



# **THE SABBATH under CROSSFIRE**

**A Biblical Analysis of Recent  
Sabbath/Sunday  
Developments**

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 **iblical  
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**DEDICATED  
to all who take time  
to honor God on His Holy  
Sabbath Day**

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# INTRODUCTION

Each of the fourteen books I have authored has a story behind it. In most cases, it was a crossfire of controversy that erupted regarding a certain biblical doctrine that compelled me to research and write a book on that topic. This book is no exception.

I had no plan to write a book in 1998. In fact, when *Immortality or Resurrection?* came off the press on December 1997, I solemnly promised my wife that I would not start another book in 1998. The reason is simple. Whenever I become involved in a biblical research project, I spend my seven-months leave-of-absence from teaching at Andrews University buried in my basement office from 5:00 a.m. to 10:30 p.m.

Having neglected my wife and many odd jobs around the house during much of 1997, I felt that in good conscience I could not undertake another major research project in 1998. However, two important events mentioned below caused me to change my plans. Thank God for an understanding wife who has accepted such changes without much complaining during our 37 years of married life. She deserves much of the credit for whatever good has come from my ministry of biblical research. Without her loving support none of my books would have ever seen the light of day.

**The Pope's Pastoral Letter.** The first event that compelled me to write this book is the promulgation of the Pastoral Letter *Dies Domini* by Pope Paul John II on May 31, 1998. This document has enormous historical significance because in it the Pope makes a passionate plea for a revival of Sunday observance by appealing to the moral imperative of the Sabbath Commandment and to the need of civil legislation to facilitate the observance of Sunday as a Holy Day.

The Pastoral Letter raises two important issues that urgently need to be addressed. The first is the Pope's defense of Sunday observance as the embodiment and "full expression" of the Sabbath. This view, as shown in Chapter 1, not only lacks biblical and historical support, but also represents a significant departure from the traditional Catholic teaching. Historically, the Catholic church has taught that Sunday observance is an ecclesiastical institution different in meaning and function from the Sabbath. John Paul departs from the traditional

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Catholic distinction between Sabbath and Sunday in order to make Sunday observance a moral imperative mandated by the Decalogue itself.

The second issue is the Pope's summons to Christians "to strive to ensure that civil legislation respects their duty to keep Sunday holy."<sup>1</sup> The justification for such a summons is the Pope's assumption that Sundaykeeping is a moral imperative "inscribed" in the Decalogue itself;<sup>2</sup> and consequently, it is to be supported by civil legislation promulgated by the international community of nations.

In view of the grave theological and legal implications of the Pastoral Letter, I felt that a response was imperative. In July 1998, I posted my initial analysis of *Dies Domini* in various discussion groups on the Internet. The response surpassed my fondest expectations. In a few weeks, over 5,000 people subscribed to a "Sabbath Discussion" list where I examine important Sabbath/Sunday developments. Several editors of religious magazines who subscribe to the list requested permission to publish my response to the Pastoral Letter.

Incidentally, anyone with Internet service interested in subscribing to my new *Endtime Issues* list can do so simply by emailing me a request at: samuele@andrews.edu or sbacchicchi@csi.com. If you choose to subscribe to the *Endtime Issues* list you will receive free of charge every couple of weeks an essay where I examine significant religious developments of our time in the light of biblical teachings. You are free to unsubscribe at any time.

The surprising interest shown by people of different persuasions in various parts of the world for an in-depth analysis of recent Sabbath/Sunday developments compelled me to take up my pen again and write this book. Thank God for a wife who does not remind me of broken promises.

This book has afforded me the opportunity to examine in greater depth some of the recent Sabbath/Sunday developments that I have discussed in a summary way in cyberspace. For example, my initial eight-page analysis of the Pastoral Letter first posted in the Internet, has been expanded into a 40-page chapter entitled "Pope John Paul II and the Sabbath." This is the first and, possibly, the most important chapter of the book because it examines the biblical, moral, historical, and legal arguments used by Pope John Paul to emphasize the "grave obligation" of Sunday observance.<sup>3</sup>

**Debate With Dale Ratzlaff.** The second event that influenced the writing of this book is the debate on the Sabbath that took place Monday, June 15, 1998, between Dale Ratzlaff and myself on KJSL, a Christian radio station in St. Louis, Missouri. Ratzlaff had served as a Seventh-day Adventist Bible

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teacher and pastor before leaving the church because of doctrinal differences. Ratzlaff claims that several months of Bible study convinced him that the Sabbath is not a creational institution for mankind, but a Mosaic, Old Covenant ordinance for the Jews.

According to Ratzlaff, “New Covenant” Christians do not need to observe the Sabbath because Christ fulfilled its typological function by becoming our salvation-rest. Consequently, “New Covenant” Christians observe the Sabbath spiritually as a *daily* experience of salvation-rest, not literally as the observance of the *seventh day* unto the Lord.

A major problem with Ratzlaff’s interpretation, as shown in Chapter 4 of this book, is the failure to recognize that the *spiritual salvation-rest* does not negate the *physical Sabbath rest*. On the contrary, God invites us to cease from our *physical work* on the Sabbath in order to enter His *spiritual rest* (Heb 4:10). Physical elements, such as the *water* in baptism, the *bread and wine* in the Lord’s Supper, and the *physical rest* on the Sabbath, are designed to help us conceptualize and internalize the spiritual realities they represent.

Ratzlaff published his views in a 345-page book entitled *Sabbath in Crisis*, where he articulates his “New Covenant” theology. He is actively promoting his anti-sabbatarian views through radio talk shows and advertisements in local papers where he offers his book free. KJSL invited me to respond to his anti-Sabbath arguments on their radio talk show on June 15, 1998. As you can imagine, we had an animated discussion. Unfortunately, the one-hour time limitation, cut even shorter by frequent radio advertisements, prevented a thorough discussion of the major issues. We agreed to continue the discussion in cyberspace.

Over a four-month period, I posted twenty-one essays where I deal systematically with Ratzlaff’s major objections against the continuity and validity of the Sabbath for “New Covenant” Christians. The demand for these essays has been incredible as thousands of people from many parts of the world requested them via email.

The enormous demand for my Sabbath essays may be due in part to the considerable influence exerted by Ratzlaff’s book, especially among Sabbatarians. A study paper entitled “The Sabbath” released by the Worldwide Church of God in 1995, lists the *Sabbath in Crisis* as one of the three sources used to support their so-called “New Covenant” theology.<sup>4</sup>

**“New Covenant” Theology.** It is hard to estimate the far-reaching influence of the “New Covenant” theology championed among Sabbatarians by

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people like Ratzlaff. The Worldwide Church of God has experienced a massive defection of over 70,000 members who have refused to accept the doctrinal changes demanded by the “New Covenant” theology.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church also has been affected by the “New Covenant” theology promoted especially by *Sabbath in Crisis*. One example is the book *New Covenant Christians* by Clay Peck, a former Adventist pastor who currently serves as senior pastor of the Grace Place Congregation in Berthoud, Colorado. In the “Introduction” to his book, Peck acknowledges his indebtedness to Ratzlaff, saying: “While I have read and researched widely for this study, I have been most challenged and instructed by a book entitled *Sabbath in Crisis* by Dale Ratzlaff. I have leaned heavily on his research, borrowing a number of concepts and diagrams.”<sup>5</sup>

Similar “Grace-oriented,” independent congregations have been established in various parts of America by former Seventh-day Adventist pastors who have embraced the “New Covenant” theology. This development is unique to our times because never before in the history of Christianity has the Sabbath come under the crossfire by those who once had championed its observance.

These developments made me forcefully aware of the need to respond to the major attacks launched against the Sabbath not only by the Pope and Sundaykeeping scholars, but also by former Sabbatarians. Initially I tried to meet this challenge by posting in cyberspace essays dealing with the anti-Sabbath arguments. I soon realized that this effort was not enough.

The thousands of email requests from all over the world for the Sabbath essays posted on the Internet alerted me to the need to expand my research and publish it in book form. This book is the result of this endeavor. During the last six months of 1998, I have worked intensively on this project, hoping to produce a compelling biblical analysis of recent Sabbath/Sunday developments.

**Objectives of This Book.** This book has two major objectives. The first is to provide a comprehensive examination of the major arguments used to negate the continuity, validity, and values of the Sabbath for today. Each of the first six chapters addresses a major argument commonly used against the Sabbath. The length of the chapters (ranging from 40 to 55 pages) reflects my aim to be as exhaustive as possible within the length limitation of each chapter.

Experience has taught me that simplistic answers do not satisfy people with inquiring minds. Thus, I have endeavored to examine each argument as thoroughly as possible. Christians who find themselves caught in the crossfire of the Sabbath/Sunday controversy should find these chapters a valuable resource to deal with popular attacks launched against the Sabbath.



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The second objective of this book is to help people discover the Sabbath as a day of joyful celebration of God's creative and redemptive love. A major contributing factor to the abandonment of the Sabbath by an increasing number of Sabbatharians is most likely their failure to experience the physical, mental, moral, and spiritual benefits of the Sabbath.

Those who experience the Sabbath as an alienating imposition and a day of gloomy frustration are apt to welcome a theology that releases them from such an oppressing and depressing experience. The solution to the problem, however, is found not in fabricating a "New Covenant" theology that does away with the Sabbath Commandment, but in discovering the Sabbath as a blessing rather than a burden, as a day of *joyful celebration* rather than a day of *gloomy frustration*.

This pastoral concern has motivated me to devote the final chapter to the rediscovery of the Sabbath. The first part of Chapter 7 briefly reports the rediscovery of the Sabbath by scholars, religious organizations, and people of different persuasions. This is the paradox of our times. While some Christians are rejecting the Sabbath as an Old Covenant institution nailed to the Cross, an increasing number of other Christians are rediscovering the continuity and value of the Sabbath for our tension-filled, restless lives.

The final section of Chapter 7 explores in a more personal way how to make Sabbathkeeping a Christ-centered experience—an experience of the awareness of the Savior's presence, peace, and rest in our lives. At a time when many are seeking for inner rest and release through pills, drugs, meditation groups, vacations, and athletic clubs, the Sabbath invites us to find true inner rest and peace not through *pills* or *places*, but in a right relationship with a *Person*, the Person of our Savior, who says: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28; NIV).

**Method and Style.** This book is written from a biblical perspective. I accept the Bible as normative for defining Christian beliefs and practices. Because the words of the Bible contain a divine message written by human authors who lived in specific historical situations, every effort must be made to understand their meaning in their historical context. My conviction is that an understanding of both the historical and literary context of relevant Biblical texts is indispensable in establishing both their original meaning and their present relevance. This conviction is reflected in the methodology I have followed in examining those controversial biblical texts that relate to the Law, in general, and the Sabbath, in particular.

Concerning the style of the book, I have attempted to write in simple, nontechnical language. In some instances, where a technical word is used, a

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definition is provided in parenthesis. To facilitate the reading, each chapter is divided into major parts and subdivided under appropriate headings. A brief summary is given at the end of each chapter. Unless otherwise specified, all Bible texts are quoted from the Revised Standard Version, copyright 1946 and 1952. In a few instances, some key words of a Bible text have been italicized for emphasis without footnoting them, since the reader is aware that the English Bible does not italicize words.

**Acknowledgments.** It is most difficult for me to acknowledge my indebtedness to the many persons who have contributed to the realization of this book. Indirectly, I am indebted to the scholars who have written articles, pamphlets, books, and dissertations on different aspects of the Sabbath/Sunday question. Their writings have stimulated my thinking and broadened my approach to this subject.

Directly, I want to express my gratitude to Joyce Jones and Deborah Everhart from Andrews University, as well as Jarrod and Eva Williamson from La Sierra University. Each of them has made a significant contribution by correcting and improving the style of the manuscript. They have worked many hours, reworking sentences so they sound more English and less Italian.

Words fail to express my gratitude to Gregory and Annita Watkins for designing a most attractive cover for the book. Gregory and Annita are a young couple serving at this time as student missionaries in China. They signed up for the "Sabbath Discussion" list and were so impressed by the essays they received in China via email, that they offered to design the cover for the book. When I accepted their offer I never anticipated that they would design such a splendid cover. The cover conveys the message of the book in a masterful way. The crossfire has attacked the Sabbath, but it has burned only the superficial veneer. The Sabbath as well as the other moral principles of the Decalogue are inscribed in the two granite tables that remain unscathed by the crossfire of human controversy. What a creative way to portray this fundamental biblical truth brought out by the book! Thank you, Gregory and Annita for designing such an attractive and suggestive cover.

Last but not least, I do express my special thanks to my wife who has been my constant source of encouragement and inspiration during the past thirty-seven years of our married life. She saw little of me while I was researching and writing this book. Without her love, patience, and encouragement, it would have been most difficult for me to complete this project in such a relatively short period of time.

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**Author's Hope.** I have written these pages with the earnest desire to help Christians of all persuasions to discover the Sabbath as God's gift of freedom to mankind. Freedom from work in order to be free before Him and hear His voice. Freedom from the world of things in order to enter into the peace of God for which we were created. Freedom to look at the world through the eyes of eternity and recapture some measure of Edenic delight. Freedom to taste and know that the Lord is good. Freedom to sing the Psalmist's Sabbath song: "Thou, O Lord, has made me glad by thy work; at the work of thy hands I sing for joy!" (Ps 92:4-5—A Song for the Sabbath).

### NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

1. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 67.

2. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 47; emphasis supplied.

3. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 62.

4. The other two sources cited in the study paper on "The Sabbath" released by the Worldwide Church of God in 1995, are the special issue of *Verdict* (vol. 4), entitled "Sabbatarianism Reconsidered," published by Robert Brinsmead on June 4, 1981, and the symposium *From Sabbath to the Lord's Day*, edited by Donald Carson and published by Zondervan in 1982.

5. Clay Peck, *New Covenant Christians* (Berthoud, CO, 1998), p. 2.

# Chapter 1

## POPE JOHN PAUL II

### AND

## THE SABBATH

On May 31, 1998, Pope John Paul II promulgated a lengthy Pastoral Letter, *Dies Domini*, in which he makes a passionate plea for a revival of Sunday observance. He appeals to the moral imperative of the Sabbath commandment and to the need of civil legislation to facilitate Sunday observance. This document has enormous historical significance since it addresses the critical problem of the prevailing Sunday profanation at “the threshold of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.”<sup>1</sup> This event has great significance for the Catholic Church, as over thirty million Catholics are expected to make their pilgrimage to Rome, seeking forgiveness for their own sins and a reduction of the temporal punishment for their loved ones in Purgatory.

The Pope is keenly aware that the crisis of Sunday observance is a major obstacle to the spiritual renewal the Great Jubilee is designed to bring about. He believes that the prevailing profanation of Sunday reflects the spiritual crisis of the Catholic Church and of Christianity, in general. The “strikingly low” attendance to the Sunday Mass indicates, in the Pope’s view, that “faith is weak” and “diminishing.”<sup>2</sup> He believes that if this trend is not reversed it can threaten the future of the Catholic Church as it stands at the threshold of the third millennium. He states: “The Lord’s Day has structured the history of the Church through two thousand years: how could we think that it will not continue to shape the future?”<sup>3</sup>

While reading the Pastoral Letter, I was reminded of a speech President Abraham Lincoln delivered on November 13, 1862. There he emphasized the vital function of the Sabbath in the survival of Christianity: “As we keep or break the Sabbath day, we nobly save or meanly loose the last and the best hope by which mankind arises.”<sup>4</sup> Obviously, for Abraham Lincoln, the Sabbath meant Sunday. This does not detract from the fact that one of American’s outstanding presidents recognized in the principle of Sabbathkeeping the best hope to renew and elevate human beings.

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The Pastoral Letter, like all papal documents, has been skillfully crafted with an introduction; five chapters which examine the importance of Sunday observance from theological, historical, liturgical, and social perspectives; and a conclusion. Pope John Paul and his advisers must be commended for composing a well-balanced document that addresses major issues relating to Sunday observance within the space limitation of approximately thirty pages.

The introduction sets the stage for the Pope's pastoral concerns by identifying some of the contributory factors to the crisis of Sunday observance and the solution that must be sought. A major factor is the change that has occurred "in socioeconomic conditions [which] have often led to profound modifications of social behavior and hence of the character of Sunday."<sup>5</sup> The Pope notes with regret that Sunday has become merely "a part of a weekend" when people are involved "in cultural, political or sporting activities" that cause the loss of awareness of "keeping the Lord's Day holy."<sup>6</sup>

Given the present situation, John Paul strongly believes that today it is "more necessary than ever to recover the deep doctrinal foundations underlying the Church's precept, so that the abiding value of Sunday in the Christian life will be clear to all the faithful."<sup>7</sup>

The Pastoral Letter reveals that the Pope firmly believes that the solution to the crisis of Sunday observance entails both doctrinal and legal aspects. Doctrinally, Christians need to rediscover the "biblical" foundations of Sunday observance in order to keep the day holy. Legally, Christians must "ensure that civil legislation respects their duty to keep Sunday holy."<sup>8</sup>

**Objectives of This Chapter.** No attempt is made in this chapter to analyze all the aspects of Sunday observance discussed in the Pastoral Letter. In the light of the overall objective of this book to consider from a biblical perspective the recent attacks against the Sabbath, this chapter focuses especially on how Pope John Paul deals with the Sabbath in his attempt to justify and promote Sunday observance.

The chapter divides into three major parts in accordance with the following three major issues addressed:

- (1) The theological connection between Sabbath and Sunday
- (2) The "biblical" support for Sunday observance
- (3) The call for Sunday legislation

## PART 1

THE THEOLOGICAL CONNECTION BETWEEN  
SABBATH AND SUNDAY

A surprising aspect of the Pastoral Letter is Pope John Paul's defense of Sunday observance as the embodiment and "full expression" of the Sabbath. In some ways this view represents a significant departure from the traditional Catholic explanation that Sunday observance is an ecclesiastical institution different from the Sabbath. In the past, this explanation virtually has been regarded as an established fact by Catholic theologians and historians. Thomas of Aquinas, for instance, makes this unambiguous statement: "In the New Law the observance of the Lord's day took the place of the observance of the Sabbath not by virtue of the precept [Sabbath commandment] but by the institution of the Church and the custom of Christian people."<sup>9</sup>

In his dissertation presented to the Catholic University of America, Vincent J. Kelly similarly affirms: "Some theologians have held that God likewise directly determined the Sunday as the day of worship in the New Law, that He Himself has explicitly substituted the Sunday for the Sabbath. But this theory is now entirely abandoned. It is now commonly held that God simply gave His Church the power to set aside whatever day or days she would deem suitable as Holy Days. The Church chose Sunday, the first day of the week, and in the course of time added other days, as holy days."<sup>10</sup>

Even the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) emphasizes the discontinuity between Sabbath and Sunday observance: "Sunday is expressly distinguished from the Sabbath which it follows chronologically every week; for Christians its ceremonial observance replaces that of the Sabbath."<sup>11</sup>

John Paul departs from the traditional distinction the Catholic Church has made between Sabbath and Sunday, presumably because he wants to make Sunday observance a moral imperative rooted in the Decalogue itself. By so doing, the Pope challenges Christians to respect Sunday, not merely as an ecclesiastical institution, but as a divine command. Furthermore, by rooting Sundaykeeping in the Sabbath commandment, the Pope offers the strongest moral reasons to urge Christians to "ensure that civil legislation respects their duty to keep Sunday holy."

The Pope's view of Sunday as the embodiment and "full expression" of the Sabbath stands in stark contrast to the so-called "New Covenant" and

Dispensational authors who emphasize the radical discontinuity between Sabbath and Sunday. The latter, as we shall see in the following chapters, is also the position of former sabbatarians who reduce the Sabbath to a Mosaic, Old Covenant institution that terminated at the Cross. The Pope rejects this position, defending instead the creational origin of the Sabbath in which he finds the theological foundation of Sunday observance. He writes: “In order to grasp fully the meaning of Sunday, therefore, we must re-read the great story of creation and deepen our understanding of the theology of the ‘Sabbath.’”<sup>12</sup>

**Creative and Redemptive Meanings of the Sabbath.** The Pope’s reflections on the theological meaning of the Sabbath are most perceptive and should especially thrill Sabbatarians. For example, speaking of God’s rest on the seventh day of creation, John Paul says: “The divine rest of the seventh day does not allude to an inactive God, but emphasizes the fullness of what has been accomplished. It speaks, as it were, of God’s lingering before the ‘very good’ work (Gen 1:31) which his hand has wrought, in order to cast upon it a gaze full of joyous delight. This is a ‘contemplative’ gaze which does not look to new accomplishments but enjoys the beauty of what has already been achieved.”<sup>13</sup>

This profound theological insight into the meaning of the divine *Shabbat* as a rest of cessation in order to express the satisfaction over a complete, perfect creation, and to fellowship with His creation, is developed at some length in my book *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness*. There I wrote: “God’s cessation on the seventh day from *doing* expresses His desire for *being* with His creation, for giving to His creatures not only *things* but *Himself*.”<sup>14</sup>

John Paul speaks eloquently of the theological development of the Sabbath from the rest of creation (Gen 2:1-3; Ex 20:8-11) to the rest of redemption (Deut 5:12-15). He notes that in the Old Testament the Sabbath commandment is linked “not only with God’s mysterious ‘rest’ after the days of creation (cf. Ex 20:8-11), but also with the salvation which he offers to Israel in the liberation from the slavery of Egypt (cf. Deut 5:12-15). The God who rests on the seventh day, rejoicing in His creation, is the same God who reveals his glory in liberating his children from Pharaoh’s oppression.”<sup>15</sup>

Being a memorial of creation and redemption, “the ‘Sabbath’ has therefore been interpreted evocatively as a determining element in the kind of ‘sacred architecture’ of time which marks biblical revelation. It recalls that the universe and history belong to God; and without constant awareness of that truth, man cannot serve in the world as a co-worker of the Creator.”<sup>16</sup>

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**The Sabbath Defines Our Relationship with God.** Contrary to Dispensational and so-called “New Covenant” writers who reduce the Sabbath to a Mosaic, ceremonial ordinance given exclusively to Jews, John Paul rightly recognizes that “the Sabbath precept . . . is rooted in the depths of God’s plan. This is why, unlike many other precepts, it is set not within the context of strictly cultic stipulations but within the Decalogue, the ‘ten words’ which represents the very pillars of the moral life inscribed on the human heart. In setting this commandment within the context of the basic structure of ethics, Israel and then the Church declare that they consider it not just a matter of community religious discipline but a defining and indelible expression of our relationship with God, announced and expounded by biblical revelation. This is the perspective within which Christians need to rediscover this precept today.”<sup>17</sup>

What a profound statement worth pondering! Sabbathkeeping is “not just a matter of community religious discipline but a defining and indelible expression of our relationship with God.” To appreciate the truth of this statement, it is important to remember that our life is a measure of time, and the way we use our time is indicative of our priorities. Believers who give priority to God in their thinking and living on the Sabbath show in a tangible way that God really counts in their life. Thus, Sabbathkeeping is indeed “a defining and indelible expression of our relationship with God.”

John Paul develops this point eloquently saying: “Man’s relationship with God demands times of explicit prayer, in which the relationship becomes an intense dialogue, involving every dimension of the person. ‘The Lord’s Day’ is the day of this relationship par excellence when men and women raise their song to God and become the voice of all creation.”<sup>18</sup>

**Sunday as the Fulfillment of the Sabbath.** In the light of these profound theological insights into the Sabbath as being a kind of “sacred architecture” of time that marks the unfolding of God’s creative and redemptive activity, and as the defining expression of our relationship with God, one wonders how does the Pope succeed in developing a theological justification for Sunday observance? He does this by making Sunday the embodiment of the biblical Sabbath.

For example, John Paul without hesitation applies to Sunday God’s blessing and sanctification of the Sabbath at creation. “Sunday is the day of rest because it is the day ‘blessed’ by God and ‘made holy’ by him, set apart from the other days to be, among them, ‘the Lord’s Day.’”<sup>19</sup>

More importantly, the Pope makes Sunday the “full expression” of the



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Sabbath by arguing that Sunday, as the Lord's Day, fulfills the creative and redemptive functions of the Sabbath. These two functions, the Pope claims, "reveal the meaning of the 'Lord's Day' within a single theological vision which fuses creation and salvation."<sup>20</sup>

"On the Lord's Day," John Paul explains, "which the Old Testament [Sabbath] links to the work of creation (cf. Gen 2:1-3; Ex 20:8-11) and the Exodus (cf. Deut 5:12-15), the Christian is called to proclaim the new creation and the new covenant brought about in the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Far from being abolished, the celebration of creation becomes more profound within a Christocentric perspective . . . . The remembrance of the liberation of the Exodus also assumes its full meaning by Christ in his Death and Resurrection. More than a 'replacement' of the Sabbath, therefore, Sunday is its fulfillment, and in a certain sense its extension and full expression in the ordered unfolding of the history of salvation, which reaches its culmination in Christ."<sup>21</sup>

The Pope maintains that New Testament Christians "made the first day after the Sabbath a festive day" because they discovered that the creative and redemptive accomplishments celebrated by the Sabbath, found their "fullest expression in Christ's Death and Resurrection, though its definitive fulfillment will not come until the Parousia, when Christ returns in glory."<sup>22</sup>

The Pope's attempt to make Sunday the "extension and full expression" of the creative and redemptive meanings of the Sabbath is very ingenious, but it lacks biblical and historical support. There are no indications in the New Testament that Christians ever interpreted Sunday to be the embodiment of the creative and redemptive meanings of the Sabbath. From a biblical and historical perspective, Sunday is not the Sabbath because the two days differ in authority, meaning, and experience.

**Difference in Authority.** The difference in authority lies in the fact that while Sabbathkeeping rests upon an explicit biblical command (Gen 2:2-3; Ex 20:8-11; Mark 2:27-28; Heb 4:9), Sundaykeeping derives from an interplay of social, political, pagan, and religious factors. I have examined these factors at length in my dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday*, published by the Pontifical Gregorian University, in Rome, Italy. The lack of a biblical authority for Sundaykeeping may well be a major contributing factor to the crisis of Sunday observance that John Paul rightly laments.

The vast majority of Christians, especially in the Western world, view their Sunday as a holiday to seek personal pleasure and profit rather than a holy day to seek divine presence and peace. I submit that a major contributing

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factor to the secularization of Sunday is the prevailing perception that there is no divine, biblical command to keep Sunday as a holy day.

The lack of a biblical conviction that Sunday should be observed as the holy Sabbath day may well explain why most Christians see nothing wrong in devoting their Sunday time to themselves rather than to the Lord. If there was a strong theological conviction that the principle of Sundaykeeping was divinely established at creation and later “inscribed” in the Decalogue, as the Pope attempts to prove, then Christians would feel compelled to act accordingly.

**Difference in Meaning.** John Paul recognizes the need to make Sundaykeeping a moral imperative and he tries to accomplish this by rooting the day in the Sabbath commandment itself. But this cannot be done because Sunday is not the Sabbath. The two days have a different meaning and function. While in Scripture the Sabbath memorializes God’s perfect creation, complete redemption, and final restoration, Sunday is justified in the earliest Patristic literature as the commemoration of the creation of light on the first day of the week, the cosmic-eschatological symbol of the new eternal world typified by the eighth day, and the memorial of Christ’s Sunday Resurrection.<sup>23</sup>

None of the historical meanings attributed to Sunday require per se the observance of the day by resting and worshipping the Lord. For example, nowhere does Scripture suggest that the creation of light on the first day ought to be celebrated through a weekly Sunday rest and worship. Even the Resurrection event, as we shall see, does not require per se a weekly or annual Sunday celebration.

The attempt to transfer to Sunday the biblical authority and meaning of the Sabbath is doomed to fail because it is impossible to retain the same authority, meaning, and experience when the date of a festival is changed. For example, if a person or an organization should succeed in changing the date of the Declaration of Independence from the 4th to the 5th of July, the new date could hardly be viewed as the legitimate celebration of Independence Day.

Similarly, if the festival of the Sabbath is changed from the seventh to the first day, the latter can hardly memorialize the divine acts of creation, redemption, and final restoration which are linked to the typology of the Sabbath. To invest Sunday with the theological meaning and function of the Sabbath means to adulterate a divine institution by making a holy day out of what God created to be a working day.

**Difference in Experience.** Third, the difference between Sabbath and Sunday is one of experience. While Sundaykeeping began and has remained largely *the hour* of worship, Sabbathkeeping is presented in Scriptures as *twenty-four hours* consecrated to God. In spite of the efforts made by Constantine, church councils, and the Puritans to make Sunday a total day of rest and worship, the historical reality is that Sunday observance has been equated with church attendance. John Paul acknowledges this historical reality in chapter 3 of the Pastoral Letter entitled “The Day of the Church. The Eucharistic Assembly: The Heart of Sunday.” The thrust of the chapter is that the heart of Sunday observance is the participation in the Mass. He cites the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which says: “The Sunday celebration of the Lord’s Day and his Eucharist is at the heart of the Church’s life.”<sup>24</sup>

The end of Sunday church services represents for many Christians also the termination of Sundaykeeping. After church, they go in good conscience to the shopping mall, a ball game, a dance hall, a theater, etc. It came as a surprise for me to discover that even in the “Bible Belt” many shops open for business as soon as the church services are over. The message is clear. The rest of Sunday is business as usual.

The recognition of this historical reality has led Christopher Kiesling, a distinguished Catholic Liturgist, to argue for the abandonment of the notion of Sunday as a day of rest and for the retention of Sunday as the hour of worship.<sup>25</sup> His reasoning is that since Sunday has never been a day of total rest and worship, there is no hope to make it so today when most people want holidays, not holy days.

Celebrating the Sabbath, however, means not merely attending church services but consecrating its *twenty-four hours* to the Lord. The Sabbath commandment does *not* say, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy by attending Sabbath school and church services.” What the commandment requires is to work six days and rest on the seventh day unto the Lord (Ex 20:8-10). This means that the essence of Sabbathkeeping is the consecration of time. The act of resting unto the Lord makes all the Sabbath activities, whether they be formal worship or informal fellowship and recreation, an act of worship because all of them spring out of a heart which has decided to honor God.

The act of resting on the Sabbath unto the Lord becomes the means through which the believer enters into God’s rest (Heb 4:10) by experiencing more fully and freely the awareness of God’s presence, peace, and rest. This unique experience of Sabbathkeeping is foreign to Sundaykeeping because

the essence of the latter is not the consecration of time but rather church attendance, generally followed by secular activities.

In the light of the foregoing considerations, we conclude that the Pope's attempt to make Sunday the theological and existential embodiment of the Sabbath is doomed to fail because the two days differ radically in their authority, meaning, and experience.

## PART 2

### THE "BIBLICAL" SUPPORT FOR SUNDAY OBSERVANCE

The second chapter of the Pastoral Letter entitled "Dies Christi—The Day of Christ" focuses on three major, biblical events that allegedly justify Sunday observance: (1) The Resurrection and appearances of Christ which took place on 'the first day after the Sabbath' (Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1);<sup>26</sup> (2) the religious gatherings that occurred on the first day of the week (cf. 1 Cor 16:2; Acts 20:7-12);<sup>27</sup> and (3) the outpouring of the Holy Spirit fifty days after the Resurrection which occurred on a Sunday (Acts 2:2-3).<sup>28</sup> We examine these arguments in their respective order.

#### (1) The Resurrection/Apearances of Christ

The Pope maintains that the earliest Christians "made the first day after the Sabbath a festive day, for that was the day on which the Lord rose from the dead."<sup>29</sup> He argues that though Sunday is rooted in the creative and redemptive meaning of the Sabbath, the day finds its full expression in the Resurrection of Christ. "Although the Lord's Day is rooted in the very work of creation and even more in the mystery of the Biblical [Sabbath] 'rest' of God, it is nonetheless to the Resurrection of Christ that we must look in order to understand fully the Lord's Day."<sup>30</sup>

**Importance Attributed to Resurrection.** The Resurrection and Appearance of Christ on the first day of the week constitute, in the Pope's view, the fundamental biblical justification for the origin of Sunday worship. He summarizes concisely the alleged Biblical evidences in the following paragraph: "According to the common witness of the Gospels, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead took place on 'the first day after the Sabbath' (Mark 16:2,9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). On the same day, the Risen Lord appeared to the two disciples of Emmaus (cf. Luke 24:13-35) and to the eleven Apostles gathered together (cf. Luke 24:36; John 20:19). A week later—as the Gospel of John recounts (cf. John 20:26)—the disciples were gathered

together once again when Jesus appeared to them and made Himself known to Thomas by showing him the signs of His Passion. The day of Pentecost—the first day of the eighth week after the Jewish Passover (cf. Acts 2:1), when the promise made by Jesus to the Apostles after the Resurrection was fulfilled by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (cf. Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5)—also fell on a Sunday. This was the day of the first proclamation and the first baptisms: Peter announced to the assembled crowd that Christ was risen and ‘those who received his word were baptized’ (Acts 2:41). This was the epiphany of the Church, revealed as the people into which are gathered in unity, beyond all their differences, the scattered children of God.”<sup>31</sup>

Numerous Catholic and Protestant scholars concur with John Paul in attributing to Christ’s Resurrection and appearances on the first day of the week the fundamental reason for the choice of Sunday by the Apostolic church. In his doctoral dissertation on the origin of Sunday, Corrado Mosna, a Jesuit student at the Pontifical Gregorian University who worked under Vincenzo Monachino, S. J. (the same professor who monitored my dissertation), concludes: “Therefore we can conclude with certainty that the event of the Resurrection has determined the choice of Sunday as the day of worship of the first Christian community.”<sup>32</sup>

The same view is expressed by Cardinal Jean Daniélou: “The Lord’s Day is a purely Christian institution; its origin is to be found solely on the fact of the Resurrection of Christ on the day after the Sabbath.”<sup>33</sup> In a similar vein, Paul Jewett, a Protestant scholar, writes: “What, it might be asked, specifically motivated the primitive Jewish church to settle upon Sunday as a regular time of assembly? As we have observed before, it must have had something to do with the Resurrection which, according to the uniform witness of the Gospels, occurred on the first day of the week.”<sup>34</sup>

**Evaluation of the Resurrection.** In spite of its popularity, the alleged role of the Resurrection in the adoption of Sunday observance lacks biblical support. A careful study of all the references to the Resurrection reveals the incomparable importance of the event,<sup>35</sup> but it does not provide any indication regarding a special day to commemorate it. In fact, as Harold Riesenfeld notes, “In the accounts of the Resurrection in the Gospels, there are no sayings which direct that the great event of Christ’s Resurrection should be commemorated on the particular day of the week on which it occurred.”<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, as the same author observes, “The first day of the week, in the writings of the New Testament, is never called ‘Day of the Resurrection’. This is a term which made its appearance later.”<sup>37</sup> Its usage first ap-

pears in the fourth century. Therefore, “to say that Sunday was observed because Jesus rose on that day,” as S. V. McCasland cogently states, “is really a *petitio principii* [begging the question], for such a celebration might just as well be monthly or annually and still be an observance of that particular day.”<sup>38</sup>

The New Testament attributes no liturgical significance to the day of Christ’s Resurrection simply because the Resurrection was seen as an existential reality experienced by living victoriously by the power of the Risen Savior, and not a liturgical practice associated with Sunday worship.

Had Jesus wanted to memorialize the day of His Resurrection, He would have capitalized on the day of His Resurrection to make such a day the fitting memorial of that event. But none of the utterances of the risen Savior reveal an intent to memorialize the day of His Resurrection by making it the new Christian day of rest and worship. Biblical institutions such as the Sabbath, Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper all trace their origin to a divine act that established them. But there is no such divine act for the institution of a weekly Sunday or an annual Easter Sunday memorial of the Resurrection.

The silence of the New Testament on this matter is very important since most of its books were written many years after Christ’s death and Resurrection. If by the latter half of the first century Sunday had come to be viewed as the memorial of the Resurrection which fulfilled the creation/redemption functions of the Old Testament Sabbath, as the Pope claims, we would expect to find in the New Testament some allusions to the religious meaning and observance of the weekly Sunday and/or annual Easter-Sunday.

The total absence of any such allusions indicates that such developments occurred in the post-apostolic period as a result of an interplay of political, social, and religious factors. These I have examined at length in my dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday*.

**No Easter-Sunday in the New Testament.** The Pope’s claim that the celebration of Christ’s Resurrection on a weekly Sunday and annual Easter-Sunday “evolved from the early years after the Lord’s Resurrection”<sup>39</sup> cannot be substantiated Biblically or historically. There is nearly unanimous scholarly consensus that for at least a century after Jesus’ death, Passover was observed not on Easter-Sunday, as a celebration of the Resurrection, but on the date of Nisan 14 (irrespective of the day of the week) as a celebration of the sufferings, atoning sacrifice, and Resurrection of Christ.

The repudiation of the Jewish reckoning of Passover and the adoption of Easter-Sunday instead is a post-apostolic development which is attributed, as Joachim Jeremias puts it, “to the inclination to break away from Judaism”<sup>40</sup> and to avoid, as J. B. Lightfoot explains, “even the semblance of Judaism.”<sup>41</sup>

The introduction and promotion of Easter-Sunday by the Church of Rome in the second century caused the well-known Passover (Quartodeciman) controversy which eventually led Bishop Victor of Rome to excommunicate the Asian Christians (c. A. D. 191) for refusing to adopt Easter-Sunday.<sup>42</sup> Indications such as these suffice to show that Christ’s Resurrection was not celebrated on a weekly Sunday and annual Easter-Sunday from the inception of Christianity. The social, political, and religious factors that contributed to the change from Sabbath to Sunday and Passover to Easter-Sunday are discussed at great length in my dissertation.

**Evaluation of the Appearances.** John Paul attaches particular significance to the appearances of the Risen Lord on the first day of the week to “the two disciples of Emmaus (cf. Luke 24:13-35) and to the eleven Apostles gathered together (cf. Luke 24:36-49; John 20:19).”<sup>43</sup> The fact that He also appeared to the disciples the following Sunday (“eight days later”—John 20:26) to make Himself known to Thomas, and that He fulfilled the promise of outpouring the Holy Spirit on a Sunday (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5) is seen as the beginning of a consistent pattern of Sunday observance.<sup>44</sup>

The appearances of Christ do not follow any consistent pattern. The mention of Christ’s appearance “eight days later” (John 20:26), supposedly the Sunday following His Resurrection, can hardly suggest a regular pattern of Sunday observance since John himself explains its reason—namely, the absence of Thomas at the previous appearance (John 20:24).

Moreover, on this occasion, John makes no reference to any cultic meal but simply to Christ’s tangible demonstration to Thomas of the reality of his bodily Resurrection (John 20:26-29). The fact that “eight days later” the disciples were again gathered together is not surprising, since we are told that before Pentecost “they were staying” (Acts 1:13) together in the upper room and there they met daily for mutual edification (Acts 1:14; 2:1).

No consistent pattern can be derived from Christ’s appearances to justify the institution of a recurring eucharistic celebration on Sunday. The Lord appeared to individuals and to groups not only on Sunday but at different times, places, and circumstances. He appeared, in fact, to single persons such as Cephas and James (1 Cor 15:5,7), to the twelve (vv. 5, 7), and to a group of five hundred persons (v. 6). The meetings occurred, for instance,

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while the disciples were gathered within shut doors for fear of the Jews (John 20:19, 26), traveling on the Emmaus road (Luke 24:13-35), or fishing on the lake of Galilee (John 21:1-14).

Only with two disciples at Emmaus, Christ “took the bread and blessed; and broke it, and gave it to them” (Luke 24:30). This last instance may sound like the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, but in reality it was an ordinary meal around an ordinary table to which Jesus was invited. Christ accepted the hospitality of the two disciples and sat “at the table with them” (Luke 24:30). According to prevailing custom, the Lord “took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them” (Luke 24:30). This act, as explained by J. Behm, was “simply a customary and necessary part of the preparation for eating together.”<sup>45</sup>

**The Witness of Matthew and Mark.** Another notable point is that, according to Matthew (28:10) and Mark (16:7), Christ’s appearances occurred not in Jerusalem (as mentioned by Luke and John) but in Galilee. This suggests that, as S. V. McCasland observes, “the appearance may have been as much as ten *days later*, after the feast of the unleavened bread, as indicated by the closing fragments of the Gospel of Peter. But if the appearance at this late date was on Sunday it would be scarcely possible to account for the observance of Sunday in such an accidental way.”<sup>46</sup>

While it may be difficult to explain the discrepancies in the Gospels’ narratives, the fact remains that both Matthew and Mark make no reference to any meal or meeting of Christ with his disciples on Easter-Sunday. This implies that no particular importance was attributed to the meal Christ shared with his disciples on the Sunday night of his Resurrection.

In the light of the foregoing considerations, we conclude that Christ’s appearances served to reassure the disheartened disciples of the reality of Christ’s Resurrection, but they could hardly have set the pattern for a recurring weekly commemoration of the Resurrection. They occurred at different times, places, and circumstances; and in those instances where Christ ate, He partook of ordinary food (like fish—John 21:13), not to institute a eucharistic Sunday worship but to demonstrate the reality of his bodily Resurrection.

## (2) The Day of the Sun and the Creation of Light

John Paul maintains that “the Old Testament vision of the Sabbath” inspired the earliest Christians to link the Resurrection with the first day of creation. He writes: “Christian thought spontaneously linked the Resurrec-



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tion, which took place on ‘the first day of the week,’ with the first day of that cosmic week (cf. Gen 1:1–2:4) which shapes the creation story of the Book of Genesis: the day of the creation of light (cf. 1:3-5).”<sup>47</sup>

The linkage between the Resurrection and the creation of light was not as “spontaneously” inspired by “the Old Testament vision of the Sabbath,” as the Pope suggests. In my dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday*, I submit compelling documents indicating that such linkage was inspired by the necessity which arose in the post-apostolic period to justify the abandonment of the Sabbath and the adoption of the Day of the Sun.

**Hadrianic Anti-Sabbath Legislation.** This development began during the reign of the Emperor Hadrian (A. D. 117-138) as a result of the repressive anti-Judaic legislation. In A. D. 135, Hadrian promulgated a legislation that categorically prohibited the practice of Judaism, in general, and of Sabbathkeeping, in particular. The aim of this legislation was to liquidate Judaism as a religion at a time when the Jews were experiencing resurgent Messianic expectations that exploded in violent uprisings in various parts of the empire, especially Palestine.<sup>48</sup>

To avoid the repressive anti-Jewish and anti-Sabbath legislation, most Christians adopted the Day of the Sun as their new day of worship. This enabled them to show the Roman authorities their differentiations from the Jews and their identification and integration with the customs and cycles of the Roman empire.

To develop a theological justification for worshipping on the Day of the Sun, Christians appealed to God’s creation of light on the first day and to the Resurrection of Christ as the Sun of Justice, since both events coincided with the Day of the Sun. The latter was connected to the first day of the creation-week, because the creation of light on the first day provided what appeared to many a providential biblical justification for observing the Day of the Sun, the generator of light.

**Sunday and the Creation of Light.** The earliest example of this linkage is found in Justin Martyr’s *Apology*, addressed to the Emperor Antoninus Pius (about A. D. 150). Justin writes: “Sunday (*dies solis*) is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead.”<sup>49</sup> Christians, as Cardinal J. Daniélou points out, noticed early the coincidence between the creation of light on the first day and the veneration of the Sun which took place on the selfsame day.<sup>50</sup>

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Jerome (A. D. 342-420) makes the connection very explicit when he says: “If it is called the Day of the Sun by the pagans, we most willingly acknowledge it as such, since it is on this day that the light of the world appeared and on this day the Sun of Justice has risen.”<sup>51</sup>

These considerations suggest that Christians did not spontaneously come to view the day of Christ’s Resurrection as the fulfillment of the creative and redemptive accomplishments celebrated by the seventh-day Sabbath. The linkage to the creation week was made primarily by virtue of the fact that the creation of the light on the first day provided what to many Christians appeared to be a “biblical” justification for observing the Day of the Sun.

**Evangelistic Considerations.** The christianization of the Day of the Sun was apparently designed also to facilitate the acceptance of Christianity by pagans who worshipped the Sun-god, especially on his day of the Sun. For them to adopt the Day of the Sun as their Christian day of worship was not a problem since that day already had special religious significance in their pagan religion.

It is noteworthy that the growing popularity of Sun worship led to the advancement of the Day of the Sun from the position of second day of the week (following Saturn-day), to that of first and most important day of the week. The historical sources available indicate that this development occurred in the early part of the second century—that is, at the very time when Christians adopted the Day of the Sun for their weekly worship.<sup>52</sup>

John Paul acknowledges the evangelistic intent of the adoption of the “day of the Sun.” He writes: “Wise pastoral intuition suggested to the Church the christianization of the notion of Sunday as ‘the day of the Sun,’ which was the Roman name for the day and which is retained in some modern languages. This was in order to draw the faithful away from the seduction of cults which worshipped the sun, and to direct the celebration of the day to Christ, humanity’s true ‘sun.’”<sup>53</sup>

Unfortunately, this strategy backfired because Christians were often tempted to revert to the popular veneration of the Sun and other planetary gods. For example, Philaster, Bishop of Brescia (died ca. A. D. 397) condemns as heresy the prevailing belief that “the name of the days of the Sun, of the Moon . . . had been established by God at the creation of the world. . . . The pagans, that is, the Greeks have set up such names and with the names also the notion that mankind depends from the seven stars”<sup>54</sup>

In a document attributed to Priscillian, a Spanish Bishop of Avila (ca. A.D. 340-385), anathema is pronounced against those Christians who “in

their sacred ceremonies, venerate and acknowledge as gods the Sun, Moon . . . and all the heavenly host, which are detestable idols worthy of the Gehenna.”<sup>55</sup>

The adoption and christianization of the day of the sun, instead of the biblical Sabbath, has not proven to be a “wise pastoral intuition” since it has tempted Christians in the past to revert to pagan worship, and it is tempting Christians today to treat Sunday as a pagan holiday rather than as a Biblical Holy Day.

**Was Sunday Needed?** At this juncture I would like to pose respectfully to Pope John Paul some important questions: If the Sabbath had been divinely established to commemorate God’s creative and redemptive accomplishments on behalf of His people, what right had the Catholic Church to make Sunday the legitimate “fulfillment,” “full expression,” and “extension” of the Sabbath? Was the theology and typology of the Sabbath no longer adequate after the Cross to commemorate creation and redemption? Was not the Paschal Mystery fulfilled through the death, burial, and Resurrection of Christ which occurred respectively on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday?

Why should Sunday be chosen to celebrate the atoning sacrifice of Christ when His redemptive mission was completed on a Friday afternoon when the Savior exclaimed “It is finished” (John 19:30), and then He rested in the tomb according to the Sabbath commandment? Does not this fact suggest that both God’s creation rest and Christ’s redemption rest in the tomb occurred on the Sabbath? How can Sunday be invested with the eschatological meaning of the final restoration rest that awaits the people of God when the New Testament attaches such a meaning to the Sabbath? “A Sabbath rest [literally, a ‘Sabbathkeeping’] has been left behind [*apoleipetai*] for the people of God” (Heb 4:9). Augustine himself recognizes the eschatological meaning of the Sabbath when he eloquently says that on that final Sabbath “we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise.”<sup>56</sup>

May I respectfully suggest that the Pope’s attempt to invest Sunday with the theological meaning and eschatological function of the Sabbath by virtue of Christ’s Resurrection on the first day is well-meaning but misguided. It mistakenly makes Sunday the biblical Sabbath, when in reality the two days differ radically in their origin, meaning, authority, and experience.

### (3) The Religious Gatherings on the First Day of the Week

In his Pastoral Letter, Pope John Paul traces the origin of Sunday worship back to the Apostolic church. He claims that from Apostolic times the first day of the week shaped the religious life of Christ’s disciples.<sup>57</sup> To

support this claim, the Pope appeals to three commonly used texts: (1) 1 Corinthians 16:2, (2) Acts 20:7-12, and (3) Revelation 1:10. Each of these passages are examined at great length in my dissertation.<sup>58</sup> In this context I limit myself to a few basic observations.

**1 Corinthians 16:2: Christian Sunday Gatherings?** The first-day fund-raising plan recommended by Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:1-3 is cited by John Paul as an indication that “from Apostolic times, ‘the first day after the Sabbath,’ the first day of the week, began to shape the rhythm of life for Christ’s disciples (cf. 1 Cor 16:2).”<sup>59</sup> The Pope affirms that “ever since Apostolic times, the Sunday gathering has in fact been for Christians a moment of fraternal sharing with the poor. ‘On the first day of the week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn’ (1 Cor 16:2), says Saint Paul in referring to the collection organized for the poor churches of Judaea.”<sup>60</sup>

John Paul sees in the first-day fund-raising plan recommended by Paul in this text a clear indication that the Christian Church gathered for worship on that day. This view is shared by numerous Catholic and Protestant scholars.<sup>61</sup> For example, Corrado Mosna argues that since Paul designates the “offering” in 2 Corinthians 9 :12 as “service–*leiturgia*,” the collection [of 1 Corinthians 16:2] must have been linked with the Sunday worship service of the Christian assembly.”<sup>62</sup>

The various attempts to extrapolate from Paul’s fund-raising plan a regular pattern of Sunday observance reveal inventiveness and originality, but they rest on construed arguments and not on the actual information the text provides. Observe, first of all, that there is nothing in the text to suggest public assemblies inasmuch as the setting aside of funds was to be done “by himself–*par’heauto*.” The phrase suggests that the collection was to be done individually and in private.

If the Christian community was worshiping together on Sunday, it appears paradoxical that Paul should recommend laying aside at home one’s gift. Why should Christians deposit their offering at home on Sunday if on such a day they were gathering for worship? Should not the money have been brought to the Sunday service?

**Purpose of the Fund-raising Plan.** The purpose of the first-day fund-raising plan is clearly stated by the Apostle: “So that contributions need not be made when I come” (1 Cor 16:2). The plan then is proposed not to enhance Sunday worship by the offering of gifts, but to ensure a substantial and efficient collection upon his arrival. Four characteristics can be identified in

the plan. The offering was to be laid aside *periodically* (“on the first day of every week”—v. 2), *personally* (“each of you”—v. 2), *privately* (“by himself in store”—v. 2), and *proportionately* (“as he may prosper”—v. 2).

To the same community on another occasion, Paul thought it necessary to send brethren to “arrange in advance for the gift . . . promised, so that it may be ready not as an exaction but as a willing gift” (2 Cor 9:5). The Apostle desired to avoid embarrassing both to the givers and to the collectors when finding that they “were not ready” (2 Cor 9:4) for the offering. To avoid such problems in this instance, he recommends both a time—the first day of the week—and a place—one’s home.

Paul’s mention of the first day could be motivated more by practical than theological reasons. To wait until the end of the week or of the month to set aside one’s contributions or savings is contrary to sound budgetary practices, since by then one finds empty pockets and empty hands. On the other hand, if, on the first day of the week before planning any expenditures, believers set aside what they plan to give, the remaining funds will be so distributed as to meet all the basic necessities. The text, therefore, proposes a valuable weekly plan to ensure a substantial and orderly contribution on behalf of the poor brethren of Jerusalem—to extract more meaning from the text would distort it.

**Acts 20:7-11: First-Day Troas Meeting.** Fundamental importance is attributed to Acts 20:7-11 inasmuch as it contains the only explicit New Testament reference to a Christian gathering conducted “on the first day of the week . . . to break bread” (Acts 20:7). John Paul assumes that the meeting was a customary Sunday assembly “upon which the faithful of Troas were gathered ‘for the breaking of the bread [that is, the Eucharistic celebration].’”<sup>63</sup>

Numerous scholars share the Pope’s view. F. F. Bruce, for example, affirms that this statement “is the earliest unambiguous evidence we have for the Christian practice of gathering together for worship on that day.”<sup>64</sup> Paul Jewett similarly declares that “here is the earliest clear witness to Christian assembly for purposes of worship on the first day of the week.”<sup>65</sup> Statements like these could be multiplied.

These categorical conclusions rest mostly on the assumption that verse 7 represents “a fixed formula” which describes the habitual *time* (“On the first day of the week”) and the *nature* (“to break bread”) of the primitive Christian worship. Since, however, the meeting occurred in the evening and “the breaking of the bread” took place after midnight (vv. 7, 11) and Paul left

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the believers at dawn, we need to ask: Was the time and nature of the Troas gathering *ordinary* or *extraordinary*, occasioned perhaps by the departure of the Apostle?

**Special Farewell Gathering.** The context clearly indicates that it was a special farewell gathering occasioned by the departure of Paul, and not a regular Sunday-worship custom. The meeting began on the evening of the first day, which, according to Jewish reckoning, was our Saturday night, and continued until early Sunday morning when Paul departed. Being a night meeting occasioned by the departure of the Apostle at dawn, it is hardly reflective of regular Sundaykeeping.

Paul would have observed with the believers only the night of Sunday and traveled during the day time. This was not allowed on the Sabbath and would not have set the best example of Sundaykeeping either. The passage suggests, as noted by F. J. Foakes-Jackson, that “Paul and his friends could not, as good Jews, start on a journey on a Sabbath; they did so as soon after it as was possible (verse 12) at *dawn* on the ‘first day’—the Sabbath having ended at sunset.”<sup>66</sup>

**The Breaking of the Bread.** The expression “to break bread—*klasai arton*” deserves closer attention. What does it actually mean in the context of the passage? Does it mean that ‘the Christians came together for a fellowship meal or to celebrate the Lord’s Supper? It should be noted that the breaking of bread was simply a customary and necessary part of the preparation for eating together. The act of breaking in pieces a loaf of bread by the host marked the opening action of a meal. In most European cultures, the same function is fulfilled by the host wishing “Buon appetito—Good Appetite” to the guest. This ritual gives permission to all to begin eating.

In the post-apostolic literature, the expression “breaking of bread” is used as a technical designation for the Lord’s Supper. But this is not the common meaning or usage in the New Testament. In fact, the verb “to break—*klao*” followed by the noun “bread—*artos*” occurs fifteen times in the New Testament. Nine times it refers to Christ’s act of breaking bread when feeding the multitude, when partaking of the Last Supper, and when eating with His disciples after His Resurrection (Matt 14:19; 15:36; 26:26; Mark 8:6; 9:19; 14:22; Luke 22:19; 24:30; 24:35); twice it describes Paul’s commencing and partaking of a meal (Acts 20:11; 27:35); twice it describes the actual breaking of the bread of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 10:16; 11:24); and twice it is used as a general reference to the disciples’ or believers’ “breaking bread” together (Acts 2:46; 20:7).

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It should be noticed that in none of these instances is the Lord's Supper explicitly or technically designated as "the breaking of bread." An attempt could be made to see a reference to the Lord's Supper in the two general references of Acts 2:46 and 20:7. As far as Acts 2:46 is concerned, the phrase "breaking bread in their homes" obviously refers to the daily table-fellowship of the earliest Christians, when, as the text says, "day by day . . . they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people" (Acts 2:46-47).

Such daily table-fellowship, though it may have included the celebrations of the Lord's Supper, can hardly be construed as exclusive liturgical celebrations of the Lord's Supper. The equivalent statement found in Acts 20:7, "We were gathered together to break bread," similarly needs mean no more than "We were gathered to eat together." In fact, there is no mention of a cup, nor of any prayers or reading of a Scripture. It is Paul alone who broke bread and ate. No indication is given that he ever blessed the bread or the wine or that he distributed it to the believers.

Furthermore, the breaking of bread was followed by a meal "having eaten—*geusamenos*" (v. 11). The same verb is used by Luke in three other instances with the explicit meaning of satisfying hunger (Acts 10:10; 23:14; Luke 14:24). Undoubtedly, Paul was hungry after his prolonged speech and needed some food before he could continue his exhortation and start his journey. However, if Paul partook of the Lord's Supper together with a regular meal, he would have acted contrary to his recent instruction to the Corinthians to whom he strongly recommended satisfying their hunger by eating at home before gathering to celebrate the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:2, 22, 34).

The New Testament does not offer any indication regarding a fixed day for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. While Paul recommends to the Corinthian believers a specific day on which to privately set aside their offerings, concerning the celebration of the Lord's Supper he *repeatedly* says in the same epistle and to the same people, "When you come together" (1 Cor 11:18, 20, 33, 34), implying *indeterminate* times and days.

The simplest way to explain the passage is that Luke mentions the day of the meeting not because it was Sunday, but most likely because (1) Paul was "ready to depart" (Acts 20:7), (2) the extraordinary miracle of Eutychus occurred that night, and (3) the time reference provides an additional, significant, chronological reference to describe the unfolding of Paul's journey.

**Revelation 1:10: “The Lord’s Day.”**

The third crucial New Testament passage used by John Paul to defend the apostolic origin of Sunday observance is found in the book of Revelation. John, exiled on the “island of Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (Rev 1 :9), writes: “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day—*en te kuriake hemera*” (Rev 1:10).

John Paul claims that this text “gives evidence of the practice of calling the first day of the week ‘the Lord’s Day’ (Rev 1:10). This would now be a characteristic distinguishing Christians from the world around them. . . . And when Christians spoke of the ‘Lord’s Day,’ they did so giving to this term the full sense of the Easter proclamation: ‘Jesus Christ is Lord’ (Phil 2:11; cf. Acts 2:36; 1 Cor 12:3).”<sup>67</sup>

The implication of the Pope’s statement is that New Testament Christians not only called Sunday “The Lord’s Day” but also expressed through such designation their faith in their Risen Savior. Numerous scholars share the same view. For example, Corrado Mosna emphatically writes: “By the phrase ‘Lord’s Day’ (Rev 1:10), John wishes to indicate specifically the day in which the community celebrates together the eucharistic liturgy.”<sup>68</sup> The phrase “eucharistic liturgy” is used by Catholics to describe the Lord’s Supper celebration in honor of the Risen Lord.

A detailed analysis of this text would take us beyond the limited scope of this chapter. In my dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday* I devoted twenty pages (pp. 111 to 131) to an examination of this verse. For the purpose of this chapter, I submit only two basic observations.

First, the equation of Sunday with the expression “Lord’s day” is not based on internal evidences of the book of Revelation or of the rest of the New Testament, but on three second-century patristic testimonies, namely, *Didache* 14:1, Ignatius’ *Epistle to the Magnesians* 9:1, and *The Gospel of Peter* 35; 50. Of the three, however, only in the *Gospel of Peter*, written toward the end of the second century, is Sunday unmistakably designated by the technical term “Lord’s—*kuriake*.” In two different verses it reads: “Now in the night in which the Lord’s day (*He kuriake*) dawned . . . there rang out a loud voice in heaven” (v. 35); “Early in the morning of the Lord’s day (*tes kuriakes*) Mary Magdalene . . . came to the sepulchre” (v. 50, 51).

It is noteworthy that while in the genuine Gospels Mary Magdalene and the other women went to the sepulchre “early on the *first day of the week*” (Mark 16:2; cf. Matt 28:1; Luke 24:1; John 20:1), in the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter* it says that they went “early in the morning of *the Lord’s day*.” The



use of the new designation “*Lord’s Day*” instead of “*first day of the week*” clearly indicates that by the end of the second century Christians referred to Sunday as “the Lord’s Day.”

The latter usage, however, cannot be legitimately read back into Revelation 1:10. A major reason is that if Sunday had already received the new appellation “Lord’s day” by the end of the first century, when both the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation were written, we would expect this new name for Sunday to be used consistently in both works, especially since they were apparently produced by the same author at approximately the same time and in the same geographical area.

If the new designation “Lord’s day” already existed by the end of the first century, and expressed the meaning and nature of Christian Sunday worship, John would not have had reasons to use the Jewish phrase “first day of the week” in his Gospel. Therefore, the fact that the expression “Lord’s day” occurs in John’s apocalyptic book but not in his Gospel—where the first day is explicitly mentioned in conjunction with the Resurrection (John 20:1) and the appearances of Jesus (John 20:19, 26)—suggests that the “Lord’s day” of Revelation 1:10 can hardly refer to Sunday.

**No Easter Sunday.** A second important consideration that discredits the Pope’s claim that Sunday was called “Lord’s Day” in the “sense of the Easter proclamation” is the fact that the book of Revelation is addressed to the seven churches of Asia Minor who did not observe Easter-Sunday. Instead, they observed Passover by the biblical date of Nisan 14. Polycrates, who claims to be following the tradition of the Apostle John, convened a council of the church leaders of Asia Minor (about A. D. 191) to discuss the summon received from Bishop Victor of Rome to adopt Easter-Sunday. The unanimous decision of the Asian bishops was to reject Easter-Sunday and to retain the Biblical dating of Passover.<sup>69</sup>

In the light of these facts, it would be paradoxical if the Apostle John, who kept Passover by the fixed date of Nisan 14 and who wrote to Christians in Asia Minor who like him did not observe Easter-Sunday, would have used the phrase “Lord’s Day” to express his Easter faith in the Risen Lord. Cardinal Jean Daniélou, a respected Catholic scholar, timidly acknowledges this fact when he writes: “In the Apocalypse (1:10), when Easter takes place on the 14 Nisan, the word [Lord’s Day] does not perhaps mean Sunday.”<sup>70</sup>

The only day that John knew as the “Lord’s Day” by the end of the first century when he wrote the book of Revelation is the Sabbath. This is the only day of which Christ proclaims Himself to be “Lord-*kupios*.” “For the Son of man is lord of the Sabbath” (Matt 12:8).

The immediate context that precedes and follows Revelation 1:10 contains unmistakable references to the eschatological day of the Lord. This suggests the possibility that the “Lord’s Day” on which John was transported in vision was a Sabbath day in which he saw the great day of Christ’s coming. What greater vision could have given courage to the aged Apostle in exile for his witness to Christ! Moreover, the Sabbath is closely linked eschatologically to the Second Advent. The meeting of the invisible Lord in time on the weekly Sabbath is a prelude to the meeting of the visible Lord in space on the final day of His coming.

Summing up, the attempt of the Pastoral Letter to find biblical support for Sunday worship in the New Testament references to the Resurrection (Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1)—the first-day farewell night meeting at Troas (Acts 20:7-11), the first-day private deposit plan mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:1-3, and the reference to the “Lord’s Day” in Revelation 1:10—is not new. The same arguments have been used repeatedly in the past and found wanting.

An important fact, often ignored, is that if Paul or any other apostle had attempted to promote the abandonment of the Sabbath (a millenarian institution deeply rooted in the religious consciousness of God’s people), and the adoption instead of Sunday observance, they would have stirred up considerable opposition on the part of Jewish-Christians, as was the case with reference to the circumcision.

The absence of any echo of Sabbath/Sunday controversy in the New Testament is a most telling evidence that the introduction of Sunday observance is a post-apostolic phenomenon. In my dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday*, I endeavored to identify the interplay of social, political, and religious factors that contributed to this historical change. In the light of these considerations, the attempt of Pope John Paul to give a biblical sanction to Sunday worship by tracing its origins to the Apostolic Church must be viewed as well-meaning but devoid of biblical support.

### PART 3

## POPE JOHN PAUL’S CALL FOR SUNDAY LEGISLATION

In his Pastoral Letter *Dies Domini*, Pope John Paul devotes one of the five chapters (chapter 4) to emphasize the obligation of Sunday observance and the legislation needed to facilitate compliance with such obligation. The Pope’s call for civil legislation to facilitate Sunday observance stems from three major considerations which we need to briefly consider:

- 1) The moral obligation of Sunday observance
- (2) The ecclesiastical enforcement of Sunday observance
- 3) The call for civil Sunday legislation

### (1) The Moral Obligation of Sunday Observance

For the Pope, Sunday observance is not an option but a moral obligation which is well-defined both in the Catholic Catechism and the Catholic Canon Law. We have seen that John Paul roots such an obligation in the Sabbath commandment itself, because he believes that Sunday is “inscribed” in the Decalogue and is the fulfillment and full expression of the Sabbath. This means that Sunday must be observed according to the directives of the Sabbath commandment.

John Paul writes: “It is the duty of Christians, therefore, to remember that, although the practices of the Jewish Sabbath are gone, surpassed as they are by the ‘fulfillment’ which Sunday brings, the underlying reasons for keeping ‘the Lord’s Day’ holy—inscribed solemnly in the Ten Commandments—remain valid, though they need to be reinterpreted in the light of the theology and spirituality of Sunday.”<sup>71</sup> The Pope continues quoting the Deuteronomic version of the Sabbath commandment (Deut 5:12-15).

The moral obligation to observe Sunday for the Pope is “inscribed solemnly in the Ten Commandments” because, “more than a ‘replacement’ of the Sabbath, Sunday is its fulfillment, and in a certain sense its extension and full expression in the ordered unfolding of the history of salvation.”<sup>72</sup> “From this perspective,” John Paul continues, “the biblical theology of the ‘Sabbath’ can be recovered in full, without compromising the Christian character of Sunday.”<sup>73</sup>

**Evaluation.** The Pope’s attempt to ground the moral obligation of Sunday observance in the Sabbath commandment is very ingenious, but, as shown earlier, it lacks biblical and historical support. From a biblical perspective, there are no indications in the New Testament that Sunday was ever viewed as the “extension and full expression” of the Sabbath. Similarly, from a historical perspective, the Fathers emphasize the difference and not the continuity between Sabbath and Sunday.

The three major theological meanings of Sunday which I found in the writings of the Fathers are as follows: (1) the commemoration of the anniversary of creation, especially the creation of light on the first day which was suggested by its analogy to the Day of the Sun; (2) the commemoration of Christ’s Resurrection which eventually emerged as the fundamental reason

for Sundaykeeping; and (3) the cosmic and eschatological speculations about the significance of the eighth day. An extensive discussion of these theological reasons is found in chapter 9 of my dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday*.

Speculations about the eighth day abound in the Patristic literature because they served to prove the superiority of Sunday—as the eighth day, symbol of the eternal world—in contrast to the Sabbath,—as the seventh day, symbol of the terrestrial millennium. These speculations were repudiated in the fourth century when the necessity to prove the superiority of Sunday over the Sabbath subsided.<sup>74</sup>

A careful study of early Christian literature suggests that Sunday arose, not as “the extension” of the Sabbath, but as its *replacement*. The necessity which arose to separate from the Jews and their Sabbath influenced Gentile Christians to adopt the venerable day of the Sun, since it provided an adequate time and symbolism to commemorate significant divine events which occurred on that day, such as the creation of light and the Resurrection of the Sun of Justice.

The adoption of the Day of the Sun provoked a controversy with those who maintained the continuity and inviolability of the Sabbath. To silence such opposition, the symbolism of the first and eighth day were introduced and widely used by the Fathers, since they provided seemingly valuable apologetic arguments to defend the superiority of Sunday. As the first day, Sunday could allegedly claim superiority over the Sabbath, since it celebrated the anniversary of both the first and the second creation which was inaugurated by Christ’s Resurrection. The seventh day, on the other hand, could only claim to commemorate the completion of creation. As the eighth day, Sunday could claim to be the alleged continuation, and supplantation of the Sabbath, both temporally and eschatologically.<sup>75</sup>

The polemic nature of the theological arguments developed by the Fathers to justify Sunday observance do not support the claim of the Pastoral Letter that Sunday was seen by the primitive Church as “the extension and full expression” of the Sabbath. The historical reality is that the Fathers emphasized the distinction between Sabbath and Sunday by making the Sabbath a Jewish institution terminated by Christ.

In the light of these considerations, the Pope’s attempt to ground the moral obligation of Sunday observance on the Sabbath commandment must be viewed as a well-meaning but misinformed endeavor, because theologically, historically, and existentially, Sunday has never been the Sabbath.

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## (2) The Ecclesiastical Enforcement of Sunday Observance

In his Pastoral Letter, Pope John Paul emphasizes not only the moral obligation of Sunday observance, but also the responsibility of the Catholic Church to ensure that her members respect such an obligation. This concept is foreign to most Protestants who view going to church on Sunday as a good practice, but not as a church law. Protestant churches do not condemn the failure to attend Sunday services as a serious sin. By contrast, the Catholic Church views the deliberate failure to attend Sunday Mass as a grave sin.

It is important to understand the Catholic view of the obligatory nature of attending Sunday Mass in order to comprehend why the Catholic Church enforces such practice within the church by means of Canon Law, and why it also urges civil governments to pass civil Sunday legislation that respects the duty of Catholics to fulfill their worship obligations. The connection between the two is discussed below.

Historically, enforcement of Sunday worship within the Catholic Church began in the fourth century. The protection provided by the Constantinian Sunday Law (A. D. 321) tempted many Christians to become negligent about attending Sunday Mass.

