

The Quarrel



SABBATH—OCTOBER 7

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Hebrews 8:6; Matthew 19:17; Revelation 12:17; Leviticus 23; Acts 15:1–29.

MEMORY VERSE: “The Law was given through [by] Moses, but loving-favor and truth came through [by] Jesus Christ” (John 1:17, NLV).

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCHES had many members who were Jews. These Jewish believers never thought for a minute that they were turning away from the Jewish faith when they accepted Jesus. These Jewish believers did not think they were turning away from the special promises God made to His people. They were right about that. They did not wonder if Jews should become Christians first before accepting Jesus. Instead, the question for many Jewish believers was: Did non-Jews need to become Jews before they could accept Christ?

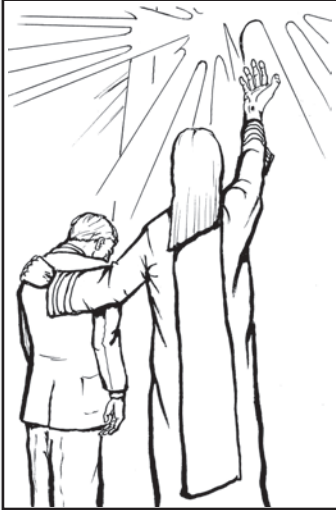
Later, the Jews got a firm answer from the Jerusalem Group. The Jerusalem Group made big decisions for the whole church. The Group decided not to force non-Jews to follow certain rules. And the Group decided not to force non-Jews to become Jews before joining the church.

But some Jewish teachers continued to cause trouble. They said that non-Jewish believers should obey Jewish rules and laws. One of these laws was circumcision. Circumcision is the act of cutting off the extra skin at the end of the male sex organ. The Jewish teachers felt that non-Jewish believers should live by these Jewish rules and laws. Then non-Jews could become part of Israel. So, how did the church solve this awful problem?



The question for many Jewish believers was: Must non-Jews become Jews before they could accept Christ?

A BETTER PROMISE (Hebrews 8:6)



Righteousness is God's power to make us right with Himself.

Read Hebrews 8:6. What are the “better promises” this verse talks about?

What is the biggest difference between the religion of the Old Testament and the religion of the New? Maybe it is that the New Testament shows us the coming of Jesus. God sent Jesus to save sinners. We cannot reject Jesus and then expect to be saved. Our sins can be forgiven only by our belief in Jesus' death for us on the cross. Then Jesus can cover us with His perfect life. Without this gift from Jesus, we could not stand before God. Instead, we would be found guilty. So, we must believe in Jesus' death for our sins. We must accept by faith Jesus' holy life in place of our lives. Then we will be saved. God gives us the gifts of Jesus' death and holy life. These gifts give us power over sin. Jesus' death on the cross for sinners and His holy life are part of a teaching that is named Jesus' righteousness. Righteousness is God's power to make people right with Himself. Nothing else can save us.

God's people in Old Testament times looked forward to the coming of the Savior. And God's people in New Testament times had to answer this question: *Would they accept Jesus of Nazareth as their Savior?* Jesus was the Messiah. The Messiah was the One God chose to save us from sin.

Read Matthew 19:17; Revelation 12:17; Revelation 14:12; and James 2:10, 11. What do these verses tell us about the importance of God's law in the New Testament?

God's law lasts forever. There were laws that explained the use of animals in the Jewish plan of worship. But these laws belonged to the Old Agreement between God and His people. These laws pointed to Jesus, His death, and His work right now for us in heaven. But these laws were no longer needed after Jesus died. Jesus opened a new way to save humans. This new way was built on “better promises.”

One of Paul's reasons for writing Romans was to help both Jews and non-Jews to understand this change from the old way to the new.

What are your favorite Bible promises? What are you doing that could be standing in the way of having these promises come true in your life?

JEWISH LAWS AND RULES (Leviticus 12, 16, 23)

Read Leviticus 12, 16, 23. Why were many of the rules listed in these chapters almost impossible to follow in New Testament times?

We can put the Old Testament laws into five separate groups. This separation will help us understand the laws better: (1) the Ten Commandments; (2) the ceremonial laws—these laws explained the use of animals in worship; (3) civil law—this law explained a citizen's duty to government and to other citizens; (4) judgments; and (5) health laws.

Now, our putting the laws into five separate groups is not a separation that is truly there in the law itself. Many laws in one group overlap with laws in another group. So, the laws are not really separate. But the separate groups help us understand the laws better. Just remember that people in Old Testament times did not think of the laws as separate.

