

Why We Believe What We Believe

By Wesley White
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I received this on the internet recently. It was written by a man named Emo Philips.

In a conversation with a person I had recently met, I asked him, "Are you Protestant or Catholic?" My new acquaintance replied, "Protestant." I said, "Me too. What franchise?" He answered, "Baptist." I said, "Me too." I said, "Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?" He said, "Northern Baptist." I shouted, "Me too."

We continued back and forth like this until finally I asked, "Northern conservative fundamentalist Baptist, Great Lakes Region, Council of 1879? Or Northern conservative fundamentalist Baptist, Great Lakes Region, Council of 1912?"

He replied, "Northern conservative fundamentalist Baptist, Great Lakes Region, Council of 1912."

I said, "Die, heretic. Just die."

When so many people in the world look at us in the Sabbath-keeping Church of God community, many times they laugh over the disagreements we have **within** the Sabbath-keeping community. The differences that we have with other Sabbath-keeping churches are many times imperceptible to others outside the Church in the same way that you and I are not able to fully understand differences between the two conferences called Northern conservative fundamentalist Baptist, Great Lakes Region, Councils of 1879 and 1912 .

So let's ask this question. Is it wrong that we have different beliefs within the Body of Christ? Absolutely not. Each person has to come to his own conclusions about what God's Word teaches. When the day comes that I must stand before my Savior Jesus, I can't point a finger at some other person or some group and say, "I only believed what I believed because that

person or that group told me to.” No, I will have to account for my actions and my beliefs all by myself.

The Bible is clear when it says in Philippians 2:12 that each of us is to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling.

So let’s briefly talk about beliefs. We should never merely consider **what** we believe. More importantly, we should always understand **why** we believe what we believe.

William Jennings Bryan

We begin our study by looking at a famous man from American history. His name was William Jennings Bryan. Bryan was one of the great orators of American history. At the Democratic National Convention of 1896, Bryan gave his famous speech called, “Cross of Gold.” The Cross of Gold speech is considered by many historians to be in the top 10 of great American speeches. It is considered secondary only to the great speeches such as:

“We have nothing to fear but fear itself” by Franklin Roosevelt..

“I have a dream” by Martin Luther King.

“Ich Bin Ein Berliner” by John Kennedy.

“A house divided against itself cannot stand” by Abraham Lincoln.

Bryan was not just an outstanding orator. He was an outstanding individual. He was nominated for the Presidency by the Democratic Party three times. He was one of the main forces behind the election of Woodrow Wilson as President. He served as Secretary of State. Bryan was one of the movers and shakers behind reforms such as women’s suffrage, Prohibition, elected U.S. Senators, and the income tax. The guy had a lot going for him.

In his old age, he got out of politics and was one of the proponents of the then-fledgling movement called Christian Fundamentalism. At that time, he got involved in the Scopes trial where the state of Tennessee prosecuted John Scopes for teaching evolution in a public school. In the trial, Bryan was called to the stand for the prosecution.

And when it came time for his cross examination, Bryan (an extremely intelligent man—an extremely accomplished man—an extremely gifted man) was totally and completely humiliated by defense attorney Clarence Darrow.

Yes, Scopes was ultimately found guilty and fined \$100 for teaching evolution in a public school. And \$100 was a fair sum of money at that time.

But the prosecution’s victory was hollow because of Bryan’s being devastated by Darrow’s questions that he couldn’t answer. Bryan proved to be a man of strong religious conviction, but he was also shown to be a man who couldn’t back up **WHY** he believed what he believed.

Bryan’s demonstrated ignorance during his testimony and the resulting publicity set the Fundamentalist movement back by years. He and his movement suffered from the worst publicity nightmare imaginable. It was so bad that, as a result of his public humiliation, WJB died five days after the end of the trial. He was only 65.