To remedy this problem, as John Paul explains, “The Church had to make explicit the duty to attend Sunday Mass: more often than not, this was done in the form of exhortation, but at times the Church had to resort to specific canonical precepts. This was the case in a number of local Councils from the fourth century onwards (as at the Council of Elvira of 300, which speaks not of an obligation but of penalties after three absences) and most especially from the sixth century onwards (as at the Council of Agde in 506). These decrees of local Councils led to a universal practice, the obligatory character of which was taken as something quite normal.”<sup>76</sup>

The obligation to attend Sunday Mass was eventually made “into a universal law” in 1917. Such law was incorporated into the Catholic “Canon Law,” that is, the law that governs the Catholic religious life. The Pope notes that “this legislation has normally been understood as entailing a *grave obligation*: this is the teaching of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and it is easy to understand why if we keep in mind how vital Sunday is for the Christian life.”<sup>77</sup>

Indeed, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is most emphatic about the obligation to attend Sunday Mass, saying that “the faithful *are bound* to participate in the Mass.”<sup>78</sup> While Protestant churches encourage their members to attend Sunday services, the Catholic Church obliges their

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members to attend Sunday Mass. The reason is that for Catholics “The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation . . . Those who deliberately fail in this obligation *commit a grave sin*.”<sup>79</sup>

John Paul explains that “because the faithful are *obliged to attend Mass* unless there is a grave impediment, Pastors have the corresponding duty to offer to everyone the real possibility of fulfilling the [Mass] precept.”<sup>80</sup> To meet this need, Catholic Church law has made provision for the celebration of several Masses on Sunday as well as special Masses on Saturday evening for those who cannot make it to church on Sunday.<sup>81</sup>

**Is the Lord’s Supper a Sacrifice?** The fundamental problem with the obligatory nature of Sunday Mass which the Pope reiterates in his Pastoral Letter is that it stems not from the Sabbath Commandment nor from the New Testament teaching regarding the Lord’s Supper. It is rather from the Catholic dogma of transubstantiation which views the Lord’s Supper as a reenactment of Christ’s sacrifice.

Pope John Paul clearly states: “The Mass in fact truly makes present the sacrifice of the Cross. Under the species of the bread and wine, . . . Christ offers himself to the Father in the same act of sacrifice by which He offered Himself on the Cross.”<sup>82</sup> This dogmatic teaching is affirmed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one single sacrifice*. The victim is one and the same: the same now offers through the ministry of priests, who then offered himself on the cross; only the manner of the offering is different. In the divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner.”<sup>83</sup>

It is this view of the Mass as a re-enactment of Christ’s atoning sacrifice before God and on behalf of the faithful that makes attendance to the Sunday Mass “a grave obligation.” By participating in the Mass, Catholics are promised the immediate benefits of Christ’s sacrifice which is re-enacted on their behalf before their eyes.<sup>84</sup>

**Sacrifices and the Sabbath Commandment.** This sacrificial and sacramental view of the Lord’s Supper is foreign to the New Testament and to the intent of the Sabbath commandment. In ancient Israel sacrificial offerings took place at the Temple on the Sabbath (Num 28:9-10), but Sabbath observance did not entail participating in the sacrificial rituals of the Tabernacle or of the Temple.

Pope John Paul and the Catholic dogma ignore that the essence of the Sabbath commandment is not participating in a sacrificial liturgy but is consecrating the Sabbath time to God. The Sabbath commandment invites us to offer to God not sacrifices, but our time, which for many is the most precious commodity to sacrifice. By giving priority to God in our thinking and living on the Sabbath, we show in a tangible way that God really counts in our lives.

Jesus or His followers did not go to the Temple on the Sabbath to watch the priestly sacrificial liturgy. Instead, they went to the synagogue to participate in the study of Scripture, to pray, and to sing praises to God.

By making the Eucharistic (Lord's Supper) celebration the core of Sunday observance, the Catholic Church has facilitated the secularization of Sunday. The reason is that many sincere Catholics believe that once they have fulfilled "the Mass precept," they are free to spend the rest of their Sunday time as they wish. For the Pope to reverse this trend at this time is a monumental task, especially since people today want *holidays* rather than *Holy Days*.

**The Nature and Time of the Lord's Supper.** The Catholic "sacrificial" view of the Lord's Supper as a re-enactment of Christ's sacrifice is foreign to the teaching of the New Testament. There is no need to repeat Christ's atoning sacrifice because "he always lives to make intercession" for us (Heb 7:25). "Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf (Heb 9:24). Hebrews continues noting that Christ does not need "to offer himself repeatedly" (Heb 9:25), as the Catholic Mass attempts to do, because He has "offered [Himself] once to bear the sins of many" (Heb 9:28).

Paul understood the Lord's Supper to be a "proclamation," not a re-enactment of Christ's death. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). The verb "proclaim—*katangellein*" is used in the New Testament for heralding the Gospel (1 Cor 9:14) and for making known one's faith (Rom 1:8). This suggests that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is a proclamation of the Gospel directed manward, not a re-enactment of Christ's sacrifice directed Godward, as taught by the Catholic church.

The Pope's contention that "the Eucharist is the heart of Sunday"<sup>85</sup> cannot be supported by the witness of the New Testament. Paul, who claims to transmit what he "received from the Lord" (1 Cor 11:23) regarding the Lord's Supper, nowhere suggests that it should be celebrated on Sunday as the core of the Sunday worship. The Apostle takes pains to instruct the Corinthians concern-

ing the *manner* of celebrating the Lord's Supper, but on the question of the *time* of the assembly no less than four times he repeats in the same chapter, "when you come together—*sunerkomenon*" (1 Cor 11:18, 20, 33, 34), thus implying *indeterminate* times and days.

If the Lord's Supper was indeed celebrated on Sunday, Paul could hardly have failed to mention it at least once, since four times he refers to the coming together for its celebration. Furthermore, if Sunday was already regarded as the "Lord's day," Paul could have strengthened his plea for a more worshipful attitude during the partaking of the Lord's Supper by reminding the Corinthians of the sacred nature of the Lord's Day in which they met. But, though Paul was familiar with the adjective "Lord's—*kuriakos*" (since he uses it in v. 20 to designate the nature of the supper), he did not apply it to Sunday, which in the same epistle he calls by the Jewish designation "first day of the week" (1 Cor 16:2).

The preceding observations have served to highlight three major flaws in the arguments of the Pastoral Letter regarding the enforcement of Sunday worship. First, John Paul wants to ground Sunday observance in the Sabbath commandment in spite of the fact that the essence of Sabbathkeeping is not participation in sacrificial rituals but the consecration of time to God.

Second, John Paul contends that the Eucharistic (Lord's Supper) celebration is the heart of Sunday worship in spite of the fact that the Lord's Supper was not associated with Sunday or Sabbath worship in the Apostolic Church.

Third, John Paul maintains that the Lord's Supper is a sacrifice in which Christ offers Himself anew to the Father on behalf of the faithful in spite of the fact that the New Testament describes it as a "proclamation," not a re-enactment of Christ's death.

What this means is that the authority of the Catholic Church to enforce the obligation to attend Sunday Mass derives not from biblical precepts or examples but from ecclesiastical traditions. The questionable and inconsistent nature of church traditions hardly provides compelling moral reasons for persuading Christians today to observe Sunday as the biblical Holy Sabbath Day.

### (3) The Call for Civil Sunday Legislation

In his Pastoral Letter, Pope John Paul call upon Christians to "strive to ensure that civil legislation respects their duty to keep Sunday holy."<sup>86</sup> Such a call stems from the belief that participation in the Sunday Mass is *not an*



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*option*, but a *grave obligation* that can only be freely fulfilled if the State guarantees to all the right to rest on Sunday.

**Importance of Civil Sunday Legislation.** John Paul rightly notes that prior to the Sunday Law promulgated by Constantine in A. D. 321, Sunday observance was not protected by civil legislation.<sup>87</sup> This meant that “Christians observed Sunday simply as a day of worship, without being able to give it the specific meaning of Sabbath rest.”<sup>88</sup> In many cases, Christians would attend an early Sunday morning service and then spend the rest of the day working at their various occupations.

The Constantinian Sunday Law changed the situation dramatically. As the Pope points out, “Christians rejoiced to see thus removed the obstacles which until then had sometimes made the observance of the Lord’s Day heroic.”<sup>89</sup> What Constantine did in making Sunday a legal holiday for the empire was not “a mere historical circumstance with no special significance for the church,” but a providential intervention that made it possible for Christians to observe Sunday “without hinderance.”<sup>90</sup>

To highlight the importance of civil legislation that guarantees Sunday rest, the Pope points to the fact that “even after the fall of the Empire, the Councils did not cease to insist upon arrangements [civil legislation] regarding Sunday rest.”<sup>91</sup> In the light of the fact that in the past most countries have maintained Sunday laws to permit Christians to observe Sunday, the Pope call for civil legislation that respects the Christian “duty to keep Sunday holy.”<sup>92</sup>

To emphasize the need for civil legislation that guarantees Sunday rest, the Pope points to the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) where Pope Leo XII speaks of “Sunday rest as a worker’s right which the State must guarantee.”<sup>93</sup> The Pontiff notes that Sunday legislation is especially needed today, in view of the physical, social, and ecological problems created by technological and industrial advancements. “Therefore,” the Pope concludes, “in the particular circumstances of our time, Christians will naturally strive to ensure that civil legislation respects their duty to keep Sunday holy.”<sup>94</sup>

The same view is explicitly expressed in the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “In spite of economic constraints, public authorities should ensure citizens a time intended for rest and divine worship. . . . In respecting religious liberty and the common good of all, Christians should seek recognition of Sunday and the Church’s holy days as legal holidays.”<sup>95</sup> It is evident that the Catholic Church is committed to ensure that civil legislation protects their rights to observe Sunday and the holy days.

**The Constitutionality of Sunday Laws.** The Pope is well aware that in many countries, like the United States, there is a separation between Church and State. This means that if Sunday Laws are perceived to be “advancing religion,” they would be declared to be unconstitutional under the First Amendment. Thus, the Pope’s strategy is to downplay the religious aspect of Sunday Laws, highlighting instead the social, cultural, and family values. For example, John Paul says: “Through Sunday rest, daily concerns and tasks can find their proper perspectives: the material things about which we worry give way to spiritual values; in a moment of encounter and less pressured exchange, we see the face of the people with whom we live. Even the beauties of nature—too often marred by the desire to exploit, which turns against man himself—can be rediscovered and enjoyed to the full.”<sup>96</sup>

By emphasizing the human and “secular” benefits and values of Sunday Laws, John Paul knows that he can gain greater international acceptance for such legislation. It is worth noting in this regard the U. S. Supreme Court decision in *McGowan v. Maryland*, 366 U. S. 420 (1961) that upheld Maryland’s Sunday Closing Laws as not violative of the Federal Constitution. The reason the Court justified the state’s interest in protecting a common day of Sunday rest is that Sunday has become secularized in the American society. The Court said: “We believe that the air of the day is one of relaxation rather than religion.”<sup>97</sup>

The recognition of this reality leads Attorney Michael Woodruff to write as follows in *Sunday* magazine of the Lord’s Day Alliance: “If we must justify the retention of the Lord’s Day as a secular day of rest, we must find compelling secular grounds to make it so. . . . If Courts view Sunday laws as having the direct effect of ‘advancing religion,’ then under current First Amendment doctrine, such laws must be unconstitutional. However, if the laws are generally applicable and have a religion-neutral purpose, then the effect is likely to be seen incidental. To this end, the distinction between religious practice and the form of laws is important.”<sup>98</sup>

The Pope is well aware of the need to maintain this distinction. Thus in his Pastoral Letter, he appeals to the social and human values that Sunday Laws guarantee and promote. He writes: “ In our historical context there remains the obligation [of the state] to ensure that everyone can enjoy the freedom, rest and relaxation which human dignity requires, together with the associated religious, family, cultural and interpersonal needs which are difficult to meet if there is no guarantee of at least one day a week on which people can both rest and celebrate.”<sup>99</sup>

**The Influence of the Pastoral Letter.** At this juncture, we may ask: How much influence will the Pastoral Letter exercise in the international community of nations in promoting Sunday civil legislation? The answer to this question largely depends upon the Pope's determination to pursue the enforcement of Sunday observance inside and outside the Catholic Church.

At this point, the indications are that John Paul is deeply committed to bringing about a renewal and revival of Sunday observance by ensuring that civil legislation facilitates the obligation to keep Sunday holy. While in Rome last October (1998), I contacted the "Sala Stampa—the Press Office" of the Vatican to learn if the Pope has been pursuing further the call of his Pastoral Letter for a revival of Sundaykeeping. The Office informed me that there is no doubt that the Pope is serious about it. One indication is that during the three months following the release of the Pastoral Letter, in his Sunday address before reciting the "Angelus," John Paul has consistently appealed to the faithful "to rediscover the importance of Sunday."<sup>100</sup>

The influence of the Holy See on the international community must not be underestimated. It is reported that when confronted by Pope Pious XII's opposition, Stalin smirked, "How many divisions does the Pope have?" If Stalin were to come out of his grave, he would be shocked to discover that the communist regime that he established with so much bloodshed has collapsed due, in no small degree, to the influence of the man who commands no military divisions.

In evaluating John Paul's role in helping to bring about the fall of totalitarian regimes, Gorbachev said in 1992: "Everything that happened in Eastern Europe during these past few years would have been impossible without the Pope, without the political role he was able to play."<sup>101</sup>

A major goal of John Paul's global vision is to protect and defend the rights of the Catholic Church to carry out her mission unhindered. In a speech entitled "The Vatican's Role in World Affairs: The Diplomacy of Pope John Paul II," J. Michael Miller, CSB, President of the University of St. Thomas and former employee of the Secretariat of State of the Holy See (1992-1997), stated: "The driving force behind John Paul's diplomatic initiatives is the defense of human rights, especially religious freedom, which allows the Church to carry out its mission in peace. . . . John Paul does have what we might call an 'agenda' for world affairs which he works systematically to promote through his preaching, his speeches to political leaders, his major writings, his endless globetrotting—which does not avoid trouble spots."<sup>102</sup>

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The influence of the Pope in the international arena is far greater than many realize. It is important to clarify that it is *not* the Vatican as a State that participates in international affairs, but the Holy See. The latter is not a territorial State, but a moral and juridical society, governed by the Pope, and representative of the Catholic Church in the community of nations. At present the Holy See maintains full diplomatic relations with over 160 nations. It receives and sends ambassadors all over the world. It has signed formal agreements with sovereign nations. It participates in dozens of international organizations concerned with moral, social, humanitarian, and cultural affairs.

The goals of John Paul, as Michael Miller rightly points out, “are, admittedly, a mixture of the religious and the more narrowly political. John Paul, however, is not constrained by American ideas of the separation of church and State, but pursues what he regards as the common good of all humanity.”<sup>103</sup>

This mixture of religious and political goals can be detected in reading the Pastoral Letter where John Paul calls for Sunday rest as a religious and social necessity. For example, he writes: “The link between the Lord’s Day and the day of rest in civil society has meaning and importance which go beyond the distinctly Christian point of view.”<sup>104</sup> By calling for a civil Sunday legislation on the basis of the common good of all humanity, John Paul can gain considerable support for his agenda from the international community of nations.

**Pluralistic Society.** In evaluating John Paul’s call for a Sunday Rest legislation, one must distinguish between his legitimate concern for the social, cultural, ecological, and religious well-being of our society, and the hardship such legislation causes to minorities who for religious or personal reasons choose to rest and worship on Saturday or on other days of the week.

To call upon Christians to “strive to ensure that civil legislation respects their duty to keep Sunday holy”<sup>105</sup> means to ignore that we live today in a pluralistic society where there are, for example, Christians and Jews who observe the seventh-day Sabbath as their Holy Day, and Moslems who may wish to observe their Friday.

If Sundaykeepers expect the State to make Sunday a legal holiday to facilitate their Sunday rest and worship, then Sabbatarians have an equal right to expect the State to make Saturday a legal holiday to protect their Sabbath rest and worship. To be fair to the various religious and nonreligious groups, the State would then have to pass legislation guaranteeing special days of rest

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and worship to different groups of people. The implementation of such a plan is inconceivable because it would disrupt our socio-economic structure.

**Sunday Laws Not Needed.** Sunday Laws, known as “Blue Laws,” are still in the books of some American States and represent an unpleasant legacy of an intolerant past. Such laws have proven to be a failure, especially because their hidden intent was religious, namely, to foster Sunday observance. People resent any attempt by the State to force religious practices upon them. This is a fundamental principle of the First Amendment to the American Constitution, that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.”

Sunday legislation is superfluous today because the short-work week, with a long weekend of two or even three days, already makes it possible for most people to observe their Sabbath or Sunday. However, problems still do exist, especially when an employer is unwilling to accommodate the religious convictions of a worker. The solution to such problems is not to be sought in Sunday or Saturday Laws, but in such legislation as the pending *Religious Freedom in the Workplace Act*. This bill is designed to encourage employers to accommodate the religious convictions of their workers when these do not cause undue hardship to their company.

The Pope’s call for Sunday Rest legislation ignores the fact that Sunday Laws have not resolved the crisis of diminishing church attendance. In most European countries, Sunday Laws have been in effect for many years. On Sunday most of the business establishments are shut down. Even most gasoline stations are closed on Sunday—a fact that can be costly to uninformed American tourists. But, have Sunday Laws facilitated church attendance? Absolutely not! The truth of the matter is that church attendance in Western Europe is considerably lower than that in the United States, running at less than 10% of the Christian population. In Italy, where I come from, it is estimated that 95% of the Catholics go to church three times in their lives, when they are “hatched, matched, and dispatched.”

The moral and religious decline in our society is not due to lack of legislation but to lack of moral convictions to compel people to live according to the principles God has revealed. The Church should not seek to solve the crisis of diminishing church attendance by external legislation but by the internal moral and spiritual renovation of its members.

What many Christians need to discover today is that Christianity is not a cultural heritage that entails going to church from time to time but a commitment to Christ. This commitment —s expressed in a special way on

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the Sabbath day when we stop our work in order to allow our Savior to work more fully and freely in our lives.

### **Conclusion**

Pope John Paul has legitimate reasons for making a passionate plea for a revival of Sunday observance at a time when church attendance is dwindling at an alarming rate. He understands that if Christians ignore the Lord on the day they call the “Lord’s Day,” ultimately they will ignore God every day of their lives. This trend, if not reversed, can spell doom to Christianity.

The solution to the crisis of declining church attendance must be sought, however, not by calling upon the international community of nations to make Sunday and the Catholic Holy Days civil holidays, but by summoning Christians to live according to the moral principles of the Ten Commandments.

The Fourth Commandment specifically calls upon believers to “Remember” what many have forgotten, namely, that the seventh day is holy unto the Lord our God (Ex 20:8-11). John Paul rightly acknowledges that “The Sabbath precept . . . is rooted in the depths of God’s plan”<sup>106</sup> and is “a kind of ‘sacred architecture’ of time which marks biblical revelation.”<sup>107</sup> He notes also that “When the divine commandment declares: ‘Remember the Sabbath day in order to keep it holy’ (Ex 20:8), the rest decreed in order to honor the day dedicated to God is not all a burden imposed upon man, but rather an aid to help him recognize his life-giving and liberating dependence upon the Creator, and at the same time his calling to cooperate in the Creator’s work and to receive his grace.”<sup>108</sup>

My appeal to Pope John Paul is to use the far-reaching influence of his office to help Christians everywhere rediscover the Sabbath, as he puts it, not as a burden, but as an “aid” designed to help them recognize their “life-giving and liberating dependence upon the[ir] Creator.”<sup>109</sup> This vital function of the Sabbath has long been forgotten by most Christians who have been taught through the centuries that the Sabbath is Jewish, fulfilled by Christ, and no longer binding upon Christians. This heresy has deprived a countless number of Christians of the physical, moral, and spiritual renewal provided by a proper observance of the Sabbath.

Our tension-filled and restless society needs to rediscover the Sabbath as that “sacred architecture of time,” which can give structure and stability to our lives and relationship with God. At a time when many are seeking for inner peace and rest through magic pills or fabulous places, the Sabbath invites us

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to find such inner rest and renewal, not through pills or places, but through the Person of our Saviour who says: “Come unto me, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28). It invites us to stop our work on the Sabbath in order to allow our Savior to work more freely and fully in our lives and thus experience the awareness of His presence, peace, and rest.

### NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 3.
2. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 5.
3. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 30.
4. Quoted by R. H. Martin, *The Day: A Manual on the Christian Sabbath* (New York, 1933), p. 184.
5. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 4.
6. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 4.
7. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 6.
8. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 67.
9. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (New York, 1947), II, 0, 122 Art. 4, p. 1702.
10. Vincent J. Kelly, *Forbidden Sunday and Feast-Day Occupations*, (Washington, DC, Catholic University of America Press, 1943), p. 2; Pope John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, trans. William J. Gibbons, (New York, 1961), p. 76, notes: “The Catholic Church has decreed for many centuries that Christians observe this day of rest on Sunday, and that they be present on the same day at the Eucharist Sacrifice.” John Gilmary Shea, “The Observance of Sunday and Civil Laws for Its Enforcement,” *The American Catholic Quarterly Review* 8 (Jan. 1883), p. 139, writes: “The Sunday, as a day of the week set apart for obligatory public worship of Almighty God, to be sanctified by a suspension of all servile labor, trade, and worldly avocations and by exercises of devotion, is purely a creation of the Catholic Church.” Martin J. Scott, *Things Catholics Are Asked About* (New York, 1927), p. 136, adds: “Now the Church . . . instituted, by God’s authority, Sunday as the day of worship.”
11. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City, 1994), p. 524.
12. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 8.

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13. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 11.

14. Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness* (Rome, Italy, 1980), p. 67.

15. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 12.

16. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 15.

17. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 13.

18. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 15.

19. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 14.

20. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 17.

21. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 59.

22. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 18.

23. For a discussion of the theology of Sunday as developed in the early Christian literature, see Chapter 9 “The Theology of Sunday” of my dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday. A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome, Italy, 1977), pp. 270-302.

24. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 32. Cited from *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (note 11), p. 525, paragraph 2177. On paragraph 46 of *Dies Domini*, John Paul states: “Since the Eucharist is the very heart of Sunday, it is clear why, from the earliest centuries, the Pastors of the church have not ceased to remind the faithful of the need to take part in the liturgical assembly.”

25. Christopher Kiesling expresses this view in his book *The Future of the Christian Sunday* (New York, 1970).

26. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 20.

27. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 21.

28. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 28.

29. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 18.

30. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 19.

31. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 20.

32. Corrado S. Mosna, *Storia della Domenica dalle origini fino agli Inizi del V Secolo* (Rome, Italy, 1969), p. 44.



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33. Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and Liturgy* (South Bend, Indiana, 1956), p. 242.

34. Paul K. Jewett, *The Lord's Day: A Theological Guide to the Christian Day of Worship* (Grand Rapids, 1972), p. 57. Pacifico Massi states categorically: "The Resurrection is the only plausible explanation for the origin of Sunday" (*La Domenica nella Storia della Salvezza* [Napoli, 1967], p. 43). F. A. Regan affirms: "From the study of the above texts one may reasonably conclude that during the earliest days of the Church there was only one liturgical feast and this feast was the weekly commemoration of the Resurrection of Christ" ("Dies Dominica and Dies Solis: The Beginning of the Lord's Day in Christian Antiquity," Doctoral dissertation, The Catholic University of America [Washington, DC, 1961], p. 191). See also Josef A. Jungmann, *The Early Liturgy to the Time of Gregory the Great* (South Bend, Indiana, 1959), pp. 19-21; also *The Mass of the Roman Rite, Its Origin and Development* (New York, 1951), vol. 1, p. 15; Y. B. Tremel, "Du Sabbat au Jour du Seigneur," *Lumière et Vie* (1962), p. 441.

35. The Resurrection of Christ is presented in the New Testament as the essence of the apostolic proclamation, faith, and hope. See, for example, Acts 1:22; 2:31; 3:75; 4:2,10,33; 5:30; 10:40; 13:33-37; 17:18,32; 24:15,21; 26:8; 1 Cor 15:11-21; Rom 10:9; 1:1-4; 8:31-34; 14:9; 1 Thess 1:9-10.

36. Harold Riesenfeld, "The Sabbath and the Lord's Day," *The Gospel Tradition: Essays by H. Riesenfeld* (Oxford, 1970), p. 124.

37. Harold Riesenfeld, "Sabbat et Jour du Seigneur," in A. J. B. Higgins, ed., *N.T. Essays: Studies in Memory of T. W. Manson* (Manchester, 1959), p. 212. For examples of the use of the phrase "Day of the Resurrection" for Sunday, see, Eusebius of Caesarea, *Commentary on Psalm 91, Patrologia Graeca* 23, 1168; Apostolic Constitutions 2, 59, 3.

38. S. V. McCasland, "The Origin of the Lord's Day," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 49 (1930), p. 69. Similarly, Paul Cotton affirms: "There is nothing in the idea of the Resurrection that would necessarily produce the observance of Sunday as a Day of Worship" (*From Sabbath to Sunday* [Bethlehem, PA, 1933], p. 79).

39. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 19.

40. Joachim Jeremias, "Pasha," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Friedrich, ed., (Grand Rapids, 1968), vol. 5, p. 903, note 64.

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41. J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London, 1885), vol. 2, p. 88.
42. For a discussion of the Passover controversy and its implications for the origin of Sunday observance, see my dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday* (note 23), pp. 198-207.
43. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 20.
44. Ibid.
45. Johannes Behm, "Klao," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Kittel, ed., (Grand Rapids, 1974), vol. 3, p. 728.
46. S. V. McCasland (note 38), p. 69.
47. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 24.
48. See *From Sabbath to Sunday* (note 23), pp. 178-182.
49. Justin Martyr, *Apology 67, 7, The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds. (Grand Rapids, 1973), vol. 1, p. 186.
50. Jean Daniélou (note 33), pp. 253, 255.
51. Jerome, *In die dominica Paschae homilia, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* 78, 550, 1, 52.
52. For a discussion of the development of Sun-worship and of the advancement of "the Day of Sun" in ancient Rome, see my dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday* (note 23), pp. 238-262.
53. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 27.
54. Philaster, *Liber de haeresibus* 113, *PL* 12, 1257.
55. Priscillian, *Tractatus undecim*, *CSEL* 18, p.14. See also, Martin of Braga, *De correctione rusticorum* ed. C. W. Barlow (New York, 1950), p. 189; Augustin, *In Psalmos* 61, 23, *CCL* 39, p. 792.
56. Augustine, *City of God* 22, 30, Vernon J. Bourke, ed., (New York, 1958), p. 544.
57. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 21.
58. See *From Sabbath to Sunday* (note 23), pp. 90-94.
59. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 21.

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60. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 70.
  61. See *From Sabbath to Sunday* (note 23), pp. 90-94.
  62. Corrado S. Mosna (note 32), p. 7.
  63. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 21.
  64. F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids, 1954), pp. 407-408.
  65. P. K. Jewett (note 34), p. 61.
  66. F. J. Foakes-Jackson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York, 1945), p. 187.
  67. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 21.
  68. Corrado S. Mosna (note 32), p. 21.
  69. For texts and discussion of the Easter controversy, see *From Sabbath to Sunday* (note 23), pp.198-207.
  70. Jean Daniélou, *The First Six Hundred Years* (New York, 1964), vol. 1, p. 74.
  71. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 62.
  72. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 59.
  73. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 60.
  74. For texts and discussion, see *From Sabbath to Sunday* (note 23), pp. 278-301.
  75. For texts and discussion of the controversy surrounding the abandonment of the Sabbath and the adoption of Sunday, see *From Sabbath to Sunday* (note 23), pp. 213-269.
  76. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 47.
  77. *Ibid.*, emphasis supplied.
  78. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (note 11), p. 526, paragraph 2180. Emphasis supplied.
  79. *Ibid.*, p. 527, paragraph 2181. Emphasis supplied.
  80. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 49. Emphasis supplied.

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81. Ibid.

82. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 43.

83. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (note 11), p. 344, paragraph 1367. Emphasis supplied.

84. Ibid., paragraph 1366.

85. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 52.

86. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 67.

87. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 64.

88. Ibid.

89. Ibid.

90. Ibid.

91. Ibid.

92. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 67.

93. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 66.

94. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 67.

95. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (note 11), p. 528, paragraphs 2187-2188.

96. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 67.

97. Cited by Michael J. Woodruff, "The Constitutionality of Sunday Laws," *Sunday* 79 (January-April 1991), p. 9.

98. Ibid., pp. 21-22.

99. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 66.

100. "Sunday Is Christ's Day, Commemorating His Resurrection," New release, Vatican City, July 26, 1998.

101. Cited in Jonathan Kwitny, *Man of the Century* (New York, 1997), p. 592.

102. J. Michael Miller, "The Vatican's Role in World Affairs. The Diplomacy of Pope John Paul II," Speech delivered in the Fall of 1997 at the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Texas.

103. Ibid.

104. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 65.

105. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 67.

106. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 13.

107. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 15.

108. *Dies Domini*, paragraph 61.

109. Ibid.

## **Chapter 2**

# **THE SABBATH CREATIONAL OR CEREMONIAL?**

The function of a tool or machine is largely determined by its original design. An automobile designed for carrying passengers is soon demolished if used to transport building materials. What is true for man-made tools or machines is also true for divine institutions. Their functions are determined by God's original design in instituting them.

To understand the meaning and function of the Lord's Supper, for example, we go back to the Last Supper and study how Jesus instituted this ordinance and what function He intended it to fulfill for the Christian Church. What is true for the Lord's Supper is also true for the Sabbath. To understand its meaning and function for the human family, we need to study how and why God instituted it at the completion of His creation.

Surprisingly, the matter-of-fact creation origin of the Sabbath, which is repeated several times in the Pentateuch (Gen 2:1-2; Ex 20:11; Ex 31:17) and is acknowledged in the New Testament (Mark 2:27; Heb 4:4), has often been rejected in Jewish and Christian history. In recent years, the creation origin of the Sabbath has been challenged by both critical minded scholars and conservative Christians.

Critical scholars have conjectured that the Sabbath derives from factors such as the veneration of the planet Saturn, the four phases of the moon, the need for a market day to buy or sell produce, the seven-day periods of ancient Mesopotamia, and the symbolic importance attached to the number seven by many ancient Near Eastern people.<sup>1</sup>

Conservative Christians have attacked the Sabbath by denying its creation-origin and reducing it to a Mosaic institution given exclusively to the Jews. Christ allegedly fulfilled the Sabbath by replacing the literal observance of the day with the offer of His rest of salvation. By rejecting the creation origin of the Sabbath these Christians attach a negative, "Jewish" stigma to seventh-day Sabbathkeeping, identifying it with the Jewish dispensation allegedly based on salvation through legal obedience.

Sundaykeeping, on the other hand, has been associated with the Christian dispensation based on salvation by grace through faith. Thus,

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Sabbathkeeping historically has been perceived as a trademark of Judaism. Within Christianity itself, those Christians who have retained seventh-day Sabbathkeeping have been stigmatized as Judaizers, holding onto an outdated Jewish superstition.

Among the conservative Christians who recently have rejected the creational and universal function of the Sabbath are several former sabbatarians churches, local congregations, and pastors. Their basic argument is that the Sabbath is an Old Covenant ordinance which was abolished by Christ and, consequently, is no longer binding upon so-called “New Covenant” Christians.

The leaders of the Worldwide Church of God (WCG), who championed Sabbathkeeping until 1994, have adopted the view that the Sabbath is not a “creation” ordinance given to mankind, but a Mosaic institution given to the Israelites together with the Ten Commandments.

They maintain that “two stumbling blocks confuse Sabbatarians. First is the idea that the Sabbath is a ‘creation ordinance’ commanded ever since creation. To understand the fallacy in this concept, we must note the facts: Although Genesis says the seventh day was declared holy at creation, there is no biblical evidence it was a commanded rest until the time of Moses. . . . The second stumbling block that confuses Sabbatarians is the idea that the Sabbath is required because it is part of the Ten Commandments. Many Christians think of the Ten Commandments as a permanent law code for all humans for all time. Nevertheless, the Ten Commandments were given to Israel as the centerpiece of the Old Covenant, not to the whole world (Ex 20:2; Lev 27:34).”<sup>2</sup>

The same view is passionately defended by Dale Ratzlaff, a former Seventh-day Adventist Bible teacher and pastor who has written an influential book *Sabbath in Crisis* (345 pages). This book is often quoted by the WCG and other Sabbatarians who have been influenced by its arguments to reject the continuity and validity of the Sabbath for today. Ratzlaff argues that the Sabbath is not a creational/moral institution for humans, but a ceremonial/Old Covenant ordinance given to the Jews. Allegedly, Christians no longer need to observe the Sabbath because Christ fulfilled its typological function by becoming our Sabbath rest.<sup>3</sup>

Why has the creation origin of the Sabbath come under the constant crossfire of controversy? The reason is plain. What Christians believe about the origin of the Sabbath determines what they believe about its validity and value for today. Those who believe that the Sabbath was established by God

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at creation for the benefit of human beings accept its observance as a creation ordinance binding upon all, Jews and Christians.

On the other hand, those who hold that the Sabbath originated at the time of Moses, or after the settlement in Canaan because of socioeconomic or astrological-astronomic considerations, regard the Sabbath as a Jewish institution not applicable to Christians. In view of these implications, it is important to briefly examine how the question of the origin of the Sabbath has been debated in Jewish and Christian history.

**Objectives of This Chapter.** This chapter has three basic objectives. The first is to survey the controversy over the origin of the Sabbath both in Jewish and Christian history. This survey is designed to provide a historical perspective which is much needed to understand the recent attacks against the creation origin of the Sabbath.

The second objective is to examine the specific arguments recently advanced against the creation origin by former Sabbatarians. In most cases, their arguments are old, having already been used in the past by those who have attempted to negate the continuity and validity of the Sabbath. Yet these arguments deserve a close examination because they are used today to mislead many sincere people.

The third objective is to reflect on the human implications of the creation origin of the Sabbath. Specifically, we consider the significance of God's act of resting, blessing, and sanctifying the seventh day for the human family. We shall note that creation week is in a special sense a human week because all that God did on that week was designed to have a lasting result for the human family.

The ultimate objective of this chapter is not to expose the fallacies of the various arguments raised against the creation origin and universal function of the Sabbath, but to encourage a fresh appreciation for the Biblical account of the Sabbath origin and meaning for today.

## **PART I**

### **THE CREATION-SABBATH IN JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN HISTORY**

**The Creation-Sabbath in the Old Testament.** The biblical view of the origin of the Sabbath is unequivocal: the Sabbath, as the seventh day, originated at the completion of the creation week as a result of three divine acts: God "rested," "blessed," and "hallowed" the seventh day (Gen 2:2-3).



Twice Genesis 2:2-3 states that God “rested” on the seventh day from all His work. The Hebrew verb *sabat*, translated “rested,” denotes *cessation*, not *relaxation*. The latter idea is expressed by the Hebrew verb *nuah*, used in Exodus 20:11, where the divine rest fulfills an *anthropological* function as a model for human rest. However, in Genesis 2:2-3 the divine rest has a *cosmological* function. It serves to explain that God, as Karl Barth puts it, “was content to be the Creator of this particular creation . . . He had no occasion to proceed to further creations. He needed no further creations.”<sup>4</sup> To acknowledge this fact, God stopped.

Genesis 2:3 affirms that the Creator “blessed” (*barak*) the seventh day just as He had blessed animals and Adam and Eve on the previous day (Gen 1:22, 28). Divine blessings in Scripture are not merely “good wishes”—they are assurance of fruitfulness, prosperity, and a happy and abundant life (Ps 133:3). In terms of the seventh day, it means that God promised to make the Sabbath a beneficial and vitalizing power through which human life is enriched and renewed.<sup>5</sup> In Exodus 20:11, the blessing of the creation seventh day is explicitly linked with the weekly Sabbath.

Genesis 2:3 also affirms that the Creator “hallowed” (RV, RSV) the seventh day, “made it holy” (NEB, NAB), or “sanctified it” (NASB). Both here and in the Sabbath commandment (Ex 20:11), the Hebrew text uses the verb *qiddes* (piel), from the root *qds*, holy. In Hebrew, the basic meaning of “holy” or “holiness” is “separation” for holy use. In terms of the Sabbath, its holiness consists in God’s separation of this day from the six working days. The holiness of the Sabbath stems not from man’s keeping it, but from God’s choice of the seventh day to be a channel through which human beings can experience more freely and fully the awareness of His sanctifying presence in their lives.

**The Importance of the Creation-Sabbath.** The great importance of the creation-Sabbath in the Old Testament is indicated by the fact that it provides the theological motivation for the commandment to observe the seventh day (Ex 20:11) and the theological justification for serving as a covenant sign between God and Israel (Ex 31:17).

The theological reason given for the command to observe the seventh day Sabbath “to the Lord your God” (Ex 20:10) is “for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Ex 20:11). The tie between the creation-Sabbath and the Sabbath commandment is so close that the former provides the basis for the latter. To keep the Sabbath holy

means (1) to follow the divine example given at creation, (2) to acknowledge God as Creator, and (3) to participate in God's rest and blessings for mankind.

The creation-Sabbath serves also as "a sign" (*ôth*) of the covenant relationship between God and His people: "It is a sign for ever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested, and was refreshed" (Ex 31:17). The very nature of a sign is to point to something beyond itself, to mediate an understanding of a certain reality and/or to motivate a corresponding behavior.<sup>6</sup>

As a covenant sign rooted in creation, the Sabbath mediates an understanding of redemptive history (i.e., covenant history) by pointing retrospectively and prospectively. Retrospectively, the Sabbath invites the believer to look back and memorialize God as the creator of an original, perfect creation (Gen 2:2-3; Ex 20:8,11; 31:17). Prospectively, the Sabbath encourages the believer to look forward and trust God's promise to fulfill His "everlasting covenant" (Ex 31:16; Heb 4:9) to restore this world to its original perfection. Thus, the Sabbath stands as a sign of an "everlasting covenant" between creation (Gen 2:2-3; Ex 20:11; 31:17) and redemption (Deut 5:15; Is 56:1-4). It directs us to the past perfect creation and it points constantly to the future, ultimate restoration.

**The Creation-Sabbath in the New Testament.** The New Testament takes for granted the creation origin of the Sabbath. A clear example is found in Mark 2:27 where Christ refutes the charge of Sabbath-breaking levelled against the disciples by referring to the original purpose of the Sabbath: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." Christ's choice of words is significant. The verb "made-*ginomai*" alludes to the original "making" of the Sabbath and the word "man-*anthropos*" suggests its human function. Thus to establish the human and universal value of the Sabbath, Christ reverts to its very origin right after the creation of man. Why? Because for the Lord, the law of the beginning stands supreme.

The importance of God's original design is emphasized in another instance in reporting the corruption of the institution of marriage, which occurred under the Mosaic code. Christ reverted to its Edenic origin, saying: "From the beginning it was not so" (Matt 19:8). Christ then traces both marriage and the Sabbath to their creation origin in order to clarify their fundamental value and function for humanity.

Some authors interpret this famous pronouncement of Christ as meaning the "well-being of man is superior to the Sabbath rest" and since the Sabbath "no longer spelt blessings but hardship, it had failed in its divine

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purpose, and as a consequence rebellion against it or disregard of it was no sin.”<sup>7</sup>

The least to be said of this interpretation is that it attributes to God human shortsightedness for having given a law that could not accomplish its intended purpose and which consequently He was forced to abolish. By this reasoning, the validity of any God-given law is not determined by its intended purpose, but rather by the way human beings use or abuse it. Such a conclusion would make human beings, rather than God, the ultimate arbitrators who determines the validity of any commandment.

Furthermore, to interpret this saying as meaning that the “well-being of man is superior to the Sabbath rest” would imply that the Sabbath rest had been imposed arbitrarily upon humans to restrict their welfare. But this interpretation runs contrary to the very words of Christ. “The Sabbath,” He said, “was made on account of (*dia*) man and not man on account of the Sabbath.” This means that the Sabbath came into being (*egeneto*) after the creation of man, not to make him a slave of rules and regulations, but to ensure his physical and spiritual well-being.

The welfare of man is *not restricted*, but *guaranteed*, by the proper observance of the Sabbath. By this memorable affirmation, then, Christ does not abrogate the Sabbath commandment but establishes its permanent validity by appealing to its original creation when God determined its intended function for the well-being of humanity.

**The Creation-Sabbath in Hebrews.** Another explicit reference to the creation-Sabbath is found in the book of Hebrews. In the fourth chapter, the author establishes the universal and spiritual nature of the Sabbath rest by welding together two Old Testament texts, namely Genesis 2:2 and Psalm 95:11. Through the former, he traces the origin of the Sabbath rest back to creation when “God rested on the seventh day from all his works” (Heb 4:3; cf. Gen 2:2-3). By the latter (Ps 95:11), he explains that the scope of this divine rest includes the blessings of salvation to be found by entering personally into God’s rest (Heb 4:3,5,10). Our immediate concern is not to understand the meaning of the rest mentioned in the passage,<sup>8</sup> but rather to note that the author traces its origin back to the time of creation when “God rested on the seventh day from all His works” (Heb 4:4).

The context clearly indicates that the author is thinking of the “works” of creation since he explains that God’s “works were finished from the foundations of the world” (Heb 4:3). The probative value of this statement is heightened by the fact that the author is not arguing for the creation origin of

the Sabbath; rather, *he takes it for granted* in explaining God's ultimate purpose for His people. Thus, in Hebrews 4, the creation origin of the Sabbath is not only asserted but is also presented as the basis for understanding God's ultimate purpose for His people.

**The Creation-Sabbath in Jewish History.** Outside the biblical sources which should settle the matter, one finds widespread recognition of the creation origin of the Sabbath in both Jewish and Christian history. The Jews developed two differing views regarding the origin of the Sabbath. Broadly speaking, the two views can be distinguished linguistically and geographically. Palestinian (Hebrew) Judaism reduced the Sabbath to an exclusive Jewish ordinance linked to the origin of Israel as a nation at the time of Moses. As stated in the *Book of Jubilees*, "He [God] allowed no other people or peoples to keep the Sabbath on this day, except Israel only; to it alone he granted to eat and drink and keep the Sabbath on it" (2:31).<sup>9</sup> If the patriarchs are sometimes mentioned as keeping the Sabbath, this is regarded as an exception "before it [the Sabbath] was given" to Israel.<sup>10</sup>

This view represents not an original tradition but a secondary development which was encouraged by the necessity to preserve a Jewish identity in the face of Hellenistic pressures (especially at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes—175 B.C.) to abandon the Jewish religion. This is indicated by the fact that even in Palestinian literature there are references to the creation origin of the Sabbath. For example, while, on one hand, the *Book of Jubilees* (about 140-100 B.C.) says that God allowed "Israel only" to keep the Sabbath (Jub 2:31), on the other hand, it holds that God "kept Sabbath on the seventh day and hallowed it for all ages, and appointed it as a sign for all His works" (Jub 2:1).

In Hellenistic (Greek) Jewish literature the Sabbath is unmistakably viewed as a creation ordinance for all mankind. Philo, for example, not only traces the origin of the Sabbath to creation but also delights to call it "the birthday of the world."<sup>11</sup> Referring to the creation story, Philo explains: "We are told that the world was made in six days and that on the seventh God ceased from his works and began to contemplate what had been so well created, and therefore he bade those who should live as citizens under this world-order to follow God in this as in other matters."<sup>12</sup> Because the Sabbath exists from creation, Philo emphasizes that it is "the festival not of a single city or country but of the universe, and it alone strictly deserves to be called public, as belonging to all people."<sup>13</sup>

**The Creation-Sabbath in the Early Church.** The recognition of the creation origin of the Sabbath is found in several documents of the early

Church. For example, in the *Syriac Didascalia* (about A.D. 250), Sunday is erroneously presented as “greater” than the Sabbath because it preceded the latter in the creation week. As the first day of creation, Sunday represents “the beginning of the world.”<sup>14</sup>

In the treatise *On the Sabbath and Circumcision*, found among the works of Athanasius (about 296-373), the superiority of Sunday over the Sabbath is argued on the basis of creation versus re-creation: “The Sabbath was the end of the first creation, the Lord’s day was the beginning of the second in which He renewed and restored the old.”<sup>15</sup> The fact that both Sabbath and Sunday keepers would defend the legitimacy and superiority of their respective days by appealing to their roles with reference to creation shows how important the creation-Sabbath was in their view.

In the so-called *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* (about 380), Christians are admonished to “keep the Sabbath and the Lord’s day festival; because the former is the memorial of the creation, and the latter of the resurrection.”<sup>16</sup> Several other references to the creation Sabbath are found in the same document. For example, a prayer commemorating Christ’s incarnation begins with the words, “O Lord Almighty, Thou hast created the world by Christ and hast appointed the Sabbath in memory thereof, because that on that day Thou hast made us rest from our works for the meditation upon Thy laws.”<sup>17</sup>

The theme of the creation Sabbath, as noted by Jean Daniélou, is also “at the center of Augustinian thought.”<sup>18</sup> For Augustine (354-430), the culmination of the creation week in the Sabbath rest provides the basis to develop two significant concepts. The first is the notion of the progress of world history toward a final Sabbath rest and peace with God. In other words, the realization of the eternal rest represents for Augustine the fulfillment of “the Sabbath that the Lord approved at the beginning of creation, where it says, ‘God rested on the seventh day from all his works.’”<sup>19</sup>

The second Augustinian interpretation of the creation Sabbath may be defined as the mystical progress of the human soul from restlessness into rest in God. A fitting example is found in one of the most sublime chapters of his *Confessions*, where Augustine prays: “O Lord God, Thou who hast given us all, grant us Thy peace, the peace of rest, the peace of the Sabbath, the peace without an ‘evening.’”<sup>20</sup> For this very beautiful order of things will pass away when they have accomplished their appointed purpose. They all were made with a ‘morning’ and an ‘evening.’ But the seventh day is without an ‘evening’ and it has no setting, because Thou hast sanctified it so that it may last eternally. Thy resting on the seventh day after the completion of Thy

works, foretells us through the voice of Thy Book, that we also after completing our works through Thy generosity, in the Sabbath of eternal life shall rest in Thee.”<sup>21</sup> This mystical and eschatological interpretation of the creation Sabbath shows the profound appreciation Augustine had for its significance, in spite of the fact that he failed to accept the literal observance of the Fourth Commandment.<sup>22</sup>

**The Creation-Sabbath in the Middle Ages.** The Augustinian spiritual interpretation of the creation Sabbath continued to some extent during the Middle Ages.<sup>23</sup> But a new development occurred following the Constantinian Sunday Law of 321. In order to give theological sanction to the imperial legislation demanding rest from work on Sunday, church leaders often appealed to the Sabbath commandment, interpreting it as a creation ordinance applicable to Sunday observance. Chrysostom (about 347-407) anticipates this development in his exposition of Genesis 2:2, “God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it.” He asks, “What do the words ‘He hallowed it’ actually mean? . . . [God] is teaching us that among the days of the week one must be singled out and wholly devoted to the service of spiritual things.”<sup>24</sup>

The reduction of the creation Sabbath from the specific observance of the *seventh day* to the principle of resting *one day in seven* in order to worship God made it possible to apply the Sabbath commandment to the observance of Sunday. Peter Comestor, for example (died about 1179), defends this application, arguing on the basis of Genesis 2:2 that “the Sabbath has been always observed by some nations even before the Law.”<sup>25</sup> This recognition of the Sabbath as a creation and thus universal ordinance was motivated, however, not by the desire to promote the observance of the seventh day but by the necessity to sanction and regulate Sunday keeping.

In late medieval theology, the literal application of the Sabbath commandment to Sundaykeeping was justified on the basis of a new interpretation which consisted in distinguishing between a moral and a ceremonial aspect within the Fourth Commandment. Thomas Aquinas (about 1225-1274) offers the most articulated exposition of this artificial distinction in his *Summa Theologica*. He argues that “the precept of the Sabbath observance is moral . . . in so far as it commands man to give some time to the things of God . . . but it is a ceremonial precept . . . as to the fixing of the time.”<sup>26</sup>

**Distinction Between Moral and Ceremonial?** How can the Fourth Commandment be *ceremonial* for specifying the *seventh day* but *moral* for enjoining humans to set apart *a day* of rest for worship? Basically because for Aquinas the moral aspect of the Sabbath is grounded on Natural Law—that

is to say, the principle of a regularly stated time for worship and rest is in accordance with natural reason.<sup>27</sup> The ceremonial aspect of the Sabbath, on the other hand, is determined by the symbolism of the seventh-day commemoration of “Creation” and prefiguration of the “repose of the mind in God, either in the present life, by grace, or, in the future life, by glory.”<sup>28</sup>

One may ask, How can the Sabbath be ceremonial (transitory) for symbolizing God’s perfect creation and the rest to be found in Him both in the present and future life? Is it not this reassurance that provides the basis for setting aside *any time* to worship God? To reject as *ceremonial* the original message of the seventh-day Sabbath, namely that God is the perfect Creator who offers rest, peace, and fellowship to His creatures, means to destroy also the very *moral* basis for devoting any time to the worshipping of God.

Apparently Aquinas himself recognized the inadequacy of his reasoning since he makes a distinction between the Sabbath and other symbolic Old Testament festivals such as Passover, “a sign of the future Passion of Christ.” The latter, Aquinas explains, were “temporal and transitory . . . consequently, the Sabbath alone, and none of the other solemnities and sacrifices, is mentioned in the precepts of the Decalogue.”<sup>29</sup>

Aquinas’ uncertainty as to the ceremonial aspect of the Sabbath is also reflected in his comment that Christ annulled not the precept of the Sabbath, but “the superstitious interpretation of the Pharisees, who thought that man ought to abstain from doing even works of kindness on the Sabbath; which was contrary to the intention of the Law.”<sup>30</sup> Aquinas’ uncertainty, however, was largely forgotten and his moral/ceremonial distinction of the Sabbath became the standard rationale for defending the Church’s right to introduce and regulate the observance of Sunday and holy days. This resulted in an elaborate legalistic system of Sunday keeping akin to that of the rabbinical Sabbath.<sup>31</sup>

**Lutheranism.** The sixteenth-century reformers repropounded with new qualifications Aquinas’ distinctions between the moral (creational) and ceremonial (Mosaic) aspects of the Sabbath. Their position was influenced by their understanding of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments as well as by their reaction against the legalistic and superstitious observance of Sunday and a host of holy days as well.

Luther and some radicals, in their concern to combat legalistic Sabbatarianism promoted not only by the Catholic Church but also by left-wing reformers such as Andreas Karlstadt,<sup>32</sup> attacked the Sabbath as a Mosaic

institution “specifically given to the Jewish people.”<sup>33</sup> Sunday was retained by Luther, not as the Christian Sabbath, but as a convenient day “ordained by the Church for the sake of the imperfect laity and the working class,”<sup>34</sup> who need “at least one day in the week to rest . . . and attend divine service.”<sup>35</sup> This position was largely determined by a radical distinction between the Old and New Testaments.

In the *Large Catechism* (1529), Luther explains that the Sabbath “is altogether an external matter, like other ordinances of the Old Testament, which were attached to particular customs, persons, and places, and now have been made free through Christ.”<sup>36</sup> This view is stated even more emphatically in Article 28 of the *Augsburg Confession* (1530): “Scripture has abrogated the Sabbath-day; for it teaches that, since the Gospel has been revealed, all the ceremonies of Moses can be omitted.”<sup>37</sup>

Luther’s radical distinction between the Old and New Testaments and between Law and Gospel was adopted and developed to extremes by radicals such as Anabaptists, leftist Puritans, Quakers, Mennonites, Hutterites, and modern antinomian denominations.<sup>38</sup> These have generally claimed that the Sabbath is not a creation ordinance but a Mosaic institution which Christ fulfilled and abolished. Consequently, “New Covenant” Christians are free from the observance of any special day.

**Sabbatarians.** Radical reformers promoted two opposing views regarding the Sabbath. One group, mentioned earlier, pressed to its logical conclusion the extreme Lutheran distinction between the Old and New Testaments, rejecting the observance of the Sabbath or of any day, as part of the Mosaic dispensation which Christ had fulfilled and replaced with the dispensation of grace. Another group, however, pursued the logical implications of the Calvinistic unity between the two Testaments, accepting and promoting the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath as a creation ordinance meant for all time and people. We shall call the latter “Sabbatarians,” a name frequently given to them by their opponents.<sup>39</sup>

Recent studies have shown that Sabbatarians constituted a respectable group at the time of the Reformation, especially in such places as Moravia, Bohemia, Austria, and Silesia.<sup>40</sup> In fact, in some Catholic catalogues of sects, they are listed immediately after the Lutherans and Calvinists.<sup>41</sup> Erasmus (1466-1536) mentions the existence of Sabbatarians in Bohemia: “Now I hear that among the Bohemians a new kind of Jews are springing up, whom they call *Sabbatarii*, who serve the Sabbath with great superstition.”<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Luther reports on the existence of Sabbatarian groups in Moravia



and Austria.<sup>43</sup> In fact, in 1538 Luther wrote a *Letter Against the Sabbatarians* (*Briefwider die Sabbathers*), arguing from the Bible against their observance of the seventh-day Sabbath.<sup>44</sup>

Oswald Glait, a former Catholic priest who first became a Lutheran and then an Anabaptist minister, began in 1527 or 1528 successfully to propagate his Sabbatarian views among Anabaptists in Moravia, Silesia, and Bohemia.<sup>45</sup> He was supported by the learned Andreas Fisher, also a former priest and Anabaptist.<sup>46</sup> Glait wrote a *Booklet on the Sabbath* (*Buchlenn vom Sabbath*—about 1530) which is not extant. From a refutation of Glait's book by Caspar Schewenckfeld,<sup>47</sup> we learn that Glait maintained the unity of the Old and New Testaments, accepting the validity and relevance of the Decalogue for the Christian dispensation.

Glait rejected the contention of his critics that the Sabbath commandment is a ceremonial law like circumcision. Instead, he held that the "Sabbath is commanded and kept from the beginning of creation."<sup>48</sup> God enjoined "Adam in paradise to celebrate the Sabbath."<sup>49</sup> Therefore "the Sabbath . . . is an eternal sign of hope and a memorial of creation, . . . an eternal covenant to be kept as long as the world stands."<sup>50</sup> On account of this teaching, Glait faced expulsions, persecutions, and, finally, death by drowning in the Danube (1546).<sup>51</sup>

The death of Glait, perhaps the most prominent leader of Sabbatarian Anabaptists, did not stop the propagation of the Sabbath doctrine. This is indicated by the existence of seventh-day Sabbathkeepers at the time of the Reformation in several European countries such as Poland, Holland, Germany, France, Hungary, Russia, Turkey, Finland, and Sweden.<sup>52</sup> In the seventeenth century, the presence of Sabbatarians became particularly felt in England. This is indicated by the fact that, as noted by R. J. Bauckham, "An impressive succession of Puritan and Anglican spokesmen addressed themselves to combating the seventh-day error: Lancelot Andrews, Bishop Francis White, Richard Baxter, John Bunyan, Edward Stillingfleet, John Owen, Nathanael Homes, John Wallis. Their efforts are a tacit admission of the attraction that the doctrine exercised in the seventeenth century, and seventh-day observers (who then usually also advocated Sunday work) were harshly treated by Puritan and Anglican authorities alike."<sup>53</sup>

The Seventh Day Baptists became the leading Sabbatarian church in England.<sup>54</sup> Their first church in America was founded at Newport, Rhode Island, in December 1671.<sup>55</sup> Seventh-day Adventists gratefully acknowledge their indebtedness to Seventh Day Baptists for bringing to them the knowledge of the Sabbath in 1845.<sup>56</sup> Later on, the Sabbath was accepted as a creation

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ordinance by the Church of God Seventh Day, the Worldwide Church of God, and a score of smaller denominations,<sup>57</sup> some of whom have recently rejected the Sabbath.

**Reformed Tradition.** Churches in the Reformed tradition, such as English Puritans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Methodists, and Baptists, adopted what might be called a “compromise position,” on one hand, acknowledging the Sabbath as a creation ordinance while, on the other hand, defending Sunday as a legitimate substitution of the Sabbath accomplished by the Church.

They generally distinguished between the temporal and the spiritual observance of Sunday. Calvin can rightly be regarded as the pioneer and promoter of this view which exerted far-reaching influence, especially in Anglo-American Puritan Sabbatarianism. The basis of Calvin’s teaching regarding the Sabbath is to be found in his rejection of Luther’s antithesis between Law and Gospel. In his effort to maintain the basic unity of the Old and New Testaments, Calvin christianized the Law, spiritualizing, at least in part, the Sabbath commandment.<sup>58</sup>

Calvin tried to reconcile his acceptance of the Sabbath as a creation ordinance for humanity with his view that “on the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, the ceremonial part of the commandment was abolished” by repropounding a new version of Aquinas’ distinction between the moral and ceremonial aspects of the Sabbath. He argues that at creation the Sabbath was given as a perpetual ordinance but “afterwards in the law a new precept concerning the Sabbath was given, which should be peculiar to the Jews, and but for a season.”<sup>59</sup>

What is the difference between the “Jewish” (ceremonial) seventh-day Sabbath and the “Christian” (moral) first-day Sabbath? The difference is not easy to detect, especially for someone not trained to distinguish theological nuances. Calvin describes the Jewish Sabbath as being “typical” (symbolic), that is, “a legal ceremony shadowing forth a spiritual rest, the truth of which was manifested in Christ.”<sup>60</sup> The Christian Sabbath [Sunday], on the other hand, is “without figure.”<sup>61</sup> By this he apparently means that it is more a pragmatic institution designed to accomplish three basic objectives: first, to allow God to work in us; second, to provide time for meditation and church services; and third, to protect dependent workers.<sup>62</sup>

**An Unresolved Contradiction.** Calvin’s attempt to resolve the tension between the Sunday-Sabbath as a perpetual creation ordinance and the Saturday-Sabbath as a temporary ceremonial law, cannot be considered

successful. Do not both fulfill the same pragmatic functions? Moreover, by teaching that for Christians the Sunday-Sabbath represents “self-renunciation” and the “true rest” of the Gospel,<sup>63</sup> did not Calvin also attribute to the day a “typological-symbolic” significance, much like the type he assigned to the Jewish Saturday-Sabbath?

This unresolved tension can be followed in the teaching of Calvin’s successors and has been the cause of endless controversies. For example, Zacharias Ursinus, compiler of that important Reformed confession known as *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563), teaches that “the Sabbath of the seventh day was appointed of God from the very beginning of the world, to declare that men, after His example, should rest from their labours,” and “although the ceremonial Sabbath has been abolished in the New Testament, yet the moral still continues and pertains to us as well as to others.”<sup>64</sup> This position was later defended tenaciously in the monumental work, *The Doctrine of the Sabbath*, written in 1595 by the famous English Puritan Nicolas Bownde,<sup>65</sup> as well as in other confessional documents such as the Synod of Dort of 1619<sup>66</sup> and the *Westminster Confession of Faith* of 1647.<sup>67</sup>

These and similar documents fail to offer a rational explanation for the artificial and arbitrary distinction between the so-called *moral/creational* (one-day-in-seven) aspect of the Sunday-Sabbath and the *ceremonial/Mosaic* (specification of the seventh day) aspect of the Saturday-Sabbath, supposedly annulled by Christ.

There is no trace of such an artificial distinction in Scripture. If such a distinction existed in the Old Testament, we would expect the alleged moral aspect of the Sabbath commandment—that is, the principle of one-day-in-seven—to be applied to such people as the priests (who had to work on the Sabbath) by granting them a day off at another time during the week. The absence of such a provision constitutes a most direct challenge to those who uphold the one-day-in-seven principle.

Donald Carson acknowledges: “If the Old Testament principle were really ‘one-day-in-seven for worship and rest’ instead of ‘the seventh day for worship and rest,’ we might have expected Old Testament legislation to prescribe some other day off for the priests. The lack of such confirms the importance in Old Testament thought of the *seventh* day, as opposed to the one-in-seven principle so greatly relied upon by those who wish to see in Sunday the precise New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament Sabbath.”<sup>68</sup>

To contend that the specification of the *seventh day* is a Mosaic-ceremonial element of the Sabbath because it was designed to aid the Jews

in commemorating creation and in experiencing spiritual rest is to be blind to the fact that Christians need such an aid just as much as the Jews. It also means leaving Christians confused as to the reasons for devoting one day to the worship of God. R. J. Bauckham acknowledges the existence of such a confusion when he notes that most “Protestants in the mid-sixteenth century had as imprecise ideas about the basis of Sunday observance as most Christians at most times have had.”<sup>69</sup>

**Two Conflicting Positions.** The unresolved contradiction between the creational/moral and Mosaic/ceremonial aspects of the Fourth Commandment has aroused recurrent controversies over the relationship between Sunday and the Sabbath commandment. Truly the Sabbath has had no rest. The creational/moral versus the Mosaic/ceremonial distinctions regarding the Sabbath have led to two main opposing views of Sunday. In the Netherlands, for example, the two views were hotly debated during more than a decade after the Synod of Dort (1619).

On one side, Dutch theologians such as Willem Teellinck, William Ames, and Antonius Walaeus wrote major treatises defending the creation origin of the Sabbath and thus the legitimate application of the Fourth Commandment to the observance of Sunday.<sup>70</sup> On the other side, a leading professor, Franciscus Gomarus, produced a major response entitled *Enquiry into the Meaning and Origin of the Sabbath and Consideration of the Institution of the Lord's Day* (1628), in which he argues for a Mosaic origin of the Sabbath and, consequently, for an independent ecclesiastical origin of Sunday.<sup>71</sup>

The debate over these two conflicting positions has flared up time and again in different countries, and no reconciliation appears yet to be in sight.<sup>72</sup> A fitting example is provided by some of the recent publications. On one side is the symposium edited by Donald Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* (1982) and by Willy Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (1968). Both studies espouse the thesis that seventh-day Sabbathkeeping is not a creation ordinance binding upon Christians but a Mosaic institution annulled by Christ.<sup>73</sup> Consequently, Sunday is not the Christian Sabbath, but an exclusive Christian creation introduced to commemorate Christ's resurrection through the Lord's Supper celebration.<sup>74</sup>

By severing all ties with the Sabbath commandment, Rordorf follows the Lutheran tradition in reducing Sunday to an *hour* of worship which could be scheduled in accordance with the demand of modern life. The practical implications of this position are obvious. If fully carried out, it could prove to

be “the death certificate of Sunday,”<sup>75</sup> since in time, even the hour of worship could readily be squeezed out of the hectic schedule of modern life.

On the other side is the study of Roger T. Beckwith and William Stott, *This Is the Day: The Biblical Doctrine of the Christian Sunday* (1978), which follows the Reformed tradition by defending the Sabbath as a creation ordinance accepted and clarified by Christ. The Apostles allegedly used the Sabbath to frame Sunday as their new day of rest and worship.<sup>76</sup> Consequently, they conclude that “in the light of the New Testament as a whole, the Lord’s Day can be clearly seen to be a Christian Sabbath—a New Testament fulfillment to which the Old Testament Sabbath points forward.”<sup>77</sup> The practical implication of their conclusions is that Sunday should be observed, not merely as an hour of worship, but as “a whole day, set apart to be a holy festival . . . for worship, rest and works of mercy.”<sup>78</sup>

## **PART 2**

### **OBJECTIONS TO THE CREATION SABBATH**

The preceding survey of the controversy over the creation versus Mosaic origin of the Sabbath has set the stage for examining the main objections against the creation origin of the Sabbath, advanced especially by former Sabbatarians. Their objections reflect the radical Lutheran distinction between the Old and New Covenants. On the basis of this distinction, as we have already seen, the Sabbath is not viewed as a creation ordinance for humanity but as a Mosaic institution for the Jews which Christ fulfilled and abolished. Consequently, so-called “New Covenant” Christians are free from the observance of any special day.

The four major objections used to negate the creation origin of the Sabbath are the following:

- 1) No command to keep the Sabbath is given in Genesis.
- 2) No example of Sabbathkeeping is recorded in Genesis.
- 3) No mention is made of the word “Sabbath” in Genesis.
- 4) No formula of “and there was evening and morning” is used for the seventh day.

#### **(1) No Command to Keep the Sabbath Is Given in Genesis**

**Absence of a Command.** The first argument used to negate the creation origin of the Sabbath is the absence of an explicit command to observe the seventh day in Genesis 2:2-3. The Worldwide Church of God

formulates this argument by means of six rhetorical statements: “There are several things that Genesis does not tell us:

- 1) It does not say that humans rested.
- 2) It does not say that humans were told to follow God’s example.
- 3) It does not say that humans were told to rest.
- 4) It does not say that God taught Adam and Eve on the Sabbath.
- 5) It does not say that God created the Sabbath.
- 6) It does not say that humans kept the Sabbath.<sup>79</sup>

Dale Ratzlaff uses the same argument, saying, “There is no command for mankind to rest in the Genesis account.”<sup>80</sup> “Nothing is expressly mentioned regarding man in the seventh-day-creation rest.”<sup>81</sup> For him, this fact indicates that the Sabbath is not a creation ordinance binding upon humanity, but a temporary institution introduced by Moses for Israel alone.

**Reasons for “No Command.”** There are several possible reasons for the absence of an explicit command to keep the Sabbath in Genesis 2:2-3. First of all, we must remember that Genesis is *not* a book of *commands* but of *origins*. None of the Ten Commandments are ever mentioned in Genesis, yet we know that their principles were known because we are told, for example, “Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” (Gen 26:5). It is evident Abraham knew God’s commandments and laws, though no reference is made to them in the book of Genesis. The reason is that Genesis is a book of beginnings; it tells us how we get from the creation of this planet to the creation of God’s people in the book of Exodus.

Another possible reason for the absence of a command to keep the Sabbath in Genesis is the *cosmological* function of the seventh day in the creation story. The divine act of resting on the seventh day is designed to tell us how God felt about His creation. It was “very good,” and to dramatize this fact, twice we are told that “He rested” (Gen 2:2-3)—that is, “He stopped.” No finishing touches were to improve His perfect creation.

In the Near Eastern creation myths, the divine rest (technically called *otiositas*), which usually implies the establishment of a secure world order, generally is achieved either by eliminating noisy, disturbing gods or by creating human beings.<sup>82</sup> For example, in the Babylonian creation epic *Enuma Elish*, the god Marduk says, “Verily, savage-man I will create. He

shall be charged with the service of the gods, that they might be at ease!”<sup>83</sup> In the creation Sabbath, however, the divine rest is secured not by subordinating or destroying competitors, nor by exploiting the labor of mankind, but by the *completion of a perfect creation*. God rested on the seventh day, not to conclude His work of creation, but rather because His work was “finished . . . done” (Gen 2 :2-3). As stated by Niels-Erik Andreasen, “It is not the rest (cessation from work) which concludes creation, but it is the concluded creation which occasions both rest and the Sabbath.”<sup>84</sup>

**The Function of God’s Rest.** Any responsible artisan works on a product until it is brought it up to the ideal; then the work stops. In an infinitely higher sense, God, having completed the creation of this world with all its creatures, desisted from creating on the seventh day. This is essentially the meaning of the Hebrew verb *sabat* which is twice translated “rested.” Its more accurate rendering is “to stop, to desist, to cease from doing.”

To express the idea of rest from physical exhaustion, the Hebrew employs a different verb, namely *nuah*, which is also generally translated in English “to rest.” The latter, in fact, occurs in Exodus 20:11 where God’s pattern of work-rest in creation is given as the basis for the commandment to work six days and to rest on the seventh. In Genesis 2, however, the verb *sabat* is used because the function of God’s rest is different. It fulfills a *cosmological* rather than an *anthropological* function. It explains to us not why people should rest but rather how God felt about His creation: He regarded it as complete and perfect; and to acknowledge it, He stopped.

This function of God’s rest has been recognized by numerous scholars. Karl Barth, for example, remarks: “We read in Genesis 2:2 that on the seventh day God, the Creator, completed His work by ‘resting.’ This simply means that He did not go on with the work of creation as such. He set both Himself and His creation a limit. He was content to be the Creator of this particular creation—to glory, as the Creator, in this particular work. He had no occasion to proceed to further creations. He needed no further creations. And He had found what he created very good’ (Gen. 1:31).”<sup>85</sup> “When creation ended with man, having found its climax and meaning in the actualization of man, God rested on the seventh day from all the work that He had done. It was to this that He looked in the recognition that everything was very good and therefore did not need to be extended or supplemented.”<sup>86</sup>

Dietrich Bonhoeffer similarly explains that “in the Bible ‘rest’ really means more than ‘having a rest.’ It means rest after the work is accomplished, it means completion, it means the perfection and peace in which the world rests.”<sup>87</sup> We might say that by confronting His creation with His cessation-

rest, God proclaimed the Good News that there was no need to put additional finishing touches on what He had created, since He regarded all of it “very good” (Gen. 1:31). God’s cessation from *doing* expresses His desire for *being* with His creation, for giving to His creatures not only *things* but *Himself*.

**An Example Rather Than a Command.** The fact that the Sabbath is established in the creation story by a divine example rather than by a divine commandment could also reflect what God intended the Sabbath to be in a sinless world—namely, not an alienating imposition but a free response to a gracious Creator. By freely choosing to make themselves available for their Creator on the Sabbath, human beings were to experience physical, mental, and spiritual renewal and enrichment. Since these needs have not been eliminated but heightened by the Fall, the moral, universal, and perpetual functions of the Sabbath precept were repeated later in the form of a commandment.

What is it that makes any divine precept moral and universal? Do we not regard a law moral when it reflects God's nature? Could God have given any stronger revelation of the moral nature of the Sabbath than by making it a rule of His divine conduct? Is a principle established by divine example less binding than one enunciated by a divine command? Do not actions speak louder than words?

The argument that the Sabbath originated at Sinai makes Moses guilty of distorting truth or, at least, the victim of gross misunderstanding. He would have traced the Sabbath back to creation in the Sabbath commandment, when in reality it was his own new creation. Such a charge, if true, would cast serious doubts on the integrity and/or reliability of anything else Moses or anyone else wrote in the Bible.

