

Sunday Facts & Sabbath Fiction

25 Reasons Why the Christian Church Worships On Sunday

by:

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This book is dedicated to the memory of my late father, Salvador Tardo, and to all seekers after truth everywhere.

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May the Lord richly reward their unselfishness.

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Let's Put an End to the Confusion

Many sincere Christians are confused about the Sabbath.

- Is keeping a Saturday sabbath incumbent upon believers today?
- Is Saturday or Sunday the correct day of worship, or is any other day acceptable?
- Was sabbath observance a part of the Old Testament law that was done away with at Calvary?
- Is Sunday the New Testament sabbath?
- Where in the Bible does it say that the sabbath has changed?

Such questions plague many Christians who want to know the truth and do the will of God. In fact, in ten years of pastoral ministry, questions about the sabbath have been among the most oft asked of this writer. Though volumes of material have been written on the subject, the crying need is for a thorough but concise book presenting the Orthodox position.* Since it is inconvenient and cost-prohibitive to produce large and expensive books for everyone with questions on the subject, we hope this effort proves to be the handy volume that fills the void.

* By "Orthodox position" we mean what mainstream Christianity has held throughout the centuries.

INTRODUCTION

The sabbatarian presses are rolling out a plethora of books, tracts and magazines, and their numerous radio and television broadcasts aggressively promote Sabbath observance, while denigrating Sunday worship. While many of their publications and broadcasts address a number of worthwhile topics and issues, the underlying theme of them all is that **sabbath keeping is necessary today**, either as a mark of one's salvation, sanctification or maturity. Many Christians have been confused by this unrelenting barrage from seemingly knowledge, Bible quoting sabbatarians, and many have even succumbed to their errors, and now spout the same mechanical sabbatarian phrases, such as "Sunday worship is the mark of the beast" or the "seal of Romanism." And while there exists a broad diversity within the sabbatarian movement, they virtually all believe that the true, distinguishing mark of God's end-time remnant people is sabbath observance. It is to all of these that this book is addressed. If this endeavor helps even one person to find the real truth about Sunday and the sabbath, if it delivers even one from the iron jaws of legalism, it will have been well worth the effort.

My prayer is that Christ, who through the influence of a good Christian book delivered me from the occult, will use this book to deliver others from the slow, hard, spiritual death that is legalism.

Here are **25 Biblical Reasons Why the Christian Church Worships on Sunday**.

1

JESUS ROSE ON SUNDAY

This is undeniable, since Mark 16:9 clearly declares,

Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week...

There is no avoiding the plain declarations of Scripture that affirm a Sunday resurrection.

Other versions translate this verse even more plainly:

Now Jesus, having risen (from death) early on the first day of the week... (Amplified).

It was early on Sunday morning when Jesus came back to life...(The Living Bible).

Now when He arose early on the first day of the week...(The Revised Standard Version.)

When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week...(New International Version).

After Jesus rose early on Sunday... (Beck, New Testament in the Language of Today).

Now after he had arisen early on the first day of the week...(New American Standard Version).

For over nineteen hundred years the Christian Church has been assembling for worship on Sunday, the first day of the week, because, among other reasons, it is the day of our Lord's resurrection.

In spite of such clear declarations of Scripture, however, some sabbatarians deny the Sunday resurrection, alleging that Christ actually rose on the Saturday sabbath. Realizing that the basis for many of the arguments favoring Sunday worship inheres in the Lord's resurrection on that day, sabbatarians go to great lengths to disprove the Sunday resurrection. An example of this is found in the writing of Frank Walker, in a book published by the Bible Sabbath Association. Walker said:

“The Resurrection did not take place on the first day of the week...Christ's Resurrection was on the Sabbath day and not on Sunday.”¹

As proof of his allegation, Walker says that the early morning visitors to Christ's tomb on the first day of the week found it already empty. To him, this means Christ had to have risen on Saturday. It never seems to cross his mind that it simply means Christ rose earlier on Sunday than the disciples arrived. Unfortunately, it is not that such logic escapes sabbatarians, but that most seem simply to ignore it. And remember the numerous translations cited earlier which state unequivocally that Christ rose early on Sunday morning? Sabbatarians ignore that also. In addition, church history unbiasedly records the belief of the Christians from the second century onward who observed Sunday worship because it was universally held by them that Christ rose on the first day of the week. This, too, is seemingly ignored by sabbatarians, bringing to mind the old adage,

“Don't confuse me with the facts, I know what I believe.”

But poor scholarship is always inexcusable among those who teach others. Unfortunately, as we shall see, there are many such examples among Sabbath keepers. How can a Bible believer insist that Jesus rose on the seventh day when the Bible he is supposed to believe very clearly states that He rose on the first day of the week? Simple. Whenever it suits them, they ignore the Bible! Plus, they ignore almost two thousand years of church history that virtually without exception records that the early church worshipped on Sunday, the day of the Lord's resurrection.

Consider what the *Zondervan Bible Dictionary* says:

“From 200 A.D. on we find no mention by the church fathers of the observance of the seventh day as the time for Christian worship.

After the resurrection, **which occurred on the first day of the week** (Luke 24:1; John 20:1), the disciples of Jesus quite naturally met on that day to celebrate the event. Jesus endorsed their choice by some special appearances on that day (Mark 16:9; John 20:19). The disciples in Troas worshipped on the first day (Acts 20:7)... That he [Paul] nowhere mentions the seventh day as a day for worship is evidence that it had been supplanted by the first day.”²

Edersheim, whose writings on the life of Christ have been considered by many to be among the most important records of Christianity, said in his comments on the Lord's resurrection passages (Mark 16:9; Luke 24:1; Matt. 28:1; John 20:1):

“It was the first day of the week — according to Jewish reckoning the third day from His death...the holy mourners who, in the gray of that Sunday morning, went to the Tomb.”³

The Sabbath had ended before the disciples left for the tomb!

That the Sabbath had already passed and the first day of the week had begun is plainly established in Mark 16:1,

And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had brought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.

The sabbath was “past” (Greek, *diaginomai*), which means, “to be through, i.e. be past, have elapsed.”⁴

The New American Standard translates it,

And when the sabbath was over....

And Williams renders it,

When the sabbath had ended....

The Lord rose from the tomb **after** the sabbath had ended. The disciples arrived early Sunday morning to find the tomb already empty, for

Jesus rose early on the first day of the week (Mark 16:9 NIV).

“The Lord rose on the first day of the week, and appeared, on the very day of His rising, to His followers on five distinct occasions.”⁵

No amount of denial can change the fact that Christ rose on a Sunday.

THE CHURCH WAS BORN ON SUNDAY

Interestingly enough, the Holy Spirit was poured out on Sunday, not on the Jewish Saturday sabbath.

Pentecost was reckoned as the fiftieth day from the “morrow after the sabbath” (Lev. 23:11,15). This would be the day following the first sabbath (i.e., Sunday) after the Passover. On this fact the Wycliffe authorities state,

*“It would mean that the waving of the firstfruits of a sheaf of grain would occur the day after the first weekly sabbath during the Feast of Unleavened Bread and that **Pentecost**, being fifty days of seven weeks completed (Lev. 23:15-16), **would always come on the morrow after the sabbath, that is, on Sunday.**”⁶*

Wycliffe states further,

*“Pentecost is regarded as the birthday of the Church. Since Christ’s resurrection fell on Sunday, Pentecost also fell on **the first day of the week** – the day on which Christians worshipped and continue to worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2).”⁷*

Smith, reporting on the birth of the church on Pentecost, says:

*“On the day of Pentecost, which in that year fell **on the first day of the week....**”⁸*

Sunday, the Lord’s Day, holds special significance to the Christian not only because of Jesus’ resurrection on that day, but because the church itself was born on that day. While this fact alone may be insufficient to undergird Sunday worship, it nonetheless weakens the sabbath’s so-called hold on the very institution born on a Sunday.

NO SABBATH COMMAND IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

We can safely assume that if God wanted His church to observe the Jewish sabbath, He would have done a better job communicating this to us. Surely, somewhere in the 27 books of the New Testament, we could find the mandate to “keep the sabbath” if it were important to Him and binding upon us. Certainly in 27 books there was ample opportunity for a sabbath ordinance to be mandated to the church if it were in God’s scheme of things.

Acts 15 Addresses This Very Issue

When false teachers tried to leaven the church with their law mentality, a council was called to address the matter and end the confusion.

The apostles and elders met to examine the teaching of these now converted, former Pharisees, who insisted that belief in Christ alone was insufficient for salvation. According to them, in order to obtain complete justification, it was necessary to be circumcised, keep the sabbath, and observe the dietary restrictions prescribed in the law of Moses (cf. Acts 15:1, 5-6). Isn’t it interesting, that these are virtually the same arguments of modern sabbatarians? Therefore, the early church’s decision should be both interesting and enlightening.

The apostles (who had traveled and ministered alongside the Master), however, found no merit in the legalists’ argument, and Peter articulated the Savior’s frown upon law keeping, declaring,

*...Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, **purifying their hearts by faith.** Now therefore why tempt ye God, **to put a yoke upon 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, even as they (Acts 15:7-11).***

The apostles considered a return to any aspect of the law a contradiction to salvation by grace through faith in Christ, as well as a yoke of bondage that God never intended His

New Testament disciples to wear! The decree of the unified voice of that apostolic council was,

... that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day (Acts 15:19-21).

It is important to note two significant findings of the apostolic band from this passage:

1. The Gentile church is not told to observe the Jewish sabbath.

If such an observance were required of them, this would have been the perfect opportunity to disclose it, because this discussion dealt exclusively with the Old Testament law's bearing upon the New Testament believer. But the apostolic conference determined that **no aspect of the law was in force for the Christian:** not circumcision, not the Jewish dietary restrictions, and **certainly not the sabbath.** Dear Bible believer, if the early church removed itself from this obligation, how has the twentieth century church re-inherited it?

2. Why should the church preach Moses? (Acts 15:21)

That is, why should Christians preach laws, restrictions, diets, and day observances? That's Moses! That's Old Testament law! They concluded that there are enough Jews in the world preaching law, but we (the church) shall preach grace through Christ Jesus.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon said,

"I am no preacher of the old legal Sabbath. I am a preacher of the gospel. The Sabbath of the Jew is to him a task; the Lord's day of the Christian, **the first day of the week**, is to him a joy, a day of rest, of peace, and of thanksgiving."⁹

JESUS CANCELLED THE SABBATH!

The words used in **John 5:18** to describe exactly what Jesus did are extremely significant.

*And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day. But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because **he not only had broken the sabbath**, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God (John 5:16-18).*

The expression, “he (Jesus) had broken the sabbath” actually declares that **Jesus had done nothing less than cancel the sabbath commandment!**

Numerous Greek scholars have stated this to be true. For instance,

- A. *M.R. Vincent translates “had broken’ literally: was loosing: the imperfect tense. Not, broke the sabbath in any particular case, but **was annulling the law and duty of sabbath observance.**”¹⁰*
- B. “This is exactly what John meant. This word translated ‘was loosing’ has profound legal significance to its meaning in contexts dealing with laws or judicial decisions. It is the same word used in Matthew 16:19: ‘Whatsoever you shall *loose* on earth *shall have been loosed* in heaven.’ It was also used to show a legal divorce in the New Testament Church. ‘Art thou *loosed* from a wife’ (1 Cor. 7:27). It also was used to describe the destruction of this world system. ‘Seeing then that all these things *shall be dissolved*...wherein the heavens being on fire *shall be dissolved*’ (2Pet. 3:11-12). It was even translated as ‘destroy’. ‘The Son of God was manifested that he might *destroy* the works of the devil’ (1 John 3:8). And as Vincent said, it meant in Greek to annul the laws and duty of sabbath observance.”¹¹
- C. Noted Greek authority, W.E. Vine, translates it, “to loosen, especially by way of deliverance, sometimes has the meaning of breaking, destructively, e.g., of breaking commandments, not only infringing them, but **loosing the force of them, rendering them not binding.**”¹²

D. Bullinger defines it, “to loose, loosen, unbind, unfasten,”¹³ and Arndt and Gingrich translate it, “1. loose, untie; 2. set free, release, be set free from bond; 3. break up; 4. destroy, bring to an end, abolish, do away with. Of commandments, laws, statements (it means to), repeal, annul, abolish, **abolish the sabbath.**”¹⁴

Thus we see that **in John 5:18, Jesus is accused, not merely of breaking the sabbath, but of doing away with it!**

While it is possible to cite other such scholarly renditions, they only become redundant. The point is clearly made. **Jesus annulled, abolished, and did away with the sabbath forever. It is no longer binding on any New Testament believer.**

In fact, the whole law of Moses has been rendered inoperative.

The New Testament message is clear for all who have “ears to hear.” The whole of the law of Moses has been rendered inoperative by the death of the Lord Jesus. The law, in its entirety, no longer has any immediate and forensic authority or jurisdiction whatsoever over anyone. This is evident in three ways:

First, from Romans 10:4:

For Christ is the end of the law unto righteousness to every one that believeth.

Christ is the complete end and fulfillment of all of the law’s 613 commandments, ending their jurisdiction over us completely. We are no longer justified through law keeping:

Yet knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we believed on Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law: because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified (Gal. 2:16).

Neither is there sanctification, perfection, or maturity found in law keeping:

For the law made nothing perfect, and a bringing in therefore of a better hope, through which we draw nigh unto God (Heb. 7:19).

