

# It DOES Matter Which Days We Observe!

*Here is an astounding proof, making plain which days the inspired New Testament Church observed.*

by Herman L. Hoeh

**W**HY DOES God's Church today observe Old Testament, so-called "Jewish" Feasts and Holy Days?

## The New Testament Proofs

The Church of God is the New Testament Church. Its Head, Jesus Christ, preached the New Testament Gospel. Nowhere did Jesus during His entire New Testament ministry ever observe the temporary customs of the law of Moses.

Christ never once offered an animal in sacrifice.

Yet Jesus kept God's annual Holy Days. Read it, in John 7:2, 10, 14 and 37.

Jesus set us an example that we should follow His steps! The Apostle John was inspired to write: "He that saith he abideth in him [Jesus Christ] ought himself also so to walk, even as He [Christ] walked" (I John 2:6).

Don't let anyone carelessly say: "I don't see as it makes any difference." It does make a difference — to God!

Now look at I Corinthians 5:7-8. Here we have a New Testament command to a church congregation predominantly of Gentile origin. Notice Paul's instruction. "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump . . ." Why? Why put out leaven, the type of sin?

"For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us." Sin has been paid for. Christ paid for and conquered sin in the flesh! Therefore, says Paul, let us keep sin out of our lives! How? By what annual reminder? Here is the apostle's answer:

"Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven" — that is, put away leaven, a type of sin, out of your houses

each feast — "neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness," but *keep the feast* "with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

No Easter here. No Lent here. But instead the New Testament Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread.

In I Corinthians 11:18-34 the apostle explained in detail how to keep the Passover in the local congregation.

Now turn to Acts 20:6. "And we [Luke and those with him] sailed away from Philippi [a *Gentile* city] after the days of unleavened bread . . ." Notice. Luke did not sail after Easter or some other pagan holiday of the Roman calendar. They sailed away after they had observed the Days of Unleavened Bread!

## Example of the Colossian Church

But the strongest proof of all is found in Paul's letter to the Colossian Christians. It is there and yet you may never have noticed it! The very scripture most often quoted *against* God's truth is, in fact, the strongest proof that God's festivals were being kept!

The Gentile converts at Colossae, like the Thessalonians, "became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus" (I Thess. 2:14). The Churches of God in Judaea kept God's festivals. They followed the example of the Headquarters Church in Jerusalem. And the scattered Churches of God in the Gentile world followed their example!

Notice Paul's commendation of the converts at Colossae. "For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ" (Col. 2:5).

The Church of God at Colossae was following Christ — doing the things He did, keeping the days He kept. They had

ceased their pagan customs. They had quit their heathen practices. "And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He [Christ] reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable . . . if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel . . ." (Col. 1:21-23).

These Gentile converts, verse 27, had been called out of the world — called to separate from the traditions of the world — but they still lived in a world steeped with pagan superstition and custom. They were under pressure from their neighbors to give up their new-found faith. Their Gentile neighbors did not like them taking up with Biblical practices. They did not want any "Jewish practices" developing in their community! They wanted everybody to continue with the traditions and doctrines of the pagan philosophers, whom the world respected. They weren't about to have their pagan holidays replaced by God's holy days, or their sun-worship rites superseded by the weekly sabbath, or the pagan Roman calendar replaced by God's calendar.

## Gentle Colossians Were Ascetic

Colossae was a very ascetic community. The people there did not believe in enjoying pleasure. They believed in a religion of severity. They believed in rigidly suppressing the body "in order to purify the soul." They thought that any indulgence of the senses was wrong. They fasted often, punished themselves, were vegetarians in part, refused to eat even those *clean* meats God created for us, and thought drinking wine was terrible!

To keep everybody "in line" they brought social pressure, and instituted

local "blue laws" (see *The Church in the Roman Empire before A.D. 170*, by W. M. Ramsay, chapter X). These pagan ascetic beliefs were commonly known to the heathen by the name "philosophy." Paul used this very word in Colossians 2:8: "Beware lest any man spoil you through PHILOSOPHY and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments [or basic concepts] of the world, and not after Christ."

Philosophy was the doctrine that one could pay for his own sins by denying himself the pleasures of the body. It was a pagan doctrine which denied the need of a Saviour. It was called philosophy because the pagan philosophers were responsible for its introduction.

The early Catholic writers used this same expression in their day to mean asceticism. Read it for yourself: "It was very common . . . to call an ascetic mode of life 'philosophical,' or 'the life of a philosopher' . . . The growing sentiment had its roots partly in the prevailing ideas of contemporary philosophy, which instinctively emphasized strongly the dualism of spirit and matter . . ." "The Neo-Platonic philosophy of the times, through its doctrine of the purification of the soul by its liberation from the body or sensuous things, taught celibacy and ascetic practices generally." (From pp. 252 and 546 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, edited by Schaff and Wace.)