## (2) No Example of Sabbathkeeping Is Recorded in Genesis

The oldest and perhaps the strongest argument against the creation origin of the Sabbath is the absence of an explicit reference to Sabbathkeeping after Genesis 2 for the whole patriarchal period up to Exodus 16. For example, in his doctoral dissertation on “Sabbatic Theology,” Roger Congdon writes: “There is absolutely no mention of the Sabbath before the Lord said to Moses, ‘Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you . . . On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily’ (Ex 16:4-5). These words indicate that the event was bound to the Decalogue of Sinai. . . . The first mention of the Sabbath in the Bible and the first chronological use of the word in all history is in Exodus 16:23.”<sup>88</sup> In a similar vein the Worldwide Church of God affirms that Genesis “does not say that humans kept the Sabbath.”<sup>89</sup>



**Not Observed?** The absence of explicit references to Sabbath-keeping between Genesis 2 and Exodus 16 does not necessarily mean that the principle of Sabbathkeeping was unknown. The apparent silence could mean that between Adam and Moses, the Sabbath, though known, was not observed. The non-observance of the feast of the Booths between Joshua and Nehemiah, a period of almost a thousand years, would provide a parallel situation (Neh 8:17).

**Taken for Granted.** A more plausible explanation is that the custom of Sabbathkeeping is not mentioned simply because it is taken for granted. A number of reasons support this explanation.

First, we have a similar example of silence regarding the Sabbath between the books of Deuteronomy and 2 Kings. Such silence can hardly be interpreted as non-observance of the Sabbath since, when the first incidental reference occurs in 2 Kings 4:23, it describes the custom of visiting a prophet on the Sabbath.

Second, Genesis does not contain laws like Exodus but is rather, a brief sketch of origins. Since no mention is made of any other commandment, silence regarding the Sabbath is not exceptional.

Third, throughout the book of Genesis and the early chapters of Exodus one finds circumstantial evidences for the use of the seven-day week which would imply the existence of the Sabbath as well. The period of seven days is mentioned four times in the account of the Flood (Gen 7:4, 10; 8:10,12).

Apparently, the “week” also is used in a technical way to describe the duration of the nuptial festivities of Jacob (Gen 29:27) as well as the duration of mourning at his death (Gen 50:10). A similar period was observed by the friends of Job to express their condolences to the patriarch (Job 2:13). Probably all the mentioned ceremonials were terminated by the arrival of the Sabbath.

Lastly, the Sabbath is presented in Exodus 16 and 20 as an already existing institution. The instructions for gathering a double portion of manna on the sixth day presuppose a knowledge of the significance of the Sabbath: “On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily” (Ex 16:5). The omission of any explanation for gathering a double portion on the sixth day would be inexplicable if the Israelites had no previous knowledge of the Sabbath.

Similarly, in Exodus 20, the Sabbath is presupposed as something already familiar. The commandment does not say “Know the Sabbath day” but “Remember the Sabbath day” (Ex 20:8), thus implying that it was already known. Furthermore, the commandment, by presenting the Sabbath as rooted in creation (Ex 20:11), hardly allows a late Exodus introduction of the festival.

To speculate on how the patriarchs kept the Sabbath would be a fruitless endeavor since it would rest more on imagination than on available information. Considering, however, that the essence of Sabbathkeeping is not *a place to go* to fulfill rituals, but a set *time to be* with God, ourselves, and others, it is entirely possible that the patriarchs spent the Sabbath holy hours within their households, engaged in some of the acts of worship described in Genesis such as prayer (Gen 12:8; 26:25), sacrifice (Gen 12:8; 13:18; 26:25; 33:20), and teaching (Gen 18:19).

### (3) No Mention Is Made of the Word “Sabbath” in Genesis

The absence of the term “Sabbath” in Genesis 2:2-3 is seen by some as an indication that the Sabbath as an institution did not originate at creation but later at the time of Moses. For example, Robert Morey emphatically states: “But isn’t the Sabbath creation ordinance found in Genesis 2:1-3? No, the word ‘Sabbath’ does not appear in the text.”<sup>90</sup>

Harold Dressler makes a similar statement: “Genesis 2 does not mention the word ‘Sabbath.’ It speaks about the ‘seventh day.’ Unless the reader equates ‘seventh day’ and ‘Sabbath,’ there is no reference to the Sabbath here.”<sup>91</sup> In a similar vein, Dale Ratzlaff writes: “There is no mention of the word ‘Sabbath’ in the Genesis account; nothing is said about *man* resting; in fact, man is not even mentioned in connection with this seventh-day-creation rest.”<sup>92</sup>

**Verbal Form.** It is true that the name “Sabbath” does not occur in the passage, but the cognate verbal form *shabat* (to cease, to stop, to rest) is used and the latter, as noted by Ugo Cassuto, “contains an allusion to the name ‘the Sabbath day.’”<sup>93</sup>

Moreover, as Cassuto sagaciously remarks, the use of the name *seventh day* rather than *Sabbath* may well reflect the writer’s concern to underline the *perpetual order* of the day, independent and free from any association with astrological “sabbaths” of the heathen nations.<sup>94</sup>

**Perpetual Order.** It is a known fact that the term *shabbatu*, which is strikingly similar to the Hebrew word for Sabbath (*shabbat*), occurs in the documents of ancient Mesopotamia. The term apparently designated the

fifteenth day of the month, that is, the day of the full moon. By designating the day by number rather than by name, Genesis seems to emphasize that God's Sabbath day is not like that of heathen nations, connected with the phases of the moon. Rather, it shall be the seventh day in perpetual order, independent from any association with the cycles of heavenly bodies.

By pointing to a *perpetual order*, the seventh day strengthens the cosmological message of the creation story—precisely that God is both Creator and constant controller of this cosmos. In Exodus, however, where the seventh day is given in the context of the Genesis, not of this cosmos, but of the nation of Israel, the day is explicitly designated “sabbath,” apparently to express its new historical and soteriological function.

**(4) No Formula of “and there was evening and morning”**

**Is Used for the Seventh day**

The omission in the creation account of the formula “and there was evening and morning” in connection with the seventh day indicates to some that the Sabbath is not a literal 24-hour day like the preceding six days, but a symbolic time representing eternal rest. For example, Dale Ratzlaff writes: “The Genesis account does not mention an end to God's seventh-day rest. Rather it is presented as an ongoing state by the omission of the formula ‘and there was evening and morning, a seventh day.’”<sup>95</sup> He interprets the absence of this formula as indicating that “the conditions and characteristics of that first seventh day were designed by God to continue and would have continued had it not been for the sin of Adam and Eve.”<sup>96</sup>

**Eternal Rest.** Both Rabbis and Christian writers have interpreted the absence of any reference to “the evening and morning” in connection with the seventh day of creation as representing the future, eternal rest of the redeemed. Augustine offers a most fitting example of this interpretation in the last page of his *Confessions*, where he offers this exquisite prayer: “O Lord God, grant Thy peace unto us . . . the peace of rest, the peace of the Sabbath which has no evening. For all this most beautiful order of things, ‘very good’ . . . is to pass away, for in them there was morning and evening. But the seventh day is without any evening, nor hath it any setting, because Thou hast sanctified it to an everlasting continuance; . . . that we also after our works . . . may repose in Thee also in the Sabbath of eternal life.”<sup>97</sup>

This spiritual, eschatological interpretation of the creation Sabbath has some merits because, as shown in chapter 4, the vision of the peace, rest,

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and prosperity of the first Sabbath inspired the prophetic vision of the peace, delight, and prosperity of the world-to-come. This interpretation is also found in Hebrews 4 where believers are urged to strive to enter into the Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God (Heb 4:9, 11).

**Literal Day.** The symbolic interpretation of creation's seventh day which has no evening does not negate its literal 24-hour duration for at least four reasons:

First, the seventh day is enumerated like the preceding six days. Note that in the Bible whenever "day-yom" is accompanied by a number it always means a day of 24 hours.

Second, the Decalogue itself clearly states that God, having worked six days, rested on the seventh day of creation week (Ex 20:11). If the first six days were ordinary earthly days, we must understand the seventh in the same way.

Third, every passage which mentions creation's seventh day as the basis of the earthly Sabbath regards it as an ordinary day (Ex 20:11; 31:17; cf. Mark 2:27; Heb 4:4).

Last, the commandment to keep the Sabbath as a memorial day of the creation-Sabbath (Ex 20:11) implies a literal original 24-hour Sabbath. God could hardly command His creatures to work six days and rest on the seventh after His own example if the seventh day were not a literal day.

The omission of the formula "and there was evening and morning, a seventh day" may be due to the fact that the seventh day is not followed by other creation days. The formula serves to separate each of the first days of creation from the following ones. The seventh day, being the last day of creation, did not need to be separated because there was no "eighth day" to follow. By marking the termination of the creation week, the seventh day did not need to be defined in terms of its termination because there were no further creation days.

Another suggestion discussed in chapter 4 is the possibility that the Sabbath was blessed with extraordinary light. For example, referring to the Messianic age, Zechariah remarks that "there shall be continuous day . . . not day and not night, for at evening time there shall be light" (Zech 14:7). Here we have a probable allusion to the seventh day of creation which in Genesis has no mention of "evening and morning." Such a detail was interpreted by the rabbis as signifying that the Sabbath was especially blessed by supernatural, continuous light. To this we return in chapter 4.

## PART 3

## THE CREATION WEEK IS A HUMAN WEEK

A fundamental problem with the preceding objections against the creation origin of the Sabbath is their failure to realize that *the creation week is a human week*, established by God for regulating our human life. God did not need six days to create our solar system. He could have spoken it into existence in a second, since His creation was accomplished by the spoken word (Ps 33:6). But He chose to establish a human week of seven days and to use it Himself in order to give a divine perspective to our six days of work and to our seventh day of rest.

This means that as we work during the six days and rest on the seventh day, we are doing in a small scale what God has done on a much larger scale. God's willingness to enter into the limitations of human time at creation in order to enable us to identify with Him is a marvellous revelation of His willingness to enter into human flesh at the incarnation in order to become Emmanuel, God with us.

On each of the first six days of creation God did something that had *lasting results* for the human family. We would expect the same to be true for the seventh day. Roy Gane notes: "God set up cyclical time even before man was created (Gen 1:3-5, 14-18). According to Genesis 1:14, God made heavenly luminaries, chiefly the sun and the moon (Gen 1:16), to mark earthly time as 'signs,' 'seasons,' i. e., appointed times, days, and years. So when Genesis 2:3 says that God blessed and hallowed the seventh day, this blessing and consecration could be on-going in a cyclical sense, applying to each subsequent seventh day. In fact, the seventh-day Sabbath provides a plausible explanation for the origin of the week, which is not defined by the movement of heavenly bodies."<sup>98</sup>

**Creation Sabbath and Weekly Sabbath.** The emphatic threefold repetition of "the seventh day" with its four divine acts ("finished," "rested," "blessed," and "hallowed"—Gen 2:2-3) at the conclusion of creation indicates that just as man is the crown of creation, so the seventh day, the Sabbath, is the final goal of creation. Thus, the creation Sabbath tells us not only how God felt about His creation, but also what He planned for His creatures. G. H. Watermann makes this point saying: "It seems clear, therefore, that the divine origin and institution of the Sabbath took place at the beginning of human history. At that time God not only provided a divine example for

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keeping the seventh day as a day of rest, but also blessed and set apart the seventh day for the benefit of man.”<sup>99</sup>

As God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day at the completion of His creation, so human beings are to accomplish their work and purpose in this creation during the six working days of the week and to follow the example of the Creator by resting on the seventh day. Sabbathkeepers can find satisfaction and fulfillment in their work and rest, because the Sabbath reassures them that they are doing on a small scale what God has done and is doing on an infinitely larger scale.

Earlier we noted that God “rested” on the seventh day to express His satisfaction over his complete and perfect creation. This idea is conveyed by the verb *shabat* used in Genesis 2:2-3 which means to “cease or stop working.” We must not ignore, however, that in Exodus 31:17 the creation rest of God is interpreted as a model for human rest. Israel is called to keep the Sabbath because “in six days the Lord made the heaven and the earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was *refreshed*” (Ex 31:17). The Hebrew verb used here is *nepshesh*, which describes God as being “refreshed” as a result of His rest on the seventh day of creation.

It is evident God did not need to rest from fatigue because “He does not faint or grow weary” (Is 40:28), yet the Bible speaks of God in human terms (anthropomorphically) as being “refreshed” on the Sabbath in order to set the pattern for the human Sabbath rest. This is not the only example in the Bible where God does something to set an example for His creatures to follow.

Jesus asked John the Baptist to baptize him, not because He needed to be cleansed from sin (Rom 6:1-5), but to set an example for His followers (Matt 3:13-14). Both baptism and the Lord’s Supper trace their origin to a divine act and example that established them. In the same way Scripture traces the origin of the Sabbath to God’s act of resting, blessing, and sanctifying the seventh day. This is the fundamental problem with Sunday observance. *No divine act established the day as a memorial of the resurrection. None of the words uttered by Christ on the day of His resurrection suggest that He intended to make the day a memorial of His resurrection.*

**The Blessing of the Seventh Day.** The *blessing* and *hallowing* of the seventh day at creation further reveals that God intended the Sabbath to have on-going benefits for the human family. It would make no sense for God to *bless* and *sanctify* a unit of holy time for Himself. The blessings of God are outgoing, benefiting His creatures. They represent not wishful thinking but assurance of fruitfulness, prosperity, and abundant life. For example, God

blessed the first couple saying, “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28; cf. 9:1; 49:22-26). Similarly, we read in the Aaronic benediction: “The Lord bless you and keep you” (Num 6:24). The blessing of God results, then, in the preservation and assurance of abundant life. This meaning is expressed explicitly by the Psalmist when he writes: “The Lord has commanded the blessing, life for evermore” (Ps 133:3). Applied to the Sabbath, this means that God made this day a channel through which human life can receive His beneficial and vitalizing power.

It must be said that the meaning of both the blessing and sanctification of the Sabbath is not spelled out in Genesis 2:3. This is puzzling because in most instances God’s benediction is accompanied by an explanation of its content. For example, “God blessed them [animals], saying, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth’” (Gen. 1:22). Similarly, God said to Abraham regarding his wife, Sarah, “I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall come from her” (Gen. 17:16; cf. 9:1; 17:20). Yet with regard to the blessing of the Sabbath, nothing is said as to what such a blessing entails.

The mystery of the blessedness and sanctity of the Sabbath begins to be unveiled in Exodus with the establishment of Israel as God’s covenant people. The day becomes now linked not only to a finished creation but to the new nation which God has miraculously brought into existence: “See! The Lord has given you the Sabbath” (Ex. 16:29). From being cosmological, a symbol of a perfect world, the Sabbath has now become a soteriological-historical symbol of God’s redemptive plan for His people. Thus the Sabbath becomes now more intimately connected with the ups and downs of the life of God’s people.

The manna story offers a starting point to understand the nature of the original blessing of the Sabbath. Notice first certain parallelisms between the creation and the manna narrative. Both are divine acts accomplished according to the seven-day structure. Both testify to the perfection of God’s activities: the daily creation was “good” and the daily portion of the manna was satisfying (Ex 16:18). In both instances, the creative activity ceases on the Sabbath: creation is “finished” (Gen 2:2) and the manna ceased to fall (Ex 16:25). In both cases God’s blessings are bestowed upon the Sabbath—by proclamation at creation (Gen 2:3) and by preservation in the manna (Ex 16:24).

In the context of the aridity of the desert and of the murmuring of the people caused by their inability to secure food, the miracle of the preservation of the manna throughout Sabbath stands as a most conspicuous revelation of

the nature of the Sabbath blessings, namely, God's reassuring gift of physical nourishment and life. In order to receive the blessings of the Sabbath, believers need to consecrate the day to God by altering their behavior, as in the manna experience. As John Skinner puts it: "The Sabbath is a constant source of well-being to the man who recognizes its true nature and purpose."<sup>100</sup>

**The Sanctification of the Sabbath.** Genesis 2:3 also affirms that the Creator "hallowed" (RV, RSV) the seventh day, "made it holy" (NEB, NAB), "declared it holy" (NKJV), or "sanctified" (NASB). Both here and in the Sabbath commandment we are told that God made the Sabbath holy. How did God make the seventh day holy? Since the day is not a material substance but a unit of time, it cannot be made holy by applying a holy substance such as anointing oil (Lev 8:10-12). The meaning of the holiness of the Sabbath must be found in its relation to the people who are affected by its observance.

Dale Ratzlaff argues that God did not sanctify the seventh day as such for human beings to observe, but the "conditions of that day were sanctified and blessed."<sup>101</sup> By "the conditions," Ratzlaff means the condition that existed on "the first day after creation was completed."<sup>102</sup> In other words, the sanctification of the seventh day refers primarily to the "conditions" of "fellowship and communion" that existed on creation's seventh day rather than to God setting aside the seventh day for humanity to experience in a special way His sanctifying presence.

The problem with this interpretation is that nowhere does the Bible suggest that the sanctification of the seventh day at creation refers to the sanctification of the conditions that existed "the first day after creation was completed." *God did not sanctify "conditions" but the seventh day itself.*

**The Meaning of Sanctification.** The basic meaning of the Hebrew idea of "holy—*qodesh*" is "set apart," "separated." Applied to the Sabbath, the divine sanctification of the day consists in God's setting apart the seventh day from the rest of the six days. It must be emphasized that God did the setting apart, not man. The holiness of the Sabbath stems not from those who keep it, but from the act of God. Believers experience the holiness of the Sabbath by altering their behavior on that day. They stop their work to allow God to enrich their lives with His sanctifying presence.

John Skinner perceptively points out that the Sabbath "is not an institution which exists or ceases with its observance by man; the divine rest is a fact as much as the divine working, and so the sanctity of the day is a fact whether man secures the benefit or not."<sup>103</sup>



The verbal form (Piel) of the Hebrew verb “to sanctify—*yeqaddesh*,” as H. C. Leupold explains, has both a causative and a declarative sense. This means that God declared the seventh day holy and caused it to be a means of holiness for humanity.<sup>104</sup> It is noteworthy that the word “holy” is used for the first time in the Bible with reference not to an object such as an altar, a tabernacle, or a person, but with regard to time, the seventh day (Gen 2:3).

The meaning of the sanctification of the Sabbath becomes clearer with the unfolding of the history of salvation. In Exodus, for example, the holiness of the Sabbath is elucidated by means of its explicit association with the manifestation of God’s glorious presence. From Mount Sinai, which was made holy by the glorious presence of God, the Sabbath is explicitly proclaimed to be God’s holy day: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Ex. 20:8). The commandment, it should be noted, not only opens with the invitation to remember and keep holy the Sabbath (cf. Deut 5:15), but also closes by reiterating that its holiness is grounded in God’s sanctification of the day at creation (Ex 20:11). In Hebrew, the identical verb is used in both instances.

**An Experience of God’s Presence.** The experience of God’s glorious presence on Mount Sinai served to educate the Israelites to acknowledge the holiness of God manifested in time (the Sabbath) and later in a place of worship (the Tabernacle). The motif of God’s glory is found in all of these (Sinai, Sabbath, and Tabernacle) and ties them together. The Israelites were instructed to prepare themselves for the encounter with God’s holy presence (Ex 19:10, 11), when the Lord would “come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people” (Ex 19:11). The preparation included personal cleansing (Ex 19:10, 14) and the setting of a boundary around the mountain (Ex. 19:12, 23) which was to be invested with God’s glory.

The nexus with the holiness of the Sabbath can hardly be missed. Indeed, personal preparation and the setting of a boundary between common and holy time are the basic ingredients necessary for the sanctification of the Sabbath. Can one enter into the experience of God’s holy presence on the Sabbath without making necessary preparation? Or is it possible to honor God’s presence on His holy seventh day without setting a boundary in time that fences off personal profits and pleasures?

The meaning of the holiness of God is further clarified at Sinai by the invitation God extended to Moses “on the seventh day” to enter into the cloud and thus experience the intimacy of His presence. “Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the Lord

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settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days; and on the *seventh day* he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people. And Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain” (Ex 24:15-18).

God’s invitation to Moses to enter on the seventh day into His glorious presence unveils the cryptic meaning of God’s sanctification of the Sabbath at creation. The holiness of the Sabbath is now explained to be not a magic quality infused by God into this day, but rather His mysterious and majestic presence manifested on and through the Sabbath in the lives of His people.

This meaning of the holiness of the Sabbath is brought out more forcefully a few chapters later when, at the end of the revelation of the tabernacle, God says to the people of Israel, “You shall keep my sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you” (Ex 31:13). The sanctity of the Sabbath is now clearly equated with the sanctifying presence of God with His people. The mystery of the sanctification of the creation-Sabbath is now unveiled. It consists precisely of God’s commitment to manifest His presence in the lives of His people.

For six days God filled this planet with good things and living beings, but on the seventh He filled it with His presence. As the symbol and assurance of God’s sanctifying presence in this world and in human lives, the Sabbath represents a most sublime and permanent expression of God’s loving care.

**The Permanence of the Sabbath.** In the creation account, we learn that God set up the ideal order of relationship that should govern human life. He instituted the Sabbath, marriage, and work—three institutions which embody principles which were later formulated in the Ten Commandments.

When Adam and Even disobeyed God by eating of the forbidden fruit (Gen 3:6), their marriage and work suffered as a result of the curse of sin. But the Sabbath did not. “The Sabbath is not affected by any curse resulting from the Fall. Unlike the other two Creation institutions, the Sabbath remains a little piece of Paradise. As such, its value is enhanced by the deterioration around it. Now that work is exhausting, ceasing from labor on the Sabbath provides needed rest. More importantly, now that human beings are cut off from direct access to God, they need a reminder of His lordship [and fellowship] even more than they did before the Fall.”<sup>105</sup>

The Fall did not eliminate the order that God established at creation to govern human life and relationship. Marriage and labor have remained, though they became more difficult. In the same way, the Sabbath has remained, though its observance is often made more difficult by working schedules that infringe on the Sabbath and by many personal tasks that clamor for use of the Sabbath time.

In the light of the foregoing considerations, we conclude that God, by resting, blessing, and sanctifying the seventh day, created a day that would delineate the on-going weekly cycle for human beings, and invites them to fellowship with Him in a special way on the Sabbath day. God created the natural world by speaking, then man by moulding him out of dust and vivifying him with His life-giving Spirit, and the Sabbath by “sabbatizing” Himself.

By instituting the Sabbath at creation along with the basic components of human life such as marriage and labor, long before Israel existed, God made the day a permanent institution for the human family (Mark 2:27). The fact that later the Sabbath became one of the Ten Commandments does not negate its universality, but rather supports it, since the other nine commandments are universal principles binding upon the whole human family, not Israel alone.

### **Conclusion**

Three main conclusions emerge from our study of the biblical and historical witness to the origin of the Sabbath. First, there is in Scripture an unmistakable consensus supporting the creation origin of the Sabbath. Second, a major and the oldest Jewish tradition traces the origin of the Sabbath back to the culmination of creation. Third, we find in the history of Christianity considerable support for the Edenic origin of the Sabbath, not only among seventh-day Sabbathkeepers but also among many Sundaykeepers. The latter have defended the Sabbath as a creation ordinance in order to justify Sunday as the Christian Sabbath.

The challenge to the creation origin of the Sabbath has come chiefly from those who have adopted Luther’s radical distinction between the Old and New Testaments and between Law and Gospel. Some former Sabbatarians have adopted this distinction, thus arguing that the Sabbath is not a creation ordinance but a Mosaic institution which Christ fulfilled and abolished. Consequently, believers in the Christian dispensation are free from the observance of any special day.

Our examination of the objections to the creation origin of the Sabbath has shown the arguments to be based on gratuitous assumptions. The consistent and unanimous testimony of Scripture is that Sabbath is rooted in the creation event and marks the inauguration of human history. This means that Sabbathkeeping is not a temporary Jewish ceremonial law, but a creation ordinance for the benefit of humanity. It also means, as so well stated by Elizabeth E. Platt, that “we have our roots in the Sabbath; we belong in it from Genesis on into Eternity in God’s plan.”<sup>106</sup>

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. For an analysis of the various theories regarding the origin of the Sabbath, see, Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness* (Rome, 1980), pp. 21-32.

2. “The Sabbath in Acts and the Epistles,” A Bible Study posted by the Worldwide Church of God in their web page ([www.wcg.org](http://www.wcg.org), September 1998), p. 4.

3. Dale Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Crisis. Transfer/Modification? Reformation/Continuation? Fulfillment/Transformation?* (Applegate, California, 1990).

4. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh, 1956), vol. 3, part 2, p. 62.

5. See, S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (London, 1943), p. 18; J. Skinner, *Genesis* (Edinburgh, 1930), p. 38; A. Simpson, “The Book of Genesis,” *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 1, p. 490.

6. F. J. Helfmeyer, “ôth,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1982), vol. 1, p. 171.

7. Willy Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia, 1968), p. 63.

8. For my analysis of the meaning of the rest in Hebrews, see *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness* (Rome, 1980), pp. 137-140. See also chapter 3 of this book entitled “The Sabbath and the Covenants.”

9. See also Jub. 2:20-22. Such an exclusive interpretation of the Sabbath led some Rabbis to teach that non-Jews were actually forbidden to observe the Sabbath. For example, Simeon B. Lagish said: “A Gentile who

keeps the Sabbath deserves death” (*Sanhedrin* 586). Earlier, “R Jose B. Hanina said: A non-Jew who observes the Sabbath whilst he is uncircumcised incurs a liability for the punishment of death. Why? Because non-Jews were not commanded concerning it” (*Deuteronomy Rabbah* 1:21).

10. *Genesis Rabbah* 11:7; 64:4; 79:6.

11. Philo, *De Opificio Mundi* 89. *De Vita Mosis* 1, 207; *De Specialibus Legibus* 2, 59.

12. Philo, *De Decalogue* 97.

13. Philo, *De Opificio Mundi* 89.

14. *Didascalia Apostolorum. The Syriac Version Translated and Accompanied by the Verona Latin Fragments*, ed. R. Hugh Connolly (Oxford, 1929), p. 233.

15. Athanasius, *De sabbatis et circumcissione* 4, PG 28, 138 B.C. For additional examples and discussion, see Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday* (Rome, 1977), pp. 273-278.

16. *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* VII, 23, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* VII, 469.

17. *Ibid.*, VII, 36, p. 474; cf. II, 36.

18. Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and Liturgy* (South Bend, IN, 1966), p. 276.

19. Augustine, *The City of God*, XXII, 30, trans. Henry Bettenson, (Oxford, 1972), p. 1090.

20. The fact that in the creation story there is no mention of “evening . . . morning” for the seventh day is interpreted by Augustine as signifying the eternal nature of the Sabbath rest both in the mystical and in the eschatological sense.

21. Augustine, *Confessions* XIII, 35-36. Cf. *Sermon* 38, PL 270, 1242; *De Genesis ad litteram* 4, 13, PL 34, 305. The “already” and the “not yet” dimensions of the Sabbath rest are concisely presented by Augustine in his *Commentary on Psalm* 91,2: “One whose conscience is good, is tranquil, and this peace is the Sabbath of the heart. For indeed it is directed toward the hope of Him Who promises, and although one suffers at the present time, he looks forward toward the hope of him Who is to come, and then all the clouds of sorrow will be dispersed. This present joy, in the peace of our hope, is our Sabbath” (PL 27, 1172).

22. In his *Epistula 55 ad Ianuarium* 22, Augustine explains: “Therefore of the Ten Commandments the only one we are to observe spiritually is that of the Sabbath, because we recognize it to be symbolic and not to be celebrated through physical inactivity” (*CSEL* 34, 194). One wonders, How is it possible to retain the Sabbath as the symbol of mystical and eschatological rest in God, while denying the basis of such a symbol, namely, its literal Sabbath-rest experience? For a discussion of this contradiction, see below.

23. Eusebius (about 455-535), for example, quotes *verbatim* from Augustine, *Adversus Faustum* 16, 29 (*Thesaurus* 66, *PL* 62, 685). Cf. Bede (about 673-375), *In Genesim* 2, 3, *CCL* 118A, 35; Rabanus Maurus (about 784-856), *Commentaria in Genesim* 1, 9, *PL* 107, 465; Peter Lombard (about 1100-1160), *Sententiarum libri quatuor* 3, 37, 2, *PL* 192, 831.

24. Chrysostom, *Homilia* 10, 7 *In Genesim*, *PG* 53, 89. Ephraem Syrus (about 306-373) appeals to the Sabbath “law” to urge that “rest be granted to servants and animals” (*S. Ephraem Syri hymni et sermones*, ed. T. J. Lamy, I, 1882, p. 542). For a brief survey of the application of the Sabbath law to Sunday observance, see L. I. McReavy, “‘Servile Work’: The Evolution of the Present Sunday Law,” *Clergy Review* 9 (1935): 273-276.

25. Peter Comestor, *Historia scholastica: liber Genesis* 10, *PL* 198, 1065. On the development of the principle of “one day in seven,” see discussion in Wilhelm Thomas, “Sabbatarianism,” *Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church*, 1965, III, p. 2090.

26. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part I-II, Q. 100, 3, (New York, 1947), p. 1039.

27. Aquinas subdivided the Mosaic law into moral, ceremonial, and judicial precepts. The moral precepts of the decalogue are viewed as precepts also of the Natural Law; that is to say, they are precepts binding upon all people because they are discoverable by all through human reason without the aid of special revelation. Cf. Aquinas (note 26), Part I-II, Q. 100, 1 and Q. 100, 3, pp. 1037, 1039.

28. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part I-II, Q. 100, 5, p. 1042.

29. See note 28. Note also that Aquinas attributes a similar symbolic function to Sunday: “As to the Sabbath, which was a sign recalling the first creation, its place is taken by the *Lord’s Day*, which recalls the beginning of the new creature in the Resurrection of Christ” (note 26, Part I-II, Q. 103, 3, p. 1085).

30. Thomas Aquinas (note 26), Part I-II, Q. 107, 3, p. 1111.

31. See L. L. McReavy, “‘Servile Work’: The Evolution of the Present Sunday Law, *Clergy Review* 9 (1935), pp. 279f. A brief survey of the development of Sunday laws and casuistry is provided by Paul K. Jewett, *The Lord’s Day* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1972), pp. 128-169. A good example of the adoption of Aquinas’ moral-ceremonial distinction can be found in the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*.

32. Karlstadt’s conception of the Sabbath rest contains a strange combination of mystical and legalistic elements. Basically he viewed the day as a time to abstain from work in order to be contrite over one’s sins. For a clear analysis of his views, see Gordon Rupp, *Patterns of Reformation*, 1969, pp. 123-130; idem, “Andrew Karlstadt and Reformation Puritanism,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 10 (1959), pp. 308-326; cf. Daniel Augsburg, “Calvin and the Mosaic Law,” Doctoral dissertation, Strasbourg University (1976), pp. 248-249; J. N. Andrews and L. R. Conradi, *History of the Sabbath and First Day of the Week* (Washington, DC, 1912), pp. 652-655.

33. Luther, *Against the Heavenly Prophets, Luther’s Works* (St. Louis, 1958), vol. 40, p. 93. A valuable study of Luther’s views regarding the Sabbath is to be found in Richard Muller, *Adventisten-Sabbat-Reformation*, *Studia Theologica Lundensia* (Lund, 1979), pp. 32-60.

34. Luther, *Treatise on Good Works* (1520), *Selected Writings of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia, 1957), p. 174.

35. *Concordia or Book of Concord, The Symbols of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (St. Louis, 1957), p. 1974.

36. Ibid.

37. *Augsburg Confession* (note 35), p. 25; cf. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York, 1919), vol. 3, p. 69.

38. Winton V. Solberg, *Redeem the Time* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 15-19; A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (London, 1964), p. 34; George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Leiden, 1962), pp. 38-58, 81-84.

39. See below, note 41.

40. A valuable survey of the ideas and influences of these Sabbatarians is provided by G. F. Hasel, “Sabbatarian Anabaptists,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 5 (1967), pp. 101-121; 6 (1968): 19-28. On the existence of Sabbathkeepers in various countries, see Andrews and Conradi (note 32), pp. 633-716. Cf. Richard Muller (note 33), pp. 110-129.

41. In a list of eleven sects by Stredovsky of Bohemia, "Sabbatarians" are listed in the third place after Lutherans and Calvinists. The list is reprinted by Josef Beck, ed., *Die Geschichts-Bücher der Widertäufer in Österreich-Ungarn* ("Fontes Rerum Austriacarum," Wien, 1883), 43:74. For an analysis of this and three other lists, see Hasel (note 40), pp. 101-106, who concludes: "These early enumerations seem to indicate that Sabbatarian Anabaptists were considered to be an important and strong group" (p. 106). Cf. Henry A. DeWind, "A Sixteenth Century Description of Religious Sects in Austerlitz, Moravia," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (1955): 51; George H. Williams (note 38), p. 676, 726, 732, 848, 408-410, 229, 257, 512.

42. Desiderius Erasmus, "Amabili Ecclesiae Concordia," *Opera Omnia* V: 505-506; translation by Hasel (note 40), p. 107.

43. Luther reports: "In our time there is a foolish group of people who call themselves Sabbatarians [Sabbather] and say one should keep the Sabbath according to Jewish manner and custom" (*D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Weimer ed. 42:520). In his *Lectures on Genesis* (4:46), Luther furnishes similar information: "I hear that even now in Austria and Moravia certain Judaizers urge both the Sabbath and circumcision; if they should boldly go on, not being admonished by the work of God, they certainly might do much harm" (cited in Andrews and Conradi, *History of the Sabbath and First Day of the Week* [Washington, DC, 1912], p. 640).

44. J. G. Walch, ed., *Dr. Martin Luther sämmtliche Schriften* (Berlin, 1910), vol. 20, p.1828ff. Cf. D. Zscharnack, "Sabbatharier," *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (1931), vol. 5, p. 8.

45. On Oswald Glait, see the study of Richard Muller (note 33), pp. 117-125. Cf. Hasel (note 40), pp. 107-121.

46. On Andreas Fisher, see the treatment by Richard Muller (note 33), pp. 125-130; Petr Ratkos, "Die Anfänge des Wiedertäuferturns in der Slowakei," *Aus 500 Jahren deutsch-tschechoslowakischer Geschichte*, Karl Obermann, ed. (1958), pp. 41-59. See also the recent study by Daniel Liechty, *Andreas Fischer and the Sabbatarian Anabaptists* (Herald Press, Scottsdale, PA, 1988).

47. Caspar Schwenckfeld's refutation of Glait's book is found in S. D. Hartranft and E. E. Johnson, eds., *Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum* (1907), vol. 4, pp. 451ff.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 458. The translation is by Hasel (note 40), p. 119.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 491.



50. Ibid., p. 457-458.

51. An Anabaptist (Hutterian) Chronicle provides this moving account of Glait's final days: "In 1545 Brother Oswald Glait lay in prison in Vienna for the sake of his faith. . . . Two brethren also came to him, Antoni Keim and Hans Standach, who comforted him. To them he commended his wife and child in Jamnitz. After he had been in prison a year and six weeks, they took him out of the city at midnight, that the people might not see or hear him, and drowned him in the Danube" (A. J. F. Zieglschmid, ed., *Die älteste Chronik der Hutterischen Brüder* [1943], pp. 259, 260, 266, trans. by Hasel [note 40], pp. 114-115).

52. A brief historical survey of seventh-day Sabbathkeepers from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century is found in Andrews and Conradi (note 32), pp. 632-759. A more comprehensive and critical study of Sabbathkeeping through the ages is the symposium Kenneth A. Strand, ed., *The Sabbath in Scriptures and History* (Washington, DC, 1982). About 20 scholars have contributed chapters to this study.

53. R. J. Bauckham, "Sabbath and Sunday in the Protestant Tradition," *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, 1982), p. 333. In 1618, for example, John Traske began preaching that Christians are bound by the Fourth Commandment to keep Saturday scrupulously. Under pressure, however, he later recanted in *A Treatise of Liberty from Judaism* (1620). Theophilus Brabourne, also an Anglican minister, published in 1628 *A Discourse upon the Sabbath Day* where he defended the observance of Saturday instead of Sunday. The High Commission induced him to renounce his views and to conform to the established church. Cf. Robert Cox, *The Literature of the Sabbath Question* (London, 1865), vol. 1, pp. 157-158.

54. Cf. W. Y. Whitley, *A History of British Baptists* (London, 1932), pp. 83-86; A. C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists* (London, 1947), chaps. 2-5.

55. Seventh Day Baptist General Conference, *Seventh Day Baptists in Europe and America* (Plainfield, NJ, 1910), vol. I, pp. 127, 133, 153. Cf. Winton U. Solberg (note 38), p. 278.

56. Raymond F. Cottrell notes: "The extent to which pioneer Seventh-day Adventists were indebted to Seventh Day Baptists for their understanding of the Sabbath is reflected in the fact that throughout the first volume [of *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*] over half of the material was reprinted from Seventh Day Baptist publications" ("Seventh Day Baptists and Adventists: A Common Heritage, *Spectrum* 9 [1977], p. 4).

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57. The Church of God Seventh Day traces their origin back to the Millerite movement. Mr. Gilbert Cranmer, a follower of Miller's views, who for a time associated himself with the Seventh-day Adventists, in 1860 was elected as the first president of a group known first as Church of Christ and later Church of God Seventh Day. Their 1977 report gives an estimated membership of 25,000 persons ("Synopsis of the History of the Church of God Seventh Day," compiled in manuscript form by their headquarters in Denver, Colorado). The 1996 *Directory of Sabbath-Observing Groups*, published by *The Bible Sabbath Association*, lists over 300 different denominations or independent groups observing the seventh-day Sabbath.

58. A comprehensive study of Calvin's understanding of the Fourth Commandment is provided by Daniel Augsburger (note 32), pp. 248, 284.

59. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. John King (Grand Rapids, 1948), p. 106.

60. *Ibid.*

61. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, 1972), vol. 1, p. 343.

62. *Ibid.* Calvin summarizes the distinction between the ceremonial and moral aspects of the Sabbath, saying: "The whole may be thus summed up: As the truth was delivered typically to the Jews, so it is imparted to us without figure; first, that during our whole lives we may aim at a constant rest from our own works, in order that the Lord may work in us by his Spirit; secondly, that every individual, as he has opportunity, may diligently exercise himself in private, in pious meditation on the works of God, and at the same time, that all may observe the legitimate order appointed by the church, for the hearing of the word, the administration of the sacraments, and public prayer; and, thirdly, that we may avoid oppressing those who are subject to us" (*ibid.*).

63. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, trans. Charles William Bingham (Grand Rapids, 1950), pp. 435-436.

64. Zacharias Ursinus, *The Summe of Christian Religion* (Oxford, 1587), p. 955.

65. On the enormous influence of Nicolas Bownde's book, *The Doctrine of the Sabbath*, see Winton U. Solberg (note 38), pp. 55-58. The book was enlarged and revised in 1606. Bownde insists that the Sabbath originated in Eden and consequently the Fourth Commandment is a moral precept binding on both Jews and Christians. The latter are urged to observe Sunday as carefully as the Jews did their Sabbath.

66. In the 163rd session of the Synod of Dort (1619), a commission of Dutch theologians approved a six-point document where the traditional ceremonial/moral distinctions are made. The first four points read as follows:

“1. In the *Fourth Commandment* of the Law of God, there is something *ceremonial* and something *moral*.

2. The resting upon the *seventh day* after the creation, and the strict observance of it, which was particularly imposed upon the *Jewish* people, was the *ceremonial* part of that law.

3. But the *moral* part is, that a certain day be fixed and appropriated to the service of God, and as much rest as is necessary to that service and the holy meditation upon Him.

4. The *Jewish Sabbath* being abolished, Christians are obliged solemnly to keep holy the Lord’s Day” (Gerard Brandt, *The History of the Reformation and Other Ecclesiastical Transactions in and about the Low Countries* [London, 1722], vol. 3, 320; cf. pp. 28-29, 289-290).

67. *The Westminster Confession*, chapter 21, article 7, reads: “As it is of the law of nature, that in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in His Word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment, binding all men in all ages, he hath particularly appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto him: which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ was changed into the first day of the week” (Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of the Christendom* [London, 1919], vol. 3, 648-649).

68. Donald A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1982), pp. 66-67.

69. R. J. Bauckham, “Sabbath and Sunday in the Protestant Tradition,” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day* (note 53), p. 322.

70. Willem Teellinck, *De Rusttijdt: Ofte Tractaet van d’onderhoudinge des Christenlijken Rust Dachs* [The Rest Time: Or a Treatise on the Observance of the Christian Sabbath] (Rotterdam, 1622). William Ames, *Medulla Theologica* (Amsterdam, 1623), trans. John D. Eusden, *The Marrow of Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1968), pp. 287-300, provides a theoretical basis for Sunday observance.

71. An earlier treatise against Sabbatarianism was produced by Jacobus Burs, *Threnos, or Lamentation Showing the Causes of the Pitiful Condition of the Country and the Desecration of the Sabbath* (Tholen, 1627). Andreas Rivetus refuted Gomarus' contention that the Sabbath was a Mosaic ceremony abrogated by Christ in his *Praelectiones [Lectures]* (1632). Gomarus replies with a voluminous *Defensio Investigationis Originis Sabbati [A Defense of the Investigation into the Origin of the Sabbath]* (Gronigen, 1632). To this Rivetus countered with *Dissertatio de Origine Sabbathi [Dissertation on the Origin of the Sabbath]* (Leyden, 1633).

72. The controversy flared up again in Holland in the 1650s. Gisbertus Voetius and Johannes Cocceius were the two opposing leaders in the new round. For a brief account, see Winton U. Solberg (note 38), p. 200. Solberg provides an excellent survey of the controversy over the Sabbath in seventeenth-century England (pp. 27-85) and especially in the early American colonies (pp. 85-282).

73. Willy Rordorf's book (note 7) was first published in 1962 in German. Since then it has been translated into French, English and Spanish. Its influence is evidenced by the many and different responses it has generated.

74. Rordorf's denial of any connection between Sunday and the Fourth Commandment can be traced historically in the writings of numerous anti-Sabbatarian theologians, such as Luther (notes 34, 35); William Tyndale, *An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue* (1531), ed. Henry Walter (Cambridge, 1850), pp. 97-98; the formulary of faith of the Church of England known as *The Institution of A Christian Man* (1537); Francis White, *A Treatise of the Sabbath-Day: Concerning a Defence of the Orthodox Doctrine of the Church of England against Sabbatarian Novelty* (London, 1636); James A. Hessey, *Sunday: Its Origin, History, and Present Obligation* (London, 1866); Wilhelm Thomas, *Der Sonntag im frühen Mittelalter* (Göttingen, 1929); C. S. Mosna, *Storia della Domenica dalle Origini fino agli Inizi del V. Secolo* (Rome 1969); D. A. Carson, ed. (note 68).

75. This concern is expressed, for example, by P. Falsioni, in *Rivista Pastorale Liturgica* (1967): 311, 229, 97, 98; (1966): 549-551. Similarly, Roger T. Beckwith and William Stott point out: "Whether the Christian Sunday could have survived to the present day if this sort of attitude [Rordorf's view] had prevailed among Christians in the past is extremely doubtful, and whether it will survive for future generations if this sort of attitude now becomes prevalent is equally uncertain" (*This is the Day: The Biblical Doctrine of the Christian Sunday* [London, 1978], p. ix).

76. Beckwith points out, for example, that “if Jesus regarded the Sabbath as *purely* ceremonial and *purely* temporary, it is remarkable that he gives so much attention to it in his teaching, and also that in all he teaches about it he never mentions its temporary character. This is even more remarkable when one remembers that he emphasizes the temporary character of other parts of the Old Testament ceremonial—the laws of purity in Mark 7:14-23 and Luke 11:39-41, and the temple (with its sacrifices) in Mark 13:2 and John 4:21. By contrast, we have already seen, he seems in Mark 2:27 to speak of the Sabbath as one of the unchanging ordinances for all mankind” (note 75, p. 26; cf. pp. 2-12).

77. Beckwith (note 75), pp. 45-46. Beckwith and Stott’s view of the Sabbath as an unchanging creation ordinance upon which the observance of Sunday rests can be traced historically in the writings of theologians such as Aquinas (partly—note 28); Calvin (partly—notes 59-62); Richard Hooker, *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (Cambridge, MA, 1957), vol. 5, p. 70, 3; Nicholas Bownde (note 65); William Teellinck, William Ames and Antonius Walaeus (note 70); formularies of faith such as the *Westminster Confession* (note 67) and the Synod of Dort (note 66); E. W. Hengstenberg, *Über den Tag des Herrn* (1852); recently by J. Francke, *Van Sabbat naar Zondag* (Amsterdam, 1973); Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh, 1956), vol. 3, pp. 47-72; Paul K. Jewett (partly), *The Lord’s Day: A Theological Guide to the Day of Worship* (Grand Rapids, 1971); Francis Nigel Lee, *The Covenantal Sabbath* (London, 1966). Lee’s study, though sponsored by the British *Lord’s Day Observance Society*, can hardly be taken seriously on account of its eccentric nature. He speculates, for example, on “The Sabbath and the time of the Fall” (pp. 79-81).

78. Beckwith and Stott (note 75), pp. 141, 143.

79. “What Do the Scriptures Say About the Sabbath? Part 1: The Books of Moses,” Bible Study prepared by the Worldwide Church of God and posted in their Web page – [www.wcg.org](http://www.wcg.org), September 1998), p. 1.

80. Dale Ratzlaff (note 3), p. 25.

81. *Ibid.* p. 26.

82. R. Pettazzoni, “Myths of Beginning and Creation-Myths,” in *Essays on the History of Religion*, trans. H. T. Rose (New York, 1954), pp. 24-36. A brief but informative treatment is found in Niels-Erik A. Andreasen, *The Old Testament Sabbath*, SBL Dissertation Series 7 (Missoula, MT, 1972), pp. 174-182. For examples of texts, see Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 1950 (UT krt A 206-211), pp. 5, 61, 69, 140.

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83. Pritchard (note 82), p. 68.
84. Andreasen (note 82), p. 189.
85. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ET (Edinburgh, 1956), vol. 3, part 2, p. 51.
86. *Ibid.*, part 1, p. 213.
87. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall. A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1-3* (New York, 1964), p. 40.
88. Roger D. Congdon, "Sabbatic Theology," Th. D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary (Dallas, 1949), p. 122.
89. "What Do the Scriptures Say About the Sabbath? Part 1: The Books of Moses," (note 79), p. 1.
90. Robert A. Morey, "Is Sunday the Christian Sabbath?" *Baptist Reformation Review* 8 (1979), p. 6.
91. Harold H. P. Dressler, "The Sabbath in the Old Testament," in *From Sabbath to Sunday, A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. Donald A. Carson (Grand Rapids, 1982), p. 28.
92. Dale Ratzlaff (note 3), p. 21.
93. Ugo Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (New York, 1961), p. 63.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
95. Dale Ratzlaff (note 3), p. 24.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
97. Augustine, *Confessions* 13, 24, 25, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, 1979), vol. 1, p. 207.
98. Roy Gane, "Sabbath and the New Covenant," Paper presented at a consultation with the Worldwide Church of God (1997), pp.5-6.
99. G. H. Waterman, "Sabbath," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, 1975), vol 5. p. 183.
100. John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh, 1930), p. 38.

101. Dale Ratzlaff (note 3), p. 24.

102. Ibid.

103. John Skinner (note 100), p. 35.

104. H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (New York, 1950), p. 103.

105. Roy Gane (note 98), p. 6.

106. Elizabeth E. Platt, "The Lord Rested, The Lord Blessed the Sabbath Day," *Sunday* 66 (1979), p. 4.

# Chapter 3

## THE SABBATH AND THE NEW COVENANT

Few Bible doctrines have been under the constant crossfire of controversy as has the Sabbath. In recent years, Dispensational and “New Covenant” Christians have renewed their attack against the Sabbath with fresh zeal. The stock weapon of their arsenal is the allegation that the Sabbath is an Old Covenant relic that terminated at the Cross. Their strategy is to make the Cross the line of demarcation between the Old and New Covenants, Law and Grace, the Sabbath and Sunday. Since they believe the Ten Commandments formed the *core* of the Old Covenant and the Sabbath is *central* to the Ten Commandments, by firing on the Sabbath they hope to destroy the validity and value of the Mosaic Law in general, and of the Sabbath in particular.

This is largely the strategy recently adopted by such former Sabbatarians as the Worldwide Church of God, Dale Ratzlaff in his influential book *Sabbath in Crisis*, and some of the newly established “grace-oriented” congregations, which consist mainly of former Sabbatarians. Their literature contains some of the strongest attacks against the Sabbath ever published. This is a surprising development of our times, because, to my knowledge, never before in the history of Christianity has the Sabbath been attacked by those who previously had championed its observance. The weapons used by former Sabbatarians in their attacks against the Sabbath are taken largely from the aging munition dump of Dispensational literature.

For the sake of accuracy I must say that, contrary to most Dispensational authors, both the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) and Dale Ratzlaff are more concerned with proving the “fulfillment” and termination of the Sabbath in Christ than in defending Sunday observance as an apostolic institution. For them, the New Covenant does not require the observance of a day as such, but the *daily* experience of the rest of salvation typified by the Sabbath rest. In *Sabbath in Crisis*, Ratzlaff does include a chapter, “The First Day of the Week,” where he makes a feeble attempt to justify the biblical origin of Sundaykeeping, but this is not the major concern of his book.



For the benefit of those less versed in theological nuances, it might help to clarify the difference between Dispensational and New Covenant theologies. Both emphasize the distinction between the Old Mosaic Covenant, allegedly based on Law, and the “New Christian Covenant” presumably based on grace. Dispensationalists, however, go a step further by applying their distinction between the Old and New Covenants as representing the existence of a fundamental and permanent distinction between Israel and the Church. “Throughout the ages,” writes Lewis Sperry Chafer, a leading Dispensational theologian, “God is pursuing two distinct purposes: one related to the earth with earthly people and earthly objectives involved, which is Judaism; while the other is related to heaven with heavenly people and heavenly objectives, which is Christianity.”<sup>1</sup>

Simply stated, Dispensationalists interpret the Old and New Covenants as representing two different plans of salvation for two different people—Israel and the Church. The destiny of each is supposed to be different, not only in this present age but also throughout eternity. What God has united by breaking down the wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:14) Dispensationalists are trying to divide by rebuilding the wall of partition not only for the present age but for all eternity. It is hard to believe that intelligent, responsible Christians would dare to fabricate such a divisive theology that grossly misrepresents the fairness and justice of God’s redemptive activities.

**Importance of This Study.** The importance of this study stems from the popular perception that the Sabbath is an Old Covenant institution no longer binding upon “New Covenant” Christians. This thesis is espoused by most Evangelical authors and is widely accepted by Christians at large. In recent years, as we noted, the abrogation view of the Sabbath has been adopted by an increasing number of former Sabbatarians.

This chapter examines primarily the literature produced by former Sabbatarians, especially Ratzlaff’s *Sabbath in Crisis*. We focus on Ratzlaff’s book for two reasons: (1) The *Sabbath in Crisis* largely reflects the Dispensational and “New Covenant” views of the Sabbath. Consequently, the analysis of this book provides an opportunity to examine the abrogation view of the Sabbath held by most Christians today. (2) This book has exercised considerable influence not only on WCG,<sup>2</sup> but also among a considerable number of former Adventist ministers and members who have rejected the Sabbath as an Old Covenant, Mosaic institution that no longer is binding upon Christians today.

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A fitting example of the influence of *Sabbath in Crisis* among Seventh-day Adventists is the book *New Covenant Christians* by Clay Peck, a former Adventist pastor who currently serves as senior pastor of the Grace Place Congregation in Berthoud, Colorado. In the “Introduction” to his book Peck acknowledges his indebtedness to Ratzlaff saying: “While I have read and researched widely for this study, I have been most challenged and instructed by a book entitled *Sabbath in Crisis*, by Dale Ratzlaff. I have leaned heavily on his research, borrowing a number of concepts and diagrams.”<sup>3</sup>

The far reaching influence of the “New Covenant” theology, championed among Sabbatarians by people like Dale Ratzlaff, is hard to estimate. The WCG has experienced a massive exodus of over 70,000 members who have refused to accept the changes demanded by the “New Covenant” theology. In the Adventist church, the “New Covenant” teaching has influenced several former pastors to establish independent “grace-oriented” congregations.

This study on the relationship between the Sabbath and the New Covenant extends beyond the sabbatarian communities. Most Sundaykeeping Christians think of Sabbathkeeping as a relic of the Old Covenant and of Sabbatarians as “Judaizers” still living under the Old Covenant. It is urgent, then, for us to examine this popular perception which, as our study will show, is based on a one-sided, misleading interpretation of the biblical teaching on the relationship between the Old and New Covenants.

**Objectives of This Chapter.** In Chapter 2 I briefly traced the origin and development of the anti-Sabbath theology. This chapter continues the study of the anti-Sabbath theology by focusing on the major arguments adduced by the “New Covenant” theology to negate the continuity, validity, and value of the Sabbath for today.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first deals with the alleged distinction between the Old Covenant based on Law and the New Covenant based on faith and love. The fundamental question addressed in the first part is: Do the Old and New Covenants contain a different set of laws, or are they based on the same set of moral principles? The second part examines the continuity and discontinuity between the Old and New Covenants as taught in the book of Hebrews. The fundamental question to be considered here is: Does the book of Hebrews support the popular contention that the coming of Christ brought an end to the Law, in general, and to the Sabbath, in particular?

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**PART 1****A LOOK AT THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS**

A major characteristic of the “New Covenant” theology recently adopted by a significant number of former Sabbatarians is the Dispensational emphasis on the radical distinction between the Old and New Covenants. To illustrate this point, we briefly examine two representative studies: (1) *The Pastor General Report*, entitled “The New Covenant and the Sabbath,” prepared by Pastor Joseph Tkach, Jr., Pastor General of the WCG; and (2) Chapters 5, 12, and 15 of the book *Sabbath in Crisis*, where Ratzlaff articulates his understanding of the distinction between the Old and the New Covenants.

**(1) Joseph Tkach’s View of the Distinction****Between the Two Covenants**

In his *Pastor General Report* of December 21, 1994, Pastor Joseph Tkach, Jr., devotes 20 pages to explain to his ministers the fundamental difference between the Old and New Covenants. He argues that the difference lies in the fact that the Old Covenant was *conditional* upon obedience to a “package of Laws,” while the New Covenant is *unconditional*, that is, without obedience as a requirement.<sup>4</sup>

For Tkach, the Sabbath is part of the Old Covenant “package of Laws” and this is why “we don’t find the Sabbath commanded in the New Covenant.”<sup>5</sup> “Something was seriously wrong with the Israelite covenant. The people did not have the heart to obey, and God knew it (Deut 31:16-21, 27-29). Unlike Abraham, they did not believe and were not faithful (Heb 3:19). . . . Therefore, God predicted a New Covenant. He hinted at it even in the old . . . . There would be no need for a New Covenant, of course, unless the Old was deficient.”<sup>6</sup> If it were true that “something was seriously wrong” with the Old Covenant, then why did God in the first place give a faulty covenant that could not change the hearts of the people? Was something “seriously wrong” with the covenant itself? Or was it with the way the people related to the covenant? If the human response was a factor with the Old Covenant, could it also be a factor with the New Covenant?

**Superiority of the New Covenant.** “The New Covenant is superior to the Old, because it is founded on better promises (Heb 8:6).”<sup>7</sup> Tkach argues that the New Covenant is the renewal of the Abrahamic covenant which was based on God’s *unconditional* promises. “God didn’t say, I’ll do this *if* you do that. Abraham had already done enough. He had accepted God’s call, went to

the land as God had commanded, and he believed God and was therefore counted as righteous.”<sup>8</sup> Like Abraham, “New Covenant” Christians accept salvation by faith and not by works of obedience.

Tkach writes: “In the New Covenant, faith is required . . . Christians have a relationship with God based on faith, not on Law. . . . We are saved on the basis of faith, not on Law-keeping, . . . In other words, our relationship with God is based on faith and promise, just as Abraham’s was. Laws that were added at Sinai cannot change the promise given to Abraham . . . That package of Laws became obsolete when Christ died, and there is now a new package.”<sup>9</sup> The problem with this statement is the gratuitous assumption that salvation was possible in the Old Covenant through Law-keeping. This is completely untrue, because, as we shall see in Chapter 6, obedience to the Law represented Israel’s response to the gracious provision of salvation. Law-keeping has never been the basis of salvation.

According to Tkach, the Old Covenant did not work because it was based “on a package of Laws” that “could not cleanse a guilty conscience.”<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, the New Covenant works because it is based on the blood of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart. “The Holy Spirit changes their [believers] hearts. The people are transformed, and they grow more and more like Christ. . . . The New Covenant affects our innermost being. The blood of Jesus Christ changes us. . . . His sacrifice sanctifies us, makes us holy, sets us aside for a holy purpose.”<sup>11</sup>

Does this mean that the blood of Christ has some kind of magic power to automatically change people, whether or not they are willing to obey God’s commandments? To attribute such magic power to the Spirit and/or to Christ’s blood reminds one of the magic power the Jews attributed to the Law. Isn’t this another form of legalism? Does the atoning sacrifice of Christ and the ministry of the Holy Spirit render obedience to God’s commandments unnecessary or possible?

The WCG acknowledges that “no New Testament verse specifically cites the Sabbath as obsolete.”<sup>12</sup> But since WCG believes that the Sabbath is part the Old Covenant terminated by Christ’s coming, the Sabbath also is no longer required. “There are verses that say that the entire Old Covenant is obsolete. The law of Moses, including the Sabbath, is not required. We are commanded to live by the Spirit, not by the Law inscribed in stone. The Sabbath is repeatedly likened to things now obsolete: temple sacrifices, circumcision, holy bread, a shadow.”<sup>13</sup> This statement contains several glaring inaccuracies that are addressed later in this chapter. We shall see that

the New Testament distinguishes between the continuity of the moral law and the discontinuity of the ceremonial law (1 Cor 7:19). In the book of Hebrews, especially, we find a clear contrast between the Levitical services which came to an end with Christ's coming (Heb 7:18; 8:13; 10:9) and Sabbathkeeping "which has been left behind for the people of God" (Heb 4:9).

**Evaluation of WCG "New Covenant" Theology.** A detailed analysis of "New Covenant" theology presented in the literature of the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) would take us beyond the limited scope of this chapter. Consequently, I make only a few basic observations.

One fundamental problem in the WCG "New Covenant" understanding of the Plan of Salvation is the faulty Dispensational assumption that, during the course of human history, God has offered salvation on different bases to different people. God started out by offering salvation to Abraham *unconditionally* on the basis of faith; but at Mt. Sinai He agreed to save the Israelites *conditionally* on the basis of obedience to His commandments, or what Tkach calls "the old package of Laws." When God discovered that such an arrangement did not work—because the Law "could not make anyone perfect. It could not change their hearts"—He reverted to the "faith arrangement" He had with Abraham. To make things easier, in the New Covenant, God did away with most of the old package of laws, including the Sabbath, and decided this time to work in the heart through the Holy Spirit.

If this scenario were true, it would surely open to question the consistency and fairness of God's saving activities. It would imply that, during the course of redemptive history, God has offered salvation on two radically different bases: on the basis of human obedience in the Old Covenant and on the basis of divine grace in the New Covenant. It would further imply, presumably, that God learned through the experience of His chosen people, the Jews, that human beings cannot earn salvation by obedience because they tend to disobey. Consequently, He finally decided to change His method and implement a New Covenant plan where salvation is offered to believing persons exclusively as a divine gift of grace rather than a human achievement.

Such a theological construct makes God changeable and subject to learning by mistakes as human beings do. The truth of the matter, however, is that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Heb 13:8). Salvation has always been in the Old and New Covenants, first and foremost a divine gift of grace and not a human achievement.

Obedience to the Law provided Israel with an opportunity to preserve their covenant relationship with God, not to gain acceptance with Him. This is the meaning of Leviticus 18:5: “You shall therefore keep my statutes and my ordinances, by doing which a man shall live.” The life promised in this text is not the life in the age to come (as in Dan 12:2), but the present enjoyment of a peaceful and prosperous life in fellowship with God. Such a life was God’s gift to His people, a gift that could be enjoyed and preserved by living in accordance with the principles God had revealed.

**Sinai Covenant: Law and Grace.** Part of the problem of the “New Covenant” theology is the failure to realize that the Sinai Covenant reveals God’s gracious provision of salvation just as much as the New Covenant does. God revealed to Moses His plan to deliver Israel from Egypt and to set her up in the land of Canaan (Ex 3:7-10, 16) because Israel is “His people” (Ex 3:10). God’s deliverance of the Israelites from the bondage of Egypt reveals His gracious provision of salvation just as much as does His deliverance of New Testament believers from the bondage of sin. In fact, in Scripture, the former is a type of the latter.

What Tkach ignores is the fact that the Israelites responded with *faith* to the manifestation of salvation: “Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians . . . and the people feared the Lord; and they *believed* in the Lord and in his servant Moses” (Ex 14:30-31). When the Israelites *believed*, God revealed to them His covenant plan: “Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:5).

These words show the gratuity of the divine election of Israel. God chose Israel without merit on her part (Deut 9:4ff), simply because He loved her (Deut 7:6ff). Having separated her from pagan nations, He reserved her for Himself exclusively. “I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself” (Ex 19:4). Through the Sinai covenant, God wished to bring people to Himself by making them a worshipping community dedicated to His service, living by the principles of His Law. This divine plan revealed at Sinai was ultimately realized at the Cross when types met antitypes.

The prophets appeal to the Sinai Covenant with emotional overtones drawn from human experiences to explain the relationship between God and His people. Israel is the flock, and the Lord is the shepherd. Israel is the vine, and the Lord the vinedresser. Israel is the son, and the Lord is the Father. Israel is the spouse, and the Lord is the bridegroom. These images, as Pierre Grelot

and Jean Gibley bring out, “make the Sinaitic covenant appear as an encounter of love (cf. Ez 16:6-14): the attentive and gratuitous love of God, calling in return for a love which will translate itself in obedience.”<sup>14</sup> All of this hardly supports Tkach’s contention that “something was seriously wrong with the Israelite covenant.”

**Faith Is Not Alone.** The obedience called for by the Sinaitic covenant was meant to be a loving response to God’s provision of salvation, not a means of salvation. Unfortunately, during the intertestamental period, the Law did come to be viewed by the Jews as the guarantee of salvation, just as faith alone is considered by many Christians today as the only basis for their salvation. But a saving faith is never alone because it is always accompanied by loving obedience (Gal 5:6). Can a person truly obey God’s laws without faith? Is there such a thing as a saving faith that is not manifested in obedience to God’s commandments? Is the problem of legalism resolved by changing packages of laws? Such distortions can only serve to make both the Old and New Covenants ineffective for many people.

At Sinai, God invited His people to obey His commandments because He had already saved them, not in order that they might be saved by His laws. As George Eldon Ladd affirms in his classic work, *A Theology of the New Testament*, “The Law was added (*pareiselthen*) not to save men from their sins but to show them what sin was (Rom 3:30; 5:13, 20; Gal 3:19). By declaring the will of God, by showing what God forbids, the Law shows what sin is.”<sup>15</sup> Ladd continues noting that “the line of thought in Galatians 3 and Romans 4 is that all the Israelites who trusted God’s covenant of promise to Abraham and did not use the Law as a way of salvation by works were assured of salvation.”<sup>16</sup>

Another point overlooked in the *Pastor General Report* is that at Sinai, God revealed to the Israelites not only *principles* of moral conduct but also *provision* of salvation through the typology of the sacrificial system. It is noteworthy that when God invited Moses to come up on the mountain, He gave him not only “the tables of stone, with the Law and the commandment” (Ex 24:12), but also the “pattern of the tabernacle” (Ex 25:9) which was designed to explain typologically His provision of grace and forgiveness.

The major difference between the Old and New Covenants is *not one of methods of salvation*, but of *shadow versus reality*. The Old Covenant was “symbolic” (Heb 9:9) of the “more excellent” redemptive ministry of Christ (Heb 8:6). Consequently, it was necessary for Christ to come “once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb 9:26).

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Greg Bahnsen rightly notes that “If we allow the Bible to interpret itself and not infuse it with a preconceived theological antithesis between the Old and New Covenants (Law and Gospel), we are compelled to conclude that the Old Covenant—indeed the Mosaic Law—was a covenant of *grace* that offered salvation on the basis of grace through faith, just as does the Good News found in the New Testament. The difference was that the Mosaic or Law-covenant looked ahead to the coming of the Savior, thus administering God’s covenants by means of promises, prophecies, ritual observances, types, and foreshadowings that anticipated the Savior and His redeeming work. The Gospel or the New covenant proclaims the accomplishments of that which the Law anticipated, administering God’s covenant through preaching and the sacraments [baptism and the Lord’s Supper]. The substance of God’s saving relationship and covenant is the same under the Law and the Gospel.”<sup>17</sup>

The Old Testament does not offer a way of salvation or teach justification differently than the New Testament. Justification is grounded in the Old Testament in “the Lord our Righteousness” (Jer 23:6). The saints of the Old Testament were people of *faith*, as Hebrews 11 clearly shows. Abraham himself, the father of the Jews, was a man of faith who trusted God’s promises (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6). The prophet Isaiah proclaimed, “In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified” (Is 45:25; KJV). Paul came to understand that in the Old Testament “the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written [in Hab 2:4], ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live’” (Rom 1:17. cf. Gal 3:11).

The result of Christ’s coming is described as “setting aside” (Heb 7:18), making “obsolete” (Heb 8:13), and “abolishing” (Heb 10:9) all the Levitical services associated with the Old Covenant. It is unfortunate that these statements are interpreted as meaning that Christ by His coming abrogated the Mosaic Law, in general, including the Sabbath. This interpretation, which is at the heart of much misguided thinking about the Law today, ignores the fact that the *termination* statements found in Hebrews refer to the Levitical priesthood and services of the Old Covenant, not to the principles of God’s moral Law which includes the Sabbath Commandment. Of the Sabbath the Book of Hebrews explicitly states, as we shall see below, “a Sabbathkeeping is left behind for the people of God” (Heb 4:9).



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## (2) Dale Ratzlaff's View of the Distinction Between the Two Covenants

In many ways Ratzlaff's view of the distinction between the Old and New Covenants is strikingly similar to that of Joseph Tkach, Jr. Consequently, there is no need to repeat what has already been said. Ratzlaff's aim is to show that the New Covenant is better than the Old because it is based no longer on the Law but on love for Christ. Like Tkach, Ratzlaff reduces the Old Covenant to the Ten Commandments and the New Covenant to the principle of love in order to sustain his thesis that Christ replaced both the Ten Commandments and the Sabbath with simpler and better laws. For the purpose of this analysis, I focus on the major contrast that Ratzlaff makes between the Old and New Covenant in terms of Law versus Love.

**Law Versus Love.** Ratzlaff's fundamental thesis is that there is a radical distinction between the Old and New Covenants because the former is based on laws while the latter is based on love. Though he acknowledges that an important aspect of the Old Covenant was "the redemptive deliverance of Israel from Egypt,"<sup>18</sup> he concludes his study of the Old Covenant with these words: "We found that *the Ten Commandments were the covenant*. They were called the 'tablets of the testimony' (Ex 31:18), the 'words of the covenant,' the 'Ten Commandments' (Ex 34:28), the 'testimony' (Ex 40:20), the 'covenant of the Lord' (1 Ki 8:8, 9,21)."<sup>19</sup>

"We also found that the other Laws in the books of Exodus through Deuteronomy were called the 'book of the covenant' (Ex 24:7) or 'the book of the Law' (Deut 31:26). We saw that these Laws served as an interpretation or expansion of the Ten Commandments."<sup>20</sup> Again Ratzlaff says that "The Ten Commandments were the words of the covenant. There was also an expanded version of the covenant: the Laws of Exodus through Deuteronomy."<sup>21</sup>

By contrast, for Ratzlaff the essence of the New Covenant is the commandment to love as Jesus loved. He writes: "Part of this 'new commandment' was not new. The Old Covenant had instructed them to love one another. The part that was new was 'as I have loved you' . . . In the Old Covenant what made others know that the Israelites were the chosen people? Not the way they loved, but what they ate and what they did not eat; where they worshipped, when they worshipped, the clothes they wore, etc. However, in the New Covenant, Christ's true disciples will be known by the way they love!"<sup>22</sup>

Ratzlaff develops further the contrast between the two covenants by arguing that as the Old Covenant expands the Ten Commandments in “the book of the Law, so the New Covenant contains more than just the simple command to love one another as Christ loved us. We have the Gospel records which demonstrate how Jesus loved. . . . Then, in the epistles we have interpretations of the love and work of Christ. . . . So the core, or heart, of the New Covenant is to love one another as Christ loved us. This is expanded and interpreted in the rest of the New Testament, and also becomes part of the New Covenant.”<sup>23</sup>

According to Ratzlaff, the distinction between “Law” and “Love” is reflected in the covenant signs. “The entrance sign to the old Covenant was circumcision, and the continuing, repeatable sign Israel was to ‘remember’ was the Sabbath. . . . The entrance sign of the New Covenant is baptism [and] the remembrance sign [is] the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>24</sup> The distinction between the two sets of signs is clarified by the following simple chart:

<b>“The Old Covenant:</b>	<b>The New Covenant:</b>
<i>Entrance sign</i>	
Circumcision	Baptism
<i>Remembrance sign</i>	
Sabbath	The Lord’s Supper.” <sup>25</sup>

The above contrast attempts to reduce the Old and New Covenants to two different sets of laws with their own distinctive signs, the latter being simpler and better than the former. The contrast assumes that the Old Covenant was based on the obligation to obey countless specific laws, while the New Covenant rests on the simpler love commandment of Christ. Simply stated, the Old Covenant moral principles of the Ten Commandments are replaced in the New Covenant by a better and simpler love principle given by Christ.

