

*The Small Print – Christians and the Law of Moses*

*Everything follows the intention of the heart.  
—Tosefta Yebamot, 2*

**Why don't Christians observe all the Torah's commands?**

Although the Hebrew Scriptures connect Judaism and Christianity, they can also separate us, because...

*"...many Jews wonder why Christians do not obey the Mosaic Law more rigorously, joining them in keeping kosher and so forth. For that matter, even Christians sometimes wonder why our tradition allows us to ignore many commandments in the Hebrew Scriptures. After all, Jesus had this to say on the subject:*

*"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. I tell you the truth, 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. (Mt 5:17-18) NIV*

*"But Christians also wonder why Jews have 'added' so many traditions to the Torah with their Talmud, when the Scriptures themselves say we must not add to the Torah or subtract from it." [Dt 4:2] (TGAM)*

**First Reason: Talmud is not Torah.**

*"...Judaism teaches that Moses received the oral Torah along with the Pentateuch on Mt. Sinai... According to an article entitled "Written Law" in The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion, p. 405, this belief is based partially upon Exodus 34:27 which can be literally translated: 'Write thou these words, for according to the mouth of these words I have made a covenant....' The idea of two Torahs, written and oral, is found in the phrases 'write thou' and 'according to the mouth.' ...Christians do not agree, just as most Jews do not believe God inspired the New Testament. So Christians do not follow the traditional rules contained in the Talmud because we do not believe they came from God. But we do believe the written Torah is of God, and try to obey its commands in our own way..." (TGAM)*

- ▶ How do we know the New Testament is divinely inspired scripture?

**Second Reason: Some laws are now impossible.**

*"...both Jews and Christians do not observe many of the Torah's commandments because they can only be obeyed at the temple in Jerusalem, but of course that temple was destroyed about forty-six years after the crucifixion of Jesus." (TGAM)*

- ▶ Why might God have allowed the temple in Jerusalem to be destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD? (Hints: compare **Mt 24:1-2**, **John 2:19-20**, and **Mt 12:6**. See also **Mt 26:59-61** and **Mt 27:39-40**)

**GOD LOVES  
AN HONEST QUESTION!**

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**Third Reason:** The Holy Spirit is now our guide.

*"In the Tanakh...God "puts" his Spirit "on" certain people (Joshua and David for example). The Holy Spirit also departs from some people, or is "on" them only for limited times and reasons. (Compare for example, 1 Samuel 11:6 where Saul receives the Spirit for the second time (the first being 1 Samuel 10:10), and 1 Samuel 16:14 where the Spirit departs from him.) But Jesus promises that those who trust in him will receive the presence of the Holy Spirit in a new and permanent way. (John 14:16-17) Christians believe the Holy Spirit now lives within our hearts in exactly the same way the Spirit or Shekinah once lived within the tabernacle in the midst of the Hebrew camp. We believe this "indwelling of the Spirit" changes us from persons who are comfortable with sin, into "new creatures" whose fundamental desire is now to be obedient. (Romans 7:6) This core change of our nature is what we mean when we talk about being "born again." (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; Ephesians 2:18-22) It is not a uniquely Christian concept, but has its roots in a promise found in the Hebrew Scriptures:*

*"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you to move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (Eze 36:26-27) NIV (TGAM)*

- ▶ What portion of the Torah's laws became unnecessary when Jesus sent his Spirit to dwell within us? (Hint: remember the Second Reason, and see **Ex 29:42-46** and **Heb 9:1-14**.)

**Fourth Reason:** Some laws were really prophecy.

*"At Chever Torah, I learned about mishpatim and chukim, two terms often found together in the Torah, and translated as "laws" and "decrees." (See Leviticus 18:4, for example.) Some of the Talmud's rabbis believed these corresponded to two distinct legal classifications: casuistic law and apodictic law. Casuistic law is case law, the kind we live by in daily life, the kind that is derived in response to known circumstances. I must not steal, lie, or murder, for example, and the reason for these prohibitions is self-evident from long experience. But apodictic law is different. There is no clear explanation for such a law. It is simply ordered on the authority of God or the whim of a king or dictator, and I obey without understanding the rationale behind the command. In the Torah, there are many such unexplained, incomprehensible laws, most of them connected directly with sacrifice or, like those in the so-called "holiness code," arising as prerequisites for the offering of a sacrifice. ...Christians believe these laws were actually prophetic rituals laced with symbolism, designed to make God's identity more clear when he later entered human history as a humble Jewish carpenter. ...the prophecy contained in the sacrificial and holiness rituals was fulfilled with Jesus' death and resurrection. This is what Jesus meant when he said nothing in the law would disappear until everything had been accomplished. Since we believe those laws were really prophetic, and since the prophecy has now been accomplished, there is no longer any need to follow them. ...symbolism becomes redundant when the real thing comes along." (TGAM)*

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- ▶ What are some commandments in the Torah that seem to be prophecies of the Gospel?

**Fifth Reason:** Jesus gives single laws to replace many, instead of many laws to protect one.

*“The rabbis of the Talmud, recognizing the extreme difficulty of observing all of God’s commands, chose to defend against disobedience with an approach they called “a fence around the Torah....” This Talmudic concept adds requirements and prohibitions not specifically found in the written Torah, with the intention of keeping a person far from any situation where it might be possible to violate the core Torah commands.... [In contrast] while the Talmud supplies many rules to avoid breaking one in the Torah, Jesus offers single commandments to summarize and replace many others.” (TGAM)*

- ▶ Do Christians every try to put a “fence around the Torah”? How? Is this wise?
- ▶ What commands did Jesus give that sum up many others in the Torah, thereby making them unnecessary? (Hint: See **Matthew 5**)

**Sixth Reason:** Obedience to Jesus is obedience to the Torah.

*“In Christianity, there is a mystical link between Jesus and the creative aspect of the Word of God:*

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1–3 & 14) NIV*

*“For Christians, this “Word” by which God created the universe is the pre-incarnate Jesus.*

*For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Col 1:16–17) NIV (TGAM)*

- ▶ What insight does this give on the story of Mt 12:1-8?
- ▶ Why might John have chosen to introduce Jesus to his readers as “the Word”? (Hint: look for the phrase found in all of these verses: **Ge 1:3,6,9,11,14 & 20**)
- ▶ Compare **Prov 8:22-30** to the Colossians quote above. Note that no Hebrew word in Proverbs 8 can be correctly translated to mean that God “created,” or “made” wisdom. What connections do you see between Paul’s teaching and Proverbs 8? What insights does this give on the relationship of Jesus and the Torah?