

Elements Of Judgment (Part Four)

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During the Days of Unleavened Bread I purposely took a break from the series on Ecclesiastes in order to give this series on the elements of judgment, because I believed that the subject is more directly applicable to the theme of the Days of Unleavened Bread. Then I broke off that series because I wanted to save this final sermon, though it is not really *the* final sermon of the Elements of Judgment, for today. I did this because I believe that the subject is a more appropriate tie-in for this day because of its connections to the covenants.

God has made quite a number of covenants with men. Some of the best known are those that He made with Adam, Noah, Abraham, David, and of course the one that He made with Israel, more commonly known as the Old Covenant. It apparently was made on the day of Pentecost.

At this time regarding covenants, Revelation 7, with its mention of specifically twelve thousand drawn from each tribe, it indicates that God is making it clear, by stating that exact figure, that He is making the New Covenant with each of us *individually*. Each of the covenants has terms which delineate who is responsible to do what, each contains promises, the terms are agreed upon by each party, and sealed by an act and a vow to show that one understands and thus pledges to fulfill their responsibility.

Of course that involves circumcision for the Old Covenant, and baptism for the New. Each of the covenants that I just mentioned is impacting on us to this very day, and yet many Israelitish people are unaware of that truth, and some of those who are unaware of them to some degree believe that elements of them, or perhaps the whole covenant, is done away.

One of the major purposes of this Elements of Judgment series, is to show that we cannot carelessly assume some parts or parts of God's Word are done away. That is a poor term for what they suggest.

We will begin this sermon in Psalm 119. We will look at a principle that is involved here, this paean of praise for God's law.

Psalm 119:89 Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven.

It has to be settled in heaven. That is where things are eternal. God's Word is eternal, this book is eternal, there is nothing done away. Do we understand that? There are some things that are set aside for a while, but as we are going to see as we go through this, they are there for purposes of learning to judge, among other things, and in addition they are going to be back in force at some time before God's purpose runs out.

Some things that you might normally think are done away forever, are not done away. They are going to be brought back to be used again, so while they are still a part of this book, they are to be used by us to increase our ability to judge things, because all godly judgment begins with His law, because His law establishes what is right.

Psalms 119:90-91 Your faithfulness endures to all generations; You established the earth, and it abides. [This is to remind us how permanent God's Word is, it is still here.] They continue this day according to Your ordinances, for all are Your servants.

All those things that God created, those things are still there, their longevity, if I can put it that way, is an illustration of God's Word, and the covenants contain God's Word. We should not carelessly just accept the idea that certain things are done away and then turn our back on them. I know that you do not have the inclination to do that but people in the world do, and sometimes it can discourage us because they do not seem to get it. They very much do not seem to get it.

Psalms 119:89-96 shows that in contrast to men, where everything about us is limited, no such limitations can be put upon God Himself, or what God says, He is absolutely everlastingly and faithful and so is His Word.

Matthew 24:34-35 [Jesus speaking] "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away."

What Jesus says here most certainly applies specifically to what He says in the Olivet prophecy context, but the principle also applies to all there is regarding a major difference between men and God. God is ever-living, and His words reflect the same faithful permanence.

These things that people are saying are done away, that is part of the Word of God, and

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we should not play around allowing things like that in our minds, that somehow things are done away.

Matthew 5:18 “For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.”

That is pretty plain. Of course He says in Malachi 3:6, “I am God, I change not.” His word can always be relied upon. Therefore when Jesus says that we are to live by every word of God, He means exactly that, and we are to understand that His words are never done away. They are always to be used as each situation demands.

A clear example for us is that God established the Sabbath and blessed it. In Genesis 2, right as God's Word is beginning, the Sabbath is there already. God's example of observing it is to be followed by mankind by doing the same. It has never been done away! Keeping it is also directly commanded within the Ten Commandments. Though there are ceremonial aspects added to the Sabbath under the Old Covenant, not one of the Ten Commandments is ceremonial in nature.

They are, every one of them, including the fourth commandment, laws regarding morality. Our conduct is to be determined by the responsibilities that those commandments charge us with, and that is, with keeping them, that we follow God's example, and express love to God and man. Is love done away with? Of course not! What is love? It is the keeping of the commandments including the fourth commandment.