Those who followed this philosophy were stern ascetics. They were the opposite of many others who loved pleasure and indulged in the sins of the flesh, whose motto was "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

Not so the Grecian Gentiles at Colossae. They severely judged their Christian neighbors for the least infraction of ascetic behavior. They did not like to see the Christians freely eating meat good for food, or drinking wine moderately, or keeping the weekly sabbath and the annual festivals. That is why Paul wrote: "Let no man therefore judge you for eating or drinking, or in connection with the observance of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days" (Col. 2:16, margin).

Here were Gentile converts, judged

by relatives and neighbors for doing the things Jesus did. Judged for keeping holy the days God made holy! Notice with your own eyes this startling proof here revealed!

#### "Let No MAN Judge You . . ."

In Colossians 2:16, Paul is thought by many to have abolished the days God made holy.

First stop to consider! Is it logical that Paul would have commanded the Gentiles in Corinth and elsewhere to observe God's festivals (I Cor. 5:7-8), and then contradict himself by telling the Colossians not to observe them? Yet most churches would make Paul just that inconsistent!

The truth is so plain here in Colossians. What is Paul writing to the saints in Colossae? "Let no man therefore judge you . . ." Does this say "God has abolished these"? Look at the verse again. It says, "Let no man . . . judge you" concerning these matters. To judge is not to abolish. Paul is warning the Colossians not to let any man judge them about certain matters. Why?

"But why do you judge your brother? . . . for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ . . . So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:10, 12).

God is the judge. Not man. It is by the Word of God that we are going to be judged, not by the ideas of man (John 12:48). Since we are to live as those who are to be judged BY THE WORD OF GOD, then we have to go to other passages of scripture to find how God will judge us with reference to meats, drinks and festive occasions. It doesn't matter what human beings think, but it does matter what *GOD THINKS*.

Now consider Col. 2:8 again. "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit" — it does not say the law of Moses. It does speak of pagans who adhered to "philosophy."

Continuing: "After the rudiments [fundamental beliefs] of the world, and not after Christ." The evil doctrines Paul is condemning were of the world. The world then was a GENTILE world. It was a pagan Roman world, filled with foolish and vain traditions. The Jews

prided themselves on being racially separate from the world. So these traditions were Gentile traditions which Paul warns us to beware of!

Now verses 9 and on: "For in Him [Christ] dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." God dwelt in Christ, not in the philosophers. "And ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power" (verse 10). We are made perfect in Christ, not through asceticism and human traditions. Christ is the Head over all. He is the One we must look to, not to the highly vaunted philosophers.

"In whom [Christ] also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ" (verse 11). Paul elsewhere reveals we are to be circumcised "in the heart" (Romans 2:29).

Christ conquered sin in the flesh. If we surrender ourselves to Christ, He will enter into us through His Holy Spirit and clean us up, conquer our sins — circumcise our hearts or minds spiritually. He enables us to completely cut away sin out of our lives — enables us to bury all our past sins in the waters of baptism, as you read in Col. 2:12: "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God" — faith in God's ability to supply us with the Holy Spirit and raise us from a dead past to new life just as He "hath raised Him [Christ] from the dead."

#### Sin, Not Law, Blotted Out

"And you," Paul continues, "being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh" — these people were, prior to conversion, uncircumcised Gentiles — "hath He [the Father] quickened together with Him [Christ], having forgiven you all trespasses" (verse 13).

God forgives sin. These Gentile converts had sinned. They had been following the foul, heathenish practices of the world about them. They had been trying to pay for their own hurt consciences by penance, by asceticism. But they hadn't found forgiveness.

Now things were different. They had really been forgiven. They were no longer bound to their past sins. They

had no longer the guilt of following human customs, human ordinances, human decrees and vanity. Their sins had been blotted out; Christ had taken them away.

### What Was Nailed to the Cross?

Notice that Christ was nailed to the stake or cross. He bore our sins. When He shed His blood in our stead, He thereby blotted out all our sins by paying for them in full with His own life. It is SIN which was blotted out. Notice Acts 3:19, "that your SINS may be BLOTTED OUT." "Have mercy upon me," cried David, "blot out my TRANSGRESSIONS . . . Hide thy face from my SINS, and BLOT OUT all mine INIQUITIES" (Psalm 51:1, 9).

Now we all can better understand Colossians 2:14. Notice this verse as it stands in the King James Version. "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross."

