

Shadow and Substance

By David Feddes

The Old Testament required a number of things that the New Testament doesn't require. How in the world was it possible for New Testament Christianity to make such a switch if the Old Testament was the word of God?

For example, the Old Testament has some very strong judgments on a variety of matters. It says of circumcision, "Any uncircumcised male ... shall be cut off from his people. He has broken my covenant" (Genesis 17:14). Those are the direct words of the Lord God himself. You had better be circumcised or else.

There are a number of laws in the Old Testament about what you must not eat: "You shall not eat any of their flesh... They are unclean to you, you shall regard them as detestable" (Leviticus 11:8,11).

When it comes to the Passover, God said, "If anyone fails to keep the Passover, that person shall be cut off from his people" (Numbers 9:13).

Regarding the Sabbath, God said, "Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death" (Exodus 31:15).

Those are strong words, and they are words from God himself. How would anyone dare to say that you don't have to be circumcised, that you can go ahead and eat flesh from any kind of animal, that the Passover is no longer binding anymore, and that it's not that big a deal if you don't keep the Sabbaths and festivals? Who would dare to say such things?

There are a number of different ways to deal with these statements from the Old Testament.

Old and New Covenants

- **Judaizers** insisted that Christians had to keep Old Testament laws (circumcision, food restrictions, special days) to be saved.
- **Gnostics** said the Old Testament was bad, and its evil lord should be ignored. Marcion's Bible was a few edited New Testament books.
- **New Testament Christians** said Christ fulfilled Old Testament signs and shadows. These had been good, but passed away with the coming of Christ, the fulfillment and substance.

One way of dealing with these Old Testament statements was followed by some people called Judaizers. They insisted that Christians had to keep Old Testament laws regarding circumcision or food restrictions or special days, and they had to do this in order to be saved. Some Judaizers wanted to simply go back to Judaism and ignore Jesus Christ entirely. But what we normally call Judaizers when speaking of people addressed by New Testament documents were people who did think you needed to believe in Jesus to be saved, but you also had to keep on obeying all of the Old Testament laws that came from God. You had to follow the Old Testament because it was the Word of God, and you had to obey those requirements.

Another approach taken by some people called Gnostics was that the Old Testament was bad and its evil Lord should be ignored. A man named Marcion followed this approach. His entire Bible was made up of a few very edited New Testament books. He threw out the whole Old Testament and any part of the New Testament that seemed to have a positive view of the Old Testament. He ended up with parts of Paul's epistles and an edited version of the book of Luke.

So you had these two approaches. One said you have to keep all Old Testament laws, and the other approach said to get rid of the Old Testament and reject the Old Testament God. That seems to be the logical choice in front of us. If God commands all these things, then you either have to follow God's commands or you have to reject this God.

And yet the New Testament Christians took a different approach. They said that Christ fulfilled Old Testament signs and shadows. These Old Testament things had been good, and the Old Testament was indeed the Word of God and continued to be valuable for study. As God's Word it had to be listened to. But some of these things had passed away with the coming of Christ, because Jesus was the fulfillment and the substance that these signs and shadows had been pointing to. In their view, Old Testament revelation is good, but New Testament revelation of Jesus Christ is better and replaces some of these older things. They did not accept the position of the Judaizers that all Old Testament rituals had to continue being observed, and they strongly rejected the Gnostic approach of saying the Old Testament was bad and that its God was bad. Let's think about how the New Testament believers came to hold this position and how they dealt with Old Testament laws.

Signs and destination

Think in terms of signs. That's how the Old Testament rituals were viewed by the New Testament Christians. If you're following a sign toward a destination, you have to pay very close attention to those signs because their purpose is to keep leading you closer and closer until you arrive at your destination.

Suppose you're following signs toward the Grand Canyon. If you said, "Who cares about signs? Signs are stupid. Get rid of them all," it would probably indicate that you didn't care about the Grand Canyon and weren't really interested in getting there. The signs are very valuable on your way there. But once you get there, the important thing to realize is that the sign's purpose is not just to draw attention to itself but to point you to the goal. And so when you reach the goal, you delight in the destination and you focus on it. You don't focus on the sign.