Regardless of the claims men use to justify their Sabbath conduct, the Sabbath law has never been done away any more than any of the other nine, and it still stands fast in the heavens regardless of what men on earth claim to do.

Matthew 7:1 “Judge not, that you be not judged.”

This series is given to improve our understanding regarding judging. If one is to base his knowledge of judging on this one scripture, then life and meeting God's purposes would be impossible. In like manner this entire subject is more involved than this one scripture would indicate.

John 7:24 “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”

This charge by Jesus gives us a better balance regarding judging, and judging righteously is the goal. Life is filled with making choices and making choices requires gathering relative information, evaluating them, and then making a judgment. Thus we understand this is what Jesus was doing in Matthew 7:1. Within that context He was placing a cautionary limit on the extent of our judgments regarding other people's conduct.

We must be very careful to not condemn them utterly—that is God's job. We know far too little to do this righteously, and thus we run the risk of overstepping our authority and sin in our judgment. So Jesus was putting a little bit of a restraint in there that He wants us to follow. We can still judge, but we have to be careful, and set a limit upon how far we go, and make sure that our judgment is as righteous as we can possibly make it. Now within the context, remember that is a cautionary limit to the extent of our judgments.

To judge is to thoughtfully act, to discern, the merits of an object and incident, a contest, a person, or a person's conduct. The object of judging is to make a judgment, to render an opinion, or conclude, what one's own conduct should be in a given circumstance.

What we have seen in our approach to God's law is in many cases similar to what we find regarding Matthew 7:1. That is that it is good to patiently search out many scriptures because God's will regarding this subject is not a "one size fits all" proposition.

Note these elements: the Bible states that all unrighteousness is sin. However, on the other hand, we have also noted that all laws are not of equal significance in regard to their importance, even in regard to the Ten Commandments. Jesus stated that there are two laws on which all others hang. Thus, He clearly inferred that, though breaking these laws hanging beneath the two great godly principles is very serious, they are individually still of lesser overall importance to the life than the two from which they hang.

Another example is that we know sin is the transgression of God's laws, and that the wages of sin is death. Those are two nice concise and clear statements, however, we also found that there is sin that is not unto death. Therefore, in regard to making judgments regarding conduct, that specific knowledge might impact greatly on one's judgment regarding conduct.

How do we know it is unto death? We have to draw a line in our minds and be careful. In addition we found that God makes it clear that who committed the sin and the circumstance under which it was committed also makes a difference, If you are a high

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priest or if you are the king, the constraints on you are much tighter than they are on that little peon that is down there working away in the gutter.

God makes sure that we understand that not everybody who sins is of the same judgment regarding what kind of penalty will be inflicted. Therefore in regard to making judgments regarding peoples conduct, that specific knowledge might impact greatly on the judgment that one actually arrives at.

In addition we found that God makes it clear that who committed the sin and the circumstance under which it was committed makes all the difference in the world. We can come to a reasonably clear summary statement regarding conduct and judgment, and it might be what Jesus states here in Luke 12. So we can see scriptural proof of what I have been saying here.

Luke 12:47-48 “And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know yet committed things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few, for everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required, and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.”

That is very clear. The same penalties are not carried out on everybody. There are different levels regarding the seriousness of what we might call a crime. The word crime introduces to me a thought and what is actually being shown here is that man's law follows the same basic principles. Whether they actually carry them out is another thing all together, but in man's law they sentence people to different sentences because of who they are, what they did, the circumstance under which it was done, the level of seriousness of the crime, and on and on.

Therefore you understand that God is going to judge each one of us individually exactly the same way. The only difference being that His judgment will be perfect in every case. Men make a lot of mistakes, but at least they have learned a number of things.

Matthew 7:1-5 “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck out of your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and

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then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye.

We will look at Jesus' illustration, and see that it confirms the things that we have begun with here in this sermon. Speck illustrates something small, rather minor; plank illustrates large, or something more serious. The conclusion we can draw from this is Jesus' illustration does not fit the issue He is using it in *if* every sin, or every law, or characteristic of conduct, is on the same level of importance, or seriousness. It is a very plain statement that shows that everything is not on the same level in regards to judgment.

