Does 1 Cor. 5:7 teach we should keep Passover?

Apologetics · https://thebiblicalroots.org/answers/was-paul-commanding-us-to-keep-passover-in-1-corinthians-57/

No. In 1 Corinthians 5:7–8, Paul uses Passover imagery to teach a lesson about Christian holiness, not to command believers to observe the annual Passover festival. His point is that because Christ, our true Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed, Christians should live lives characterized by sincerity and truth rather than by sin and hypocrisy.

Some Christians understand this passage as an instruction to continue celebrating the biblical feast of Passover. However, the broader context and Paul's use of symbolic language strongly suggest he is speaking metaphorically rather than issuing a new command for the Church to observe the Mosaic festival.

The context is church discipline—not the calendar

The immediate context of 1 Corinthians 5 is not a discussion about feast days. Paul is addressing a case of serious, unrepentant sexual immorality within the church (1 Cor. 5:1–5). Using imagery drawn from Passover, he writes:

> “Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven... but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor. 5:7–8).

Paul's concern is moral purity within the congregation. Just as Israelites removed leaven from their homes before Passover, believers are to remove persistent, unrepentant sin from the church.

What does “let us celebrate the festival” mean?

The phrase “let us celebrate the festival” has led some readers to conclude that Paul is commanding Christians to continue observing Passover. However, notice how Paul explains what he means. He does **not** say:

- celebrate with unleavened bread,

- slaughter a Passover lamb,
- gather on the fourteenth day of Nisan,
- or observe the regulations found in Exodus 12.

Instead, he immediately interprets the imagery:

> "...not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

The "leaven" is symbolic of sin. The "unleavened bread" represents sincerity and truth. Paul is applying Passover imagery to the Christian life rather than instructing believers to keep the Mosaic feast. In other words, Christians "celebrate" by living in light of Christ's sacrifice every day—not merely by observing an annual festival.

Christ is the fulfillment of Passover

Paul begins by declaring,

> "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed."

This is the theological center of the passage. The original Passover lamb protected Israel from God's judgment during the Exodus (Ex. 12). That sacrifice pointed forward to Jesus, whose death delivers His people from sin and death (John 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:18–19).

Because Christ has fulfilled what the Passover anticipated, the emphasis shifts from observing the shadow to living in the reality to which it pointed. This is consistent with Paul's broader teaching that the Old Testament festivals were "a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ" (Col. 2:16–17).

Does this forbid Christians from celebrating Passover?

Not at all. Many Christians choose to hold a Passover meal or Seder as an educational way of remembering God's redemption in the Exodus and seeing how it points to Christ. Such observances can be spiritually enriching when understood in their proper context.

The New Testament concern arises only when observing Passover—or any other Old Testament feast—is presented as a covenant obligation for Christians or as necessary for spiritual maturity. Paul consistently teaches that believers should not judge one another regarding festival days (Col.

2:16–17; Rom. 14:5–6). Observing or not observing a feast is a matter of Christian freedom, not a requirement of salvation or faithful discipleship.

Why does Paul use Passover imagery at all?

The Old Testament is filled with pictures that foreshadow Christ. Paul regularly draws upon these images to explain the Gospel. Elsewhere he describes Christ as the spiritual Rock that accompanied Israel (1 Cor. 10:4), compares baptism to Israel's crossing of the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1–2), and uses Israel's wilderness experience as examples for the Church (1 Cor. 10:6–11). Likewise, in 1 Corinthians 5 he uses Passover as a vivid illustration of what Christ has accomplished and how Christians should therefore live.

The imagery is powerful precisely because Jesus fulfills the feast.

Key Scriptures to Study

- **Exodus 12:1–28** — The institution of the Passover.
- **John 1:29** — Jesus is the Lamb of God.
- **1 Corinthians 5:6–8** — Christ our Passover Lamb and the call to holiness.
- **1 Corinthians 10:1–11** — Paul uses Israel's history as Christian instruction.
- **Colossians 2:16–17** — The festivals were shadows pointing to Christ.
- **Romans 14:5–6** — Christians should not judge one another over special days.
- **1 Peter 1:18–19** — Christ is the spotless sacrificial Lamb.
- **Hebrews 10:1** — The Old Testament institutions pointed forward to Christ.

Objections & Misconceptions

Paul literally says, ‘Let us keep the feast.’
Paul immediately explains the kind of “celebration” he has in view: not literal unleavened bread but “the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” The entire illustration is built on symbolic language applied to Christian conduct, not instructions for observing the Mosaic Passover.

If Christ is our Passover Lamb, shouldn't Christians celebrate Passover every year?
Christians certainly should celebrate what Christ accomplished through His death. The question is whether that celebration must take the form of observing the Mosaic feast. The New Testament never commands the Church to keep the annual Passover, and Paul explicitly teaches that believers should not be judged regarding festival observance (Col. 2:16–17).

Didn't the early Jewish Christians continue celebrating Passover?

Many Jewish believers naturally continued participating in aspects of their cultural and religious heritage. The question is whether those practices were binding on the whole Church. The New Testament consistently distinguishes between voluntary observance and making Old Testament festivals obligatory for all believers.

Why This Matters

Understanding 1 Corinthians 5 helps us distinguish between **illustration** and **command**. Paul uses the rich symbolism of Passover to call Christians to holiness because Christ has fulfilled the feast through His sacrificial death.

The focus of the Christian life is not preserving the shadows but living in the reality they anticipated. Because Christ, our true Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed, believers are called to put away sin and live each day with the “unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

Recommended Resources

- Gordon D. Fee — *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*
- Anthony C. Thiselton — *The First Epistle to the Corinthians (NIGTC)*
- Craig L. Blomberg — *From Pentecost to Patmos*
- Thomas R. Schreiner — *40 Questions About Christians and Biblical Law*
- R. L. Solberg — *What God Has Made Clean*