Ratzlaff affirms this view unequivocally: “In Old Covenant life, morality was often seen as an *obligation to numerous specific Laws*. In the New Covenant, *morality springs from a response to the living Christ*. ”<sup>26</sup> “The new Law [given by Christ] is better than the old Law [given by Moses].”<sup>27</sup> “In the New Covenant, Christ’s true disciples will be known by the way they love! This commandment to love is repeated a number of times in the New Testament, just as the Ten Commandments were repeated a number of times in the Old.”<sup>28</sup>

**Evaluation of Ratzlaff's Covenants Construct.** The attempt by Ratzlaff to reduce the Old and New Covenants to two different sets of laws with their own distinctive signs, the latter being simpler and better than the former, is designed to support his contention that the Ten Commandments, in general, and the Sabbath, in particular, were the essence of the Old Covenant that terminated at the Cross. The problem with this imaginative interpretation is that it is devoid of biblical support besides incriminating the moral consistency of God's government.

Nowhere does the Bible suggest that with the New Covenant God instituted "better commandments" than those of the Old Covenant. Why would Christ need to alter the moral demands that He has revealed in His Law? Why would Christ feel the need to change His perfect and holy requirements for our conduct and attitudes? Paul declares that "the [Old Testament] Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good" (Rom 7:12). He took the validity of God's moral Law for granted when he stated unequivocally: "We know that the Law is good, if one uses it Lawfully" (1 Tim 1:8). Christ came not to change the moral requirements of God's Law, but to atone for our transgression against those moral requirements (Rom 4:25; 5:8-9; 8:1-3).

It is evident that by being sacrificed as the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29; 1 Cor 5:7), Christ fulfilled all the sacrificial services and Laws that served in Old Testament times to strengthen the faith and nourish the hope of the Messianic redemption to come. But the New Testament, as we shall see, makes a clear distinction between the sacrificial laws that Christ by His coming "set aside" (Heb 7:18), made "obsolete" (Heb 8:13), "abolished" (Heb 10:9), and Sabbathkeeping, for example, which "has been left behind for the people of God" (Heb 4:9).

Why should God first call the Israelites to respond to His redemptive deliverance from Egypt by living according to the moral principles of the Ten Commandments, and later summon Christians to accept His redemption from sin by obeying simpler and better commandments? Did God discover that the moral principles He promulgated at Sinai were not sufficiently moral and, consequently, needed to be improved and replaced with simpler and better commandments?

Such an assumption is preposterous because it negates the immutability of God's moral character reflected in His moral laws. The Old Testament teaches that the New Covenant that God will make with the house of Israel consists not in the replacement of the Ten Commandments with simpler and

better laws, but in the *internalization* of God's Law. "This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my Law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God" (Jer 31:33).

This passage teaches us that the difference between the Old and New Covenants is not a difference between "Law" and "love." Rather, it is a difference between failure to internalize God's Law, which results in disobedience, and successful internalization of God's Law, which results in obedience. The New Covenant believer who internalizes God's Law by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit will find it hard to break the Law because, as Paul puts it, "Christ has set him free from the Law of sin and death" (Rom 8:2).

**Internalization of God's Law.** The internalization of God's Law in the human heart applies to Israel and the Church. In fact, Hebrews applies to the Church the very same promise God made to Israel (Heb 8:10; 10:16). In the New Covenant, the Law is not simplified or replaced but *internalized* by the Spirit. The Spirit opens up people to the Law, enabling them to live in accordance with its higher ethics. Ratzlaff's argument that under the New Covenant "the Law no longer applies to one who has died with Christ"<sup>29</sup> is mistaken and misleading. Believers are no longer under the condemnation of the Law when they experience God's forgiving grace and, by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, they live according to its precepts. But this does not mean that the Law no longer applies to them. They are still accountable before God's Law because all "shall stand before the judgment seat of God" (Rom 14:10) to give an account of themselves.

The Spirit does not operate in a vacuum. His function of the Spirit is not to bypass or replace the Law, but to help the believer to live in obedience to the Law of God (Gal 5:18, 22-23). Eldon Ladd notes that "more than once he [Paul] asserts that it is the new life of the Spirit that enables the Christian truly to fulfill the Law (Rom 8:3,4; 13:10; Gal 5:14)."<sup>30</sup>

Any change in relation to the Law that occurs in the New Covenant is not in the moral Law itself but in the believer who is energized and enlightened by the Spirit "in order that the just requirements of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Rom 8:4). Guidance by the Spirit without respect for the Law of God can be dangerous to Christian growth. This is a fundamental problem of "New Covenant" theology espoused by the WCG, Ratzlaff, and countless Evangelicals today: it is a theology that ultimately makes each person a Law

unto himself. This easily degenerates into irresponsible behavior. It is not surprising that America leads the world not only in the number of evangelical Christians (estimated at almost 100 million) but also in crime, violence, murders, divorces, etc. By relaxing the obligation to observe God's Law in the New Covenant, people find an excuse to do what is right in their own eyes.

Perhaps as a reaction to the popular "abrogation of the Law" perception, there is a hunger today for someone to help the Christian community to understand how to apply the principles of God's Law to their lives. To a large extent, this is what the Basic Youth Conflict seminars have endeavored to accomplish since 1968, drawing thousands of people to its sessions in every major city in North America. Referring to this phenomenon, Walter Kaiser writes: "This is an indictment on the church and its reticence to preach the moral Law of God and apply it to all aspects of life as indicated in Scripture."<sup>31</sup>

**No Dichotomy Between Law and Love.** No dichotomy exists in the Bible between Law and Love in the covenantal relationship between God and His people because a covenant cannot exist without the Law. A covenant denotes an orderly relationship that the Lord graciously establishes and maintains with His people. The Law guarantees the order required for such a relationship to be meaningful.

In God's relationship with believers, the moral Law reveals His will and character, the observance of which makes it possible to maintain an orderly and meaningful relationship. Law is not the product of sin, but the product of love. God gave the Ten Commandments to the Israelites after showing them His redeeming love (Ex 20:2). Through God's Law the godly come to know how to reflect God's love, compassion, fidelity, and other perfections.

The Decalogue is not merely a list of ten laws, but primarily ten principles of love. There is no dichotomy between Law and love, because one cannot exist without the other. The Decalogue details how human beings must express their love for their Lord and for their fellow beings. Christ's new commandment to love God and fellow beings is nothing else than the embodiment of the spirit of the Ten Commandments already found in the Old Testament (Lev 19:18; Deut 6:5). Christ spent much of His ministry clarifying how the love principles are embodied in the Ten Commandments. He explained, for example, that the sixth commandment can be transgressed not only by murdering a person but also by being angry and insulting a fellow being (Matt 5:22-23). The seventh commandment can be violated not only by committing adultery but also by looking lustfully at a woman (Matt 5:28).

Christ spent even more time clarifying how the principle of love is embodied in the Fourth Commandment. The Gospels report no less than seven Sabbath-healing episodes used by Jesus to clarify that the essence of Sabbathkeeping is people to love and not rules to obey. Jesus explained that the Sabbath is a day “to do good” (Matt 12:12), a day “to save life” (Mark 3:4), a day to liberate men and women from physical and spiritual bonds (Luke 13:12), a day to show mercy rather than religiosity (Matt 12:7). In Chapter 4, “The Savior and the Sabbath,” we take a closer look at how Jesus clarified the meaning and function of the Sabbath.

Ratzlaff’s attempt to divorce the Law of the Old Covenant from the Love of the New Covenant ignores the simple truth that in both covenants love is manifested in obedience to God’s Law. Christ stated this truth clearly and repeatedly: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). “He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me” (John 14:21). “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love” (John 15:10). Christ’s commandments are not an improved and simplified set of moral principles, but the same moral principles He promulgated from Mt. Sinai.

Under both covenants, the Lord has one moral standard for human behavior, namely, holiness and wholeness of life. Wholeness of life is that integration of love for God and human beings manifested in those who grow in reflecting the perfect character of God (His love, faithfulness, righteousness, justice, forgiveness). Under both covenants, God wants His people to love Him and their fellow beings by living in harmony with the moral principles expressed in the Ten Commandments. These serve as a guide in imitating God’s character. The Spirit does not replace these moral principles in the New Covenant. He makes the letter become alive and powerful within the hearts of the godly.

**Jesus and the New Covenant Law.** The contention that Christ replaced the Ten Commandments with the simpler and better commandment of love is clearly negated by the decisive witness of our Lord Himself as found in Matthew 5:17-19: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven” (NIV).

In this pronouncement, Christ teaches three important truths: (1) Twice He denies that His coming had the purpose of abrogating “the law and the prophets”; (2) all of the Law of God, including its minute details, has an abiding validity until the termination of the present age; and (3) anyone who teaches that even the least of God’s commandments can be broken stands under divine condemnation. This indictment should cause “New Covenant” Christians to do some soul-searching.

There is no exegetical stalemate here. Christ gave no hint that with His coming the Old Testament moral Law was replaced by a simpler and better Law. It is biblically irrational to assume that the mission of Christ was to make it morally acceptable to worship idols, blaspheme, break the Sabbath, dishonor parents, murder, steal, commit adultery, gossip, or envy. Such actions are a transgression of the moral principles that God has revealed for both Jews and Gentiles.

It is unfortunate that Ratzlaff, the WCG, and Dispensationalists try to build their case for a replacement of the Old Testament Law with a simpler and better New Testament Law by selecting a few problem-oriented texts (2 Cor 3:6-11; Heb 8-9; Gal 3-4), rather than by starting with Christ’s own testimony. The Savior’s testimony should serve as the touchstone to explain apparent contradictory texts which speak negatively of the Law.

In Chapter 5, “Paul and the Law,” I examine Paul’s apparently contradictory statements about the Law. This study suggests that the resolution to this apparent contradiction is to be found in the different contexts in which Paul speaks of the Law. When he speaks of the Law in the context of salvation (justification—right standing before God), especially in his polemic with Judaizers, he clearly affirms that Law-keeping is of no avail (Rom 3:20). On the other hand, when Paul speaks of the Law in the context of Christian conduct (sanctification—right living before God), especially in dealing with antinomians, he upholds the value and validity of God’s Law (Rom 7:12; 13:8-10; 1 Cor 7:19).

**Ratzlaff’s Interpretation of Matthew 5:17-19.** Ratzlaff examines at some length Matthew 5:17-19 in chapter 14 of his book entitled “Jesus: The Law’s Fulfillment.” He bases his interpretation of the passage on two key terms: “Law” and “fulfill.” A survey of the use of the term “Law” in Matthew leads him to “conclude that the ‘Law’ Jesus makes reference to is the *entire* Old Covenant Law, which included the Ten Commandments.”<sup>32</sup> This conclusion per se is accurate, because Jesus upheld the moral principles of the Old Testament, in general. For example, the “golden rule” in Matthew 7:12 is

presented as being, in essence, “the Law and the prophets.” In Matthew 22:40, the two great commandments are viewed as the basis upon which “depend all the Law and the prophets.”

The problem with Ratzlaff’s rationale is that he uses the broad meaning of Law to argue that Christ abrogated the Mosaic Law, in general, and the Ten Commandments, in particular. He does this by giving a narrow interpretation to the verb “to fulfill.” He argues that “in the book of Matthew *every time* the word ‘fulfill’ is used, it is employed in connection with the life of Christ, or the events connected with it. In *every instance* it was *one event* which ‘fulfilled’ the prophecy. In *every instance* Christians are not to participate in any ongoing fulfillment.”<sup>33</sup> On the basis of these considerations, Ratzlaff concludes that the word “fulfill” in Matthew 5:17-19 refers not to the continuing nature of the Law and the prophets but to the fulfillment of “prophecies regarding the life and death of Messiah.”<sup>34</sup>

To support this conclusion, Ratzlaff appeals to the phrase “You have heard . . . but I say unto you,” which Jesus uses six times in Matthew 5:21-43. For him, the phrase indicates that the Lord was asserting His authority to “completely do away with the binding nature of the Old Covenant. This He will do, but not before He *completely fulfills* the prophecies, types and shadows which pointed forward to His work as the Messiah and Savior of the world which are recorded in the Law. Therefore, the Law must continue *until* he has *accomplished* everything. This happened, according to John, at the death of Jesus.”<sup>35</sup> The conclusion is clear. For Ratzlaff, the Cross marks the termination of the Law.

**The Continuity of the Law.** Ratzlaff’s conclusion has several serious problems which largely derive from his failure to closely examine a text in its immediate context. The immediate context of Matthew 5:17-19 clearly indicates that the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets ultimately takes place, not at Christ’s death as Ratzlaff claims, but at the close of the present age: “I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Matt 5:18). Since, at Christ’s death, heaven and earth did not disappear, it is evident that, according to Jesus, the function of the Law will continue until the end of the present age.

Ratzlaff’s claim that the six antitheses, “You have heard . . . but I say unto you,” indicate that Jesus intended to do away completely “with the binding nature of the Old Covenant” is untenable because in each instance Christ did not release His followers from the obligation to observe the six commandments mentioned. Instead, He called for a more radical observance



of each of them. As John Gerstner points out, “Christ’s affirmation of the moral Law was complete. Rather than setting the disciples free from the Law, He tied them more tightly to it. He abrogated not one commandment but instead intensified all.”<sup>36</sup>

Christ did not modify or replace the Law. Instead, He revealed its divine intent which affects not only the outward conduct but also the inner motives. The Law condemned murder; Jesus condemned anger as sin (Matt 5:21-26). The Law condemned adultery; Jesus condemned lustful appetites (Matt 5:27-28). This is not a replacement of the Law, but a *clarification* and *intensification* of its divine intent. Anger and lust cannot be controlled by Law, because legislation has to do with outward conduct that can be controlled. Jesus is concerned with showing that obedience to the spirit of God’s commandments involves inner motives as well as outer actions.

**The Continuation of the Law.** Ratzlaff is correct in saying that “to fulfill” in Matthew generally refers to the prophetic realization of the Law and prophets in the life and ministry of Christ. This implies that certain aspects of the Law and the prophets, such as the Levitical services and messianic prophecies, came to an end in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. But this interpretation cannot be applied to the moral aspects of God’s Law mentioned by Jesus, because verse 18 explicitly affirms that the Law would be valid “till heaven and earth pass away.” In the light of the antitheses of verses 21-48, “to fulfill” means especially “to explain” the fuller meaning of the Law and the prophets. Repeatedly, in Matthew, Jesus acts as the supreme interpreter of the Law who attacks external obedience and some of the rabbinical (Halakic) traditions (Matt 15:3-6; 9:13; 12:7; 23:1-39).

In Matthew, Christ’s teachings are presented not as a replacement of God’s moral Law but as the continuation and confirmation of the Old Testament. Matthew sees in Christ not the termination of the Law and the prophets but their realization and continuation. The “golden rule” in Matthew 7:12 is presented as being the essence of “the Law and the prophets.” In Matthew 19:16-19, the rich young man wanted to know what he should do to have eternal life. Jesus told him to “keep the commandments,” and then He listed five of them.

In Matthew 22:40, the two great commandments are viewed as the basis upon which “depend all the Law and the prophets.” Ratzlaff should note that a summary does not abrogate or discount what it summarizes. It makes no sense to say that we must follow the summary command to love our neighbor as ourselves (Lev 19:19; Matt 22:39) while ignoring or violating the

second part of the Decalogue which tells us what loving our neighbor entails. We must not forget that when the Lord called upon people to recognize “the more important matters of the Law” (Matt 23:23), He immediately added that the lesser matters should not be neglected.

We might say that, in Matthew, the Law and the prophets live on in Christ who realizes, clarifies, and, in some cases, intensifies their teachings (Matt 5:21-22, 27-28). The Christological realization and continuation of the Old Testament Law has significant implications for the New Testament understanding of the Sabbath in the light of the redemptive ministry of Jesus. This important subject is investigated in Chapter 4 of this study, “The Savior and the Sabbath.”

## PART 2

### THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS

#### IN THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Considerable importance is attached to the book of Hebrews in defining the relationship between the Sabbath and the covenants. Why? First, because Hebrews deals more with the relationship between the Old and New Covenants than any other book of the New Testament; and second, because Hebrews 4:9 clearly speaks of a “Sabbathkeeping that remains for the people of God.” If the reference is to a literal Sabbathkeeping, this text would provide a compelling evidence of the observance of the Sabbath in the New Testament church.

**The WCG Interpretation of the Sabbath in Hebrews 4:9.** The Worldwide Church of God acknowledges the importance of this text, saying: “If this passage [Heb 4:9] requires Christians to keep the seventh-day Sabbath, it would be the *only* direct post-resurrection Scriptural command to do so. If it doesn’t, then we have no existing proof-text command specifically written to the New Testament church mandating the keeping of the Sabbath. In view of this, it is extremely important that we understand clearly what the verses in question are telling us.”<sup>37</sup>

There is no question that “it is extremely important” to understand the meaning of Hebrews 4:9 in the context of the author’s discussion of the Old and New Covenants. This is indeed what we intend to do now by examining the text in the light of its immediate and larger contexts. The interpretation given by the WCG to the Sabbath in Hebrews can be summarized in a simple syllogism.

**First premise:**

Christ made the Old Covenant obsolete.

**Second premise:**

The Sabbath was part of the Old Covenant.

**Conclusion:**

Therefore, the literal observance of the Sabbath is obsolete.<sup>38</sup>

The WCG interprets the “Sabbathkeeping—*sabbatismos*—that remains for the people of God” (Heb 4:9) as a daily experience of spiritual salvation rest, not the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath. “The spiritual rest of salvation into which God’s people are entering is a *sabbatismos*—‘a Sabbathkeeping.’ . . . In summary, the verses in question do not exhort us to keep the Old Covenant Sabbath, but they do admonish us to enter the spiritual ‘rest’ of God by having faith in Christ.”<sup>39</sup> The evaluation of the WCG interpretation of the Sabbath in Hebrews 4:9 is given in the context of the analysis of Ratzlaff’s interpretation, since the two are similar.

**Ratzlaff’s Interpretation of Hebrews 4:9.** Like the WCG, Ratzlaff attaches great importance to the teachings of the book of Hebrews regarding the covenants and the Sabbath. His reason is clearly stated: “The contextual teaching of this book deals with the very point of our study: how Christians were to relate to the Old Covenant Law. Therefore, we should accept the following statements as having the highest teaching authority.”<sup>40</sup>

Ratzlaff’s argument is essentially identical to that of the WCG. He argues that the Sabbath was part of the Old Covenant Law which became obsolete and was done away with the coming of Christ. He states his view clearly in commenting on Hebrews 9:1: “Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship (Greek word is service) (Heb 9:1). It is unquestionably clear that the Sabbath was one of those regulations of divine worship or service (Lev 23). . . . Let me clarify by reviewing what is said here. First, our author calls the Sinaitic Covenant the ‘first covenant’ (called old in other places). Then he says that it had regulations for divine worship. He goes on to list the things included in this ‘first covenant,’ including ‘the tables of the covenant’—a clear reference to the Ten Commandments. These are the facts of Scripture in their contextual setting. Thus the ‘tables of the covenant,’ which include the Sabbath commandment, and the ‘Laws for divine worship,’ which include the Sabbath, are old and ready to disappear.”<sup>41</sup>

**Discontinuity in Hebrews.** Ratzlaff is right in pointing out the discontinuity taught by Hebrews between the Old and New Covenant as far as the Levitical services are concerned. These were brought to an end by Christ's coming. But he is wrong in applying such a discontinuity to the moral principles of the Ten Commandments, especially the Sabbath.

There is no question that the author of Hebrews emphasizes the discontinuity brought about by the coming of Christ when he says that "if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood" (Heb 7:11), there would have been no need for Christ to come. But because the priests, the sanctuary, and its services were "symbolic" (Heb 9:9; 8:5), they could not in themselves "perfect the conscience of the worshipper" (Heb 9:9). Consequently, it was necessary for Christ to come "once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb 9:26). The effect of Christ's coming, as Ratzlaff notes, is described as "setting aside" (Heb 7:18), making "obsolete" (Heb 8:13), "abolishing" (Heb 10:9) all the Levitical services associated with the sanctuary.

The problem is that Ratzlaff interprets these affirmations as indicating the abrogation of all the Old Testament laws, including the Sabbath. Such an interpretation ignores that the statements in question are found in chapters 7 to 10 which deal with the Levitical, sacrificial regulations. In these chapters, the author uses the terms "Law" (Heb 10:1) and "covenant" (Heb 8:7, 8, 13) specifically with reference to the Levitical priesthood and services. It is in this context—that is, as they relate to the Levitical ministry—that they are declared "abolished" (Heb 10:9). But this declaration can hardly be taken as a blanket statement for the abrogation of the Law, in general.

Walter Kaiser emphasizes this point: "The writer to the Hebrews clearly shows that what he saw as being abrogated from the first covenant were the ceremonies and rituals—the very items that had a built-in warning from God to Moses from the first day they were revealed to him. Had not God warned Moses that what he gave him in Exodus 25-40 and Leviticus 1-27 was according to the 'pattern' he had shown him on the mountain (e.g., Ex 25:40)? This meant that the real remained somewhere else (presumably in heaven) while Moses instituted a 'model,' 'shadow,' or 'imitation' of what is real until reality came! The net result cannot be that for the writer of Hebrews, the whole Old Covenant or the whole Torah had been superseded."<sup>42</sup>

Ratzlaff ignores the fact that the reference to "the tables of the covenant" in Hebrews 9:4 is found in the context of the description of the

contents of the ark of the covenant, which included “the tables of the covenant.” The latter are mentioned as part of the furniture of the earthly sanctuary whose typological function terminated with Christ’s death on the Cross. However, the fact that the services of the earthly sanctuary terminated at the Cross does not mean, as Ratzlaff claims, that the Ten Commandments also came to an end simply because they were located inside the ark.

### **Continuity of the Ten Commandments in the New Covenant.**

Hebrews teaches us that the earthly sanctuary was superseded by the heavenly sanctuary where Christ “appears in the presence of God on our behalf” (Heb 9:24). When John saw in vision the heavenly Temple, he saw within the Temple “the ark of the covenant” which contains the Ten Commandments (Rev 11:19). Why was John shown the ark of the covenant within the heavenly temple? The answer is simple. The ark of the covenant represents the throne of God that rests on justice (the Ten Commandments) and mercy (the mercy seat).

If Ratzlaff’s argument is correct that the Ten Commandments terminated at the Cross because they were part of the furnishings of the sanctuary, then why was John shown the ark of the covenant which contains the Ten Commandments in the heavenly Temple? Does not the vision of the ark of the covenant in the heavenly sanctuary where Christ ministers on our behalf provide a compelling proof that the principles of the Ten Commandments are still the foundation of God’s government?

It is unfortunate that in his concern to argue for the discontinuity between the Old and New Covenants, Ratzlaff ignores the clear continuity between the two. The continuity is expressed in a variety of ways. There is continuity in the revelation which the same God “spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets” and now “in these last days has spoken to us by a Son” (Heb 1:1-2). There is continuity in the faithfulness and accomplishments of Moses and Christ (Heb 3:2-6).

There is continuity in the redemptive ministry offered typologically in the earthly sanctuary by priests and realistically in the heavenly sanctuary by Christ Himself (Heb 7-10). There is continuity in faith and hope as New Testament believers share in the faith and promises of the Old Testament worthies (Heb 11-12).

More specifically, there is continuity in the “Sabbathkeeping—*sabbatismos*” which “remains (*apoleipetai*) for the people of God” (Heb 4:9). The verb “remains—*apoleipetai*” literally means “has been left behind.” Literally translated, verse 9 reads: “So then a Sabbath-keeping has been left

behind for the people of God.” The permanence of the Sabbath is also implied in the exhortation to “strive to enter that rest” (Heb 4:11). The fact that one must make efforts “to enter that rest” implies that the “rest” experience of the Sabbath also has a future realization and, consequently, cannot have terminated with the coming of Christ.

It is noteworthy that while the author declares the Levitical priesthood and services as “abolished” (Heb 10:9), “obsolete,” and “ready to vanish away” (Heb 8:13), he explicitly teaches that a “Sabbathkeeping has been left behind for the people of God” (Heb 4:9).

**Ratzlaff’s Objections to Literal Sabbathkeeping.** Ratzlaff rejects the interpretation of “*sabbatismos*” as literal Sabbathkeeping because it does not fit his “New Covenant” theology. He goes as far as saying that *sabbatismos* is a special term coined by the author of Hebrews to emphasize the uniqueness of the salvation rest of the New Covenant. “The writer of Hebrews characterizes this rest as a ‘Sabbath rest’ by using a word which is *unique* to Scripture. I believe he did this to give it special meaning just as we do when we put quotation marks around a word as I have done with the term ‘God’s rest.’ As pointed out above, the author is showing how much better the new covenant is over the old. I believe the truth he is trying to convey is that the ‘Sabbath’ (*sabbatismos*, Gr) of the New Covenant is better than the Sabbath (*sabbaton*, Gr) of the Old Covenant.”<sup>43</sup>

The truth of the matter is that the author of Hebrews did not have to invent a new word or use it with a *unique* meaning because the term *sabbatismos* already existed and was used both by pagans and Christians as a technical term for Sabbathkeeping. Examples can be found in the writings of Plutarch, Justin, Epiphanius, the Apostolic Constitutions, and the Martyrdom of Peter and Paul.<sup>44</sup> The one who is inventing a new meaning for *sabbatismos* is not the author of Hebrews but Dale Ratzlaff himself, in order to support his unbiblical “New Covenant” theology.

Professor Andrew Lincoln, one of the contributors to the scholarly symposium *From Sabbath to the Lord’s Day*, a major source used by Ratzlaff, acknowledges that in each of the above instances “the term denotes the observance or celebration of the Sabbath. This usage corresponds to the Septuagint usage of the cognate verb *sabbatizo* (cf. Ex 16:23; Lev 23:32; 26:34f.; 2 Chron 36:21) which also has reference to Sabbath observance. Thus the writer to the Hebrews is saying that since the time of Joshua an observance of Sabbath rest has been outstanding.”<sup>45</sup>

Lincoln is not a Sabbatarian but a Sundaykeeping scholar who deals in a responsible way with the linguistic usage of *sabbatismos*. Unfortunately, he chooses to interpret spiritually the ceasing from one's works on the Sabbath (Heb 4:10) as referring to the spiritual cessation from sin rather than to the physical cessation from work.<sup>46</sup> This interpretation, as we see below, is discredited by the comparison the author of Hebrews makes between the divine and human cessation from "works."

**Ratzlaff's Five Reasons Against Literal Sabbathkeeping.** Ratzlaff submits five reasons to support his contention that *sabbatismos* "cannot be the seventh-day Sabbath of the fourth commandment."<sup>47</sup> The first and second reasons are essentially the same. Ratzlaff argues that since Hebrews states that the Israelites at the time of Joshua and, later, the time of David "did not enter the rest of God," though they were observing the Sabbath, then, the *sabbatismos* has nothing to do with literal Sabbathkeeping.<sup>48</sup>

This conclusion ignores the three levels of meaning that the author of Hebrews attaches to the Sabbath rest as representing (1) the physical rest of the seventh day, (2) the national rest in the land of Canaan, and (3) the spiritual (messianic) rest in God. The argument of Hebrews is that though the Israelites did enter into the land of rest under Joshua (Heb 4:8), because of unbelief they did not experience the spiritual dimension of Sabbathkeeping as an invitation to enter God's rest (Heb 4:2, 6). This was true even after the occupation of the land because, at the time of David, God renewed the invitation to enter into His rest (Heb 4:7). The fact that the spiritual dimension of the Sabbath rest was not experienced by the Israelites as a people indicates to the author that "a *sabbatismos*—sabbathkeeping has been left behind for the people of God" (Heb 4:9). It is evident that a proper understanding of the passage indicates that the *sabbatismos*—sabbathkeeping that remains is a literal observance of the day which entails a spiritual experience. The physical act of rest represents a faith response to God.

The third reason given by Ratzlaff is his assumption that "the concept of 'believing' is *never* associated with keeping the seventh-day Sabbath in the old covenant."<sup>49</sup> This assumption is negated by the fact that Sabbath is given as the sign "that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you" (Ex 31:13). Is it possible for anyone to experience God's sanctifying presence and power on the Sabbath without a "belief" or "faith response" to God? Furthermore, does not the prophet Isaiah summon the people to honor the Sabbath by "taking delight in the Lord" (Is 58:14)? Can one delight in the Lord on the Sabbath without believing in Him?

The fourth reason advanced by Ratzlaff relates to the verb “has rested” in Hebrews 4:10 which is past tense (aorist tense in Greek). To him the past tense indicates “that the believer who rests from his works did so *at one point in time in the past*.”<sup>50</sup> In other words the past tense “has rested” suggests not a weekly cessation from work on the Sabbath but a rest of grace already accomplished or experienced in the past.

This interpretation ignores two important points. First, the verb “has rested—*katepausen*” is past simply because it depends upon the previous verb “*eiselthon*—he that entered,” which is also past. The Greek construction (aorist participle) makes it clear that some have already entered into God’s rest. It is evident that he who “entered” into God’s rest in the past has also “rested from his works” in the past.

Second, the text makes a simple comparison between the divine and the human cessation from “works.” In the RSV the text reads: “For whoever enters God’s rest also ceases from his labors as God did from his” (Heb 4:10). The point of the analogy is simply that as God ceased from His work on the seventh day in order to rest, so believers who cease from their work on the Sabbath enter into God’s rest. If the verb “has rested” referred to the “rest of grace,” as Ratzlaff claims, then by virtue of the analogy God also has experienced “the rest of grace,” an obvious absurdity. All of this shows that the analogy contains a simple statement of the nature of Sabbathkeeping which essentially involves cessation from work in order to enter God’s rest by allowing Him to work in us more fully and freely.

The reason both verbs “entered—*eiselthon*” and “rested—*katepausen*” are past tense (aorist) may be because the author wishes to emphasize that the Sabbathkeeping that has been left behind for the people of God has both a past and present dimension. In the past, it has been experienced by those who have entered into God’s rest by resting from their work (Heb 4:10). In the present, we must “strive to enter that rest” (Heb 4:11) by being obedient. Both the RSV and the NIV render the two verbs in the present (“enters — ceases”) because the context underlines the present and timeless quality of the Sabbath rest (Heb 4:1, 3, 6, 9, 11).

**Is the Sabbath Rest a Daily Rest of Grace?** The fifth reason given by Ratzlaff for negating the literal meaning of “*sabbatismos*—Sabbathkeeping” in Hebrews 4:9 is his contention that, since “the promise of entering God’s rest is good ‘today,’” the author of Hebrews is not thinking of the *seventh day* Sabbath rest but of the “‘rest’ of grace” experienced by believers *every day*.<sup>51</sup> “The writer of Hebrews stresses the word ‘today’ on



several occasions. In the New Covenant, one can enter into God's rest 'today.' He does not have to wait until the end of the week. . . . The New Covenant believer is to rejoice into God's rest *continually*."<sup>52</sup>

It amazes me how Ratzlaff can misconstrue the use of "today" to defend his abrogation view of the Sabbath. The function of the adverb "today—*semeron*" is not to teach a continuous Sabbath rest of grace that replaces literal Sabbathkeeping; it is to show that Sabbathkeeping as an experience of rest in God was not experienced by the Israelites as a people because of their unbelief (Heb 4:6). To prove this fact, the author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 95:7 where God invites the people to respond to Him, saying: "Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" (Heb. 4:7, cf. Ps. 95:7).

The "today" simply serves to show that the spiritual dimension of the Sabbath as rest in God still remains because God renewed the invitation at the time of David. To argue that "today" means that "New Covenant" Christians observe the Sabbath every day by living in God's rest is to ignore also the historical context—namely, that the "today" was spoken by God at the time of David. If Ratzlaff's interpretation of "today" were correct, then already, at the time of David, God had replaced the literal observance of the Sabbath with a spiritual experience of rest in Him. Such an absurd conclusion can be reached only by reading into the text gratuitous assumptions.

**Three Levels of Interpretation of the Sabbath Rest in the Old Testament.** To understand better the preceding discussion about the Sabbath rest in Hebrews 3 and 4, it is important to note three levels of meaning attached to the Sabbath rest in the Old Testament and in Jewish literature. In the Old Testament, we find that the Sabbath rest refers first of all to the physical cessation from work on the seventh day (Ex 20:10; 23:12; 31:14; 34:21). Second, the Sabbath rest served to epitomize the national aspiration for a peaceful life in a land at rest (Deut 12:9; 25:19; Is 14:3) where the king would give to the people "rest from all enemies" (2 Sam 7:1; cf. 1 Kings 8:5), and where God would find His "resting place" among His people and especially in His sanctuary at Zion (2 Chron 6:41; 1 Chron 23:25; Ps 132:8, 13, 14; Is 66:1).

The fact that the Sabbath rest as a political aspiration for national peace and prosperity remained largely unfulfilled apparently inspired the third interpretation of the Sabbath rest—namely, the symbol of the Messianic age, often known as the "end of days" or the "world to come." Theodore Friedman notes, for example, that "two of the three passages in which Isaiah

refers to the Sabbath are linked by the prophet with the end of days (Is 56:4-7; 58:13, 14; 66:22-24) . . . . It is no mere coincidence that Isaiah employs the words ‘delight’ (*oneg*) and ‘honor’ (*kavod*) in his descriptions of both the Sabbath and the end of days (Is 58:13—‘And you shall call the Sabbath a delight . . . and honor it’; Is 66:11—‘And you shall delight in the glow of its honor’). The implication is clear. The delight and joy that will mark the end of days is made available here and now by the Sabbath.”<sup>53</sup>

Later rabbinic and apocalyptic literature provide more explicit examples of the Messianic/eschatological interpretation of the Sabbath. For example, the Babylonian Talmud says: “Our Rabbis taught that at the conclusion of the septennate the son of David will come. R. Joseph demurred: But so many Sabbaths have passed, yet has he not come!”<sup>54</sup> In the apocalyptic work known as *The Book of Adam and Eve* (about first century A.D.), the archangel Michael admonishes Seth, saying: “Man of God, mourn not for thy dead more than six days, for on the seventh day is a sign of the resurrection and the *rest* of the age to come.”<sup>55</sup>

How did the Sabbath come to be regarded as the symbol of the world to come? Apparently the harsh experiences of the desert wandering, first, and of the exile, later, inspired the people to view the Edenic Sabbath as the paradigm of the future Messianic age. In fact, the Messianic age is characterized by material abundance (Am 9:13-14; Joel 4:19; Is 30:23-25; Jer 31:12), social justice (Is 61:1-9), harmony between persons and animals (Hos 2:20; Is 65:25; 11:6), extraordinary longevity (Is 65:20; Zech 8:4), refulgent light (Is 30:26; Zech 14:6, 7), and the absence of death and sorrow (Is 25:8).

This brief survey indicates that both in the Old Testament and in later Jewish literature, the weekly experience of the Sabbath rest served not only to express the national aspirations for a peaceful life in the land of Canaan (which remained largely unfulfilled), but also to nourish the hope of the future Messianic age which came to be viewed as “wholly sabbath and rest.”<sup>56</sup>

### **Three Levels of Interpretation of the Sabbath Rest in Hebrews.**

The existence in Old Testament times of three levels of interpretation of the Sabbath rest as a personal, national, and Messianic reality provides the basis for understanding these three meanings in Hebrews 3 and 4. By welding two texts together—namely, Psalm 95:11 and Genesis 2:2—the writer presents three different levels of meaning of the Sabbath rest. At the first level, the Sabbath rest points to God’s creation rest, when “his works were finished from the foundation of the world” (Heb 4:3). This meaning is established by quoting Genesis 2:2.

At the second level, the Sabbath rest symbolizes the promise of entry into the land of Canaan, which the wilderness generation “failed to enter” (Heb 4:6; cf. 3:16-19), but which was realized later when the Israelites under Joshua did enter the land of rest (4:8). At the third and most important level, the Sabbath rest prefigures the rest of redemption which has dawned and is made available to God’s people through Christ.

How does the author establish this last meaning? By drawing a remarkable conclusion from Psalm 95:7, 11 which he quotes several times (Heb 4:3, 5, 7). In Psalm 95, God invites the Israelites to enter into His rest which was denied to the rebellious wilderness generation (Heb 4:7-11). The fact that God should renew “again” the promise of His rest long after the actual entrance into the earthly Canaan—namely, at the time of David by saying “today” (Heb 4:7)—is interpreted by the author of Hebrews to mean two things: first, that God’s Sabbath rest was not exhausted when the Israelites under Joshua found a resting place in the land, but that it still “remains for the people of God” (4:9); and second, that such rest has dawned with the coming of Christ (Heb 4:3, 7).

The phrase “Today, when you hear his voice” (Heb 4:7) has a clear reference to Christ. The readers had heard God’s voice in the “last days” (Heb 1:2) as it spoke through Christ and had received the promise of the Sabbath rest. In the light of the Christ event, then, ceasing from one’s labor on the Sabbath (Heb 4:10) signifies both a present experience of redemption (Heb 4:3) and a hope of future fellowship with God (Heb 4:11). For the author of Hebrews, as Gerhard von Rad correctly points out, “the whole purpose of creation and the whole purpose of redemption are reunited” in the fulfillment of God’s original Sabbath rest.<sup>57</sup>

**The Nature of the Sabbath Rest in Hebrews.** What is the nature of the “Sabbath rest” that is still outstanding for God’s people (Heb 4:9)? Is the writer thinking of a literal or spiritual type of Sabbathkeeping? The answer is both. The author presupposes the literal observance of the Sabbath to which he gives a deeper meaning—namely, a faith response to God. Support for a literal understanding of Sabbathkeeping is provided by the historical usage of the term “*sabbatismos*—sabbathkeeping” in verse 9 and by the description of Sabbathkeeping as cessation from work given in verse 10: “For whoever enters God’s rest also ceases from his labors as God did from his.”

We noted earlier that *sabbatismos* is used in both pagan and Christian literature to denote the literal observance of the Sabbath. Consequently, by the use of this term, the writer of Hebrews is simply saying that “a

Sabbathkeeping has been left behind for the people of God.” The probative value of this text is enhanced by the fact that the writer is not arguing for the permanence of Sabbathkeeping; he takes it for granted.

The literal nature of Sabbathkeeping is indicated also by the following verse which speaks of the cessation from work as representing entering into God’s rest. “For whoever enters God’s rest also ceases from his labors as God did from his” (Heb 4:10). The majority of commentators interpret the cessation from work of Hebrews 4:10 in a figurative sense as “abstention from servile work,” meaning sinful activities. Thus, Christian Sabbathkeeping means not the interruption of daily work on the seventh day, but the abstention from sinful acts at all times. In other words, “New Covenant” believers experience the Sabbath rest not as a *physical* cessation from work on the *seventh day* but as a *spiritual* salvation rest *every day*. As Ratzlaff puts it, “The New Covenant believer is to rejoice in God’s rest *continually*.”<sup>58</sup>

To support this view, appeal is made to the reference in Hebrews to “dead works” (Heb 6:1; 9:14). Such a concept, however, cannot be read back into Hebrews 4:10 where a comparison is made between the divine and the human cessation from “works.” It is absurd to think that God ceased from “sinful deeds.” The point of the analogy is simply that as God ceased on the seventh day from His creation work, so believers are to cease on the same day from their labors. This is a simple statement of the nature of Sabbathkeeping which essentially involves cessation from works.

**The Meaning of Sabbathkeeping in Hebrews.** The concern of the author of Hebrews, however, is not merely to encourage his readers to interrupt their secular activities on the Sabbath, but rather to help them understand the deeper significance of the act of resting for God on the Sabbath. The recipients of the book are designated as “Hebrews” presumably because of their tendency to adopt Jewish liturgical customs as a means to gain access to God. This is indicated by the appeal in chapters 7 to 10 to discourage any participation in the Temple’s sacrificial services. Thus, these Hebrew-minded Christians did not need to be reminded of the physical-cessation aspect of Sabbathkeeping. This aspect yields only a negative idea of rest, one which only would have served to encourage existing Judaizing tendencies. What they needed, instead, was to understand the meaning of the act of resting on the Sabbath, especially in the light of the coming of Christ.

This deeper meaning can be seen in the antithesis the author makes between those who failed to enter into God’s rest because of “unbelief—*apeitheias*” (Heb 4:6, 11), that is, faithlessness which results in disobedience,

and those who enter it by “faith—*pistei*” (Heb 4:2, 3), that is, faithfulness that results in obedience.

Chapter 4 covers more fully the meaning of Sabbathkeeping as a faith response to God in conjunction with the relationship between the Savior and the Sabbath. There we see that Hebrews’ deeper meaning of Sabbathkeeping reflects to a large extent the redemptive understanding of the day we find in the Gospels. Christ’s offer of His “rest” (Matt 11:28) represents the core of the “Sabbath rest” available “today” to God’s people (Heb 4:7, 9).

The act of resting on the Sabbath for the author of Hebrews is not merely a routine ritual (cf. “sacrifice”—Matt 12:7) but rather a faith response to God. Such a response entails not the hardening of one’s heart (Heb 4:7) but being receptive to “hear his voice” (Heb 4:7). It means experiencing God’s salvation rest, not by works but by faith—not by doing but by being saved through faith (Heb 4:2, 3, 11). On the Sabbath, as John Calvin aptly expresses it, believers are “to cease from their work to allow God to work in them.”<sup>59</sup>

This expanded interpretation of Sabbathkeeping in the light of the Christ event was apparently designed to wean Christians away from a too materialistic understanding of its observance. To achieve this objective, the author, on the one hand, reassures his readers of the permanence of the blessings contemplated by Sabbathkeeping and, on the other hand, explains that such a blessing can be received only by experiencing the Sabbath as a faith response to God.

It is evident that for the author of Hebrews the Sabbathkeeping that remains for “New Covenant” Christians is not only a physical experience of cessation from work on the seventh day but also a faith response, a yes “today” response to God. Karl Barth puts it eloquently. The act of resting on Sabbath is an act of resignation to our human efforts to achieve salvation in order “to allow the omnipotent grace of God to have the first and last word at every point.”<sup>60</sup>

### Conclusion

The preceding study of the Sabbath in its relationship to the New Covenant has shown that there is an organic unity between the Old and New Covenants—a unity which is reflected in the continuity of the Sabbath. Both covenants are part of the everlasting covenant (Heb 13:20), that is, of God’s commitment to save penitent sinners. In both covenants, God invites His people to accept the gracious provision of salvation by living in accordance with the moral principles He has revealed. Christ came not to nullify or

modify God's moral Law but to clarify and reveal its deeper meaning. Christ spent much of His ministry clarifying how the love principle is embodied in the Ten Commandments, in general, and in the Sabbath, in particular.

Of all the commandments, the Sabbath offers us the most concrete opportunity to show our love to God because it invites us to consecrate our time to Him. Time is the essence of our life. The way we use our time is indicative of our priorities. A major reason why the Sabbath has been attacked by many throughout human history is that sinful human nature is self-centered rather than God-centered. Most people want to spend their Sabbath time seeking for personal pleasure or profit rather than for the presence and peace of God.

New Covenant believers who on the Sabbath stop their work to allow God to work in them more fully and freely tangibly show that God really counts in their lives. They make themselves receptive and responsive to the presence, peace, and rest of God. At a time when so-called "New Covenant" theology is deceiving many Christians into believing in the "simpler" and "better" principle of love, the Sabbath challenges us to offer to God not just lip-service, but the service of our total being by consecrating our time and life to Him.

### NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Dispensationalism* (Dallas, 1936), p. 107.
2. A study paper on "The Sabbath" released by the Worldwide Church of God on 1995, lists Dale Ratzlaff's book, *Sabbath in Crisis*, as one of the major sources used. The other two sources are the special issue of *Verdict* (vol. 4), entitled "Sabbatarianism Reconsidered," published by Robert Brinsmead on June 4, 1981, and the symposium *From Sabbath to the Lord's Day*, and published by Zondervan in 1982.
3. Clay Peck, *"New Covenant" Christians* (Berthoud, Colorado, 1998), p. 2.
4. Joseph Tkach, Jr., "The New Covenant and the Sabbath," *Pastor General Report* (December 21, 1994), pp. 8, 11.
5. Joseph Tkach, Jr., *Pastor General's Report* (January 5, 1995), p. 1.
6. "Covenant in the Bible," a Bible study prepared by the Worldwide Church of God and posted in their Web page ([www.wcg.org](http://www.wcg.org) – September 15, 1998), p. 3.

7. Ibid., p. 4.

8. Joseph Tkach, Jr., (note 4), p. 2.

9. Ibid., p. 11.

10. Ibid., p. 6.

11. Ibid., p. 7.

12. "The Sabbath in Acts and the Epistles," a Bible study prepared by the Worldwide Church of God and posted on their web page ([www.wcg.org](http://www.wcg.org), September 1998), p. 3.

13. Ibid., pp. 3-4.

14. Pierre Grelot and Jean Giblet, "Covenant," *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed., by Xavier Leon-Dufour (New York, 1970), p. 95.

15. George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1974), p. 507.

16. Ibid., p. 507.

17. Greg L. Bahnsen, "The Theonomic Reformed Approach to the Law and Gospel," in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1993), p. 97.

18. Dale Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Crisis: Transfer/Modification? Reformation/Continuation? Fulfillment/Transformation?* (Applegate, California, 1990), p. 73.

19. Ibid., p. 78, emphasis supplied.

20. Ibid., p. 78.

21. Ibid., p. 180.

22. Ibid., p. 181.

23. Ibid., p. 182.

24. Ibid., pp. 182, 183, 185.

25. Ibid., p. 185.

26. Ibid., p. 74.

27. Ibid., p. 73.

28. Ibid., p. 185.

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29. Ibid., p. 207.

30. George Eldon Ladd (note 15), p. 128.

31. Walter C. Kaiser, "The Law as God's Gracious Guidance for the Promotion of Holiness," in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1993), p. 198.

32. Dale Ratzlaff (note 18), p. 228.

33. Ibid., p. 228.

34. Ibid., p. 229.

35. Ibid., p. 229.

36. John H. Gerstner, "Law in the NT," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, revised edition, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1960), vol 3, p. 88.

37. "Does Hebrews 4:9 Command Us to Keep the Sabbath?" A Bible study prepared by the Worldwide Church of God and posted on their Web page ([www.wcg.org](http://www.wcg.org) – September, 1998), p. 1.

38. "The New Covenant and the Sabbath," a Bible study prepared by the Worldwide Church of God and posted on their Web page ([www.wcg.org](http://www.wcg.org) – September, 1998), pp. 9-10.

39. "Does Hebrews 4:9 Command Us to Keep the Sabbath?" (note 37), pp.8-9.

40. Dale Ratzlaff (note 18), p. 197.

41. Ibid., p. 198.

42. Walter C. Kaiser (note 31), p. 186.

43. Dale Ratzlaff (note 18), p. 246.

44. Plutarch, *De Superstitione* 3 (Moralia 1660); Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 23, 3; Epiphanius, *Adversus Haereses* 30, 2, 2; *Apostolic Constitutions* 2, 36.

45. Andrew T. Lincoln, "Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament," in *From Sabbath to the Lord's Day*, ed. Donald A. Carson (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1982), p. 213.

46. Ibid.

47. Dale Ratzlaff (note 18), p. 243.



48. Ibid., pp. 243-244.

49. Ibid., p. 244.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid., p. 247.

53. Theodore Friedman, "The Sabbath: Anticipation of Redemption," *Judaism* 16 (1967), p. 445. Friedman notes that "at the end of the *Mishnah Tamid* (*Rosh Hashanah* 31a) we read: 'A Psalm, a song for the Sabbath day—a song for the time-to-come, for the day that is all Sabbath rest in the eternal life.' The Sabbath, the Gemara asserts, is one-sixtieth of the world to come" (ibid., p. 443).

54. *Sanhedrin* 97a.

55. *The Books of Adam and Eve* 51:1,2 in R. H. Charles, ed., *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1913), vol 2, p. 153. Cf. *Apocalypsis of Mosis* 43:3. A similar view is found in *Genesis Rabbah* 17:5: "There are three antitypes: the antitype of death is sleep, the antitype of prophecy is dream, the antitype of the age to come is the Sabbath." Cf. *Genesis Rabbah* 44:17.

56. *Mishnah Tamid* 7:4. The viewing of the Sabbath as the symbol and anticipation of the Messianic age gave to the celebration of the weekly Sabbath a note of gladness and hope for the future. Cf. *Genesis Rabbat* 17; 44; *Baba Berakot* 57f. Theodore Friedman shows how certain Sabbath regulations established by the school of Shammai were designed to offer a foretaste of the Messianic age (note 53, pp. 447-452).

57. Gerhard von Rad, "There Remains Still a Rest for the People of God," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (New York, 1965), p. 94-102.

58. Dale Ratzlaff (note 18), p. 247.

59. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1965), vol. 2, p. 337. Karl Barth keenly observes that by resting on the Sabbath after the similitude of God (Heb 4:10), the believer "participates consciously in the salvation provided by him [God]" (*Church Dogmatic* [Edinburgh, 1961], vol. 3, part 2, p. 50).

60. Karl Barth (note 59), p. 51.

# Chapter 4

## THE SAVIOR AND THE SABBATH

The human heart longs for constant reassurance of divine forgiveness, acceptance, and salvation. We each want to know, “Has God really forgiven and saved me?” In Scripture, the reassurance of divine forgiveness and salvation is communicated not only verbally but also through types and symbols. The sacrificial system, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, footwashing, and the Sabbath are all institutions established by God to help believers conceptualize and experience the assurance of salvation.

The Sabbath occupies a unique place among the various God-given institutions. It is unique in its *origin*, *nature*, *survival*, and *function*. It is unique in its *origin* because it is the first institution established by God to invite His people to enter into the joy of His rest and fellowship (Gen 2:2-3; Heb 4:3-10). It is unique in its *nature* because it is not a material object or a place accessible only to few, but a day (time) available to all. Being time, the Sabbath invites the believers to experience divine fellowship—not through “holy objects,” but in time shared together.

The Sabbath is unique in its *survival* because it has survived the Fall, the Flood, the Egyptian slavery, the Babylonian exile, the Roman anti-Sabbath legislation (promulgated by Emperor Hadrian in A. D. 135), the French and Russian temporary introduction of the ten-day week, and the recent attempts to negate its validity for today by numerous Catholic and Protestant doctoral dissertations, the Pope’s Pastoral Letter *Dies Domini*, and anti-Sabbath publications produced by former Sabbatarians. It is unique in its *function* because it has helped Jews and Christians to conceptualize, internalize, and experience the reality of God’s creative and redemptive accomplishments.

**Importance of This Study.** This study derives its importance from the fact that many Christians believe the Sabbath is an Old Covenant institution that pointed to the Savior to come. Christ fulfilled the typological function of the Sabbath through His redemptive mission. The way Christ fulfilled the Sabbath, however, is understood differently by different Chris-

tians. For some, Christ fulfilled the Sabbath commandment by terminating its observance altogether and by replacing it with an existential experience of salvation-rest available to believers every day. This is essentially the Lutheran position which recently has been adopted by the Worldwide Church of God, Dale Ratzlaff in his book *Sabbath in Crisis*, and several independent “Adventist” congregations.

For other Christians, Christ fulfilled and terminated only the *ceremonial* aspect of the Sabbath commandment—namely, the specific observance of the *seventh day* which foreshadowed the salvation rest offered by Christ. However, they believe that the *moral* aspect of the Sabbath commandment, consisting in the principle of observing *one day in seven*, was not abrogated by Christ but was transferred to the observance of the first day of the week, Sunday. This is essentially the Catholic and Calvinistic position which has been adopted by churches in the Reformed tradition.

The common denominator of both positions is the belief that Christ fulfilled the ceremonial-typological function of the Sabbath, thus releasing His followers from the obligation to observe the seventh-day Sabbath. During the course of our study, we have found that this prevailing view constitutes a major attack against the validity and value of Sabbathkeeping for Christians today and, consequently, deserves careful analysis.

**Objective of This Chapter.** This chapter explores how the Sabbath relates to the Savior to come in the Old Testament and to the Savior who has come in the New Testament. The first part examines the sabbatical typologies of Messianic redemption in the Old Testament and Jewish literature. Here we focus on some significant Sabbath themes that nourished the hope of redemption in the heart of God’s people in Old Testament times. The second part considers the redemptive meaning and function of the Sabbath in the New Testament. Our focus in this section is on the meaning of the Sabbath for Christians today in the light of the Sabbath teaching and ministry of Jesus.

The question at hand is the relationship between the Messianic redemption foreshadowed by the Sabbath and Christ’s redemptive ministry. Simply stated, the question we wish to address in this chapter is this: Did Christ fulfill the sabbatical typologies of Messianic redemption by *terminating* the function of the Sabbath, as in the case of the Temple’s services (Heb 8:13; 9:23-28), or by *actualizing* and enriching its meaning and observance through His redemptive ministry?

Surprisingly, Sabbatarian literature largely ignores this important aspect of the redemptive meaning and function of the Sabbath in the Old and

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New Testaments. Its focus is primarily on the creational origin of the Sabbath and its continuity during the course of redemptive history. Yet an appreciation for the theological development of the Sabbath, from a memorial of perfect creation to a celebration of complete redemption and of final restoration, can provide believers with a richer meaning and experience of Sabbath observance.

## PART 1

### THE SABBATH AND THE SAVIOR

#### IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The story of creation is in a sense a redemption story: redemption from disorder into order, from chaos into cosmos. Within the creation event, the Sabbath reveals the purpose of God's first redemptive act. It tells us that God created this world not merely for the enjoyment of making something new and beautiful out of formless matter (Gen 1:2) but for the special pleasure of sharing Himself with His creatures.

This truth is reflected especially in the blessing and sanctification of the Sabbath. Since it is the manifestation of God's holy presence that makes a day or a place holy, the sanctification of the Sabbath reveals God's commitment to bless His creatures with abundant life through His holy presence. God "sanctified" or "made holy" the seventh day (Gen 2:3) by setting the day apart for the manifestation of His Holy presence among His creatures. To put it differently, by blessing and sanctifying the seventh day, God revealed His intent to offer mankind not only beautiful things, but also the sweet experience of His fellowship.

**A Promise of Emmanuel.** When the prospect of a joyous life in the presence of God was shattered by sin, the Sabbath became the symbol of divine commitment to restore broken relationships. From being the symbol of God's initial *cosmological* accomplishments (that is, bringing into existence a perfect cosmos out of chaos), the Sabbath became the symbol of God's future *soteriological* activities (that is, the redemption of His people from bondage into His freedom). From serving as a symbol of God's *initial entrance into human time* to bless and sanctify human beings with His divine presence, the Sabbath became a symbol of God's *future entrance into human flesh* to become "Emmanuel—God with us." The first as well as the second coming of Christ represents the fulfillment of God's purpose for this world expressed initially through the blessings and sanctification of the Sabbath.

In his book *Toward an American Theology*, Herbert W. Richardson rightly emphasizes the connection between the sanctification of the creation Sabbath and the incarnation of Christ. He writes: “God created the world so that the Sabbath guest, Jesus Christ, might come and dwell therein. That is, the world was created for the sake of ‘Emmanuel, God with us.’ The incarnation is, therefore, not a rescue operation, decided upon only after sin had entered into the world. Rather, the coming of Christ fulfills the purpose of God in creating the world.”<sup>1</sup>

To trace how the Sabbath has fulfilled this redemptive function in the Old and New Testaments is not an easy task for three major reasons. First, the Sabbath has provided the basis for constant new reflections. Various strands of sabbatical concepts such as the themes of Sabbath “rest,” “peace,” and “delight;” the cosmic week; the liberation experience of the Sabbath years; and the sabbatical structure of time have all been used to express the future (eschatological) expectations of divine deliverance. Second, the liberation message of the Sabbath has been applied, as we shall see, both to immediate national concerns for political restoration and to future expectations of Messianic redemption. This dual application to the same theme readily creates confusion in the mind of an unwarned reader.

Third, the biblical and extrabiblical sources provide us with fragmented information rather than systematic explanation of the various levels of meanings attributed to the Sabbath. Also, certain allusions to sabbatical themes in the Old Testament become clearer in the light of their New Testament interpretation, especially in Hebrews 3 and 4.

**Adam’s First Day.** In Old Testament times, the Sabbath served not only to provide personal rest and liberation from the hardship of work and social injustices, but also to nourish the hope for a future Messianic peace, prosperity, and redemption.<sup>2</sup> The latter function was apparently inspired by the role of the Sabbath in God’s original creation.

Genesis provides no information on the actual observance of the Sabbath by Adam and Eve before their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Yet the picture of perfection and satisfaction (note the sevenfold repetition of the phrase “it was good”—Gen 1:4,10,17,18,21,24,31) it portrays, especially through the divine blessing and sanctification of the seventh day (Gen 2:3), could easily offer to believers the basis for a vision of the Messianic age.

The parallels and equivalences between the Sabbath of Genesis, Adam’s *First Day* after his creation, and the *Last Days* of the Messianic age, though not always explicitly made, are implicitly present in biblical and

extrabiblical sources. To illustrate how the creation Sabbath became the symbol of Messianic redemption and restoration, we briefly examine a few significant themes.

**Sabbath Peace and Harmony.** The peace and harmony that existed between Adam and the animals at the creation Sabbath will be restored in the Messianic age when “the wolf shall dwell with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them” (Is 11:6). At that time, according to the same prophet, “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea” (Is 11:9).<sup>3</sup> This vision of the earth full of peace and of the knowledge of God in the Last Days may well have been inspired by the view of the First Days, of which the Sabbath is the epitome.

The link between the First Sabbath and the Last Days or world to come, is suggested by those rabbinical Sabbath regulations which prohibited killing insects or carrying weapons on the Sabbath because the day represents a foretaste of the world to come. For example, Rabbi Simeon B. Eleazar taught that “Vermin must not be killed on the Sabbath: this is the view of Beth Shammai [a leading rabbinical school]. . . . If one kills vermin on the Sabbath, it is as though he killed a camel.”<sup>4</sup>

The Mishnah, an ancient collection of Jewish laws, similarly states that on the Sabbath, “A man may not go out with a sword or a bow or a shield or a club or a spear . . . for it is written, ‘And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.’”<sup>5</sup> These rabbinical injunctions are derived from the notion of the absence of death during the primordial Sabbath which served as a paradigm of the world to come. The abstention from any form of killing on the Sabbath represents a foretaste of that world.

**Sabbath Prosperity.** The material prosperity and abundance which characterized the creation Sabbath inspired the prophetic vision of extraordinary material abundance during the Messianic age. Amos declares: “Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord, “when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine and the hills shall flow with it” (9:13). Similar descriptions are found in Isaiah (4:2; 7:22; 30:23-25), Joel (4:19), Zephaniah (3:13), Jeremiah (30:19; 31:24), and Ezekiel (34:13-14; 47:12).

Later Jewish and Christian works abound with descriptions of the material prosperity of the world to come, often equated with the cosmic

Sabbath.<sup>6</sup> For example, The *Epistle of Barnabas* (c. A. D. 135), included among the writings of the “Apostolic Fathers,” interprets the millennium as the cosmic Sabbath which will follow the six thousand years typified by the six days of creation and which will be characterized by the peaceful, prosperous, and luminous reign of Christ upon this earth (“He changes the sun and moon and stars, then he will rest well on the seventh day”—15:5).<sup>7</sup>

The typological meaning of the Sabbath, as a symbol of the future age of rest and prosperity, presumably explains why the rabbinical school of Shammai prohibited contributions for the poor on the Sabbath in the synagogue or even the giving of a dowry to an orphan to be married.<sup>8</sup> In rabbinical thinking, acts of charity on the Sabbath would negate its prefiguration of the material prosperity of the Messianic age.

**Sabbath Delight.** The delight and joy of the Edenic Sabbath also inspired the prophetic vision of the Messianic age. Theodore Friedman notes that “two of the three passages in which Isaiah refers to the Sabbath are linked by the prophet with the end of days (Is 56:1-7; 58:13-14; 66:20-24) . . . It is no mere coincidence that Isaiah employs the words ‘delight’ (*oneg*) and ‘honor’ (*kavod*) in his description of both the Sabbath and the end of days (58:13—‘And thou shalt call the Sabbath a delight . . . and honor it’; 66:11—‘And you shall delight in the glow of its honor’). The implication is clear. The delight and joy that will mark the end of days is made available here and now by the Sabbath.”<sup>9</sup>

The concept of “Sabbath delight” appears to derive from the vision of the Edenic Sabbath—a day of joy, light, harmony, and peace which serves as a paradigm of the Messianic age.

**Sabbath Lights.** Sabbath delight is expressed in the Jewish tradition especially by kindling lights on that day. This act, a prerogative of the Jewish woman, is interpreted as symbolic of the extraordinary light that God caused to shine out for 36 hours in consideration of the Sabbath (that is, from Friday morning to Saturday night). This conclusion is drawn from a curious rabbinic interpretation of the title of Psalm 92: “A Psalm, a song for the Sabbath day.” “R. Levi said in the name of R. Zimra: ‘For the Sabbath day,’ that is, for the day which darkness did not attend. You find that it is written of other days ‘And there was evening and there was morning, one day’ but the words ‘There was evening’ are not written of the Sabbath . . . The Sabbath light continued throughout thirty-six hours.”<sup>10</sup>

The Midrash, an ancient Jewish commentary of the Old Testament, interprets the text “God blessed the seventh day” (Gen 2:3) as meaning He

blessed it with the blessing of light.<sup>11</sup> Adam was the first to benefit from such a blessing because God let His light shine upon him though he deserved to be deprived of it by reason of his disobedience.<sup>12</sup>

The redemptive role of the primordial Sabbath in the Jewish tradition is impressive.<sup>13</sup> Being viewed as the symbol of primordial redemption from chaos to a perfect cosmos, the Sabbath could effectively typify the future Messianic restoration. The tradition of kindling lights on the Sabbath was symbolically linked both to the supernatural light that shone upon Adam during the first Sabbath as an assurance of salvation and of the extraordinary light of the Messianic age.

The prophets envision the appearance of refulgent light during the latter days: “Moreover the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of the seven days” (Is 30:26). The comparison with “*the light of the seven days*” is presumably an allusion to the seven days of creation, which, according to an ancient Midrash, were bathed by extraordinary light more brilliant than the sun.<sup>14</sup>

Zechariah’s remark that “there shall be continuous day . . . not day and not night, for at evening time there shall be light” (Zech 14:7) probably refers to the seventh day of creation which in Genesis has no mention of “evening and morning.” Such a detail was interpreted as signifying that the Sabbath was especially blessed by supernatural, continuous light.

One should note that while Dale Ratzlaff appeals to the absence of the phrase “evening and morning” for the seventh day to argue that God sanctified not a literal seventh day but a continuous condition of open fellowship with God irrespective of the Sabbath<sup>15</sup> the Jewish tradition consistently interprets such a detail as indicative of the extraordinary light that bathed the seventh day. The prophetic vision of the extraordinary light of the Messianic age most likely derives from the notion of the supernatural light experienced by Adam on the first Sabbath—light which, according to Jewish tradition, disappeared at the close of the creation Sabbath because of his disobedience, but which is expected to reappear in the Messianic age.<sup>16</sup>

**Sabbath Rest.** The theme of Sabbath rest (*menuhah*) which to “the biblical mind,” as Abraham Joshua Heschel explains, “is the same as happiness and stillness, as peace and harmony,”<sup>17</sup> has served as an effective typology of the Messianic age, often known as “the end of days” or “the world-to-come.”

In the Old Testament, the notion of “rest” is utilized to express both national and Messianic aspirations. As a national aspiration, the Sabbath rest



served to typify a peaceful life in a land of rest (Deut 12:9; 25:19; Is 14:3) where the king would give to the people “rest from all enemies” (2 Sam 7:1) and where God would find His “resting place” among His people and especially in His sanctuary at Zion (2 Chron 6:41; 1 Chron 23:25; Ps 132:8, 13, 14; Is 66:1).<sup>18</sup>

These references to political “rest” (*menuhah*) do not mention specifically the Sabbath rest. However, it is reasonable to assume, as noted by Ernst Jenni,<sup>19</sup> that it was the weekly Sabbath rest experience that served as a model to typify the larger aspiration for national rest. The two themes are often connected in rabbinic literature. For example, in a rabbinic comment on Psalm 92, we read: “A Psalm, a song for the Sabbath day—for the day when God’s people abide in peace as is said: ‘And my people shall abide in a peaceable habitation, and in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places’ (Is 32:18).”<sup>20</sup> This comment clearly links together Isaiah’s vision of messianic peace, security, and quiet resting places with the notion and experience of the Sabbath rest.

The connection between Sabbath rest and national rest is also clearly established in Hebrews 4:4, 6, 8 where the author speaks of the creation-Sabbath rest as the symbol of the promised entrance into the land of Canaan. Because of disobedience, the wilderness generation “failed to enter” (v. 6) into the land of rest typified by the Sabbath. Even later, when the Israelites under Joshua did enter the land of rest (v. 8), the blessings of the Sabbath rest were not fulfilled because God offered His Sabbath rest again long afterwards through David, saying, “Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Heb 4:7).<sup>21</sup>

The fact that the blessings of the Sabbath rest were never realized as a political condition of rest and peace challenged God’s people to look for their future fulfillment at and through the coming of the Messiah. In Jewish literature we find numerous examples where the Sabbath rest and the septenary structure of time are used to signify the rest, peace, and redemption of the messianic age.

For example, the Babylonian Talmud says “Our Rabbis taught: at the conclusion of the Sabbath the son of David will come. R. Joseph demurred: But so many Sabbaths have passed, yet has he not come!”<sup>22</sup> The age of the Messiah is often described as a time of sabbatical rest. At the end of the *Mishnah Tamid* we read: “A Psalm, a song for the Sabbath day—a song for the time to come, for the day that is all Sabbath *rest* in the eternal life.”<sup>23</sup>

These few examples suffice to show that the rest experience of the Sabbath nourished the hope and strengthened the faith of the future Messianic peace and rest. The time of redemption came to be viewed, as stated in the *Mishnah*, as “all Sabbath and rest in the life everlasting.”<sup>24</sup>

**Sabbath Liberation.** The freedom, release, and liberation which the weekly and annual Sabbaths were designed to grant to every member of the Hebrew society also have served as effective symbols of the expected Messianic redemption.

In the Deuteronomic version of the Fourth Commandment, the Sabbath is explicitly linked to the Exodus liberation by means of the “remembrance clause”: “You shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out thence with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath” (Deut 5:15).

The connection between the Sabbath and the Exodus deliverance may explain why the Sabbath became ideologically connected with the Passover, the annual celebration of the deliverance from Egypt.<sup>25</sup> In a sense, the Sabbath came to be viewed as a “little Passover” in the same way as many Christians have come to view their weekly Sunday as a “little Easter.”

The Sabbath was a real liberator of the Hebrew society by providing a release from the hardship of life and social inequalities, not only every seventh day but also every seventh year, on the sabbatical year (Lev 25:8), and every “seven sabbaths of years,” on the jubilee year (Lev 25:8). At these annual institutions, the Sabbath truly became the liberator of the oppressed in Hebrew society. The land was to lie fallow to provide free produce for the dispossessed and animals. The slaves were emancipated and the debts owed by fellow citizens were remitted. Though seldom observed, these annual Sabbaths served to announce the future liberation and redemption to be brought about by the Messiah. One reason for the Messianic function of the Sabbath years is found in three significant features they contained.

First, the annual Sabbaths promised *release* from personal debts and slavery. Such a *release* provided an effective imagery to typify the expected Messianic deliverance (Is 61:1-3, 7; 40:2).<sup>26</sup> In his dissertation on the jubiliary theology of the Gospel of Luke, Robert Sloan shows how the New Testament concept of forgiveness (“*aphesis*”) is derived largely from the release from financial indebtedness and social injustices of the annual Sabbaths.<sup>27</sup> These are referred to as “the release,” “the Lord’s release,” and “the year of release” (Deut 15:1,2,9; 31:10; Lev 25:10).

In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), the Hebrew term for “release” (*deror*), is translated as *aphesis*—“release,” which is the New Testament word for “forgiveness.” Thus, the Lord’s Prayer’s phrase “forgive us our debts” (Matt 6:12) derives from the release from financial indebtedness of the annual Sabbaths. The sabbatical release from financial indebtedness and social injustices came to be viewed as the prefiguration of the future Messianic release from the moral indebtedness of sin.

Isaiah 61:1-3 employs the imagery of the sabbatical release to describe the mission of the Messiah who would bring jubilarly amnesty and release from captivity. Christ, as we shall see, utilized this very passage to announce and explain the nature of His redemptive mission.