Thus He is cautioning us because our carnal nature is very quick to judge the seriousness of one's own sins as being minor and to exaggerate another person's sins as being major. But because of the ease of making the misjudgment, and seeing we do not really know all the facts, the reality might be exactly the opposite in the one who is rendering the judgment.

Our destiny is to share rulership with Jesus Christ when He establishes His Kingdom on earth. Rulers make judgments in positions of high authority, but this picture does not end with His sharing His civil responsibility, because Jesus is also High Priest.

I want to show that the overall reason for the importance of this teaching regarding judging lies in our overall destiny. In other words Jesus is preparing us for the goal of the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 19:27-29 Then Peter answered and said to him, "See we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?" So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit everlasting life."

Does this statement by Jesus apply only to the twelve apostles? I will show you that it does not only apply to the twelve apostles.

Revelation 3:21 "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."

That statement about sitting on the thrones indicates that He will share His responsibilities with us in the Kingdom of God. In other words, we can make this very plain. This thing regarding judging is very important because we are being trained to work under Him.

Our destiny then is to share rulership with Jesus Christ when He establishes His Kingdom on earth. Rulers make judgments in positions of high authority, but we will add another clarifying picture here.

Revelation 14:1-4 Then I looked, and behold, a lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. And they sang as it were, a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. These are the ones [this is the key verse for you and me] who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.

Now the judgments all concerned will make (these are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes) in both areas of responsibility, that is, civil, moral, spiritual, and ethical, situations. There is no doubt that these issues will overlap one another, and Jesus' teaching regarding judging shows that judging righteously requires rightly dividing the Word of God.

Right now is graduation season, and I heard an advertisement regarding graduation that said, "It takes twelve years to prepare a graduate." Let us think about this in relation to us. Life is teaching us that sin is not committed in a straightforward manner in every case. There are twists and turns, angles and perspectives, circumstances that must be considered and weighed. This requires knowledge and understanding in order to produce wise judgment.

We face this reality, that we are being educated in the school of hard knocks. That is, actual literal field experience. Real life is where we do our lab work and in this educational process the term is very long, with no semester breaks, because life is lived every day, and as we are learning from the book of Ecclesiastes, everything matters to some degree.

Thus we must also carry with us the undeniable truth that judgment, mercy, and faithfulness, which are very important actions, are all matters of law, because conduct regarding those virtues are to be based in the proper discernment of how the laws of God apply in any given circumstance.

God's laws set the standards upon which our conduct is to be based, therefore anybody claiming to be Christian but saying that God's laws are done away, is greatly crippling judgment of righteous conduct. In addition, that person may render himself and others unfit for God's Kingdom.

God's purpose is not just that we attain good character, but also, because we are going to rule under Jesus Christ, that we attain right knowledge, good understanding, precise discernment, justice, and equity. One ruling needs to institute God's way as a ruler under Jesus Christ.

That is a load, and that is why it takes a lifetime to get prepared for the Kingdom of God. It is not a twelve year stint in a closed-in school, it is a lifetime responsibility right out in the world, where all the action is taking place, and it is impacting on us, and we are impacting on it. We have the responsibility of doing what we can to bring honor and glory to God as we go through this, as we learn, and as we repent when we make mistakes, and go on with life.

Turn to Acts 15. Here is where we enter into what appears to have been, the most intense internal doctrinal issue the first century church had to face.

Acts 15:1 And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

Acts 15:5 But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."

Acts 15:7-11 And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them; "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as He did to us. And made no distinction between

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us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.”

Acts 15:18-21 “Known to God from eternity are all His works. Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”

The first thing we learned is that there was a great deal of disputing going on here over this issue. The terms that are used here are important in order to get a grip on the importance of this issue, and the solution to rightly discerning what this paragraph or two is saying. Of importance are the words circumcision, cannot be saved, Pharisees, law of Moses, purified by faith, grace, and a yoke.

First let us understand how the term circumcision is used biblically. I will not chase all of these out because some of them you know quite well, First and foremost is used to illustrate the right by which the Old Covenant was sealed as having been made by a man.

