

An Answer to a Jehovah's Witness Disciple

Thanks for your recent letter, and your thoughts concerning a number of salient points that you addressed. I hope you will carefully consider my responses to some points made in your letter, since they conflict with the contexts of the passages you quoted. The first is Colossians 2:13-17, where we read, "... having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross [or stake, from the Greek *stauros*]." This passage is discussed in the paper entitled "God's Laws Are Eternal"¹ which I enclosed with my package recently sent to you. Perhaps you did not read and study that paper, for the first page discusses this very scripture. I have included this article again for your convenience, and have indicated with a red line the pertinent subject matter. Note that verse 11 of Colossians 2 places the issue of God's laws in context, that we are to put off the "... body of sins of the flesh ...," showing that the "nailing to the cross" cannot mean the doing away with God's commandments, but refers to the payment of our sins through this horrible crucifixion, through His shed blood.

I encourage you to check out several commentaries on this passage in Colossians that support what I am saying here. An internet search is also very helpful to get a sense of what Colossians 2:13-17 is really saying.

Regarding Matthew 5:17 (that is the scripture I think you meant, not Matthew 5:7), which states, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill," note what is obviously in plain sight: He did not come to destroy [Gr. *kataluo*, "to disintegrate, to demolish, to halt"] the Law and the Prophets [i.e., their teachings to us], but rather He came to fulfill [Gr. *pleroo*, "to fill"] the Law and the Prophets. This word *pleroo* is used in context for filling things such as a net (Matthew 13:48), a building (John 12:3; Acts 2:2), a city (Acts 5:28), needs (Philippians 4:19), and metaphorically of valleys (Luke 3:5), figuratively of a measure of iniquity (Matthew 23:32), of Christ Himself with wisdom (Luke 2:40), with joy in His return to His Father (Acts 2:28). As you can see, this word fulfill has nothing to do with finishing or ending a task or function, but has everything to do with filling up something, which is what Christ did during His tenure on earth. He showed us how to keep the Law through its dwelling within us (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10), not on tablets of stone but in the fruits of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, patience, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23) that are the ramifications of His laws living within us and being expressed in their correct spiritual context, as Christ revealed by living them. These are qualities that Christ set as an example for us that we might not just have life, but have abundant life (John 10:10).

To further prove that the message of Mathew 5:17 is not that Christ fulfilled the law and did not disband it, notice the context. Verse 18 states that none of the law would pass away until heaven and earth would pass away. That certainly means the law will be in force forever, even as the law codifies the very nature of Elohim Himself.

Further yet, note verse 19. There the text states that whoever does and teaches even the "least of these commandments ... shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Jesus then goes on in verse 21 to indicate what those commandments are, as He quotes the Sixth Commandment: "You shall not murder." Thus, the section of Scripture here proves that the laws of God are still in force, and always will be. They are not done away. This includes, of course, the Fourth Commandment.

You mentioned Galatians 6:20 in regard to Christians being "under the law of the Christ," but

there is no such scripture; Galatians 6 has only 18 verses. Romans 10:4, which you mentioned in this same regard, states, "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes." *End* here is the Greek word *telos*, which means "to set out for a definite point or goal; the point aimed at." Thus, Christ is indeed the goal towards which we must aim, and the law is a key to that righteousness for all of us who believe on Him. While different translations put this a bit differently, the *Phillips Translation* renders the passage quite well: "For Christ means the end of the struggle for righteousness-by-the-Law for everyone who believes in Him." It is by grace we are saved through faith (Ephesians 2:8), with the Laws of God internalized (Hebrews 8:10) to now guide us to keeping His fruits (Galatians 5:22-23) as Jesus revealed in living those Laws in their intent. We follow in His footsteps in that quest (I John 2:6).

Ephesians 2:15 is a bit more difficult to explain in a paragraph or two, so I have included a "Comments on Ephesians 2:15"² to explain this passage. The word "abolished," as *Ellicott's Commentary* indicates, is better rendered "to supersede by something better than itself," as the Apostle Paul uses it. Paul says in Romans 3:31 that his discussions "establish the Law"; the Law is not made void. Paul cannot say this and then reverse himself in Romans 2:15. That makes no sense. I highly recommend that you thoroughly digest this short commentary.