Furthermore, the rending of the veil at the moment of Christ’s death powerfully demonstrated an end to the Old Covenant, and the beginning of the New.

And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent (Matt. 27:51).

In this unmistakable action, God showed that the way to Him was wonderfully opened (Heb. 10:14-26). No longer was there any need for a priesthood, altars, temples, rites, or

sacrifices. Christ had finished, once for all, the work of salvation by His death on the cross. (Heb. 7:27, 10:10; Rom. 6:10).

“The earthquake reminds us of what happened at Mount Sinai when God gave the law to Moses (Exod. 19:16ff). The earthquake at Calvary signified that the demands of the law had been met and the curse of the law forever abolished (Heb. 12:18-24). The torn veil indicates that He conquered sin; the earthquake suggests that He conquered the law and fulfilled it...”¹⁵

Friend, if God intended for the law to continue to hold jurisdiction over us, why did He personally tear it down?

Thus, we see that to continue to observe the law’s sabbath is not a mark of maturity, obedience or sanctification. It is a mark of biblical ignorance.

Second, we find that the law was never intended to be a permanent administration, but rather a temporary one:

What then is the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise hath been made...(Gal. 3:19).

Paul, in this context, refers to the law of Moses as an addition to God’s covenant with Abraham. It was added for the express purpose of revealing the holiness of God and the sinful nature of men, in order to make men know just how sinful they really were. Paul said in Romans 7:7:

If it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin (RSV).

So the law was intended as a temporary measure until the seed (Christ) came. Now that He has come, the law has lost its *raison d’etre*. Romans 3:20-21 reinforces this fact:

*Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God **without the law** is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets.*

Third, Christ introduced a new priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, not after the order of Aaron. While the Mosaic Law provided the basis for a Levitical Priesthood, the New Covenant provided a new order of priests:

Now if there was perfection through the Levitical priesthood (for under it hath the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should arise after the order of Melchizedek, and not be

reckoned after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.... For there is a disannulling of a foregoing commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness (Heb. 7:11-12,18).

The law of Moses has been disannulled in favor of a new law, which is the basis for the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek.

Fruchtenbaum well said,

“The law is a unit comprised of 613 commandments, and all of it has been invalidated. There is no commandment that has continued beyond the cross of Christ. The law is there and can be used as a teaching tool to show God’s standard of righteousness and man’s sinfulness and need of a substitutionary atonement. It can be used to point one to Christ (Gal. 3:23-25). However, it has completely ceased to function as an authority over individuals.”¹⁶

THE SABBATH WAS PART OF THE LAW GIVEN EXCLUSIVELY TO THE JEWS

Sabbath keeping was the “seal” of the Mosaic Covenant — God’s covenant with the Jewish nation. As the rainbow was the seal and sign of the Noachic Covenant, and circumcision was the seal and sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, so sabbath keeping was the seal and sign of God’s exclusive covenant with the Jews.

Rabbi Abraham P. Bloch, in his book, *The Biblical and Historical Background of Jewish Customs and Ceremonies*, makes this clear:

*“The rites of circumcision and the sabbath are equally **basic to Judaism**. Both laws are memorials to a **special covenant between God and the children of Israel**”¹⁷ (emphasis added).*

One of the first principles of Biblical interpretation is to identify and carefully note to whom the portion of Scripture you are studying was addressed. A failure to be honest and diligent in this first step is guaranteed to produce the type of confusion that has resulted over the very issue under consideration. Clearly, God is addressing Israel, and Israel exclusively, in the passages imposing sabbath observance. Note:

*Wherefore **the children of Israel** shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant (Exod. 31:16).*

Who is here enjoined to keep the sabbath? The children of Israel. Not the Gentiles, and certainly not the church! This is an Old Testament passage setting forth the sign and seal of the Mosaic Covenant – God’s covenant with Israel.

*Speak thou also **unto the children of Israel**, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: **for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations....It is a sign between me and the children of Israel forever...** (Exod. 31:13,17).*

The sabbath was imposed upon the nation of Israel alone as a sign of God’s exclusive (Old Testament) covenant with them:

*Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, **to be a sign between me and them**, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them (Ezek. 20:12).*

CHRIST FULFILLED THE LAW

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill (Matt. 5:17).

While sabbatarians infer from this verse that Christ intended to keep the law perpetually in effect, Jesus here declared that He would finish the law, bring it into its completion, end its tyranny over us, and thereby, fulfill it.

The Pharisees thought Jesus was fighting against the law.

He healed on the sabbath day, and ordered a paralytic to carry his bed (cf. John 5:8-11). Such burden bearing was forbidden (Jer. 17:21-22)!

His disciples stripped kernels of grain from the wheat fields on the sabbath, which angered the Pharisees (Matt. 12:1-8).

Jesus touched the leper (Matt. 8:1-3; Mark 1:41), an act likewise forbidden (cf. Num. 5:2-3; Lev. 13-14; Deut. 24:8).

Even the Lord's associations seemed contrary to the law, for He befriended publicans and sinners (Matt. 9:10-11).

But in all of this, **Jesus was not fighting the law, but fulfilling it**, placing compassion above external observances, and human need above legalistic conformity, for,

...love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom. 13:10).

While Jesus rejected the false, external righteousness of the religious leaders, who considered their mere observance of a sabbath day, or the giving of alms, or public prayers and fastings to be pleasing to God, Jesus fulfilled the law by love.

In fact, Christ fulfilled the law in several ways:

1. He fulfilled it in His birth, being born as a child, "made under the law" (Gal. 4:4).
2. He fulfilled it in His life, meeting its demands both as a child and an adult, for none were able to rightly accuse Him of sinning, and the Father was always "well pleased" with His Son (Matt. 3:17; 17:5).

3. He fulfilled the law by being love incarnate. Friend, God is love (1 John 4:8). The greatest of all loves was demonstrated in Christ, when He laid down His life for us.

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:9-10; cf. John 15:13).

We are therefore, likewise commanded to “love one another” (John 13:34; 15:12; 1 John 4:7, 11; etc.).

For he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law (Rom. 13:8).

4. He fulfilled the law by fulfilling all of the Old Testament types and ceremonies, so that they are no longer required of the New Testament believer (cf. Heb. 9-10).

5. He fulfilled the law by bearing the curse imposed upon the violators of the law (Gal. 3:13).

6. He kept the law perfectly, and now we fulfill it vicariously through faith in Him,

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth (Rom. 10:4).

Beloved, it is not by “walking in the flesh” (i.e., the observance of laws, rituals or sabbaths) that we fulfill the law and find justification or perfection. But we have His righteousness imputed to us by walking in the spirit, by simply trusting in Christ, who perfectly fulfilled the law.

That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Rom. 8:4).

Galatians 5:18 declares,

But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under law.

Note: There is no article “the” before “law” in the Greek in this verse. Thus, the New Testament believer is “not under law” of any kind, **including that of the sabbath!**

NO SABBATH OBSERVANCE BEFORE THE LAW

Sabbath observance did not exist before the giving of the law to Moses on Sinai. Though many sabbatarians zealously claim otherwise, there is no commandment to observe the sabbath before the institution of the Mosaic Law, and **there is no instance of sabbath keeping before the time of Moses!**

One zealous sabbatarian stated, “Although not mentioned by name, the sabbath was kept by the ancient patriarch Abraham.”¹⁸

Of course, such statements are utter nonsense, being totally insupportable by Scripture or any historical record. Nowhere does the Bible make such a declaration. For that matter, we may as well allege that Abraham observed Sunday, since there is as much Scripture for either position. It is unfortunate that some, in their zeal for sabbath observance, will stoop to the point of fabricating what cannot be found in the Bible.

Packer, Tenney and White, in their book *Daily Life in Bible Times* said:

“There seems to have been no observance of a special day of rest among the Hebrews before the time of Moses. The first mention of the sabbath is in Exodus 16:23, when the Hebrews camped in the Wilderness of Sin before they received the Ten Commandments.”¹⁹

“Remember the Sabbath...”

Sabbatarians claim that God’s command to Israel to “**Remember** the sabbath to keep it holy” (Exod. 20:8) indicates that it was something previously known to them, therefore they should remember or recollect it.

The recognized Old Testament Hebrew authorities, Keil and Delitzsch, however, claim otherwise.

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy, presupposes an **acquaintance** with the sabbath, as the expression ‘remember’ is sufficient to show, **but not that the sabbath had been kept before this.** From the history of the creation that had been handed down, Israel must have known, that after God created the world in six days He rested on the seventh day, and by His resting sanctified the day. **But hitherto there**

had been no commandment given to man to sanctify the day. This was given for the first time to Israel at Sinai.”²⁰

Therefore we see that God intended for Israel to “remember” the sabbath, by observing it in their future, and by recalling that God had rested on the seventh creation day. But they themselves had no previous knowledge of any sabbath observance.

The Method In Their Madness

Why would someone interested in keeping the sabbath insist that sabbath observance preceded the law? Because it could then be alleged that what predated the law could not perish with the law. Therefore, if sabbath keeping began at creation (as is alleged), and not on Sinai, then it escaped being nailed to Calvary’s cross (Col. 2:14-17) with the rest of the law.

However, this reasoning is faulty on all accounts. The first reference to any **human** resting on the sabbath is made in Exodus 16:23, where manna was given to Israel in the wilderness, which they were forbidden to gather on the sabbath.

The plain fact is, **no institution of a sabbath observance was imposed upon anyone before the giving of the law to Moses** (Exod. 16:23; 20:8; 31:16-17). Therefore, in the name of honesty and fear of God, let’s refrain from adding to His word what simply isn’t there (Prov. 30:6).

Did the Sabbath Begin with the Law?

Where mankind is concerned, yes! Sabbatarians deny this, however, stating, “What did not originate with the law could not perish with the law.” As hinted at previously, they refer instead to God’s own seventh day rest at creation as the original institution of the sabbath. **But the Genesis account of God’s rest on the sabbath day was never imposed on anyone until the Exodus of Israel from Egypt.**

This fact is made abundantly clear by the Word of God itself. When does the Bible specifically state that the sabbath was imposed?

Nehemiah 9:13-14 has the answer:

Thou camest down also upon Mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments: And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant.

The Bible reveals in unmistakable language that **sabbath observance was unknown to Israel or anyone else before the giving of the law of Moses on Mount Sinai**. Sabbath keeping was “made known” to Israel at Sinai! It therefore, could not have been observed by Israel or anyone in any way before then. Indeed, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and company were not even in a position to explain what a sabbath was, let alone whether they were faithful to observe it. Thus, we are certain that the sabbath, where service to God is concerned, was undeniably a part of the Old Testament law which God plugged into operation with Moses, and which had its plug pulled at Calvary.

Furthermore, several aspects of the law actually began in practice before their presentation to Moses on Sinai:

The priesthood (Melchizedek — Gen. 14:18);

The tithe (Gen. 14:20); and,

Sacrifice (Abel — Gen. 4:4).

All of these began prior to the law, were incorporated into the law, and were abolished with the law! Plainly, sabbatarians err on all counts in maintaining that the sabbath is still in force because it began before the law and thus was not cancelled with the law. In fact, if, as we have shown, it was not imposed upon Israel before the giving of the law at Sinai, but was totally unknown theretofore (Neh. 9:13-14), then it follows that the sabbath would stand less a chance of surviving a nailing to the cross than the already functioning aspects (sacrifice, priesthood, tithe, etc.) which died at the cross. And it certainly did end with the rest of the law at Calvary.

SABBATH KEEPING DIED WITH THE LAW

Every bit of the law was nailed to Calvary's cross, having been completed and fulfilled in the person and life of Jesus Christ.

Colossians 2:14-16 says,

Having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come....

What was this “handwriting of ordinances” that was against us? Was it not the Decalogue, written by the finger of God Himself, representing the whole law? Yes! And that handwriting opposed us in that **it only amplified every man's guilt and unworthiness before God.** It continually stood between us and God, declaring our trespasses, reminding us of our sins, disclosing our imperfections, proclaiming our guilt and demanding our punishment. The blessedness of the atonement lies in Christ's “blotting out” this handwriting. He rendered it null and void, cancelling its claims over us, erasing it, and ending its jurisdiction over us forever.

The Greek term employed by Paul in verse 14 is very strong. “Blotting out” is *exaleipho*, “to totally wash and wipe away.” Wuest translates it, “to wipe off, wipe away, to obliterate, erase.”²¹

Those of us who hold to a divinely inspired Bible are compelled to believe that God used a strong, intensive word here for a reason, to convey in unmistakable language the fact of the law's obliteration for the Christian.

Moffatt translates verse 14,

*He cancelled the regulations that stood against us — all these obligations He set aside when He nailed them to the cross.*²²

Since the Christian has been freed forever from the legal demands of the whole law, we must resist any attempts by legalists to ensnare us into new bondage to legalistic requirements. The apostle Paul vigorously drove home this point.

*Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration **or a Sabbath day**. These are **a shadow** of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ (Col. 2:16-17, The New International Version).*

Because we are complete in Christ (Col. 2:10), having found acceptance with God entirely through Him, He has dispensed with the former, shadowy elements that regulated meats and drink (clean and unclean foods), and “holy days” of any kind, **including the seventh day sabbath**. Not man, but God Himself dispensed with the sabbath, personally nailing it and 612 other legal demands to a blood stained cross. Not one shred of that law could fall off the cross and flutter down to the ground to be picked up again by sabbath keepers.