In following through with this, a person after circumcision was officially recognized as a person in agreement with and submissive to the Old Covenant. However that is not the only way it is used. It is used as a noun that includes, or represents, or covers, a whole package of elements and in this case it is being used by other terms that we might be more familiar with. It is a collective noun. I do not know if there is such a term as that but it is being used in the same way as ‘team.’

The word team indicates that there are others who are part of a team. Family, father, mother, sister, brother, school might have hundreds of different elements, children who are a part of it, an army might have thousands or millions.

The word circumcision is used in that manner in the Bible. For example, a few times the entire Jewish Nation is simply called the circumcision. That is how the other nations identified them. That is an additional way the term is used and it can have an impact on rightly discerning what this issue in Acts 15 is about.

At other times it can refer to the entire body of religious regulations. Again it is a collection of things in which circumcision is being used as a title. Depending on the context, the person hearing that word and then discerning that word, understood that it was not just the cutting away of the foreskin of a man, but a great deal besides that as well, and it was all included within their understanding.

Another one, and this one applies to the New Covenant—circumcision of the heart—indicates a spiritual repentance and conversion and thus a series of acts that truly effect the heart, conduct, and character.

That is five different ways in which that word circumcision is used. Now circumcision was one of the Old Covenant's most important rights, but we are going to take a look at several important phrases as to what was really going on here.

Acts 15:5 But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."

What were they trying to do here? Before they became these new converts, before they became New Covenant Christians, the Jews wanted them, first of all, to be Old Covenant members, part of that covenant. I will put it as plainly as I know how: they essentially wanted the people to become Jews before they became Christians.

Peter refuted that, by saying this: The new converts were receiving the Holy Spirit before any circumcision was involved, and therefore the justification had already taken place and it was unnecessary to go any further than that.

That is so simple. He just cut through the mass of all of this falderal that they were throwing up there with terms that made it look as though they were avoiding doing the right thing by saying, God has already put His seal of approval on these people, by giving them His Holy Spirit without the necessity of circumcision.

To add to the understanding is that the justification was by faith in Christ's blood, and to a lesser extent this even extended to sanctification unto holiness because the Holy Spirit was given as evidence that they already received it. So in one fell swoop, Peter includes both justification and sanctification as having taken place before any circumcision took place, therefore he said, it is not necessary to do that. They were already Christians, they did not have to become Jews before they became Christians, they did not have to be adherent of the Old Covenant before they became converts to

the New Covenant.

Acts 15:6 So the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.
[Peter is still speaking.]

Acts 15:10 “Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the necks of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”

They mentioned the law of Moses. Was the law of Moses impossible for men to bear? We have to see what the Bible says.

Matthew 11:28-30 “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

This is the same God who says that He never changes, He does not make burdens heavy, and difficult to be born. He clearly states to us, besides that:

I Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as in common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

Again I remind you, this is the same Jesus Christ who gave the Ten Commandments, who gave the terms of the Old Covenant, and His yoke is, by His own testimony, light and easy to bear.

Did God release Israel from their bondage in Egypt? This is the God who does not make people's burdens heavy, and then take the Israelites out in the wilderness and put them into bondage to a ceremonial law. That does not make logical sense, and that level of thinking makes God look like a contradicting fool! God does not contradict Himself.

He is always merciful, He is always kind, He gave Israel the best law that a people could be given at that time considering His purpose for them. It was not a law that was difficult to bear, a yoke that people could not do well under.

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I John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

It does not matter whether they are in the Old Covenant or the New Covenant, they are not burdensome. We will analyze this a little bit further from a slightly different angle. Please turn to Romans 7. This is the chapter that Paul is describing the difficulty that he had with sin that dwelled in him. The problem was sin that was within him, not a law, not the Old Covenant, not the New Covenant law, but sin, that was in him.

Romans 7:17-25 But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

Sin is giving the problems. He was not blaming the problems that he had on God's law, he was blaming it on sin that was in him. In this chapter Paul was discussing some spiritual sins of his, and what he said regarding them does not make them sound very easy. Remember, it is sin causing the problems, not God's law.

His concern here was the level of how deeply effected his conscience was by his failures to follow through in obedience, it is not the difficulty of what he physically had to do.

