

"Paul's ethic" represents the moral principles that underpinned Apostle Paul's life and teachings. This term implies a unique, individualistic system of values governing his conduct, differing from the norms of his era. Paul's teachings, as seen in his letters to early Christian communities, emphasized faith in Christ and liberty from the law, contrasting prevailing standards of the Law. We will explore these distinct Pauline principles further.

SABBATH AND HOLY DAY OBSERVANCE

The Torah sanctifies the Sabbath, from Friday to Saturday sundown, as per Genesis 2:2-3 and Exodus 20:8-10, emphasizing rest, worship, and refraining from work. The Torah also outlines annual Holy Days, including Passover and the Day of Atonement, each with specific observances and penalties for non-compliance as detailed in Exodus 31:14-15, Leviticus 23:29, and Numbers 9:13.

Paul, however, in his letters, contradicts Torah's teachings, suggesting that Christians aren't bound by these strict observances. Romans 14:5 and Colossians 2:16-17 express his views, emphasizing individual discretion over holy days and dismissing the judgment over Sabbath observance. In Galatians 4:9-10, Paul asserts that Christians are no longer obligated to observe the Sabbath or any other Holy Days as per the Old Testament laws.

This departure from the Torah poses two options for Scripture followers. They can either embrace Paul's teachings as a transformative shift away from traditional Jewish customs, or reject them as a false doctrine, adhering strictly to the Torah's teachings.

FINANCIAL GIVING

The concept of tithing, or giving a tenth of one's income or produce, is explicitly defined in the Hebrew Scriptures. Leviticus 27:30 (KJV) states: "And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD's: it is holy unto the LORD." This strict commandment is reinforced in Numbers 18:26 (KJV): "Thus speak unto the Levites, and say unto them, When ye take of the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then ye shall offer up a heave offering of it for the LORD, even a tenth part of the tithe."

The penalties for not tithing were a severe curse, as outlined in Malachi 3:8-9 (KJV): "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation." Furthermore, Leviticus 27:31 (KJV) states: "And if a man will at all redeem ought of his tithes, he shall add thereto the fifth part thereof" (that is, a 20% penalty upon repayment).

In stark contrast to the Hebrew Scriptures, Paul's teachings on financial giving were not tied to a specific percentage. Instead, he emphasized the attitude of the giver and the voluntary nature of giving. This is evident in 2 Corinthians 9:7 (KJV): "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver."

This clear contrast in teachings once again forces us to either accept Paul's proprietary program or dismiss him altogether. On one hand, we have the Hebrew Scriptures' explicit commandments on tithing, with severe penalties for non-compliance. On the other hand, we have Paul's teachings that emphasize the attitude of the giver, suggesting a voluntary approach to giving. Each of these perspectives offers a different interpretation of financial obligations to God, forcing followers to choose which doctrine to adhere to.

DIETARY LAWS

The dietary laws of the Old Testament are highly significant and well-known. These laws, outlined in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, delineate certain foods as "clean" and others as "unclean," with instructions prohibiting the consumption of unclean foods. These dietary restrictions include certain types of meat, like pork, which makes a common breakfast food like bacon an abomination according to these laws.

However, today, virtually no Christians adhere to these dietary laws. This deviation from Old Testament laws is primarily due to the teachings of Paul. In his letters, Paul explicitly gives Christians freedom from the Jewish dietary laws. For example, in Romans 14:14 (KJV), Paul states, "I know, and am

persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean."

This statement, along with similar ones in his other letters, effectively dismisses the dietary laws of the Old Testament for Christians. Without Paul's teachings, the dietary habits of most Christians today would be in direct violation of God's laws as outlined in the Old Testament.

The fact that many Christians do not follow kosher laws is an implicit affirmation of the Pauline Program. It is a sign that Christians have, in some way, recognized that Paul had the authority to override the laws of the Old Testament.

However, the question arises — how could Paul have such authority? Most Christians struggle to explain this because they do not recognize that Paul's program is fundamentally different from that of the Old Testament. Yet, as Christians, we follow Paul as our pattern, based on his claim in 1 Corinthians 11:1 (KJV) where he writes, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

This acceptance of Paul's teachings implies a recognition of his authority to introduce a new ethic, a new way of living that deviates from Old Testament laws but aligns with the teachings of Christ. This shift is a fundamental part of the Christian faith, and it underscores the transformative power of the Gospel as preached by Paul.

HEARING FROM GOD

During a time when believers were gifted with spiritual manifestations, Paul endorsed their use, especially prophecy. He also foresaw a time when these manifestations would cease, leaving only faith, hope, and charity (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). This prophecy suggests a significant shift in God's communication with mankind, implying a change in His methods. This can either affirm Paul as a messenger of God, if seen as a divine revelation, or label him as arrogant and pretentious if not.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

The Torah guided decisions with over 600 commands. Under Paul, believers live by the fruit of the Spirit, as outlined in Galatians 5:22-23 (KJV). Paul posits that these virtues can lead believers to make wise decisions, honoring God, even without specific commands. This view respects the freedom of the will and Scripture's perfection, guiding moral decisions through love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Pauline believers assert that Paul's teachings are divine revelations from God.

Following the ascension, the disciples chose Judas' replacement by casting lots, an Old Testament method of discerning God's will. Today's church, however, uses logic, common sense, interviews, questionnaires, and advice when seeking leaders. This change is attributed to Paul's teachings where the sufficiency of God's Word and the fruit of the Spirit guide decisions.

MORAL ISSUES

Concerning moral issues, Paul speaks directly to some topics, such as sexual immorality, idolatry, theft, greed, drunkenness, and slander, as outlined in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. In these issues, his teachings align with those previously expressed in the Scripture. This alignment is because matters of morality, whether expressed in the Ten Commandments or from the pen of Paul, do not originate from these texts but rather from the character of God. God's character, being unchanging and holy, is the ultimate source of all moral law. Therefore, any moral instruction found in the teachings of Paul or in the Ten Commandments is a reflection of God's character and His desire for humanity to live righteously.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Pauline ethic, as explored in this chapter, represents a significant shift in religious doctrine, moving away from strict adherence to Old Testament laws and towards a new understanding of liberty in Christ. Through his teachings, Paul introduced a new paradigm of moral conduct for Christ's followers — one that emphasizes the principles of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This shift is a profound movement toward liberty, granted to believers in Christ in the dispensation of the grace of God. It is a liberty that is unique to the teachings of Paul and is not found elsewhere in Scripture. Thus, the Pauline ethic presents a transformative and liberating approach to Christian living, one that truly encapsulates the freedom found in a life dedicated to Christ.