prophets foretold that the Messiah would suffer, for example not the prophet Haggai. Also Jesus said on the one hand:

<sup>2</sup> The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. <sup>3</sup> So you must be careful to do everything they tell you... (Mt 23:2-3; “everything” = “pás” 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). Furthermore, Jesus gave his twelve disciples power and authority to drive out all demons (Greek “daimonion”; Lk 9:1) and impure spirits (Greek “pneúma”; Mk 6:7); nevertheless, a demon, also called an impure spirit, could not be cast out by them, but only by Jesus (Lk 9:39-42; Mk 9:17-29; Mt 17:14-21).

Unfortunately, it is not clear which day the text was about 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 “koinós” 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 “akáthartos.” 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 (1Cor 7:18-19). He also stated:

<sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> 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. (1Cor 9:20-21)

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

In the further course of this epistle Paul wrote:

<sup>25</sup> Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, <sup>26</sup> for, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.” <sup>27</sup> If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. <sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> I am referring to the other person’s conscience, not yours. For why is my freedom being judged by another’s conscience? <sup>30</sup> If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for? (1Cor 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” (1Cor 10:21). This is forbidden and Paul also vehemently railed against it (1Cor 10:14-22). Subsequently, he stated in the text quoted above, what on the other hand is permitted (1Cor 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:

<sup>2</sup> You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> Such confidence we have through Christ before God. <sup>5</sup> Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. <sup>6</sup> 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. (2Cor 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 (2Cor 3:7-11).

### Galatians

Paul explained:

<sup>19</sup> For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. <sup>20</sup> 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).

<sup>10</sup> 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.’ <sup>11</sup> Clearly no-one who relies on the law is justified before God, because ‘the righteous will live by faith.’ <sup>12</sup> The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, ‘The person who does these things will live by them.’ <sup>13</sup> 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.’ <sup>14</sup> 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:

<sup>19</sup> 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...

<sup>24</sup> So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup> Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. <sup>26</sup> So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, <sup>27</sup> 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:

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. <sup>3</sup> Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. <sup>4</sup> You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. <sup>5</sup> For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. <sup>6</sup> 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:

<sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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 "katargéō" 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:

<sup>1</sup> The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. <sup>2</sup> Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, <sup>5</sup> because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. (1Tim 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 (Heb 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:

<sup>11</sup> 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? <sup>12</sup> For when the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also. (Heb 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:

<sup>8</sup> If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. <sup>9</sup> But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. <sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, <sup>13</sup> 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:

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

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

<sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister. <sup>1</sup> Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. <sup>2</sup> This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. <sup>3</sup> In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, (1Jn 4:7 – 1Jn 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 Mosaic Law and the Ten Commandments

The Mosaic Law is documented in the in the first five books of the bible, which are the Torah. We do not want to quote the hundreds of commands but focus only on the Ten Commandments. These are of particular 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 (Heb 9:4). The tabernacle with the ark of the covenant were copies and shadows of heavenly things (Heb 8:5).

Let's read the Ten Commandments:

	<b>Exodus 20:3-17</b>	<b>Deuteronomy 5:7-21</b>
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 neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.	You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbor's house or land, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Violation of commandments 1 to 4 and 6 and 7 was punishable by death; regarding the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment see Deut 13:2-16, Deut 17:2-5; 3<sup>rd</sup> commandment: Lev 24:11-14; 4<sup>th</sup> commandment: Ex 31:14, Ex 35:2, Num 15:32-36; 6<sup>th</sup> commandment: Ex 21:12, Lev 24:11, Num 35:30; 7<sup>th</sup> commandment: Lev 20:10, Deut 22:22. Furthermore, in view of the 5<sup>th</sup> 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 7<sup>th</sup> commandment is implied by abstaining from fornication as imposed at the Council at Jerusalem. Whether the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment to keep the Sabbath should still be kept today, will be answered later.