Another comparison to help understand this is the principles of Acts 15. What is more difficult, the physical or the spiritual? Which is more difficult, to wash your hands or circumcise your heart? It is much easier to wash your hands. Think about this because they said that this law that they called the law of Moses, was too difficult to be borne. How difficult is it to wash your hands? How difficult is it to sacrifice an animal? How much pain do you really go through? How difficult is it to wash your entire body when something like that happens? Or stay away from other people because you are sick.

Are you getting the point here? Is it easier to sacrifice a turtle dove or to face the guilt, the shame, the embarrassment of repentance before a holy God? This law that they are calling something that could not be borne was not what we know of as the law of Moses at all. That was easy, to be clean, to be careful to handle the holy things in the right way, or simply to pay attention to something like that.

What I am saying to you is that in its own way the New Covenant is much more difficult than what they were saying here in Acts 15 was too difficult to be borne. Sometimes when our conscience strikes us, it rips us from bottom to top because we are so stupid, but it was not the law that is doing that, it is our conscience, and our relationship with God that is doing that because we are bearing the guilt of our stupidity, and our weaknesses. It is not the law doing that.

Is it easier to keep your word, not lose your temper, resist lust, not get your feelings of hatred or vengeance, sacrifice yourself in service to people who may not care one whit and give no recognition to your efforts, or to circumcise a child who is not even aware of what he is going through, nor will ever remember?

Do you understand that in its own way the New Covenant has its own difficulties, but we just read what Jesus said regarding His way, and the New Covenant, according to Jesus, is easy and freeing?

We can reach a conclusion. It will be honest and it will be right. What is being spoken of in Acts 15 as too difficult to bear, is not God's law given through Moses, but the whole of the perverted regulations added to what God gave and combined with God's law, as though they were all on the same level, and which the Jews were calling the law of Moses. That wipes Acts 15 perfectly free, in terms of what people will normally think of it as being.

What God Himself gave in the Old Covenant was not a yoke that could not be borne. Just because the people failed is no reason to blame God, and yet that is what the carnal mind of the unconverted does. The entire package of perverted regulations was not something that suddenly appeared out of nowhere, but gradually grew through the years in the minds of undoubtedly sincere men and women who did not want to sin. In fact their purpose was an attempt to make it impossible to sin, but it drove them to become separated from their fellow Israelites, and perverted their judgment as to what is truly important. They also actually became separated from righteous judgments and God Himself in the process.

Romans 10:1-5 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is

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that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. [They submitted to the righteousness of fellow Pharisees.] For Christ is the end [He is the goal], of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, "The man who does those things shall live by them,"

There is no doubt that the Pharisees had a zeal for God beyond that of the average Israelite, and they also had a measure of righteousness. We understand that it was self-righteousness that was produced by means of, in most cases, a very intense striving on their part to keep God's laws and their added laws, and I have no doubt that these people gave the appearance of a very intense morality. But did they have love? Yes they did, but it was only that which keeping laws, even God's laws through human effort, will produce.

From Matthew 23 we learn that, among other things, they bound heavy burdens and refused to help and instead exalted themselves. Jesus is referring here to the yoke that was too hard to bear, too heavy to bear. I have no doubt that these people gave an appearance of an intense morality. In addition, Jesus said, they devoured widows houses, were rapacious in business dealings by taking advantage of the weak, they swore falsely by failing to keep their word in contracts, they lacked justice, mercy, and fidelity. That ought to tell you something—that those laws they were following were not producing righteousness.

They outwardly appear righteous, which was hypocritical. Jesus said they were hard hearted, closed minded, and appeared in religious discussion only interested in trapping Him. Jesus did not intend that we think that they were all like this, not every Pharisee exhibited the same exact characteristics, but they may well be, in the Bible, the clearest model of a confused, contradictory, rigid, even cruel, self-centered, and hypocritical state of this world's religious elite. The fact that they appeared publicly moral was of no help, and yet regarding things drawn from the Old Covenant they were not following it.

Please turn back to Acts 15. We are headed toward seeing step by step that what the Pharisees wanted to do was totally wrong and the decision made by the apostles were correct.

Acts 15:18-20 "Known to God from eternity are all His works. [That tells you

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that God has things planned out, and He knows where He is headed.] Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God [In other words he was saying no to the Pharisees issue, that we are going to go on with what we have understood already], but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood.”