Once you've made it to the Grand Canyon, you don't go back and take snapshots of all the signs and then dwell upon those lovely snapshots of the signs pointing you to the Grand Canyon. You look at the splendor of the canyon. The sign's purpose is to draw your attention to the canyon. If you glimpsed the goal but then turned away and wanted to go back and gaze at each sign, you're heading away from the splendor and missing out on it. To focus on the signs after you've reached the destination would mean that you are rejecting the destination.

Jesus is the final destination. Jesus is the ultimate splendor, and the Old Testament signs and rituals were pointing in that direction. But once the signs got you to Jesus, their purpose had been

fulfilled, and you were not to go back to those rituals again, to those old covenant regulations. You were to stay focused on Jesus, of which these things had only been pointers and signs.

Judaizers

The Judaizers didn't understand that. They wanted to insist that all of the ritual requirements were still binding. They said that circumcision was required for salvation. They emphasized that the food and drink requirements of the Old Testament were still in effect. The kosher laws of what you could or couldn't eat were still in effect. You could not eat pork, and there were many other things you couldn't eat. Meat had to be certified as killed properly. They even added requirements that weren't even in the Old Testament. Hands and utensils had to be ritually washed, and you couldn't share any meals with Gentiles. There was a whole host of food and drink requirements.

The festivals of Passover, of Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), the Feast of Tabernacles, and various other festival days and seasons had to be strictly observed, according to the Judaizers, because they were part of the Word of God. "You can't just reject the word of God," they said. That's what they thought you were doing if you rejected festivals or food and drink restrictions or circumcision. They also said Sabbath observance had to be observed strictly.

The Judaizers and the Pharisees, who had a lot in common with the Judaizers, kept making rules even stricter and more detailed than the rules that Moses had laid down from God. These were the positions that the Judaizers took on these matters.

The Judaizers are in action in the book of Acts chapter 15, which tells about a council that had to be held. "Some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers in Antioch: 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.' Some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, 'The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses'" (Acts 15:1, 5).

Gentiles were coming into the church, and the question was: Do they have to follow all the ritual requirements in the law of Moses and be circumcised in order to be saved?

What happened? The Spirit led the apostles and church leaders to hold a council. At that council they issued a decision: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements" (Acts 15:28). The basic thing they decided was that the Spirit had revealed that Gentiles did not have to be circumcised and did not have to obey Mosaic rituals. They did suggest just a couple of things to make it easier for Jews to find the Gentiles acceptable, saying, "We recommend you abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality" (Acts 15:29). But the Spirit had revealed that they did not have to be circumcised or consider Mosaic rituals binding. They were not to consider salvation as being Jesus plus circumcision. Salvation and new life is Jesus Christ plus nothing.

Circumcision

The Bible goes on to speak of this decision and to apply it in a variety of ways. One thing we need to understand is that circumcision is not necessarily something just done with a knife on the foreskin of a male human being. The apostle Paul writes, "In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead" (Colossians 2:11-12). If you've been baptized into Jesus Christ, you have already been circumcised with the only circumcision that matters.

Paul wrote, "A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God" (Romans 2:28-29). Everybody is a child of Abraham if they have faith in Christ and faith like Abraham (Galatians 3:7, 29). To be a physical descendant of Abraham didn't make you a real Jew. The important thing under the new covenant is circumcision without hands done by Jesus Christ, an inward heart circumcision, not a physical bodily circumcision.

Paul says that if you're tied to the law, you're actually cut off from Jesus Christ. The law was valuable as a pointer leading up to Christ, but once you had reached Christ and then tried to latch on to the law again and all of its rituals, you were going to lose Christ. "Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace" (Galatians 5:2-4).

What strong words! Paul in that same letter says, "You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?" (Galatians 3:1). And he says of these people who keep insisting on circumcision, "As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!" (Galatians 5:12). He was very upset. Why? Because he knew that if they were depending on all of this, they were going back to reliance on the things that had pointed to Christ and were rejecting Christ himself. If you got circumcised because you thought faith in Jesus wasn't enough for salvation, you would lose Christ. You would lose salvation because you were treating Jesus as inadequate and insufficient.