Therefore, the return to legal observance of the sabbath or law of any kind is retrogressive and prevents one’s acceptance of the only salvation God recognizes, the one provided entirely by Christ through faith alone.

Sabbatarian Subterfuge

Incredibly, many sabbatarians claim that the sabbaths that were nailed to the cross were the “ceremonial sabbaths,” and not the seventh day sabbath of the Decalogue. Resorting to a “two laws” theory to justify a continued insistence on law keeping, they claim that since the word “sabbaths” (Greek — *sabbaton*) is in the plural in the King James Version, it refers to the **ceremonial** sabbaths and not the weekly one, which, of course, they contend is still in effect.

But the evidence that Colossians 2:16 refers to the seventh day sabbath is undeniable.

1. W.E. Vine says:

*“Sabbaton or sabbata, the latter the plural form, was transliterated from the Aramaic word which was mistaken for a plural: hence the singular sabbaton was formed from it....In the Epistles the only direct mentions are in Colossians 2:16 ‘a sabbath day’ RV (which rightly has the singular), where it is listed among things that were a ‘shadow of things to come;’ i.e., of the age introduced at Pentecost and in Hebrews 4:4-11 where the perpetual *sabbatismos* is appointed for believers.”²³*

Vine thus reveals that, since the term is singular, its scope certainly includes the weekly sabbath.

2. Several Bible translations render the Greek “*sabbaton*” of Colossians 2:16, “the sabbath day,” **singular**, and unmistakable reference to the seventh day sabbath. For example;
- A. The New American Standard translates it, “a sabbath day”.
 - B. Beck — In the Language of Today translates it, “a sabbath”.
 - C. The Amplified translates it, “a sabbath”.
 - D. The Revised Standard Version translates it, “a sabbath”.
 - E. The American Standard Version, and the New International Version, both translate it in the singular, “a sabbath day”.

The fact is, the majority of translators, expositors and commentators render the term in the singular, making it inclusive of not merely some “ceremonial sabbaths,” but the seventh day sabbath as well.

3. The Greek word *sabbaton* occurs 60 times in the New Testament. In 59 of those occurrences, most sabbatarians generally agree that it refers to the seventh day sabbath. Only at this one occurrence in Colossians 2:16, however, do they insist it does not! In other words, the same word 59 times out of 60 means the weekly sabbath, except here, where the same translation would threaten the very core of Sabbatarianism! Here it must be pawned off to us as a reference to a “ceremonial sabbath.” This writer is unable to reconcile such tactics with honest biblical hermeneutics.

4. In his comments on Colossians 2:16, Alford says:

“We may observe, that if the ordinance of the Sabbath had been, **in any form**, of lasting obligation to the Christian Church, it would have been quite impossible for the apostle to have spoken thus. The fact of an obligatory rest of one day, whether the seventh or the first, would have been directly in the teeth of his assertion here: the holding of such would have been still to retain the shadow, while we possess the substance.”²⁴

The Sabbath is a “Mere Shadow” of Christ, the Reality

Paul declared the sabbath to be a prophetic “shadow” of the substance and reality of rest in Christ. In referring to the religious festivals, celebrations, and the sabbath day, the NIV translates Colossians 2:17:

These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

The Pulpit Commentary says:

“With St. Paul, they (the religious festivals and the seventh day sabbath) shadow forth prophetically the concrete facts of the Christian revelation, and therefore **are displaced by its advent.**”²⁵

It goes on to state:

“The sabbath of the Jews was typical, and therefore **was abolished in Christ**, and therefore, as well as for other reasons, the Lord’s day, which took its place from the beginning of the gospel dispensation, was changed from the last to the first day of the week. The sabbath day was so long and so deeply associated with the stated feasts, the sabbatical year, and the jubilee year of Judaism, that it partook of their typical character, and thus **passed away with the other institutions of Judaism.**”²⁶

Keil and Delitzsch say:

“But this (sabbath) observance is an institution **peculiar to the Old Testament**. At the same time, as an *‘entole tou nomou’*, an ingredient in the Sinaitic Law, it belonged to the ‘shadow of (good) things to come’ (Col. 2:17, cf. Heb. 10:1), **which was to be done away** when the ‘body’ in Christ had come. Christ is Lord of the sabbath (Matt. 12:8), and after the completion of His work, He also rested on the sabbath. But He rose again on the **Sunday**; and through His resurrection, which is the pledge to the world of the fruit of His redeeming work, He has made this day [Sunday] the *‘kuriake hemera’* (Lord’s day) for His church, **to be observed by it till the Captain of its salvation shall return.**”²⁷

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT IS ABSENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT!

Sabbath keepers maintain that the fourth commandment is as valid today as are the other nine. They declare that if murder, stealing and adultery are still sin in the New Testament, then so is sabbath-breaking.

Ellen G. White, the founding voice of Seventh Day Adventism, the largest sabbatarian denomination in the world, said,

“Some will say that the ten commandments were only for the Jews and that God did not want us to keep them today. They say that Christ died so that we would no longer have to obey the Moral Law of Ten Commandments. But if such a hideous thought were actually true, then we can now commit adultery, lie, steal, and murder our fellow men — with the full blessing of God and with assurance of salvation in Christ for having done so.”²⁸

These are the kinds of assertions that delude multitudes because they sound pious and authoritative. The truth, however, is that, of the Ten Commandments, nine are repeated in the New Testament, while one is glaringly absent, the sabbath! And of the nine that are reiterated, some are put forth with added emphasis. For example:

- 1.** The First and Second Commandments, prohibiting other gods and idols (Exod. 20:3-4) are repeated often in the New Testament (cf. Acts 15:29, 17:16; Rom. 1:25; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 10:14; 20; 1 John 5:21; Rev. 21:8 and 22:15).
- 2.** The Third Commandment, demanding proper reverence for God (Exod. 20:7), finds its New Testament counterpart in such passages as Matthew 5:33-37, and James 5:12.
- 3.** The Fifth Commandment, requiring respect for parents, and by extension, all authority, is a theme often reiterated in the New Testament in such passages as Matthew 15:4-9; Ephesians 6:1-3 and Romans 13:1-7.
- 4.** The Sixth Commandment forbidding murder (Exod. 20:13) is repeated in the New Testament in Romans 13:9; Matthew 19:18; and is intensified to include even the harboring of hateful anger in Matthew 5:21-22.
- 5.** The Seventh Commandment, prohibiting adultery (and all sexual sin — Exodus 20:14), is also specifically forbidden throughout the New Testament in such passages as

Acts 15:20; Romans 2:22; 13:13; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:9,13,15 18; 10:8; Ephesians 5:3, 11-12, etc.

Jesus added new insight into the constitution of adultery by forbidding the desire as well as the act (Matt. 5:27-28).

6. The Eighth Commandment, forbidding dishonesty (Exod. 20:15), is repeated in Romans 2:21; Ephesians 4:28; 1 Thessalonians 4:6; James 5:4; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20; etc.

7. The Ninth Commandment, condemning false witness (Exod. 20:16), is likewise found in the New Testament in Matthew 15:19; 19:18; Luke 3:14; and 1 Timothy 1:9-10.

8. The Tenth Commandment, denouncing covetousness (Exod. 20:17), is often repeated in the New Testament in passages such as Mark 7:21-23; Luke 12:15, 33-34; Romans 1:29; 13:9; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:10; Ephesians 5:3-5; etc.

Only the Fourth Commandment — the Sabbath — has no New Testament counterpart.

It is not spoken of as a prescribed observance anywhere in the 27 books of the New Testament, except when its observance by Christians is condemned by the apostle Paul (Gal. 4:9-11; Col. 2:16-17).

Isn't it incredible, that the very commandment considered by sabbath keepers to be central of the ten, the core of the Moral Law, and the one they seem to preach the most vigorously, is entirely missing in the New Testament! This conspicuous absence has caused more than one practicing sabbatarian to re-examine the scriptural basis for this belief and conclude that there is no biblical New Testament justification for preaching or practicing a sabbath observance.

SABBATH KEEPING IS THE “MINISTRATION OF DEATH”!

Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart...Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious. Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: And not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (2 Cor. 3:3, 6-17).

These verses devastate sabbatarian arguments and strip them of all New Testament validity. No one who reads and understands this passage of Scripture could possibly believe that God wants Christians to observe the Jewish sabbath or any other part of the law.

Incredibly, some sabbatarians look these verses in the face and seem to deny what they see. Walker, for example, says that Paul has no reference to the Ten Commandments here at all,²⁹ in spite of Paul’s explicit reference to a covenant engraved in letters on stone and delivered by Moses as he had the veil over his face (Exod. 34:29-35). Exodus 34:28, the immediate context, makes it absolutely clear that this **ministration of death** Paul referred to is the Ten Commandments.

Tables of Stone and Tables of the Heart Contrasted

The apostle Paul speaks of the superiority of his epistles, written, “with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart” (2 Cor. 3:3).

The meaning is obvious. Paul is contrasting the Old Testament law (represented in its entirety by the Ten Commandments) with the New Covenant of Christ. When God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, they were written on stone by the finger of God:

And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon Mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God (Exod. 31:18).

However, even if an Israelite were to read and try to obey the tablets, his heart and life would often remain unchanged. As Warren Weirsbe explains,

“The law is an external thing, and people need an internal power if their lives are to be transformed. The legalist can admonish us with his ‘Do this!’ or ‘Don’t do that!’ but he cannot give us the power to obey. If we do obey, often it is not from the heart — and we end up worse than before!”³⁰

The superiority of the New Covenant is affirmed in that the Spirit of God applies the Word of God to the **hearts** of men. This is what genuinely changes men’s lives, not merely reading or keeping an external law.

The Danger of Legalism

The danger of legalism is that it implies that by practicing mere external observances a person becomes spiritual. Such ideas produce the very evil fruit of spiritual pride and exclusivism that characterizes most legalistic groups. Remember that Paul’s message of grace produced an opposite fruit — that of repentance, brokenness, and humility. The gospel of grace tells us we are lost sinners who cannot save ourselves and that no amount of work we may undertake changes the fact that we are sinners in need of salvation, a salvation that was provided freely by Christ and can only be received by faith in Him (cf. Rom. 3:23-28; 4:1ff; 5:1; 6:23; Eph. 2:8-9, etc.).

The Letter is Death, but the Spirit is Life

*Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit; **for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life** (2 Cor. 3:6).*

Other Bible translations make it even clearer that the “letter” refers to the entire written law, including the Ten Commandments. For example:

He has made us able servants of a new covenant, not of a written Law but of the Spirit, because the written Law kills, but the Spirit makes alive (Beck —In the Language of Today).

The Living Bible translates it:

*He is the one who helped us tell others about His new agreement to save them. We do not tell them that they must obey every law of God or die; but we tell them there is life for them from the Holy Spirit. **The old way, trying to be saved by keeping the Ten Commandments, ends in death; in the new way, the Holy Spirit gives them life.***

One cannot help but notice Paul’s stark contrast in 2 Corinthians 3 between the law and grace, death and life. He reminds the church continually that the Old Testament law did not give life because it could not. Instead it brought death! (Cf. vs.7; Gal. 3:21) Not that the law had been unnecessary or unimportant, for what it purported to do, it did well: exposing the utter sinfulness and helplessness of man.

Since the law ministers death, why would anyone want to retrogress by retreating under it?

Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? (Gal. 3:3).

In other words, if you received the ministration of the Spirit (i.e., the grace of God which led you to repentance and salvation through faith in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ), then you “began in the Spirit.” What could possibly prompt you to think that you should return to the bondage of the law, to observe the sabbath, to “be made perfect by the flesh”?

Friend, not life, but **death is the result of sabbath keeping!**

The Ministration of Death!

But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away; How shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the

glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious. (2 Cor. 3:7-11).

This passage refers to Exodus 34:27-35, where God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses for the second time. (Remember, the first time Moses had destroyed the tablets.) When Moses descended from the mountain with the tablets of stone, he was unaware that his face shone with the glory of the Lord. That glory signified the very real glory of the Author of the law he carried, and it so awed the Israelites that they were afraid to look upon his face. Moses actually had to veil his face from the people until the glory faded.

Now, in the dispensation of grace, Paul revealed the deeper significance of that incident. He argues,

First, that if the law (the Ten Commandments which was “written and engraven in stones”) that brought death was glorious, the New Covenant that ministers life has to exceed it in glory! (vss. 7-8.)

Second, the law was “introduced with great splendor” (vs. 7, Williams New Testament), with a glory that was only temporary in that it was to be done away.

The temporal nature and glory of the Ten Commandments is typified in the disappearance of the shine from the face of Moses who introduced it. The glory of Moses’ countenance passed away when the occasion passed away, which points to the temporary nature of the dispensation of law, represented by the Ten Commandments. This was contrasted with the permanent nature of the Christian gospel dispensation (vvs. 7, 11).

Then, in 2 Corinthians 3:13-14, Paul makes a startling observation:

And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished; but their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament; which veil is done away in Christ.