Notice Galatians 3:21, which states that the Law is not against the promises of God. The next verses (22 to 25) point out that the Law was our schoolmaster or tutor (Gr. *paidagogos*, "a guide, guardian, or trainer of boys." However, lexicons emphasize that this word implies the training and discipline of a child, and responsibility for moral and physical well-being ... not the imparting of knowledge or teaching. This being the case, the Law is understood as disciplining us in the obtaining of the knowledge of our Creator so that, through faith, we would be drawn to him in the course of time by the Father: "No man can come to Me except the Father who sent Me draw him ..." (John 6:44). The Law in this process is in no way obviated, but stands firm as the standard of His character that now dwells within His people (Hebrews 8:10).

Regarding the Sabbath, I think the paper "God's Laws Are Eternal" summarizes this issue quite well, as have the references to the essentiality to Christians of God's Laws in everyday living. Keep in mind too that judgment cannot exist without Law as the basis for judgments. We are indeed required to — and desire to — worship God every day, but on the seventh day we are told to rest (Exodus 20:8-11; Leviticus 23:2-3). Please note that Leviticus 23:2 states that these are "The feasts of the Lord [YHWH], His feasts, holy convocations, of which the weekly Sabbath is first mentioned in this chapter. They are not the "feasts of the Jews," but are designed for all people, and surely designed for us as Christians. Read Exodus 31:12-17 and discover that these are My [God's] Sabbaths, and we should work six days followed by the seventh-day rest ... and how greatly my wife and I have discovered we need that rest! Verse 16 states this is a "perpetual covenant," and is a sign between Him and us that we are His people.

Romans 14:5 does not negate this Sabbath command, and is explained in some detail in the short article, "What Are the Days Referred to in Romans 14:5-6?"³ This passage of scripture is in the context of Paul's discussing vegetarianism, in which brethren were admonished not to challenge a weak believer were he or she to believe that eating meat is wrong. Judgment is the issue. Note that verse 5 begins with "One" This tells us that men, not God, were teaching about a person esteeming one day above another. Paul is warning the saints about judging one another and causing strife through differing opinions. God's will is what is important.

It is good to note that the disciples kept the Holy Days after Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, following Christ's example, showing that the Fourth Commandment was in force after Christ's crucifixion. For example,

Acts 18:21. "I [Paul] must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem."

Acts 20:16. "For Paul had determined not to stop at Ephesus, fearing he might be delayed there, because he was hastening, if it were possible for him, to celebrate the day of Pentecost at Jerusalem."

I Corinthians 5. Brethren in this predominantly Gentile fellowship were taught by Paul about keeping the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread.

David Stern (*Jewish New Testament Commentary*, page 447) said, "I see no compelling reason in the context to excise the plain sense ... from the phrase, 'Let us celebrate the Seder [Passover].' Instead, it seems the early believers, Gentiles included, observed the Jewish feast of Pesach Evidently the Corinthians congregation observed Passover without supposing that, as many of today's Christians might think, they were 'going back under the Law.'"

The New Testament teachings of Paul were in line with what Jesus Christ taught, and set as an example. We likewise today ought to follow His example and keep the seventh-day Sabbath and Holy Days.

As one last point, I have often wondered how those who claim that the Ten Commandments were done away at Christ's crucifixion still maintain that it is wrong to worship idols, murder, commit adultery, take God's name in vain, covet, and so forth, when these very evils are identical to the teachings of the Ten Commandments. This is like saying, "I believe the Commandments are done away, but I keep them anyway." I have come to believe that the reason for this belief is to remove the need to keep the seventh-day Sabbath that the Fourth Commandment admonishes us to keep. Yet, by keeping the other nine commandments a person is admitting that the Commandments are indeed just and good, and binding on us today. In fact, we read in James 2:10, written well after Christ's crucifixion, that "For whoever shall keep the whole law, even though he fail in but one statute, he is guilty as to the whole law." James goes on to talk in verse 11 about the laws against adultery and murder, and in verse 8 about loving your neighbor as yourself — which Jesus in Matthew 22:39-40 stated constitutes the Law and the Prophets. Here James is affirming the necessity to keep the Commandments of our Creator, all ten of them in their spiritual intent.

I sincerely hope I have adequately answered any questions you might have regarding the points you brought up in your kind letter. I highly advise that you carefully study the original meanings of words used in the Hebrew and Greek texts to come to a more complete understanding of what is being said. I use *The New Strong's Exhaustive Expanded Concordance of the Bible* (J.R. Kohlenberger, II, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, Tennessee, 2001), as well as *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, (W.E. Vine et.al., Thomas Nelson, Nashville, Tennessee, 1985), and also the *New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew Aramaic English Lexicon* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1981), but Thayer's and others, such as Biblehub.com and Biblegateway.com are also good internet lexical sources.