A second Messianic feature of the Sabbath years is *the trumpet blast* by means of a ram’s horn (*yobel*—from which derives the term “jubilee”) which ushered in the Sabbath years.<sup>28</sup> The imagery of the Jubilee’s trumpet blast is used in the Old Testament to describe the Messianic ingathering of the exiles (Is 27:13; cf. Zech 9:9-14) and in the New Testament to announce the return of Christ (1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16; Matt 24:31).

A third Messianic feature of the Sabbath years is *the date* of the tenth day of the seventh month (*Atonement Day*) on which the ram’s horn was blown to inaugurate the year of jubilee (Lev 25:9). It was the cleansing and new moral beginning offered by God to the people on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:13-19) which inaugurated the sabbatical release of the Jubilee year.

The connection between the Day of Atonement and the Jubilee year was noticed by rabbis who said: “The Lord would forgive Israel’s debt on the seventh month, which is Tishri, at the blast of the *shofar*, and just as the Holy One blessed be He has had mercy on Israel in this age at the blast of the *shofar*, also in the future I will have mercy on you through the *shofar* and bring your redeemed ones near.”<sup>29</sup>

**Sabbatical Structure of Time.** The unique Messianic features of the Sabbath years apparently inspired the use of the sabbatical structure of time used to measure the waiting time to the Messianic redemption. Some scholars call this phenomenon “sabbatical Messianism”<sup>30</sup> or “chronomessianism.”<sup>31</sup>

The classical place of sabbatical Messianism is found in Daniel 9 where two sabbatical periods are given. The first refers to the 70 years of Jeremiah’s prophecy (Jer 29:10) regarding the length of the exile before the *national restoration* of the Jews (Dan 9:3-19) and consists of 10 sabbatical

years (10 x 7). The second period is of “seventy weeks (*shabuim*)”—technically “seventy sabbatical cycles”—which would lead to *Messianic redemption* (Dan 9:24-27). This sabbatical Messianism is found in later Jewish literature such as *The Book of Jubilees* (1:29) and a fragmentary text discovered in 1956 in Qumran Cave II (known as 11Q Melchizedek).<sup>32</sup> Other examples are present in rabbinic tradition. For example, the Talmud says: “Elijah said to Rab Judah . . . ‘The world shall exist not less than eighty-five jubilees, and in the last jubilee the son of David will come.’”<sup>33</sup>

**Conclusion.** This brief survey of Old Testament Sabbath themes shows that in Old Testament times the weekly and annual Sabbaths served not only to provide physical rest and liberation from social injustices but also to epitomize and nourish the hope of future Messianic redemption.

Rabbi Heschel captures vividly the Old Testament messianic function of the Sabbath in this way: “Zion is in ruins, Jerusalem lies in the dust. All week there is only hope of redemption. But when the Sabbath is entering the world, man is touched by a moment of actual redemption; as if for a moment the spirit of the Messiah moved over the face of the earth.”<sup>34</sup> The sabbatical typologies of messianic redemption we have found in the Old Testament help us to appreciate the relationship between the Sabbath and the Savior in the New Testament.

## PART II

### THE SABBATH AND THE SAVIOR

#### IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The existence in the Old Testament of a Messianic/redemptive typology of the Sabbath has led many Christians to conclude that the Sabbath is an Old Testament institution given specifically to the Jews to remind them of God’s past creation and of the future Messianic redemption. Calvin, for example, describes the Old Testament Sabbath as “typical” (symbolic), that is, “a legal ceremony shadowing forth a spiritual rest, the truth of which was manifested in Christ.”<sup>35</sup> Therefore, Christians no longer need to observe the Sabbath because Christ has fulfilled its Messianic/redemptive typology. As Paul K. Jewett puts it, “by his redemptive work, Jesus sets aside the Sabbath by fulfilling its ultimate divine intent.”<sup>36</sup>

The view that Christ fulfilled the Sabbath by terminating its observance is very popular today among both Catholics and Protestants. During the course of this study, we noted that recently this view has been adopted even by former sabbatarians like the Worldwide Church of God, Ratzlaff in his

book *Sabbath in Crisis*, and some newly organized independent “Adventist” congregations. The popular acceptance of this view calls for close examination of the New Testament teachings regarding the relationship between the Sabbath and the Savior.

The basic questions addressed here are these: Did Christ’s redemptive mission fulfill the eschatological expectations inherent in the Sabbath by *terminating* its function and observance, as in the case of the Temple’s services (Heb 8:13; 9:23-28), or by *expanding* its meaning and enriching its observance as the celebration of His redemptive accomplishments? Did Christ view the observance of the Sabbath as the unquestionable will of God for His followers? Or, did Christ regard the obligation of Sabbathkeeping as fulfilled and superseded by His coming, the true Sabbath? Did Christ teach that “New Covenant” Christians are to observe the Sabbath by experiencing the “rest of salvation” every day rather than by resting unto Lord on the seventh day? To find answers to these questions, we briefly examine some Sabbath passages found in Luke, Matthew, John, and Hebrews.

### 1. The Sabbath in Luke

**Christ: A Model of Sabbathkeeping.** Luke’s account of the opening scene of Christ’s ministry provides a suitable starting point for inquiring into the relationship between the Savior and the Sabbath. According to Luke, it was “on a Sabbath day” that Jesus officially inaugurated His ministry in the synagogue of Nazareth, making a programmatic speech. It is noteworthy that Luke introduces Christ as an habitual observer of the Sabbath (“as his custom was”—Luke 4:16). Does Luke intend by this to set Christ before his readers as a model of Sabbathkeeping? Max B. Turner, a contributor to the scholarly symposium *From Sabbath to the Lord’s Day*, rejects this possibility, maintaining instead that it is “Jesus’ more recently acquired habit of *teaching* in the synagogues that is primarily in view,” especially since Luke uses the same expression in “Acts 17:2 in respect of Paul’s (Sabbath) synagogue *ministry*.”<sup>37</sup>

Without denying the possibility that Luke may have also thought of Christ’s custom of teaching on the Sabbath, it hardly seems justifiable to conclude that the phrase “as his custom was” “provides little real evidence of *theological* commitment on behalf of Jesus to Sabbath worship.”<sup>38</sup> Why? For at least five reasons. First, Luke speaks of Christ’s customary Sabbathkeeping in the immediate context of His upbringing in Nazareth (“where he had been brought up”—v. 16). This suggests that the allusion is especially to the custom of Sabbath observance during Christ’s youth.

Second, even if the phrase referred exclusively to Christ's habitual Sabbath *teaching* in the synagogue, would not this also provide a theological model? Has not the Christian Church adopted the teaching model of the Sabbath (whether it be Saturday or Sunday) by reading and expounding the Scripture during the divine service?<sup>39</sup>

Third, the word "Sabbath" occurs in Luke's Gospel 21 times and 8 times in Acts.<sup>40</sup> That is approximately twice as often as in any of the other three Gospels. This surely suggests that Luke attaches significance to the Sabbath. Fourth, Luke not only begins but also closes the account of Christ's earthly ministry on a Sabbath by mentioning that His entombment took place on "the day of Preparation and the Sabbath was beginning" (Luke 23:54). A number of scholars recognize in this text Luke's concern<sup>41</sup> to show that the Christian community observed the Sabbath.

Lastly, Luke expands his brief account of Christ's burial by stating emphatically that the women "rested on the sabbath in obedience to the commandment" (23:56b—NIV). Why does Luke present not only Christ but also His followers as habitual Sabbathkeepers. This consistent pattern can hardly be construed as insignificant or incidental. The many examples and situations of Sabbathkeeping reported by Luke strongly suggest that Luke intended to set before his readers Christ as "a model of reverence for the Sabbath."<sup>42</sup> To understand such a "model," however, it is necessary to study how Luke and the other evangelists relate the Sabbath to the coming of Christ.

**Messianic Fulfillment of Sabbath Liberation.** In His inaugural Nazareth address, Christ read and commented upon a passage drawn mostly from Isaiah 61:1-2 (also 58:6) which says: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18).<sup>43</sup>

The vital function of this passage has been noticed by many scholars. Hans Conzelmann correctly views it as a nutshell summary of the "Messianic program."<sup>44</sup> The original passage of Isaiah, as noted earlier, describes by means of the imagery of the Sabbath year the liberation from captivity that the Servant of the Lord would bring to His people. The fact that the language and imagery of the Sabbath years found in Isaiah 61:1-3 (and 58:6) were utilized by sectarian and mainstream Jews to describe the work of the expected Messiah makes Christ's use of this passage all the more significant. This means that Christ presented Himself to the people as the very fulfillment of

their Messianic expectations which had been nourished by the vision of the Sabbath years.

This conclusion is supported by what may be regarded as a brief summary of Jesus' exposition of the Isaianic passage which is recorded in Luke 4:21: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." In other words, the Messianic redemption *promised* by Isaiah through the imagery of the Sabbath year is "now" being *fulfilled*. As Paul K. Jewett aptly comments, "The great Jubilee Sabbath has become a reality for those who have been loosed from their sins by the coming of the Messiah and have found inheritance in Him."<sup>45</sup>

The theme of *promise* and *fulfillment* recurs in all the Gospels. Many aspects of Christ's life and ministry are presented repeatedly as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. The risen Christ Himself, according to Luke, explained to His disciples that His teaching and mission represented the *fulfillment* of "everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms" (Luke 24:44; cf. 24:26-27).

How does the Sabbath fit into this theme of promise and fulfillment? What did Christ mean when He announced His mission to be the fulfillment of the sabbatical promises of liberation? Did He intend to explain, perhaps in a veiled fashion, that the institution of the Sabbath was a type which had found its fulfillment in Himself, the Antitype, and therefore its obligations had ceased? In such a case, Christ would have paved the way for the replacement of the Sabbath with a new day of worship, as many Christians believe. Or did Christ through His redemptive mission fulfill the promised sabbatical rest and release in order to make the day a fitting channel through which to experience His blessings of salvation?

To find an answer to these questions, it is necessary to examine the Sabbath teaching and ministry of Christ reported in the Gospels. So far we have noticed that, according to Luke, Christ delivered His programmatic speech on a Sabbath claiming to be the fulfillment of the Messianic restoration announced by means of the Sabbath years (Is 61:1-3; 58:6).

**Early Sabbath Healings.** Christ's announcement of His Messiahship (Luke 4:16-21) is followed in Luke by two Sabbath healing episodes. The first took place in the synagogue of Capernaum during a Sabbath service and resulted in the *spiritual* healing of a demon-possessed man (Luke 4:31-37; Mark 1:21-28).

The second healing was accomplished immediately after the religious service in Simon's house and brought about the *physical* restoration of

Simon's mother-in-law (Luke 4:38-39; Mark 1:29-31). The result of the latter was *rejoicing* for the whole family and *service*: "immediately she rose and served them" (Luke 4:39). The themes of *liberation*, *joy*, and *service* present in embryonic form in these first healings are more explicitly associated with the meaning of the Sabbath in the subsequent ministry of Christ.

**The Crippled Woman.** The healing of the crippled woman, reported only by Luke, further clarifies the relationship between the Sabbath and the Savior's saving ministry. In the brief narrative (Luke 13:10-17), the Greek verb *luein*, usually translated "to free, to untie, to loose," is used by the Lord *three* times, thus suggesting *intentional* rather than *accidental* usage of the term.

The first time, the verb is used by Christ in addressing the woman: "You are *freed* from your infirmity" (Luke 13:12, emphasis supplied). Twice again the verb is used by Christ to respond to the indignation of the ruler of the synagogue: "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath *untie* his ox or his ass from the manger and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be *loosed* from this bond on the Sabbath day?" (Luke 13:15-16; emphasis supplied).

Arguing from a minor to a major case, Christ shows how the Sabbath had been paradoxically distorted. An ox or an ass could be legitimately *untied* on the Sabbath for drinking purposes (possibly because a day without water would result in loss of weight and, consequently, of market value), but a suffering woman could not be released on such a day from the shackles of her physical and spiritual infirmity.

Christ acted deliberately against prevailing misconceptions in order to restore the day to God's intended purpose. It should be noted that in this as well as in all other Sabbath healings, Christ is not questioning the *validity* of the Sabbath commandment; rather, He argues for its true values which had been obscured by the accumulation of traditions and countless regulations.

**Sabbath Redemption.** The imagery of loosing on the Sabbath a victim bound by Satan's bonds (Luke 13:16) recalls Christ's announcement of His mission "to proclaim *release* to the captives . . . to set at *liberty* those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18; emphasis supplied). Does not Jesus' act of freeing a daughter of Abraham from her physical and spiritual bonds on the Sabbath exemplify how the Messianic liberation typified by the Sabbath was being fulfilled (Luke 4:21)?



The connection between the redemptive typology of the Sabbath and Jesus' healings on the Sabbath is recognized, for example, by Paul K. Jewett who rightly observes that "We have in Jesus' healings on the Sabbath, not only acts of love, compassion, and mercy, but true 'sabbatical acts,' acts which show that the messianic Sabbath, the fulfillment of the Sabbath rest of the Old Testament, has broken into our world. Therefore, the Sabbath, of all days, is the most appropriate for healing."<sup>46</sup>

This fulfillment by Christ of the Old Testament Sabbath does not imply, as argued by the same author, that "Christians therefore are . . . free from the Sabbath to gather on the first day,"<sup>47</sup> but rather that Christ by fulfilling the redemptive typology of the Sabbath made the day a fitting memorial of His redemptive mission. The redemptive meaning of Christ's Sabbath healings can be seen also in the spiritual ministry Jesus provides to those whom He heals (cf. Mark 1:25; 2:5; Luke 13:16; John 5:14; 9:38).

Acts of healing people such as the crippled woman are not merely acts of love and compassion but true "sabbatical acts" which reveal how the Messianic redemption typified and promised by the Sabbath was being fulfilled through Christ's saving ministry. For all the people blessed by Christ's Sabbath ministry, the day became the memorial of the healing of their bodies and souls, the exodus from the bonds of Satan into the freedom of the Savior.

Some scholars reject this interpretation, arguing that the comparison between the loosing on the Sabbath of oxen and donkeys from their cribs for drinking purposes and the freeing of a woman from Satan's bond suggests that the Sabbath was not a particularly appropriate day for Christ's works of mercy. They reason that since the untying and watering of animals took place daily, irrespective of the Sabbath, Christ's saving acts are performed, not because it is Sabbath, but in spite of it.<sup>48</sup>

Such an argument comes short on at least two counts. First, the animals are explicitly included among the beneficiaries of the Sabbath commandment ("your ox, or your ass, or any of your cattle," – Deut. 5:14; cf. Ex. 20:10). Thus showing kindness even to dumb beasts was especially appropriate on the Sabbath.<sup>49</sup> Second, Christ challenges the contention of the ruler of the synagogue that healing ought to take place only during the "six days" rather than "on the sabbath day" (Luke 13:14) by affirming exactly the contrary, namely, that the woman ought to be loosed from her bond "on the sabbath day" (v. 16). This implies that Christ chose to heal her not *in spite of* the Sabbath *but rather because* the day provided a most fitting occasion.<sup>50</sup>

The physical and spiritual freedom that the Savior offered to that sick woman on the Sabbath represents a token manifestation of Christ's proclaimed fulfillment of the Sabbath liberation (Luke 4:18-21), which had dawned with His coming. This redemptive meaning of the Sabbath is further clarified in other incidents to be examined. But, before leaving this episode, we may ask, How did the woman and the people who witnessed Christ's saving interventions come to view the Sabbath? Luke reports that while Christ's "adversaries were put to shame; all the people rejoiced" (Luke 13:17) and the woman "praised God" (Luke 13:13). Undoubtedly for the healed woman and for all the people blessed by Christ's Sabbath ministry, the day became the memorial of the healing of their bodies and souls, of the exodus from the bonds of Satan into the freedom of the Savior.

## 2. The Sabbath in Matthew

**The Savior's Rest.** Matthew does not introduce any Sabbath episode until almost halfway through his Gospel. Then he relates two Sabbath pericopes (Matt 12:1-14) which he connects *temporally* to Jesus' offer of His rest: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt 11:28-30). To understand the nature of the Savior's rest, it is important to look at the wider and immediate context.

In the wider context, Jesus' offer of His rest is sandwiched between several accounts of rejection or opposition: the doubting of John the Baptist (11:1-6), the rejection by an unbelieving generation (11:7-19) and by the Galilean cities (11:20-24), the plotting of Pharisees (12:14), the rejection of Christ's healing by Pharisees (12:22-37), the rebuke to an unbelieving generation (12:38-45), and the misunderstanding by His relatives (12:46-50). In this context of unusual opposition and misunderstanding, Jesus disclosed His Messianic identity by proclaiming Himself to be "the Son" who "knows" and "reveals" "the Father" in a unique way (11:27). To support this Messianic claim, Christ offered the Messianic rest typified by the Sabbath (11:28-30).

We noted earlier that the Sabbath rest in Old Testament times served to nourish the hope of Messianic redemption. The messianic age was expected to be "wholly Sabbath and *rest* in the life everlasting."<sup>51</sup> In the light of the existing Messianic understanding of the Sabbath rest, it appears that Christ, by offering His rest immediately after His Messianic disclosure intended to substantiate His Messianic claim by offering what the Messiah was expected to bring—namely, the peace and rest typified by the Sabbath.<sup>52</sup>

**The Savior's Rest and the Sabbath.** The connection between Jesus' rest and the Sabbath is also indicated in Matthew by the placement of the former (11:28-30) in the immediate context of two Sabbath episodes (12:1-14). The two are connected, as noted by several scholars, not only *structurally* but also *temporally* by the phrase "at that time" (12:1).<sup>53</sup> The time referred to is a Sabbath day when Jesus and the disciples went through a field.

The fact that, according to Matthew, Christ offered His rest on a Sabbath day suggests the possibility that the two are linked together not only *temporally* but also *theologically*. The theological connection between the two is clarified by the two Sabbath episodes which serve to explain how the Messianic rest offered by Jesus is related to the Sabbath. The first story about the disciples plucking ears of corn on a Sabbath (Matt 12:1-8) interprets Jesus' rest as redemption-rest, especially through Christ's appeal to the example of the priests who worked intensively on the Sabbath in the Temple and yet were "guiltless" (Matt 12:5). The second story about the healing of the man with the withered hand interprets Jesus' rest as restoration-rest, especially through Christ's illustration of the rescuing of a sheep from a pit on the Sabbath (Matt 12:11-12).

Why were the priests "guiltless" though offering more services and sacrifices on the Sabbath (Num 28:8, 9)? Certainly it was not because they took a day off at another time during the week. No such provision is contemplated in the Old Testament. The absence of such a provision constitutes a direct challenge to the *one-day-in-seven principle* so greatly relied upon by many Christians to justify Sunday observance on the basis of the Sabbath commandment. Donald Carson, editor of the scholarly symposium *From Sabbath to the Lord's Day*, acknowledges that "if the Old Testament principle were really 'one day in seven for worship and rest' instead of 'the seventh day for worship and rest,' we might have expected Old Testament legislation to prescribe some other day off for the priests. The lack of such confirms the importance in Old Testament thought of the *seventh* day, as opposed to the mere one-in-seven principle so greatly relied upon by those who wish to see in Sunday the precise New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament Sabbath."<sup>54</sup>

The priests performed activities on the Sabbath which per se were rightly condemned by the commandment; yet they were guiltless because they were fulfilling the purpose of the Sabbath, which is to supply the spiritual needs of the people. But, how could Christ defend His actions as well as those of His disciples by this example of the service performed by the priests on the

Sabbath, when neither He nor His disciples were fulfilling the divine law of sacrifices on that day? The answer is found in the subsequent statement Christ made: “I tell you something greater than the temple is here” (Matt 12:6).

The symbolic function of the temple and its services had now found its fulfillment and were superseded by the service of the *True High Priest*. Therefore, on the Sabbath, and even by preference on the Sabbath, Christ also must intensify His “sacrificial offering,” that is to say, His ministry of salvation on behalf of needy sinners; and what He does His followers, the new priesthood, must do likewise. In John 7:22-23 Christ expresses the same concept. As the priest on the Sabbath extends the blessing of the covenant to the newborn through the act of circumcision, so Christ on the Sabbath must work for the salvation of the entire person.

Christ finds in the redemptive work performed typologically by the priests on the Sabbath a valid basis to justify His own Sabbath ministry because He views it as “something greater than the temple” (12:6). The redemption offered *typologically* through the Temple services and sacrifices performed by the priests<sup>55</sup> is now being provided *realistically* through the saving mission of the Son of Man, the Messiah.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, just as the priests were “guiltless” in performing their Sabbath services in the Temple, so were Jesus’ disciples in serving the One who is greater than the Temple.<sup>57</sup>

The Temple and its services provide Jesus with a valid frame of reference to explain His Sabbath theology. This is because their redemptive function best exemplified both His Messianic mission and the divine intended purpose for the Sabbath. In fact, by identifying His saving mission with the Sabbath, Christ reveals the ultimate divine purpose of the commandment, namely, fellowship with God. Through Christ’s redemptive ministry, the Sabbath becomes a time not only to commemorate God’s past creation but also to experience the blessings of salvation by ministering to the needs of others.

The humanitarian dimension of the Sabbath unfortunately had largely been forgotten in Christ’s day. The claims of rituals had taken the place of the claims of service to human needs. In the statement reported by Matthew, Christ openly attacks this perversion of the Sabbath, saying, “If you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless” (Matt 12:7). For Christ, the disciples are “guiltless” though they had contravened the Sabbath law of complete rest because the true meaning of the commandment is “mercy and not sacrifice.”

What do “mercy” and “sacrifice” stand for? The prophet Hosea, from whose book these words are quoted, rebukes his people for “seeking the Lord . . . with their flocks and herds” (5 :6) as if God could be propitiated by the many costly sacrifices (cf. 1 Sam 15:22). The prophet reminds them that what God desires is “mercy and not sacrifice” (Hos 6:6). This mercy desired by God is characterized both in the Old and New Testaments by a compassionate attitude that finds expression in helpful acts. In the Gospel of Matthew, especially, “mercy” denotes the acts of aid and relief that members of the covenant community owe to one another (Matt 5:7; 9:13; 12:7, 23:23). It was this pity and sympathy for anyone in distress that the Pharisees lacked. Therefore, the hunger experienced by Christ and His disciples did not kindle within their hearts any feeling of tenderness or eagerness to help. Instead, they were condemning the disciples.

This showing of love by acts of kindness represents for Christ the true observance of the Sabbath, since it acknowledges the very redemptive activity of God, which the day commemorates. In fact, as memorial of the divine redemption from both the bondage of Egypt (Deut 5:15) and the bonds of sin (Luke 4:18-19; 13:16; John 5:17), the Sabbath is the time when believers experience God’s merciful salvation by expressing kindness and mercy toward others. Therefore, the order of the true Sabbath service which Christ sets up requires first the living-loving service of the heart and then the fulfillment of cultic prescriptions. It is a sobering thought that in the Gospels less is said about the preaching ministry of Christ on the Sabbath in the Synagogue and more about His ministry of compassion and mercy on behalf of needy sinners.

**Authority or Legality?** Some scholars argue that Christ used the example of David and of the priests in order to show His *authority* to transcend the Sabbath law rather than to prove the *legality* of the disciples’ action within that law. For them, “it is a question of authority rather than of legality” that is at stake in this passage.<sup>58</sup> The comparison between the priests and Christ is allegedly supposed to show that “persons with authority” can override the Sabbath.<sup>59</sup> The ultimate conclusion drawn from such reasoning is that Christ’s authoritative teaching supposedly anticipates the change in the day of worship, which, however, did not actually occur until after the resurrection.<sup>60</sup> Such reasoning reveals a genuine desire to find grounds for Sunday observance in Christ’s teaching, but it cannot be legitimately supported by Christ’s arguments.

Did Christ appeal to the example of David and of the priests to show that persons of *authority* have the right to *supersede* the Sabbath law? Can

human authority per se be regarded as a valid criterion to transcend God's law? If this were true, there would be constant conflict between human authority and divine precepts. Such a conflict, however, does not exist in Jesus' reasoning. What He tells the Pharisees is not that the law does not apply to important persons such as David or the priests but, on the contrary, that their exceptional conduct, like that of the disciples, is contemplated by the law. This is clearly indicated by the counter-question Christ asks twice: "Have you not read in the law . . .?" (Matt 12:5; cf. v. 3).

Note that it is *within the law* (not outside it) that Jesus finds precedents to defend the legality of the disciples' conduct. The disciples were "guiltless" then, not because their authority (or that of Christ) transcended the law, but because their action fell *within the intention of the law itself*. David Hill stresses this point in his comment on Matthew 12:5: "The verse provides a precedent for the action of the disciples *within the Law itself*, and therefore places Jesus securely within the Law."<sup>61</sup>

**Christ, the Interpreter of the Law.** All laws must be interpreted. The case of the priests provides a fitting example. The law ordered them to work on the Sabbath (Num 28:9; Lev 24:8), thus causing them to break another law—that of the Sabbath rest (Ex 20:8-10). This means that the letter of the law cannot be applied indiscriminately, but must be interpreted discriminately when applied to specific cases. In American society, the Supreme Court acts as the final interpreter of the intent of the laws of the land. This is the authority that Christ claims by proclaiming Himself "Lord of the Sabbath" (Matt 12:8; Mark 2:28). It is not the authority to abrogate or substitute the Sabbath commandment but rather to reveal its *true divine intention*.<sup>62</sup>

Christ demonstrates this authority as interpreter of the true meaning of the Fourth Commandment by presenting five significant arguments to defend the innocence of His disciples. First, the Lord refers to David to validate the general principle that the law admits exceptions (Matt 12:3; Mark 2:25). Second, Christ provides a specific example of exceptional use of the Sabbath by the priests to prove that the commandment does not preclude but contemplates ministering to the spiritual needs of people (Matt 12:5). Third, Christ claims for Himself and His disciples the same Sabbath privileges of the priests because, as the superior Antitype of the Temple and its priesthood (Matt 12:6), He and His followers also, like the priests, must provide a ministry of salvation to needy sinners.

Fourth, by citing Hosea's statement, "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice" (Matt 12:7), Jesus explains that the order of priorities in the observance

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of the Sabbath is first a loving service to needy persons and then the fulfillment of ritual prescriptions. Lastly, Jesus asserts His lordship over the Sabbath—that is, His prerogative to interpret its meaning by reaffirming the fundamental principle that the Sabbath was instituted to insure human well-being (Mark 2:28). Consequently, to deny human needs on account of the Sabbath is a perversion of its original purpose.

**The Man with the Withered Hand.** Christ’s proclamation of lordship over the Sabbath is followed immediately by a second healing episode of the man with the withered hand (Matt 12:9-21; cf. Mark 3 :1-6). The function of this healing was to demonstrate how Christ exerted His lordship over the Sabbath by offering Messianic healing and restoration on that day.

Jesus finds Himself in the synagogue before a man with a paralyzed hand, brought there in all probability by a deputation of Scribes and Pharisees. They came to the synagogue, not to worship, but to scrutinize Christ and “see whether he would heal him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him” (Mark 3:2). According to Matthew, they ask Christ the testing question: “Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath?” (Matt 12:10). Their question is not motivated by a genuine concern for the sick man, nor by a desire to explore how the Sabbath is related to the healing ministry. Rather, they are there as the authority who knows all the exemptions foreseen by the rabbinic casuistry and who wants to judge Christ on the basis of the minutiae of their regulations.

Christ reading their thoughts is “grieved at their hardness of heart” (Mark 3:5). He accepts the challenge and meets it fairly and squarely. First, He invites the man to come to the front, saying, “Come here” (Mark 3:3). This step is possibly designed to waken sympathy for the stricken man and at the same time to make sure all are aware of what He is about to do. Then He asks the experts of the law, “Is it lawful on the sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” (Mark 3:4). To bring this question into sharper focus, according to Matthew, Christ adds a second question in the form of a parabolic saying: “What man of you, if he has one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep?” (Matt 12:11,12).

These questions raise an important issue. By the question of principle, which Christ illustrated with the second question containing a concrete example, did He intend to abrogate radically the Sabbath commandment or did He aim at restoring the institution to its original divine value and function? Most scholars subscribe to the former option. For example, Leonard Goppelt emphatically states that “Jesus’ double question marks the end of the Sabbath

commandment: it is no longer a statutory ordinance and it no longer has absolute validity if this all-embracing, overlapping alternative is valid—namely to save life.”<sup>63</sup>

This interpretation rests on the assumption that “to save life” is contrary to the spirit and function of the Sabbath. Can this be true? It may perhaps reflect the prevailing misconception and misuse of the Sabbath, but not the original purpose of the Sabbath commandment. To accept this supposition would make God guilty of failing to safeguard the value of life when instituting the Sabbath.

**The Sabbath: A Day to Show Concern.** The original purpose of the Sabbath and its related institutions is to emphasize the importance of loving one’s neighbor, especially the defenseless. In the various versions of the Sabbath commandment, for instance, a recurring list of persons appears to whom freedom to rest on the Sabbath is to be granted. The ones particularly singled out are usually the manservant, the maidservant, the son of the bondmaid, the cattle, and the sojourner and/or alien. This indicates that the Sabbath was ordained especially to show compassion toward defenseless and needy beings. “Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh you shall rest; that your ox and your ass may have rest and the son of your bond-maid and the alien may be refreshed” (Ex 23 :12).

Niels-Erik Andreasen aptly comments that “the landlord must be concerned with the human value of his subjects, just as Yahweh was when he secured freedom for his people.”<sup>64</sup> It is indeed moving that the Sabbath was designed to show concern even for the cattle, but, Hans Walter Wolf points out, “It is even more touching that, of all the dependent laborers, the son of the female slave and the alien are especially singled out. For when such persons are ordered to work, they have no recourse or protection.”<sup>65</sup>

This original dimension of the Sabbath as a day to honor God by showing concern and compassion to fellow beings had largely been forgotten in the time of Jesus. The Sabbath had become the day when correct performance of a ritual was more important than a spontaneous response to the cry of human needs. Our story provides a fitting example of this prevailing perversion by contrasting two types of Sabbath-keepers. On one side stood Christ “grieved at the hardness of the heart” of his accusers and taking steps to save the life of a wretched man (Mark 3:4-5). On the other side stood the experts of the law who, even while sitting in a place of worship, spent their Sabbath time looking for faults and thinking of methods to kill Christ (Mark 3:2,6). This contrast of attitudes may well provide the explanation to Christ’s question about the legitimacy of saving or killing on the Sabbath (Mark 3:4);



the person who is not concerned for the physical and spiritual salvation of others on the Sabbath is automatically involved in destructive efforts or attitudes.

Christ's program of Sabbath reform must be seen in the context of His overall attitude toward the law. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ explains that His mission is to restore the various prescriptions of the law to their original intentions (Matt 5 :17,21ff.). This work of clarifying the intent behind the commandments was a dire necessity since the accumulation of traditions had in many cases obscured their original function. As Christ put it, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition!" (Mark 7:9).

The fifth commandment, for instance, which enjoins one to "honor your father and your mother," according to Christ, had been made void through the tradition of the Corban (Mark 7:12-13). This practice consisted in translating a service or an obligation to be rendered to one's parents into a gift to be given to the temple. Likewise, the Sabbath commandment, unless liberated from the many senseless casuistic restrictions, would have remained a system for self-righteousness rather than a time for loving the Creator-Redeemer and one's fellow beings.

By healing the man with the withered hand, Christ not only clarified the intent of the Sabbath commandment but also demonstrated how He fulfilled the Messianic restoration which had been nourished by the celebration of the Sabbath. These intentional healing acts performed by Christ on behalf of incurable persons serve to clarify the relationship between the Savior's rest and the Sabbath.

Summing up, in Matthew the Old Testament Sabbath rest is seen as being actualized by Christ who offers to His followers the Messianic rest. The two Sabbath episodes reported by Matthew qualify the meaning of the Sabbath rest, first as Messianic *redemption* through its references to mercy and to Sabbath services performed by priests, and second, as Messianic *restoration* through the example of the Sabbath rescuing of a sheep and the restoring to health of a sick man. In the light of this redemptive/Messianic understanding of the Sabbath, how was the Sabbath observed in the Matthean community and in the apostolic church as a whole? This question is addressed below in the final section of this chapter dealing with the manner of Sabbathkeeping in the Apostolic Church.

### 3. The Sabbath in John

In John's Gospel, the relationship between the Sabbath and Christ's work of salvation is alluded to in two Sabbath miracles: the healing of the paralytic (John 5:1-18) and of the blind man (John 9:1-41). The two episodes are examined together since they are substantially similar. Both healed men had been chronically ill: one an invalid for 38 years (John 5:5) and the other blind from birth (John 9:2). In both instances, Christ told the men to act. To the paralyzed man He said, "Rise, take up your pallet, and walk" (John 5:8); to the blind man, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (John 9:7). Both of these actions represent breaking rabbinical Sabbath laws, and thus both are used by Pharisees to charge Christ with Sabbath-breaking (John 5:10, 16; 9:14-16). In both instances, Christ repudiated such a charge by arguing that His works of salvation are not precluded but rather contemplated by the Sabbath commandment (John 5:17; 7:23; 9:4). Christ's justification is expressed especially through a memorable statement: "My Father is working until now and I am working" (John 5:17; cf. 9:4).

**Negation or Clarification of the Sabbath?** What did Christ mean when He formally defended Himself against the charge of Sabbath-breaking by appealing to the "working until now" of His Father? Did He use the example of His Father to rescind the obligation of Sabbathkeeping both for Himself and for His followers or to clarify its true nature and meaning? To put it bluntly, does Christ's statement represent a *negation* or a *clarification* of the Sabbath law?

In a previous study I showed that the "working until now" of the Father and of the Son has historically received three basic interpretations: (1) continuous creation, (2) continuous care, and (3) redemptive activities.<sup>66</sup> The exponents of these three views basically agree in regarding Christ's pronouncement as an implicit (for some, explicit) annulment of the Sabbath commandment. Does such a conclusion reflect the legitimate meaning of the passage or rather arbitrary assumptions which have been read into the passage? To answer this question and to understand the significance of Christ's saying, we briefly examine the role of the adverb "until now"—*heos arti*, the meaning of the verb "is working"—*ergazetai*, and the theological implications of the passage.

**The Adverb "Until Now."** Traditionally, the adverbial phrase "until now" has been interpreted as the *continuous* working of God (whether it be in creation, preservation, or redemption) which allegedly overrides or rescinds the Sabbath law. But the adverb itself ("until"), especially as used in Greek in its emphatic position before the verb, presupposes not *constancy* but

*culmination*. The latter is brought out by some translators through the use of the emphatic form “even until now.”<sup>67</sup>

This adverbial phrase presupposes a beginning (*terminus a quo*) and an end (*terminus ad quem*). The former is apparently the initial creation Sabbath (Gen 2:2-3) and the latter the final Sabbath rest envisaged in a similar Sabbath pronouncement as the “night . . . when no one can work” (9:4). What Jesus is saying, then, is that though God rested on the Sabbath at the completion of creation, because of sin He has been “working until now” to bring the promised Sabbath rest to fruition.

**The Verb “Is Working.”** The meaning of the verb “is working” until now of the Father is clarified by John’s references to the working and works of God which are repeatedly and explicitly identified, not with a continuous divine creation nor with a constant maintenance of the universe, but with the saving mission of Christ.

Jesus explicitly states: “This is the *work* of God, that you *believe* in him whom he has sent” (John 6:29, emphasis supplied). And again, “If I am not doing the *works* of my Father, then do not *believe* me; but if I do them, even though you do not *believe* me, *believe the works*, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (John 10:37, 38; cf. 4:34; 14:11; 15:24; emphasis supplied).

The redemptive nature of the works of God is evident in the healing of the blind man since the act is explicitly described as the manifestation of “the works of God” (John 9:3). This means then that God ended on the Sabbath His *works of creation* but not His *working, in general*. Because of sin, He has been engaged in the work of redemption “until now.” To use the words of A. T. Lincoln, one might say, “As regards the work of creation God’s rest was final, but as that rest was meant for humanity to enjoy, when it was disturbed by sin, God worked in history to accomplish his original purpose.”<sup>68</sup>

**Theological Implications.** Christ appeals to the “working” of His Father not to nullify but to clarify the function of the Sabbath. To understand Christ’s defense, one must remember that the Sabbath is linked both to *creation* (Gen 2:2-3; Ex 20:11) and *redemption* (Deut 5:15).

While by interrupting all secular activities the Israelite was remembering the Creator-God, by acting mercifully toward fellow-beings he was imitating the Redeemer-God. This was true not only in the life of the people, in general, who on the Sabbath were to be compassionate toward the less fortunate, but especially in the service of the priest who could legitimately

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perform on the Sabbath works forbidden to other Israelites, because such works had a redemptive function.

On the basis of this theology of the Sabbath admitted by the Jews, Christ defends the legality of the “working” that He and His Father perform on the Sabbath. In John, Christ appeals to the example of circumcision to silence the echo of the controversy over the healing of the paralytic (John 7:22-24). The Lord argues that if it is legitimate on the Sabbath for the priests to care for one small part of man’s body (according to rabbinic reckoning, circumcision involved one of man’s 248 members)<sup>69</sup> in order to extend to the newborn child the salvation of the covenant,<sup>70</sup> there is no reason to be “angry” with Him for restoring on that day the “*whole body* of man” (John 7:23).

For Christ, the Sabbath is the day to work for the redemption of the *whole* man. This is borne out by the fact that in both healings, Christ looked for the healed men on the same day and, having found them, He ministered to their spiritual need (John 5:14; 9:35-38). Christ’s opponents cannot perceive the redemptive nature of His Sabbath ministry because they “judge by appearances” (John 7:24). For them, the pallet and the clay are more important than the social reunion (5:10) and the restoration of sight (John 9:14) which those objects symbolized. It was necessary therefore for Christ to act against prevailing misconceptions in order to restore the Sabbath to its positive function.

In the Sabbath healing of the blind man recorded in John 9, Christ extends to His followers the invitation to become links of the same redemptive chain, saying: “We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work” (v. 4). The “night” apparently refers to the conclusion of the history of salvation, a conclusion which we found implied in the adverbial phrase “until now.” Such a conclusion of divine and human redemptive activity would usher in the final Sabbath of which the creation Sabbath was a prototype.

To bring about that final Sabbath, the Godhead “is working” for our salvation (John 5:17); but “*we* must work” to extend it to others (John 9:4). The foregoing considerations indicate that the two Sabbath healings reported by John substantiate the redemptive meaning of the Sabbath we found earlier in Luke and Matthew—namely, a time to experience and share the blessings of salvation accomplished by Christ.

#### 4. The Sabbath in Hebrews

The redemptive meaning of the Sabbath we found in the Gospels is reflected in Hebrews 4:1-11 where the author draws upon existing

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eschatological understandings of the Sabbath rest to relate God's rest of the seventh day of creation (Heb 4:4) to all the rest and peace God intends to confer on His people. The discussion of the Sabbath in Hebrews is crucial to our study because it reveals how Sabbathkeeping was understood and experienced by the New Testament church.

In Chapter 3, we examined how the Sabbath in Hebrews relates to the discussion about the Old and New Covenants. At this juncture, our concern is to establish if the meaning of Sabbathkeeping in Hebrews reflects the same redemptive meaning of the Sabbath we have found in the Gospels.

The relationship between the Sabbath and the Savior is established by the author of Hebrews by linking together Genesis 2:2 with Psalm 95:7, 11. By means of these two texts the writer of Hebrews explains that the Sabbath rest offered at creation (Heb 4:4) was not exhausted when the Israelites under Joshua found a resting place in Canaan, since God offered again His rest "long afterwards" through David (Heb 4:7; cf. Ps 95:7). Consequently, God's promised Sabbath rest still awaited a fuller realization which has dawned with the coming of Christ (Heb 4:9). It is by believing in Jesus Christ that God's people can at last experience ("enter"—Heb 4:3, 10, 11) the "good news" of God's rest promised on the "seventh day" of creation (Heb 4:4).

**Literal or Figurative Sabbathkeeping?** What inference can be legitimately drawn from this passage regarding the actual observance and understanding of the Sabbath among the recipients of Hebrews? The position of the majority of commentators is that this passage provides no indication that these "Hebrew" Christians actually observed the Sabbath or that the author intended to give a Christian interpretation to such an observance. We find this to be the position of Ratzlaff who submits five reasons against a literal interpretation of "*sabbatismos*—Sabbathkeeping" (Heb 4:9). Since we have already dealt with Ratzlaff's reasons in chapter 3, at this juncture we wish to consider three other basic reasons advanced to support a figurative interpretation of the Sabbath rest in Hebrews.<sup>71</sup>

First, some argue that since the author of Hebrews discusses not the actual observance of the Sabbath but the permanence and the fulfillment of its rest through the Christ-event, no inference can be drawn regarding its literal observance.

Second, some point out that since "the Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God" (Heb 4:9) is a future realization, the exhortation to enter God's rest (Heb 4:10, 11) has no implication for the present observance of the day.<sup>72</sup>

Third, some assume that since the author of Hebrews in a number of instances indicates that, with the coming of Christ, certain Old Covenant institutions were made “obsolete” (Heb 8:13; 7:11-9:28), the Sabbath was presumably among those “obsolete” institutions.

None of these arguments are convincing. The first argument fails to recognize that the recipients of the Epistle (whether Gentiles or Jewish-Christians) were so attracted to Jewish liturgy (of which the Sabbath was a fundamental part) that it was unnecessary for the author to discuss or to encourage its actual observance. What those “Hebrew” Christians actually needed, tempted as they were to turn back to Judaism,<sup>73</sup> was to understand the meaning of Sabbath observance in the light of Christ’s coming.

With regards to the second argument, one can hardly say that in Hebrews the Sabbath rest is viewed primarily as a future benefit, unrelated to the present observance of the day. The Sabbath rest that “remains for the people of God” (Heb 4:9) is presented primarily as a present experience into which those “who have believed *are entering*” (Heb 4:3).

The verb “are entering” (Heb 4:3) is in the present tense and, in Greek, is placed first in the sentence to stress the present reality of this “rest” experience. The same is true of the verb “remains” (Heb 4:9). If taken out of context, it could imply a future prospect; but in its present context, it refers back to the time of Joshua (Heb 4:8) in order to emphasize the present permanence of the Sabbath rest for God’s people.

**Obsolete or Remaining?** This leads us to the third argument, which maintains that the Sabbath is an Old Testament shadow or type of the salvation rest which Christ has fulfilled and, consequently, its function terminated with His coming.

Does Hebrews teach that the Sabbath, like the temple and its services, lived out its function with the coming of Christ? Or did the Sabbath acquire fresh meaning and function with His coming? Our study of the Sabbath material of the Gospels shows that Christ fulfilled the typological and eschatological Messianic Sabbath rest and release, not by annulling the actual observance of the day, but by making it a time to experience and share His accomplished salvation.

Let us now look at what Hebrews has to say on this point. There is no question that the author clearly teaches that Christ’s coming has brought about “a decisive discontinuity” with the sacrificial system of the Old Covenant. In chapters 7 to 10, the writer of Hebrews explains at great length how Christ’s atoning sacrifice and subsequent heavenly ministry have re-

placed completely the typological (“copy and shadow”—Heb 8 :5) function of the levitical priesthood and its Temple. These services Christ “abolished” (Heb 10:9). Thus they are “obsolete” and “ready to vanish away” (Heb 8:13). But, does the writer of Hebrews place the Sabbath in the same category, viewing it as one of the “obsolete” Old Covenant institutions? This is indeed the conclusion that many have drawn, but it can hardly be supported by a careful study of the passage.

The “*sabbatismos*—Sabbath rest” is explicitly and emphatically presented, not as being “*obsolete*” like the Temple and its services, but as being a divine benefit that still “*remains*” (Heb 4:9). We noted in Chapter 3 that the verb “remains—*apoleipetai*” is a present passive tense which literally translated means “has been left behind.” Thus, literally translated, Hebrews 4:9 reads as follows: “So then a Sabbath-keeping has been left behind for the people of God.”

The contrast between the Sabbath and the sanctuary services is obvious. While the latter are “obsolete,” the former is “left behind” and, therefore, is still relevant. A similar contrast is found in the Gospel of Matthew. There the rending of the Temple curtain in conjunction with Christ’s death (Matt 27:51) indicates the termination of the Temple services. On the other hand, Christ’s warning about the possibility that the future flight out of the city might occur on a Sabbath (Matt 24:20) takes for granted the permanence of its observance.

The exhortation given in verse 11 to “strive to enter that rest” provides an additional indication of the permanence of the Sabbath. The fact that one must make an effort “to enter that rest” implies that the “rest” experience of the Sabbath is not exhausted in the present but has a future realization also. This Christian view of the Sabbath rest as representing not only a *present* but also a *future* “rest” experience reflects to a large extent what we have already found in the Old Testament and in later Jewish literature. There we noted that the Sabbath was understood not only as a *present* experience of personal rest and liberation from social injustices but also as the anticipation of the *future* rest and peace to be realized by the Messiah. Thus, in his own way, the author of Hebrews reaffirms the Old Testament understanding of the Sabbath in a fresh Christian setting— namely, a day to experience the present rest of salvation while looking forward to the future and final rest in the heavenly Canaan.

**Literal or Spiritual Sabbathkeeping?** What is the nature of the “Sabbath rest” that is still outstanding for God’s people (4:9)? Is the writer

thinking of a literal or spiritual type of Sabbathkeeping? The passage provides two important indications that support a literal understanding of Sabbathkeeping as a faith response to God. Since we have already discussed at some length both of these indications in Chapter 3, we only briefly mention them in this context.

The first indication is the usage of the term “*sabbatismos*—Sabbathkeeping” found in Hebrews 4:9. Though the term occurs only in Hebrews 4:9 in the New Testament, it is used in secular and Christian literature as a technical term for literal Sabbathkeeping.<sup>74</sup> Consequently, the usage of “*sabbatismos*—Sabbathkeeping” in verse 9 makes it abundantly clear that the writer of Hebrews is thinking of a literal Sabbath observance.<sup>75</sup>

The second indication is the description of the Sabbath rest as cessation from work which is found in verse 10: “For whoever enters God’s rest also ceases from his labors as God did from his” (Heb 4:10). Historically, the majority of commentators have interpreted the cessation from work of Hebrews 4:10 in a figurative sense, as “abstention from servile work,” meaning sinful activities.<sup>76</sup> Thus, Christian Sabbathkeeping means not the interruption of daily work on the seventh day but the abstention from sinful acts at all times.

In support of this view, appeal is made to Hebrews’ reference to “dead works” (Heb 6:1; 9:14). Such a concept, however, cannot be read back into Hebrews 4:10 where a comparison is made between the divine and the human cessation from “works.” It would be absurd to think that God ceased from “sinful deeds.” The point of the analogy, as indicated in Chapter 3, is simply that as God ceased on the seventh day from His creation work, so believers are to cease on the same day from their labors. This is a simple statement of the nature of Sabbathkeeping which essentially involves cessation from works.

**The Meaning of Sabbathkeeping.** Is the author of Hebrews merely encouraging his readers to interrupt their secular activities on the Sabbath? Considering the concern of the writer to counteract the tendency of his readers to adopt Jewish liturgical customs as a means to gain access to God, he could hardly have emphasized solely the physical “cessation” aspect of Sabbathkeeping. This aspect yields only a negative idea of rest, one which would only serve to encourage existing Judaizing tendencies. Obviously, then, the author attributes a deeper meaning to the act of resting on the Sabbath.



The deeper meaning can be seen in the antithesis the author makes between those who failed to enter into God's rest because of "*unbelief—apeitheias*" (Heb 4:6, 11)—that is, faithlessness which results in disobedience—and those who enter it by "*faith—pistei*" (Heb 4:2, 3)—that is, faithfulness that results in obedience.

The act of resting on the Sabbath for the author of Hebrews is not merely a routine ritual (cf. "sacrifice"—Matt 12:7), but rather a faith-response to God. Such a response entails not the hardening of one's heart (Heb 4:7) but the making of oneself available to "hear his voice" (Heb 4:7). It means experiencing God's salvation rest not by *works* but by *faith*, not by *doing* but by *being saved through faith* (Heb 4:2, 3, 11). On the Sabbath, as John Calvin aptly expresses it, believers are "to cease from their work to allow God to work in them."<sup>77</sup>

The Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God (4:9) is not a mere day of idleness, for the author of Hebrews, but rather an opportunity renewed every week to enter *God's rest*—to free oneself from the cares of work in order to experience freely by faith God's creation and redemption rest. The Sabbath experience of the blessings of salvation is not exhausted in the present, since the author exhorts his readers to "strive to enter that rest" (Heb 4:11). This dimension of the future Sabbath rest shows that Sabbathkeeping in Hebrews expresses the tension between the "already" and the "not yet," between the present experience of salvation and its eschatological consummation in the heavenly Canaan.

This expanded interpretation of Sabbathkeeping in the light of the Christ event was apparently designed to wean Christians away from a too materialistic understanding of its observance. To achieve this objective, the author of Hebrews on the one hand reassures his readers of the permanence of the blessings contemplated by the Sabbath rest and, on the other hand, explains that the nature of these blessings consists in experiencing both a present salvation-rest and the future restoration-rest which God offers to those "who have believed" (Heb 4:3).

It is evident that for the author of Hebrews, the Sabbathkeeping that remains for New Covenant Christians is not only a physical experience of cessation from work on the seventh day, but also a faith response, a yes "today" response to God. As Karl Barth eloquently explains it, the act of resting on Sabbath is an act of resignation to our human efforts to achieve salvation in order "to allow the omnipotent grace of God to have the first and last word at every point."<sup>78</sup>

Hebrews' interpretation of the Sabbath rest reflects to a large extent the redemptive understanding of the day we found earlier in the Gospels. Christ's great promise to have come to offer the expected sabbatical "release" (Luke 4:18) and "rest" (Matt 11:28) represents the core of the "Sabbath rest" available "today" to God's people (Heb 4:7, 9). Similarly, Christ's assurance that He and His Father are "working until now" (John 5:17) to realize the final Sabbath rest is reflected in the exhortation to "strive to enter that rest" (Heb 4:1).

The fact that Hebrews 4 reflects the gospel understanding of the Sabbath as a time to experience the blessings of salvation, which will be fully realized at the end of our earthly pilgrimage, shows that the Sabbath was understood in the Apostolic Church as a time to celebrate God's creative and redemptive love.

### 5. The Manner of Sabbathkeeping

How did New Testament believers observe the Sabbath in the light of its expanded redemptive meaning derived from Christ's ministry? Initially, most Christians attended Sabbath services at the Jewish synagogue (Acts 13:14, 43, 44; 17:2; 18:4). Gradually, however, Christians established their own places of worship. Matthew suggests that the process of separation had already begun at the time of his writing, because he speaks of Christ entering "their synagogue" (Matt 12:9). The pronoun "their" suggests that the Matthean community as a whole no longer shared in Sabbath services at the Jewish synagogue by the time the Gospel was written. Presumably, they had organized their own meeting places of worship by then.

The distinction in Sabbathkeeping between Christian and Jewish communities soon became not only *topological* but also *theological*. The various Sabbath pericopes reported in the Gospels reflect the existence of an ongoing controversy between the Christian congregations and the Jewish synagogues which, in some cases, may have been located across the street from one another. The controversy centered primarily on the manner of Sabbathkeeping in the light of Christ's teachings and example. Was the day to be observed primarily as "sacrifice," that is, as an outward fulfillment of the Sabbath law? Or was the Sabbath to be observed as "mercy," that is, as an occasion to show compassion and do good to those in need? (Matt 12:7).

**A Day to Do Good.** To defend the Christian understanding of Sabbathkeeping as a day to celebrate Messianic redemption by showing "mercy" and doing "good" to those in need, the Evangelists appeal to the example and teaching of Jesus. For example, in the healing of the crippled

woman, Luke contrasts two different concepts of Sabbathkeeping: that of the ruler of the synagogue versus that of Christ. For the ruler, the Sabbath consisted of rules to obey rather than people to love (Luke 13:14). For Christ, the Sabbath was a day to bring physical and spiritual liberation to needy people (Luke 13:12, 16).

Christ challenged the Ruler's misconception by appealing to the accepted customs of watering animals on the Sabbath. If the daily needs of animals could be met on the Sabbath, how much more the needs of "a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years"! Shouldn't she "be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?" (Luke 13:16).

This humanitarian understanding of the Sabbath is also expressed in the episode of the healing of the man with the withered hand, reported by all the three Synoptics (Mark 3:1-6; Matt 12:9-14; Luke 6:6-11). In this instance, Jesus responds to the testing question posed by a deputation of Scribes and Pharisees regarding the legitimacy of healing on the Sabbath by asking a question of principle: "Is it lawful on the sabbath, to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" (Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9).

It is noteworthy that in both Mark and Luke, Christ substitutes for the verb "to heal" (*therapeuein*), used in the question, the verbs "to do good" (*agathopoiein*) and "to save" (*sozein*). The reason for this change is Christ's concern to include not one type but all kinds of benevolent activities within the intention of the Sabbath commandment. Such a broad interpretation of the function of the Sabbath finds no parallel in rabbinic concessions.

**A Day of Benevolent Service.** According to Matthew, Christ illustrated the principle of Sabbathkeeping as a time of benevolent service by adding a second question that contains a concrete example: "What man of you, if he has one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more *value* is a man than a sheep!" (Matt 12:11-12). Both by the question of principle and by its illustration, Christ reveals the *original value* of the Sabbath as a day to honor God by showing concern and compassion for others. The believer who on the Sabbath experiences the blessing of salvation automatically is moved "to save" and not "to kill" others.

Christ's accusers, by failing to show concern for the physical and spiritual well-being of others on the Sabbath, revealed their defective understanding and experience of God's Holy Day. Rather than celebrating God's goodness on the Sabbath by being involved in a saving ministry, they engaged in destructive efforts, *looking for faults* and devising methods *to kill* Christ (Mark 3:2-6).

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The new Christian understanding of the Sabbath as a time of active, loving service to needy souls, rather than of passive idleness, represents a radical departure from contemporary Jewish Sabbathkeeping. This is attested to also in an early document known as the *Epistle to Diognetus* (dates between A. D. 130-200), where the Jews are charged with “speaking falsely of God” because they claim that “He [God] forbade us [Christians] to do what is good on the Sabbath-day—how is not this impious?”<sup>79</sup> This positive humanitarian understanding of Sabbathkeeping is rooted in Christ’s fulfillment of the redemptive typology of the Sabbath, which is brought out in the Gospels.

### Conclusion

The preceding study of the relationship between the Sabbath and the Savior shows that both in the Old and New Testaments the Sabbath is closely linked to Christ’s redemptive mission. In the Old Testament, various themes—such as Sabbath peace and prosperity, the Sabbath rest, the Sabbath liberation, and the sabbatical structure of time—indicate that, in Old Testament times, the weekly and annual Sabbaths served to epitomize and nourish the hope of Messianic redemption.

In the New Testament, the coming of Christ is seen as the actualization, the realization of the redemptive typology of the Sabbath. Through His redemptive mission, Christ offers to believers the expected sabbatical “release” (Luke 4:18) and “rest” (Matt 11:28). In the light of the Cross, the Sabbath memorializes not only God’s creative but also His redemptive accomplishments for mankind. Thus, “the Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God” (Heb 4:9) is not only a physical cessation from work to commemorate God’s perfect creation, but also a spiritual entering into God’s rest (Heb 4:10) made possible through Christ’s complete redemption. The physical act of resting becomes the means through which believers experience the spiritual rest. We cease from our daily work on the Sabbath to allow God to work in us more freely and fully.

In the New Testament, the Sabbath is not *nullified* but *clarified* and *amplified* by Christ’s teaching and saving ministry. Viewing the rest and redemption typified by the Old Testament Sabbath as realized by Christ’s redemptive mission, New Testament believers regarded Sabbathkeeping as a day to celebrate and experience the Messianic redemption-rest by showing “mercy” and doing “good” to those in need. This means that for believers today, the Sabbath is the day to celebrate not only God’s creation by resting, but also Christ’s redemption by acting mercifully toward others.

In an age when the forces of chaos and disorder increasingly appear to prevail—when injustice, greed, violence, corruption, crime, suffering, and death seem to dominate—God through the Sabbath reassures His people that these destructive forces will not triumph because “there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God” (Heb 4:9). Through the Sabbath, God reassures us that He is in control of this world, working out His ultimate purpose. God tells us that He conquered chaos at creation, that He has liberated His people from the bonds of sin and death through the saving mission of His Son, and that He “is working until now” (John 5 :17) in order to establish a New World where “from sabbath to sabbath all flesh shall come to worship before God” (Is 66:23). In that final Sabbath, as eloquently expressed by Augustine, “we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise.”<sup>80</sup>

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. Herbert W. Richardson, *Toward an American Theology* (New York, 1967), p. 139.

2. For my analysis of the Messianic typologies of the Sabbath in the Old Testament, see *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness* (Rome, 1980), pp.134-145; also “Sabbatical Typologies of Messianic Redemption,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, vol. 17, no. 2 (1987).

3. See also Is 11:7-9; 65:25; Hos 2:20.

4. *The Babylonian Talmud, Shabbath* 12a; cf. also 12b.

5. Mishnah, *Shabbath* 6:2. The quotations are taken from *The Mishnah*, ed. Herbert Danby (London, 1933).

6. For a convenient collection of texts, see Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel* (New York, 1955), pp. 43-44, 62-63, 85-86, 99-101, 158-160, 175-177, 283-284, 342-345, 377-378, 409-410, 505-512. *The Book of the Secrets of Enoch*, an apocryphon of the Old Testament composed between A.D. 1-50, alludes to the seven-day millennial scheme. It says: “And I blessed the seventh day which is the Sabbath . . . God shows Enoch the age of this world, its existence of seven thousand years” (32:3). A similar scheme was developed by the rabbis. *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer* asserts: “The Holy One, blessed be He, created seven aeons, and of them all He chose the seventh aeon only; the six aeons are for the going in and coming out . . . The seventh aeon is entirely Sabbath and rest in the life everlasting” (trans. Gerald Friedlander [New York, 1971], p. 141). See also *Shabbath* 30b; *Kethubboth* 111b.

7. For my analysis of Barnabas and of the patristic interpretation of the cosmic Sabbath, see *From Sabbath to Sunday* (Rome, 1977), pp. 218-223, 278-285.

8. Tosephta *Shabbat* 16:22 reads: “Beth Shammai says: ‘Contributions for the poor are not allotted on the Sabbath in the synagogue, even a dowry to marry an orphan young man to an orphan young woman. Quarrels between husband and wife are not adjudicated and one does not pray for the sick on the Sabbath.’ Beth Hillel permits these activities.”

9. Theodore Friedman, “The Sabbath: Anticipation of Redemption,” *Judaism* 16 (1967): 445.

10. *The Midrash on Psalms*, trans. William G. Braude (New Haven, 1959), vol. 2, p. 112. In a similar vein, *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer* says: “He created the seventh day, (but) not for work, because it is not said in connection therewith, ‘And it was evening and it was morning.’ Why? For it is reserved for the generations (to come), as it is said, ‘And there shall be one day which is known unto the Lord; not *day* and not *night*’ (Zech 14:7)” (trans. Gerald Friedlander [New York, 1971], p. 137). Cf. also *Shabbath* 11b; *Berakhoth* 58b; *Rosh Hashanah* 31a. Church Fathers also took notice of the absence of any mention of “evening and morning” in conjunction with the seventh day of creation and interpreted it as representing the future eternal peace and rest of the saints. For example, Augustine in his *Confessions* offers this sublime prayer: “O Lord God, grant Thy peace unto us . . . the peace of rest, the peace of the Sabbath, which hath no evening. For all this most beautiful order of things . . . is to pass away, for in them there was morning and evening. But the seventh day is without any evening, nor hath any setting, because Thou hast sanctified it to an everlasting continuance; that that which Thou didst after Thy works, which were very good, resting on the seventh day . . . that we also after our works (therefore very good, because Thou has given them unto us) may repose in Thee also in the Sabbath of eternal life” (*The Confessions of St. Augustine* 13, 50-51, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff [Grand Rapids, 1979], first series v. 1, p. 207). See also Augustine’s *City of God*, book 22, chapter 30.

11. *Bereshith Rabbah* 12:6.

12. According to the Midrash, the Sabbath acted as Adam’s savior when God was about to destroy him on Friday evening on account of his sin: “At that moment the Sabbath arrived and became Adam’s advocate, saying to the Holy One, blessed be He: ‘During the six days of Creation no one suffered punishment. And wilt Thou begin it with me? Is this my holiness? Is

this my rest?’ And thus Adam was saved by the Sabbath’s plea from destruction in Gehenna. When Adam saw the power of the Sabbath, he was about to sing a hymn in her honor” (*The Midrash on Psalms*, trans. William G. Braude [New Haven, 1959], vol. 2, p. 112).

13. The redemptive role of the Sabbath is reflected especially in the belief expressed by R. Eliezer of Modihim, that if Israel kept the Sabbath, the Lord would give her the land of Israel, the kingdom of the house of David, the future world, the new world (Mekilta, *Vayassah* 5:66-73). See also *Shabbath* 118b, 119b, 3a; *Mishnah Aboth* 5:8; Jubilees 2:28.

14. See, for example, *Bereshith Rabbah* 3:6; 11:2. For other sources, see Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1946), vol. 5, p. 8, n. 19.

15. Dale Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Crisis* (Applegate, California, 1990), p. 24.

16. See *The Midrash on Psalms* (n. 12), vol. 2, p. 112; *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer* (n. 10), p. 144.

17. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York, 1951), p. 23.

18. On the development of the rest-theme in the Old Testament, see Gerhard von Rad, “There Remains Still a Rest for the People of God,” in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (New York, 1966), pp. 94-102.

19. Ernst Jenni, *Die Theologische Begründung des Sabbatgebotes im Alten Testament* (Zurich, 1956), p. 282.

20. *The Midrash on Psalms* (n. 12), vol. 2, p. 113.

21. The author of Hebrews presents what may be called three different levels of meaning of the Sabbath rest: creation-rest (4:3), national-rest (4:6, 8), redemption-rest (4:3, 7, 9, 10). For my analysis of the passage, see Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness* (Rome, 1980), pp. 135-136, 164-170; idem, *From Sabbath to Sunday* (Rome, 1977), pp. 63-69.

22. *Sanhedrin* 97a.

23. *Mishnah Tamid* 7:4.

24. Ibid.

25. See *Mishnah Pesahim* 10:5. The underlying connection among the Sabbath, Passover, and the Day of Atonement appears to be not only theological (i.e., redemption motif) and terminological (i.e., *Shabbath* designation) but presumably also numerical. Saul J. Berman notes that “The fact that the Jewish calendar can be begun with either the month of Tishrei or with the month of Nissan will allow us to recognize a further relationship of the term, ‘Shabbat,’ to the number seven. Counting from the month of Tishrei, the seventh month, Nissan, contains a Shabbat, namely Pesah. Counting the months of the year from Nissan yields Tishrei as the seventh month, and that month too, contains a Shabbath, Yom Kippur . . . Pesah, in the seventh month from Tishrei, and Yom Kippur, in the seventh month from Nissan, together constitute the Sabbath of months” (“The Extended Notion of the Sabbath,” *Judaism* 22 (1973): 343). The weekly Sabbath appears then to share in common the theme of redemption with the Sabbath of months and the Sabbath of years (sabbatical and jubilee years).

26. For a perceptive discussion of the redemptive features of the Sabbath years, see George Wesley Buchanan, *Revelation and Redemption* (Dillsboro, North Carolina, 1978), pp. 9-10; idem, *The Consequences of the Covenant* (Leiden, 1970), p. 18.

27. Robert B. Sloan, *The Favorable Year of the Lord: A Study of Jubiliary Theology in the Gospel of Luke* (Austin, Texas, 1977).

28. Julian Morgenstern maintains that “in all likelihood the ‘great trumpet’ (Is 27:13), a blast from which would inaugurate a new and happier era for conquered and dispersed Israel, was a *yobel*. All this suggests cogently that the ram’s-horn trumpet was of unusual character, used only upon extraordinary occasions and for some particular purpose (cf. Ex 19:13) . . . This year acquired its name just because this unique, fiftieth year was ushered in by this blast upon the *yobel*, whereas the commencement of ordinary years was signaled only by a blast upon a *shophar* (2 Sam 15:10; cf. Lev 23:24)” (*The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* [Nashville, 1962], s. v. “Jubilee, Year of,” vol. 2, p. 1001).

29. *Behodesh Hashebihi* 172a, cited in George W. Buchanan, *Revelation and Redemption* (Dillsboro, North Carolina, 1978), p. 13.

30. The term and concept of “sabbatical eschatology” is used and explained by Buchanan, in *Revelation and Redemption* (note 26), pp. 3-6; also idem, *The Consequences of the Covenant* (note 30), pp. 9-17.



31. The terms “sabbatical messianism” and “chronomessianism” are used by Ben Zion Wacholder in his article, “Chronomessianism. The Timing of Messianic Movements and the Calendar of Sabbatical Cycles,” *Hebrews Union College Annual* 46 (1975), p. 201.

32. For an edition and analysis of 11Q Melchizedek, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “Further Light on Melchizedek from Qumran Cave II,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86 (1967), p. 25-41; M. de Jonge and A. S. van der Woude, “11Q Melchizedek and the New Testament,” *New Testament Studies* 12 (1865-1966), p. 301-326.

33. *Sanhedrin* 97b.

34. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York, 1951), p. 68.

35. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. John King (Grand Rapids, 1948), p. 106.

36. Paul K. Jewett, *The Lord’s Day: A Theological Guide to the Christian Day of Worship* (Grand Rapids, 1972), p. 86.

37. M. Max B. Turner, “The Sabbath, Sunday, and the Law in Luke/Acts,” in the symposium *From Sabbath to the Lord’s Day* (Grand Rapids, 1982), p. 102.

38. *Ibid.*

39. On the influence of the synagogue upon the Christian divine service, see C. W. Dugmore, *The Influence of the Synagogue upon the Divine Office*, 1964; A. Allan McArthur, *The Evolution of the Christian Year*, 1953; Dom Benedict Steuart, *The Development of Christian Worship*, 1953.

40. Luke 4:16,31; 6:1,2,5,6,7,9; 13:10,14,15,16; 14:1,3,5; 23:54, 56; Acts 1:12; 13:14,27,42,44; 15:21; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4.

41. See, for example, I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (New York, 1978), p. 883; F. Godet, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Saint Luke*, (London, 1870), II, p. 343; A. R. Leaney, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Luke* (Grand Rapids, 1966), p. 288. The same view is implied by the translators of the New International Version: “Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment” (Luke 23:56).

42. M. Max B. Turner (note 37), p. 102.

43. The two crucial terms of the passage are “to proclaim” and “release.” Both of these terms, which recur twice, are technical terms for the Sabbath years. For an informative treatment of this question, see Robert B. Sloan (note 27), pp. 32-42. P. Miller rightly notes: “The tie that binds Isaiah 61:1-2 and 58:6 together in Luke 4 is the small word *aphesis*, the word translated ‘release’ for the captives and ‘liberty’ for the oppressed . . . it is the catchword binding the two quotations together. Out of the four sentences in Isaiah 58:6 that all say essentially the same thing, the one chosen here in the gospel quotation is the one that in the Greek translation uses *aphesis*” (“Luke 4:16-21,” *Interpretation* 29 [October, 1975], p. 419).

44. H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (New York, 1960), p. 180. Similarly, G. B. Caird points out that Luke “places the incident at the beginning of his story of the Galilean ministry because it announces the *pattern* which the ministry is to follow” (*Saint Luke* [Grand Rapids, 1963], p. 86). Robert C. Tannehill also writes: “These words and acts [Luke 4:16-30] have typical programmatic significance for the whole of Jesus’ ministry as Lukes understands it . . . Luke chose to make this quotation [Luke 4:18-19] the title under which the whole ministry of Jesus is placed. He did so because it expresses clearly certain important aspects of his own understanding of Jesus and his ministry” (“The Mission of Jesus according to Luke 4:16-30,” in *Jesus in Nazareth* [Grand Rapids, 1972], pp. 51, 72).

45. Paul K. Jewett (note 36), p. 27. A. Strobel argues that behind Christ’s quotation lay an actual historical jubilee year which is dated in A.D. 26-27 (*Kerygma und Apokalyptik*, [1967], p. 105-111). If this were the case, then Christ’s speech would have added significance since it would have been delivered in the context of an actual jubilee year.

46. Paul K. Jewett (note 36), p. 42.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

48. This view is expressed, for example, by M. M. B. Turner who writes: “There is no question here of the Sabbath being particularly appropriate for such healing; any more than it is particularly appropriate on that day to loose oxen and donkey from their crib and to water them. The argument, in other words, is not that the Sabbath *is* a special day, in this respect, but precisely that it is *not*. The inbreaking kingdom, the loosing of Satan’s captives, is no respecter of days” (note 37, p. 107).

49. Nathan A. Barack correctly affirms: “The Sabbath inspires its beneficiaries to feel that the universe is the work of a purposeful Creator, that

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human life has meaning and sanctity, that all life must be preserved, and that even animals must be provided with their necessary rest” (*A History of the Sabbath* [1965], p. xii).