Again, Bryan had strong beliefs. But he had no idea **WHY** he believed what he believed. I look at his life story and I can’t help but compare it to some men in Scripture who we see live great lives in the beginning and then they blow it at the end. Jeroboam is a prime example of this problem. All through the books of the Kings the Chronicles , we read how Jeroboam lives this exemplary life. He does wonderful things on behalf of his God and on behalf of the nation of Israel. But then he blows it toward the end of his life when he takes the ten northern tribes into idolatry.

Scriptural Examples

We see this happen with other men of Scripture such as Joab, Saul, and Solomon. It's obvious that these Bible characters had not fully internalized their belief systems. The foundations of their belief systems were built on sand. And when waters of difficulty arose, their belief systems were washed away.

We can learn from these examples. Because many Christians have faithfully served God for decades. Many Christians have lived exemplary lives. Many Christians were called by God as young men and women and have done some wonderful works in the name of Jesus. If you are one of these people, you don't want to blow it at the end like William Jennings Bryan, Joab, Saul, and Solomon.

And this is why it's important that we not only know what we believe. We must also know WHY we believe what we believe.

Years ago, one church had numerous hearing sermons where it was claimed that that Church was superior to other nominal Christian churches because those believers didn't **only** follow the teachings of the New Testament. It was proudly boasted in sermons that those members followed ALL the laws of the Old Testament as well. Well, guess what? That church didn't follow all the laws of the Old Testament!

Letter to Dr. Laura

If you think you follow all the laws of the Old Testament in addition to the laws of the New testament, let's look at an actual letter that was written to Dr. Laura Schlesinger. Reading this letter is not an attempt to diminish the teachings of Dr. Schlesinger. She helps many people every day. But we have to acknowledge that this letter asks some excellent questions.

Dear Dr. Laura,

Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's law. I have learned a great deal from you and I try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind them that Lev 18:22 clearly states it is an abomination. End of debate.

I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some of the other specific OT laws and how to best follow them.

1) When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odor for the Lord as stated in Lev 1:9. The problem is my neighbors. They claim the odor is not pleasing to them. How should I deal with this?

2) I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as it suggests in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?

3) I know that I am allowed no contact whatsoever with any woman who is in her menstrual uncleanness as stated in Lev 15:19-24. The problem is, how do I tell when a woman is in her cycle? I have tried asking this of women, but most get offended at my question.

4) Lev 25:44 states that we may buy slaves from the nations that are around us. A friend of mine claims that this applies only to Mexicans but not to Canadians. Can you clarify?

5) *I have a neighbor who insists on working on the Sabbath which is a violation of Ex 35:2 where it clearly says he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself or should I ask others to help?*

6) *Lev 20:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear prescription glasses. Does my vision have to be exactly 20/20 or is there some wiggle room here?*

I know you have studied these OT concepts extensively, so I am confident you can help. Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging.

*Sincerely yours,
(Signature)*

No One Follows or Rejects the Whole Torah

If you were asked these questions that were presented to Dr. Laura, how would you answer them? Again, this letter brings up some excellent points.

Question: What's the Torah? First five books of the Bible.

Question: How many laws are in the Torah. 613.

Question: In this day and age, who **keeps** all 613 laws? What group? What people?

No one! It's not possible to keep all 613 laws at this time.

Question: In this day and age, who **rejects** all 613 laws? What group? What people?

No one! Because every sane person on the face of the earth follows at least some of the laws in the Torah. Everybody who lives agrees with at least some of the Torah.

For example, the late Madelyn Murray O'Hare was the founder of the modern atheist movement in American. I never met the woman, but I have read from many sources that she was crude and foul-mouthed. Now, are all atheists this way? No. Over the years, I've met some atheists and agnostics who were very nice people.

Madalyn Murray O'Hare simply was not nice. She admitted it. She made no secret that she saw no need to possess Christian niceties in her daily life. And even though she rejected the existence of God and had language that included more barnyard references than the Farmer's Almanac, O'Hare believed it was wrong to **steal** and she believed it was wrong to murder. So, in this regard, on these two points alone, she was in agreement with the Torah which teaches against stealing and murder. Again, *no one* rejects the Torah completely. Everyone believes in some part of it whether he's a Catholic, Protestant, atheist, Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindu.