The fact is, Moses’ face was veiled so the Jews could not see when the glory faded from his face. This typifies the law which itself has faded in the presence of the gospel. But a **spiritual veil** is still over the eyes of the Jews (and all legalists) in failing to discern that the past “glory of the law” has been abolished and superseded by the permanent, increasing glory of the gospel of Christ. Just as, when the glory faded from Moses’ face the Jews didn’t know it, so today the Old Testament has been abolished, and they still don’t know it. Its temporary glory was represented by the temporary shine on Moses’ face. The dispensation of commandments and law has passed, but they missed it fading and today remain ignorant of the new, permanent covenant of grace introduced by Jesus at the cross. Sadly, the legalistic sabbath observers are in the same boat. Blinded to the

fact of the fading glory of the Ten Commandments, they still row with the Jews in an outmoded vessel upon the stagnant waters of legalism.

In light of these Scriptures, how can anyone insist upon feeding at the very table labeled by the New Testament itself as the “the ministration of death” (vs. 7); “the ministration of condemnation” (vs. 9); the written letter that kills (vs. 6); the glory that “was to be done away” (vss. 7, 11); and “that which was abolished” (vs. 13)?

THERE IS ONLY ONE LAW!

Sabbatarians allege that there is a difference between the moral, civil, and ceremonial law. The moral law, they claim, is the Ten Commandments, written in stone by the finger of God and therefore still in effect. The remainder, consisting of prescribed rites, civil obligations and various rituals, commandments and sacrifices are lumped together as the civil and ceremonial law, which have been done away with. Some go a step further, concocting two laws; **one** given by Moses which was abolished at Calvary; **the other**, given by God (the Ten Commandments) still remaining in effect.

If one attempts to impose sabbath keeping upon believers today, a distinction must be created between the “law” and the “ordinances.” One must somehow separate the Ten Commandments from the rest of the “law,” which most (though by no means all) sabbatarians acknowledge has been abolished (cf. Matt. 27:51; Mark 7:15; Luke 11:41; John 4:23-24; Acts 10:15; 11:9; Rom. 14:1-12; Gal. 5:1-8, 18; Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 13:9-16).

This line of reasoning is vulnerable on three fronts. Two of them will be addressed in this chapter. The third is the subject of the next.

1. There is no Biblical distinction between a “moral” law and a “ceremonial” law.

The fact is, there is only one law! And that one law is monolithic — an undivided single unit! God gave only one law to Moses at two different times, not two laws at one time. That one law, predictably enough, included sabbath keeping (cf. Neh. 9:13-14). Neither the Father, nor the Son, nor the Spirit has given man, the recipient of the law, permission to dissect it like a frog in Biology class. These are artificial divisions devised by the will of men who want to glory in the flesh (Gal. 6:13) by salvaging portions of the law to observe and relegating what doesn’t suit them to the ash pile!

Commenting on this, Fruchtenbaum says,

*“It must be understood that **the Mosaic Law is viewed by the Scriptures as a unit.** The word Torah, ‘Law’, when applied to the law of Moses is always singular, although it contains 613 commandments. The same is true of the Greek word nomos in the New Testament. The division of the law of Moses into ceremonial, legal, and moral parts is convenient for the study of the different types of commandments contained within it, but it is never divided in this way by the Scriptures themselves. **Neither is there any Scriptural basis for separating the Ten Commandments from the whole 613 and making only the ten perpetual.** All 613 commandments are a single unit comprising the law of Moses.*”

It is the principle of the unity of the law of Moses that lies behind the statement found in James 2:10:

For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is become guilty of all.

*The point is clear. A person needs only to break one of the 613 commandments to be guilty of breaking all of the law of Moses. **This can only be true if the Mosaic Law is a unit.** If it is not, the guilt lies only in the particular commandment violated and not in the whole law. In other words, if one breaks a legal commandment, he is guilty of breaking the ceremonial and moral ones as well. The same is true of breaking a moral or ceremonial commandment. To bring the point closer to home, if a person eats ham, according to the law of Moses he is guilty of breaking the Ten Commandments, although none of them say anything about ham. The law is a unit, and to break one of the 613 commandments is to break them all.*

In order to have a clear understanding of the law of Moses and its relationship to the believer, it is necessary to view it as the Scriptures view it: **as a unit that cannot be divided into parts that have been done away with and parts that have not. Nor can certain commandments be separated in such a way as to give them a different status from other commandments.**³¹

2. *The term “law,” whenever it is used in reference to the Old Testament, never excludes the Ten Commandments.*

One cannot speak accurately of the “law” as though it were separate from the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments stood as representative of all the law to Israel, which is precisely what we see in the New Testament when it is cited as comprising the essence of God’s whole law (Matt. 19:16-20; Luke 10:25-28; Rom. 2:17-23; 7:7; 13:9-10; 1 Tim. 1:7-10). It was placed in the ark of the testimony where it represented the continuing covenant between God and Israel (Deut. 10:1-5; 1 Kings 8:9).

This is further seen in the use of the original language. The Hebrew noun, *Torah*, is translated “law” some 215 times in the Old Testament. It is used in the singular sense 172 times to refer to the whole law of God, and eleven times in the plural with the same meaning. It has particular reference to the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament, which includes the Ten Commandments), but is also used to refer to the entire Old Testament (cf. John 10:34, when Jesus referred to Psalm 82:6 as “your law” and 1 Corinthians 14:21, where Gentiles under grace are directed to Isaiah 28).

The two noted German Old Testament authorities, Keil and Delitzsch, point out,

“*Torah* is the sun and substance of all the instructions and all the commandments which Jehovah had given to His people as the rule of life. *Chuggim* (translated ordinances or commandments) are the separate precepts contained in the *torah*, including not only the ceremonial commands, **but the moral commandments also.**”³²

Thus, while the Ten Commandments may be seen to be distinct **within** the law (i.e., in that they were written by the finger of God, placed within the ark of the testimony, etc.), it is scripturally inaccurate to imply that the Ten Commandments are somehow distinct **from** the law.

As the late Walter Martin aptly stated:

“There are not two laws, moral and ceremonial, but one law containing many commandments, all perfectly fulfilled by the life and death of the Lord Jesus Christ.”³³

Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath Day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ (Col. 2:16-17, NIV).

SABBATH OBSERVANCE IS CEREMONIAL

*By its very nature, sabbath keeping is not moral to being with — it is ceremonial!
It is the ceremonial, ritualistic observance of a day!*

There is nothing “moral” about it! Additionally, sabbath keeping has no bearing on keeping behavior moral, as do the other nine.

If sabbath-keeping were a matter of morality, it would be repeated in the New Testament just as the other nine. But the careful observer will note that the sabbath commandment alone is strangely absent from the New Testament. Why? Again, because of its ceremonial flavor, which, along with the rest of the Law’s rites, rituals, ceremonies and observances, God has seen fit to dissipate at the cross.

That sabbath observance is clearly ceremonial is proven by the fact that it is not a moral imperative written in the heart of mankind.

Morality has a universal application to both Jews and Gentiles, and God Himself has written it in the hearts of all.

Romans 2: 14-16 says,

For when the Gentiles, which do not have the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.

Thus, all Gentiles, even those in the remotest corners of the earth who have never heard the law, never heard gospel preaching, never been to church, and never heard a missionary, still know that it is wrong to steal, lie, commit adultery and kill. They have an inner sense of right and wrong built into their being. They have a conscience, and are made to sense when they do wrong because God says He has furnished them with that capability, and written it in their hearts.

Though repeated sin is able to dull their perception of that law written in their hearts, they still know that murder, adultery and stealing are wrong. Their conscience tells them so.

The late John R. Rice perceptively wrote:

“But would such a heathen savage know by something written in the universal heart of mankind that his boy babies must be circumcised? Would his conscience, which never heard the Scripture, nor even heard such a matter mentioned as from God, tell him that it was right to eat beef or mutton but wrong to eat pork? Certainly not. Ceremonial laws were for Jews only and are not written in the hearts of people as is the case with the moral law. There is nothing in the conscience of people to tell them they must observe one day in seven as a Sabbath, and that this day of rest must be Saturday. No, no heathen ever feels impressed that he must keep the Jewish Sabbath or that he has sinned in not doing so, unless some man has taught him that. Conscience certainly does not teach him that.

Therefore the Jewish Sabbath, Saturday, is not the moral law written in the heart of mankind. It is ceremonial law, meant for Jews under ceremonial law, and for no one else.”³⁴

Thus we see that, even by their own definition, sabbatarians are guilty of observing a part of the “ceremonial law.”

Still Further Proof that Sabbath Keeping is not “Moral”

In his book entitled, *The Falsities of Seventh-Day Adventism*, Robert L Summer said,

“Let me give you some clear biblical evidence that the Sabbath observance was strictly a ceremonial matter. Perhaps the strongest argument lies in the fact that God Himself listed it as such. In Leviticus 23:1-44, He enumerated His holy convocations. The first one He listed, in verse 3, was the seventh day sabbath, which He identified as “an holy convocation.” Following that, as further “holy convocations” (vs.4), He listed the passover sabbath, the unleavened bread sabbath, the first-fruits sabbath, the wave-offering sabbath, the blowing of trumpets sabbath, the day of atonement sabbath and the feast of tabernacles sabbath. Common rules of honest interpretation demand that, if all the others are ceremonial, then the first one listed, the seventh-day sabbath, is ceremonial also.”³⁵

Summer then goes on to probe the faulty reasoning of typical sabbath observing groups who make token claims of recognizing those who worship Christ on Sunday as genuine brothers in Christ.

“I am curious about your understanding of the sabbath as a moral law. You say that I am your brother in Christ, yet you know that I do not observe the seventh day, repudiating any suggestion that it is a command for people today. How can you consider me a Christian? According to your

philosophy, I am grievously sinning against God two days out of every seven. I sin on the first day of the week because I honor God on Sunday, which is the mark of the beast.³⁶ And I sin on the seventh day because I fail to obey God's command about rest on that day. So I am grievously sinning 104 days out of every 365. Could you consider me a good Christian if I violated any of the other nine commandments in such a manner? Would you consider me your brother in Christ if I committed adultery 104 times a year? What if I robbed banks 104 days out of every 365? Quite frankly, I do not think you have thought the matter through very clearly.

Trying to make the sabbath observance a moral commandment is fraught with all kinds of problems. For example, if it is a matter of morality, how come another day is satisfactory with God? Romans 14:5-6 makes it very clear that men may differ on the day if it is regarded unto the Lord.

If sabbath observance is a moral matter, why did it apply to animals (Exod. 30:10)?

If sabbath observance is a moral matter, why are Gentiles denounced repeatedly throughout the Old Testament for other sins, yet not one time for failing to keep the sabbath (and we know they did not)?

If sabbath observance is a moral matter, how could it be adjusted, modified and amended under certain circumstances? Could the moral commands about murder and adultery be set aside? No, but ceremonial laws about unclean foods, the shewbread and the sabbath could — and were (Matt. 12:5).

If sabbath observance is a moral matter, why are all the other nine commandments repeatedly emphasized in the New Testament, yet nowhere is seventh-day observance commanded? D.M. Canright finds the other nine commandments repeated 109 times in the New Testament, yet the fourth never commanded once Not once is one warned he will be punished if he works on the seventh day, nor is he told a single time that there is blessing in keeping it.”³⁷

D. M. Panton has well said:

“An honest, if uninstructed error is very prevalent among the Churches of Christ, and affords the Seventh-Day Adventist the fulcrum for his lever. It is said that the ceremonial law, and the civil law of Israel, have been abolished but not the moral law, and that the sabbath as occurring in the Decalogue, is part of the unrevoked moral law of God. But,

(1) most remarkably no inspired writer ever makes any such distinction between ‘moral’ and ‘ceremonial’ law; the ceremonial law (e.g., Lev 19)

contains laws as purely moral as any in the Decalogue, and had we been delivered from the ceremonial, while remaining under the moral, Paul most surely would have said so — an utterance he never makes.

(2) The sabbath, in its nature, is itself a ceremonial law: the moral law is all law which appeals to the conscience, and needs no written revelation; but as to which day to observe, or whether to observe any day at all, conscience is silent. If we are to distinguish between the moral and the ceremonial law on the ground that one is passed, and the other still in force, then — as the sabbath is purely ceremonial law — it is passed. But the most important point still remains.

(3) I, as a Christian, obey all law that is moral in the Decalogue, not because it is the law, but because it is in the gospel. Worship of God only is enjoined fifty times in the New Testament: idolatry is forbidden twelve times; profanity four times; honor of father and mother is commanded six times; adultery is forbidden twelve; theft six; false witness four; and covetousness, nine times.

Paul, in all his fourteen epistles, never once names the Sabbath — except in a single passage where, classing it with the entire law, he declares it has been totally abolished. So the early church held.”³⁸

SABBATARIANS DON'T KEEP THE SABBATH

The biblical sabbath is inseparably bound with its prescribed ceremonial obligations that could be properly observed only by ancient Jews with their Levitical priesthood.

The sabbath was to be kept from sunset to sunset (Lev. 23:32). If within its time frame any burden was carried (Jer. 17:21), or fire kindled (Exod. 35:3), or cooking done (Exod. 16:23), the sabbath would be broken, the penalty for which was death (Num. 15). Were this law applicable to most sabbatarians, they would be exterminated, as the above stipulations are difficult to keep today. In this writer's opinion it would be hypocritical to "say and do not" (Matt. 23:3) by requiring others to keep what all must customarily break.