Paul says that those people who talk a lot about circumcision aren't really the true circumcision: "Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reasons for such confidence" (Philippians 3:2-4). Paul then lists his qualifications: he was circumcised, part of a Jewish tribe, had all kinds of qualifications under the old law. Yet he said, "Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:7-8).

Jesus accomplishes what Old Testament circumcision was only a sign of. The pain and blood of Old Testament circumcision foreshadowed Jesus' suffering. Jesus endured much more intense pain and shed his blood in order to satisfy God's law. Jesus doesn't just change foreskins, he changes hearts. Those who belong to Jesus can say, "We are the circumcision" (Philippians 3:3).

Scripture treats circumcision a certain way in the Old Testament, and it's very highly esteemed and very important. Why? Because it pictures and foreshadows blood and pain as punishment for sin. It points to Jesus. It's a sign of faith and belonging to God's people. "Abraham received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised" (Romans 4:11). If you rejected circumcision and you were a Jew living in Old Testament times, you were rejecting God because it was a sign of your faith and of covenant belonging. It was a mark of your commitment to keeping God's law, not as a way of salvation, but because you belonged to him and because he had claimed you as his own. It was also a symbol: just as a foreskin was rolled away from the male sexual organ, so it symbolized stripping away sin on the inside. So circumcision is a very valuable and important thing in the Old Testament.

But the view of circumcision in the New Testament is different because things have shifted. Circumcision has been fulfilled in Jesus' blood and in his pain. Circumcision has been replaced by painless, bloodless baptism, which applies not just to men but to women as well. It's been replaced by a better sign. If you then chose to be circumcised for religious purposes, not for sanitary reasons or reasons of custom, but for purposes of being right with God, of adding it on to what Jesus had done, then it was a mark of trusting in ritual law for your salvation and not trusting God's grace in Christ. It became a symbol of obsession with external things rather than internal transformation.

This helps us see how the attitude toward circumcision and the meaning of circumcision shifted with the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle warns about the circumcision party: "For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families... Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled" (Titus 1:10-15).

The Judaizers were requiring circumcision. They had their food and drink laws. They had their requirements regarding festivals and Sabbath observance. We've dealt in some detail with circumcision. Let's look at these other matters as well and how the New Testament believers dealt with them under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Foods and festivals

The apostle Paul wrote, "Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ" (Colossians 2:16-17). These things are a shadow,

and Christ is the substance. So you shouldn't be judged on these once you have Christ, the substance.

If a regulation has been outdated, will you still be condemned on the basis of that regulation? Let's say a judge has retired because his area of law became outdated. Would you let that judge put you in jail for having bacon for breakfast? He says, "Pork is prohibited. I hereby sentence you to five years in prison for eating pork." Well, the man has been retired and the laws he enforced aren't in effect anymore. Paul says those Old Testament requirements regarding diet and other things are not in effect anymore. The old law has now been retired, and you shouldn't let anybody use that as a basis for judging you anymore.

If there was a corrupt judge who was fired, would you listen to him if he said he would imprison you for peeling potatoes on Sunday because you're violating that day? Paul says there are elemental spirits at work. The Greek word is *stoicheia*, sometimes translated "basic principles of this world," but better translated "elemental spirits." Paul says that these demonic powers are trying to pass judgment on you on things they never cared about in the first place. They're corrupt, but they're trying to get you to fall away from Christ.

This has been happening ever since. The structures of Judaism that have focused so much on ritual have persistently rejected Jesus Christ completely. Islam, which became very caught up in prohibitions against pork, in following various rituals, and in observing certain fast seasons as a way to be right with God, has denied that Jesus is the Christ and that his death saves. They use things from Old Testament law, which are no longer in effect, to condemn. That is the work not just of religions but of corrupt spirits behind those religions. Paul says, "Let no one pass judgment on you," because it's the *stoicheia*, the elemental spirits, who are at work when they're trying to pull you away from Jesus Christ and back into the things that were only pointers to Christ.