Jesus answered the question about the most important commandment:

<sup>37</sup>... "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." <sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup> And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>40</sup> All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. (Mt 22:37-40; see also Mk 12:28-31)

These two commandments are not one of the Ten Commandments, even though they have such special significance. Therefore, the Ten Commandments are not the most important commandments. Why did God not add these two ones to the Ten Commandments, but chose other commandments and wrote them as the Ten Commandments on the tablets of stone? The Israelites had a problem with idolatry. Moses spent 40 days on Mount Sinai and was given in particular the instructions for the tabernacle and the tablets with the Ten Commandments (Ex 24:16 to Ex 31:18). Meanwhile, the Israelites made a golden calf as their idol (Ex 32,1-4). And during the 40 years in the wilderness they still had self-made idols (Am 5:25-26; Acts 7:42-43). This may explain why the first two of the Ten Commandments are dealing with idolatry. As we will see later, Moses established the Sabbath as a non-working day of rest. It is



plausible that this is why the Sabbath commandment became part of the Ten Commandments and God explained it in such detail in order to make it very clear to the Israelites how they should change their habits.

Are the Ten Commandments part of the law of Moses?

At the Council at Jerusalem it was stated that one does not have to keep the law of Moses, but should instead observe the four things. If the Ten Commandments were not part of the Mosaic Law, then the Council would not be relevant to them. Therefore, we are going to answer this question in detail now.

(1) It is written just before the Ten Commandments are quoted for the first time:

And God spoke all these words: (Ex 20:1)

Then God spoke the Ten Commandments as well as several other ordinances and regulations (Ex 20:3 to Ex 23:33). And then we read:

Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said. (Ex 24:4)

What Moses wrote down were the Ten Commandments and others. Three verses later, this writing of Moses is referred to as the “Book of the Covenant” (Ex 24:7). The Ten Commandments are therefore part of the Mosaic Covenant and as a consequence part of the Mosaic Law.

(2) Some chapters later we read:

And he gave to Moses, when he had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God. (Ex 31:18 ESV)

What is the testimony? The Hebrew word “eduth” is translated as “testimony” (ESV, KJV) or “covenant law” (NIV, NIRV). What did God write on the tablets of stone? Immediately after the repeating of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy the following is written:

These are the commandments the Lord proclaimed in a loud voice to your whole assembly there on the mountain from out of the fire, the cloud and the deep darkness; and he added nothing more. Then he wrote them on two stone tablets and gave them to me. (Deut 5:22)

God had written the Ten Commandments on the two stone tablets. They are therefore the testimony that Moses placed in the ark of the covenant (Ex 40:20).

By the way, stones had also been a witness of the covenant between Jacob and Laban, his father-in-law (Gen 31:44-52). And other memorial stones were erected for various reasons (Gen 28:10-18; Gen 35:10-15; Ex 24:4; Deut 27:2-4; Josh 4).

Let’s read what David said to his son Solomon:

and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses... (1Kgs 2:3 ESV)

The testimonies (Hebrew “eduth”), i.e. the Ten Commandments, were written down in the law of Moses. They are therefore part of the Mosaic Law.

(3) During the reign of Josiah, the priest Hilkiah found the “Book of the Law of the Lord that had been given through Moses” (2Chr 34:14). This book was also called the “Law of Moses” (2Kgs 23:25) and the “Book of the Covenant” (2Kgs 23:2+21; 2Chr 34:30). It contained God’s “commandments and his testimonies and his statutes” (2Kgs 23:3 ESV; 2Chr 34:31 ESV). – Here the testimonies (Hebrew “eduth”), i.e. the Ten Commandments, are again explicitly mentioned as part of the law of Moses.

(4) It is written in the book of the prophet Malachi:

Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. (Mal 4:4)

What God commanded Moses on Mount Horeb was the law of Moses, in particular the Ten Commandments (Deut 5:2-21). Mount Horeb was also called Mount Sinai in Exodus.

(5) In Deuteronomy it is written about the Lord:

He declared to you his covenant, the Ten Commandments, which he commanded you to follow and then wrote them on two stone tablets. (Deut 4:13)

The Ten Commandments are referred to here as the Mosaic covenant, so they must be an important part of it.