The Wycliffe authorities remind us that sabbath laws,

“specifically forbid the kindling of a fire for cooking (Exod. 35:3), and the gathering of wood (Num. 15:32ff). However, in keeping with the purpose of the sabbath, burden-bearing (Jer. 17:21ff), traveling (Exod. 16:29), and trading (Amos 8:5; Neh. 10:31; 13:15,19) were also forbidden.”³⁹

Do modern sabbatarians travel to their churches on Saturday? Whether they drive, walk or ride, they break the sabbath. Do they buy food to take home after church or stop at a restaurant to eat? Then they break the sabbath. If they cook at home on Saturday or even heat on Saturday what they cooked on Friday, they likewise break the sabbath. Whether they buy gasoline for their cars or buy a coke from a vending machine, they *ipso facto* violate the rules of the very sabbath they would impose on Sunday worshippers.

THE CHURCH ALWAYS WORSHIPPED ON SUNDAY

The Christian Church has since its inception worshipped on the first day of the week—Sunday, the day Christ rose from the grave (Mark 16:2,9).

1. This is evident in the normal practice of the church as recorded in Acts 20:7,

And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached to them....

This passage reveals the customary practice of the early Christians. Their own gatherings were held not on the Jewish sabbath, but on Sunday, the first day of the week. Their assembly was characterized by breaking bread (a term especially used to represent the observance of the church ordinances — the communion of the bread and cup (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 10:16), fellowship, preaching, worship, and prayer (cf. Acts 2:42,46).

Commenting on Acts 20:7, the scholarly JFB Commentators say:

“This, when compared with 1Corinthians 16:2, and other similar allusions, plainly indicates that the Christian observance of the first day of the week — afterwards emphatically termed ‘The Lord’s Day’ — was already a fixed practice of the churches.”⁴⁰

Matthew Henry, commenting on the same verse said,

“They came together on the first day of the week, which they called the Lord’s Day (Rev 1:10)...celebrated to the honor of Christ and the Holy Spirit, both on the first day of the week. This is here said to be the day when the disciples came together, that is, when it was their practice to come together in all the churches. Note, the first day of the week is to be religiously observed by all the disciples of Christ; and it is a sign between Christ and them.”⁴¹

Sabbatarians claim that the assembling of the church on Sunday, as recorded in Acts 20:7, does not reflect their normal practice. Instead, they allege, it was a special meeting called on Sunday simply because Paul was in town, and planning to leave the next day.

Isn’t it more plausible, however, to believe that Paul had planned specifically to be there and preach on Sunday, since Sunday was their normal meeting day, and then to leave on Monday to continue his journey? In fact, he had probably preached there all week long

(Acts 20:6). Indeed, in virtually every Christian church in the world, traveling ministers plan to preach on Sunday, and depart the next day.

Acts 20:7 is normal procedure, reflecting the already established custom of worship on Sunday.

2. *That the Early Church worshipped on Sunday is evident in that Sunday, the first day of the week, is uniquely designated, “The Lord’s Day” in Revelation 1:10.*

In this passage, the apostle John said, “I was in the spirit on the Lord’s Day.”

Hoekema aptly points out the original language in John’s phrase,

“en tee kuriakee heemera. The Greek word *kuriakee* is an adjective meaning ‘belonging to the Lord’; literally, therefore, the expression means: **on the day belonging to the Lord.** Seventh-day Adventists contend that the expression the **Lord’s Day**, as here used, refers to Saturday. In taking this position, however, they stand completely alone. These words have been understood universally as referring to Sunday, the first day of the week. They are so understood by the standard commentators, and by the standard lexicons.”⁴²

If we add to this the fact that the expression “The Lord’s Day” is used to stand for Sunday in such early Christian writings as the *Didachee*⁴³ and Ignatius’ *Letter to the Magnesians* (both written second century A.D.), we see on what flimsy grounds Adventists stand when they try to interpret these words as meaning Saturday. John’s statement that he was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day further confirms the fact that the first day of the week was now the one commonly used for worship.⁴⁴

3. *It is evident by the Bible’s record of blessed events that occurred on Sunday.*

Canright reminds us:

(1) On Sunday, Jesus rose from the dead (Mark 16:9).

(2) On this day, He first appeared to His disciples.

(3) On this day, He met them at different places and repeatedly (Mark 16:1-13; Matt. 28:8-10; Luke 24:34; John 20:19-23).

(4) On this day Jesus blessed them (John 20:19).

(5) On this day He imparted to them the gift of the Holy Ghost (John 20:22).

(6) Here He first commissioned them to preach the gospel to all the world (John 20:21 with Mark 16:9-15).

(7) Here He gave His apostles authority to legislate for and guide His church (John 20:23).

(8) Here this day became the day of joy and rejoicing to the disciples. “Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.” (John 20:20); “And while they yet believed not for joy...” (Luke 24:41).

(9) On that day the gospel of the risen Christ was first preached, saying: “The Lord is risen indeed...” (Luke 24:34).

(10) On that Sunday, Jesus Himself set the example of preaching the gospel of His resurrection by explaining all the Scriptures on that subject and by opening their minds to understand it. “Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27,41).

(11) Finally, on this day the purchase of our redemption was completed.⁴⁵

With so many blessed events occurring on the first day of the week — Sunday, how can sabbatarians refer to it as “common,” “heathen,” the “mark of the beast,” or the “pope’s day”?

Make no mistake, it is to the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day, the day belonging to the Lord, that John refers in Revelation 1:10.

HISTORY VALIDATES SUNDAY WORSHIP

All of the accounts recorded in early church history reveal that the church always met, worshipped, observed the ordinances, prayed and fellowshiped on the first day of the week — Sunday — the “Lord’s Day” (Rev. 1:10).

The writings and records of the early church reveal that the practice of Sunday worship was established with the apostles, and has been continued by the faithful ever since. For instance:

1. THE EPISTLE OF BARNABAS (about A.D. 100).

“Wherefore, also we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus arose again from the dead.”

2. THE EPISTLE OF IGNATIUS TO THE MAGNESIANS (A.D. 107).

“Be not deceived with strange doctrines, nor with old fables which are unprofitable. For if we still live according to the Jewish Law, we acknowledge that we have not received grace....If, therefore, those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord’s Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death. It is monstrous to talk of Jesus Christ and to practice Judaism.”

3. THE WRITINGS OF JUSTIN MARTYR (A.D.145-150).

“And on the day called Sunday all who live in cities or in the country gather together in one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read....But Sunday is the day on which we all hold a common assembly, because it is the First Day of the Week on which God...made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead.”

4. APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS: Church Life in the Second Century.

“On the day of the resurrection of the Lord — that is, the Lord’s Day — assemble yourselves together without fail, giving thanks to God and

praising Him for those mercies God has bestowed upon you through Christ.”

5. IRENAEUS (A.D. 155-202).

“The mystery of the Lord’s resurrection may not be celebrated on any other day than the Lord’s Day, and on this alone should we observe the breaking off of the Paschal Feast.”⁴⁶

As a matter of fact, the first day of the week — The Lord’s Day — was selected not in place of the sabbath, but as a day in which to celebrate our Lord’s death and resurrection.

One writer said,

“It is a day of thanksgiving and liberty to the Christians, and a day which they delight in regarding it as unto the Lord (Rom. 16:6). It is the Lord’s Day, as John called it in Revelation 1:10. On that day Jesus rose the Head of a new creation. On the Lord’s Day He appeared to His disciples. On the Lord’s Day the Holy Ghost was given. On the Lord’s Day the door of the kingdom was unlocked and 3,000 souls entered in. On the Lord’s Day the disciples came together to break bread in remembrance of Him (Acts 20:7).”⁴⁷

6. THE EPISTLE TO DIOGNETUS (A.D. 150).

“But again (the Jewish) scruples concerning meats, and their superstition relating to the sabbath and the vanity of their circumcision and the dissimulation of their fasting and new moons, I do [not] suppose you need to learn from me, are ridiculous and unworthy of any consideration.”⁴⁸

7. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA (A.D. 174).

“The old seventh day has become nothing more than a working day.”

8. BARDESANES (A.D. 180).

In his book of the *Laws of the Countries*, he states, “On one day, the first day of the week, we assemble ourselves together.”

9. TERTULLIAN (A.D. 200).

In his *Apologeticus*:

“In the same way if we devote Sunday to rejoicing, from a far different reason than sun-worship, we have some resemblance to some of you ‘The Jews’, who devote the day of Saturn (Saturday) to ease and luxury.”

In another of his works he says:

“He who argues for Sabbath keeping and circumcision must show that Adam and Abel and the just of old times observed these things.”

10. ORIGEN (A.D. 185-255).

“John the Baptist was born to make ready a people for the Lord, a people fit for Him at the end of the Covenant now grown old, which is the end of the Sabbath.”

He further says,

“It is one of the marks of a perfect Christian to keep the Lord’s Day.”

11. VICTORIANUS (A.D. 300).

“On the Lord’s Day we go forth to our bread with the giving of thanks. Lest we should appear to observe any Sabbath with the Jews, which Christ Himself the Lord of the Sabbath in His body abolished” (*On the Creation of the World*, section 14).

12. PETER, BISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA (A.D. 306).

“But the Lord’s Day we celebrate as the day of joy because on it He rose again.”⁴⁹

The early church historian, Henry Chadwick, says:

“Each Sunday they met for their ‘thanksgiving’ in which the baptized ate bread and drank wine in a sacred meal....”⁵⁰

And Philip Schaff, in his thorough *History of the Christian Church* says,

“The celebration of the Lord’s Day in memory of the resurrection of Christ **dates undoubtedly from the apostolic age**. Nothing short of apostolic precedent can account for the universal religious observance in the churches of the second century. **There is no dissenting voice**. This custom is confirmed by the testimonies of the earliest post-apostolic writers, as Barnabas, Ignatius, and Justin Martyr. It is also confirmed by the younger Pliny. The *Didache* calls the first day ‘the Lord’s Day of the Lord.’”⁵¹

Schaff further states,

“The fathers did not regard the Christian Sunday as a continuation of, but as a **substitute for, the Jewish Sabbath**, and based it not so much on the fourth commandment, and the primitive rest of God in creation, to which the commandment expressly refers, as upon the resurrection of Christ and the apostolic tradition.” **“Sunday,”** he said, **“was always regarded in the ancient church as a divine institution.”**⁵²

Thus, the entire weight of all early church history piles up against sabbatarians.

Constantine did not Change the Sabbath

The apostles did not keep the sabbath. The early church did not keep the sabbath. Therefore, Constantine could not have changed the church’s worship from Saturday to Sunday in the fourth century, as sabbatarians love to claim. As we have shown, all of the facts prove otherwise. Because the apostles and the developing churches always worshipped on the first day of the week, what Constantine did was merely a ratification of Sunday worship as a public holiday. The church had sanctioned and practiced it as the Lord’s Day long before the close of the first century.

“Sunday, the Christian day of worship, was observed from the very beginning of the Christian church. It was a radical departure from Judaism, which observed the sabbath (or seventh day of the week). The move to the first day of the week was to make a weekly reminder of the day when Jesus rose from the dead. Sunday was not observed as a public holiday until the time of Constantine (in the early fourth century).”⁵³

We must remember that Constantine was the first emperor to show favor to Christianity. Most of the previous emperors persecuted Christians, forcing them to assemble secretly on Sundays in order to worship. After Constantine’s alleged conversion to Christianity, he abolished all persecution of the churches, and actually showed them favor over other religions. His official sanction of Sunday as a day of Christian worship gave Christians freedom to assemble openly for the first time. Again, he merely made official what the early church had been practicing all along.

Therefore, to contend that the early church observed the Saturday sabbath until Constantine changed it to Sunday is to be misled at best, less than honest at worst.

Another historian writes,

“From the earliest time, Christians assemble regularly on the first day of the week....they called it ‘the Lord’s Day’, they also called it ‘the eighth day.’”⁵⁴

Dear reader, the historical records of the Christian church, from the first century to the present, unanimously name Sunday as the day the Christians worshipped. Shouldn't we do likewise?

SATURDAY WAS FOR EVANGELISM!

Every passage in the gospels and the book of Acts that shows the disciples gathering on the sabbath has to do with their outreach to the Jews. Remember, the gospel was given “to the Jew first” (Rom. 1:16-17).

Sabbatarians contend that the Book of Acts depicts the apostles as sabbath observers. Is this a valid contention?

No! We must remember that the apostles themselves were formerly Jews. On Saturday, Jews met and listened to spiritual instruction. What better time to preach Christ to them than on their sabbath? Indeed, what other day would find Jews congregating for spiritual edification? While the sabbatarians contend that the presence of the apostles in the synagogues on sabbath days indicated that they still kept the sabbath, once again, the facts prove otherwise. Historians in unison record,

“Preaching in the Jewish synagogues was a very common tactic in the age of the apostles.”⁵⁵

Most evangelical Christians occasionally hold various evangelistic campaigns, special meetings, seminars, and gatherings on Saturday. They canvass neighborhoods, distribute literature, witness and share Christ at every available opportunity, often on Saturdays. Why? Not because they are observing the sabbath, but because they are observing the great commission (Mark 16:15ff; Matt. 28:19-20), and because most people are not working on weekends, presenting Christians with a good opportunity to reach others for Christ.

Likewise, in every instance when the disciples gathered on sabbath days, it was to preach Christ to unsaved sabbath observing Jews!

Acts 13:14 is often quoted by sabbatarians as alleged “proof” of sabbath keeping Christian apostles.

But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down (Acts 13:14).