Haven't you assumed this verse to mean God's law? But look at the verse again.

What is blotted out? Sin! It does not say "the Ten Commandments." It does not read "law of Moses," or "works of the law." It reads "handwriting of ordinances."

What "ordinances" were these?

### Sinful Pagan Customs

Let the Bible answer. Paul tells us in verses 20 to 23 of this same chapter!

"Wherefore if ye" — the Gentile converts — "be dead with Christ from the rudiments [fundamental principles or ideas] of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?" (verse 20). ORDINANCES! Notice it. But which ordinances?

The answer is in the next verse: "(Touch not; taste not; handle not; which are all to perish with the using;) AFTER THE COMMANDMENTS AND DOCTRINES OF MEN?"

There you are! They were human traditions! Ways of sin! Continuing: "Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in *will worship*" — pagan asceticism — "and humility, and neglecting of the body" — appearing outwardly humble and self-denying, but inwardly

self-righteous — "*but are of no value against indulgence of the flesh*" (Last part from Panin trans.).

Did you catch it? These evil practices were pagan ordinances, or customs of men — based on the commandments and doctrines of pagan speculative philosophy. They were heathen ordinances, heathen customs forbidding people from touching, tasting and handling those things God allows. We see the same customs today: don't dance, don't drink, etc., in today's Christianity!

So the original inspired Greek for "handwriting of ordinances" is not even referring to Moses' laws! In fact this is not a proper translation! The original Greek reads *cheirographon tois dogmasin*. It does not mean a code of laws.

The Greek word for "handwriting" originally referred to "a note of hand, or writing in which one acknowledges that money has either been deposited with him or lent to him by another, to be returned at an appointed time" (From Thayer's *Lexicon*).

It came later to refer to any acknowledgment of debt. We all owe a debt to God because of sin. That is the meaning of the word "handwriting" here — an acknowledgment of debt.

But how was it originally incurred? What did the Colossians do that brought on that debt of sin? The answer is in verse 13. What was blotted out were trespasses (verse 13, last part) incurred through following sinful ordinances, believing lying dogmas — like the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, which was at the root of pagan asceticism!

Nothing is said here about any "law of Moses." Those Gentiles had never heard of or kept that law!

So the written record of sins which were blotted out involved the frightful practice of evil pagan ordinances for which Christ paid the penalty and God forgave us.

### How the Colossians OBEYED

The Colossian Christians had been taught Christ's gospel. They believed and obeyed. Christ was living His life in them as they yielded to Him. They were being knit together in love (Col. 2:2). Love is the fulfillment of the Law (Romans 13:10). The Colossians were

keeping God's law. Like other Gentiles they had not heard of God's law before it was preached to them. (See Romans 2:12, 13.) They did not know the way of love. But now they not only knew it, they were practicing it!

They were no longer ascetics, trying to conquer the flesh by themselves. They were conquering themselves through the Holy Spirit. But God gives His Holy Spirit only to those "who obey Him" (Acts 5:32). Because the Colossian Christians were obeying God, it made their neighbors feel self-condemned and inferior. Their neighbors began sitting in judgment of them — condemning them — for following the ways of Christ which they had newly learned. And what were these Christians being judged for?

Notice it! It was not for keeping Christmas and Easter and Sunday — pagan holidays — not for total abstinence from meats and alcohol! No indeed! But —

"Let no man therefore judge you for eating and drinking" (margin) — the Colossians were no longer ascetics — "or in connection with the observance of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbaths."

That is why they were being judged — "in connection with the observance" (as Moffatt translates it) of God's festivals, His calendar measured by the new moon, and the Sabbath!

The once-pagan Colossians never kept these days before! They were heathen prior to conversion. Now that they had learned the Gospel, they were keeping holy the days God made holy. And Paul is warning them not to return to or be influenced by their old pagan ways — the ways of their relatives and neighbors who hated God's law and His festivals.

The original Greek in verse 16 — *en broosei* and *en posei* — means "in eating and in drinking." It does not mean meat and drink offerings. Every competent scholar acknowledges this to be the true meaning.

These verses are speaking of the Christian liberty to enjoy life! Jesus came eating and drinking (Matthew 11:19 and Luke 7:34). Jesus set us the example. He was no ascetic! And neither were the Colossian Christians any

longer! They were daily enjoying the Christian life in temperance and self-control, and especially in connection with each Feast, every new month and the weekly Sabbaths!

And what does the apostle mean when he tells the Colossians not to let any MAN judge them "in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days"?

The phrase "in respect of," as found in the common versions is ambiguous. It is rendered "in part of" in the margin of the King James Version.