I know you are dedicated to the Jehovah's Witnesses doctrines, but they are not all correct, though I especially appreciate their promotion of an understanding of the Kingdom of God that will be coming on this earth. This is what we in our family are waiting patiently for as well, as I am sure you gathered that truth from my book that I sent you, *The Bridge to Eden*.

Again, thank you for your attention to these important issues. I look forward to hearing from you again soon.

Sincerely yours, in Christ, Paul

Bibliography

1. An extract from “God’s Laws Are Eternal,” available on the website www.churchesathome.org.

There are some people within Christendom who claim that the laws of God were somehow done away once Jesus was crucified, citing Colossians 2:14 as evidence.

“... having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”

This verse is cited as evidence of the commandments being done away in spite of the fact that in verse 11 of the same chapter Paul speaks of “... putting off the body of the sins of the flesh ...”, and sin is, of course, defined as the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4). Moreover, there are at least three reasons that this verse, and the surrounding context, does not imply the commandments are now void.

1) Jesus, with His crucifixion and shed blood, has cancelled the record of our debt that held us in bondage to death (Hebrews 2:15), in the same way that a legal pardon cancels the penalty for a crime: “... having wiped out the handwriting of requirements ...” During Paul’s day, a person could be arrested and enslaved to pay off debts or for committing a crime, so thus Paul’s saying, “... taken it out of the way...,” indicates a debt being erased with no legal consequences. Some commentators have said that this verse may be an allusion to the custom in many ancient countries of driving a nail through an edict or decree so that the words were no longer legible.

2) The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, the Perfect One, not only set aside our sins — “... taken it out of the way ...” — but any barrier of remembrance is removed between us and our Creator (Psalm 103:12) so we can have a joyful, living relationship with Him.

3) This brutal form of death, on the stake, is sufficient payment for all sins, thus the metaphor “... nailed it [the handwriting of requirements] to the *cross* [*stauros*, or stake].” In reality, this terrible form of execution, which to the Romans portrayed shame, crucified sin itself, ignoring the sin and cutting it off from ever condemning us again.

2. Comments on Ephesians 2:15, from *Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers* (Zondervan Publishing House, January 1, 1979).

“Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances.” In this difficult passage it will be well first to examine the particular expressions.

(1) The word rendered “to abolish” is the word often used by St. Paul for “to supersede by something better than itself”—translated “to make void,” in Romans 3:31; to “bring to nought,” in 1 Corinthians 1:28, and (in the passive) “to fail,” “to vanish away,” “to be done away,” in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10. Now, of the relation of Christ to the Law, St. Paul says, in Romans 3:31, “Do we make void the Law? God forbid! Yea, we establish the Law.” The Law, therefore, is abolished as a law “in ordinances”—that is, “in the letter”—and is established in the spirit.

(2) “The law of commandments in ordinances.” The word here rendered “ordinance” (dogma) properly means “a decree.” It is used only in this sense in the New Testament (see Luke 2:1; Acts 16:4; Acts 17:7; Hebrews 11:23); and it signifies expressly a law imposed and accepted, not for its intrinsic righteousness, but on authority; or, as Butler expresses it (Anal., Part ii., Ephesians 1), not a “moral,” but “a positive law.” In Colossians 2:14 (the parallel passage) the word is connected with a “handwriting” that is a legal “bond”; and the Colossians

are reprov'd for subjecting themselves to "ordinances, which are but a shadow of things to come"; while "the body," the true substance, "is Christ." (See Ephesians 2:16-17; Ephesians 2:20-21.)

(3) Hence the whole expression describes explicitly what St. Paul always implies in his proper and distinctive use of the word "law." It signifies the will of God, as expressed in formal commandments, and enforced by penalties on disobedience. The general idea, therefore, of the passage is simply that which is so often brought out in the earlier Epistles (see Romans 3:21-31; Romans 7:1-4; Romans 8:1-4; Galatians 2:15-21, et al.), but which (as the Colossian Epistle more plainly shows) now needed to be enforced under a somewhat different form—viz., that Christ, "the end of the law," has superseded it by the free covenant of the Spirit; and that He has done this for us "in His flesh," especially by His death and resurrection.