(6) Solomon said that in the ark of the covenant there was the covenant that God made with their ancestors when he brought them out of Egypt (1Kgs 8:21). In the ark were the testimonies, i.e. the Ten Commandments, which are again referred to here as the covenant of Moses.

(7) In Hebrews, the tablets with the Ten Commandments in the ark of the covenant are called “tablets of the covenant” (Heb 9:4). Therefore, the Ten Commandments represent the covenant made by Moses on Mount Sinai (Ex 24:3-8), i.e. the Old Covenant, whereas nowadays we live in the New Covenant.

(8) The Jews call the first five books of the Bible, Genesis to Deuteronomy, the Torah or the Law. The New Testament identifies these books as the law of Moses in order to distinguish them from the other Old Testament writings such as the Prophets and Psalms (Lk 24:44; Jn 1:45; Acts 28:23).

Each of these eight points shows that whenever we read about the law of Moses in the Bible, the Ten Commandments are always included.

## Old Testament Prophecies

In this section we read prophecies related to the law.

### Isaiah

Isaiah prophesied about the judgment to come:

<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> “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)

So in the eyes of God, eating meat of pigs and other unclean animals will be an abomination in future.

## Jeremiah

Jeremiah prophesies about the New Covenant in which we live:

<sup>31</sup> “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, <sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> 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. <sup>34</sup> 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. For we are also Jews if we are circumcised inwardly at heart in the spirit (Rom 2:29; 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 (2Cor 3:3) and was quoted in the epistle to the Hebrews (Heb 8:10; Heb 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:

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

I would like to invite you to study some additional scriptures from the Old and the New Testament 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, but to any kind of sexual immorality (1Cor 5:1). This parlance corresponds to that of the Old Testament. There the Hebrew verb "zanah" stands for committing harlotry or for having sexual intercourse out of marriage, i.e. fornication (Deut 22:21). The masculine noun "zenunim" and the feminine "zenuth" for prostitution, whoredom or fornication are derived from this verb. There is the following admonishment:

<sup>10</sup> They shall eat, but not be satisfied; they shall play the whore, but not multiply, because they have forsaken the Lord to cherish <sup>11</sup> whoredom, wine, and new wine, which take away the understanding. <sup>12</sup> My people inquire of a piece of wood, and their walking staff gives them oracles. For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray, and they have left their God to play the whore. (Hos 4,10-12 ESV)

Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. For the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they know not the Lord. (Hos 5,4 ESV)

The spirit of fornication therefore hinders the knowledge of God as well as repentance and can even take away the understanding.

What is whoredom or fornication or 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. This means 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:

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

<sup>28</sup> 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:

<sup>8</sup>... “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. <sup>9</sup> 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)

<sup>11</sup>... “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. <sup>12</sup> 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:

<sup>15</sup>... So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth. <sup>16</sup> ‘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)

<sup>20</sup> ...if ... evidence of virginity was not found in the young woman, <sup>21</sup> 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 “arsenokoîtēs,” describing sexual intercourse between men, was used by Paul in the following two scriptures:

<sup>9</sup> 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 <sup>10</sup> nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1Cor 6:9-10)

<sup>8</sup> We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. <sup>9</sup> 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, <sup>10</sup> 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 <sup>11</sup> that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me. (1Tim 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:

<sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. <sup>27</sup> 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, (1Cor 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

(2Sam 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 (2Sam 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 (1Cor 7:7-9).

God did not always command men and women to comply with the same rules; only men had to travel to the temple in Jerusalem for the highest feasts (Ex 23:17; Ex 34:23; Deut 16:16). Other commandments also differ depending on gender (Ex 13:12-13+15; Ex 22:29; Lev 12:2-5; Lev 27:3-7; Num 30:3-15). 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, why God commanded to keep it and what promises are related to it. Then we read scriptures about the future of the Sabbath and answer the question whether the commandment to rest on the Sabbath is everlasting. Finally, we discuss celebrating Sunday as Sabbath before concluding this section on the Sabbath.