However they would do well to keep reading, for in verse 16 the apostle Paul stood up in the synagogue on the sabbath, and preached Christ to them (vss. 16-41). He returned the next sabbath and did the same thing (vss.44-49), this time preaching an open air meeting that drew almost the whole city. The motive? Evangelism, not worship. If worship was

his reason for being there, he certainly would not have taken it upon himself to proclaim the gospel of the very liberty the sabbath sought to prohibit. He was no more a sabbath keeper than Billy Graham, who, by the way, also occasionally holds campaigns to reach the lost on Saturdays.

The same basic procedure is followed in Acts 16:13 where we read,

And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.

In this case Paul's strategy paid off again. Lydia of Thyatira received the message of Christ and was gloriously saved, as was her household (vss. 14-15).

In Acts 17:1-2 we read,

They came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in to them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures.

Plainly, Paul's custom was to enter the Jewish synagogue on sabbath days not to **conform**, but to **reform** — to preach Christ! It was an evangelistic opportunity.

In Acts 18:4 we find Paul following the same procedure in the synagogue in Corinth, preaching Christ on the sabbath day to Jews and Gentile proselytes.

And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks (Acts 18:4).

On no occasion did the apostles come together simply to “keep the sabbath.” But on every available occasion they entered the Jewish meeting places on sabbath days and preached Christ to them.

This is fundamental to what Paul means in 1 Corinthians 9:20, when he says,

....to the Jews I became as a Jew....

And why? 1 Corinthians 9:22,

...that I might by all means save some.

Another point worth mentioning is that in every occasion where New Testament Christians are involved with the sabbath, we do not find the sabbath to be a “Christian day of worship,” but rather **a day of evangelism!** Thus, for the apostles and all Christian evangelists, the sabbath was a work day! One never reads of the apostles gathering on sabbath days except to preach Jesus to unsaved sabbatarians!

Furthermore, the apostles did not preach sabbath keeping! Isn't it interesting that a doctrine that figures so prominently in the theology and preaching of sabbatarians, and that is supposed to be so high on God's list of priorities, is entirely absent in the New Testament? Why didn't Paul deal with it as a doctrinal matter the way he did with **sin** in Romans 5, **giving** in 2 Corinthians 8, or **the coming of the Lord** in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5? Why didn't Peter or John preach it? Why can't we find it portrayed as obligatory in maintaining a covenant relationship with God anywhere in the entire New Testament? Clearly the answer is, because it is neither a New Testament commandment, doctrine, nor practice!

SUNDAY IS NOT THE “CHRISTIAN SABBATH”

Sunday is not a “Christian Sabbath.” New Testament believers are not mandated to “observe days.” Those who insist that Sunday is the “Christian Sabbath” are almost as wrong as the sabbatarians. The first day of the week is never referred to as the “Sabbath” in Scripture. Though many refer to it as such, they do so erroneously.

Who Changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday?

This is a favorite question of the sabbatarians. Usually, while making much over the Old Testament commandments of sabbath observance, sabbatarians challenge Sunday worshippers to “find in the Bible where God changed the sabbath.” Generally, Roman Catholicism is accused of changing the sabbath under Constantine. The facts, however (as we’ve already seen), prove that no one **changed** the sabbath. The early church simply abandoned it. They recognized it as a distinctly Jewish practice that held no bearing on the church.

Chambers said,

“Sunday was never to the early church what the Sabbath was to the Jews. For the first ten years of its existence, the church was entirely Jewish. These Christians observed both the Sabbath and the Lord’s day — the first day of the week, never equating the two or identifying one with the other. The Jewish Christians, as long as they were permitted to do so, kept the Sabbath in the traditional way. As the sun set on Saturday, ending the Sabbath, the Christian Jews gathered for the observance of the Lord’s Supper, fellowship, teaching, and prayer. The Lord’s Day was not a day of rest in the Sabbath sense. It was never, to the early church the ‘Christian Sabbath.’”⁵⁶

The Quest for the Holy Grail

In the lore of medieval times, chivalrous knights were said to have spent their lifetimes in search of the “holy grail” (supposedly, the cup or chalice that Jesus drank from when He instituted the Lord’s Supper). They believed that supernatural powers could be tapped, and even eternal life owned by merely drinking from that cup. Of course, such nonsense not only breeds legends and fairy tales, but also demonstrates carnal man’s innate attraction to some tangible item or object that is holy or sacred.

Sabbatarians seem to mount a similar quest for a “holy day” instead of a holy grail, one out of seven that is more holy than the rest. When reading sabbatarian literature, one is bombarded with such questions as, “Where does it say that the sabbath has been changed?” or “Where does it say that Sunday is sanctified or that Sunday is the sabbath?” etc. One can expect to wade through a plethora of Old Testament passages that record the establishment of the sabbath between God and Israel quoted and applied to Christians as alleged proof of its continuing special sacredness. But their very question reveal their misunderstanding of God’s whole dealing with mankind in the New Testament. In this dispensation of grace, no one day is holier than any other, just as no one place is holier than another. We can commune with God in an automobile, at work, home, school, or a church building just as confidently on Tuesday as on Sunday. Under grace, we have privileges far beyond what sabbath-bound Jews had under law.

Having therefore, brethren, boldness (liberty, free access) to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh (Heb 10:19-20).

Through prayer every believer can enter into the very presence of God Himself anywhere on earth, because God has taken great pains to declare unto us that no one place enjoys more of His presence than another. Likewise, no one day is exalted above other days in the New Testament (Rom. 14:5ff).

The Apostle Paul Specifically Refuted Sabbath Keeping

Paul was greatly concerned about the Galatian Church. They had fallen under the influence of the false legalistic teachers who were trying to bind the believers with aspects of the law. He wrote:

*But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the **weak and beggarly elements**, whereunto ye desire again to be **in bondage**? **Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.** I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain (Gal. 4:9-11).*

The Galatian Christians had been persuaded by legalists to revert to aspects of Judaism, including sabbath keeping, a reversion which did not draw God’s approval, but His rebuke! Their mistake was thinking that certain days or periods had some special holiness about them. Paul, however, under inspiration, set the record straight. And what does the record state? The Lord of the New Covenant is not concerned with a “holy day” any more than He would be concerned with “holy water” or “holy objects” or “holy places.” These things are ritualistic elements peculiar to ceremonial forms of man-made religion which are condemned without reservation in the New Testament. In the above

passage they are referred to as “beggarly elements” and “bondage” that result in vain spiritual labor. It is tragic indeed, then, to see sabbatarians clinging to a “holy day” under the New Covenant, when the Father is instead searching for those who will “worship Him in spirit and in truth” (cf. John 4:23-24).

Kenneth Wuest, an acknowledged Greek authority, puts it this way:

“The question, ‘How is it possible that you are turning back again to the weak and beggarly rudimentary things to which ye desire to be in bondage again?’ is a rhetorical one, the purpose of which is to show the absurdity of their actions. It also calls the attention of the Galatians to the ineffectiveness and poverty of their old religious system, contrasted to the power and richness of the gospel.”⁵⁷

That these deluded Galatians had reverted to the observance of the sabbath, holy days, and religious festivals prescribed in the Mosaic law is evident from Paul’s statement in Galatians 4:10 and verse 21; that is grieved him is evident from the strength of the Greek used there.

The simple fact is, and remains, that under grace, all days have been rendered alike unto God. God is to be revered, worshipped, loved, adored, served, and obeyed on the same level, and with the same intensity seven days a week. A church is not in sin holding services on Saturday or any other day. Romans 14:6 gives it that right. It becomes sin when certain groups approach the cross with a claw hammer and proceed to pull the nails out of Jewish rites that have been nailed there by a God who sought to institute and put into operation something better (Heb. 8:6).

No “Third Ordinance” in the New Testament

Water baptism and the communion of the bread and cup are the only two ordinances that the church has recognized throughout the centuries. This is because the New Testament is devoid of a third. Therefore, there is no “third ordinance” of sabbath keeping. In fact, there is no such thing as a special “holy day” anywhere in the New Testament, since every day is considered equally holy unto the Lord (Rom 14:5). When someone today insists on sabbath keeping, he or she is insisting that Paul’s writings were either erroneous or dishonest. Paul’s holy grail is Philippians 3:14, not the sabbath. What is yours?

I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:14).

SABBATH KEEPING ENDANGERS THE SOUL

Sabbath keepers endanger their very souls by attempting to return to the law and bondage.

In Paul's day, the church in Galatia had fallen under the influence of false teachers. Formerly Paul had ministered there with great success, and large numbers of people, mostly Gentiles, were converted to Christ. Shortly thereafter, however, certain Jewish teachers began to arise insisting that the Gentiles had to add law to faith in Christ in order to be saved. These zealous but uninformed Christians received the false teachers as wholeheartedly as they had received Paul, and soon there arose an epidemic of circumcision and "holy day" keeping among them (Gal. 4:8-11). Alarmed by their return to the ritualistic, outward, externalism of religious bondage, Paul wrote the Epistle to the Galatians, correcting their error.

Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years (Gal. 4:10).

He said,

I am afraid...lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain (vs. 11).

And what can be the result of laboring in vain for a number of years, as they were doing? In one of the most sobering passages in all of Scripture, Paul declared,

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace (Gal. 5:1-4).

While the Old Covenant was one of bondage, law, and death, the New Covenant was one of liberty, righteousness, and life. Christ Himself has set the believer free from the law (Rom. 10:4; Eph. 2:14-15; Col. 2:14-17). But this is not liberty to sin (1 Cor. 8:9; Gal. 5:13; 1 Pet. 2:16).

Therefore, the Christian is to stand fast in his Christ-given liberty from all works-law bondage (cf. Gal. 3:10-12). Christ did not die for us to remain in the entanglement of the yoke of the law in any aspect (Gal. 3:1; Acts 15:10). So, anyone who insists on such a return — for example, by being circumcised, or observing the sabbath, or the dietary

restrictions of the Old Testament law, or any of the Old Testament laws — takes upon himself the obligation to keep and be justified by the whole law (Gal. 3:3). Remember James 2:10:

For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

One cannot pick and choose, as sabbatarians do, what portions of the law they want to observe. To choose circumcision is to automatically choose the whole law, not just the Ten Commandments (which stood as representative of the whole), but all the over 600 rules, restrictions, and regulations that comprised the law. And remember, to do so is to become,

...a debtor to do the whole law (Gal. 3:3).

Dear reader, should you choose to observe any aspect of the law, you testify to the courts of heaven that you have less than full confidence in the sufficiency of Calvary, and that you seek justification by works and not by the means provided by God in the New Covenant, which is faith in the redeeming sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot have it both ways. Either we are saved solely by faith in Christ without adding our own works, or we are obligated to observe the entire Old Testament law, in which case Christ will profit us nothing (Gal. 5:2,4), and we are fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4). Sabbatarians must realize they endanger their very salvation by insisting on the law's sabbath. If you keep the sabbath you must keep the law. If you keep the law, why did Christ die?

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth (Rom. 10:4).

FAITH IN CHRIST IS OUR SABBATH

The Old Testament sabbath of **rest** was only a picture of the future spiritual rest that the believer would enter into by placing his faith in Christ alone, and ceasing from his own “works” (Heb. 4:1-11).

The word “sabbath” means rest. In creating the world, God took a sabbath (rest) on the seventh day. In six days He created the world, the universe, and the heavens, and on the seventh day God is said to have “rested” from His works (Gen. 1). Of consummate importance is the fact that He did not then institute a sabbath observance binding upon man. That eventually came with the giving of the law to Moses, when men were to maintain covenant relationship with God through **works** (Neh. 9). But the “sabbath” of rest would eventually be theirs, when in the dispensation of **grace** they could rest in their salvation, having found justification with God by faith in Christ!

Rice says,

“The Jewish Sabbath (Saturday) is clearly a picture of a rest earned after work. Under the law, if one were perfect all his life, fulfilling all the commands, he would deserve heaven. Since no one was ever perfect but Jesus, nor did any one besides Him keep the law, man could not be saved by the law. You can see then how the Jewish Sabbath, picturing a salvation by good works, is out of place in a dispensation of grace. We are saved by grace, freely, justified without the deeds of the law, so we worship on the first day of the week, representing peace and rest obtained without labor. The Jewish Sabbath, Saturday, is ceremonial law, and does not fit a grace dispensation. Our Lord’s Day, the first day of the week, does fit every Christian.”⁵⁸

In a very real sense, this whole dispensation of grace is a sabbath for it is a dispensation of rest! It is a dispensation of salvation, not by works (which was foreshadowed in the six creation days in which God worked), but by faith, which is foreshadowed in God’s rest on the seventh day.

For we which have believed do enter into rest... (Heb. 4:3).

Hebrews 4:1-11

This passage is widely misunderstood by sabbatarians who feel it supports sabbath keeping. In fact, it does just the opposite. The passage and its entire context refutes the

concept of returning to a Jewish works-based salvation. The Hebrew Christians were being influenced by legalists who tried to bring them back under bondage to Jewish laws and observances. The epistle was written to combat that error and remind the Christians that we live in a sabbath dispensation, that is, a dispensation of grace! No one is saved by works! Not by offering sacrifices, not by following strict dietary restrictions, laws, rules, regulations, and not by sabbath observance. In this dispensation, faith in Christ is our rest (sabbath) from all religious works! *The Living Bible* translates the passage:

Although God's promise still stands — His promise that all may enter His place of rest — we ought to tremble with fear because some of you may be on the verge of failing to get there after all.