Paul says, "Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink" (Colossians 2:16). A little later in that passage, he warns against regulations: "'Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch,' referring to things that all perish as they are used" (Colossians 2:21-22). These aren't eternal things. You eat food, and then it perishes. Paul is echoing his master, the Lord Jesus. Jesus said, "'Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?' Thus he declared all foods clean" (Mark 7:18-19). Food goes in one end and out the other. This is not the essence of a relationship with God. Jesus insisted on it, and so did Paul. Still today, some Christians think it might be evil to eat pork. But Jesus **declared all foods clean**. Is there anything about that statement that is not clear? All foods have been declared clean by Jesus Christ himself. Don't let anybody judge you in questions of food and drink.

Peter had heard Jesus' teaching, and yet even Peter still had a hard time accepting these things in regard to foods and in regard to separating from Gentiles who would eat those foods. Peter had a vision of animals that were not permitted to be eaten under Old Testament law. In the vision, the voice from heaven told Peter, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." Peter said, "Surely not, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." The reply from heaven was, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (Acts 10:13-15).

So you were free to eat what had formerly been declared unclean. More importantly, Peter was called to eat with Gentile people who weren't following laws about clean and unclean foods. Peter was called to go to a Gentile, the Roman centurion Cornelius, and his household, to share the gospel with them and become a brother in Christ to them (Acts 10:28, 34-48). If God has declared these foods clean, you don't get to declare them unclean. If God has declared these people his own, you don't get to avoid them.

Even after that, Peter still needed to be reminded. In Galatians we read of Paul having to remind Peter: "When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group" (Galatians 2:11-12).

Peter had taken to heart the fact that you could eat whatever you wanted and didn't have to follow all the old requirements anymore. He lived that way. When he was with Gentile believers, he ate with them without any question about what they were eating, and all was well. But when people from the circumcision party came to town, Peter got nervous. He thought, "They're not going to like it that I'm Jewish and yet living like a Gentile." So he separated himself from those Gentile Christians and wouldn't eat with them anymore. Paul rebuked him right to his face. Paul said, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?" (Galatians 2:14).

Peter had gone back on what he had learned. Paul told him he was sinning against the grace of Christ and betraying the gospel. Paul reminded Peter, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). Peter took that to heart, but this was a hard thing. I want you to understand how hard it was for a devout Jewish man to realize that much of the Word of God in the Old Testament had reached its fulfillment in Christ and was no longer required.

Preparing for Christ

The law, rightly understood, was to prepare people for Christ in at least two ways. First, it revealed our desperate need for Christ's salvation by showing us the sinfulness of our sin. Much of Old Testament law is God's moral law, abiding for all ages, and it continues to serve that function of showing us our desperate need for Jesus because we break that moral law so much.

Another way the law pointed people to Christ was foreshadowing him by sacrifices and other rituals. The moral law remained abiding, but the law of sacrifices and rituals was no longer binding once Jesus came and fulfilled the meaning of the sacrifices and rituals. If people wanted the law instead of Christ, they missed the point of the law. If people wanted to add dependence on law and ritual to dependence on Christ, they were denying the sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

The apostle warned them that going back to ritual law would mean going back to slavery. He said, "Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles [*stoicheia* = elemental spirits] of

the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? **You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain**" (Galatians 4:9-11) In other words, if you think your sacred schedule is part of how you're making yourself right with God, then did I waste my time bringing you the gospel of salvation through Jesus?

The book of Hebrews speaks in a similar vein: "The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God" (Hebrews 7:18-19) .

Those old regulations were set aside. Old covenant regulations of food and festivals were weak and useless except as pointers to Jesus. If these God-given rules and pointers were set aside, then a whole bunch of man-made rules were certainly not binding. The New Testament believers said Old Testament ritual requirements weren't binding, and certainly neither were all the other requirements heaped up by people, requirements that weren't even in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Paul said in Colossians, "These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ" (Colossians 2:17). Hebrews says something very similar: "They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.... But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises... the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities" (Hebrews 8:5-6, 10:1)

If you see a shadow of a person moving along the ground from around the corner of a building, that shadow tells you that somebody is coming. The shadow doesn't just exist on its own and have its own importance. It is the shadow of somebody. When the person comes into view and you're talking to that person, you focus on the person and look them in the eyes. You don't keep looking at the shadow and saying, "Oh, shadow, you're so fabulous." You're dealing with the person. That shadow you saw coming around the corner before the person arrived was simply an indicator that the person was about to come.