It is the last half of that verse that is so interesting. Where did those regulations come from? They came from the Old Covenant, and here he is telling them that the new converts are still to abide by those things. They were not going to do away with the real law of Moses, they were doing away with those hundreds of regulations that they imposed.

Acts 15:21 For Moses had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.

In other words what he was saying here, the people were already familiar with this, let us not upset things, just tell them that because the strangling of animals, and eating their blood, and things like that, are part of the Gentile way of life, tell them do not do that any more. If you are a new convert and they want you to eat these things, do it not.

Those regulations came from Genesis and were certainly included in the Old Covenant.

Acts 18:18 So Paul still remained a good while, then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow.

Where did you think he got that? He got it out of the Old Covenant, and he followed what it said, that when you take a vow like that and you are ending that vow, you get your hair cut. I do not know exactly what it meant but that is where it came from. Here is the apostle Paul keeping that part. Did he think that things were just done away? No, he did not.

Acts 21:19-26 When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, “You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all

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zealous for the law; but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according the customs. What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come. Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow. Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law.”

Galatians 2:3 [he is in a Gentile city and meeting with Christians there] Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.

That almost sounds like a contradiction. It is not. Acts 15 shows that circumcision was not necessary for making the New Covenant. On the other hand, Paul did circumcise Timothy. Is there a contradiction? No, circumcision is clearly replaced by a more fitting ceremony and that is baptism. In addition, the book of Hebrews makes very clear that the Old Covenant sacrifices that pertain to Christ's life and works, including His death, are also no longer required because a better example is supplied, and that is Jesus Christ.

What I am getting to is this. When we see what is given to us for information, for knowledge, or understanding regarding the way the apostles used the Old Covenant, even though the New Covenant was now being applied, what did they do? They used the Old Covenant as they saw fit, they used it according to need, they used it according to circumstance, that suited what was going on in the preaching that they were giving. They were not against it, they continued to use it as needed. They did not look at it as being done away. They could use it as they saw it fit the situation that they found themselves in.

I just mentioned the sacrifices, and Hebrews makes it clear that they are no longer binding on us at this time, but are they done away? No, they are not. I can show you places, which I will not, but where Paul invoked the use of sacrifices in the book of Acts and went through with carrying them out. But I am going to show you something that is in a way arresting.

Turn to the book of Ezekiel. What is the time element that we are going to be looking at

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here? It is after Christ returned, and Israel is set up in its own land. We will say, Jerusalem and its environments.

Ezekiel 44:9 [Christ is on earth, Christ is ruling over the Israelitish people] Thus says the Lord God: “No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart or uncircumcised in flesh. . .

Do you see what that is saying? Circumcision is going to be reinstated. How can something done away be reinstated? If God's Word is forever and it is ready to be used by us if the circumstance permits it, or maybe even is needed.

Ezekiel 44:9-12 . . . shall enter My sanctuary, including any foreigner who is among the children of Israel. And the Levites who were far from Me, when Israel went astray, who strayed away from Me after their idols, they shall bear their iniquity. Yet they shall be ministers in My sanctuary, as gatekeepers of the house and ministers of the house; they shall slay the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister to them. Because they minister to them before their idols and caused the house of Israel to fall into iniquity, therefore I have lifted My hand in an oath against them,” says the Lord God. “That they shall bear their iniquity.”

Not only is circumcision going to be reinstated, the sacrifices, the burnt offerings, and so forth, they also are going to be reinstated.

I hope that gives you a little better handle on things. There is nothing evil about the Old Covenant. It is there for our use. Very much that has to do with the Old Covenant does not teach us a great deal, but it does teach us spiritual principles that are important for us to understand, become a part of our knowledge, and become part of that which we need to make proper judgments regarding ethical and moral circumstances that come across in living our life.

God's Word just continues right on, and we are to use it in order to bring glory and honor to Him. We may have to think things through pretty clearly from time to time, but always catch the principle that is involved here. All these things that are given in this Book are for us to use in judging, so that we make the very best use of God's Word. And to come to the concept that things are done away is going to severely cut into your ability to make good judgments. There is much to learn there in the Old Covenant. It is there for

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us to make good use of.