50. Robert Banks comments in this regard: “Luke desires to highlight those works of Jesus which bring salvation and healing to men, which as v. 16 makes clear, especially occur on that day” (*Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition* [1985], p.131). Similarly, I. Howard Marshall writes: “Hence it was necessary for her to be released immediately, even though it was Sabbath, perhaps indeed all the more fitting on the Sabbath” (*The Gospel of Luke* [1978], p. 559).

51. *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer* (note 10), p. 141.

52. For my extensive analysis of the literary context and of the sabbatical nature of Christ’s rest, see “Matthew 11:28-30: Jesus’ Rest and the Sabbath,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 24 (Summer 1984), p. 1-23.

53. See, for example, J. Daniélou, *Bible and Liturgy* (South Bend, Indiana, 1956), p. 226; David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (London, 1972), pp. 209-210; D. A. Carson, “Jesus and the Sabbath in the Four Gospels,” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day. A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids, 1982), p. 66.

54. Donald A. Carson, “Jesus and the Sabbath in the four Gospels,” in the symposium *From Sabbath to the Lord’s Day* (Grand Rapids, 1982), p. 102.

55. The book of Jubilees explains that “burning frankincense and bringing oblation and sacrifices before the Lord . . . shall be done on Sabbath-days in the sanctuary of the Lord your God; that they may atone for Israel with sacrifice” (50:10-11).

56. This view is held by various scholars. Gerhard Barth, for example, comments that by the phrase “something greater than the temple is here . . . undoubtedly Jesus is meant, for in him the Messianic fulfillment and consummation has come and he is therefore more than the Temple” (*Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* [Philadelphia, 1963], p. 82).

57. Ellen G. White perceptively notes: “The priests were performing those rites that pointed to the redeeming power of Christ, and their labor was in harmony with the object of the Sabbath. But now Christ Himself had come. The disciples, in doing the work of Christ, were engaged in God’s service, and that which was necessary for the accomplishment of this work it was right to do on the Sabbath” (*The Desire of Ages* [Mountain View, California, 1940], p. 285).

58. Robert Banks, *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition* (Grand Rapids, 1967), p. 117. Cf. Morna D. Hooker, *The Son of Man in Mark* (New York, 1967), p. 98; P. K. Jewett (note 36), p. 37.

59. D. A. Carson (note 54), p. 67.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 79. Cf. W. Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia, 1968), pp. 70, 296.

61. David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (1972), p. 211.

62. This view is emphatically stated by Etan Levine: "The Pharisees are not being told that the Sabbath injunctions should be abrogated; rather, within their own realm of discourse they are being reminded that plucking grain on the Sabbath is legitimate for sacred purposes. Thus, Jesus does not abrogate the *Torah*, but exercises his prerogative to interpret it, in this case defining the 'sacred' in term other than the Temple ritual, as the text explicitly states" ("The Sabbath Controversy According to Matthew," *New Testament Studies* 22 [1976]: 482). Similarly, William L. Lane writes: "The divine intention was in no way infringed by the plucking of heads of grain on the part of Jesus' disciples" (*The Gospel According to Mark* [New York, 1974], p. 120).

63. L. Goppelt, *Christentum und Judentum im ersten und zweiten Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1954), p. 46, as cited in W. Rordorf (note 60), p. 71. Rordorf himself defends this view and goes so far as to accuse Matthew of "beginning the moralistic misunderstanding of Jesus' attitude toward the Sabbath" (note 60, p. 68). This misunderstanding allegedly consists in assuming "that the obligation to love one's neighbour displaces in certain circumstances the command to keep a day of rest" (*ibid.*).

One wonders whether Matthew really misunderstood or truly understood Christ's meaning and message of the Sabbath, when he wrote, "It is lawful to do good on the sabbath" (Matt 12:12). It is true that in post-exilic Judaism an elaborate fence had been erected around the Sabbath to assure its faithful observance. The multitude of meticulous and casuistic regulations, produced to guard the Sabbath, turned the observance of the day into a legalistic ritual rather than into a loving service. It was Christ's intent to restore the Sabbath to the original divine design.

64. Niels-Erik Andreasen, "Festival and Freedom," *Interpretation* 28 (1974), p. 289.

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65. Hans Walter Wolff, "The Day of Rest in the Old Testament," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 43 (1972), p. 504.

66. For my analysis of John 5:17, see my article "John 5:17: Negation or Clarification of the Sabbath?" *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 19 (Spring 1981), p. 3-19.

67. See, for example, George Allen Turner, Julius R. Mantey, O. Cullman, E. C. Hoskyns, F. Godet on John 5:17.

68. A. T. Lincoln, "Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, ed. Donald A. Carson (Grand Rapids, 1982), p. 204.

69. *Yoma* 85b.

70. On the redemptive meaning of circumcision, see Rudolf Meyer, "peritemno," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel (Grand Rapids, 1973), vol. 6, pp. 75-76.

71. For a presentation of the three reasons, see A. T. Lincoln (note 68), pp. 212-214.

72. Among the commentators who view the fulfillment of the Sabbath rest as an exclusive future experience are E. Käsemann, O. Michel, H. Windisch, W. Manson, F. F. Bruce, F. Delitzsch, and R. C. H. Lenski.

73. Bruce Metzger rightly remarks: "Many of them felt themselves drawn to Jewish liturgy and were on the point of renouncing Christianity and returning to their ancestral Jewish faith" (*The New Testament: Its Background, Growth and Content* [Nashville, 1965], p. 249).

74. The term *sabbatismos* occurs in the following works: Plutarch, *De Superstitione* 3 (*Moralia* 1660); Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 23, 3; Epiphanius, *Adversus Haereses* 30, 2, 2; *Apostolic Constitutions* 2, 36.

75. Andrew T. Lincoln, a contributor to the scholarly symposium *From Sabbath to the Lord's Day* acknowledges that in both secular and Christian literature "the term [*sabbatismos*] denotes the observance or celebration of the Sabbath. This usage corresponds to the Septuagint usage of the cognate verb *sabbatizo* (cf. Ex 16:23; Lev 23:32; 26:34f; 2 Chron 36:21) which also has reference to Sabbath observance. Thus, the writer to the Hebrews is saying that since the time of Joshua an observance of Sabbath rest has been outstanding" (note 68), p. 213.

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76. For examples and discussion of the spiritual interpretation of the Sabbath commandment, see W. Rordorf (note 60), pp. 100-108. Franz X. Pettirsch also notes: “The early fathers of the Church applied the law of Sabbath rest only allegorically to absention from sin; a literal application to work was foreign to their thinking” (“A Theology of Sunday Rest,” *Theology Digest* 6 [1958], p. 116). The author explains how during the Middle Ages the formula “servile work” was interpreted in a literal sense as meaning “field work, any heavy work” (p. 117). The spiritual interpretation of the Sabbath rest as “self-renenciacion” is advocated also by John Calvin, in *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses*, trans. C. W. Bingham (Grand Rapids, 1950), p. 436.

77. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids, 1972), vol. 2, p. 337. Karl Barth keenly observes that, by resting on the Sabbath after the similitude of God (Heb 4:10), the believer “participates consciously in the salvation provided by him [God]” (*Church Dogmatics* [Edinburgh, 1961], vol. 3, part 2, p. 50).

78. Karl Barth (note 77), p. 51.

79. *Epistle to Diognetus* 4, 3, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, 1973 reprint), vol. 1, p. 26.

80. Augustine, *City of God*, XXII, 30, trans. Gerald Walsh, Demetrius B. Zema, Grace Monahan (New York, 1958), p. 544.

## Chapter 5

# PAUL AND THE LAW

In the Sabbath-Sunday debate, it has been customary to appeal to Paul in defense of the abrogation-view of the Old Testament Law, in general, and of the Sabbath, in particular. This has been especially true in recent attacks launched against the Sabbath by former Sabbatarians. For example, in his open letter posted on the Internet on April 1, 1995, Joseph W. Tkach, Jr., Pastor General of the Worldwide Church of God, wrote: “Paul does not hold the Mosaic Law as a moral standard of Christian conduct. Rather, he holds up Jesus Christ, the suffering of the Cross, the Law of Christ, the fruit and leadership of the Holy Spirit, nature, creation and the moral principles that were generally understood throughout the Gentile world as the basis of Christian ethics. He never, I repeat, never, argues that the Law is the foundation of Christian ethics. Paul looks at Golgotha, not Sinai.”

Similar categoric statements can be found in *Sabbath in Crisis*, by Dale Ratzlaff, a former Seventh-day Adventist Bible teacher and pastor. He writes: “Paul teaches that Christians are not under old covenant Law. . . . Galatians 3 states that Christians are no longer under Sinaitic Law. . . . Romans 7 states that even Jewish Christians are released from the Law as a guide to Christian service. . . . Romans 10 states that Christ is the end of the Law for the believer.”<sup>1</sup>

These categoric statements reflect the prevailing Evangelical perception of the relationship between Law and Gospel as one in which the observance of the Law is no longer obligatory for Christians. Texts such as Romans 6:14; 2 Corinthians 3:1-18; Galatians 3:15-25; Colossians 2:14; Ephesians 2:15; and Romans 10:4 are often cited as proof that Christians have been delivered from the obligation to observe the Law, in general, and the Sabbath, in particular, since the latter “was the sign of the Sinaitic Covenant and could stand for the covenant.”<sup>2</sup>

For many Christians these statements are so definitive that any further investigation of the issue is unnecessary. They boldly affirm that so-called “New Covenant” Christians live “under grace” and not “under the Law;” consequently, they derive their moral principles from the principle of love

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revealed by Christ and not from the moral Law given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai.

For example, Ratzlaff writes: “In old covenant life, morality was often seen as an obligation to numerous specific Laws. In the new covenant, morality springs from a response to the living Christ.”<sup>3</sup> “The new Law [given by Christ] is better than the old Law [given by Moses].”<sup>4</sup> “In the New Covenant, Christ’s true disciples will be known by the way they love! This commandment to love is repeated a number of times in the New Testament, just as the Ten Commandments were repeated a number of times in the Old.”<sup>5</sup>

This study shows that statements such as these represent a blatant misrepresentation of the New Testament teaching regarding the role of the Law in the life of a Christian. They ignore the fact that the New Testament never suggests that Christ instituted “better commandments” than those given in the Old Testament. On the contrary, Paul unequivocally stated that “the [Old Testament] Law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous, and good” (Rom 7:12). “We know that the Law is good” (1 Tim 1:8).

This prevailing misunderstanding of the Law as no longer binding upon Christians is negated by a great number of Pauline passages that uphold the Law as a standard for Christian conduct. When the Apostle Paul poses the question: “Do we then overthrow the Law?” (Rom 3:31). His answer is unequivocal: “By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the Law” (Rom 3:31). The same truth is affirmed in the Galatian correspondence: “Is the Law then against the promises of God? Certainly not” (Gal 3:21). These statements should warn antinomians that, as Walter C. Kaiser puts it, “any solution that quickly runs the Law out of town certainly cannot look to the Scripture for any kind of comfort or support.”<sup>6</sup>

There are few teachings within the whole compass of biblical theology so grossly misunderstood today as that of the place and significance of the Law both in the New Testament and in the life of Christians. Fortunately, an increasing number of scholars are recognizing this problem and addressing it. For example, in his article “St. Paul and the Law,” published in the *Scottish Journal of Theology*, C. E. B. Cranfield writes: “The need exists today for a thorough re-examination of the place and significance of Law in the Bible. . . . The possibility that . . . recent writings reflect a serious degree of muddled thinking and unexamined assumptions with regard to the attitudes of Jesus and St. Paul to the Law ought to be reckoned with—and even the further possibility that, behind them, there may be some muddled thinking or, at the least, careless and imprecise statement in this connection in some



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works of serious New Testament scholarship which have helped to mould the opinions of the present generation of ministers and teachers.”<sup>7</sup>

I share Cranfield’s conviction that shoddy biblical scholarship has contributed to the prevailing misconception that Christ has released Christians from the observance of the Law. There is an urgent need to re-examine the New Testament understanding of the Law and its place in the Christian life. The reason for this urgency is that muddled thinking about the role of the Law in the Christian life affects a whole spectrum of Christian beliefs and practices. In fact, much of the anti-sabbatarian polemic derives from the mistaken assumption that the New Testament, especially Paul’s letters, releases Christians from the observance of the Law, in general, and the Sabbath commandment, in particular.

**Objectives of This Chapter.** The purpose of this chapter is to examine Paul’s attitude toward the Law which is one of the most complex doctrinal issues of his theology. To determine Paul’s view of the Law, we examine four specific areas. First, the background of Paul’s view of the Law from the perspective of his pre- and post-conversion experience. Second, Paul’s basic teachings about the nature and function of the Law. Third, the five major misunderstood Pauline texts frequently appealed to in support of the abrogation view of the Law. Fourth, why legalism became a major problem among Gentile converts.

By way of conclusion, I propose that the resolution to the apparent contradiction between Paul’s negative and positive statements about the Law is found in their different contexts. When he speaks of the Law in the context of salvation (justification—right standing before God), he clearly affirms that Law-keeping is of no avail (Rom 3:20). On the other hand, when Paul speaks of the Law in the context of Christian conduct (sanctification—right living before God), he upholds the value and validity of God’s Law (Rom 7:12; 13:8-10; 1 Cor 7:19).

## PART 1

### THE BACKGROUND OF PAUL’S VIEW OF THE LAW

**Various Usages of “Law.”** Paul uses the term “Law-*nomos*” at least 110 times in his epistles, but not uniformly. The same term “Law” is used by Paul to refer to such things as the Mosaic Law (Gal 4:21; Rom 7:22, 25; 1 Cor 9:9), the whole Old Testament (1 Cor 14:21; Rom 3:19, 21), the will of God written in the heart of Gentiles (Rom 2:14-15), the governing principle of conduct (works or faith—Rom 3:27), evil inclinations (Rom 7:21), and the guidance of the Spirit (Rom 8:2).

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Sometimes the term “Law” is used by Paul in a personal way as if it were God Himself: “Whatever the Law says it speaks to those who are under the Law” (Rom 3:19). Here the word “Law” could be substituted for the word “God” (cf. Rom 4:15; 1 Cor 9:8).

Our immediate concern is not to ascertain the various Pauline usages of the term “Law,” but rather to establish the apostle’s view toward the Old Testament Law, in general. Did Paul teach that Christ abrogated the Mosaic Law, in particular, and/or the Old Testament Law, in general, so that Christians are no longer obligated to observe them? This view has predominated during much of Christian history and is still tenaciously defended today by numerous scholars<sup>8</sup> and Christian churches. Unfortunately, this prevailing view rests largely on a one-sided interpretation of selected Pauline passages at the exclusion of other important passages that negate such an interpretation.

Our procedure will be, first, to examine the positive and negative statements that Paul makes about the Law and then to seek a resolution to any apparent contradiction. We begin our investigation by looking at the background of Paul’s view of the Law, because this offers valuable insights into why Paul views the Law both as “*abolished*” (Eph 2:15) and “*established*” (Rom 3:31), *unnecessary* (Rom 3:28), and *necessary* (1 Cor 7:19; Eph 6:2, 3; 1 Tim 1:8-10).

**The Old Testament View of the Law.** To understand Paul’s view of the Law, we need to look at it from three perspectives: (1) the Old Testament, (2) Judaism, and (3) his own personal experience. Each of these perspectives had an impact in the development of Paul’s view of the Law and is reflected in his discussion of the nature and function of the Law.

Contrary to what many people believe, the Old Testament does not view the Law as a means of gaining acceptance with God through obedience, but as a way of responding to God’s gracious redemption and of binding Israel to her God. The popular view that in the Old Covenant people were saved, not by grace but by obeying the Law, ignores the fundamental biblical teaching that salvation has always been a divine gift of grace and not a human achievement.

The Law was given to the Israelites at Sinai, not to enable them to gain acceptance with God and be saved, but to make it possible for them to respond to what God had already accomplished by delivering them from Egyptian bondage. The context of the Ten Commandments is the gracious act of divine deliverance. “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of

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Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Ex 20:2). Israel was chosen as God’s people not because of merits gained by the people through obedience to the Law, but because of God’s love and faithfulness to His promise. “It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it is because the Lord loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage” (Deut 7:7-8).

Obedience to the Law provided the Israelites with an opportunity to preserve their covenant relationship with God, and not to gain acceptance with Him. This is the meaning of Leviticus 18:5: “You shall therefore keep my statutes and my ordinances, by doing which a man shall live.” The life promised in this text is not the life in the age to come (as in Dan 12:2), but the present enjoyment of a peaceful and prosperous life in fellowship with God. Such life was God’s gift to His people, a gift that could be enjoyed and preserved by living according to the principles God had revealed.

The choice between life and death laid before the people in Deuteronomy 30:15-20 was determined by whether or not the people would choose to trust and obey the Word of God. Obedience to the Law of God was an expression of trust in God which revealed who really were His people. The obedience demanded by the Law could not be satisfied by legalistic observance of external commands, like circumcision, but by an internal love-response to God. The essence of the Law was love for God (Deut 6:5; 10:12) and for fellow-beings (Lev 19:18). Life was understood as a gift to be accepted by a faith response to God. As Gerhard von Rad puts it, “Only by faith, that is, by cleaving to the God of salvation, will the righteous have life (cf. Hab 2:4; Am 5:4, 14; Jer 38:20). It is obvious that life is here understood as a gift.”<sup>9</sup>

It was only after his conversion that Paul understood that the Old Testament view of the function of the Law was a faith-response to the gift of life and salvation and not a means to gain life through legalistic obedience. Prior to his conversion, as we shall see, Paul held to the Pharisaic view of the Law as a means of salvation, a kind of mediator between God and man. After his encounter with Christ on the Damascus Road, Paul was compelled to reexamine his theology. Gradually, he came to realize that his Pharisaic view of the Law as a way of salvation was wrong because the Old Testament teaches that salvation was promised already to Abraham through the Christ, the Seed to come, 430 years before the giving of the Law at Sinai (Gal 3:17).

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**The Jewish View of the Law.** These considerations led Paul to realize that salvation in the Old Testament is offered not through Law, but through the promise of the coming Redeemer. “For if the inheritance is by the Law, it is no longer by promise” (Gal 3:18). It was this rediscovery of the Old Testament meaning of the Law as a response to God’s gracious salvation that caused Paul to challenge those who wanted to make the Law a means of salvation. He said: “For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the Law, since through the Law comes knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20).

The view that the observance of the Law is an indispensable means to gain salvation developed later during the intertestamental period, that is, during the four centuries that separate the last books of the Old Testament from the first books of the New Testament. During this period a fundamental change occurred in the understanding of the role of the Law in the life of the people. Religious leaders came to realize that disobedience to God’s Law had resulted in the past suffering and deportation of the people into exile. To prevent the recurrence of such tragedies, they took measures to ensure that the people would observe every detail of the Law. They interpreted and applied the Law to every minute detail and circumstance of life. At the time of Christ, this ever-increasing mass of regulations was known as “the tradition of the elders” (Matt 15:2).

During this period, as succinctly summarized by Eldon Ladd, “the observance of the Law becomes the basis of God’s verdict upon the individual. Resurrection will be the reward of those who have been devoted to the Law (2 Mac 7:9). The Law is the basis of hope of the faithful (Test of Jud 26:1), of justification (Apoc Bar 51:3), of salvation (Apoc Bar 51:7), of righteousness (Apoc Bar 57:6), of life (4 Ezra 7:21; 9:31). Obedience to the Law will even bring God’s Kingdom and transform the entire sin-cursed world (Jub 23). Thus the Law attains the position of intermediary between God and man.”<sup>10</sup>

This new view of the Law became characteristic of rabbinic Judaism which prevailed in Paul’s time. The result was that the Old Testament view of the Law “is characteristically and decisively altered and invalidated.”<sup>11</sup> From being a divine revelation of the moral principle of human conduct, the Law becomes the one and only mediator between God and the people. Righteousness and life in the world to come can only be secured by faithfully studying and observing the Law. “The more study of the Law, the more life . . .” “If a person has gained for himself words of the Law, he has gained for himself life in the world to come.”<sup>12</sup>

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**Paul's Pre-Conversion Experience of the Law.** This prevailing understanding of the Law as a means of salvation influenced Paul's early life. He himself tells us that he was a committed Pharisee, blameless and zealous in the observance of the Law (Phil 3:5-6; Gal 1:14). The zeal and devotion to the Law eventually led Paul to pride (Phil 3:4,7) and boasting (Rom 2:13,23), seeking to establish his own righteousness based on works (Rom 3:27).

As a result of his conversion, Paul discovered that his pride and boasting were an affront to the character of God, the only One who deserves praise and glory (1 Cor 1:29-31; 2 Cor 10:17). "What he as a Jew had thought was righteousness, he now realizes to be the very essence of sin, for his pride in his own righteousness (Phil 3:9) had blinded him to the revelation of the divine righteousness in Christ. Only the divine intervention on the Damascus Road shattered his pride and self-righteousness and brought him to a humble acceptance of the righteousness of God."<sup>13</sup>

The preceding discussion of Paul's background experience of the Law helps us to appreciate the radical change that occurred in his understanding of the Law. Before his conversion, Paul understood the Law like a Pharisee, that is, as the external observance of commandments in order to gain salvation (2 Cor 5:16-17). After his conversion, he came to view the Law from the perspective of the Cross of Christ, who came "in order that the just requirements of the Law might be fulfilled in us" through the enabling power of His Spirit (Rom 8:4). From the perspective of the Cross, Paul rejects the Pharisaic understanding of the Law as a means of salvation and affirms the Old Testament view of the Law as a revelation of God's will for human conduct.

## PART 2

### PAUL'S VIEW OF THE LAW

This brief survey of Paul's background view of the Law provides us with a setting for examining now Paul's basic teachings about the Law. For the sake of clarity, we summarize his teachings under the following seven headings.

**(1) The Law Reveals God's Will.** First of all, it is important to note that for Paul *the Law is and remains God's Law* (Rom 7:22, 25). The Law was given by God (Rom 9:4; 3:2), written by God (1 Cor 9:9; 14:21; 14:34), contains the will of God (Rom 2:17, 18), bears witness to the righteousness of God (Rom 3:21), and is in accord with the promises of God (Gal 3:21). Repeatedly and explicitly Paul speaks of "*the Law of God*." "I delight in *the*

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*Law of God* in my inmost self” (Rom 7:22); “I of myself serve *the Law of God* with my mind” (Rom 7:25); the carnal mind “does not submit to *God’s Law*” (Rom 8:7). Elsewhere he speaks of “keeping the *commandments of God*” (1 Cor 7:19) as being a Christian imperative.

Since God is the author of the Law, “the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good” (Rom 7:12). The Law is certainly included among “the oracles of God” that were entrusted to the Jews (Rom 3:2). To the Jews was granted the special privilege (“advantage”) to be entrusted with the Law of God (Rom 3:1-2). So “the giving of the Law” is reckoned by Paul as one of the glorious privileges granted to Israel (Rom 9:4). Statements such as these reflect Paul’s great respect for the divine origin and authority of God’s Law.

Paul clearly recognizes the inherent goodness of the moral principles contained in the Old Testament Law. The Law “is holy and just and good” (Rom 7:12) because its ethical demands reflect nothing else than the very holiness, righteousness, and goodness of *God Himself*. This means that the way people relate to the Law is indicative of the way they relate to God Himself. The Law is also “spiritual” (Rom 7:14) in the sense that it reflects the spiritual nature of the Lawgiver and it can be internalized and observed by the enabling power of the Spirit. Thus, only those who walk “according to the Spirit” can fulfill “the just requirements of the Law” (Rom 8:4).

The Law expresses the will of God for human life. However, what the Law requires is not merely outward obedience but a submissive, loving response to God. Ultimately, the observance of the Law requires a heart willing to love God and fellow beings (Rom 13:8). This was the fundamental problem of Israel “who pursued the righteousness which is based on Law” (Rom 9:31); they sought to attain a right standing before God through outward obedience to God’s commandments. The result was that the people “did not succeed in fulfilling that Law” (Rom 9:31). Why? Because their heart was not in it. The people sought to pursue righteousness through external obedience to commandments rather than obeying the commandments out of a faith-love response to God. “They did not pursue it through faith, but as if it were based on works” (Rom 9:32).

The Law of God demands much more than conformity to outward regulations. Paul makes this point when he speaks of a man who may accept circumcision and yet fail to keep the Law (Rom 2:25). Superficially this appears to be a contradictory statement because the very act of circumcision is obedience to the Law. But Paul explains that true circumcision is a matter of the heart, not merely something external and physical (Rom 2:28-29).

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For Paul, as C. K. Barrett points out, “obedience to the Law does not mean only carrying out the detailed precepts written in the Pentateuch, but fulfilling that relation to God to which the Law points; and this proves in the last resort to be a relation not of legal obedience but of faith.”<sup>14</sup> *The failure to understand this important distinction that Paul makes between legalistic and loving observance of the Law has led many to wrongly conclude that the apostle rejects the validity of the Law, when in reality he rejects only its unlawful use.*

**(2) Christ Enables Believers to Obey the Law.** For Paul the function of Christ’s redemptive mission is to enable believers to live out the principles of God’s Law in their lives and not to abrogate the Law, as many Christians mistakenly believe. Paul explains that in Christ, God does what the Law by itself could not do—namely, He empowers believers to live according to the “just requirements of the Law.” “For God has done what the Law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirements of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:3-4).

The new life in Christ enables the Christian to keep the Law, not as an external code, but as a loving response to God. This is the very thing that the Law by itself cannot do because, being an external standard of human conduct, it cannot generate a loving response in the human heart. By contrast, “Christ’s love compels us” (2 Cor 5:14) to respond to Him by living according to the moral principles of God’s Law. Our love response to Christ fulfills the Law because love will not commit adultery, or lie, or steal, or covet, or harm one’s neighbor (Rom 13:8-10).

The permanence of the Law is reflected in Paul’s appeal to specific commandments as the norm for Christian conduct. To illustrate how the principle of love fulfills the Law, Paul cites several specific commandments: “The commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,’ and any other commandment, are summed up in the sentence, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the Law” (Rom 13: 9-10).

Paul’s reference to “any other commandment” presupposes the rest of the Ten Commandments, since love fulfills not only the last six commandments that affect our relationship with fellow beings, but also the first four commandments that govern our relationship with God. For example, love

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fulfills the Sabbath commandment because it motivates Christians to truly love the Lord by giving priority to Him in their thinking and living during the hours of the Sabbath.

Central to Paul's understanding of the Law is the Cross of Christ. From this perspective, he both negates and affirms the Law. Negatively, the Apostle repudiates the Law as the basis of justification: "if justification were through the Law, then Christ died to no purpose" (Gal 2:21).

Positively, Paul teaches that the Law is "spiritual, good, holy, just" (Rom 7:12, 14, 16; 1 Tim 1:8) because it exposes sin and reveals God's ethical standards. Thus, he states that Christ came "in order that the just requirements of the Law might be fulfilled in us" through the dynamic power of His Spirit (Rom 8:4).

Three times Paul states: "Neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision;" and each time he concludes this statement with a different phrase: "but keeping the commandments of God . . . but faith working through love . . . but a new creation" (1 Cor 7:19; Gal 5:6; 6:15). The parallelism shows that Paul equates the keeping of God's commandments with a working faith and a new life in Christ, which is made possible through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

### **(3) The Law Is Established by the Ministry of the Holy Spirit.**

Christ's ministry enables His Spirit to set us free from the tyranny of sin and death (Rom 8:2) and to re-establish the true spiritual character of the Law in our hearts. In Romans 8, Paul explains that what the Law, frustrated and abused by sin, could not accomplish, Christ has triumphantly accomplished by taking upon Himself the condemnation of our sins (Rom 8:3). This Christ has done, not to release us from the obligation to observe the Law, but "in order that the just requirements of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Rom 8:4).

The Spirit establishes God's Law in our hearts by setting us free from tampering with God's commandments and from "boasting" of presumptuous observance (Rom 2:23; 3:27; 4:2). The Spirit establishes the Law by pointing us again and again to Christ who is the goal of the Law (Rom 10:4). The Spirit establishes the Law by setting us free to obey God as our "Father" (Rom 8:5) in sincerity. The Spirit enables us to recognize in God's Law the gracious revelation of His fatherly will for His children. The final establishment of God's Law in our hearts will not be realized until the coming of Christ when the "revealing of the sons of God" will take place (Rom 8:19).



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The slogan of “New Covenant” Christians—Not under Law but under love”—does not increase the amount of true love in the world, because love without Law soon degenerates in deceptive sentimentality. E. C. Cranfield perceptively observes that “while we most certainly need the general command to love (which the Law itself provides in Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18), to save us from understanding the particular commandments in a rigid, literalistic and pedantic manner, we also need the particular commandments into which the Law breaks down the general obligation of love, to save us from the sentimentality and self-deception to which we all are prone.”<sup>15</sup>

**(4) The Law Reveals the Nature of Sin.** As a revelation of God’s will for mankind, the Law reveals the nature of sin as disobedience to God. Paul explains that “through the Law comes the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20), because the Law causes people to recognize their sins and themselves as sinners. It is self-evident that this important function of the Law could not have been terminated by Christ, since the need to acknowledge sin in one’s life is as fundamental to the life of Christians today as it was for the Israelites of old.

By showing people how their actions are contrary to the moral principles that God has revealed, the Law increases sin in the sense that it makes people more conscious of disobeying definite commandments. This is what Paul meant when he says: “Law came in, to increase the trespass” (Rom 5:20; cf. Gal 3:19). By making people conscious of disobeying definite commandments, the Law increases the awareness of transgressions (Rom 4:15).

The Law not only heightens the awareness of sin but also increases sin by providing an opportunity to deliberately transgress a divine command. This is what Paul suggests in Romans 7:11: “For sin, finding opportunity in the commandments, deceived me and by it killed me.” The term “deceived” is reminiscent of the creation story (Gen 3:13) where the serpent found in God’s explicit prohibition (Gen 2:17) the very opportunity he wanted to lead Adam and Eve into deliberate disobedience and rebellion against God.

It is in this sense that “the power of sin is the Law” (1 Cor 15:56). “In the absence of Law sin is in a sense ‘dead’ (Rom 7:8), that is, relatively impotent; but when the Law comes, then sin springs into activity (Rom 7:9—‘sin revived’). And the opposition which the Law offers to men’s sinful desires has the effect of stirring them up to greater fury.”<sup>16</sup>

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Sinful human desires, unrestrained by the influence of the Holy Spirit, as Calvin puts it in his commentary on Romans 7:5, “break forth with greater fury, the more they are held back by the restraints of righteousness.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, the Law, in the absence of the Spirit, “increases the trespass” (Rom 5:20) by attacking sinful desires and actions. To claim that “New Covenant” Christians are no longer under Law, in the sense that they no longer need the Law to expose sin in their life, is to deny or cover up the presence of sin. Sinful human beings need the Law to “come to the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20), and need a Saviour to “have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:14; cf. Eph 1:7).

**(5) Observance of the Law Can Lead to Legalism.** The goodness of the Law is sullied when it is used wrongfully. Paul expresses this truth in 1 Timothy 1:8: “Now we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully.” Contrary to what many believe, Paul affirms the validity and goodness of the Law, but it must be used according to God’s intended purpose. This important distinction is ignored by those who teach that “New Covenant” Christians are no longer obligated to observe the moral Law given to Moses on Mount Sinai, because they claim to derive their moral principles from the principle of love revealed by Christ. God has only one set of moral principles. Paul openly and constantly condemns the *abuse*, and not the proper use of God’s Law.

The abuse was found in the attitude of the Judaizers who promoted the works of the Law as a means to achieve self-righteousness before God. Paul recognizes that observance of the Law can tempt people to use it unlawfully as a means to establish their own righteousness before God. He exposes as hopeless the legalist’s confidence of seeking to be justified in God’s sight by works of the Law because “no human being will be justified in his sight by the works of the Law, since through the Law comes knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20). Human beings in their fallen condition can never fully observe God’s Law.

It was incredible pride and self-deception that caused the Jews to “rely upon the Law” (Rom 2:17) to establish their own righteousness (Rom 10:3) when in reality they were notoriously guilty of dishonoring God by transgressing the very principles of His Law. “You who boast in the Law, do you dishonor God by breaking the Law?” (Rom 2:24). This was the problem with the Pharisees, who outwardly gave the appearance of being righteous and Law-abiding (Luke 16:12-15; 18:11-12), but inwardly they were polluted, full of iniquity, and spiritually dead (Matt 23:27-28).

The Pharisaic mentality found its way into the primitive church, among those who refused to abandon the wrongful use of God’s Law. They

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did not recognize that Christ's redemptive accomplishments brought to an end those ceremonial parts of the Law, like circumcision, that foreshadowed His person and work. They wanted to "compel the Gentiles to live like Jews" (Gal 2:14). These Judaizers insisted that in order to be saved, the Gentiles needed to be circumcised and observe the covenantal distinctiveness of the Mosaic Law (Acts 15:1). In other words, the offer of salvation by grace had to be supplemented with the observance of Jewish ceremonies.

Paul was no stranger to the attitude of the Judaizers toward the Law of Moses, because he held the same view himself prior to his conversion. He was brought up as a Pharisee and trained in the Law at the feet of Gamaliel (Phil 3:5; Acts 22:3). He describes himself as "extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers" (Gal 1:14). From the perspective of a person who is spiritually dead, Paul could claim that as far as "legalistic righteousness" was concerned, he was "faultless" (Phil 3:6, NIV).

After his conversion, Paul discovered that he had been deceived into believing that he was spiritually alive and righteous, when in reality he was spiritually dead and unrighteous. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, Paul recognized that "having a righteousness of my [his] own, based on Law" (Phil 3:9) was an illusion typical of the Pharisaic mentality. Such mentality is reflected in the rich young ruler's reply to Jesus: "Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth" (Mark 10:20). The problem with this mentality is that it reduced righteousness to compliance with Jewish oral Law, which Jesus calls "the tradition of men" (Mark 7:8), instead of recognizing in God's Law the absolute demand to love God and fellow beings. When the Holy Spirit brought home to Paul's consciousness the broader implications of God's commandments, his self-righteous complacency was condemned. "I was once alive apart from [a true understanding of] the Law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died" (Rom 7:9).

In his epistles, Paul reveals his radical rejection, not of the Law, but of legalism. He recognizes that attempting to establish one's righteousness by legalistic observance of the Law ultimately blinds a person to the righteousness which God has made available as a free gift through Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 10:3). This was the problem with the prevailing legalism among the Jews of Paul's time, namely, the failure to recognize that observance of the Law by itself without the acceptance of Christ, who is the goal of the Law, results in slavery. Thus, Paul strongly opposes the false teachers who were troubling the Galatian churches because they were promoting circumcision as a way of salvation without Christ. By so doing, they were propagating the legalistic notion that salvation is by

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works rather than by faith—or we might say, it is a human achievement rather than a divine gift.

By promoting salvation through the observance of such ceremonies as circumcision, these false teachers were preaching a “different Gospel” (Gal 1:6), which was no Gospel at all (Gal 1:7-9), because salvation is a divine gift of grace through Christ’s atoning sacrifice. With this in mind, Paul warns the Galatian Christians: “Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all . . . . You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace” (Gal 5:2, 4, NIV). It is evident that what Paul opposes is the unlawful use of the Law, that is, the attempt to earn acceptance with God by performing rituals like circumcision, thus ignoring the gracious provision of salvation offered through Jesus Christ.

#### **(6) The Law Was Never Intended to Be a Means of Salvation.**

After his conversion Paul understood that the Old Testament Law was never intended to be legalistic in character, that is, a means to earn salvation. From his personal experience, he learned that he could not gain self-merit or justification before God by faithfully obeying the Law. Gradually he understood that the function of the Law is to reveal the nature of sin and the moral standard of human conduct, but not to provide a way of salvation through human obedience.

This truth is expressed in Galatians 2:19 where Paul says: “For I *through the law* died to the law, that I might live to God” (emphasis supplied). Paul acknowledges that it was *the Law itself*, that is, his new understanding of the function of the Law, that taught him not to seek acceptance before God through Law-works. The Law was never intended to function as a way of salvation, but to reveal sin and to point to the need of a Savior. This was especially true of the promises, prophecies, ritual ordinances, and types of the Mosaic Law which pointed forward to the Savior and His redeeming work. In the great Bible lessons of all time, Christ expounded “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, . . . what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:27).

Paul insists that the Mosaic Law did not annul the promise of salvation God made to Abraham (Gal 3:17, 21). Rather, the Law was added “till the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made” (Gal 3:19). The function of the Mosaic Law was not soteriological but typological, that is, it was not given to provide a way of salvation through external ceremonies but to point the people to the Savior to come, and to the moral principles by which they ought to live.

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**(7) The Law Pointed to the Savior to Come.** The typological function of the Law was manifested especially through what is known as the “ceremonial Law”—the redemptive rituals like circumcision, sacrifices, sanctuary services, and priesthood, all of which foreshadowed the work and the person of Christ. Paul refers to this aspect of the Mosaic Law when he says that “the Law was our tutor . . . to Christ, that we may justified by faith” (Gal 3:24, NASB). Here Paul sees the Mosaic Law as pointing to Christ and teaching the same message of justification contained in the Gospel. The tutor or schoolmaster to which Paul alludes in Galatians 3:24-25 is most likely the ceremonial Law whose rituals typified Christ’s redemptive ministry. This is indicated by the fact that Paul was engaged in a theological controversy with the Judaizers who made circumcision a requirement of salvation (Gal 2:3-4; 5:2-4).

When Paul speaks of the Law as pointing to Christ and teaching that justification comes through faith in Christ (Gal 3:24), it is evident that he was thinking of sacrificial ordinances that typified the Messianic redemption to come. This was also true of circumcision that pointed to the “putting off of the body of flesh,” that is, the moral renewal to be accomplished by Christ. “In him you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ” (Col 2:11). The moral principles of the Ten Commandments, like “you shall not steal,” hardly represented the redemptive work of Christ.

Paul insists that now that Christ, the object of our faith, has come, we no longer need the tutorship aspect of the Mosaic Law that pointed to Christ (Gal 3:25). By this Paul did not mean to negate the continuity and validity of the moral Law, in general. This is indicated by his explicit affirmation in 1 Corinthians 7:19: “For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God.” Usually Paul does not distinguish between the ethical and ceremonial aspects of the Law, but in passages such as this the distinction is abundantly clear. Commenting on this text, Eldon Ladd notes: “Although circumcision is a command of God and a part of the Law, Paul sets circumcision in contrast to the commandments, and in doing so separates the ethical from the ceremonial—the permanent from the temporal.”<sup>18</sup>

The failure to make such a distinction has led many Christians to mistakenly conclude that Paul teaches the abrogation of the Law in general as a rule for the Christian life. This conclusion is obviously wrong, because Paul while presents to the Gentiles “the commandments of God” as a moral imperative, he adamantly rejects the ceremonial ordinances, such as circum-

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cision, for these were a type of the redemption accomplished by Christ (1 Cor 7:19).

For Paul, the typological function of the ceremonial Law, as well as the unlawful legalistic use of the Law, came to an end with Christ; but the Law as an expression of the will of God is permanent. The believer indwelt by the Holy Spirit is energized to live according to “the just requirements of the Law” (Rom 8:4).

The starting point of Paul’s reflection about the Law is that atonement for sin and salvation come only through Christ’s death and resurrection, and not by means of the Law. This starting point enables Paul, as well stated by Brice Martin, “to make the distinction between the Law as a way of salvation and as a norm of life, between the Law as it encounters those in the flesh and those in the Spirit, between the Law as a means of achieving self-righteousness and as an expression of the will of God to be obeyed in faith. . . . The moral Law remains valid for the believer.”<sup>19</sup>

### PART 3

#### A LOOK AT SOME MISUNDERSTOOD TEXTS

Several Pauline passages are often used to support the contention that the Law was done away with by Christ and consequently is no longer the norm of Christian conduct. In view of the limited scope of this chapter, we examine the five major passages frequently appealed to in support of the abrogation view of the Law.

##### **(1) Romans 6:14: “Not Under Law”**

Romans 6:14 is perhaps the most frequently quoted Pauline text to prove that Christians have been released from the observance of the Law. The text reads: “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under Law but under grace.” The common interpretation of this text is that Christians are no longer under the Mosaic Law as a rule of conduct because their moral values derive from the principle of love revealed by Christ.

This is a serious misreading of this passage because there is nothing in the immediate context to suggest that Paul is speaking of the Mosaic Law. In the immediate and larger context of the whole chapter, Paul contrasts the dominion of sin with the power of Christ’s grace. The antithesis indicates that “under Law” simply means that Christians are no longer “under the dominion of sin” and, consequently, “under the condemnation of the Law” because the grace of Christ has liberated them from both of them.

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To interpret the phrase “under Law” to mean “under the economy of the Mosaic Law” would imply that believers who were under the Mosaic economy were not the recipients of grace. Such an idea is altogether absurd. Furthermore, as John Murray perceptively observes, “Relief from the Mosaic Law as an economy does not of itself place persons in the category of being under grace.”<sup>20</sup>

“The ‘dominion of Law’ from which believers have been ‘released’ is forthrightly explained by Paul to be the condition of being ‘in sinful nature,’ being ‘controlled’ by ‘sinful passions . . . so that we bore fruit for death’ (Rom 7:1-6). From this spiritual bondage and impotence, the marvellous grace of God, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, has set believers free; but it has not set them free to sin against God’s moral principles.”<sup>21</sup>

Since “under grace” means under God’s undeserved favor, the contrast with “under Law” presupposes the idea of being under God’s disfavor or condemnation pronounced by the Law. Thus, in Romans 6:14 Paul teaches that believers should not be controlled by sin (cf. Rom 6:1-2, 6, 11-13) because God’s grace has liberated them from the dominion of sin and the condemnation of the Law.

In this passage, as John Murray brings out, “there is an absolute antithesis between the potency and provision of the Law and the potency and provision of grace. Grace is the sovereign will and power of God coming to expression for the deliverance of men from the servitude of sin. Because this is so, to be ‘under grace’ is the guarantee that sin will not exercise the dominion—‘sin will not lord it over you, for ye are not under Law but under grace.’”<sup>22</sup>

**Not Under the Condemnation of the Law.** Paul expresses the same thought in Romans 7 where he says: “Brethren, you have died to the Law through the body of Christ . . . Now we are discharged from the Law, dead to that which held us captive” (Rom 7:4, 6). The meaning here is that through Christ’s death, Christians have been discharged from the condemnation of the Law and from all the legalistic misunderstanding and misuse of the Law. To put it differently, Christians have died to the Law and have been discharged from it insofar as it condemns them and holds them in bondage as a result of its unlawful, legalistic use. But they are still “under the Law” insofar as the Law reveals to them the moral principles by which to live.

This interpretation is supported by the immediate context where Paul affirms that “the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and

good” (Rom 7:12). Again he says: “We know that the Law is spiritual” (Rom 7:14). And again, “So then, I of myself serve the Law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the Law of sin” (Rom 7:25). These statements clearly indicate that for Paul the Law is and remains the *Law of God*, which reveals the moral standard of Christian conduct.

Surprisingly, even Rudolf Bultmann, known for his radical rejection of the cardinal doctrines of the New Testament, reaches the same conclusion. “Though the Christian in a certain sense is no longer ‘under Law’ (Gal 5:18; Rom 6:14), that does not mean that the demands of the Law are no longer valid for him; for the *agape* [love] demanded of him is nothing else than the fulfillment of the Law (Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:14).”<sup>23</sup> The point is well made, because we find that in Romans 13:8-13 Paul explains how love fulfills the Law by citing four specific commandments and by including “any other commandment.”

In the light of these considerations, we conclude that far from dismissing the authority of the Law, Paul teaches that believers should not transgress the Law simply because God’s grace has “set [them] free from sin” (Rom 6:18). It is only the sinful mind that “does not submit to God’s Law” (Rom 8:7). But Christians have the mind of the Spirit who enables them to fulfill “the just requirements of the Law” (Rom 8:4). Thus, Christians are no longer “under the Law,” in the sense that God’s grace has released them from the dominion of sin and the condemnation of the Law, but they are still “under Law” in the sense that they are bound to govern their lives by its moral principles. Thanks to God’s grace, believers have “become obedient from the heart to the standard of teachings” (Rom 6:17) and moral principles contained in God’s Law.

## **(2) 2 Corinthians 3:1-18: The Letter and the Spirit**

2 Corinthians 3 contains a great deal that is often used to argue that the Law has been done away with by Christ and, consequently, Christians are no longer bound to it as a norm for their conduct. In view of the importance attributed to this chapter, we look at it in some detail.

The chapter opens with Paul explaining why he does not need letters of recommendation to authenticate his ministry to the Corinthians. The reason given is, “You yourselves [Corinthian believers] are our letter of recommendation, written on your hearts, to be known and read by all men” (2 Cor 3:2). If, on coming to Corinth, inquiry should be made as to whether Paul carried with him letters of recommendation, his answer is: “You yourselves, new persons in Christ through my ministry, are my credentials.”



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Paul continues developing the imagery of the letter from the standpoint of the Corinthians relationship to Christ: “You are a letter from Christ delivered to us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (2 Cor 3:3). The mention of a letter written by the Spirit in the heart triggers in Paul’s mind the graphic imagery of the ancient promises of the New Covenant. Through the prophets, God assured His people that the time was coming when through His Spirit He would write His Law in their hearts (Jer 31:33) and would remove their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh (Ez 11:19; 36:26). The change of heart that the Corinthians had experienced as a result of Paul’s ministry was a tangible proof of the fulfillment of God’s promise regarding the New Covenant.

**The Letter and the Spirit.** Paul continues summing up the crucial difference between the ministries of the Old and New Covenants by describing the former as a ministry of the letter and the latter as a ministry of the Spirit. “God . . . has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:6, NIV). We must now examine the significance of the distinction which Paul makes between the letter which kills and the Spirit which gives life.

Is Paul saying here, as many believe, that the Law is of itself something evil and death-dealing? This cannot be true, since he clearly taught that “the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good” (Rom 7:12) and that “the man who practices the righteousness which is based on the law shall live by it” (Rom 10:5; cf. Gal 3:12; Lev 18:5).

Commenting on this text in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, Philip Hughes writes: “Paul is a faithful follower of his Master in that he nowhere speaks of the Law in a derogatory manner. Christ, in fact, proclaimed that He had come to fulfil the Law, not to destroy it (Matt 5:17). So also the effect of Paul’s doctrine was to establish the Law (Rom 3:31). There is no question of an attack by him on the Law here [2 Cor 3:6], since, as we have previously seen, the Law is an integral component of the New no less than it is of the Old Covenant.”<sup>24</sup>

It is unfortunate that many Christians today, including former Sabbatarians who attack the Sabbath, ignore the fundamental truth that “the Law is an integral component of the New no less than it is of the Old Covenant.” This is plainly shown by the terms used by God to announce His New Covenant: “I will put *my Law* within them” (Jer 31:33). The intended purpose of the internalization of God’s Law is “that they may walk in *my*

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*statutes*, and keep *my ordinances*, and do them” (Ez 11:20). Note that in the New Covenant, God does not abolish the Law or give a new set of Laws; instead He internalizes His existing Law in the human heart.

Philip Hughes states the difference between the two Covenants with admirable clarity: “The difference between the Old and New Covenants is that under the former the Law is written on tables of stones, confronting man as an external ordinance and condemning him because of his failure through sin to obey its commandments, whereas under the latter the Law is written internally within the redeemed heart by the dynamic regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, so that through faith in Christ, the only Law-keeper, and inward experience of His power man no longer hates but loves God’s Law and is enabled to fulfill its precepts.”<sup>25</sup>

Coming back to the distinction Paul makes between the letter that kills and the Spirit that gives life, it is evident that the Apostle is comparing the Law as *externally* written at Sinai on tablets of stone and the *same* Law as written *internally* in the heart of the believer by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. As an *external* ordinance, the Law confronts and condemns sin as the breaking of God’s Law. By revealing sin in its true light as the transgression of God’s commandments, the Law kills since it exposes the Lawbreaker to the condemnation of death (Rom 6:23; 5:12; Ez 18:4; Prov 11:29). It is in this sense that Paul can speak startlingly of the letter which kills.

By contrast, the Spirit gives life by *internalizing* the principles of God’s Law in the heart of the believer and by enabling the believer to live according to the “just requirement of the Law” (Rom 8:4). When Christ is preached and God’s promises made in Christ are believed, the Spirit enters the heart of believers, motivating them to observe God’s Law, and thus making the Law a living thing in their hearts.

Paul knew from first-hand experience how true it is that the letter kills and the Spirit makes alive. Before his conversion, he was a self-righteous observer of the Law: “As to the Law a Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the Law blameless” (Phil 3:6). Yet at the same time, he “blasphemed and persecuted and insulted him [Christ]” (1 Tim 1:13), that is, he was a transgressor of the Law under divine judgment. His outward conformity to the Law only served to cover up the inward corruption of his heart. It was as a result of his encounter with Christ and of the influence of the Holy Spirit in his heart that it became possible for Paul to conform to God’s Law, not only outwardly, in letter, but also inwardly, in spirit, or as he puts it, to “serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit” (Rom 7:6).

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**The Ministry of Death and the Ministry of the Spirit.** Paul develops further the contrast between the letter and the Spirit by comparing them to two different kinds of ministries: one the ministry of death offered by the Law and the other the ministry of the Spirit made possible through Christ's redemptive ministry: "Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!" (2 Cor 3:7-11, NIV).

It should be pointed out first of all that Paul is speaking here of two *ministries* and not two dispensations. The Greek word used by Paul is "*diakonia*," which means "service" or "ministry." By translating "*diakonia*" as "dispensation," some translations (like the RSV) mislead readers into believing that Paul condemns the Old Covenant as a dispensation of death. But the Apostle is not rejecting here the Old Covenant or the Law as something evil or inglorious. Rather, he is contrasting the *ministry of death* provided by the Law with the *ministry of the Spirit* offered through Christ.

The ministry of death is the service offered by the Law in condemning sin. Paul calls this a "ministry of condemnation" (2 Cor 3:9) that was mediated through Moses when he delivered the Law to the people. The ministry of the Spirit offers life and is made available through Christ (cf. Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). Both ministries derive from God and, consequently, are accompanied by glory. The ministry or service of the Law coming from God was obviously glorious. This was evident to the people by the glory which Moses' countenance suffused when he came down from Mount Sinai to deliver the Law to the people. His countenance was so bright that the people had difficulty gazing upon it (Ex 34:29-30).

The ministry or service of the Spirit rendered by Paul and other Christian preachers is accompanied by greater glory, that is, the light of God's Spirit that fills the soul. The reason such ministry is more glorious is that, while the glory reflected in Moses' face at the giving of the Law was temporary and gradually faded away, the glory of the ministry of the Spirit is permanent and does not fade away. Through His Spirit, God has "made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 3:6, NIV).

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Cranfield correctly summarizes the point of these verses, saying: “Since the service rendered by Moses at the giving of the Law, which was actually going to effect ‘condemnation’ (2 Cor 3:9) and ‘death’ (2 Cor 3:7), was accompanied by glory (the glory on Moses’ face—Ex 34:29ff), the service of the Spirit rendered by himself (and other Christian preachers) in the preaching of the Gospel must much more be accompanied by glory.”<sup>26</sup>

Paul’s aim is not to denigrate the service rendered by the Law in revealing and condemning sin. This is indicated by the fact that he calls such service a “glorious” ministry: “If the ministry that condemns men is glorious . . .” (2 Cor 3:9, NIV). Rather, Paul’s concern is to expose the grave error of false teachers who were exalting the Law at the expense of the Gospel. Their ministry was one of death because by the works of the Law no person can be justified (Gal 2:16; 3:11). Deliverance from condemnation and death comes not through the Law but through the Gospel. In this sense, the glory of the Gospel excels that of the Law.

The important point to note here is that Paul is contrasting not the Old and New Covenants as such, rejecting the former and promoting the latter; rather, is he is contrasting *two ministries*. When this is recognized, the passage becomes clear. The reason the glory of the Christian ministry is superior to that of Moses’ ministry, is not because the Law given through Moses has been abolished, but because these two ministries had a different function with reference to Christ’s redemption.

The comparison that Paul makes in verse 9 between the “ministry of condemnation” and the “ministry of righteousness” clearly shows that Paul is not disparaging or discarding the Law. “Condemnation is the consequence of breaking the Law; righteousness is precisely the keeping of the Law. The Gospel is not Lawless. It is the ministration of righteousness to those who because of sin are under condemnation. And this righteousness is administered to men solely by the mediation and merit of Christ, who alone, as the incarnate Son, has perfectly obeyed God’s holy Law.”<sup>27</sup>

**With Unveiled Face.** Paul utilizes the theme of “the veil” in the remaining part of the chapter (2 Cor 3:12-18) to make three basic points. First, while the ministry of Moses was marked by concealment (“who put a veil over his face”—v. 13), his own ministry of the Gospel is characterized by great openness. He uses no veil. His ministry of grace and mercy is opened to every believer who repents and believes.

Second, Paul applies the notion of “the veil” to the Jews who up to that time were unable to understand the reading of the Law in the synagogue

because a veil of darkness obscured the glory which they had deliberately rejected (2 Cor 3:14-16). Paul is thinking historically. The veil that Moses placed over his face to indicate the rebellion and unbelief of the people, which curtained the true apprehension of God's glory, symbolically represents for Paul the veil of darkness that prevents the Jews from seeing the glory of Christ and His Gospel (2 Cor 3:15). But, Paul continues, "when a man turns to the Lord the veil is removed" (2 Cor 3:16). "There is here no suggestion," C. E. Cranfield correctly points out, "that the Law is done away, but rather that, when men turn to Christ, they are able to discern the true glory of the Law."<sup>28</sup> The reason is aptly given by Calvin: "For the Law is itself bright, but it is only when Christ appears to us in it, that we enjoy its splendor."<sup>29</sup>

Third, when the veil that prevents the understanding of the Law is removed by the Spirit of the Lord, there is liberty. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor 3:17). The point Paul is making here, as C. E. Cranfield explains, is that when the Law "is understood in the light of Christ, when it is established in its true character by the Holy Spirit, so far from being the 'bondage' into which legalism has perverted it, is true freedom (cf. James 1:25—'the perfect Law, the Law of liberty')."<sup>30</sup>

In the light of the preceding analysis, we conclude that in 2 Corinthians 3 Paul is not negating the value of the Law as a norm for Christian conduct. The concern of the Apostle is to clarify the function of the Law in reference to Christ's redemption and to the ministry of the Spirit. He does this by contrasting the ministry of the Law with that of the Spirit. The Law kills in the sense that it reveals sin in its true light as the transgression of God's commandments and it exposes the Lawbreaker to the condemnation of death (Rom 6:23; 5:12; Ez 18:4; Prov 11:29). By contrast, the Spirit gives life by enabling the believer to internalize the principles of God's Law in the heart and to live according to "just requirement of the Law" (Rom 8:4).

### **(3) Galatians 3:15-25: Faith and Law**

Perhaps more than any other Pauline passage, Galatians 3:15-25 has misled people into believing that the Law was done away with by the coming of Christ. The reason is that in this passage Paul makes some negative statements about the Law which, taken in isolation, can lead a person to believe that Christ terminated the function of the Law as a norm for Christian conduct. For example, he says: "The Law was added because of transgressions, till the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made" (Gal 3:19). "Now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian" (Gal 3:25).

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Before examining these passages, it is important to remember that Paul's treatment of the Law varies in his letters, depending on the situation he was facing. Brice Martin makes this important point in concluding his scholarly dissertation *Christ and the Law in Paul*. "In his letters Paul has faced varied situations. In writing to the Galatians he tends to downplay the Law because of their attempts to be saved by means of it. In 1 Corinthians he stresses the Law and moral values since he is facing an antinomian front. In Romans he gives a carefully balanced statement and assures his readers that he is not an antinomian."<sup>31</sup>

**The Galatian Crisis.** The tone of Paul's treatment of the Law in Galatians is influenced by his sense of urgency of his converts' situation. False teachers had come in to "trouble," "unsettle," and "bewitch" them (Gal 1:7; 3:1; 5:12). Apparently they were leading his converts astray by teaching that in order to be saved, one needs not only to have faith in Christ, but must be circumcised. They taught that the blessings of salvation bestowed by Christ can only be received by becoming sons of Abraham through circumcision. Faith in Christ is of value only if such faith is based upon circumcision.

The false teachers accused Paul of accommodating and watering down the Gospel by releasing Christians from circumcision and observance of the Mosaic Law. His Gospel disagreed with that of the Jerusalem brethren who upheld circumcision and the observance of the Law. Realizing that his entire apostolic identity and mission in Galatia was jeopardized by these Judaizers infiltrators, Paul responds by hurling some of his sharpest daggers of his verbal arsenal. "Credulity (Gal 1:6) is the operative principle of the foolish Galatians (Gal 3:1). Cowardice motivates the trouble-makers (Gal 6:12). Seduction is their method of proselytizing (Gal 4:17). Castration is their just deserts (Gal 5:12)."<sup>32</sup>

The message of the agitators was primarily built around the requirement of circumcision. This is underscored by Paul's warning: "Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all" (Gal 5:2, NIV). That circumcision was the main tenet of the "other Gospel" preached by the false teachers is indicated also by Paul's exposure of their motives: "Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the Cross of Christ. Not even those who are circumcised obey the Law, yet they want you to be circumcised, they may boast about your flesh" (Gal 6:12-13).

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The emphasis of the false teachers on circumcision reflects the prevailing Jewish understanding that circumcision was required to become a member of the Abrahamic covenant and receive its blessings. God made a covenant of promise with Abraham because of his faithful observance of God's commandments (Gen 26:5), and circumcision was the sign of that covenant.

**Paul's Response.** In his response, Paul does admit that being a son of Abraham is of decisive importance. He does not deny or downplay the importance of the promise covenant that God made with Abraham. But, he turns his opponents' argument on its head by arguing that God's covenant with Abraham was based on his faith response (Gen 15:6; Gal 3:6) *before* the sign of circumcision was given (Gen 17:9-14). In all probability, the false teachers appealed to the institution of circumcision in Genesis 17 to argue that circumcision was indispensable to become a son of Abraham. Paul also points to Genesis—not of course to Genesis 17 *but* to Genesis 15:6 which says: "He [Abraham] believed the Lord and he reckoned it to him as righteousness." From this Paul concludes: "So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham" (Gal 3:7).

Paul uses the same Scripture to which his opponents appealed to show that God announced in advance to Abraham that He would justify the Gentiles by faith: "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying: 'In you shall all the nations be blessed.'" (Gal 3:8). And again Paul concludes: "So then, those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith" (Gal 3:9).

Paul's argument can be briefly summarized by means of the following syllogism:

**First premise:**

God justified Abraham because of his faith before instituting circumcision.

**Second premise:**

In Abraham all people are blessed.

**Conclusion:**

Therefore, all the people are blessed in Abraham (in the sense of being justified) because of their faith (as in the case of Abraham), irrespective of circumcision.

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Paul develops this argument further by setting the promise given to Abraham (in Genesis 18:18) against the giving of the Law at Sinai which occurred 430 years later (Gal 3:15-18). Making a play on the word *diatheke*, which in Greek can mean both will-testament and covenant, Paul points out that as a valid human testament cannot be altered by later additions, so the promise of God given to Abraham cannot be nullified by the Law, which came 430 years later. The fact that the covenant with Abraham was one of promise based on faith excludes the possibility of earning righteousness by works. "For if the inheritance is by the Law, it is no longer by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise" (Gal 3:18).

The same thought is expressed in Romans where Paul says that Abraham attained righteousness by faith before the sign of circumcision had been given (Rom 4:1-5). Circumcision, then, in its true meaning, is a sign or seal of a justifying faith (Rom 4:9-12). "The implication of the line of thought in Galatians 3 and Romans 4," as Eldon Ladd points out, "is that all the Israelites who trusted God's covenant of promise to Abraham and did not use the Law as a way of salvation by works, were assured salvation. This becomes clear in the case of David, who, though under the Law, pronounced a blessing on the man to whom God reckons righteousness by faith apart from works (Rom 4:6-7)."<sup>33</sup>

The examples of Abraham and David as men of faith under the Old Covenant help us to interpret Paul's statement: "But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian" (Gal 3:25). The *coming* of faith for Paul does not mean that saving faith was not exercised prior to the coming of Christ, since he cites Abraham and David as men of faith. Rather, he uses "faith" in a historic sense identical to the proclamation of the Gospel (Gal 4:4-5; Rom 1:16-17). Salvation was by faith in the Old Covenant, but faith was frustrated when people made the Law the basis of their righteousness and boasting.

If salvation was by way of promise (faith) and not Law, what then was the role of the Law in God's redemptive purpose? Paul's answer is both novel and unacceptable to Judaism. The Law "was added because of transgressions, till the offspring should come to whom the promises had been made" (Gal 3:19). The Law was not added to save men from their sins, but to reveal the sinfulness of their transgressions. The term "transgression" (*parabasis*), as Ernest Burton points out, implies "not simply the following of evil impulse, but violation of explicit Law."<sup>34</sup> By revealing what God forbids, the Law shows the sinfulness of deeds which otherwise might have passed without recognition.



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In this context, Paul speaks of the Law in its narrow, negative function of exposing sin, in order to counteract the exaltation of the Law by its opponents. Calvin offers a perceptive comment on this passage: “Paul was disputing with perverse teachers who pretended that we merit righteousness by the works of the Law. Consequently, to refute their error he was sometimes compelled to take the bare Law in a narrow sense, even though it was otherwise graced with the covenant of free adoption.”<sup>35</sup>

**The Law as a Custodian.** It is the “bare Law” understood in a narrow sense as the Law seen apart from Christ which was a temporary custodian until the coming of Christ. “When once ‘the seed’ has come, ‘to whom the promise hath been made,’ the One who is the goal, the meaning, the substance, of the Law, it is no longer an open possibility for those who believe in Him to regard the Law merely in this nakedness (though even in this forbidding nakedness it had served as a tutor to bring men to Christ). Henceforth it is recognized in its true character ‘graced’ or clothed ‘with the covenant of free adoption.’”<sup>36</sup>

To explain the function of the “bare Law” before Christ, Paul compares it to a *paidagogos*, a guardian of children in Roman and Greek households. The guardian’s responsibility was to accompany the children to school, protect them from harm, and keep them from mischief. The role of a *paidogogos* is an apt illustration of how some aspects of the Law served as a guardian and custodian of God’s people in Old Testament times. For example, circumcision, which is the fundamental issue Paul is addressing, served as a guardian to constantly remind the people of their covenant commitment to God (Jos 5:2-8).

When God called Israel out of Egyptian bondage, He gave them not only the Decalogue that they might see the sinfulness of sin, but also ceremonial, religious Laws designed to exhibit the divine plan for the forgiveness of their sins. These Laws, indeed, had the function of protecting and guiding the people until the day of their spiritual deliverance through Jesus Christ. With the coming of Christ, the ceremonial, sacrificial Laws ended, but the Decalogue is written in human hearts (Heb 8:10) by the ministry of the Holy Spirit who enables believers to “fulfill the just requirement of the Law” (Rom 8:4).

It is difficult to imagine that Paul would announce the abolition of the Decalogue, God’s great moral Law, when elsewhere he affirms that the Law was given by God (Rom 9:4; 3:2), was written by God (1 Cor 9:9; 14:21; 14:34), contains the will of God (Rom 2:17,18), bears witness to the

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righteousness of God (Rom 3:21), and is in accord with the promises of God (Gal 3:21). So long as sin is present in the human nature, the Law is needed to expose its sinfulness (Rom 3:20) and reveal the need of a Savior.

On the basis of the above considerations, we conclude that Paul's negative comments about the Law must be understood in the light of the polemic nature of Galatians. In this epistle, the apostle is seeking to undo the damage done by false teachers who were exalting the Law, especially circumcision, as a *means* of salvation. In refuting the perverse and excessive exaltation of the Law, Paul is forced to depreciate it in some measure, especially since the issue at stake was the imposition of circumcision as a means of salvation.

C. E. Cranfield rightly warns that "to fail to make full allowance for the special circumstances which called forth the letter would be to proceed in a quite uncritical and unscientific manner. In view of what has been said, it should be clear that it would be extremely unwise to take what Paul says in Galatians as one's starting point in trying to understand Paul's teaching on the Law."<sup>37</sup>

#### **(4) Colossians 2:14: What Was Nailed to the Cross?**

Christians who believe that "New Covenant" Christians are not under the obligation to observe the Law usually refer to Colossians 2:14, saying: "Does not Paul clearly teach that the Law was nailed to the Cross!" This conclusion is drawn especially from the KJV translation which reads: "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" (Col 2:14). The phrase "handwriting of ordinances" is interpreted as a reference to the Mosaic Law which allegedly was nailed to the Cross.

Does Paul in this text supports the popular view that Christ blotted out the Law and nailed it to the Cross? Is the "written document—*cheirographon*" that was nailed to the Cross the Law, in general, or the Sabbath, in particular? Traditionally, this is the way this text has been interpreted, namely, that God set aside and nailed to the Cross the Mosaic Law with all its ordinances, including the Sabbath.

This popular interpretation is unwarranted for at least two reasons. First, as E. Lohse points out, "In the whole of the epistle the word Law is not used at all. Not only that, but the whole significance of the Law, which appears unavoidable for Paul when he presents his Gospel, is completely absent."<sup>38</sup>

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Second, this interpretation detracts from the immediate argument designed to prove the fullness of God's forgiveness. The wiping out of the moral and/or ceremonial Law would hardly provide Christians with the divine assurance of forgiveness. Guilt is not removed by destroying Law codes. The latter would only leave mankind without moral principles.

**The Contest of Colossians 2:14.** To understand the legal language of Colossians 2:14, it is necessary to grasp the arguments advanced by Paul in the preceding verses to combat the Colossian false teachers. They were "beguiling" (Col 2:4) Christians to believe that they needed to observe ascetic "regulations—*dogmata*" in order to court the protection of those cosmic beings who allegedly could help them to participate in the completeness and perfection of the divinity.

To oppose this teaching, Paul emphasizes two vital truths. First, he reminds the Colossians that in Christ, and in Him alone, "the whole fullness of the deity dwells bodily" (Col 2:9) and, therefore, all other forms of authority that exist are subordinate to Him, "who is the head of all rule and authority" (Col 2:10). Second, the Apostle reaffirms that it is only in and through Christ that the believer can "come to the fullness of life" (Col 2:10), because Christ not only possesses the "fullness of deity" (Col 2:9) but also provides the fullness of "redemption" and "forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:14; 2:10-15; 3:1-5).

In order to explain how Christ extends "perfection" (Col 1:28; 4:12) and "fullness" (Col 1:19; 2:9) to the believer, Paul appeals, not to the Law, but to baptism. Christian perfection is the work of God who extends to the Christian the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection through baptism (Col 2:11-13). The benefits of baptism are concretely presented as the forgiveness of "all our trespasses" (Col 2:13; 1:14; 3:13) which results in being "made alive" in Christ (Col 2:13).

The reaffirmation of the fullness of God's forgiveness, accomplished by Christ on the Cross and extended through baptism to the Christian, constitutes Paul's basic answer to those trying to attain to perfection by submitting to ascetic practices to gain protection from cosmic powers and principalities. To emphasize the certainty and fullness of divine forgiveness explicitly mentioned in verse 13, the Apostle utilizes in verse 14 a legal metaphor, namely, that of God as a judge who "wiped out, . . . removed [and] nailed to the Cross . . . the written document—*cheirographon*."

**The Written Document Nailed to the Cross.** What is the "written document—*cheirographon*" that was nailed to the Cross? Is Paul referring to

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the Mosaic Law with its ceremonial ordinances, thus declaring that God nailed it to the Cross? If one adopts this interpretation, there exists a legitimate possibility that the Sabbath could be included among the ordinances nailed to the Cross.

This is indeed the popular view defended, especially in the anti-sabbatarian literature that we have examined during the course of this study. But besides the grammatical difficulties,<sup>39</sup> “it hardly seems Pauline,” writes J. Huby, “to represent God as crucifying the ‘holy’ (Rom 7:6) thing that was the Mosaic Law.”<sup>40</sup> Moreover, this view would not add to but detract from Paul’s argument designed to prove the fullness of God’s forgiveness. Would the wiping out of the moral and/or ceremonial Law provide to Christians the assurance of divine forgiveness? Hardly so. It would only leave mankind without moral principles. Guilt is not removed by destroying Law codes.

Recent research has shown that the term *cheirographon* was used to denote either a “certificate of indebtedness” resulting from our transgressions or a “book containing the record of sin” used for the condemnation of mankind.<sup>41</sup> Both renderings, which are substantially similar, can be supported from rabbinic and apocalyptic literature.<sup>42</sup> This view is supported also by the clause “and this he has removed out of the middle” (Col 2:14). “The middle” was the position occupied at the center of the court or assembly by the accusing witness. In the context of Colossians, the accusing witness is the “record-book of sins” which God in Christ has erased and removed out of the court.