Some Christians claim they don't believe in the Torah or, for that matter, any of the Old Testament. They say, "Our church only believes in the New Testament. We believe that the Old Testament was done away with completely at Calvary."

One major denomination won't allow musical instruments in their worship services. Any instruments. Drums, guitar, piano, and violin are all banned. If someone points out to these people that there were all kinds of instruments in the Tabernacle and the Temple, these people reply, "That's the Old Testament and the Old Testament is only good for history. We only go by the teachings of the New Testament. And in the New Testament there is no approval given for musical instruments in church."

Interesting approach. Again, they say they are not bound by the teachings of the Old Testament—only the New Testament. But when you press them for specifics, they have a real

problem. You say, “Does this mean we don’t have to keep the Commandment regarding the Sabbath?” They emphatically say, “Yes. The Sabbath command has been done away with.”

So you ask, “What about the commandment about making graven images of God.” These folks aren’t so emphatic about this one because, while they usually don’t care for statues of Jesus, they don’t mind pictures of Jesus.”

So then you ask, “What about the commandments not to commit adultery or bear false witness? Shouldn’t we obey those two commandments?” At that point, they become befuddled and they meander things about how, if you’re converted, you just don’t want to commit adultery or bear false witness.” They say that somehow the HS guides you into this, but doesn’t guide you into keeping the Sabbath.

The problem mankind has with the Torah is that **everyone picks and chooses what they want to believe from the Torah.** That’s right. Everyone.

In the Sabbath-keeping Church of God movement, some say, “We don’t pick and chose.” Yes, we do. We have to be honest and admit that we all pick and chose. We just can’t agree with each other on WHAT to pick and choose.

We HAVE To Pick and Choose

For example, some people in the Sabbath keeping Church of God movement set up mikvahs for their wives. Some sew blue fringe into their garments. Some keep the new moons as high days. Some use phylacteries when they pray.

Dynamic Christian Ministries does not promote any of these things. But of those who do they say to the same thing we say to Sunday-keeping Christians. We say to Sunday keeping Christians the following: “We appreciate the parts of the Bible, but we think you reject too many things from the Old Testament.”

The interesting part of this equation is this: The Messianic Christians who use mikvahs, blue fringe, and phylacteries say the same thing to us. They say, “We appreciate the parts of the Bible that you keep, but we think you reject too many OT things such as new moons, mikvahs, blue fringe, and phylacteries.”

Bill Clinton is not the most popular person in the fundamentalist Christian movement. Some professing Christians seem to hate him. But I think we have to concede that not everything Bill Clinton has ever said was a lie. Bill Clinton once pointed out that, while there are New Testament condemnations of fornication, adultery, and homosexuality, we must acknowledge that there are far more references in the New Testament to helping the poor. Clinton stated that you can find several New Testament references that condemn fornication, adultery, and homosexuality, but he said that there are about 400 references in the New Testament to helping others.

Determining whether or not Clinton is correct might be an interesting Bible study for all Christians. Again, I think his point is well taken that Christians shouldn’t focus only on condemning sin. Christians should put just as much emphasis on helping the poor and doing other good works.

Every Christian needs to ask the question: “As I pick and chose what I obey and don’t obey in the Bible, do I place more emphasis on condemning sins of other people than I do on performing good works such as feeding the poor, visiting the sick, and helping the fatherless?”

I remember that TV show years ago called “Bewitched.” An annoying character on the show was a character named Mrs. Cravitz who lived next door to Samantha and Darren. Mrs. Cravitz was the ultimate busybody. She had pink curlers in her hair and wore a powder blue

bathrobe. She sat all day glued to the window watching her neighbors and trying to find fault with them.

Christians don't want to be one of those churches that has a bunch of Mrs. Cravitzes for members. We don't want to spend out time looking out the window to the world and condemning the people in it instead of doing what we need to do in our Christian walk.