So it is with the Old Testament rituals. They were indicators of Christ who was to come, but the substance or the body belongs to Christ. The word translated "substance" is in Greek simply the word "body." You have the shadow in the rituals; you have the body of the person in Christ.

When we look at ultrasounds, they give us a shadow of things to come. Before a baby arrives, an ultrasound is the best look you get at that baby. You see a fuzzy black-and-white image, and that's your best picture, and you're glad to have it. Expectant parents are excited about that ultrasound. But after the child is born, do you keep looking at the ultrasound, kissing that ultrasound, and saying, "Oh, beautiful ultrasound"? Not exactly. You've got a real baby. The ultrasound is forgotten. You may throw it in a scrapbook somewhere, but it is not the object of your attention and affection. You file that thing away and focus on the child.

So it is with Christ. The Old Testament gave us an ultrasound of who was coming. But now Jesus has come, and the body, the reality, the substance, is here.

Back to sacred systems

Unfortunately, despite all that the New Testament reveals about focusing on Jesus and him being totally sufficient, and about leaving behind the old ritual requirements, very often Christians have gotten too fixated on rituals and gone right back to them again. Christians may have ignored some of the Jewish requirements about food and drink, but then suddenly it was required to go without meat on Fridays, and you were sinning if you didn't. There were certain fast days that were required. Now, it's valuable for people to fast from time to time, but for the church to set it up as a requirement on certain days and make it mandatory for everybody was going back to the kind of ritual system that had previously existed.

The church, in leaving behind Old Testament seasons and festivals, set up its own schedule. Again, it's not necessarily bad to have certain special moments and days, but the church started to require them. They created a church year with Advent leading up to Christmas, then Epiphany, then the season of Lent, Good Friday, Easter, and required feasts for various saints. By the year 190, Pope Victor tried to excommunicate Eastern Christians because they had a different date for ending the fast of Lent and then having the feast of Easter. They were getting the date "wrong," so they were to be excommunicated and cut off from Christ. That is how quickly Christians and church leaders can forget the Word of God. They make their own invented festival date something required for everybody and say, "You're out if you don't follow my date."

Priestly ritual came back in. The priesthood was fulfilled in Christ, but churches began to come up with vestments, liturgies, and other things to recover that sense of the priestly and the stately.

Pilgrimages to the Holy Land increased, and were based on the notion that this was the spot on earth where special things are and where God is present in a special way. They began to collect holy relics, the bones of saints, the hair of the virgin Mary, enough wood from Jesus' cross to fill several ships, sacred sites where everything was "holy," and the sale of sanctified souvenirs—all of it was a part of going back to things that were meant to be left behind.

Jesus himself said to a woman of Samaria, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:21-24).

The notion that the Holy Land is a place to get especially close to God is simply not true. Yet Christians keep going back to these kinds of things, and in many cases they are denying the sufficiency of Christ.

I've been in Israel. I spent two months there. I loved visiting the various places where Jesus had been and seeing the places where he had walked, but not in order to become especially holy. I'm closer to God when I'm in the presence of another person indwelt by God's Spirit than when I'm standing on some rocks in a land where Jesus once walked.

Messianic Christians sometimes observe Old Testament festivals and food laws even as they accept Jesus Christ as divine Savior. Not all of these things are horrible in and of themselves, but they very quickly get turned into a whole system that exists alongside Jesus Christ and is considered to be as mandatory as faith in Jesus Christ himself. We need to beware of them when they reach that status.

Focus on Jesus

How do we handle foods and festivals? Some said, "You must keep regulations of foods and festivals or you will not be saved." That is false. New Testament believers said under God's inspiration, "You must not put your faith in foods and special days, or you will not be saved." If you put your faith in things like that, your faith is in the wrong thing and you cannot be saved.