#### How was the Sabbath established?

The Bible reports on the very first day of rest:

<sup>2</sup> By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. <sup>3</sup> 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:

<sup>10</sup> Therefore I led them out of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. <sup>11</sup> I gave them my decrees and made known to them my laws, by which the person who obeys them will live. <sup>12</sup> 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 Jashar<sup>1</sup> reports in detail about the introduction of the Sabbath as a day of rest during slavery in Egypt:

<sup>41</sup> 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. <sup>42</sup> And Moses returned to Egypt and came to the house of Pharaoh, and came before the king, and Moses bowed down before the king. <sup>43</sup> 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. <sup>44</sup> And Moses said unto Pharaoh, Let there be given unto thy servants the children of Israel who are in Goshen, one day to rest therein from their labor. <sup>45</sup> And the king answered Moses and said, Behold I have lifted up thy face in this thing to grant thy request. <sup>46</sup> And Pharaoh ordered a proclamation to be issued throughout Egypt and Goshen, saying, <sup>47</sup> 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 moon, i.e. the first day of the month on which the trumpets were blown and offerings were made (Num 10:10; Num 28:11-14; Num 29:6). The Mosaic Law does not command to rest at new moons, nevertheless they were celebrated (1Sam 20:5+18; 2Kgs 4:23; Ezek 46:1+3; Hos 2:13) and sometimes even observed as days of rest (Am 8:5).

The fourth of the Ten Commandments forbids working on the Sabbath. This includes not buying or selling anything (Neh 10:32; Neh 13:15-21; Am 8:5). The Mosaic Law commands:

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<sup>1</sup> 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 2Samuel 1:18.



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)

The Israelites were supposed to celebrate a 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)

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)

<sup>16</sup> The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting **covenant**. <sup>17</sup> 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 31:16-17)

God rested and refreshed himself after six days of work. He is the example. God gave the day of **rest** for all his creation, not only for the Israelites, but also for their servants, their animals and the foreigners.

Additionally, the Sabbath is a **sign of the covenant** between God and the Israelites. If we are Christians and thus live in the New Covenant with Jesus, then we are “grafted” into the people of the Israelites (Rom 11:17-24) and have thus also entered into their covenant, without having to keep the Law of Moses.

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)

<sup>13</sup>... 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**.

<sup>14</sup> 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**. 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; in the same way in 1Sam 1:19-20)

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:

<sup>13</sup> '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, <sup>14</sup> 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)

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

David wrote:

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

"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:

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

Jesus said this when speaking about the great tribulation before his return (Mt 24:3+14+30). So the Sabbath will also have a special importance in future. Isaiah prophesied:

<sup>22</sup> "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. <sup>23</sup> 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.

New moons also had a special significance at the time of the Old Testament. The Festival of Trumpets is on the new moon (Lev 23:24; Num 29:1) and a number of remarkable events took place on the new moon (Gen 8:5; Gen 8:13; Ex 40:2; Ex 40:17; Num 1:18; Num 33:38; Deut

1:3; 2Chr 29:17; Ezr 3:6; Ezr 7:9; Ezr 10:16-17; Neh 8:2; Ezek 45:18) and God often spoke on the new moon (Num 1:1; Ezek 26:1; Ezek 29:17; Ezek 31:1; Ezek 32:1; Hag 1:1).

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

<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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 worshiping 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 spring feasts have an additional meaning in the context of Jesus' life on this earth, because Jesus was crucified on the Passover (Lev 23:5), he was resurrected during the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Lev 23:6-8), specifically on the Day of Firstfruits (Lev 23:9-14), and it was at the Feast of Weeks (Lev 23:15-21) that the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples (Acts 2). I expect that the Festival of Tabernacles (Lev 23:33-36) in autumn will get an additional meaning in future, perhaps also the Festival of Trumpets (Lev 23:23-25) and the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:26-32).

Is the commandment to rest on the Sabbath everlasting?