When I was a kid, I'd look at Mrs. Cravitz on the TV and yell, "Mind your own business." If I watched her today, I'd yell, "Go help out in a soup kitchen."

Again, each of us needs to ask the question: As I pick and chose what I obey and don't obey in the Bible, do I place more emphasis on condemning sins of other people than I do on performing good works such as feeding the poor, visiting the sick, and helping the fatherless?

In other words, do I need to change? Because, until Jesus returns, questions about change should be asked daily by every Christian. And each Christian must all work out his own salvation through fear and trembling.

Two Interesting Examples

When it comes to picking and choosing, let's look at two glaring dichotomies. Here are two diametrically opposite extremes:

The first man really exists. He is not fictional. This man is REALLY into the Old Testament. He's a Sabbath keeper in Christ. He lives and breathes the Old Testament. He can read and speak Hebrew. He is very familiar with all 613 laws of the Torah. It is doubtful you find a man who keeps as many Old Testament laws as he does. Except one. **He is totally and completely against tithing.** He doesn't want to have to give any his money to any church group. So he embraces so much of the Old Testament, but rejects tithing.

Then we have the complete opposite. This is a preacher who I used to enjoy watching on TV years ago. His thing was GRACE GRACE GRACE. He wouldn't teach against homosexuality or adultery or fornication. He wouldn't teach the 10 commandments. He only wanted to talk about grace. To him, the Old Testament was a great historical document, but he claimed a Christian certainly wouldn't want to go there for doctrine. He taught that you go to the Gospels or the writings of Paul. He hated the book of James. He hated reading anything about doing good works.

So he rejected the teachings of the Old Testament. Well, almost all of them. There was one Old Testament teaching that he embraced with all his heart. Tithing! He taught tithing over and over. He would call his viewers insulting names if they didn't tithe to him. Again, he was the total antithesis of the other guy who hated tithing but loved the Torah. You talk about picking and choosing. In the religious world, people are all over the place when it comes to picking and choosing what they want to believe from the Bible.

So, have we provided enough examples and beat to death this concept of picking and choosing? Have we thoroughly demonstrated that there are all kinds of differences in approach to what is believed from the Bible?

Guidelines For Picking and Choosing

So, let's cut to the chase now. Why do we at Dynamic Christian ministries believe what we believe? I'm going to give you some guidelines that we follow on picking and choosing. Again, we don't follow all of the 613 laws of the Torah. We only follow certain ones. And here is why we follow the ones that I do:

1) Many people say that a lot of the laws in the Torah were only for ancient Israel. And this is true. But if a teaching in the Torah is also taught by the apostles after the Crucifixion, we need to follow it. For example, Exodus 20:12 tells us to honor our father and mother. Was this command only for the ancient Israelites? If you believe this commandment was only for ancient Israelites, you need to read Ephesians 6:1.

This is a command in the Torah that is clearly repeated by the apostle Paul **after** the Crucifixion. This command about honoring parents from the Torah is one that Christians are to keep even today.

2) Many people say that a lot of the laws in the Torah were only for ancient Israel. And this is true. And if a teaching in the Torah is also taught and practiced by God-fearers **before** Moses, we need to follow it.

For example, let's look at the laws of clean and unclean. In Leviticus 11 God tells the Israelites what animals they may eat and which ones they may not eat. God divides the animals into three classifications: Land animals, sea animals, and birds. He says you can't eat a land animal unless it chews the cud and parts the hoof. He says you can't eat fish unless it has fins and scales. And then he lists the birds you can eat and can't eat.

Some say, "Well, these dietary guidelines were just for the Israelites." They say, "These laws were only for the Israelites."

Only for the Israelites? Really? If that were so, why does the Genesis Flood account tell us that Noah took seven of every clean animal and only two of every unclean animal into the ark? Noah was not an Israelite. God gave Noah this instruction because the laws of clean and unclean were in effect long, long before the Israelite nation existed.