**Ephesians 2:15.** To support the view that the “written document” nailed to the Cross is the Mosaic Law, some appeal to the similar text of Ephesians 2:15 which says: “Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the Law of commandments contained in ordinances”(KJV). But the similarity between the two texts is more apparent than real. In the first place, the phrase “the Law of commandments” which occurs in Ephesians is not found in Colossians. Second, the dative in Ephesians “*en dogmasiv*—in ordinances” is governed by “*en*—in,” thus expressing that the Law was set out “in ordinances.” Such a preposition does not occur in Colossians.

Last, the context is substantially different. While in Ephesians the question is how Christ removed what separated Jews from Gentiles, in Colossians the question is how Christ provided full forgiveness. The former He accomplished by destroying “the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph 2: 14). This is a possible allusion to the wall that divided the court of the Gentiles from the sanctuary proper,<sup>43</sup> making it impossible for them to participate in the worship service of the inner court with the Jews.

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The wall of partition was removed by Christ “by abolishing the Law of commandments [set out] in regulations” (Eph 2:15). The qualification of “commandments contained in ordinances” suggests that Paul is speaking not of the moral Law, but of “ceremonial ordinances” which had the effect of maintaining the separation between Jews and Gentiles, both in the social life and in the sanctuary services. The moral Law did not divide Jews from Gentiles, because speaking of the latter, Paul says that what the moral “Law requires is written on their heart” (Rom 2:15).

In Colossians 2:14, full forgiveness is granted, not by “abolishing the Law of commandments contained in ordinances,” but by utterly destroying “the written record of our sins which because of the regulations was against us. The context of the two passages is totally different, yet neither of the two suggests that the moral Law was nailed to the Cross.

**Record of Our Sins.** The “written record—*cheirographon*” that was nailed to the Cross is the record of our sins. By this daring metaphor, Paul affirms the completeness of God’s forgiveness. Through Christ, God has “cancelled,” “set aside,” “nailed to the Cross” “the written record of our sins which because of the regulations was against us.” The legal basis of the record of sins was “the binding statutes, regulations” (*tois dogmasin*), but what God destroyed on the Cross was not the *legal ground* (Law) for our entanglement into sin, but the *written record* of our sins.

One cannot fail to sense how, through this forceful metaphor, Paul is reaffirming the completeness of God’s forgiveness provided through Christ on the Cross. By destroying the *evidence* of our sins, God has also “disarmed the principalities and powers” (Col 2:15) since it is no longer possible for them to accuse those who have been forgiven. There is no reason, therefore, for Christians to feel incomplete and to seek the help of inferior mediators, since Christ has provided complete redemption and forgiveness.

In this whole argument the Law, as stated by Herold Weiss, “plays no role at all.”<sup>44</sup> Any attempt, therefore, to read into the “written record—*cheirographon*” a reference to the Law, or to any other Old Testament ordinance, is altogether unwarranted. The document that was nailed to the Cross contained not moral or ceremonial Laws, but rather the record of our sins. Is it not true even today that the memory of sin can create in us a sense of incompleteness? The solution to this sense of inadequacy, according to Paul, is to be found not by submitting to a system of ascetic “regulation,” but by accepting the fact that on the Cross God has blotted out our sins and granted us full forgiveness.

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Some people object to this interpretation because, in their view, it undermines the doctrine of the final judgment which will examine the good and the bad deeds of each person who ever lived (Rom 14:10; Rev 20:12). Their argument is that if the record of our sins was erased and nailed to the Cross, there would be no legal basis for conducting the final judgment. This objection ignores that the imagery of God cancelling, setting aside, and nailing the record of our sins to the Cross is designed not to do away with human accountability on the day of judgment, but to provide the reassurance of the totality of God's forgiveness in this present life.

For example, when Peter summoned the people in the Temple's Portico, saying, "Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19), he was not implying that there will be no final judgment for those whose sins have been blotted out. On the contrary, Peter spoke of the time when "judgment [is] to begin with the household of God" (1 Pet 4:17; cf. 2 Pet 2:9; 3:7). The imageries of God being willing to "blot out" our sins, or of casting "all our sins into the depths of the sea" (Mic 7:19) are not intended to negate the need of the final judgment, but to reassure the believer of the totality of God's forgiveness. The sins that have been forgiven, "blotted out," and "nailed to the Cross," are the sins that will be automatically vindicated in the day of judgment.

We conclude by saying that Colossians 2:14 reaffirms the essence of the Gospel—the Good News that God has nailed on the Cross the record and guilt of our sins—but it has nothing to say about the Law or the Sabbath. Any attempt to read into the text a reference to the Law is an unwarranted, gratuitous fantasy.

### **(5) Romans 10:4: "Christ Is the End of the Law"**

Few Pauline passages have been more used and abused than Romans 10:4 which reads: "For Christ is the end [*telos*] of the Law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (KJV). This text has been utilized as an easy slogan for two contrasting views regarding the role of the Law in the Christian life. Most Christians assume to be self-evident that in this text Paul teaches that Christ's coming has *put an end* to the Law as a way of righteousness and, consequently, "New Covenant" Christians are released from the observance of the Law.

Other Christians contend just as vigorously that in this text Paul teaches that Christ is the *goal* toward which the whole Law was aimed so that its promise of righteousness may be experienced by whoever believes in Him.

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I subscribe to the latter interpretation because, as we shall see, it is supported by the linguistic use of *telos* (its basic meaning is “goal” rather than “end”), the flow of Paul’s argument, and the overall Pauline teaching regarding the function of the Law.

**The Meaning of *Telos*: Termination or Goal?** The conflicting interpretations of this text stem mostly from a different understanding of the meaning of *telos*, the term which is generally translated as “end” in most English Bibles. However, the English term “end” is used mostly with the meaning of *termination*, the point at which something ceases. For example, the “end” of a movie, a journey, a school year, or a working day is the termination of that particular activity. By contrast, the Greek term *telos* has an unusual wide variety of meanings. In their *A Greek-English Lexicon*, William Arndt and Wilbur Gingrich explain that *telos* is used not only with the sense of “termination, cessation” but also with the meaning of “goal, outcome, purpose, design, achievement.”<sup>45</sup>

The use of *telos* as “goal, design, purpose” was most common in classical Greek as well as in biblical (Septuagint) and extra-biblical literature. This meaning has been preserved in English compound words such as *telephone*, *telescope*. In these instances, *tele* means “designed for,” or “for the purpose of.” For example, the *telephone* is an instrument *designed* for reproducing sounds at a distance. The *telescope* is an instrument *designed* for viewing distant objects. These different meanings of *telos* have given rise to two major interpretation of Romans 10:4, generally referred to as (1) “termination” and (2) “teleological.”

Most Christians hold to the *termination* interpretation which contends that *telos* in Romans 10:4 means “termination,” “cessation,” or “abrogation.” Consequently, “Christ is the end of the Law” in the sense that “Christ has put an end to the Law” by releasing Christians from its observance. This view is popular among those who believe that Paul negates the continuity of the Law for “New Covenant” Christians and is reflected in the New English Bible translation which reads: “For Christ ends the Law.”

This interpretative translation eliminates any possible ambiguity; but, by so doing, it misleads readers into believing that Paul categorically affirms the termination of the Law with the coming of Christ. The problem with *termination* interpretation, as we shall see, is that it contradicts the immediate context as well as the numerous explicit Pauline statements which affirm the validity and value of the Law (Rom 3:31; 7:12, 14; 8:4; 13:8-10).

The *teleological* interpretation maintains that *telos* in Romans 10:4 must be translated according to the basic meaning of the word, namely, “goal” or “object.” Consequently, “Christ is the goal of the Law” in the sense that the Law of God, understood as the Pentateuch or the Old Testament, has reached its purpose and fulfillment in Him. Furthermore, through Christ, believers experience the righteousness expressed by the Law. This interpretation has prevailed from the Early Church to the Reformation, and it is still held today by numerous scholars.

Two major considerations give us reason to believe that the teleological interpretation of Romans 10:4 as “Christ is the goal of the Law” correctly reflects the meaning of the passage: (1) The historical usage of *telos* in Biblical and extra-Biblical literature, and (2) the flow of Paul’s argument in the larger and immediate context. We now consider these two points in their respective order.

**The Historical Usage of *Telos*.** In his masterful doctoral dissertation *Christ the End of the Law: Romans 10:4 in Pauline Perspective*, published by *The Journal for the Study of the New Testament* (University of Sheffield, England), Roberto Badenas provides a comprehensive survey of the meaning and uses of *telos* in biblical and extra-biblical literature. He concludes his survey by noting that in classical Greek, the Septuagint, the Pseudepigrapha, Flavius Josephus, Philo, and Paul, the “basic connotations [of *telos*] are primarily directive, purposive, and completive, not temporal [termination]. . . . *Telos nomou* [end of the Law] and related expressions are indicative of the purpose, fulfillment, or object of the Law, not of its abrogation. . . . In all the New Testament occurrences of phrases having the same grammatical structure as Romans 10:4, *telos* is unanimously translated in a teleological way.”<sup>46</sup> In other words, *telos* is used in the ancient biblical and extra-biblical Greek literature to express “goal” or “purpose,” *not* “termination” or “abrogation.”

Badenas also provides a detailed historical survey of the interpretation of *telos nomou* [“end of the Law”] in Christian literature. For the period from the Early Church to the end of the Middle Ages, he found “an absolute predominance of the teleological and completive meanings. The Greek-speaking church understood and explained *telos* in Romans 10:4 by means of the terms *skopos* [goal], *pleroma* [fullness], and *telesiosis* [perfection], seeing in it the meanings of ‘purpose,’ ‘object,’ ‘plenitude,’ and ‘fulfillment.’ *Nomos* [Law] was understood as the Holy Scripture of the Old Testament (often rendered by *nomos kai prophetai* [Law and prophets]). Consequently, Romans 10:4 was interpreted as a statement of the fulfillment of the Old Testament, its prophecies or its purposes, in Christ.”<sup>47</sup>



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In the writings of the Latin Church, the equivalent term *finis* was used with practically all the same meanings of the Greek *telos*. The Latin word *finis* “was explained by the terms *perfectio*, *intentio*, *plenitudo*, *consummatio*, or, *impletio* [fullness].”<sup>48</sup> Thus, in both the Greek and Latin literature of the Early Church, the terms *telos/finis* are used almost exclusively with the *teleological* meaning of “goal” or “purpose,” and *not* with the *temporal* meaning of “termination” or “abrogation.”

No significant changes occurred in the interpretation of Romans 10:4 during the Middle Ages. The text was interpreted as “a statement of Christ’s bringing the Old Testament Law to its plenitude and completion. The Reformation, with its emphasis on literal exegesis, preserved the Greek and Latin meanings of *telos/finis*, giving to Romans 10:4 both teleological (e.g., Luther) and perfective (e. g., Calvin) interpretations.”<sup>49</sup> It is unfortunate that most translations of Romans 10:4 ignore the historic use of *telos* as “goal, purpose, perfection,” and, consequently, they mislead readers into believing that “Christ has put an end to the Law.”

The antinomian, abrogation interpretation of Romans 10:4 developed after the Reformation, largely due to the new emphasis on the discontinuity between Law and Gospel, the Old and New Testaments. The Lutherans began to apply to Romans 10:4 the negative view of the Law which Luther had expressed in other contexts.<sup>50</sup> The Anabaptists interpreted Romans 10:4 in terms of abrogation, according to their view that the New Testament supersedes the Old Testament.<sup>51</sup>

The lower view of Scripture fostered by the rationalistic movements of the eighteenth century further contributed to the tendency of interpreting Romans 10:4 in the sense of abolition.<sup>52</sup> In the nineteenth century, the overwhelming influence of German liberal theology, with its emphasis on biblical higher criticism, caused the antinomian “abrogation of the Law” interpretation of Romans 10:4 to prevail.<sup>53</sup>

The *termination/abrogation* interpretation of Romans 10:4 is still prevalent today, advocated especially by those who emphasize the discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments, the Law and the Gospel.<sup>54</sup> During the course of our study, we have found that the abrogation interpretation has been adopted even by former sabbatarians, like the Worldwide Church of God and Dale Ratzlaff in his book *Sabbath in Crisis*. This interpretation is largely conditioned by the mistaken theological presupposition that Paul consistently teaches the termination of the Law with the coming of Christ.

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A significant development of the last two decades is that a growing number of scholars have adopted the teleological interpretation of Romans 10:4, namely, that “Christ is the goal of the Law.” What has contributed to this positive development is the renewed efforts to analyze this text exegetically rather than imposing upon it subjective theological presuppositions. Badenas notes that “It is significant that—in general—the studies which are more exegetically oriented interpret *telos* in a teleological way [“Christ is the goal of the Law”], while the more systematic [theology] approaches interpret the term temporally [“Christ had put an end to the Law”].”<sup>55</sup>

It is encouraging that new exegetical studies of Romans 10:4 are contributing to a rediscovery of the correct meaning of this text. It is doubtful, however, that these new studies will cause an abandonment of the abrogation interpretation because it has become foundational to many Evangelical beliefs and practices. In this context, we can mention only a few significant studies, besides the outstanding dissertation of Roberto Badenas already cited.

**Recent Studies of Romans 10:4.** In a lengthy article (40 pages) published in *Studia Theologica*, Ragnar Bring emphasizes the culminating significance of *telos* in Romans 10:4 on the basis of the race-track imagery in the context (Rom 9:30-10:4). He argues that in this context, *telos* “signifies the winning-post of a race, the completion of a task, the climax of a matter.”<sup>56</sup> Bring explains that, since “the goal of the Law was righteousness,” the Law served as a custodian (*paidagogos*) directing people to Christ, who only can give righteousness. This means that “Christ is the goal of the Law” in the sense that He is the eschatological fulfillment of the Law.<sup>57</sup>

In the article cited earlier, “St. Paul and the Law,” C. E. B. Cranfield argues that in the light of the immediate and larger context of Romans 10:4, *telos* should be translated as “goal.” Consequently, he renders the texts as follows: “For Christ is the goal of the Law, so that righteousness is available to every one that believeth.”<sup>58</sup> He notes that verse 4 begins with “for—*gar*” because it explains verse 3 where Paul explains that “The Jews in their legalistic quest after a righteous status of their own earning, have failed to recognize and accept the righteous status which God has sought to give them.” On verse 4, according to Cranfield, Paul continues his explanation by giving the reasons for the Jews’ failure to attain a righteous status before God: “For Christ, whom they have rejected, is the goal toward which all along the Law was directed, and this means that in Him a righteous status before God is available to every one who will accept it by faith.”<sup>59</sup>

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Similarly, George E. Howard advocates a goal-oriented interpretation of *telos* in Romans 10:4, arguing that “Christ is the goal of the Law to everyone who believes because the ultimate goal of the Law is that all be blessed in Abraham.”<sup>60</sup> A lengthier treatment of Romans 10:4 is provided by J. E. Tows, who interprets *telos* as “goal” on the basis of “linguistic and contextual grounds.”<sup>61</sup>

More recently, C. T. Rhyne has produced a perceptive dissertation on Romans 3:31 where Paul says: “Do we then overthrow the Law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the Law.” Rhyne shows that there is a theological connection between this verse and Romans 10:4. This connection supports the teleological interpretation of *telos* and is more consistent with Paul’s positive understanding of the relationship between Christ and the Law in Romans.<sup>62</sup>

Walter Kaiser, a well-known and respected Evangelical scholar, offers a compelling defense of the teleological interpretation of Romans 10:4 by examining closely the arguments developed by Paul in the whole section from Romans 9:30 to 10:13. He notes that in this passage Paul is “clearly contrasting two ways of obtaining righteousness—one that the Gentiles adopted, the way of faith; the other, a work method, that many Israelites adopted—all to no avail.”<sup>63</sup>

What many fail to realize, according to Kaiser, is that the “homemade Law of righteousness [adopted by many Jews] is not equivalent to the righteousness that is from the Law of God.”<sup>64</sup> In other words, what Paul is condemning in this passage is not “the righteousness that God had intended to come from the Law of Moses,” but the homemade righteousness which many Jews made into a Law without Christ as its object.<sup>65</sup> Paul’s condemnation of the perverted use of the Law does not negate its proper use.

Kaiser concludes his insightful analysis of this passage with these words: “The term *telos* in Romans 10:4 means ‘goal’ or purposeful conclusion. The Law cannot be properly understood unless it moves toward the grand goal of pointing the believer toward the Messiah, Christ. The Law remains God’s Law, not Moses’ Law (Rom 7:22; 8:7). It still is holy, just, good, and spiritual (Rom 7:12, 14) for the Israelite as well as for the believing Gentile.”<sup>66</sup>

**The Larger Context of Romans 10:4.** In the final analysis, the correct meaning of Romans 10:4 can only be established by a careful examination of its larger and immediate contexts. This is what we intend to do now. In the larger context (Romans 9 to 11), Paul addresses not the

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relationship between Law and Gospel, but how God's plan of salvation—finally fulfilled with the coming of Christ—relates to the destiny of Israel. The fact that the majority of Christian converts were Gentiles and that the majority of the Jews had rejected Christ, raised questions about the trustworthiness of God's promises regarding the salvation of Israel.

The question that Paul is discussing is stated in Romans 9:6: "Has the word of God failed?" How can God's promises to Israel be true when Israel as a nation has jeopardized its election as God's people by rejecting Christ? This was a crucial question in the apostolic church which was formed by many Jewish Christians and directed by Twelve Apostles who were Jews. "The issue was how to explain that the people of the old covenant, who had been blessed by God with the greatest privileges (Rom 9:4-5), were now separated from the community of the new covenant, which, as a matter of fact, was nothing other than the extension of Israel."<sup>67</sup>

Paul responds to this question in Romans 9 to 11 first by pointing out that God's word has not failed because divine election has never been based on human merits, but on God's sovereignty and mercy. The inclusion of the Gentiles following Israel's disobedience is not unjust because it represents the triumph of God's plan as contemplated in the Scriptures (Rom 9:6-29). "As indeed he says in Hosea, 'Those who were not my people I will call my people'" (Rom 9:25).

Second, Paul points out that Israel's rejection of Christ comes from their failure to understand God's purposes as revealed in Scripture and manifested through the coming of Christ (Rom 9:30 to 10:21). Instead of receiving the righteousness of God by faith, Israel sought to establish its own righteousness (Rom 9:31; 10:3).

Last, Paul brings out that the failure of Israel is only partial and temporary. God has not rejected Israel but has used their failure for the inclusion of the Gentiles and ultimately the salvation of Israel (Rom 11:1-36). "A hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:25-26).

This bare outline of the larger context of Romans 10:4 suffices to show that the issue that Paul is addressing is not the relationship between Law and Gospel, but how God is working out His plan for the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles, "for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek" (Rom 10:12). This means that Romans 10:4 must be interpreted not on the basis of a "Law-Gospel" debate, which is foreign to the context, but on the basis of the salvation of Jews and Gentiles which is discussed in the context.

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**The Immediate Context of Romans 10:4.** The section of Romans 9:30 to 10:13 is generally regarded as the immediate context of Romans 10:4. Paul customarily signals the next stage of his argument in Romans by the recurring phrase: “What shall we say, then?” (Rom 9:30). And the issue he addresses in Romans 9:30 to 10:13 is this: How did it happen that the Gentiles who were not in the race after righteousness obtained the righteousness of God by faith, while Israel who was in the race to attain the righteousness promised by the Law, did not reach the goal?

Badenas provides a convenient, concise summary of Paul’s argument in Romans 9:30-33. He writes; “Paul presents the failure of Israel in the fact that it did not recognize from Scriptures (*eis nomon ouk ephthasen*—did not attain to the Law—Rom 9:31) Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah, the goal and substance and meaning of the Law. Looking at the Torah [Mosaic Law] from the human perspective—as a code primarily interested in human performance—Israel overlooked the importance of looking at it from the perspective of God’s saving acts and mercy. Having failed to take their own Law seriously in that particular respect, they did not see that God’s promises had been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. In other words, Israel’s misunderstanding of Torah [Mosaic Law] is presented by Paul as blindness to the Law’s witness to Christ (cf. Rom 9:31-33 with 10:4-13 and 3:21) which was epitomized in Israel’s rejection of Jesus as Messiah.”<sup>68</sup>

It is important to note that in the immediate context, Paul is not disparaging the Law but is criticizing its improper use as a way to attain one’s own righteousness. The Jews were extremely zealous for God, but their zeal was not based on knowledge (Rom 10:2). Being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, many Jews tried “to establish their own righteousness” (Rom 10:3).

The problem with the Jews was not the Law, but their misunderstanding and misuse of it. They did not attain to the righteousness promised by the Law because they misunderstood it and transformed it into a tool of personal achievement (Rom 10:2-3, 5; 2:17, 27; 3:27; 4:2). They insisted on establishing their own righteousness (Rom 10:3) rather than accepting the righteousness that had been revealed by God through Moses in the Law. They did not see that the righteousness of God had been revealed especially through the coming of the promised Messiah. They looked at the Law in order to see what a person could do to become righteous before God instead of recognizing what God had already done for them through Jesus Christ. They failed to recognize that Christ is the goal of the Law, as Paul says in verse 4.

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**Romans 10:4: Goal or Termination?** Paul continues his argument in verse 4, which literally reads: “For Christ is the goal of the Law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” This crucial text begins with the conjunction “For—*gar*,” thus indicating a continuous explanation within the flow of Paul’s thought. This means that this text must be interpreted in the light of its immediate context where Paul discusses the failure of the Jews to attain the righteousness promised by the Law.

In Greek, the key sentence reads “*telos nomou Christos*,” which literally translated means “The goal of Law [is] Christ.” The structure of the sentence with *telos nomou* at the beginning indicates that Paul is making a statement about the Law rather than about Christ. The Law (*nomos*) has been the center of Paul’s discussion since Romans 9:6, and particularly since Romans 9:31, where he speaks of *nomos dikaiosunes*—the Law of righteousness, that is, the Law that holds forth the promise of righteousness.

Note must be taken of the fact that in the immediate context, Paul does not speak of the *Law* and *Christ* as standing in an antagonistic relationship. In Romans 9:31-33 he explains that, had the Jews believed in Christ (“the stone”), they would certainly have “attained” the Law which promises righteousness. Consequently, in the light of the immediate context, it is more consistent to take the Law—*nomos* as *bearing witness to Christ* rather than as *being abrogated by Christ*. The abrogation interpretation (“Christ has put an end to the Law”) disrupts Paul’s flow of thought, works against his main argument, and would have been confusing to his readers in Rome accustomed to use *telos* with the sense of “goal” rather than “termination.”

The athletic metaphors used in the immediate context (Rom 9:30-33) also suggest that *telos* is used with the meaning of “goal,” because *telos* was one of the terms commonly used to denote the winning-post or the finish line. Other athletic terms used by Paul are *diokon* (Rom 9:30-31), which denotes the earnest pursuit of a goal; *katelaben* (Rom 9:30), which describes the attaining of a goal; *ouk ephthasen* (Rom 9:31), which refers to the stumbling over an obstacle in a race; and *kataiskuno* (Rom 9:33), which expresses the disappointment and shame of the defeat.

The implications of the athletic metaphors are well stated by Badenas: “If by accepting Christ the Gentiles reached the winning-post of *dikaiousune* [righteousness] and, thereby, acceptance within the new people of God (Rom 9:30), and by rejecting Christ Israel did not reach the goal of the Law and thereby admission into God’s new people, the logical conclusion is what Romans 10:4 says: that the goal of the Law and the winning-post of

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*dikaiosune* [righteousness] and entrance into God's eschatological people are to be found nowhere else than in Christ."<sup>69</sup>

**The Qualifying Clause: "For Righteousness . . ."** Further support for the teleological interpretation is provided by the qualifying clause that follows: "For righteousness to every one that believeth" (Rom 10:4b; KJV). The phrase "for righteousness" translates the Greek *eis dikaiosunen*. Since the basic meaning of the preposition *eis*—"into" or "for" is directional and purposive, it supports the teleological interpretation of the text, which would read: "Christ is the goal of the Law in [its promise of] righteousness to everyone that believeth."

This interpretation harmonizes well with the context, and contributes to the understanding of such important elements in the context as "the word of God has not failed" (Rom 9:6), the Gentiles attained righteousness (Rom 9:30), Israel did not "attain" to the Law (Rom 9:31) but stumbled over the stone (Rom 9:33), and ignored God's righteousness (Rom 10:2-3). All these major themes fit if Romans 10:4 is understood in the sense that the Law, in its promise of righteousness to whoever believes, pointed to Christ.

The abrogation interpretation that "Christ has put an end to the Law *as a way of* righteousness by bringing righteousness to anyone who will believe," interrupts the flow of the argument and works against it. The same is true of the interpretation which says "Christ has put an end to the Law *in order that* righteousness based on faith alone may be available to all men." The problem with these interpretations is that they wrongly assume that, prior to Christ's coming, righteousness was obtainable through the Law and that the Law was an insurmountable obstacle to the exercise of righteousness by faith, and, consequently, it was removed by Christ.

The assumption that Christ put an end to the Law as a way of salvation is discredited by the fact that, in Paul's view, salvation never did come or could come by the Law (Gal 2:21; 3:21). In Romans 4, Abraham and other Old Testament righteous people were saved by faith in Christ (cf. Rom 9:30-33). The rock that Israel stumbled over was Christ (Rom 9:33; cf. 1 Cor 10:4). Paul explicitly says that the Law was not an obstacle to God's righteousness, but a witness to it (Rom 9:31; 3:21, 31).

Another important point to consider is that the key to understanding Romans 10:4 may be found in the proper comprehension of the last words of the text—"to everyone who believes." This is the view of George Howard who notes that this is the theme of the inclusion of the Gentiles which dominates the immediate context. He writes: "The Jews based their salvation

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on the fact that they had the Law, the fathers, and all the blessings which go with these. Their extreme hostility to the Gentiles (1 Thess 2:15-16) had caused them to miss the point of the Law itself, that is, that its very *aim* and *goal* was the ultimate unification of all nations under the God of Abraham according to the promise. In this sense Christ is the *telos* [goal] of the Law; he was its *goal to everyone who believes*.<sup>70</sup>

In the light of the preceding considerations, we conclude that Romans 10:4 represents the logical continuation and culmination of the argument initiated in Romans 9:30-33, namely, that Christ is the goal of the Law because He embodies the righteousness promised by the Law for everyone who believes. This is the righteousness which the Gentiles attained by faith and which most Jews rejected because they chose to establish their own righteousness (Rom 10:3) rather than accept the righteousness the Law pointed to and promised through Jesus Christ. Thus, far from declaring the abrogation of the Law with the coming of Christ, Romans 10:4 affirms the realization of the goal of the Law in Christ who offers righteousness to everyone who believes.

**Romans 10:5-8: The Obedience of Faith.** In order to support the statement in Romans 10:4 that Christ is the goal of the Law in offering righteousness to everyone who believes, Paul continues in verses 5 to 8 showing how the Law calls for a response, not of works in which a person can boast, but of faith in which God receives the credit. Paul develops his argument by quoting two texts from the Old Testament—Leviticus 18:5 in verse 5 and Deuteronomy 30:12-14 in verses 6 to 8.

Romans 10:5-8 reads: “For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on the Law shall live by it [quote from Lev 18:5]. But the righteousness based on faith says, Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend to heaven?’ (that is, to bring Christ down) or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach)” [paraphrase of Deut 30:12-14].

The principal problem with these verses is in establishing the relationship between the quotation of Leviticus 18:5 in Romans 10:5 and the quotation of Deuteronomy 30:12-14 in Romans 10:6-8. Are the two quotations intended to present two complementary aspects of righteousness or two conflicting ways of righteousness? The common interpretation assumes that the two quotations are used by Paul to contrast two ways of righteousness: the righteousness by works of the Law as taught in Leviticus 18:5 and the



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righteousness by faith as taught in Deuteronomy 30:12-14. The former would represent the Jewish way of righteousness based on human obedience and the latter the righteousness of divine grace offered by faith.

This popular interpretation rests on two mistaken assumptions. The first is that the two particles “*gar*—for . . . *de*—but,” which are used to introduce verses 5 and 6, respectively, serve to contrast the two types of righteousness. “*For* Moses writes . . . *but* the righteousness of faith says . . . .” This assumption is wrong because the Greek word translated “but” in verse 6 is *de* and not *alla*. The particle *de* is frequently translated as “and” without any contrast intended, while *alla* is consistently translated as “but” because it serves to make a contrast. George Howard clearly and convincingly points out that “*gar* . . . *de* do not mean “for . . . but,” but as in Romans 7:8-9; 10:10; 11:15-16, they mean “for . . . and.”<sup>71</sup> In other words, in this context Paul uses this set of particles not in an adversative way but in a connective way, to complement two aspects of righteousness.

**One Kind of Righteousness.** The second mistaken assumption is that the two quotations used by Paul are antithetical, teaching two different kinds of righteousness. But this cannot be true. If Paul had quoted Leviticus 18:5 as teaching righteousness by works, he could hardly have faulted the Jews for pursuing the “the righteousness which is based on Law” (Rom 9:31), since they would have been doing exactly what the Law commanded them to do. But this is contrary to Paul’s charge that the Jews had misunderstood the Scripture.

In their original contexts, both quotations say essentially the same thing, namely, that the Israelites must observe God’s commandments in order to continue to enjoy the blessings of life. In Leviticus 18:5, Moses admonishes the Israelites not to follow the ways of the heathen nations, but to keep God’s “statutes and ordinances” in order to perpetuate the life God had given them. Similarly, in Deuteronomy 30:11-16, Moses tells the Israelites “to obey the commandments of the Lord” because they are not hard to observe, and ensure the blessings of life (“then you shall live and multiply”—Deut 30:16).

Some argue that Paul took the liberty of misinterpreting Deuteronomy 30:11-14 in order to support his teachings of righteousness by faith. But had Paul done such a thing, he would have exposed himself to the legitimate criticism of his enemies who would have accused him of misinterpreting Scripture. Furthermore, neither Paul nor any Bible writer sets Moses against Moses or against any other biblical statement. It was not the custom of Paul to seek out contradictions in the Scripture or to quote the Old

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Testament to show that one of its statements was no longer valid. The fact that Paul quoted Deuteronomy 30:12-14 immediately after Leviticus 18:5 suggests that he viewed the two passages as complementary and not contradictory.

The complementary function of the two quotations is not difficult to see. In Romans 10:4 Paul affirms that Christ is the goal of the Law in offering righteousness to everyone who believes. In verse 5, he continues (note “for—*gar*”) expanding what this means by quoting Leviticus 18:5 as a summary expression of the righteousness of the Law—namely, that “whoever follows the way of righteousness taught by the Law shall live by it.” This fundamental truth had been misconstrued by the Pharisees who made the Law so hard to observe that, to use the words of Peter, it became a “yoke upon the neck” that nobody could bear (Acts 15:10). Paul clarifies this misconception in verses 6 to 8 by paraphrasing Deuteronomy 30:12-14 immediately after Leviticus 18:5 in order to show that God’s Law is not hard to observe, as the Pharisees had made it to be. All it takes to obey God’s commandments is a heart response: “The word is near to you, on your lips and in your heart” (Rom 10:8).

Daniel Fuller rightly observes that “by paraphrasing Deuteronomy 30:11-14 right after a verse spotlighting the righteousness of the Law which Moses taught [Lev 18:5], and by affirming this paraphrase of Moses which inserts the word ‘Christ’ at crucial points, Paul was showing that the righteousness set forth by the Law was the righteousness of faith. Since the wording of the Law can be replaced by the word ‘Christ’ with no loss of meaning, Paul has demonstrated that Moses himself taught that Christ and the Law are one piece. Either one or both will impart righteousness to all who believe, and thus the affirmation of Romans 10:4 [that ‘Christ is the goal of the Law’] is supported by Paul’s reference to Moses in verses 5-8.”<sup>72</sup>

What Paul wishes to show in Romans 10:6-8 is that the righteousness required by the Law in order to live (Lev 18:5) does not necessitate a superhuman achievement, like climbing into heaven or descending into the abyss. This was Paul’s way of expressing the impossible task the Jews wanted to accomplish through their own efforts. By contrast, the righteousness required by the Law is fulfilled through the Word which is in the heart and in the mouth, that is, by believing and confessing the Lord (Rom 10:10).

The reference to the nearness of the Word in Deuteronomy 30:14 permitted Paul to link the divine grace made available by God in the Law with the divine grace made available by God in Christ, the Word. His commentary

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on Deuteronomy 30:14 clearly shows that he understood Christ to be the substance and content of both the Law and the Gospel. Because of the unity that exists between the two, he could identify the *word* of the Law (Deut 30:14) with the *word* of the Gospel (Rom 10:8-9).

The recognition of the unity between Law and Gospel leads Walter Kaiser to pose a probing rhetorical question: “What will it take for modern Christians to see that Moses, in the same way that the apostle Paul, advocated, wanted Israel to ‘believe unto righteousness’ (Rom 10:10; cf. Deut 30:14)? . . . Both Moses and Paul are in basic agreement that the life being offered to Israel, both in those olden days and now in the Christian era, was available and close at hand; in fact it was so near them that it was in their mouth and in their hearts.”<sup>73</sup> It is unfortunate that so many Christians fail to recognize this basic unity that exists between the Law and the Gospel, Moses and Paul, both affirming that Christ is the goal and culmination of the Law in its promise of righteousness to everyone who believes.

**Conclusion.** The foregoing analysis of Romans 10:4 shows that Christ is not the *end*, but the *goal* of the Law. He is the *goal* toward which the whole Law was aimed so that its promise of righteousness may be experienced by whoever believes in Him. He is the goal of the Law in the sense that in His person and work He fulfilled its promises, types, and sacrificial ceremonies (2 Cor 1:20; Rom 10:6-10; 3:21; Heb 10:1-8). He is also the goal of the Law in the sense that He is the only Man who was completely obedient to its requirements (Phil 2:8; Rom 5:19; Rom 10:5). He is also the goal of the Law in the sense that He enables the believer to live in accordance to “the just requirements of the Law” (Rom 8:4).

#### PART 4: THE LAW AND THE GENTILES

In studying some of Paul’s negative comments about the Law, we noted that such comments were occasioned by the Apostle’s effort to undo the damage done by false teachers who were exalting the Law, especially circumcision, as a means of salvation. To bring into sharper focus Paul’s criticism of the Law, we now consider why the Gentiles were tempted to adopt legalistic practices like circumcision.

Paul’s letters were written to congregations made up predominantly of Gentile converts, most of whom were former “God-fearers” (1 Thess 1:9; 1 Cor 12:2; Gal 4:8; Rom 11:13; 1:13; Col 1:21; Eph 2:11). A crucial problem among Gentile Christians was their right as Gentiles to enjoy full

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citizenship in the people of God without becoming members of the covenant community through circumcision.

**A Jewish Problem.** This was not a uniquely Christian problem. W. D. Davies has shown that the relationship of Israel to the Gentile world was the foremost theological problem of Judaism in the first century.<sup>74</sup> Basically, the problem for the Jews consisted in determining what commandments the Gentiles had to observe in order for them to have a share in the world to come.

No clear-cut answer to this question existed in Paul's time. Some Jews held that Gentiles had to observe only a limited number of commandments (Noachic Laws). Other Jews, however, like the House of Shammai, insisted that Gentiles had to observe the whole Law, including circumcision. In other words, they had to become full-fledged members of the covenant community in order to share in the blessings of the world-to-come.<sup>75</sup>

Lloyd Gaston perceptively notes that "it was because of this unclarity that legalism—the doing of certain works to win God's favor and be counted righteous—arose a Gentile and not a Jewish problem at all."<sup>76</sup> Salvation was for all who were members of the covenant community, but since the God-fearers were not under the covenant, they had to establish their own righteousness to gain such an assurance of salvation.

Marcus Barth has shown that the phrase "works of the Law" is not found in Jewish texts and designates the adoption of selected Jewish practices by the Gentiles to ensure their salvation as part of the covenant people of God.<sup>77</sup> Recognition of this legalistic Gentile attitude is important to our understanding of the background of Paul's critical remarks about the Law.

**A Christian Problem.** The Jewish problem of whether Gentiles were saved within or without the covenant soon became also a Christian problem. Before his conversion and divine commission to the Gentiles, Paul apparently believed that Gentiles had to conform to the whole Mosaic Law, including circumcision, in order for them to be saved. The latter is suggested by the phrase "but if I still preach circumcision" (Gal 5: 11), which implies that at one time he did preach circumcision as a basis of salvation.

After his conversion and divine commission to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, Paul understood that Gentiles share in the blessing of salvation without having to become part of the covenant community through circumcision. To defend this conviction, we noted earlier that Paul appeals in Romans 4 and Galatians 3 to the example of Abraham who became the father of all who believe by faith before he was circumcised.

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In proclaiming his non-circumcision Gospel, Paul faced a double challenge. On one hand, he faced the opposition of Jews and Jewish-Christians because they failed to understand (“Israel did not understand”—Rom 10:19) that, through Christ, God had fulfilled His promises to Abraham regarding the Gentiles. On the other hand, Paul had to deal with the misguided efforts of Gentiles who were tempted to adopt circumcision and other practices to ensure their salvation by becoming members of the covenant community (Gal 5:2-4).

**Law as Document of Election.** To counteract the double challenge from Jewish and Gentile Christians, Paul was forced to speak critically of the Law as a document of election. Several scholars have recently shown that the concept of the covenant—so central in the Old Testament—came more and more to be expressed by the term “Law” (*torah—nomos*).<sup>78</sup> One’s status before God came to be determined by one’s attitude toward the Law (*torah—nomos*) as a document of election and not by obedience to specific commandments.

The Law came to mean a revelation of God’s electing will manifested in His covenant with Israel. Obviously, this view created a problem for the uncircumcised Gentiles because they felt excluded from the assurance of salvation provided by the covenant. This insecurity naturally led Gentiles to “desire to be under Law” (Gal 4:21), that is, to become full-fledged covenant members by receiving circumcision (Gal 5:2). Paul felt compelled to react strongly against this trend because it undermined the universality of the Gospel.

To squelch the Gentiles’ “desire to be under Law,” Paul appeals to the Law (Pentateuch), specifically to Abraham, to argue that the mothers of his two children, Ishmael and Isaac, stand for two covenants: the first based on works and the second on faith (Gal 4:22-31)—the first offering “slavery” and the second resulting in “freedom.” The first, Hagar, who bears “children of slavery,” is identified with the covenant of Mount Sinai (Gal 4:24).

Why does Paul attack so harshly the Sinai covenant which, after all, was established by the same God who made a covenant with Abraham? Besides, did not the Sinai covenant contain provisions of grace and forgiveness through the sanctuary services (Ex 25-30), besides principles of conduct (Ex 20-23)? The answer to these questions is to be found in Paul’s concern to establish the legitimacy of the salvation of the Gentiles as Gentiles.

To accomplish this goal, Paul attacks the understanding of the Law (covenant) as an *exclusive document of election*. This does not mean that he

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denies the possibility of salvation to Jews who accepted Christ as the fulfillment of the Sinai covenant. On the contrary, he explicitly acknowledges that just as he was “entrusted with the Gospel to the uncircumcised,” so “Peter had been entrusted with the Gospel to the circumcised” (Gal 2:7).

Paul does not explain what was the basic difference between the two Gospels. We can presume that since the circumcision had become equated with the covenant, the Gospel to the circumcised emphasized that Christ through His blood ratified the Sinai covenant by making it operative (Matt 26:28). This would make it possible for Jews to be saved as Jews, that is, while retaining their identity as a covenant people.

Note that Paul does not deny the value of circumcision for the Jews. On the contrary, he affirms: “Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the Law; but if you break the Law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision” (Rom 2:25). Again in Romans 9 to 11, Paul does not rebuke the Jews for being “Jewish” in their life-style (Rom 11:1), but rather for failing to understand that the Gentiles in Christ have equal access to salvation because Christ is the goal of the Law.

### Conclusion

Several conclusions emerge from our study of Paul’s view of the Law. We noted that prior to his conversion, Paul understood the Law like a Pharisee, namely, as the external observance of commandments in order to gain salvation (2 Cor 5:16-17). After his encounter with Christ on the Damascus Road, Paul gradually came to realize that his Pharisaic view of the Law as a way of salvation was wrong, because the Old Testament teaches that salvation was already promised to Abraham through the Christ, the Seed to come, 430 years before the giving of the Law at Sinai (Gal 3:17).

From the perspective of the Cross, Paul rejected the Pharisaic understanding of the Law as a means of salvation and accepted the Old Testament view of the Law as a revelation of God’s will for human conduct. We found that for Paul *the Law is and remains God’s Law* (Rom 7:22, 25), because it was given by God (Rom 9:4; 3:2), was written by Him (1 Cor 9:9; 14:21; 14:34), reveals His will (Rom 2:17, 18), bears witness to His righteousness (Rom 3:21), and is in accord with His promises (Gal 3:21).

Being a revelation of God’s will for mankind, the Law reveals the nature of sin as disobedience to God. Paul explains that “through the Law comes the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20) because the Law causes people to recognize their sins and themselves as sinners. It is evident that this important

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function of the Law could not have been terminated by Christ, since the need to acknowledge sin in one's life is as fundamental to the life of Christians today as it was for the Israelites of old.

The function of Christ's redemptive mission was not to abrogate the Law, as many Christians mistakenly believe, but to enable believers to live out the principles of God's Law in their lives. Paul affirms that, in Christ, God has done what the Law by itself could not do—namely, He empowers believers to live according to the “just requirements of the Law.” “For God has done what the Law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirements of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:3-4).

The new life in Christ enables the Christian to keep the Law, not as an external code, but as a loving response to God. This is the very thing that the Law by itself cannot do, because being an external standard of human conduct, it cannot generate a loving response in the human heart. By contrast, “Christ's love compels us” (2 Cor 5:14) to respond to Him by living according to the moral principles of God's Law (John 14:15).

Paul recognizes that the observance of the Law can tempt people to use it unlawfully as a means to establish their own righteousness before God. This was the major problem of his Gentile converts who were tempted to adopt practices like circumcision in order to gain acceptance with God. Paul exposes as hopeless all attempts to be justified in God's sight by works of the Law because “no human being will be justified in his sight by the works of the Law, since through the Law comes knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20). Human beings in their fallen condition can never fully observe God's Law.

What Paul radically rejects is not of the Law, but of legalism, that is, the attempt to establish one's righteousness through the external observance of the Law. Legalism ultimately blinds a person to the righteousness which God has made available as a free gift through Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 10:3). This was the problem with the false teachers who were promoting circumcision as a way of salvation without Christ. By so doing, they were propagating the false notion that salvation is a human achievement rather than a divine gift.

The mounting pressure of Judaizers who were urging circumcision upon the Gentiles made it necessary for Paul to attack the exclusive covenant concept of the Law. “But,” as George Howard points out, “under other circumstances he [Paul] might have insisted on the importance of Israel's retention of her distinctiveness.”<sup>79</sup>

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An understanding of the different circumstances that occasioned Paul's discussion of the Law is essential for resolving the apparent contradiction between the positive and negative statements he makes about the Law. For example, in Ephesians 2:15 Paul speaks of the Law as having been "*abolished*" by Christ, while in Romans 3:31, he explains that justification by faith in Jesus Christ does not overthrow the Law but "*establishes*" it. In Romans 7:6, he states that "now we are discharged from the Law" while a few verses later he writes that "the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good" (Rom 7:12). In Romans 3:28, he maintains that "a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law," yet in 1 Corinthians 7:19, he states that "neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God."

How can Paul view the Law both as "*abolished*" (Eph 2:15) and "*established*" (Rom 3:31), *unnecessary* (Rom 3:28) and *necessary* (1 Cor 7:19; Eph 6:2, 3; 1 Tim 1:8-10)? Our study shows that the resolution to this apparent contradiction is found in the different contexts in which Paul speaks of the Law. When he speaks of the Law in the context of salvation (justification—right standing before God), especially in his polemic with Judaizers, he clearly affirms that Law-keeping is of no avail (Rom 3:20). On the other hand, when Paul speaks of the Law in the context of Christian conduct (sanctification—right living before God), especially in dealing with antinomians, then he upholds the value and validity of God's Law (Rom 7:12; 13:8-10; 1 Cor 7:19).

In summation, Paul criticizes not the moral value of the Law as guide to Christian conduct, but the soteriological (saving) understanding of the Law seen as a document of election that includes Jews and excludes Gentiles. Failure to distinguish in Paul's writing between his moral and soteriological usages of the Law, and failure to recognize that his criticism of the Law is directed especially toward Gentile Judaizers who were exalting the Law, especially circumcision, as a means of salvation, has led many to fallaciously conclude that Paul rejects the value and validity of the Law as a whole. Such a view is totally unwarranted because, as we have shown, *Paul rejects the Law as a method of salvation but upholds it as a moral standard of Christian conduct.*



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**NOTES TO CHAPTER 5**

1. Dale Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Crisis* (Applegate, California, 1990), pp. 200, 218, 219.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 181.

6. Walter C. Kaiser, "The Law as God's Gracious Guidance for the Promotion of Holiness," in *Law, The Gospel, and the Modern Christian* (Grand Rapids, 1993), p. 178.

7. C. E. B. Cranfield, "St. Paul and the Law," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 17 (March 1964), pp. 43-44.

8. A convenient survey of those scholars (Albert Schweitzer, H. J. Schoeps, Ernest Käseman, F. F. Bruce, Walter Gutbrod) who argue that the Law is no longer valid for Christians, is provided by Brice Martin's *Christ and the Law in Paul* (Leiden, Holland, 1989), pp. 55-58.

9. Gerhard von Rad, "Zao," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, 1974), p. 845.

10. George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1974), p. 497.

11. H. Kleinknecht, *Bible Key Words* (Grand Rapids, Michigan 1962), p. 69.

12. *Pike Aboth* 2:7. For other references, see H. Kleinknecht (note 11), p. 76.

13. George Eldon Ladd (note 11), p. 501.

14. C. K. Barrett, *Commentary on the Book of Romans* (New York, 1957), p. 58.

15. C. E. B. Cranfield (note 7), p. 47.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

17. John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, trans. R. Mackenzie (Edinburg, 1961), p. 141.

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18. George Eldon Ladd (note 10), p. 541.
  19. Brice L. Martin, *Christ and the Law in Paul* (Leiden, Holland, 1989), pp. 53, 68.
  20. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1982), p. 229.
  21. Greg L. Bahnsen, "The Theonomic Reformed Approach to Law and Gospel," in *Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian* (Grand Rapids, 1993), p. 106.
  22. John Murray (note 20), p. 229.
  23. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York, 1970), vol. 1, p. 262.
  24. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1962), p. 97.
  25. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
  26. C. E. B. Cranfield (note 7), p. 58.
  27. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes (note 24), p. 104.
  28. C. E. B. Cranfield (note 7), p. 59.
  29. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. by J. Pringle (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1948), vol. 2, p. 183.
  30. C. E. B. Cranfield (note 7), p. 61.
  31. Brice L. Martin (note 19), p. 155.
  32. Ardel Bruce Caneday, "The Curse of the Law and the Cross: Works of the Law and Faith in Galatians 3:1-14," Doctoral dissertation submitted at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Deerfield, Illinois 1992), p. 58.
  33. George Eldon Ladd (note 11), p. 507.
  34. Ernest De Will Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (Edinburgh, 1962), p. 188.
  35. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. F. L. Battles (London, 1961), vol. II, VI, 2.

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36. C. E. B. Cranfield (note 7), p. 63.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

38. Eduard Lohse, *A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Philadelphia, 1971), p. 116.

39. To justify this interpretation, the phrase “*cheirographon tois dogmasiv*” is translated “the document consisting in ordinances.” But, Charles Masson explains that “the grammatical justification for this construction is highly debatable. . . . It should have by rule the preposition *en* (cf. v. 11) to say that the document “consisted in ordinances” (*L'Épître de St. Paul aux Colossiens* [Paris, 1950], p. 128).

40. J. Huby, *Saint Paul: les Épîtres de la captivité* (Paris, 1947), p. 73. Charles Masson (note 37), p. 128, mentions that for Schlatter, Huby, and Percy, “the idea of the Law nailed on the Cross with Christ would have been unthinkable for Paul.”

41. For a lengthy list of commentators who interpret the *cheirographon* either as the “certificate of indebtedness” resulting from our transgressions or as the “book containing the record of sin,” see Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome, Italy, 1977), p. 349.

42. For references of rabbinical and apocalyptic literature, see Samuele Bacchiocchi (note 41), pp. 339-340.

43. See Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 5, 5, 2; 6, 2, 4.

44. Herold Weiss, “The Law in the Epistle to the Colossians,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 34 (1972), p. 311, note 10.

45. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, 1979), p. 811.

46. Roberto Badenas, *Christ the End of the Law: Romans 10:4 in Pauline Perspective*, published as Supplement Series 10, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* (Sheffield, England, 1985), pp. 79-80.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-26.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

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51. Ibid., p. 22.

52. Ibid., p. 24.

53. Ibid., pp. 25-27.

54. For a representative list of scholars who advocate the *termination* interpretation of Romans 10:4, see Robert Badenas (note 46), pp. 30-32.

55. Ibid., p. 32.

56. Ragnar Bring, "Paul and the Old Testament: A Study of the Ideas of Election, Faith, and Law in Paul, with Special Reference to Romans 9:30-10:13," *Studia Theologica* 25 (1971), p. 42.

57. Ibid., p. 47.

58. C. E. B. Cranfield (note 7), p. 49.

59. Ibid., p. 49.

60. George E. Howard, "Christ the End of the Law: The Meaning of Romans 10:4ff," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969), p. 337.

61. John E. Toews, "The Law in Paul's Letter to the Romans. A Study of Romans 9:30-10:13," Ph. D. dissertation, Northwestern University (1977), pp. 219-245.

62. Clyde Thomas Rhyne, *Faith Establishes the Law: A Study on the Continuity between Judaism and Christianity, Romans 3:31*, SBL Dissertation Series, 55 (Missoula, 1981), pp. 114-116.

63. Walter C. Kaiser (note 6), p. 182.

64. Ibid., p. 184.

65. Ibid., p. 182.

66. Ibid., p. 188.

67. Roberto Badenas (note 46), p. 93.

68. Ibid., p. 107.

69. Ibid., p. 115.

70. George E. Howard (note 60), p. 336.

71. Ibid., pp. 335-336.

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72. Daniel P. Fuller, *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan 1980), p. 86.

73. Walter C. Kaiser (note 6), p. 187.

74. W. D. Davies, "From Schweitzer to Scholem. Reflections on Sabbatai Svi," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95 (1976), p. 547.

75. For an informative discussion of the Jewish understanding of the salvation of Israel and of the Gentiles, see E. P. Sanders, "The Covenant as a Soteriological Category and the Nature of Salvation in Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaism," *Jews, Greeks and Christians* (Leiden, 1976), pp. 11-44.

76. Lloyd Gaston, "Paul and the Torah" in *Anti-Semitism and the Foundations of Christianity*, ed. Alan T. Davis (New York, 1979), p. 58. Gaston provides a most perceptive analysis of Paul's attitude toward the Law.

77. Marcus Barth, *Ephesians*, Anchor Bible (Grand Rapids, 1974), pp. 244-248.

78. See D. Rössler, *Gesetz und Geschichte* (Neukirchen, 1960); E. P. Saunders (note 75), p. 41, concludes: "Salvation comes by *membership* in the covenant, while obedience to the commandments *preserves* one's place in the covenant."

79. George E. Howard, *Paul: Crisis in Galatia. A Study in Early Christian Theology* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 81.

# Chapter 6

## PAUL AND THE SABBATH

The most popular weapons used to attack the Sabbath are the following three Pauline texts: Colossians 2:14-17, Galatians 4:8-11, and Romans 10:4-5. Of these references, greater importance has been attached to Colossians 2:14-17, inasmuch as the passage explicitly speaks of Christ's nailing something to the Cross (Col 2:14) and warns against paying heed to regulations regarding several things, including "a sabbath" (Col 2:16).

Based on these texts, the predominant historical consensus has been that Paul regarded the Sabbath as part of the Old Covenant that was nailed to the Cross.<sup>1</sup> Paul K. Jewett exemplifies the historical interpretation when he writes: "Paul's statement (Col 2:16) comes as near to a demonstration as anything could, that he taught his converts they had no obligation to observe the seventh-day Sabbath of the Old Testament."<sup>2</sup>

This popular view has been adopted and defended recently by former Sabbatharians. For example, commenting on Colossians 2:16-17, the Worldwide Church of God affirms: "Under the laws of Moses, the Sabbath *was* a law by which people were judged. But Jesus' crucifixion has changed that. Now the Sabbath is no longer a basis for judgment."<sup>3</sup> The implication is that Christians are no longer held accountable for transgressing the Sabbath commandment because it was a "'shadow' of things to come."<sup>4</sup>

In *Sabbath in Crisis*, Dale Ratzlaff categorically affirms: "In every instance in the epistles [of Paul] where there is *teaching about the Sabbath*, that teaching suggests that the Sabbath either undermines the Christian's standing in Christ, or is nonessential. . . . The Sabbath is said to be enslaving. Observance of the Sabbath, and the related old covenant convocations, made Paul 'fear' that he had labored in vain."<sup>5</sup> Ratzlaff goes so far as to say that, according to Paul, "the observance of the Sabbath by Christians seriously undermines the finished work of Christ."<sup>6</sup>

Did Paul take such a strong stand against the Sabbath, warning his converts against the detrimental effects of its observance in their Christian life? Did the Apostle really find Sabbathkeeping so dangerous? In what way could the act of stopping our work on the Sabbath to allow our Savior to work in our lives more fully and freely “seriously undermine the finished work of Christ”?

**Objectives of This Chapter.** This chapter seeks to answer these questions by examining Paul’s attitude toward the Sabbath as reflected primarily in Colossians 2:14-17 and secondarily in Galatians 4:8-11 and Romans 14:5-6. We endeavor to establish whether Paul advocated the abrogation or the permanence of the principle and practice of Sabbathkeeping.

## PART 1

### COLOSSIANS 2:14-17: APPROBATION OR CONDEMNATION OF THE SABBATH?

#### (1) The Colossian Heresy

Paul’s reference to the observance of “Sabbaths” in Colossians 2:16 is only one aspect of the “Colossian heresy” refuted by Paul. It is necessary, therefore, to ascertain first of all the overall nature of the false teachings that threatened to “disqualify” (Col 2:18) the Colossian believers. Were these teachings Mosaic ordinances and can they be identified with the “written document—*cheirographon*” which God through Christ ‘wiped out . . . removed, nailed to the cross” (Col 2:14)?

Most commentators define the Colossian heresy as syncretistic teachings which incorporated both Hellenistic and Jewish elements. Such a false teaching had both a *theological* and *practical* aspect.

**Theological Aspect.** *Theologically*, the Colossian “philosophy” (Col 2:8) was competing with Christ for believer’s allegiance. Its source of authority was human “tradition” (Col 2:8), and its object was to impart true “wisdom” (Col 2:3, 23), “knowledge” (Col 2:2-3; 3:10) and the assurance access to and participation in the divine “fullness” (Col 2:9-10; 1:19).

To attain divine fullness, Christians were urged to do homage to cosmic principalities (Col 2:10, 15), to “the elements of the universe” (Col 2:8, 20), and to angelic powers (2:15, 18), following ritualistic ascetic practices (Col 2:11-14, 16, 17, 21-22).

To gain protection from these cosmic powers and principalities, the Colossian “philosophers” urged Christians to offer cultic adoration to angelic

powers (Col 2:15,18,19,23) and to follow ritualistic and ascetic practices (Col 2:11,14,16,17,21,22). By that process, one was assured of access to and participation in the divine “fullness—*pleroma*” (Col 2:9,10, cf. 1:19). Essentially, then, the theological error consisted in interposing inferior mediators in place of the Head Himself, Jesus Christ (Col 2:9-10, 18-19).

**Practical Aspect.** The *practical* outcome of the theological speculations of the Colossian heretics was their insistence on strict ascetism and ritualism. These consisted in “putting off the body of flesh” (Col 2:11—apparently meaning withdrawal from the world); rigorous treatment of the body (Col 2:23); prohibition to either taste or touch certain kinds of foods and beverages (Col 2:16, 21), and careful observance of sacred days and seasons—festival, new moon, Sabbath (Col 2:16).

Christians presumably were led to believe that by submitting to these ascetic practices, they were not surrendering their faith in Christ but rather, they were receiving added protection and were assured of full access to the divine fullness. This may be inferred both from Paul’s distinction between living “according to the elements of the universe” and “according to Christ” (Col 2:8) and from the Apostle’s insistence on the supremacy of the incarnate Christ. “In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col 2:9); therefore Christians attain “the fullness—*pleroma*” of life not by worshipping the elements of the universe, but through Christ, “who is the head of all rule and authority” (2:10; cf. 1:15-20; 3:3).

This bare outline suffices to show that the Sabbath is not mentioned in the passage in the context of a direct discussion of the Old Covenant law, as Ratzlaff claims,<sup>7</sup> but rather in the context of syncretistic beliefs and practices, which included elements from the Old Testament. Presumably the latter provided a justification for the ascetic principles advocated by the Colossian “philosophers.” We are not informed what type of Sabbath observance these teachers promoted; nevertheless, on the basis of their emphasis on scrupulous adherence to “regulations,” it is apparent that the day was to be observed in a most rigorous and superstitious manner.

**Circumcision and Baptism.** To combat the above false teachings, Paul chose to extol the centrality and superiority of Christ who possesses “the fullness of deity” (Col 2:9) and provides full redemption and forgiveness of sin (Col 2:11-14). To emphasize the certainty and fullness of Christ’s forgiveness, Paul utilizes three metaphors: circumcision, baptism, and “the written document” (Col 2:11-14).



Of the first two metaphors, Paul says: “In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ ; and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of the flesh, God has made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses” (Col 2:11-13).

To support his contention that the Sabbath is part of the Old Covenant nailed to the Cross, Ratzlaff interprets Paul's reference to the circumcision and baptism in this passage as indicating that the Old Covenant, of which circumcision was the entrance sign, has been replaced by the New Covenant, of which baptism is the entrance sign. “Circumcision not only served as the entrance sign to the old covenant, Paul shows how it also pointed forward to Christ, yet it does not continue as a sign in the new covenant. In the new covenant baptism replaces circumcision.”<sup>8</sup>

The problem with Ratzlaff's interpretation is his failure to recognize that Paul is not comparing or contrasting the Old and New Covenants, but affirming the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection through the imageries of circumcision and baptism. The imageries of circumcision and baptism are not used by Paul to discuss the Old and New Covenants, but to affirm the fullness of God's forgiveness, accomplished by Christ on the cross and extended through baptism to the Christian. Indeed, the proclamation of God's forgiveness constitutes Paul's basic answer to those attempting perfection by submitting to worship of angels (Col 2:18) and of the “elements of the world” (Col 2:8) by means of ascetic practices.

## (2) The Written Document Nailed to the Cross

To further emphasize the certainty and fullness of divine forgiveness explicitly mentioned in verses 11-13, Paul utilizes a legal metaphor in verse 14, namely that of God as a judge who “wiped out, . . . removed [and] nailed to the cross . . . the written document—*cheirographon*.”

**Mosaic Law?** What is the “written document—*cheirographon*” nailed to the Cross? Traditionally, it has been interpreted to be the Mosaic Law with all its ordinances, including the Sabbath, which God allegedly set aside and nailed to the Cross. This interpretation is defended by Ratzlaff who writes: “What was the ‘certificate of debt’ or ‘decrees’ which were nailed to the cross? In context, Paul has been speaking of the old covenant. Was the old covenant ‘against us’? We should remember from our study of the old covenant that one of its functions was to act as a ‘testimony’ against Israel if

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they sinned . . . (Deut 31:26). The cursing associated with the broken law and the ability of the law to condemn were both taken away when Christ was nailed to the Cross. ‘There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus’ (Rom 8:1).”<sup>9</sup>

This interpretation has several serious problems. First, the wrong assumption is made that the Old Covenant was “against us.” If that were true, God would be guilty of establishing a covenant that was against His people. Could a gracious, redeeming God do such an unjust thing? What was against the people was not the covenant, which is God’s commitment to save, but their sins which were exposed by the Law. The reason there is “no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1) is not because Christ nailed to the Cross “the ability of the law to condemn,” thus leaving mankind without moral principles, but because God sent “his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh . . . in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:3-4).

Even more serious is Ratzlaff’s misinterpretation of the “written document” that was nailed to the Cross. He interprets this document to be the Old Covenant including the Sabbath, which God allegedly set aside and nailed to the Cross.<sup>10</sup> This popular and traditional interpretation has largely been discredited by modern scholarship for at least two reasons. First, as Eduard Lohse points out in his commentary on Colossians, “in the whole of the epistle the word law is not used at all. Not only that, but the whole significance of the law, which appears unavoidable for Paul when he presents his gospel, is completely absent.”<sup>11</sup>

Second, this interpretation detracts from the immediate argument designed to prove the fullness of God’s forgiveness. The wiping out of the moral and/or ceremonial law would hardly provide Christians with the divine assurance of forgiveness. Guilt is not removed by destroying law codes. The latter would only leave mankind without moral principles.

The validity of these comments is acknowledged even by Douglas R. De Lacey, Professor of New Testament at Cambridge University and contributor to the scholarly symposium *From Sabbath to the Lord’s Day*, which is largely a response to my dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday*. De Lacey writes: “Bacchiocchi lays great stress on the fact that the term *nomos* [law] is entirely absent from Colossians, and although his own interpretation at times fails to convince, *he is surely right in his conclusion that this passage cannot be interpreted as stating that the Mosaic law itself was ‘wiped out’ in the death of Christ.*”<sup>12</sup>

**Record Book of Sin.** The meaning of *cheirographon*, which occurs only once in Scripture (Col 2:14), has been clarified by recent studies on the usage of the term in apocalyptic and rabbinic literature.<sup>13</sup> The term is used to denote the “record book of sins” or a “certificate of sin-indebtedness” but not the moral or ceremonial law. This view is supported also by the clause “and this he has removed out of the middle” (Col 2:14). “The middle” was the position occupied at the center of the court or assembly by the accusing witness. In the context of Colossians, the accusing witness is the “record book of sins” which God in Christ has erased and removed out of the court.

By this daring metaphor, Paul affirms the completeness of God’s forgiveness. Through Christ, God has “cancelled,” “set aside,” and “nailed to the cross” “the written record of our sins which because of the regulations was against us.” The legal basis of the record of sins was “the binding statutes,” or “regulations” (*tois dogmasin*), but what God destroyed on the Cross was not the *legal ground* (law) for our entanglement into sin, but the *written record* of our sins.

By destroying the *evidence* of our sins, God also “disarmed the principalities and powers” (Col 2:15) since it is no longer possible for them to accuse those who have been forgiven. There is no reason, therefore, for Christians to feel incomplete and to seek the help of inferior mediators since Christ has provided complete redemption and forgiveness.

We conclude, then, that the document nailed to the Cross is not the Law, in general, or the Sabbath, in particular, but rather the record of our sins. Any attempt to read into this text a reference to the Law or the Sabbath lacks contextual and linguistic support.

### (3) **Approbation or Condemnation of Sabbathkeeping?**

Having refuted the *theological* speculations of the Colossian false teachers by reaffirming the supremacy of Christ and the fullness of His redemption (Col 2:8-15), Paul turns to some *practical* aspects of their religious practices, saying: “Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ” (Col 2:16-17).

**Warning Against the Sabbath?** Historically, this passage has been interpreted, as stated by Luther, that “here Paul abolished the Sabbath by name and called it a bygone shadow because the body, which is Christ himself, has come.”<sup>14</sup> Ratzlaff interprets the passage along the same line, saying: “The context makes it clear that Paul is against those who are trying

to force the Colossians to keep the Sabbath and other old covenant convocations. They are to allow no one to make them feel guilty for *not* observing them.”<sup>15</sup> He interprets the statement “Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you . . .” as a warning from Paul against the five mentioned practices, which include the Sabbath.<sup>16</sup>

This interpretation is wrong because in this passage Paul warns the Colossians not against the observances of these practices as such, but against “anyone” (*tis*) who passes judgment on how to eat, to drink, and to observe sacred times. The judge who passed judgment is not Paul but the Colossians false teachers who imposed “regulations” (Col 2:20) on how to observe these practices in order to achieve “rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body” (Col 2:23).

Douglas De Lacey, a contributor to the scholarly symposium *From Sabbath to the Lord’s Day* cited earlier, rightly comments: “The judge is likely to be a man of ascetic tendencies who objects to the Colossians’ eating and drinking. The most natural way of taking the rest of the passage is not that he also imposes a ritual of feast days, but rather that he objects to certain elements of such observation.”<sup>17</sup> Presumably the “judge” wanted the community to observe these practices in a more ascetic way (“severity to the body”—Col 2:23, 21); to put it bluntly, he wanted the Colossian believers to do less feasting and more fasting.

**Approbation of the Sabbath.** By warning against the right of the false teachers to “pass judgment” on how to observe festivals, Paul is challenging not the validity of the festivals as such but the authority of the false teachers to legislate the manner of their observance. The obvious implication, then, is that Paul in this text is expressing not a condemnation but an approbation of the mentioned practices, which include Sabbathkeeping.

It is noteworthy that even De Lacey reaches this conclusion, in spite of his view that Paul did not expect Gentile converts to observe the Sabbath. He writes: “Here again (Col 2:16), then, it seems that Paul could *happily countenance Sabbathkeeping* . . . However, we interpret the situation, Paul’s statement ‘Let no one pass judgement on you,’ indicates that no stringent regulations are to be laid down over the use of festivals.”<sup>18</sup>

Troy Martin, Professor at Saint Xavier University in Chicago, comes to the same conclusion in a recent article published in *New Testament Studies*. He writes: “This essay provides evidence that the Pauline community at Colossae, not the opponents, practices the temporal schemes outlined by Colossians 2:16. . . . This investigation into the function of the list in

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Colossians 2:16 indicates that the Colossians Christians, not their critics, participate in a religious calendar that includes festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths.”<sup>19</sup>

It is encouraging to see scholars finally recognizing that, contrary to the traditional and popular interpretation advocated by people like Ratzlaff, Colossians 2:16 is not the death knell of Sabbathkeeping in the New Testament but, instead, a proof of its Pauline approbation. Why does Ratzlaff totally ignore the conclusion of Prof. De Lacey (and others), though he uses the symposium as the major resource for his own book? Most likely because he does not want readers to learn about anything that contradicts his anti-Sabbath interpretation of Colossians 2:16. This methodology is hardly reflective of responsible scholarship which requires the examination of opposing views before presenting one's own conclusions.

#### **(4) The Manner of Sabbathkeeping**

What is the nature of the “regulations” promoted by the Colossians false teachers regarding food and festivals, including the weekly Sabbath? Regretfully, Paul gives us only few catch phrases such as “self-abasement and worship of angels,” “rigor of devotion . . . severity to the body” (Col 2:18, 23) and their teachings—“Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” (Col 2:21). These catch phrases indicate that the regulations did not derive from the Levitical law since nowhere does the latter contemplate such an ascetic program. Though the designation of the festivals is Jewish, the motivation and manner of their observance stems from pagan syncretistic ideologies.

Eduard Lohse perceptively notes that “In the context of Colossians, the command to keep festival, new moon, and Sabbath is not based on the Torah according to which Israel received the Sabbath as a sign of her election from among the nations. Rather the sacred days must be kept for the sake of ‘the elements of the universe’ who direct the course of the stars and also prescribe minutely the order of the calendar . . . The ‘philosophy’ made use of terms which stemmed from Jewish tradition, but which had been transformed in the crucible of syncretism to be subject to the service of ‘the elements of the universe.’”<sup>20</sup>

In the ancient world there was widespread belief that ascetism and fasting enabled a person to come closer to a deity and to receive divine revelation.<sup>21</sup> In the case of the Colossian “philosophy,” the dietary taboos and the observance of sacred times were apparently regarded as an expression of subjection to and worship of the cosmic powers (elements) of the universe.

Paul's warning against the "regulations" of the false teachers cannot be interpreted as a condemnation of Mosaic laws regarding food and festivals, since what the Apostle condemns is not the teachings of Moses but their perverted use by Colossian false teachers. A *precept* is not nullified by the condemnation of its *perversion*.

**Shadow of the Reality.** Paul continues his argument in the following verse, saying: "These are the shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ" (Col 2:17). To what does the relative pronoun "these" (*ha* in Greek) refer? Does it refer to the five practices mentioned in the previous verse or to the "regulations" (*dogmata*) regarding these practices promoted by the false teachers?

In a previous study, I argued for the former, suggesting that Paul places dietary practices and the observance of days "in their proper perspective with Christ by means of the contrast 'shadow-body.'"<sup>22</sup> Additional reflection caused me to change my mind and to agree with Eduard Lohse that the relative pronoun "these" refers not to the five mentioned practices as such, but rather to the "regulations" regarding such practices promoted by the false teachers.<sup>23</sup>

**A Reference to "Regulations."** This conclusion is supported by two considerations. First, in verse 16, Paul is not warning against the merits or demerits of the Mosaic law regarding food and festivals, but against the "regulations" regarding these practices advocated by the false teachers. Thus, it is more plausible to take "the regulations" rather than the actual practices as the antecedent of "these."

Second, in the verses that immediately follow, Paul continues his warning against the deceptive teachings, saying, for example, "Let no one disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement . . ." (Col 2:18); "Why do you submit to regulations, 'Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch'?" (Col 2:20-21). Since what precedes and what follows that relative pronoun "these" deals with the "regulations" of the Colossian "philosophy," it is most likely that Paul describes the latter as "a shadow of what is to come" (Col 2:17).