God said to Moses:

<sup>16</sup> Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. <sup>17</sup> It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed. (Ex 31:16-17 ESV)

The Hebrew word "olam" has been translated here as "forever." It is also used in the following verses:

<sup>44</sup> As for your male and female slaves whom you may have... <sup>46</sup> You may bequeath them to your sons after you to inherit as a possession forever... (Lev 25:44-46 ESV)

<sup>12</sup> If your brother, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you... <sup>16</sup> But if he says to you, 'I will not go out from you,' because he loves you and your household, since he is well-off with you, <sup>17</sup> then you shall take an awl, and put it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your slave forever... (Deut 15:12-17 ESV)

The word "olam," translated as "forever," also means "for a long duration" or "for an indefinite time." It was regularly used in the context of the Mosaic Law, where its instructions were often referred to as "lasting ordinance" (NIV), "perpetual statute" (ESV), "statute forever" (ESV, KJV) or "ordinance for ever" (KJV): Ex 12:14+17+24; Ex 27:21; Ex 28:43; Ex 29:9+28; Ex 30:21; Ex 40:14; Lev 3:17; Lev 6:18+22; Lev 7:34-36; Lev 10:9+15; Lev 16:29+31+34; Lev 17:7; Lev 23:14+21+31+41; Lev 24:3+8-9; Lev 25:32-34; Num 10:8; Num 15:15; Num 18:8+11+19+23; Num 19:10+21; Num 25:13. God also gave the Israelites the land "forever" (Gen 13:15; Gen 17:8; Gen 48:4; Ex 32:13), even though heaven and earth will pass away (Mt 24:35).

There are not any commands to rest on the weekly Sabbath or other feasts apart from the Mosaic Law. God gave the Sabbaths to those whom he brought out of Egypt (Ex 16:29; Ezek 20:12). The prophecies about the future earth and the New Testament do not give any indication either that work would be forbidden on the Sabbath.

There are Christians today who believe that the apostles wrote nothing about the Sabbath because it would have been self-evident that the Ten Commandments had to be kept. The Gentiles did not keep the Sabbath and were sometimes so far away from Israel that many probably did not even know it. So they would have had to start keeping the Sabbath when they converted. And then they would have had to keep it so strictly that none of the apostles saw any reason to remind them of the Sabbath commandment. Consider in this regard that many Christians, even after their conversion, did not live an ideal life and were often admonished, even regarding several of the Ten Commandments. Here are some examples:

1<sup>st</sup> Commandment, no idolatry: 1Cor 5:11; 1Cor 6:9; 1Cor 10:7+14; 1Jn 5:21

5<sup>th</sup> Commandment, honor parents: Eph 6:2

6<sup>th</sup> Commandment, do not murder: Jam 4:2; 1Pet 4:15

7<sup>th</sup> Commandment, do not commit adultery: Rom 2:22; Rom 13:13; 1Cor 5:11; 1Cor 6:9; 1Cor 10:8; 2Cor 12:21; Eph 5:3+5; Col 3:5; Heb 13:4; Jam 4:4

8<sup>th</sup> Commandment, do not steal: Rom 2:21; 1Cor 5:11; 1Cor 6:10; Eph 4:28; 1Tim 1:10; 1Pet 4:15

9<sup>th</sup> Commandment, do not give false testimony: 1Cor 5:11; 1Cor 6:10; 2Cor 12:20; Eph 4:31; Col 3:8; 1Tim 3:11; Tit 2:3; Jam 4:11; 1Pet 2:1

10<sup>th</sup> Commandment, do not covet: Rom 13:13; 1Cor 5:11; 1Cor 6:10; Gal 5:26; Eph 5:3; Jam 3:14; Jam 4:2; 1Pet 2:1; 2Pet 2:3

The Corinthians had committed such terrible adultery that “even pagans do not tolerate” (1Cor 5:1). So why should they have kept the Sabbath in an exemplary manner, so that they would not even need to be reminded of it, when they were so vehemently violating so many of the Ten Commandments?

Jesus occasionally reminded of some of the Ten Commandments (Mt 5:21+27; Mt 19:18-19; Mk 10:19; Lk 18:20). However, there is not a single scripture where he encouraged people to keep the Sabbath.