Some preachers actually teach that Noah observed the laws of clean and unclean because he was a Jew! Now, if a person ever tells you Noah was a Jew or if he says Noah was an Israelite or if he says Noah was a Hebrew, know immediately that you are dealing with an person who is woefully ignorant when it comes to Scripture. But again, there are TV and radio preachers who actually teach this.

You can't be a Jew unless you were descended from a man named Judah who was born over a thousand years **AFTER** Noah. You can't be an Israelite unless you were descended from a man named Israel who was born over a thousand years **AFTER** Noah. You can't be a Hebrew unless you were descended from a man named Eber who was born hundreds of years **AFTER** Noah.

Noah was not an Israelite or a Jew or a Hebrew. Noah was **NOT** bound by the laws of ancient Israel. But he was bound by the **laws of God** which existed from Creation, which were carried through from the antediluvian world, and which were taught to the ancient Israelites. And these laws are still in effect today!

This is the truth regarding the laws of clean and unclean. They existed thousands of years before the nation of Israel was created.

So again, I believe that if a teaching in the Torah was also taught by God-fearers before Moses, then we in the church are to keep it.

3) We can ignore any commands in the Torah regarding sacrifices. In the Torah, we find many instructions on how to perform sacrifices. We are told what days to sacrifice. How many of each animal to sacrifice. It tells us that some sacrifices are for sin—some are for thanksgiving—some are for yourself—some are for the nation—there were peace offerings—there were trespass offerings. But all of this killing of animals ended at Golgotha. And we know from Jeremiah 7:22 that God never really wanted this system of killing animals. He says that all

he ever wanted was for the Israelites to obey Him. But since they wouldn't obey, He set up the sacrificial system to remind them of their sins and to give them a preview of the ultimate sacrifice for humanity which was His Son, Jesus.

But we've got to be careful on adamantly stating that sacrifices have been totally done away with. Sure, we don't kill and cut up animals anymore. But Romans 12:1 makes it very clear that each Christian is to be a *living sacrifice* for our Lord.

This is the same principal of circumcision. The early church experienced confusion on the issue of circumcision. So in Acts 15 we see a council convened in Jerusalem in 44 AD to deal with several issues. As a result of the council, some now say there is no more circumcision. But actually Romans 2:29 circumcision is still in effect! The change is that it is no longer restricted to men. We now know that everyone—men and women—is to be circumcised. But we no longer get cut on physically, we are *circumcised of the heart*.

4) In the Torah we find instructions for how to conduct oneself inside the Temple and Tabernacle. It tells you who can go into the holy place, who can go into the holy of holies, how the priests were to dress, what basins to use, where to pour water, what colors to paint the place, on and on. But the Temple and the Tabernacle no longer exist, so these laws can no longer be obeyed.

5) The subject of vengeance is addressed in the Torah. In the book of Numbers, there are instructions on labeling certain cities to be cities of refuge. This means that, if you do something to cause a man to want to get even with you, you can flee to one of the cities of refuge. Once you make it there, your angry enemy has to leave you alone. But if you leave that city of refuge, he can hunt you down all over again. This whole business of vengeance has been done away with by the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus tells us not to seek revenge.

The cities of refuge are the same principal as polygamy and slavery. God never wanted these things practiced by His people, the nation of Israel. But he knew they were going to participate in these cruel practices, so he put restrictions and rules on these practices. Now that Christians have the holy spirit to guide us, these things shouldn't be a concern to us anymore.

Old Testament Prohibition Against Mixing Races

Now let's insert an important point here. Sometimes people ask me, "Didn't the Old Testament prohibit the mixing of races? Did the New Testament do away with that prohibition?"

The answer is that the New Testament..NT doesn't do away with race mixing because that was never any such law in the Old Testament because we can't find racism in the Old Testament.

When Genesis 6:9 says Noah was perfect in his generations, it does NOT mean he was racially pure. It means he was morally upright in his time.