Some said, "You have to keep regulations of foods and festivals to be an elite Christian. You can be saved without them, but keeping them moves you up to a higher level." What did the New Testament say? Foods and festivals are matters of personal preference as long as you keep your focus on the Lord Jesus Christ. They do not make you better if you observe them. They do not make you worse if you ignore them. They are matters of personal preference.

Sometimes the New Testament sounds like it is totally against any observation of what to eat or of special days and that it would be disastrous if you did any of that. But that's not the whole New Testament revelation regarding Old Testament rituals and signs. If you were relying on those things for salvation, they were disastrous. If you were using them as a basis for judging others or for promoting yourself, it was disastrous. But if it was a matter between you and God, where you loved God and kept your focus on Jesus, then it was a matter of personal preference.

Paul puts it like this: "One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (Romans 14:2-4).

Even if someone has different opinions about what diet is proper, don't pass judgment on each other in these matters. "One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God" (Romans 14:5-6).

Whatever you do with the day or the food, do it to the Lord to honor him and to express faith in Jesus Christ and to serve Christ in the Spirit, and you'll be okay. "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (Romans 4:17-19).

As long as you kept these things as a matter of personal preference between you and God, serving him, doing it for his glory, it was fine whether you did it or chose not to. But it was ruinous to use such things as a basis for judging others, as a basis for making yourself better than them, or worst of all, as a basis to make yourself right with God alongside faith in Jesus Christ. In that case, you had to leave behind entirely all such things and put no faith in them.

That's why there are such strong statements in Galatians and Colossians: beware of using these as a basis for your standing with God or for judging others. But in Romans, there is a milder statement in a less controversial setting, where people weren't in danger of trusting food and drink for their salvation. In that setting, Scripture says, "Do as it seems right to you."

This may be applied to some ritual things like observance of Easter or Lent or particular days. They might help one person's faith; they might be useless or even harmful to another's faith. Let each do whatever honors Christ and helps him walk with the Lord, as long as you're not relying on rituals or special days for salvation or for judging.

"The substance (body, reality) belongs to Christ." There were signs, but Jesus is the reality. There was the shadow, but the body is Jesus. This is where our focus is to be. This is why New Testament Christianity left behind requirements of Old Testament rituals, because they had all been pointing to the riches of Jesus Christ: "the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). Not kosher food in you, but Christ in you!

"Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority" (Colossians 2:9-10). You don't need other things added to him. You've been filled in him. He's the head of all rule and authority.

"Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ" (Colossians 2:16-17).

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Why Old Testament Rituals Became Obsolete for New Testament Christians

Strong judgments

- Any uncircumcised male .. shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant. (Genesis 17:14)
- You shall not eat any of their flesh... they are unclean to you... You shall regard them as detestable. (Leviticus 11:8,11)
- If anyone ... fails to keep the Passover, that person shall be cut off from his people. (Numbers 9:13)
- Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. (Exodus 31:15)

Old and New Covenants

- **Judaizers** insisted that Christians had to keep Old Testament laws (circumcision, food restrictions, special days) to be saved.
- **Gnostics** said the Old Testament was bad, and its evil lord should be ignored. Marcion's Bible was a few edited New Testament books.
- **New Testament Christians** said Christ fulfilled Old Testament signs and shadows. These had been good, but passed away with the coming of Christ, the fulfillment and substance.

Following signs toward a destination brings you closer and closer until you arrive.

The sign's purpose is not to draw attention to itself, but to point you to the goal. When you reach the goal, you delight in it. You don't focus on the sign.

If you glimpse the goal but then turn away and prefer to go back and gaze at each sign, you are missing out and are heading farther away from the splendor.

Jesus is the final destination. Jesus is the ultimate splendor.

Don't go back to distant signs--the old covenant regulations.

Judaizers

- **Circumcision:** required for salvation
- **Food and drink:** kosher laws, no pork, meat must be certified as killed properly, hands and utensils must be ritually washed, no sharing meals with Gentiles
- **Festival:** Passover, Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles, and more
- **Sabbath observance:** kept making rules stricter and more detailed than ever

Christ plus circumcision?