For this wonderful news — the message that God wants to save us — has been given to us just as it was to those who lived in the time of Moses. But it didn't do them any good because they didn't believe it. They didn't mix it with faith.

For only we who believe God can enter into His place of rest. He has said, "I have sworn in My anger that those who don't believe Me will never get in," even though He has been ready and waiting for them since the world began.

We know He is ready and waiting because it is written that God rested on the seventh day of creation, having finished all that He had planned to make.

Even so they didn't get in, for God finally said, "They shall never enter my rest."

Yet the promise remains and some get in — but not those who had the first chance, for they disobeyed God and failed to enter.

But He has set another time for coming in, and that time is now. He announced this through King David long years after man's first failure to enter, saying in the words already quoted, "Today when you hear Him calling, do not harden your hearts against Him."

This new place of rest He is talking about does not mean the land of Israel that Joshua led them into. If that were what God meant, He would not have spoken long afterwards about "today" being the time to get in.

So there is a full complete rest still waiting for the people of God.

Christ has already entered there. He is resting from His work, just as God did after the creation.

Let us do our best to go into that place of rest, too, being careful not to disobey God as the children of Israel did, thus failing to get in (Heb. 4:1-11, L.B.).

Again, the promised **rest** God refers to could not possibly be the observance of a seventh day sabbath, because the “rest” transcends a mere day and speaks of an entire dispensation of faith, in which men would find right standing with God not by their own works, but by simple trust in Christ.

Matthew Henry puts it this way,

“It is certain that God, after the creating of the world in six days, entered into his rest; and it is certain that Christ, when he had finished the work of our redemption, entered into his rest; and these were not only examples, but earnest, that believers shall enter into their rest: **“For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his”** (vs. 10). Every true believer hath ceased from his own works of sin, from relying on his own works of righteousness, and from the burdensome works of the law, and God and Christ have ceased from their works of creation and redemption.”⁵⁹

The Jews, who scrupulously observed the seventh day sabbath, still failed to enter into the real rest of God. The true rest is that of faith in Christ, and cessation from all external observances and works, including the sabbath.

Another writes,

“Jesus spoke of quite another kind of rest — rest for the souls of men (Matt. 11:28-30). This is nearer to what the author [of Hebrews] means. We might also notice an idea of the rabbis. The Mishnah explains the use of Psalm 92 (a psalm headed ‘A Psalm: A Song for the Sabbath’) in these terms: ‘A Psalm, a song for the time that is to come, for the day that shall be all Sabbath and rest in the life everlasting’ (Tamid 7:4). This is the kind of rest the author refers to....His links rest with the original Sabbath, with what God did when he finished Creation and what Christians are called into....To enter rest means to cease from one’s own work, just as God ceased from His....There is a sense in which to enter Christian salvation means to cease from one’s works and rest securely on what Christ has done.”⁶⁰

Obviously, the rest for believers today is not a mere day, but an entire dispensation. It is not a practice, but a person — the Lord Jesus Christ.

As Spurgeon once said,

“The change which our Lord has made in the Sabbath is indicative of the change which He has made in our life. The law says, ‘Work six days and then observe the seventh as the Sabbath.’ But under the gospel the arrangement is, ‘Rest on the first day before you have done a stroke of work. Just as the week begins, take your rest, and after that, in the strength derived from it, and from the grateful motives which arise out of that one blessed day of rest, give to the Lord the six days of the week.’ There is a change from law to gospel indicated in that very change. So let it be with you.”⁶¹

THE SABBATH WAS NOT INTENDED TO ENDURE FOREVER

Sabbatarians argue that the sabbath was to be a perpetual covenant, placing great emphasis on the Old Testament Hebrew word *olam*, translated “forever.” They contend that since “forever” is still going on, the sabbath commandment is still binding.

Their contention, however, is easily refuted on two fronts:

First, we must remember to whom God was speaking when He commanded sabbath observance. This “perpetual covenant” was made with Israel exclusively. This is borne out further in Ezekiel 20:12, 20, where **national** Israel is under consideration.

Second, we must realize that the use of the word “forever” does not always signify “for eternity.”

Chambers explains,

“The fact is that the Hebrew word *olam*, ‘forever’, has as its root meaning ‘a long, indefinite period of time.’ It usually does **not** mean eternal or without end. Often it is used of the past as in Genesis 6:4, ‘mighty men...of old.’”⁶²

Other examples make this clear:

1. **The Passover** was given to Israel just as was the sabbath, and it too, was to be observed “forever” (Heb. “*olam*,” Exod. 12:14).
2. **Circumcision** was to be an “everlasting” (Heb. *olam*) covenant (Gen. 17:13).
3. **The lamps of the sanctuary** were to burn continually before the Lord, “as a statue for ever” (*olam* vs. 3).
4. **The shewbread** set before the Lord was part of the “everlasting covenant,” and “perpetual statute” (Lev. 24:5-9) given to Israel.

These parts of the law are spoken of in the same terms as the sabbath. If they are no longer binding, why is the seventh day? If the sabbath is binding still, then so are these observance. Also binding would be the punishment for failure to observe them to the smallest detail.

A Sabbath Day's Journey

Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey (Acts 1:12).

This verse is sometimes referred to by sabbatarians to bolster their argument for the New Testament practice of sabbath keeping. They reason, "If sabbath obligations ceased with the cross, why then do such references as this appear after Calvary? Does this not indicate that sabbath restrictions were still observed?"

Again, we answer, **no**, and this for two obvious reasons:

First, this statement was intended to convey the idea of distance, not law. The term was one that all who were familiar with the Jewish religion would immediately understand. The sabbath laws only permitted them to travel a limited distance. The distance from Mount Olivet to Jerusalem was simply stated to be "a sabbath day's journey."⁶³ The casual way in which the phrase was used indicates that it was customarily employed as a simple measure of distance. In our own day and culture, you or I would probably say, "It's about a mile up the road." Remember, the Jews had been using such terminology for centuries. Therefore it is not surprising to see it still in usage so soon after Calvary.

Second, if sabbatarians offer Acts 1:12 as proof the sabbath is yet binding, we contend that **they become indicted by their own argument**. For if this passage proves the sabbath is binding, then so are the sabbath restrictions, commandments, and regulations, i.e. absolute rest for all, including servants and animals, all business stops (buying or selling of any kind is sin), offerings are made, travel is severely limited, all lifting or carrying of burdens prohibited, gathering, cooking, or even warming food is forbidden, etc. As we mentioned in an earlier chapter, sabbatarians themselves do not really observe the sabbath. They travel to their sabbatarian churches, they warm food (some justify using a microwave), they eat at restaurants and fast food stores, they purchase gasoline and soda, etc. Therefore, for them to argue their case from Acts 1:12 is not only hypocritical and self-indicting, it is sheer folly.

Did Jesus Teach a Continuing Sabbath?

But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day (Matt. 24:20).

Some sabbatarians believe that a case for sabbath keeping can be made from these words of Christ. After all, why would Jesus say this if He was going to nullify the sabbath? A pair of sabbatarian authors put it this way,

"Near the end of His ministry, Jesus indicated that His followers would continue keeping the sabbath after His death and resurrection. The

occasion was the ‘Olivet prophecy’ recorded in Matthew 24. His disciples had come to Him asking about the destruction of Jerusalem and the signs of His coming at the end of the age. In verse 16, He spoke about the people of Judea fleeing into the mountains. In verse 20, He exhorted the disciples, ‘Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the sabbath.’

Now, if the sabbath was to cease following Jesus’ death, this exhortation would be totally uncalled for. But such is not the case. The sabbath would continue to be a day of rest, worship, and rejuvenation for God’s people.”⁶⁴

The answer to this argument is glaringly obvious. In fact, the authors answer it themselves! They declare, “in verse 16 He spoke about **the people of Judea** fleeing into the mountains.” Who would flee? Who was Jesus speaking of? The people of Judea, **the Jews!** The Jews would be hunted, hated, persecuted, and caused to experience great suffering in the last days, as Jesus describes in these verses. Those days are specifically referred to as the “great tribulation” (vs. 21), and “the time of Jacob’s (Israel’s) trouble” (Jer. 30:7), in which Israel is eventually brought to a place of repentance, and an acknowledgement of Christ (Rom. 11:17-29; cf. Zech. 12:9ff; Isa. 59:20; Jer. 31:33-34).

Jesus knew that His message of faith, forgiveness, and grace would be rejected by the Jews, who would cling to their own works-righteousness (cf. Rom. 9:30-33), as do modern sabbatarians.

This entire paragraph of instruction (Matt. 24:15-22) was intended for an end-time audience of Jews who would experience the horrors of a satanic persecution, the likes of which the earth has never seen (vss. 21-22). Those who read it would know what to do:

Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be (Matt. 24:16-21).

The time of great tribulation has erupted upon Israel. That Jesus spoke specifically to the sabbath keeping Jews of Judea upon whom the great tribulation would come is beyond dispute (vss. 16, 21). Therefore, to claim it refers to the church (as sabbatarians do) is an absurd and desperate attempt to lend legitimacy to an illegitimate practice.

Furthermore, if sabbatarians claim that Matthew 24:20 is a proof text for New Testament sabbath keeping, they again indict themselves for the same reasons mentioned previously from Acts 1:12 (i.e., if last day travel is prohibited on the sabbath, so is modern travel, etc.).

In fact, sabbatarians would be wise to avoid this passage altogether, for Jesus here implies that sabbath observance is more than merely worshipping on Saturday, **it is keeping every minute aspect of the sabbath law** as outlined in the Old Testament! Obviously, no one does that.

Israel and the Sabbath in the Millennium

Interestingly enough, God will require Israel to continue sabbath observance, temple worship, and sacrifice during the millennium (cf. Ezek. 40-46). Of course, such rites will have no expiatory power, but will serve as memorials throughout the millennium. Careful exegesis here will bear out that what used to be the church is excluded.

Pentecost says of the passage,

“...this worship was particularly planned for a redeemed Israel.”⁶⁵

**NO ONE READING
THE NEW TESTAMENT
WOULD BE CONVICTED
TO OBSERVE THE SABBATH**

No one who reads the New Testament and wants to believe and obey it, would come away believing that he or she should observe the Jewish sabbath.

Sabbath keeping, as a formulated doctrine, is found outside of the New Testament! It is unknown in the epistles, absent in early church history and altogether foreign to New Testament faith.

If we were to give an unconverted heathen (one who was totally ignorant of the Bible) a New Testament to read, could we honestly imagine that, having read it, he or she would experience a heartfelt obligation to observe the sabbath? Of course not! Followers of Christ are simply not instructed to observe days. If anything, the opposite is true. They are warned not to let the purity of their faith be polluted by returning to sabbath observance and ritual (Gal. 4:9-10; Col.2:16-17).

Friend, if God wanted you to observe the Jewish sabbath, wouldn't he have told you to do so? There are 27 books in the New Testament which contain all that anyone under grace needs to know to be saved and live a victorious and faithful life. Isn't it remarkable that while **nowhere in the entire New Testament** is a believer under grace ever told to observe the sabbath, it's still the major emphasis of sabbatarians? Don't you find it strange that the New Testament says nothing about the main thrust, doctrine, emphasis, and passion of sabbath keepers?

SABBATH BREAKING IS NOT SIN!

While every kind of sin imaginable is specifically mentioned and denounced in the New Testament, not once is “sabbath breaking” ever named. Why is that? Simply because it **is not a sin!** Sabbath keeping was never imposed on anyone in the New Testament, or else sabbath breaking would have been sinful, and therefore mentioned and denounced. Isn’t it rather strange that Paul warned the church against committing a variety of sins (e.g., he lists 15 specific sins in Galatians 5:19-21; 18 are mentioned in 2 Timothy 3:2-4), and hosts of others are named elsewhere in the New Testament), but sabbath breaking is nowhere ever mentioned in the New Testament as a sin! The fact is, **Christians are never told to observe the sabbath and never condemned for not observing it.**

Smith has rightly observed:

“The Epistles, it must be admitted, with the exception of one place...are silent on the subject of the Sabbath. No rules for its observance are ever given by the apostles — its violation is never denounced by them; Sabbath breakers are never included in any list of offenders.”⁶⁶

Therefore, sabbatarians commit a grievous error by calling something “sin” that is not sin! **Sabbath breaking is not sin!** Scripture warns:

*Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!
(Is. 5:20)*

Sabbath breaking is **nowhere** called “evil” or “darkness” in the New Testament! Yet the sabbatarians call it so. Therefore, **woe unto them!** They are guilty of adding to God’s book (Rev. 22:18) and are as blameworthy as the Pharisees for heaping burdens upon others that God never intended them to bear.

For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders...(Matt. 23:4).

Jesus did not deal lightly with the ancient Pharisees. Neither will He deal lightly with these modern ones.

THE SABBATH WAS MADE FOR MAN

And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath (Mark 2:27-28).

While it is sometimes alleged that this verse urges sabbath keeping by those who link it with the creation of man, honest exegesis again contradicts them. Jesus is simply setting forth **the inner principle of sabbath law**, by stating that man does indeed need rest. We are not machines. We cannot run continually, 24 hours a day, seven days a week without experiencing a physical or mental breakdown. As wondrous and marvelous a creation as it is, the body needs rest. God has illustrated this to us both by principle and personal example. Therefore, we all should see the need for at least one day off per week. By resting we rejuvenate our bodies and refresh ourselves spiritually through church attendance, worship, and prayer.