Another name for the Ten Commandments is the moral law (Exodus 20:1–7). The moral law shows us our duty to God. The civil laws and judgments come from the moral law. The civil laws list punishments for law-breaking.

The law explaining the use of animals in the Jewish plan of worship is named the ceremonial law. It included the different animals that the Jews had to bring as gifts to God. These laws also list feast days and how to honor them.

The health laws overlap the other laws. Some health laws talk about how sin makes God's people "unclean." But the health laws also include rules for a healthy body. The health laws also talk about rules for clean and unclean meats.

Many Jews thought of these laws as one package. But the Jews must have felt that some laws were more special than other laws. God spoke the Ten Commandments to His people. So, this miracle made that law very special.

But the other laws God gave Moses to give to the Jews could not always be followed. There were laws explaining worship in the sanctuary. The sanctuary was the place where God was worshiped before Solomon's temple was built. But the sanctuary laws could be followed only while the sanctuary was in place. Other examples were the civil laws. And the Jews no longer followed the civil laws when they were under the control of another country. Many laws about using animals for worship could not be followed after the temple was destroyed. Also, the animals pointing to Jesus were not needed after He died.



Another name for the Ten Commandments is the moral law. The moral law shows us everything we owe God and everything He asks us to do.

FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF MOSES (Acts 15:2–12)

Read Acts 15:1. What problem was causing disagreement in the church? Why did some people believe the problem was not only about Jews, but also about Gentiles? Gentiles were non-Jews. (Read Genesis 17:10 for a hint.)

Christians in the city of Antioch wanted to win many people to Jesus. To do that, they needed the help of the apostles. Apostles were men chosen by Jesus to be the first leaders in the church. So, the church in Antioch worked together with the apostles to win people to Jesus.

At the same time, some Jews from Judea began to cause trouble in the church. These Jews said all Gentile believers must do two things to be saved: (1) Gentiles must be circumcised. To be circumcised means that the extra skin at the end of the sex organ of a man or a boy is cut off. (2) Gentile believers must follow the whole ceremonial law. You will remember that this law explained the use of animals in the Jewish plan of worship.

The Jews were proud of their worship plan. Many Jews who accepted Jesus felt God would never change any part of that plan. They said that Jewish laws and special feast days should be included in the Christian religion. These Jewish Christians were slow to understand that the animals they brought to God were symbols of Jesus' death. But the animals were no longer needed after Jesus died.



Paul understood he was only one small part of the larger church. So, he needed to work together with the church as much as possible.

How was the disagreement in Acts 15:2–12 solved?

“Paul asked God for wisdom. Paul also felt the need to ask church leaders for help. Paul was glad to take problems to church leaders and ask for advice.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [Leaders]*, page 200, adapted.

How interesting! After all, Paul was a prophet. A prophet is a special messenger from God. But here was Paul the prophet gladly working together with the church. Paul understood he was only one small part of a larger group. So, Paul felt he needed to work together with the church as much as possible.

What would happen if no one wanted to work together? How would we ever get anything done?

THE NON-JEWISH BELIEVERS (Acts 15:5–29)

Read Acts 15:5–29. As shown in these verses, what decision did the Jerusalem Group make, and why?

The Jerusalem Group made big decisions for the whole church. The Jerusalem Group’s decision went against the Judaizers. The Judaizers taught that non-Jewish believers who were male (1) must have the extra skin at the end of their sex organs cut off and (2) follow all the laws of Moses. The Judaizers said faith alone was not enough to save a person. The Judaizers also said that “the Jewish laws and religious feasts should be included in the Christian religion.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [Leaders]*, page 189, adapted.

It is interesting that in Acts 15:10 Peter says these old laws were a “heavy load” no one could carry (NIRV). Would the God who made the laws lay them as a heavy weight on His people? No! But over time, some Jewish leaders changed the gift of these laws into heavy loads by adding many more rules for the people to follow. So, the Jerusalem Group wanted to free non-Jews from carrying those loads.

Notice nothing is said in these verses about *not* obeying the Ten Commandments. It would be very strange if the Jerusalem Group told the non-Jews not to eat blood, but said it was OK to steal!

Read Acts 15:20, 29. What rules did the Jerusalem Group give the non-Jewish believers? And why these rules?

The Jerusalem Group voted that Jewish believers should not force their human-made rules on non-Jews. But the Jerusalem Group also wanted to be sure non-Jews did not insult the Jews. So, the leaders of the Group wrote the non-Jews a letter. The letter told non-Jews (1) not to eat meat offered to statues of gods, (2) not to eat meat from strangled animals, and (3) not to eat blood. And non-Jews were not to have sex outside of marriage. But the letter said nothing about the Sabbath at all. Some Bible thinkers believe the letter’s silence about the Sabbath shows that non-Jews did not need to obey it. But the letter says nothing about the laws against lying and murder either. So, it is foolish to think that the non-Jews did not obey the Sabbath just because Paul does not say anything about the topic!