When Ezra and Nehemiah broke up marriages, it wasn't because they were against interracial marriages. It was because these marriages were between God's people and pagans. God didn't care what genes got brought into the camp of Israel. He cared what evil religious practices were brought into the camp of Israel.

Leviticus 19:33 clearly instructs the Israelites to accept people of all races into their nation IF and only IF the person would become obedient to Yahweh. And Leviticus 19:33 makes it very clear that, once a person accepts God and gets his foreskin cut, the Israelites were NOT to treat him like a second class citizen. Instead, they were to treat him like he was born an

Israelite and just like he had been there from the beginning. Try as you might, you can find no racism in the Torah.

Rejecting the Torah

Let's insert another important point. We really shouldn't be too quick to look for reasons not to keep things in the Torah. The Torah had some excellent instructions for getting along with other people.

For example, Deuteronomy 19:14 tells the Israelites not to move property markers. Suppose an Israelite wanted a couple feet of his neighbor's land. Well, God said the people had no business going out in the middle of the night and moving the markers a few feet into their neighbor's land.

In man's history, we see that many nations were communal in that its citizens weren't allowed to own private land. Israel was not a communal nation. Each tribe had its own plot of land. And each family had its own smaller plot of land. The elders set up markers on the boundary lines of the properties. And Deuteronomy 19:14 said you can't move these markers because you have to respect the property line between you and your neighbor.

So, again, there are some really good laws in the Torah—many of which are still good today.

We See Through a Glass Darkly

Can we figure out all these things perfectly? We have to be honest and realize that we can't. If you encounter a person who says he knows all the answers to Scripture, you may want to remind him of Paul wrote in I Corinthians 13:12 where he said that, as we try to understand the Scriptures, we see through a glass darkly. We don't understand all this perfectly. And we are not going to in this lifetime. But we must try to do the best we can.

Also, it is important to understand that Torah does not really mean *Law*. It actually means *The Teaching*. There is a difference. Law implies some clear cut instructions. Teaching implies general guidelines.

As much as it makes us uncomfortable, we must admit that there are a lot of gray areas in Scripture that we just don't know all the answers to.

A good example of gray area is the Sabbath. Everyone who keeps the Sabbath cannot agree on every point on how to keep it. We agree that the Bible commands it, but we don't agree on all the finer points.

And this makes sense because the Bible only gives us two admonitions for the Sabbath: First, don't work. Second, don't forsake the assembling of yourselves together. Yes, the King James version of Isaiah 58:1 tells us not to do our pleasure on the Sabbath, but the word *pleasure* in 1611 meant something totally different than it means today. This Scripture is very debatable.

So let's get back to our two Sabbath admonitions: Don't work and don't forsake assembling.

After these two admonitions, there isn't much more Sabbath instruction for us in the Bible. Sure, we can find a lot more instruction in the Talmud. But the Talmud is the traditions of the elders that Jesus warned us to stay away from.

And, yes, there's the incident in Numbers 15 where they stoned a man for picking up wood on the Sabbath. But even in this chapter, we learn that there are two laws regarding the Sabbath: One for the Israelites who knew better. And another law for the ignorant stranger. So

even during the time of Moses, Sabbath keeping was not cut and dried. And this was in the theocracy where God was King over the nation of Israel.

For all these reasons, it's just not possible for every Christian to agree on things.

The important point is we shouldn't judge each other on these matters. Why? Because each person is to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling.

People who keep the law know that our keeping the law doesn't save us. Only the blood of Jesus can save us. But keeping the Law is pleasing to God that we do it. For this reason, we should continue to follow the Law of God—always studying, mediating, praying, and learning. Always trying to rightly divide the Word of God. We should never abandon we believe. And we should study the Scriptures diligently so we can always know WHY we believe what we believe.

For more information, check us out on the web. You can find us at DynamicChristianMinistries.org.

Or write to us at:

Dynamic Christian Ministries
PO Box 1062
Big Sandy TX 75755