Some sabbatarians tend to follow in the legalistic footsteps of the Pharisees, believing that man was made for the sabbath and not the other way around.

Lindsay explains,

“Jesus gives some apt illustrations to show that the Sabbath was to be the servant of man, and not man the servant of the Sabbath. As an example, He pointed out the case of David, who ate the holy bread which was unlawful for any to eat but the priests. But David’s needs in the emergency were superior to the ceremonial law (Mark 2:25).

Again, He mentions the priests who profane the Sabbath and are blameless. Their service as priests was superior to the Sabbath. (Mark 2:26).

Still again the Lord speaks of a man whose sheep fall into a pit on the Sabbath. It was more important that the sheep should be rescued from the pit than to keep the letter of the law (Luke 14:5).

Thus we see the Lord, Himself, was against a rigid interpretation of the Pharisees who would put keeping the Sabbath above everything else. Rather, it was a ceremonial law given to Israel, and beyond the fact that the human body requires rest at regular intervals, there is nothing about

that particular day which could not give way, when higher purposes and interests were at stake.”⁶⁷

Mark 2:27-28 in its Context

This statement of Christ came immediately after His discussion about putting new wine into old wineskins (vss. 21-22). Most interpreters believe this to be a reference to the contrast between the Old and New Covenants, or between Judaism and Christianity. In essence, Jesus was saying that the rich fullness of the New Covenant gospel could not be poured into the rigid confines of Judaism. Like an old wineskin that was stiff and inflexible, it could not contain the rich bounty of the New Testament. The gospel of Jesus Christ had to be placed into a “new wineskin” — the church!

Furthermore, the context shows that the Pharisees were again perturbed by the liberties Jesus and His disciples took with the sabbath:

And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn. And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful? (Mark 2:23-24)

These Pharisees, graduates from the Old Wineskins School of Rigid Legality, could not perceive the inner, spiritual principles of the sabbath enjoyed and employed by Jesus and His disciples. They were absolutely chafed over the liberties Christ’s disciples had taken with the sabbath! They knew that the sabbath demanded complete rest (Exod. 31:15) and abstaining from all work (Exod. 20:10). Plowing and harvesting was to be interrupted for the sabbath (Exod. 34:21), and since there was to be no cooking on the sabbath, all gathering was to be completed on the day before (Exod. 16:23-26).

Ratzlaff says,

“Looking through the eyes of the Pharisees we can see why they considered Christ’s disciples to be breaking the Sabbath on at least three counts: (1) They were ‘harvesting and threshing’ the grain in their hands, which was work and therefore a violation of the Sabbath. (2) They were not completely resting, which was required on the Sabbath. (3) They had failed to ‘remember the sabbath’ in that they apparently had not prepared their food the day before.”⁶⁸

Jesus’ response to the Pharisees’ query is worthy of note:

And he said unto them, Have you never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungered, he, and they that were with him? How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him? (Mark 2:25-26)

The principles set forth by Christ here are significant:

First, meeting human need outweighs legal demand (cf. Luke 13:10-17).

Second, therefore, Jesus' disciples were innocent, not only because they were hungry, but because they were involved with Him in His work, a work which took precedence over sabbath law.

We, too, are free from the condemnation of sabbath law, because of who we are in the Christ! Because of our union with Him by faith, we find right standing with God, not through the ceremonial observance of a day, but through the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 3:24, 28; 4:1ff).

The true servants of God have been liberated from slavish sabbath keeping.

Matthew records this response of Christ to the Pharisees:

Or have you not read in the Law, that on the sabbath the priests in the temple break the sabbath, and are innocent? (Matt. 12:5)

In the normal course of their duties, the priests had to regularly and consistently break the sabbath! They had to prepare and display the fresh shewbread (Lev. 24:5-9), offer the sabbath sacrifices (Num. 28:9-10), and perform numerous rituals and duties that would be considered "works." But since these activities were associated with God's service, they were allowable, and the priests who performed them were innocent. Even today, what is the "day of rest" for most people is probably the busiest day of the week for Christian ministers and pastors. The day of worship is most likely the day they work the hardest! Are they guilty? Of course not! Nor is any Christian guilty of sabbath breaking, for no such sin is ever once mentioned in the entire New Testament. There is no such thing as the "sin of sabbath breaking" for a New Testament believer. All Christians are disciples of Christ, "priests and kings," and are liberated from the stranglehold of sabbath law (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6).

Third, the Pharisees had missed the whole point! The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath! **It serves us, we do not serve it.** We are to enjoy the benefits of the spiritual principles it contains. We need rest for our bodies. And we experience true rest, spiritual rest, rest from dead religious works, rest from the torments and burdens of sin, by our faith in Christ.

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth (Rom. 10:4).

The Sabbath of the Lord

*Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is **the sabbath of the Lord your God** (Exod. 20:8-10).*

Sabbath keepers insist that it's the Lord's sabbath, not man's. If it belongs to God, we are obligated to observe it perpetually.

However, if this is true, then it follows that we are likewise obligated to observe all of the Old Testament rites, days, and ceremonies that are similarly reckoned. For instance:

We would be obligated to keep the Lord's "Passover" (Lev. 23:5), and to bring forth "the offerings of the Lord" (cf. Lev. 5:11-12) to "the tabernacle of the Lord" (Lev. 17:4). We would be obligated to make peace offerings, designated "the holy thing of the Lord" (Lev. 19:5-8). Furthermore, the first-born belongs to the Lord (cf. Lev. 27:26), and the tithe is the Lord's, for to withhold it is to rob God (Mal. 3:8).

Ratzlaff is correct in his assessment when he says:

"If we are going to observe the seventh-day sabbath because it is 'the sabbath of the Lord,' then to be consistent we must also be willing to observe the seven annual sabbaths, the grain offerings, the burnt offerings, the tabernacle services, the peace offerings, and the offerings of the firstborn, all of which are said to be 'of the Lord.'"⁶⁹

SABBATH KEEPERS ARE WEAK IN FAITH

Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind (Rom. 14:1-2,5).

In this chapter, the apostle Paul speaks of two kinds of believers: the mature believer who knows his position in Christ, and the weak believer whose faith in Christ is newly found, and who is yet to be fully delivered from a legal, Old Testament mindset. His reference to the “weak” believer undoubtedly alludes to recent Jewish converts to Christianity who brought many of their Judaistic practices with them into the church, such as their dietary restrictions (vss. 2-3), and their sabbath and holy day observances (vss. 5-6).

Instead of rebuking or rejecting these weaker brethren, they were to be received into fellowship and given a chance to grow in faith. Paul knew that, given time and teaching, they would mature in faith and come to grasp their true liberty in Christ (John 8:31-32).

Three important things should be noted about this passage:

First, it is easily observed that it was the weak Christians who had Jewish scruples about clean and unclean foods, while the strong believer knew that he could eat all things (vs. 2a; cf. 1 Cor. 10:25; 1 Tim. 4:3-5). It is also clearly observed that the weak believer esteemed one day (the sabbath) above others, while the mature Christian esteemed all days alike (vs. 5). The weak saint has been well described as follows:

“The weakness is weakness in respect of faith. The weak man is one who does not fully appreciate what his Christianity means; in particular, he does not see that the soul which has committed itself to Christ for salvation is emancipated from all law but that which is involved in its responsibility to Him. Hence, his conscience is fettered by scruples in regard to customs dating from pre-Christian days.”⁷⁰

Paul’s concern was that the stronger brethren bear patiently with these young converts, and not condemn them about their scruples (vss. 3-4, 10,13). Previously, they may have been prohibited from participating in the church’s worship because of their defective faith. Here, Paul urges a tolerant patience. They were to be received as brothers in the

Lord, since their belief in Christ was genuine. (vss. 3,6,8,18), though their knowledge of Him was rudimentary.

These weaker believers thought they were serving God by maintaining the Jewish dietary regulations and day observances:

He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord...he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not...(vs.6).

Their motive was good though their conscience was weak and their understanding of Christianity incomplete.

Second, this passage cannot be used to condone sabbath observance today. Paul was dealing with a unique situation in a unique time. These new converts to Christ had come out of Judaism where sabbath keeping was mandated as the continuing sign of their covenant with God. It was natural for them to still have scruples about the sabbath after a lifetime of having its sacred observance driven into them. Therefore, they were to be welcomed into the Christian community of fellowship, allowed to grow without condemnation over their scruples, and considered true brethren in the Lord (unless they made sabbath keeping a condition for salvation, sanctification or fellowship). However, the Scriptures are very clear, both from the immediate context (vs. 1), and from the teaching of the New Testament as a whole (Acts 15; 2 Cor. 3:3; 6-17; Gal. 4:9-11; 5:1; Col. 2:16-17, etc.), that these weaker brothers were not to be allowed to become troublesome and attempt to impose their legalistic scruples on the church.

Third, Romans 14 sets forth the important principle of toleration in the church, particularly in regard to weaker believers (new converts). We are not to tolerate sin, or overlook error, but Christians must give new believers time to grow in their knowledge of the Lord (1 Peter 2:2).

Thus it can be observed, that sabbath keeping is not a mark of a mature (or “sanctified”) Christian, as sabbatarians would have us to believe. Rather, it is the distinct mark of the “weak” believer, who has a great need to grow in faith and in the true knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

SABBATH KEEPING DENIES THE ALL SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST

The apostle Paul declares in Colossians 2:10,

...and ye are complete in him.

The context of the Colossian epistle reveals just what this means to the Christian. Paul was warning the church against false teachers,

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ (Col. 2:8).

The false teachers were attempting to add new revelations and doctrines to the church, things which were foreign to the New Testament teaching they had received from the apostles. In some cases, the error mongers attempted to drag Old Covenant Jewish practices into the New Covenant assemblies. Obviously, things such as circumcision (2:11), clean and unclean meats, observance of the sabbath and holy days were being promulgated, and were thoroughly denounced by the apostle Paul (2:16).

He reminded the church that all fullness and completion are found in Christ (2:9-10), not in rites, observances, or traditions. And if we are complete in Christ (vs.10), why would we need anything else?

Noted Greek authority Kenneth Wuest comments on Colossians 2:10,

“ ‘Are complete’ ...is a participle in the perfect tense. Literally it is, ‘And you are in Him, having been filled full, with the present result that you are in a state of fullness.’”⁷¹

Therefore, it is not so much that we are made full in Him, but that we are in Him, made full!

And, while we are certainly to grow in Christ, we just as certainly cannot add to Christ! As Wiersbe says,

“When a person is born again into the family of God, he is born complete in Christ. His spiritual growth is not by **addition**, but by **nutrition**. He grows from the inside out. Nothing needs to be added to Christ because

He already is the very fullness of God. As the believer draws on Christ's fullness, he is 'filled unto all the fullness of God' (Eph. 3:19)."⁷²

Friend, if we are complete in Him, then sabbath observance cannot improve our position!

Furthermore, Scripture comments further upon the futility of such fleshly "self-improvement" after the cross:

By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified (Heb. 10:10,14).

What can be plainer? We are sanctified through Christ's atoning death for us. It is already done, finished "once for all" and complete, for we are complete in Him (Col. 2:10). Wuest comments on Hebrews 10:10:

"The Greek word 'to sanctify,' *hagiazō*, means 'to set apart for God.' Here the work of sanctification refers to the placing of the believing sinner into the status of a saved person, with all the accompanying blessings and enablements which that act includes. The words 'we are sanctified' are in the Greek text a perfect participle and a finite verb, showing in the strongest way the permanent and continuous state of salvation into which the believer is brought and in which he lives."⁷³

Therefore, he translates the verse in his *Expanded Translation*,

*By means of which will we stand permanently sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*⁷⁴

However, it is the word "perfected" in Hebrews 10:14 that is the real key to this issue. Wuest explains:

"The word 'perfected' is the translation of *teleioō* which means, 'to bring to a state of completion.' Here, the completeness of the state of salvation of the believer is in view. **Everything essential to the salvation of the individual is included in the gift of salvation which the sinner receives by faith in Messiah's sacrifice.** The words 'for ever' are here to be construed with 'perfected.' It is a permanent state of completeness in salvation to which reference is made.... 'for by one offering He has brought to completion forever those who are sanctified.'"⁷⁵

Would sabbatarians have us believe that we can further perfect that which is already perfected? Can we add by works some further righteousness to that imputed to us by faith in Christ? Clearly, as we have shown throughout this book, the answer is **no**. Friend, one cannot by sabbath observance (or any other form of works) improve upon the redemption perfectly and freely provided by Jesus Christ.

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (John 8:31-32).

The truth of God's Word set the believing Jews free from all of the Old Testament law, including the sabbath. Let it do the same for you.

EPILOGUE

Dear reader,

In the preceding pages I have presented a sound, Scriptural case for Sunday worship. I have attempted to answer all of the arguments sabbatarians normally raise. I have answered their every charge with Scripture, with church history, with Christian theology as a whole, and with clear reason. I have addressed their most popular contentions and proven them wrong on every point. Please do not lightly dismiss this book. If you have been confused by sabbatarians, you owe it both to Christ who bought you and to yourself to read through it again. Examine it with Scripture carefully, and read it prayerfully. My prayer for you is that Jesus Christ, our loving Savior, will help you to see the all-sufficiency of His grace.

Russell K. Tardo
January, 1992

NOTES

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