Now what is the real meaning of the ambiguous phrase "in respect of"? The Greek word translated "respect" literally means "a part" or "a portion." See *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*.

It was in connection with the sacrificial part or portion that the carnal Gentiles were judging their converted neighbors. They reasoned — as many do today — that one can't keep God's days holy without the Mosaic sacrifices. Nonsense. Don't let any man sit in judgment of this matter. Let God speak out!

God commanded no sacrifices except the Passover, which is still continued under different symbols today, when He revealed the holy days to Israel. (See Jer. 7:22-23.)

The weekly and annual Sabbaths were not instituted for the purpose of sacrifice. God says: "For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be My people: and walk ye in all ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you" (Jeremiah 7:22, 23).

So we see that Paul is telling the Colossians to know the word of God so thoroughly that they could refute any MAN who would dare to sit in judgment of them for trusting in the sacrifice of Christ.

#### What Was Foreshadowed?

Now notice Col. 2:17. "Which are a shadow of things to come . . ." Or, better translated, "which foreshadow things to come." Did these Scriptural

days foreshadow things to come? Indeed!

Do the weekly Sabbaths foreshadow good things to come? Indeed they do! Not only is the weekly Sabbath a memorial of creation — but it also foreshadows the seventh 1000 years, in which man shall rest from his labors of sin.

In speaking of the seventh day of the week, in Hebrews 4:4, the Apostle Paul goes right on to show that the seventh day foreshadows God's thousand year millennial rest. But does that do away with the weekly Sabbath? Not at all! "There remaineth therefore a keeping of a Sabbath to the people of God" (Hebrews 4:9, margin). Sabbath keeping is a TEST OF OBEDIENCE. No one shall enter into an eternal rest unless he first, here and now, is willing to enter into the rest of each Sabbath, each seventh day of the week. And that is exactly what the Colossians were doing — observing the weekly Sabbaths.

In like manner the annual festivals were instituted as memorials of events which also foreshadow the plan of God. They were given to the Church in order to keep the Church in the knowledge of that plan.

Only one festival has been entirely fulfilled in type — the Passover. Yet Jesus said that each year we are to celebrate it again: "*DO THIS* in remembrance of Me."

Some claim that Colossians 2:16 refers "to annual feasts, new moons, and annual sabbaths" — not to the weekly Sabbaths.

*This is not true!* Whenever the expression "Sabbath days" is used with "holy days" and "new moons," the *weekly* Sabbaths are always meant! There is no exception. Read I Chron. 23:31; II Chron. 2:4; 31:3; Ezra 3:5; Neh. 10:33.

All annual holy days ARE annual Sabbaths!

Notice that in all these verses the weekly Sabbaths are referred to IN THE PLURAL just as in Colossians 2:16! Col. 2:16 includes BOTH weekly AND annual Sabbaths! If it abolishes one, it abolishes the other. But as it establishes one, so it establishes the other as New Testament practice.

#### The Body of Christ

"Let no man therefore judge you . . ." in these matters, said Paul, "but [rather] the body of Christ" (Col. 2:17, last part).

This verse has troubled many. Yet it should not. Notice that the word "is" in the King James Version is in italics. It does not appear in the original. The original Greek says only: "the body of Christ." What is the body of Christ? How does Paul use this expression in Colossians?

Turn to chapter 1. In verse 18 we find that Christ "is the Head of the body, THE CHURCH." See also Col. 2:19.

The true Church of God is the body of Christ. Just as the Spirit of God once dwelled in the earthly body of Jesus Christ, so now the Holy Spirit dwells in each member of the Church and together we constitute one body, doing the very work Christ did. We are therefore Christ's body today! And Christ is the Head as the husband is the head of the wife (Ephesians 5:23).

No man is to sit in judgment of our Christian conduct, Paul is declaring in Colossians 2:16-17. Man does not determine how we should live. But it is the responsibility of the Church — the body of Christ — to determine these matters! The Church is to teach how to observe the festivals — to explain the meaning of self-control, etc.

So these little-understood verses ought to be translated clearly: "Let no man therefore judge you . . . but [rather] let the body of Christ [determine it]." Greek scholars recognize that the first expression "let no man" demands that there be a subsequent expression which tells who is to do the judging of the matter!

How plain these verses are. How clear that the Colossians were keeping holy the time God made holy!

Let us now keep the Feasts this autumn with real deep joy, thankful that the great God of Heaven is our Judge and not *any* man. Let us also *keep the Feast* with deep appreciation of the wonderful world tomorrow it pictures when all of today's *judging* fellow humans will be KEEPING THE FEAST with us!!!