But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” ... But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.” (Acts 15:1,5)

The Spirit revealed that Gentiles did not have to be circumcised or follow Mosaic rituals.

Circumcision without hands

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. (Colossians 2:11-12)

Paul insisted that baptized believers in Christ already had all the circumcision they needed.

Inward Jews

For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God. (Romans 2:28-29)

Tied to law, cut off from Christ!

I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. (Galatians 5:2-4)

If you got circumcised because you thought faith in Jesus wasn't enough for salvation, you would lose Christ and salvation.

We are the circumcision

Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. (Phil 3:2-4)

Jesus accomplishes what OT circumcision was only a sign of:

- + *Pain and blood to satisfy God's law*
- + *Changing hearts, not just foreskins.*

Circumcision in Scripture

Circumcision in the Old Testament

- picture foreshadowing blood and pain as punishment for sin
- sign of faith and belonging to God's people
- mark of commitment to keeping God's law
- symbol of stripping away sin within

Circumcision in the New Testament

- fulfilled in Christ's blood and pain
- replaced by painless, bloodless baptism
- mark of trusting law, not grace in Christ
- symbol of obsession with externals

The circumcision party

For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families... Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. (Titus 1:10-15)

Judaizers

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Faith in Christ, not foods or festivals

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. (Colossians 2:16-17)

Let no one pass judgment on you

- If a judge retired because his area of law became outdated, would you let him jail you for having bacon for breakfast?
- If a corrupt judge was fired, would you listen to him if he said he would imprison you for peeling potatoes on Sunday?

Questions of food and drink

Colossians 2:21-22 ...regulations— “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch,” referring to things that all perish as they are used.

Mark 7:18-19 Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?

Thus he declared all foods clean. (7:19)

Peter’s vision (Acts 10)

“I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.”

“What God has made clean, do not call common.”

Paul had to remind Peter (Galatians 2)

“If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

Preparing for Christ

The law, rightly understood, was to prepare people for Christ in at least two ways:

- Revealing our desperate need for Christ's salvation by showing the sinfulness of sin.
- Foreshadowing the reality of Christ by sacrifices and other rituals.

If people want the law instead of Christ, they miss the point of the law. If people want to add dependence on law and ritual to dependence on Christ, they deny the sufficiency of Christ.

Back to slavery?

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles [*stoicheia* = elemental spirits] of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? **You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.** (Galatians 4:9-11)

A better hope

The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God. (Hebrews 7:18-19)

Old covenant regulations of food and festivals were weak and useless except as pointers to Jesus. If these God-given rules are set aside, surely man-made rules are not binding.

These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things... But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises... the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities. (Hebrews 8:5-6, 10:1)

A shadow of the things to come

Before baby arrives, an ultrasound is your best view.

After the child is born, do you keep looking at the ultrasound and kissing it?

No, you file the shadow away in a scrapbook, and you focus on your child.

Back to sacred systems

- **Food and drink:** meatless Fridays
- **Festival:** church year, Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, feasts for saints
- **Priestly ritual:** vestments, liturgies
- **Holy land:** pilgrimage, holy relics, sacred sites, sanctified souvenirs
- **Messianic:** observe festivals and food laws while accepting Jesus as divine Savior

How to handle foods and festivals?

You must keep regulations of foods and festivals, or you will not be saved.

You must not put your faith in foods and special days, or you will not be saved.

You must keep regulations of foods and festivals to be an elite Christian, though you can be saved without them.

Foods and festivals are matters of personal preference, so long as you focus on Jesus.

Let no one pass judgment

2 One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. 3 Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. 4 Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (Romans 14:2-4)

Whatever you do with shadow, honor the substance: the Lord

5 One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. (Romans 14:5-6)

Not eating and drinking, but serving Christ in the Spirit

17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. 19 So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. (Rom 4:17-19)

The substance (body, reality) belongs to Christ

...the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (1:27)

...Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (2:3)

For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. (2:9-10)