The prohibition to work on the Sabbath is part of the Mosaic Law, which does not have to be obeyed, as the apostles and the Holy Spirit stated at the Council at Jerusalem. Therefore, one cannot conclude that it is forbidden to work on the Sabbath nowadays.

How about celebrating the Sunday as the Sabbath?

When the Christians in Jerusalem were in need, Paul encouraged the believers from the other churches to collect for them:

Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. (1Cor 16:2 KJV)

On the first day of the week, i.e. Sunday, everyone should save something for themselves. This is a practical advice and does not indicate an assembly or any other sanctification of this day. However, there is a biblical passage that refers to an assembly on Sunday:

On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. (Acts 20:7)

This was the meeting in which a young man fell asleep during Paul’s sermon. He fell out of the window, died and then came back to life (Acts 20:7-12). This meeting was also special in this respect. This may have been the reason why the day of the week was explicitly mentioned

here. However, we cannot conclude from this that they met primarily on Sundays, especially not because it is written about the first Christians:

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, (Acts 2:46)

Based on the Bible, therefore, it cannot be assumed that Sunday was celebrated in a special way in early Christianity. On the Sabbath, however, the word of God was regularly preached (Acts 13:42+44; Acts 16:13; Acts 17:2; Acts 18:4).

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 millennia 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:

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> 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; Josh 24:19; Jam 4:4-5).

## Conclusions

On the basis of the biblical scriptures, it cannot be concluded that we are not allowed to work on the Sabbath. But the Sabbath is very important to God. It always has been and will be a holy day for eternity. So I recommend everyone to ask God what to do on this day and how to sanctify it. Please also remember that there are promises associated with keeping the Sabbath.

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, Heb 13:15)

### 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:

<sup>43</sup> 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.

<sup>44</sup> 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. <sup>45</sup> 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 would have cleansed unclean animals. Isaiah prophesied that eating meat of unclean animals will also be an abomination in future (Isa 66:17). In the Book of Revelation it is 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; Heb 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" (1Pet 1:1 ESV):

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

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

<sup>19</sup> 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; <sup>20</sup> you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies. (1Cor 6:19-20; see also 1Cor 3:16-17; 2Cor 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 18:21-24; Deut 14:22-29; Heb 7:5). The Levites also gave the tenth of their income, that is, the tenth of the tenth they received from the others (Num 18:25-32). 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 (Heb 5:10; Heb 6:20; Heb 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:

<sup>18</sup> Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, <sup>19</sup> and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High,

Creator of heaven and earth. <sup>20</sup> 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:

<sup>20</sup> 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 <sup>21</sup> so that I return safely to my father’s household, then the Lord will be my God <sup>22</sup> 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:

<sup>7</sup> 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?” <sup>8</sup> ‘Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. ‘But you ask, “How are we robbing you?” ‘In tithes and offerings. <sup>9</sup> You are under a curse – your whole nation – because you are robbing me. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> ‘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:



<sup>13</sup> 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.' <sup>14</sup> 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):

<sup>9</sup> Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; <sup>10</sup> 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:

<sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. <sup>4</sup> 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, <sup>5</sup> 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. The Law of Moses says that it is an abomination to God if sacrifices are offered to him that are not without blemish (Deut 17:1). And Malachi wrote that God is displeased when people offer him inferior things (Mal 1:6-14).

Offerings were often brought in the morning (Ex 36:3; Lev 9:17; 1Chr 16:40; 2Chr 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; see also Lk 12:31)

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)

<sup>1</sup>... Blessed is the one who considers the poor! In the day of trouble the Lord delivers him; <sup>2</sup> the Lord protects him and keeps him alive; he is called blessed in the land; you do not give him up to the will of his enemies. <sup>3</sup> The Lord sustains him on his sickbed; in his illness you restore him to full health. (Ps 41:1-3 ESV)

<sup>6</sup> "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? <sup>7</sup> 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? <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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, <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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 (Ps 41:3; 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; 2Cor 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:

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

<sup>40</sup> Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. <sup>41</sup> 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. <sup>42</sup> 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 (1Cor 9:1-14; see also 1Tim 5:17-18; 3Jn 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:

<sup>6</sup>... Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. <sup>9</sup> As it is written: 'They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures for ever.' (2Cor 9:6-9)

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). Jesus said:

In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples. (Lk 14:33)

It is also 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)

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. (2Cor 8:9)

God wants us to be well and to live in prosperity (see also Deut 8:18; Deut 28:8+11-12; Ps 112:3; Prov 14:24; 2Cor 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), Jacob (Gen 30:43), Job (Job 1:3), Solomon (1Kgs 10:23) and Hezekiah (2Chr 32:27-29).

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. (1Tim 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 Job 31:24; Prov 11:28; Jer 48:7; 1Tim 6:17).

Jesus said:

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> 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. (1Cor 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)

<sup>15</sup> O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. <sup>16</sup> For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. <sup>17</sup> The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. <sup>18</sup> Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem; <sup>19</sup> 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)

<sup>30</sup> I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving. <sup>31</sup> 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; see also Prov 21:3; Jer 7:22-23)

## Closing Remarks

Also consider:

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

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Heb 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, for example, not to eat pork. So his commandments only partially reflect how to live according to his heart's desires. Jesus said:

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (Mt 7:21)

Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother. (Mk 3:35; see also Mt 12:50)

... I seek not to please myself but him who sent me. (Jn 5:30; see also Jn 4:34)

For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. (Jn 6:38; see also Heb 10:7+9)

Jesus not only fulfilled the Mosaic Law, but moreover did the will of our Father. The Greek word for will ("thélēma") means desire and wish. It often refers to God's preferred-will, i.e. his best-offer to people which can be accepted or rejected. Doing God's will means doing what he

desires and longs for, and that goes beyond what he commands. So we should aspire not only to keep God's commandments, but beyond that, to live according to his will:

<sup>20</sup> Now may the God of peace... <sup>21</sup> equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ... (Heb 13:20-21)

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Rom 12:2)

The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives for ever. (1Jn 2:17; see also Lk 12:47; Jn 9:31; Rom 2:18; Eph 5:17; Eph 6:6; Col 1:9; Col 4:12; Heb 10:36; 1Pet 4:2; 1Jn 5:14)

It is written about Jesus:

You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy. (Heb 1:9; see also Ps 45:8)

If we do God's will and, moreover, feel as he does, that is, love righteousness and hate wickedness, that is, hate sinful behavior (but love sinners), then we will be anointed more strongly by God.

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 (Jer 29:13; Heb 11:6; Jam 4:8). 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 (Heb 8:10; Heb 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.

Peter wrote:

<sup>14</sup> As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. <sup>15</sup> But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; <sup>16</sup> for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.' <sup>17</sup> Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. (1Pet 1:14-17)

And in the Epistle of James we read:

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

<sup>25</sup> 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 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:

<sup>12</sup> And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. <sup>13</sup> I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. <sup>14</sup> 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.

However, our deeds and thoughts should not only be based on these commandments, but we should seek God, explore his will and do it. Let us do what he desires and longs for.

The Mosaic Law prohibiting work on the Sabbath does not apply to us. But we should ask God how we should sanctify the "Lord's holy day" (Isa 58:13), i.e. the Sabbath. Even God rested on the seventh day in an exemplary manner. Like other feasts, the Sabbath will be of importance to God in the future. God promised a special blessing if we keep it 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! Originally, Sunday is a pagan day and its sanctification is not in line with God's will.

We are not forbidden to eat pork or other unclean animals, but we would be committing an abomination in God's eyes. Instead, we should glorify God with our body which is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

We also 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. Let him write his commandments and his will in our hearts and live by them. We should be doers of the word; for faith without works is dead.

**Author**

Please address questions and feedback to:

Martin Zahn

Herbert-Ewe-Str. 18

18435 Stralsund

Germany

E-Mail: [contact@mzahn.eu](mailto:contact@mzahn.eu)

Website: [www.mzahn.eu/en](http://www.mzahn.eu/en)