Over time, some Jewish leaders turned the laws into heavy loads no one could carry.

PAUL AND THE CHRISTIANS IN GALATIA (Galatians 1:1–12)

The church was clear about what non-Jewish believers needed to do and not do. But some church members continued to say that non-Jews must follow many Jewish beliefs. Paul felt this idea rejected the Good News about Jesus.

As shown in Galatians 1:1–12, what is the problem in Galatia? How serious does Paul feel the problem is?



Our obeying the law does not save us. But saying that the law does not save us is not the same thing as teaching that the Ten Commandments should be thrown out.

We said earlier that the problem in Galatia was a big reason why Paul wrote his letter to the Romans. The false teachers in Galatia argued that the law God gave to Moses should be followed by the non-Jewish believers. Paul did not want these false teachers to take control in Rome the way they had taken control in Galatia. So, Paul wanted to show the Romans the true meaning of the law.

Some people might wonder which law Paul is talking about in Galatians and Romans. Is it the old law explaining the use of animals in worship? Or is it the Ten Commandments? But that question is too simple. That question asks for a quick and easy answer that does not include all the facts about the problem of the law that Paul talks about. That question causes the true meaning of the law to be misunderstood. The problem in Rome was about the things non-Jewish believers needed to do to become members. Should they be made to follow Jewish ways and laws? The answer was no.

Today, Christians continue to argue over which laws should be followed. Some Christians see both of Paul's letters as proof that Christians no longer need to obey the Ten Commandments. These Christians say the Sabbath no longer needs to be kept holy. But these people misunderstand what Paul wrote. Paul taught that we are saved by faith alone. Obeying the law does not save us. But saying that the law does not save us is not the same thing as teaching that the Ten Commandments should be thrown out. There was never a doubt in Paul's mind that Christians must obey the Ten Commandments. Christians who think Paul was putting an end to the Ten Commandments are dead wrong.

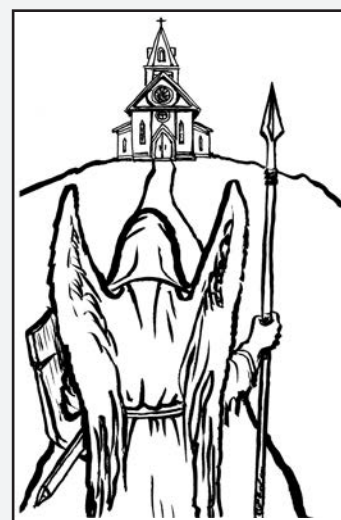
What do you say to Christians who believe we no longer need to honor the Sabbath?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: It is true that our church experiences times of disagreement and differences about ideas. Quarrels in the church are nothing new. After all, Satan always has been at war with the church. We find this war going on in the earliest days of the church too. There was strong disagreement at that time among believers. But there was one disagreement that could have destroyed the church in its early years. In the end, the problem was solved.

But it was an awful problem while it lasted. At that time, “False teachers tricked the believers in Jerusalem. Their false teachings led believers in Galatia to sin. The false teachers mixed Jewish ways and beliefs handed down from the past with the truths about the Good News that Jesus saves us from sin. These false teachers rejected the ruling by the Jerusalem Group. Instead, they said that non-Jewish believers must follow the old Jewish ceremonial law. [The ceremonial law explained the different gifts a person should bring to God in worship].”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [Leaders]*, page 383, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 How might you or your church be putting “heavy loads” on members? At the same time, how can we tell if we have become too careless in the way we live or follow God?
- 2 What are some of the ideas used to support the false teaching that Christians no longer need to obey the Ten Commandments? Why are these ideas wrong?
- 3 Read Galatians 1:1–12 again. Notice Paul’s strong stand for the Good News. Paul is not willing to give up the truths he believes so that he might reach an agreement. What should Paul’s strong stand for the truths of the Good News in Jesus tell us about how strongly we must stand in our beliefs too?
- 4 In class, talk about what started the Protestant Reformation. The Protestant Reformation was a time when people began to “wake up” to Bible truths. The Reformation began in the 1500s. Its purpose was to change the Roman Catholic Church for the better. Later, those changes led to the start of the Protestant churches. What differences continue to be there today between Protestants and Catholics?



Satan always has been at war with the church.