(4) But in what sense is this Law called "the enmity," which (see Ephesians 2:16) was "slain" on the Cross? Probably in the double sense, which runs through the passage: first, as "an enmity," a cause of separation and hostility, between the Gentiles and those Jews whom they called "the enemies of the human race"; next, as "an enmity" a cause of alienation and condemnation, between man and God—"the commandment which was ordained to life, being found to be unto death" through the rebellion and sin of man. The former sense seems to be the leading sense here, where the idea is of "making both one"; the latter in the next verse, which speaks of "reconciling both to God," all the partitions are broken down, that all alike may have "access to the Father." Comp. Colossians 1:21, "You, who were enemies in your mind, He hath reconciled;" and Hebrews 10:19, "Having confidence to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated to us, through the veil, that is to say His flesh."

3. What are the days referred to in Romans 14:5-6?

Some conclude that these verses state that it does not make a difference to God which days we keep. They take these verses out of context and apply their own meaning. In order to grasp the true intent, we must read starting where the context of the subject begins—not just these two verses. Verses 1-4 identify the subject in context as vegetarianism—not which days should be kept.

Notice: "One man esteems one day above another: another esteems every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regards the day, regards it unto the Lord; and he that regards not the day, to the Lord he does not regard it. He that eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he that eats not, to the Lord he eats not, and gives God thanks" (Rom. 14:5-6).

Does Paul state here that Jesus, by His death, did away with the very days He kept during His whole life? No! Does he say, "God esteems one day above another" and "God esteems every day alike?" Again, no! The verse says, "One man esteems one day above another." This is telling us that it was what men were teaching, not what God says.

Christ is not going to judge us by what any man believes. He will judge us by His Word, the Bible. "...the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48).

Notice that the saints at Rome were forbidden to judge one another: "Who are you that judges another man's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Yes, he shall be helped up: for God is able to make him stand" (Rom. 14:4).

Paul is not condemning a particular period of time, but he is warning the saints not to judge one another and cause strife for having differing opinions about things. Those in Rome were weak in the faith. They had not yet matured spiritually. Paul says, "For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end that you may be established" (Rom. 1:11).

This in no way is giving a license to believe whatever you want. God commands, "...and lean not unto your own understanding" (Prov. 3:5). Until you know what God says in His word, how are you going to be fully assured in your own mind? Paul stated, "the holy scriptures...are able to make you wise unto salvation" (II Tim. 3:15).

Paul is writing to both Jewish and Gentile converts at Rome. He advised them to accept those who were weak in the faith (Rom. 14:1), and to not dispute with them over insignificant matters, nor sit in judgment of them. Some of these newly converted Gentiles, being weak in the faith, were vegetarians and refused to eat meats.

The reason they did not eat meat is explained in I Corinthians 8. Most meat available for purchase at the market had been previously offered to idols at pagan temples. Therefore, some, with conscience of the idol, ate it "as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. But meat commends us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse" (vs. 7-8). Some of the converts at Rome, who had given up idolatry, were Gentiles. Still being superstitious, they thought the idol was something real.

What were these days Paul was referring to? Why did Paul break into this thought—about eating meat—and mention "days?" The answer is found in the Moffatt translation: "Then again, this man rates one day above another, while that man rates all days alike. Well, everyone must be convinced in his own mind; the man who values a particular day does so to the Lord. The eater eats to the Lord, since he thanks God for his food; the non-eater abstains to the Lord, and he too thanks God" (Rom. 14:5-6).

Notice! Not only were there weak converts who avoided eating meat offered to idols, but there were others who customarily abstained from particular foods. They semi-fasted on certain particular days. Still others refused to practice a semi-fast or abstain from foods, but regarded every day in the same way!

A number of Jews of that time would often hold a semi-fast twice in the week (Luke 18:12). Some would also fast during the fifth and seventh months (Zech. 7:4-7). They were divided as to exactly when to fast. The Gentile converts were also divided as to what days to abstain from certain foods. Because of the differing backgrounds of these people, they could not agree on which days to do this. There were divisions in the congregation. Jesus taught us that fasting is something that is done without making it obvious to others (Matt. 6:16). It is a personal matter, between an individual and God.

The subject of this question surrounded the matter of abstinence on particular days—upon which days many voluntarily abstained from certain foods. It did not involve whether or not to keep pagan holidays or God's Holy Days.