The proponents of the Colossian "philosophy" presumably maintained that their "regulations" represented a copy which enabled the believer to have access to the reality ("fullness"). In such a case, Paul is turning their argument against them by saying that their regulations "are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ" (Col 2:17). By emphasizing that Christ is the "body" and the "head" (Col 2:17, 19), Paul indicates that any "shadow" cast by the regulations has no significant value.

In the light of the above indications, we conclude that what Paul calls a “bygone shadow” is not the Sabbath but the deceptive teachings of the Colossian “philosophy” which promoted dietary practices and the observance of sacred times as auxiliary aids to salvation.

### (5) The Sabbath in Colossians 2:16

The “regulations” advocated by the Colossian “philosophy” had to do not only with “food and drink” but also with sacred times referred to as “a festival or a new moon or a sabbath” (Col 2:16). Commentators agree that these three words represent a logical and progressive sequence (annual, monthly, and weekly), as well as an exhaustive enumeration of sacred times. This interpretation is validated by the occurrence of these terms in similar or reverse sequence five times in the Septuagint and several other times in other literature.<sup>24</sup>

Some view the “sabbaths—*sabbaton*” as a reference to annual ceremonial Sabbaths rather than the weekly Sabbath (Lev 23:6-8, 21, 24-25, 27-28, 37-38).<sup>25</sup> Such a view, however, breaks the logical and progressive sequence and ignores the fact that in the Septuagint the annual ceremonial Sabbaths are never designated simply as “sabbath” (*sabbaton*), but always with the compound expression “Sabbath of Sabbaths” (*sabbata sabbaton*). Indications such as these compellingly show that the word “*sabbaton*” used in Colossians 2:16 cannot refer to any of the annual ceremonial Sabbaths.

**Weekdays.** The plural form “Sabbaths” (*sabbaton*) is used in Scripture to designate not only the seventh-day Sabbath but also the week as a whole (Greek Septuagint on Ps 23:1; 47:1; 93:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; Acts 20:7). This fact suggests the possibility that the term “Sabbath” may refer to weekdays as a whole.<sup>26</sup> The latter view harmonizes better with the sequence of the enumeration which suggests yearly, monthly, and weekly festivities.

A similar sequence, though in reverse order, is given by Paul in Galatians 4:10 where he opposes a strikingly similar teaching which included the observance of “days, and months, and seasons, and years.” The fact that the Galatian list begins with “days” (*hemeras*, plural) suggests the possibility that the “Sabbaths” in Colossians may also refer to weekdays, in general, rather than to the seventh-day Sabbath, in particular.

Assuming for the sake of inquiry that the “sabbaths” in Colossians do refer to or include the Sabbath day, the question to be considered is this: What kind of Sabbath observance would the false teachers advocate? The data provided by Colossians are too meager to answer this question conclusively.

Yet the nature of the heresy allows us to conclude that the rigoristic emphasis on observance of dietary rules would undoubtedly be carried over to Sabbathkeeping as well. The veneration of “the elements of the universe” would also affect the observance of the Sabbath and of sacred times, since it was commonly believed that the astral powers, which direct the stars, control both the calendar and human lives.<sup>27</sup>

We know that in the pagan world Saturday was regarded as an unlucky day because of its association with the planet Saturn.<sup>28</sup> In view of the prevailing astral superstitions associated with the days of the week, any Sabbath observance promoted by the Colossians’ ascetic teachers—known for their worship of the elements of the world—could only have been of a rigorous, superstitious type. A warning against such a superstitious type of Sabbathkeeping by Paul would have been not only appropriate but also desirable. In this case, Paul could be attacking not the *principle* of Sabbathkeeping but its *perverted function* and *motivation* which adulterated the ground of salvation. This conclusion is confirmed by two other Pauline passages (Rom 14:4-5; Gal 4:10) to be considered now.

## PART 2

### THE SABBATH IN ROMANS AND GALATIANS

#### (1) The Sabbath in Romans

The Sabbath is not specifically mentioned in Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. However, in chapter 14, the Apostle distinguishes between two types of believers: the “strong” who believed “he may eat anything” and the “weak” who ate only “vegetables” and drank no wine (Rom 14:2, 21). The difference extended also to the observance of days, as indicated by Paul’s statement: “One man esteems one day as better than another, while another man esteems all days alike. Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind” (Rom 14:5).

Many Christians maintain that the weekly Sabbath comes within the scope of this distinction respecting days. They presume that the “weak” believers esteemed the Sabbath better than other days while “the strong” treated the Sabbath like the rest of the weekdays. For example, the Worldwide Church of God uses Romans 14:5 to argue that “Paul did not teach Gentile Christians to keep the Sabbath. He actually told them that the Sabbath was not an area in which we should be judged.”<sup>29</sup> “That is because something had happened to change the basis of our relationship with God . . . the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because of that, the Old Covenant laws came



to an end. Days are no longer a matter for judging behavior.”<sup>30</sup> In a similar vein, Ratzlaff concludes that “The ‘days’ mentioned in this chapter [Rom 14:5] that some ‘regard’ and ‘observe’ over other days, are *probably* Sabbath days, although the evidence is not conclusive.”<sup>31</sup>

**No Reference to Mosaic Law.** Can the Sabbath be legitimately read into this passage? The answer is “No!” for at least three reasons. First, the conflict between the “weak” and the “strong” over diet and days cannot be traced back to the Mosaic law. The “weak man” who “eats only vegetables” (Rom 14:2), drinks no wine (Rom 14:21), and “esteems one day as better [apparently for fasting] than another” (Rom 14:5) can claim no support for such convictions from the Old Testament. Nowhere does the Mosaic law prescribe strict vegetarianism, total abstinence from fermented and unfermented wine,<sup>32</sup> and a preference for fasting days.

Similarly, the “strong man” who “believes he may eat anything” (Rom 14:2) and who “esteems all days alike” is not asserting his freedom from the Mosaic law but from ascetic beliefs apparently derived from sectarian movements. The whole discussion then is not about freedom to observe the law versus freedom from its observance, but concerns “unessential” scruples of conscience dictated not by divine precepts but by human conventions and superstitions. Since these differing convictions and practices did not undermine the essence of the Gospel, Paul advises mutual tolerance and respect in this matter.

That the Mosaic law is not at stake in Romans 14 is also indicated by the term *koinos*—“common” which is used in verse 14 to designate “unclean” food. This term is radically different from the word *akathartos*—“impure” used in Leviticus 11 (Septuagint) to designate unlawful foods. This suggests that the dispute was not over meat which was unlawful according to the Mosaic Law, but about meat which per se was lawful to eat but because of its association with idol worship (cf. 1 Cor 8:1-13) was regarded by some as *“koinos—common,”* that is, to be avoided by Christians.

A second point to note is that Paul applies the basic principle “observe it in honor of the Lord” (Rom 14:6) *only* to the case of the person “who observes the day.” He never says the opposite, namely, “the man who esteems all days alike, esteems them in honor of the Lord.” In other words, with regard to diet, Paul teaches that one can honor the Lord both by eating and by abstaining (Rom 14:6); but with regard to days, he does not even concede that the person who regards all the days alike does so to the Lord. Thus, Paul hardly gives his endorsement to those who esteemed all days alike.

**Sabbathkeeping: For “Weak” Believers?** Finally, if as generally presumed, it was the “weak” believer who observed the Sabbath, Paul would classify himself with the “weak” since he observed the Sabbath and other Jewish feasts (Acts 18:4, 19; 17:1, 10, 17; 20:16). Paul, however, views himself as “strong” (“we who are strong”—Rom 15:1); thus, he could not have been thinking of Sabbathkeeping when he speaks of the preference over days.

Support for this conclusion is also provided by Paul’s advice: “Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind” (Rom 14:5). It is difficult to see how Paul could reduce the observance of holy days such as the Sabbath, Passover, and Pentecost to a matter of personal conviction without ever explaining the reason for it. This is especially surprising since he labors at great length to explain why circumcision was not binding upon the Gentiles.

If Paul taught his Gentile converts to regard Sabbathkeeping as a personal matter, Jewish Christians readily would have attacked his temerity in setting aside the Sabbath law, as they did regarding circumcision (Acts 21:21). The fact that there is no hint of any such controversy in the New Testament indicates that Paul never discouraged Sabbathkeeping or encouraged Sundaykeeping instead.<sup>33</sup>

**No Hint of Conflict.** The preference over days in Romans presumably had to do with fast days rather than feast days, since the context deals with abstinence from meat and wine (Rom 14:2, 6, 21). Support for this view is provided by the *Didache* (ch. 8) which enjoins Christians to fast on Wednesday and Friday rather than on Monday and Thursday like the Jews.

Paul refuses to deliberate on private matters such as fasting, because he recognizes that spiritual exercises can be performed in different ways by different people. The important thing for Paul is to “pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding” (Rom 14:19).

If the conflict in the Roman Church had been over the observance of holy days, the problem would have been even more manifest than the one over diet. After all, eating habits are a private matter, but Sabbath-keeping is a public, religious exercise of the whole community. Any disagreement on the latter would have been not only noticeable but also inflammatory.

The fact that Paul devotes 21 verses to the discussion of food and less than two verses (Rom 14:5-6) to that of days suggests that the latter was a very limited problem for the Roman Church, presumably because it had to do with private conviction on the merit or demerit of doing certain spiritual exercises such as fasting on some specific days.

In the Roman world there was a superstitious belief that certain days were more favorable than others for undertaking some specific projects. The Fathers frequently rebuked Christians for adopting such a superstitious mentality.<sup>34</sup> Possibly, Paul alludes to this kind of problem, which at his time was still too small to deserve much attention. Since these practices did not undermine the essence of the Gospel, Paul advises mutual tolerance and respect on this matter. In the light of these considerations, we conclude that it is hardly possible that Sabbathkeeping is included in the “days” of Romans 14:5.

## (2) The Sabbath in Galatians

In Galatians, as in Romans, there is no specific reference to the Sabbath. Paul does mention, however, that some Galatian Christians had themselves circumcised (Gal 6:12; 5:2) and had begun to “observe days, and months, and seasons, and years” (Gal 4:10).

In many respects, the polemic in Galatians 4:8-11 is strikingly similar to that of Colossians 2:8-23. In both places the superstitious observance of sacred times is described as slavery to the “elements.” In Galatians, however, the denunciation of the “false teachers” is stronger. They are regarded as “accursed” (Gal 1:8, 9) because they were teaching a “different gospel.” Their teaching that the observance of days and seasons was necessary to justification and salvation perverted the very heart of the Gospel (Gal 5:4).

**Pagan Days or Sabbath Day?** The question to be addressed is whether the “days” (*hemera*—Gal 4:10) observed by the Galatians were superstitious pagan holidays or the biblical Sabbath day. Some scholars argue on the basis of the parallel passage of Colossians 2:16, where “sabbaths” are explicitly mentioned, that the “days” mentioned in Galatians were the Biblical seventh-day Sabbaths.<sup>35</sup>

Ratzlaff affirms categorically this view saying: “We have a clear reference to the seventh-day Sabbath in this passage [Gal 4:10] for the following four reasons. (1) The context of the book of Galatians, including chapter 4, is dealing with those ‘who want to be under the law.’ (2) Paul’s use of ‘elemental things’ usually, if not always, refer to that which is contained in the old covenant. (3) The Galatians were observing days, months, seasons, and years, thus placing themselves back under the old covenant law. (4) These convocations are listed in order.”<sup>36</sup>

**Comparison of Colossians 2:16 and Galatians 4:10.** The fundamental problem with Ratzlaff’s four reasons is that they are based on

gratuitous assumptions rather than on a careful analysis of the context. In the immediate context, Paul reminds the Galatians that in their pre-Christian days they “were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe” (Gal 4:3). The “elemental spirits—*stoikeia tou kosmou*” have nothing to do with the Old Covenant since the Mosaic Law was unknown to the Corinthians in their pagan days. Most scholars interpret the “elements” as the basic elements of this world, such as the earth, water, air, and fire, or pagan astral gods who were credited with controlling human destiny.<sup>37</sup>

The context clearly indicates that Paul rebukes the Galatians for turning back to their pagan days by reverting to their pagan calendar. Thus, the issue is not their adoption of Jewish Holy Days but their return to observing pagan superstitious days. Paul makes this point rather clearly: “Formerly, when you did not know God, you were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods; but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days, and months, and seasons, and years! I am afraid that I have labored over you in vain” (Gal 4:8-10).

Two recent articles by Troy Martin, published in *New Testament Studies* and the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, make a significant contribution to the understanding of the passage under consideration. Martin points out that the time-keeping scheme found in Galatians 4:10 (“days, and months, and seasons, and years”) is clearly different from that found in Colossians 2:16 (“a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths”). He shows that while the list in Colossians 2:16 is unquestionably Jewish, because the temporal categories of festival, new moon, and Sabbaths are characteristic of the Jewish religious calendar, the list in Galatians 4:10 of “days, and months, and seasons, and years” “describes a pagan calendar unacceptable to Paul and his communities.”<sup>38</sup>

Martin reaches this conclusion by examining not only the time structure of pagan calendars,<sup>39</sup> but especially the immediate context where Paul condemns the Galatians’ attempt to return to their pagan practices (Gal 4:8-9) by reverting to the use of their pagan calendar. “As the immediate context clearly states, Paul is worried that he has labored for the Galatians in vain since they have returned to their former pagan life as evidenced by their renewed preconversion reckoning of time. Because of its association with idolatry and false deities, marking time according to this pagan scheme is tantamount to rejecting Paul’s Gospel and the one and only true God it proclaims (Gal 4:8-

9). Galatians 4:10, therefore, stipulates that when the Galatians accepted Paul's Gospel with its aversion to idolatry (Gal 4:8), they discarded their pagan method of reckoning time. . . . A comparison of these lists demonstrates that the Gentile conversion to Paul's gospel involves rejection of idolatrous pagan temporal schemes in favor of the Jewish liturgical calendar."<sup>40</sup>

**Gentiles' Adoption of Jewish Calendar.** Troy Martin's conclusion, that the Gentiles' conversion to the Gospel involved the rejection of their pagan calendar built upon the idolatrous worship of many gods and the adoption of the Jewish religious calendar which had been transformed by Christ's coming, represents in my view a significant breakthrough in our understanding of the continuity between Judaism and Christianity.

Paul's time references clearly reflect his adoption of the Jewish religious calendar, though modified and transformed by the coming of Christ. For example, in 1 Corinthians 16:2, Paul recommends a fund-raising plan for the Jerusalem church consisting of laying aside at home some money *kata mian sabbaton*, that is, "every first day from the Sabbath." The fact that Paul refers to the first day of the week by the Jewish designation "first day from the Sabbath," and not by the prevailing pagan name *dies solis*—Day of the Sun, reveals that he taught his Gentile converts to regulate their lives by the Jewish calendar.

In the same epistle, Paul builds an elaborate argument based upon the festival of Passover and unleavened bread in order to exhort the Corinthians, "Let us keep the festival" (1 Cor 5:6-8). The whole argument and exhortation to keep Passover would have been meaningless to the Gentile congregation of Corinth unless Paul had taught about the Jewish religious calendar. In the light of these considerations we conclude, with Martin, that "although the temporal references in Paul's letters are sparse, 1 Corinthians provides strong evidence for the Pauline adoption of the Jewish practice that marked time by festivals and Sabbaths."<sup>41</sup>

The Christian adherence to the Jewish calendar is especially evident in the book of Acts. Repeatedly, Paul proclaims the Gospel in synagogues and in the outdoors on the Sabbath (Acts 13:14, 44; 16:13; 17:2). In Troas, Paul speaks to the believers on the first day from Sabbath (*mia ton sabbaton*) (Acts 20:7). "The portrayal of Paul in Acts," as Martin points out, "supplies clear evidence that Christians mark time by segments of festivals and Sabbaths."<sup>42</sup> This conclusion is clearly supported by Colossians 2:16 where we find the standard Jewish nomenclature of annual feasts, monthly new moons, and weekly Sabbaths.

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The fact that Paul taught his Gentile congregations to reject their pagan calendar, where the days were named after planetary gods and the months after deified emperors, and to reckon time according to the Jewish religious calendar, does not necessarily mean that he taught them to practice Jewish religious rituals. The Romans themselves replaced just before the origin of Christianity their “eight day week—*nundinum*” with the Jewish seven-day week and adopted in the first century the Jewish Sabbath as their new day for rest and feasting, without the concomitant adoption of the Jewish rituals.<sup>43</sup> By the same token, Paul taught his Gentile converts to reckon time according to the Jewish religious calendar without expecting them to practice the rituals associated with it. A good example is Paul’s discussion of the new meaning of the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread in the light of Christ’s event (1 Cor 5:6-8).<sup>44</sup>

**Superstitious Motivation.** Our preceding discussion shows that the temporal categories of Galatians 4:10 (“days, and months, and seasons, and years”) are pagan and not Jewish, like the list found in Colossians 2:16. To argue, as Ratzlaff does, that the Galatians were observing the Old Covenant Holy Days means to ignore the immediate context where Paul speaks of pagan temporal categories to which the Galatians were turning back again.

The Galatians’ observance of pagan sacred times was motivated by superstitious beliefs in astral influences. This is suggested by Paul’s charge that their adoption of these practices was tantamount to a return to their former pagan subjection to elemental spirits and demons (Gal 4:8-9).

Paul’s concern is not to expose the superstitious ideas attached to these observances but to challenge the whole system of salvation which the Galatians’ false teachers had devised. By conditioning justification and acceptance with God to such things as circumcision and the observance of pagan days and seasons, the Galatians were making salvation dependent upon human achievement. This for Paul was a betrayal of the Gospel: “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace” (Gal 5:4).

It is within this context that Paul’s denouncement of the observance of days and seasons must be understood. If the motivations for these observances had not undermined the vital principle of justification by faith in Jesus Christ, Paul would only have recommended tolerance and respect, as he does in Romans 14. The motivation for these practices, however, adulterated the very ground of salvation. Thus the Apostle had no choice but strongly to reject them. In Galatians as in Colossians, then, it is not the principle of

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Sabbathkeeping that Paul opposes, but rather the perverted use of cultic observations which were designed to promote salvation as a human achievement rather than as a divine gift of grace.

### Conclusion

Several conclusions emerge from this study of Paul's attitude toward the law, in general, and the Sabbath, in particular.

First, the three texts (Col 2:14-16; Rom 14:5, Gal 4:10) generally adduced as proof of Paul's repudiation of the Sabbath do not deal with the validity or invalidity of the Sabbath commandment for Christians but, rather, with ascetic and cultic practices which undermined (especially in Colossians and Galatians) the vital principle of justification by faith in Jesus Christ.

Second, in the crucial passage of Colossians 2:16, Paul's warning is not against the validity of observing the Sabbath and festivals as such but against the authority of false teachers to legislate on the manner of their observance. Implicitly, Paul expresses approval rather than disapproval of their observance. Any condemnation had to do with a *perversion* rather than a *precept*.

Third, Paul's tolerance with respect to diet and days (Rom 14:3-6) indicates that he would not have promoted the abandonment of the Sabbath and the adoption of Sunday observance instead. If he had done so, he would have encountered endless disputes with Sabbath advocates, especially among Jewish Christians. The absence of any trace of such a polemic is perhaps the most telling evidence of Paul's respect for the institution of the Sabbath.

In the final analysis, Paul's attitude toward the Sabbath must be determined not on the basis of his denunciation of heretical and superstitious observances which may have influenced Sabbathkeeping, but rather on the basis of his overall attitude toward the law.

The failure to understand that Paul rejects the law as a method of salvation but upholds it as a moral standard of Christian conduct has been the root cause of much misunderstanding of Paul's attitude toward the law, in general, and toward the Sabbath, in particular. May this study contribute to clarify this misunderstanding and allow us to discover, with Paul, that "the law is good, if any one uses it lawfully" (1 Tim 1:8).

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**NOTES TO CHAPTER 6**

1. For a brief historical survey of this interpretation, see Samuele Bacchiocchi, "Paul and the Sabbath," in *From Sabbath to Sunday* (Rome, 1977), Appendix, pp. 339-343.

2. Paul K. Jewett, *The Lord's Day: A Theological Guide to the Christian Day of Worship* (Grand Rapids, 1971), p. 45.

3. "The Sabbath in Acts and the Epistles," Bible Study prepared by the Worldwide Church of God and posted in its web page ([www.wcg.org](http://www.wcg.org), September, 1998), p. 2.

4. Ibid.

5. Dale Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Crisis: Transfer/Modification? Reformation/Continuation? Fulfillment/Transformation?* (Applegate, California, 1990), pp. 173-174.

6. Ibid., p. 174.

7. Commenting on Colossians 2:14,15, Ratzlaff writes: "What was the 'certificate of debt' or the 'decrees' which were nailed to the Cross? In context, Paul has been speaking about the old covenant" (note 5, p. 156). This cannot be true, because in the context Paul refutes the Colossian heresy by affirming the fullness of God's forgiveness.

8. Dale Ratzlaff (note 5), pp. 155-156.

9. Ibid., p. 156.

10. Ibid., pp. 156-161.

11. Eduard Lohse, *A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Philadelphia, 1971), p. 116. In a similar vein, Herold Weiss emphasizes that in Paul's argument (Col 2:8-19), the law "plays no role at all" ("The Law in the Epistle to the Colossians," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 34 [1972]: 311).

12. Douglas R. De Lacey, "The Sabbath/Sunday Question and the Law in the Pauline Corpus," *From Sabbath to Lord's Day. A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. Donald A. Carson (Grand Rapids, 1982), p. 173. Emphasis supplied.

13. For a lengthy list of commentators who interpret the *cheirographon* either as the "certificate of indebtedness" resulting from our transgressions or as the "book containing the record of sin," see Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From*



*Sabbath to Sunday. A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome, 1977), Appendix, pp. 349-350.

14. Martin Luther, "Wider die himmlischen Propheten," in his *Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. by Johann Georg Walch (1890), vol. XX, col. 148.

15. Dale Ratzlaff (note 5), p. 163.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 161-162.

17. Douglas R. De Lacey (note 12), p. 182.

18. *Ibid.*, emphasis supplied.

19. Troy Martin, "Pagan and Judeo-Christian Time-keeping Schemes in Galatians 4:10 and Colossians 2:16," *New Testament Studies* 42 (1996), p. 111.

20. Eduard Lohse (note 11), p. 155.

21. For texts and discussion, see G. Bornhamm, "Lakanon," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, 1967), vol. 4, p. 67; also J. Behm writes in the same *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, IV, p. 297: "The Greeks and Romans knew that abstention makes receptive to ecstatic revelations."

22. For a discussion of Colossians 2:17, see Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday* (note 1), pp. 356-357.

23. Eduard Lohse (note 11), p. 116.

24. See the Septuagint on 2 Chron 2:4; 31:3; Neh 10:33; Ezek 45:17; Hos 2:11. Also *Jub* 1:14; *Jos. Ber.* 3:11; Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 8:4.

25. See, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D. C., 1957), vol. 7, pp. 205-206.

26. This is the view of Nobert Hagedé, *Commentaire de L'Épître aux Colossiens* (Paris, 1969), p. 144. On the plural usage of "Sabbaths" to designate the week as a whole, see Eduard Lohse (note 11), pp. 7, 20.

27. Günter Bornhamm emphasizes this view when he writes: "Paul mentions New Moon and Sabbath (Col 2:16), days, months, season, and years (Gal 4:10), i.e., in each case days and seasons that do not stand under the sign of the history of salvation, but under the sign of the periodic cycles of nature, i.e., corresponding to the movement of the stars" ("The Heresy of Colossians," in Fred O. Francis and Wayne A. Meeks, eds., *Conflict at Colossae, SBL Sources for Biblical Study* 4, 1973, p. 131).

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28. Texts and discussion are found in Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday* (note 1), pp. 173f. and 243.

29. "Paul and the Sabbath," Bible Study prepared by the Worldwide Church of God and posted in its web page ([www.wcg.org](http://www.wcg.org), September, 1998), p. 1.

30. "The Sabbath in Acts and the Epistles," Bible Study prepared by the Worldwide Church of God and posted in its web page ([www.wcg.org](http://www.wcg.org), September, 1998), p. 2.

31. Dale Ratzlaff (note 5), p. 169.

32. The Nazarite's vow included abstention from all grape products (Num 6:2-4). This, however, was a temporary and voluntary vow. Some, such as Samuel (1 Sam 1:11) and John the Baptist (Luke 1:15) were Nazarites for life. But we have no record of a person taking the vow voluntarily for life. Perpetual vows were taken by parents on behalf of children. The Rechabites led a nomadic life in tents and abstained from all intoxicating drinks (Jer 35:1-19). For a study on the Biblical teaching regarding the use of alcoholic beverages, see Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Wine in the Bible* (Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1989). My study shows that the Bible disapproves of the use of fermented wine but approves the consumption of unfermented wine, commonly called "grape juice."

33. Paul K. Jewett wisely acknowledges that "if Paul had introduced Sunday worship among the Gentiles, it seems likely Jewish opposition would have accused his temerity in setting aside the law of the Sabbath, as was the case with the rite of circumcision (Acts 21:21)" (note 2), p. 57.

34. For texts and discussion, see Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday* (note 1), p. 254.

35. See, for example, Willy Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia, 1968), p. 131; C. S. Mosna, *Storia della Domenica dalle Origini Fino agli Inizi del V. Secolo* (Rome, 1969), p. 183.

36. Dale Ratzlaff (note 5), p. 165.

37. For a discussion of scholarly views regarding the meaning of *stoicheia*, see Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday* (note 1), pp. 344-345.

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38. Troy Martin (note 19), p. 119. See also idem, "But Let Everyone Discern the Body of Christ (Colossians 2:17)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114/2 (1995), p. 255.

39. For a discussion of the pagan calendar, see also E. J. Bickerman, *Chronology of the Ancient World* (Ithaca, New York, 1968), pp. 70-79.

40. Troy Martin (note 19), pp. 117, 119.

41. Ibid., pp. 108-109.

42. Ibid., p. 109.

43. The Roman adoption of the seven-day planetary week just prior to the beginning of Christianity is discussed at some length in Samuele Bacchiochi, *From Sabbath to Sunday* (note 1), pp. 238-251.

44. For a discussion of the observance and meaning of Passover/Unleavened Bread in the New Testament, see Samuele Bacchiocchi, *God's Festivals in Scripture and History: Volume 1: The Spring Festivals* (Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1995), pp. 75-77.

## **Chapter 7**

# **REDISCOVERING THE SABBATH**

A paradox of our time is that while some Christians are rejecting the Sabbath as an Old Covenant institution nailed to the Cross, an increasing number of other Christians are rediscovering the continuity and value of the Sabbath for our tension-filled and restless lives.

In the previous chapters, we examined the origin and development of the anti-Sabbath theology, manifested today especially in the Dispensational and “New Covenant” theology which reduces the Sabbath to an Old Covenant, Jewish institution terminated at the Cross. We found that such a theology breaks the unity and continuity of the Plan of Salvation besides ignoring the cosmic sweep of the Sabbath which embraces creation, redemption, and final restoration.

An increasing number of Christian thinkers are discovering that the abrogation view of the Sabbath derives not from Scripture, but from the “Christian” theology of contempt for Jews and their religion. This theology originated in the early Church and has plagued Christianity through much of its history, causing the loss of the precious Jewish heritage of the Christian faith by advocating a radical discontinuity between the Old and New Covenants, Law and Gospel, Sabbath and Sunday.

In their desire to recover the biblical and Jewish roots of Christianity, many Christians are taking a fresh look at institutions such as the Sabbath, which for too long have been regarded as a trademark of Judaism. To their surprise, they are discovering, as Dorothy Bass puts it in her article “Rediscovering the Sabbath,” that “the practice of Sabbathkeeping may be a gift waiting to be unwrapped, a confirmation that we are not without help in shaping the renewing ways of life for which we long.”<sup>1</sup>

**Objectives of This Chapter.** This chapter has two major objectives. The first is to briefly report on the rediscovery of the Sabbath by scholars, religious organizations, and people of different persuasions. Hopefully this report will counteract any negative impression some readers may have gained from reading in the preceding chapters about the different arguments commonly used to attack the validity and value of the Sabbath.

After reading so many pages about the crossfire of controversy surrounding the Sabbath today, some may be tempted to think that the Sabbath *is* in crisis, as the title of Dale Ratzlaff's book suggests. The truth is that the Sabbath has never been in crisis because it is a divine institution. God's moral principles are not subject to crisis. The rediscovery of the Sabbath by Christians of different persuasions confirms that the Sabbath is not in crisis. It still provides rest and renewal to those who accept God's invitation to make themselves free and available for Him on His Holy Sabbath Day.

The second objective of this chapter is to explore, by way of conclusion to the whole book, how the Sabbath enables believers to experience rest and renewal in their lives. This final section is a Christ-centered, practical reflection designed to help people discover the Sabbath as a day to joyfully celebrate God's creative and redemptive love.

**Two Types of Sabbatarians.** The rediscovery of the Sabbath today assumes two different forms. On one hand, some Christians are reexamining the biblical meaning and function of the Sabbath in order to develop a "biblical" model for Sunday observance. We may call these people "Sunday-Sabbatarians" because they believe in observing Sunday as their biblical Sabbath. They follow the Reformed, Calvinistic tradition which gives prominence to the *moral* aspect of the Sabbath commandment by viewing the observance of a day of rest and worship as a creation ordinance for mankind. Consequently, they promote Sundaykeeping as the legitimate substitution and continuation of the Old Testament Sabbath.

Contrary to Dispensationalists and "New Covenant" Christians who emphasize the radical discontinuity between the Sabbath (which they see as the sign of the Old Covenant) and Sunday (which they view as the sign of the New Covenant), Sunday-Sabbatarians recognize the underlying unity and continuity that exists between the Old and the New Testaments, Sabbath and Sunday. Consequently, they are eager to rediscover the biblical view of the Sabbath in order to better understand how Sunday should be observed.

On the other hand, an increasing number of Christians reject the compromise position of Sunday-Sabbatarians and want to rediscover the Sabbath as the biblical seventh day, both in terms of its meaning and experience. These seventh-day Sabbatarians sense the need to recover the biblical and Jewish roots of the Christian faith and to return to the beliefs and practices of the Apostolic Church.

The rediscovery of the Sabbath by both Sunday-Sabbatarian and Seventh-day Sabbatarians is motivated also by the realization that the values of the Sabbath as a day for spiritual, physical, moral, and social renewal are essential for revitalizing the religious experience of millions of Christians today.

For the sake of clarity, this chapter is divided into three parts: (1) The rediscovery of the Sabbath by Sunday sabbatarians, (2) the rediscovery of the Sabbath by seventh-day Sabbatarians, and (3) the rediscovery of the Sabbath as Christ's rest for human restlessness.

## PART 1

### THE REDISCOVERY OF THE SABBATH

#### BY SUNDAY SABBATARIANS

*Keeping the Sabbath Wholly.* A good example of the rediscovery of the Sabbath as a model for Sundaykeeping is the book *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting* by Marva J. Dawn, a Lutheran theologian.<sup>2</sup> With refreshing insight she captures the meaning and experience of the Sabbath in Scripture and in the religious life of the Jewish people. For example, Dawn writes: "All the great motifs of our Christian faith are underscored in our Sabbathkeeping. Its *Ceasing* deepens our repentance for the many ways that we fail to trust God and try to create our own future. Its *Resting* strengthens our faith in the totality of His grace. Its *Embracing* invites us to take the truths of our faith and apply them practically in our values and life-styles. Its *Feasting* heightens our sense of eschatological hope—the Joy of our present experience of God's love and its foretaste of the Joy to come."<sup>3</sup>

When I heard Marva Dawn present the highlights of her book at the International Sabbath Symposium, sponsored by the University of Denver on May 24-26, 1989, I was tempted to spring forward to extend to her the right hand of fellowship into my own Seventh-day Adventist Church. I felt that she did a marvellous job in capturing some of the fundamental meanings and experiences of the Sabbath. However, my thrill was dampened when I read

the appendix of her book where she explains how to observe the Christian Sabbath from sunset Saturday to sunset Sunday. Dawn's attempt to invest Sunday with the meaning and experience of the Sabbath ignores the fundamental fact that Sunday is not the Sabbath. The two days, as I show in Chapter 1, are different in their origin, meaning, and experience.

**“Call the Sabbath Delightful.”** Another example of the rediscovery of the Sabbath as a model for Sundaykeeping is the article “Call the Sabbath Delightful,” published in *The Lutheran* on March 16, 1983. The author, Judith Fiedler Finn, an attorney, discovered the Sabbath by turning to the Jews in her community. She discovered that “the Sabbath is a sanctuary in time. In fact, it is a time in which we can begin to experience eternity and its peace.”<sup>4</sup> She decided, however, that for her family “the most practical choice” was to make Sunday their Sabbath. Despite her husband's initial protest, she writes, “We plunged in ‘cold turkey.’ No work from sunset Saturday to sunset Sunday.”<sup>5</sup> She continues explaining how her family celebrates Sunday as the biblical Sabbath.

Finn's attempt to celebrate Sunday from sunset to sunset as though it were the Sabbath ignores the historical reality that the essence of Sundaykeeping has never been a consecration of time, but attendance at the Mass or at a church service. The recognition of this historical reality has led the Catholic Church, as well as over 4000 Protestant churches in the USA,<sup>6</sup> to anticipate Sunday church services to Saturday evening in order to accommodate those who are unable or unwilling to go to church on Sunday morning. This may be good enough for Sundaykeeping, but it is not good enough for Sabbathkeeping because the essence of the latter is not primarily going to church, but giving priority in one's thinking and living during the 24 hours of the seventh day.

**“Rediscovering the Sabbath.”** The article “Rediscovering the Sabbath,” written by Dorothy C. Bass and published in *Christianity Today* on September 1, 1997, offers another fitting example of Sunday-Sabbatarianism. Bass speaks of the Sabbath as “the most challenging and spiritual discipline for contemporary Christians.”<sup>7</sup> She eloquently writes that “as the new century dawns, the practice of Sabbath keeping may be a gift waiting to be unwrapped, a confirmation that we are not without help in shaping the renewing ways of life for which we long.”<sup>8</sup>

The problem with the article is that Bass wants to unwrap the gift of the Sabbath by trying to fit Sunday into what may be called “the Sabbath gift box.” This does not work because Sunday is not the Sabbath. In fact, Bass has

a problem deciding, for example, “What, besides churchgoing, is Christian Sabbath [Sunday] keeping?”<sup>9</sup> She suggests that it may be a good idea to refrain from buying, selling, “paying bills, preparing tax returns, and making lists of things to do in the coming week.”<sup>10</sup> But she cannot provide a compelling biblical reason for abstaining from these secular activities. Why? Simply because historically the essence of Sundaykeeping has been going to church on Sunday and not refraining from business activities. This can still be seen today even in the Bible Belt where many businesses open on Sunday as soon as church services are over.

**University of Denver Sabbath Symposium.** The scholarly community also has shown an interest for rediscovering the Sabbath as a model for Sundaykeeping. An example is the *International Sabbath Symposium* sponsored by the University of Denver May 24-26, 1989. The organizer of the symposium was Dr. Stanley M. Wagner, Director of the Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Denver.

Stanley Wagner received from one of his students a tape of a Sabbath lecture I delivered at the First Denver Seventh-day Adventist Church. While listening to that tape, Dr. Wagner recounts, “I was absolutely overwhelmed by Dr. Bacchiocchi’s address, in which he spoke of the Sabbath in the warmest, most loving terms I had ever heard from the mouth of a Christian. It was then that I felt the time had come for Jewish and Christian scholars to meet to explore our respective traditions relative to the Sabbath.”<sup>11</sup>

I vividly recall the evening when Dr. Wagner called me to tell me how impressed he was by my lecture on the Sabbath and by my book *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness*. He told me that the lecture and the book had inspired him to explore the possibility of convening at the University of Denver for an international Sabbath symposium that would bring together Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Sabbatarian scholars for the purpose of reexamining the relevance of the Sabbath for today. Then he asked me: “Would you be willing to come to deliver one of the major addresses?” I replied: “Dr. Wagner, I would be glad to come at my own expense, if necessary.”

This Sabbath Symposium was truly a ground-breaking event that brought together leading scholars from prestigious institutions as far away as England and Israel. While some of the papers presented made an attempt to apply the values of the Sabbath to Sundaykeeping, most of them examined the history, theology, and relevance of the Sabbath for today. Eventually, the papers were published by Crossroad in the book *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (272 pages).



What surprised me most at the conference was to hear some Sundaykeeping scholars waxing eloquent about the Sabbath—a day they had never observed. For example, instead of critiquing my paper, Catholic Professor Dennis Kennedy, C. M., from St. Thomas Seminary, chose to present his own meditation on the relevance of the Sabbath for both the human and subhuman creation. He said: “We humans need to experience God’s sanctifying presence. So we keep the Sabbath to (1) follow divine example, (2) acknowledge God as Creator, and (3) participate in God’s rest and blessings. It is a sign of covenant between God and us—we look back to the past perfect creation and forward to the ultimate salvation.”<sup>12</sup>

Prof. Kennedy continued saying: “I would like to suggest that this Sabbath symposium is not some kind of dusty, scholarly tediousness for a few learned doctors only; rather, it is an attempt to revise the relationship of Creator to creation and to define what our part in that creation is to be. Sabbath is meant to refer to rest for all involved in the process of creation: rest for the earth as well as for human.”<sup>13</sup> He called for the recovery of a sabbatical ecological conscience which consists in becoming the *curators* rather than the *predators* of God’s creation. By teaching us to admire God’s creation, the Sabbath teaches us to respect the natural world.

The willingness of Sundaykeeping scholars to reexamine the values of the Sabbath for the social, ecological, and psychological problems of our society represents a positive trend that needs to be encouraged. In time, this trend could well motivate Christians to adopt seventh-day Sabbathkeeping, not only as a philosophical value but also as an existential practice governing their lives.

**University of South Africa Sabbath Conference.** A similar conference on “The biblical Day of Rest” was sponsored by the C. B. Powell Bible Center of the University of South Africa on June 16-17, 1994. The conference was partly called to deal with the question debated in the public press on how the Lord’s Day should be observed. The question was stirred up by the refusal of some rugby players to play on Sunday during an international game in Australia. These players belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church that observes Sunday as the Christian Sabbath.

The conference was attended by about 100 scholars and church leaders of the major denominations in South Africa. The papers presented at the conference were published in a book *The Biblical Day of Rest*. It was evident that the prevailing concern was to reaffirm the Reformed view of Sunday as the Christian Sabbath. For example, in his presentation on “The

Meaning of Sunday as a Day Dedicated to God,” Dr. Francois Möller, President of the Apostolic Faith Mission, said: “Sunday must be observed as a day dedicated to God. To make this possible, there must be purposeful rules and behavior on the part of the church and every Christian individual. Things which need to be done, must be done during the week. This is not the day to catch up on the washing, mend clothes, clean the house, service the car, help children with school work, prepare large meals, go shopping, make appointments, etcetera.”<sup>14</sup>

I was invited to present two papers at this conference on “The Biblical Day of Rest.” The first dealt with the historical change from Sabbath to Sunday in early Christianity, and the second addressed the relevance of the Sabbath for modern society. The response was very positive. I could sense that though there was disagreement about which day is the Christian Sabbath, there was agreement on its meaning, nature, and relevance for today.

Three Dutch Reformed pastors attending the conference told me that they wanted to reexamine the validity and value of the seventh-day Sabbath for themselves and for their congregations. In fact, one of them came to visit me at the home of the Adventist pastor where I was staying and kept me up on a Friday night until past midnight. Another attended the Sabbath morning service at the City Hall auditorium where I spoke.

It was gratifying to witness a gathering of church leaders and scholars eager to deepen their understanding of the biblical Sabbath in order to find ways to revitalize Sundaykeeping. Such an endeavor, however, holds little hope of success, because as noted in Chapter 1, Sunday is not the Sabbath. Historically, Sundaykeeping has been understood and experienced not as the “Holy Day of Rest” but primarily as church attendance followed by normal activities. The attempt of church leaders to make Sunday into a holy day today is a nearly impossible task, because historically Christians have not understood and experienced Sunday as a holy day. Moreover, people today are more interested in *holidays* than in the observance of a *holy day*.

**The Lord’s Day Alliance.** A final example of rediscovery of the Sabbath as a model for Sunday keeping is provided by the goals and work of the Lord’s Day Alliance of the United States (LDA). I became personally acquainted with the work of the LDA several years ago when its Executive Director, Dr. James Wesberry, came to spend a Sabbath with our family here at Andrews University where I teach. After reading my book *From Sabbath to Sunday*, he wrote me a most gracious letter inquiring about the possibility of our meeting. He wrote: “It will be a great joy to meet and talk with you any

time such a meeting may be arranged. . . . Such a conversation might add to my knowledge and give me additional ideas about how the Lord's Day should be observed. . . . If you propose a time and a place for such a get-together, it will be an honor to meet and talk with you. I should hope you might visit me here in our office."<sup>15</sup>

Dr. Wesberry came to spend Sabbath, December 2, 1978, with us. The visit was a memorable occasion not only for my family but also for him. In fact, in his farewell address to the Board Members of the LDA published in *Sunday*, the official magazine of the LDA, Dr. Wesberry mentioned his visit to Andrews University as one of the highlights of his tenure as Executive Director of the LDA. He was greatly impressed by the atmosphere of peace and tranquillity that he felt was so pervasive in our homes, campus, and lives on the Sabbath.

When my wife and I took Dr. Wesberry to the South Bend airport that Saturday night, he said: "This was the most delightful Sabbath I have ever experienced in my life." Then he asked: "Would you be willing to come to Atlanta, Georgia, next February 14, and be our keynote speaker at our annual LDA board meeting that brings together about 150 church leaders representing 21 denominations? I would like you to share with them some of the things you have shared with me today." It goes without saying that I was delighted to accept the invitation. It was for me an unforgettable experience to speak to such a distinguished group of Church leaders. In my lecture, I spoke not only on how the change came about from Saturday to Sunday in early Christianity, but also on how the values of the Sabbath can revitalize the religious experience of millions of Christians today.

Dr. Wesberry was especially impressed by my book *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness* because he found in it new insights into the meaning and experience of the Sabbath which he felt were applicable to Sunday observance. In his Foreword to the book he wrote: "The author has dealt well with his subject. He has built a gold mine of Sabbath material and made an invaluable contribution to the strengthening of the Sabbath throughout the world! No one, no matter of what faith or denomination he or she may be, can read this book without finding Divine rest for his or her restlessness."<sup>16</sup>

Prior to his death Dr. Wesberry wrote me a most gracious letter asking me to do him "a big favor," namely, to explore the possibility of establishing an endowed chair for Sabbath Studies in his name. When I informed him by phone that an endowed chair for Sabbath Studies at Andrews University would require an investment of half a million dollars, he told me that this was

way beyond his means. We discussed the possibility of raising together the funds needed for this worthy project, but he passed away before anything could be done about it.

What stands out most in my memory about Dr. James Wesberry is his dedication to help Christians experience the physical and spiritual renewal that comes from the celebration of the Sabbath. Though I could not support his endeavors to apply the values of the biblical Sabbath to Sunday, I fully share his conviction that a recovery of the meaning and experience of Sabbathkeeping is indispensable to revitalize the spiritual life of Christians today. Christians who give priority to the Lord in their thinking and living during the Sabbath day ultimately give priority to the Lord every day of their lives.

## **PART 2**

### **THE REDISCOVERY**

#### **OF THE SEVENTH-DAY SABBATH**

While Sunday-Sabbatarians are satisfied to rediscover the Sabbath as a model for Sundaykeeping, an increasing number of Christians today wish to rediscover the Sabbath as the biblical seventh-day. A comprehensive report on the rediscovery of the seventh-day Sabbath by individuals and various religious groups is beyond the limited scope of this essay. Interested readers will find a listing in *The Directory of Sabbath-Observing Groups*, published by the Bible Sabbath Association. This valuable source of information lists approximately 300 churches and groups who have accepted the Sabbath in recent times.

It has been a most informative and inspiring experience to contact by phone a dozen pastors who in recent years have led their congregations from Sundaykeeping to Sabbathkeeping. Unfortunately, most of these pastors have not published an orderly account of how they became Sabbathkeepers. One, Pastor Dan Gayman of The Church of Israel, wrote a brief report which is cited below.

For the purpose of this chapter, I submit first a sampling of recent publications rediscovering the seventh-day Sabbath. Then follows a brief report on a few Sabbatarian churches with which I have become personally acquainted. A comprehensive history of the many Sabbatarian churches and groups that have come into existence during the past 30 to 40 years would require considerable research and the writing of a sizeable volume. The few examples of Sabbatarian publications and churches cited below are only

representative of the rediscovery of the Sabbath by Christians of different persuasions.

***Catch Your Breath: God's Invitation to Sabbath Rest.*** A fitting example of the rediscovery of the Sabbath in recent publications is the newly released book *Catch Your Breath: God's Invitation to Sabbath Rest* (1997), authored by Don Postema who serves as pastor of the Campus Chapel at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. The book, which is published by CRC (Christian Reformed Church), provides a practical and creative study of the meaning of the Sabbath for today. In his spiritual search for inner peace and rest, Postema tried various resources including Eastern meditation until he was struck by the fact that “Jews and Christians have a practice as near as our Bible, as close as our tradition, as available as the next ten minutes or weekend: the Sabbath.”<sup>17</sup>

Postema explains that “The Sabbath is a gift from God given to humanity right from the beginning. An attitude waiting to be lived ever since Moses received the Ten Commandments and Jesus declared the Sabbath was made for us! A promise that unfolds the more we participate in it. A vacation with God planned from the beginning to be enjoyed into eternity.”<sup>18</sup>

The aim of the book is to invite people not only to think about the Sabbath but also to *practice* it. Postema writes: “The benefit of the Sabbath is not simply in the study of it but most assuredly in the practice of it—in *living* Sabbath. Reading and thinking about Sabbath is like reading travel brochures and dreaming about great vacation spots but never going there for a vacation. It is interesting. You can learn a lot. But you can't have the experience unless you make the journey.

“This book is something like a travel guide to an intriguing vacation spot. But I hope you don't simply read about it quickly and put it down thinking, ‘I might like to go there some time.’ Rather, I hope that together we can experience a vacation with God.”<sup>19</sup> Contrary to other authors who study the Sabbath as a role model for Sundaykeeping, Postema focuses exclusively on the biblical seventh-day Sabbath. I found no attempts in the book to apply the values of the Sabbath to Sunday.

***Restore.*** An unusual journal called *Restore* was recently started by Dr. John D. Garr, founder of the Restoration Foundation. Garr has pioneered research, writing, and teaching on the Hebrew foundations of the Christian faith for the past thirty years. The aim of *Restore* is to promote the recovery of the biblical Hebrew heritage to the Christian believer. The contributors are mostly scholars who write within their field of expertise.

I have been invited to contribute articles to *Restore* and to participate in their Dallas-based radio program, *The Roots of Yeshua*. The Sabbath has been the major topic discussed in three radio talk shows. The host of the program can be reached at (817) 794-0455. Several articles on the Sabbath have been published in *Restore*. One of them, "How to Have a Family Shabbat," suggests an order of service for opening the Sabbath in a Christian home.<sup>20</sup>

What I find surprising about this organization is that it is transdenominational and multi-ethnic. It claims no religious affiliation. It simply exists to help Christians of all faiths recover vital aspects of their Hebrew heritage, like the Sabbath, that have been lost as a result of centuries of anti-Judaism and anti-semitism. Anyone interested in receiving their journal and/or their publications can contact them by phone (423) 472-7321 or by email at RestorationFoundation@compuserve.com. These people represent a fine example of educated Christians who are eager to rediscover long-forgotten biblical truths, like the Sabbath.

***Hemisphere.*** A most unlikely place to find an article discussing the rediscovery of the Sabbath is *Hemisphere*, the magazine of United Airlines. I was surprised on a United Airline flight to the West Coast to read in the July 1997 issue of *Hemisphere* a delightful article entitled "Ancient Wisdom," written by Nan Chase, a frequent contributor to *The Washington Post*. Chase tells the story of how she discovered the Sabbath by reading about it in a Jewish book about Holy Days. She came across the book at the very time she and her husband went to a marriage counselor because they were deadlocked "over crises of time management, of growth and change."<sup>21</sup>

Chase was "electrified" when she read: "The Sabbath marks the difference between man and all other creatures that live in the universe."<sup>22</sup> She noted that "this day of rest was to be observed in order for humans to cease the everyday struggle for existence and to enjoy life's material and spiritual gifts."<sup>23</sup>

She decided to begin observing the Sabbath from "sundown Friday until sundown Saturday" by resting: "No cooking, no shopping or paying of bills, no pulling of weeds or pruning shrubs, no cleaning or repairing the house, nor even talking about or thinking about work and the office. The Sabbath is a day without labor, a time to savor the sweetness of life . . . My personal life, my professional life, and my family life have all improved, and I plan to go on celebrating the Sabbath."<sup>24</sup> What an inspiring testimony to be found, of all places, in an airline magazine. This is but one example of how different people today are rediscovering the blessings of Sabbathkeeping for their families, marriages, and personal lives.

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*Du Sabbat au Dimanche.* The next example of rediscovering the Sabbath sounds almost too nice to be true. A Belgian Benedictine monk, Ferdinand Poswick, Director of the Center for Biblical Information at the Abbey of Maredsous in Belgium, ordered a copy of my dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday*, when it first came out from the pontifical Gregorian University Press in 1977. Being impressed by documents and arguments which indicate the continuity, validity, and value of the Sabbath for the Christian life today, Poswick decided to contact me during his trip to America in 1982. He never anticipated meeting me in Dallas at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature.

At the Dallas meeting, Poswick shared his great desire to translate and publish the book into French if I would give him permission. He felt that the book could contribute to the recovery of the biblical values of the Sabbath for today. I was delighted to grant him permission, forfeiting royalties in view of the cost of translation.

Poswick supervised the translation done by another Benedictine monk, Dominique Sebire, who worked for almost two years on this project, producing a superb French translation. The French title of the book is *Du Sabbat au Dimanche*. Poswick and Sebire did all of this as a labor of love, without receiving a cent of compensation from anyone. They were inspired by the desire to help Christians rediscover the blessings of the biblical Sabbath for today. They verbalize this desire in the Foreword which I do my best here to translate from French into English.

“Did Jesus of Nazareth abolish the Sabbath? Paul, who was often accused by his own Jewish brethren of many transgressions—was he ever accused of Sabbathbreaking? Why then did Christians stop observing the Sabbath beginning from the fourth century? Was it perhaps to distinguish themselves from the Jews and to facilitate their integration in the rhythms and customs of the Constantinian empire?

“Doesn’t Sabbathkeeping remain a very visible sign of the break that occurred between carnal Israel and those who claim to be spiritual Israel? At any rate, should we not prefer the sincere and truthful celebration of the Sabbath unto God to the pharisaism of a paganized Sunday? [Isn’t this a daring statement to make by Benedictine monks?]

“Some Christians, the Seventh-day Adventists, often considered as marginal among the main line denominations, do observe the Sabbath. One of their theologians wished to verify the historical sources dealing with the change from the observance of the Sabbath to the observance of Sunday. .

[biographical information about me follows]. For the reflection of Christians we present this research that the author has adapted for the American edition of his dissertation.

“May this thorough study stimulate biblical, patristic, and liturgical research, challenging everyone to return to the sources, improve the methodology of research, and reexamine afresh a truth [that is, the Sabbath truth] which the author presents with the conviction of someone who has found in the celebration of the Sabbath a spiritual enrichment which gives a special quality to his faith in the Resurrection and Return of Christ.”<sup>25</sup>

Words fail to express my heartfelt appreciation to these dedicated Benedictine monks, not only for giving unstintingly their time and skills to this project, but also for daring to challenge Christians to “reexamine afresh” the values of the Sabbath which can bring spiritual enrichment to our Christian life today. It is hard for me to believe that they succeeded in having the French edition of my dissertation *Du Sabbat au Dimanche* published and distributed through Catholic bookstores.

The sampling of publications cited above reflect the growing interest for rediscovering the Sabbath on the part of Christian thinkers of different persuasions. At this juncture, I would like to mention a few churches and groups who have rediscovered the Sabbath in recent times. No special mention will be made of the rediscovery of the Sabbath by older Sabbatarian churches, like the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Seventh Day Baptist Church, or the Church of God Seventh-day, since all of these churches have been in existence for a longer time.

**Various “Churches of God.”** Numerous recently established Sabbatarian churches and independent congregations have adopted the name of “Church of God” with or without additional qualifying designations. Several of them use the name “Church of God Seventh-day,” the larger of which has its headquarters in Denver, Colorado. On several occasions I have been invited to speak at their gatherings. Others use variations of the same name such as “Church of God The Eternal,” “Church of God and Saints in Christ,” “Church of God Fellowship,” “Church of God in Truth,” “Church of God, Jerusalem,” “Church of God of the Ozarks,” “Church of God, Philadelphian Era,” etc.

Several new Churches of God have come into existence as a result of the doctrinal changes recently introduced by the leadership of the Worldwide Church of God (WCG). The Pastor General of the WCG, Joseph Tkach, Jr., supported by a few close advisers, adopted the “New Covenant” theology.



Early in 1995, Tkach informed his members that their beliefs in the Sabbath, Holy Days, tithing, clean and unclean meats, and other things were part of the Old Covenant and no longer binding upon Christians today. The result of these doctrinal changes has been a massive exodus of approximately 70,000 members who chose to leave the WCG rather than give up doctrines such as the Sabbath, which had been vital to their spiritual life.

About half of the members who left the WCG have joined newly formed “Churches of God” such as the United Church of God, Global Church of God, Church of God International, and Philadelphia Church of God. Some time ago, *The Journal*, a paper that publishes “News of the Churches of God,” listed about seventy different “Churches of God” that trace their roots to the WCG. It is estimated that an almost equal number of former WCG members have not as yet joined any church. They often refer to themselves as “Living Room Sabbatharians” since on the Sabbath they meet with friends for worship in their living rooms. At a “Friends of the Sabbath” Conference held in 1996 at the Sheriton Convention Center in Tacoma, Washington, about half of the 400-plus participants identified themselves as “Living Room Sabbatharians.”

During the past three years I have been privileged to minister to many former and current members of the WCG at Sabbath conferences held across the US and overseas. It has been an inspiring experience to listen to moving accounts of the pain and suffering some of them have endured to remain loyal to the principle and practice of Sabbathkeeping.

I vividly recall a gentleman who flew from Phoenix, Arizona to San Antonio, Texas to attend a Sabbath conference held at the Mansion del Rio Hotel from December 24-26, 1995. He told me: “After having been a Sabbathkeeper in the WCG for the past thirty years, I would have never imagined that the day would come when I would fly across the country to listen to a lecture on the Sabbath. But my family has been split over the Sabbath question. My wife and a son have chosen to stay on with the WCG and they no longer wish to observe the Sabbath. Out of desperation I decided to come to this conference in order to get all the help that I can receive.” My heart goes out to these Sabbatarian friends who are facing opposition and even rejection from their own family members and former church members because of their decision to honor their Savior on His Sabbath day.

**Sabbatarian Methodists.** A Reformed Methodist movement, known as Wesley Synod, rediscovered the Sabbath in 1996. Bishop Steven Sanchez, S. T. D., told me in a telephone conversation that he presides over 68 congregations scattered throughout North America. The concern of the

Wesley Synod is to return to the Hebraic roots of Christianity. They believe in the observance of God's law, in general, and the Sabbath, in particular.

Bishop Sanchez explained to me that, though their denomination was organized only recently, they stand fully in the Wesleyan tradition because at one time John Wesley was a seventh-day Sabbath keeper and believed in keeping the dietary laws. He claims that this information is not found in later biographies of Wesley's life but can be found in earlier books. He promised to mail me some of this documentation. The Wesley Synod views itself as the resurrection of true Methodism. Obviously this has created some problems with the Methodist Church to which they are still committed.

The Wesley Synod observes the Sabbath from sunset Friday till sunset Saturday not only by going to church on Saturday morning, but also by abstaining from ordinary work in order to give priority to the Lord in their thinking and living. It is encouraging to see how the Holy Spirit is moving upon the hearts of Christians in mainline denominations to recover the Hebrew heritage of the Christian faith, especially by returning to the principle and practice of Sabbathkeeping.

**The Church of Israel.** At the "Friends of the Sabbath Conference" held in Sydney, Australia, June 1996, the participants were delighted to hear Pastor Dan Gayman relate in a most gripping way how the Lord led his Open Bible Church, near Schell City, Missouri, to rediscover and accept the Sabbath. As a result of the rediscovery of new biblical truths, the name of the church was changed to "The Church of Israel." Gayman's presentation was so inspiring that he was invited to repeat it in several Adventist churches in Sydney after the Conference.

Pastor Gayman graciously faxed me on September 6, 1998, a nutshell summary of the providential way the Lord led his congregation to rediscover the Sabbath. He explains that his congregation, being an Open Bible Church, was interested in following biblical truths wherever they might lead them. "Beginning in the year 1985 the Church of Israel [of approximately 200 members] made a conscious effort to study the question of the Sabbath. . . . The congregation studied the issue of the Sabbath for a period of two years and carefully researched every word to be found in Scripture on the subject, along with voluminous books on the subject. The goal was to bring the church into the truth of the Sabbath without loss of a single family." Incidentally, Guyman ordered my Sabbath books on numerous occasions during the time his congregation was involved in the study of the Sabbath.

After two years of Bible study, "in the late Fall of 1987 the ministers and the congregation made their decision to transfer their church services

from Sunday to the biblical Sabbath.” The official change occurred on December 17, 1987, “without the loss of a single family.” Since that time “the church has never failed to observe a full scale worship service on the biblical Sabbath.”

Pastor Guyman concludes his summary report with these words: “The transfer from Sunday to the biblical Sabbath has been one of the most important spiritual events in the life of the church. It has wrought powerful transformation in the lives of all the church members. The church has doubled in size and increased its evangelistic outreach to every state in the United States. The church has shared its testimony on the Sabbath with untold numbers of people and upwards of one thousand people have joined the church in the celebration of the Holy Sabbath around the United States.”

The experience of Pastor Guyman and his congregation stands in stark contrast to that of Pastor Dale Ratzlaff and his congregation. Ratzlaff, a former Seventh-day Adventist Bible teacher and minister, claims in his book *Sabbath in Crisis* that seven months of a weekly study of the Sabbath with a group of his members led him to the conclusion that the Sabbath is an Old Covenant institution, fulfilled by Christ and no longer binding about “New Covenant” Christians.<sup>26</sup> The outcome was that Pastor Ratzlaff left the Seventh-day Adventist Church and established a congregation that meets on Sunday in Phoenix, Arizona.

By contrast, Pastor Guyman, a Sundaykeeper, affirms that two years of study of the Sabbath with his congregation convinced every single family of his 200-member congregation to accept the biblical validity and value of the Sabbath. These two contrasting experiences illustrate the point that one can study the Bible to accept or to reject its truths. The difference largely lies in what one seeks to find in the Bible.

**Messianic Jewish Congregations.** The rediscovery of the Sabbath has played a significant role in the religious life of the Messianic Jewish Movement which has gained prominence during the past thirty years. During this time, hundreds of Messianic Jewish Congregations have been established across the United States and overseas. These congregations belong to one of two major organizations, the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations or the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America. Messianic Judaism is a fast-growing movement that is bringing the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ to many Jews around the world.

During the past two years, I have invited a dozen Messianic Jewish Rabbis to speak at Sabbath conferences held in different parts of the country.

Their presentations on the Sabbath have always been most enlightening. At some conferences, the Rabbis demonstrated how their families open and close the Sabbath with a special ceremony by sitting around the family table which, on these special occasions, becomes the family altar. Their ritual is largely adopted from the Jewish tradition with new Christian elements.

Learning how the Sabbath is conceptualized and experienced within the Messianic Jewish community, can be an educational experience for Sabbatarians. The Sabbath liturgy of Messianic Jews may provide a model that some Sabbatarians may wish to adopt with modifications and innovations. In my view, more needs to be done by Sabbatarian churches to help their members develop a meaningful family tradition of Sabbath-keeping that can help to keep alive the significance and experience of the Sabbath.

The rediscovery of the Sabbath among Messianic Jews has been a gradual process. The Messianic Jewish Movement gained momentum in the early seventies, possibly influenced by the events that transpired during the six-days war of 1967. At that time most of their members were Sundaykeepers. Rabbi Harvey Koelner of the Temple Aron Kodesh, a Messianic Jewish congregation in Lauderdale Lake, Florida, explained to me in a telephone conversation that initially his 500-member congregation had “a split personality.” Some members attended Friday night services, as most Jews do today, but the rest attended Sunday services. Gradually, however, his whole congregation became Sabbathkeepers. I understand that the same thing has happened in over 95 percent of the Messianic Jewish congregations as they have come to observe exclusively the Sabbath.

**Recovering the Jewish Roots.** Some Messianic Jews were originally Sundaykeepers largely because their movement was originally sponsored by Sundaykeeping Protestant churches. Surprisingly, Sabbatarian churches have done very little to reach the Jews with the Gospel. I remember meeting with some Messianic Jewish congregations in Chicago in the early eighties in facilities offered them by evangelical churches. Since the mission to the Jews was launched by Sundaykeeping Protestant churches, one is not surprised that initially Messianic Jews were Sundaykeepers. This has also been the case with the *Jews for Jesus* Movement whose members today are still mostly Sundaykeepers.

What has led Messianic Jewish congregations to rediscover the Sabbath in recent times is their commitment to recover the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. Some Messianic Jewish Rabbis have explained to me that in their search for their roots, they discovered that Jesus and the apostles were

Jews who observed the law, in general, and the Sabbath, in particular. They found that Christianity began as the continuation of Judaism, not as a radical break away from it. Consequently, they came to realize that the acceptance of Jesus as their expected Messiah did not necessitate for them to reject such an important aspect of their Jewish heritage as Sabbathkeeping.

An important lesson can be learned from the Messianic Jews. Christians also need to reexamine the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, Judaism and Christianity, law and grace, Sabbath and Sunday. For too long Christians have been taught to view the Cross as the line of demarcation between these sets of contrasts. In recent years, however, numerous scholars have exposed the fallacies of this artificial theological construct. They have come to recognize that the earliest Christians were believing Jews who were “zealous for the law” (Acts 21:20).

For believing Jews in New Testament times, it would have been unthinkable to abandon one of the chief precepts of the law, the Sabbath commandment. If Paul had dared to do so, they would have fiercely condemned his temerity, as they did in the case of circumcision. The absence of any echo of controversy regarding the Sabbath is a compelling indication of the continuity of its observance. We can only hope that Dispensationalists and “New Covenant” Christians gradually come to recognize this historical reality and abandon the artificial distinction they have fabricated between the Old and New Covenant, Judaism and Christianity, Law and grace, Sabbath and Sunday.

**Sabbatarian Mennonites.** The interest of some Mennonites for a rediscovery of the Sabbath can be traced back to some of their Anabaptist founding fathers who were Sabbatarians. The Anabaptist movement represents the radical wing of the Reformation. Their concern was to complete the reformation initiated by Luther and Calvin by returning to the beliefs and practices of the Apostolic Church. Because of this overriding concern, they became known as restitutionists.

Two active Anabaptist leaders, Andreas Fisher and Oswald Glait, became the pioneers and promoters of the Sabbath. Both of them suffered martyr deaths, largely due to their Sabbatarian views. Sabbatarians owe a debt of gratitude to these Sabbath pioneers whose work later influenced the origin of the Seventh Day Baptist church. The latter has been instrumental in helping the early Adventists and other Christians to rediscover the Sabbath.

Mennonite scholar Daniel Liechy has produced a comprehensive biography of Andreas Fisher through a painstaking examination of all the

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primary and secondary sources he searched out in various European countries. His research was published in 1988 by the Herald Press under the title *Andreas Fisher and the Sabbatarian Anabaptists*. It was my privilege to write the Foreword to this important research.

Liechty carefully reconstructs the Sabbatarian theology of one wing of the Anabaptist movement. In doing so, he raises important questions regarding the theological consistency of the major Anabaptist streams that wanted to rediscover and restore apostolic biblical teachings and practices and yet refused to accept the apostolic practice of Sabbathkeeping. In a personal letter, Liechty informed me that his research has had such an impact upon him that he has become a Sabbatarian.

Liechty's research is of immense value to Sabbatarian churches because it proves that the principle and practice of seventh-day Sabbathkeeping was rediscovered and accepted in the earliest years of the Reformation itself. Moreover, it provides vital information for tracing the historical roots of their theological beliefs.

I was made aware of the interest of the Mennonites in the Sabbath a few years ago when I was invited by the president of the student association of the Associate Mennonite Seminary, in Elkhart, Indiana, to speak at their chapel program on the historical change from Sabbath to Sunday in early Christianity. The lecture was followed by a pleasant discussion. At the end of the discussion, an elderly Old Testament professor, who looked very much like an Old Testament patriarch with a nice flowing white beard, stood up and made a daring speech. He said something like this: "I have listened attentively to the presentation of Dr. Bacchiocchi and to the discussion. It appears to me that there is a keen interest on the part of some Mennonites to return to the biblical principle and practice of Sabbathkeeping. Rather than arguing about this matter, why not open up our church doors on Saturday morning so that those who have this conviction can worship God on the Sabbath without interference."

A few months later one of my colleagues learned during a visit to the Associated Mennonite Seminary that a group of people on the campus meets for worship on Sabbath mornings. This episode provides another example of the providential way the Lord is leading sincere people to rediscover the Sabbath.

**Assemblies of Yahweh.** One of the larger Sabbatarian churches is the Assemblies of Yahweh, with headquarters in Bethel, Pennsylvania. This church came into existence in 1962 largely as a result of the work of Jacob O.

Meyer, who is regarded as the founding father. Since then numerous independent Assemblies of Yahweh have been formed. Though these share the same or a similar name, they function independently from the mother church.

In an article entitled “Why I Keep the Seventh Day Sabbath,” Jacob Meyer recounts how he became a Sabbathkeeper at the age of 27. At the time he was serving as a Sunday-school teacher in the Church of the Brethren, formerly known as the German Baptist Brethren. Meyer recalls that “Approximately November 1961, the Sunday school lesson I taught to my young married people’s class concerned the fourth commandment, the keeping of the Sabbath. We studied through the fourth commandment in the allotted time of an hour. After some additional study and meditation, I was not as convinced about keeping Sunday (the first day of the week) as I had been before.”<sup>27</sup>

Sometime later two couples spent a Saturday evening with the Meyers studying the Bible, especially the keeping of the commandments, including the Sabbath. The next day, Sunday, Meyer decided to study about the Sabbath rather than go to church. He writes: “I stayed home and applied myself to a serious study of the sacred Scriptures, seeing things I had never seen before in my Bible. I studied the subject of the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath. I read the passages from my own Bible, and with the center-column references, through a word study I pursued the subject through the entire Bible. . . .

“After a long productive morning of Bible study with my wife, I turned to her and said: ‘Honey, next week we will begin keeping the seventh day Sabbath!’ From then on (early 1962) we have observed the Sabbath and we intend to continue to the end of our lives.”<sup>28</sup> Later Meyer discovered that his forefather Johannes Meyer was a Sabbathkeeper in colonial America in the early 1700s. He belonged to the Seventh Day German Baptist Church.

The story of the discovery of the Sabbath by Jacob Meyer serves to illustrate again how the Lord uses unexpected circumstances to lead sincere people to find forgotten biblical truths. As a result of Meyer’s witness and leadership, numerous Assemblies of Yahweh congregations are observing the Sabbath across North America.

**True Jesus Church.** The rediscovery of the Sabbath is a phenomenon occurring not only among Christians in North America but also overseas. A few examples are familiar to me. A rather well-known Sabbatarian church in China and the South Pacific is the True Jesus Church. It was established in 1917 in Beijing, China, by Paul Wei, Ling-Shen Chang, and Barnabas Chung, who had been affiliated with Sundaykeeping denominations. They claim to

have received the complete truth regarding salvation through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>29</sup>

Sabbath observance is one of their fundamental beliefs, as stated in the list of their basic beliefs: “The Sabbath Day, the seventh day of the week (Saturday), is a holy day, blessed and sanctified by God. It is to be observed under the Lord’s grace for the commemoration of God’s creation and redemption, and with the hope of eternal rest.”<sup>30</sup>

Although the True Jesus Church originated in China, its mission has spread to the South Pacific, South-East Asia, and other parts of the world, including Russia. At present it has approximately 1,000,000 members in China and 79,000 members in the free world.<sup>31</sup> In 1985, the headquarters of the church was relocated from Taiwan to Los Angeles and “four evangelical centers were also established to meet the expansion of the work: the American Evangelical Center (AEC), the Europe Evangelical Center (EEC), the North-East Asia Evangelical Center (NEAEC), and the South-East Asia Evangelical Center.”<sup>32</sup>

**Sabbatarians Overseas.** In 1992, I received a letter from Robert Kiesel, president of the Polish Brethren Unity Church, inviting me to attend a meeting of 1,500 leaders of congregations in Western Ukraine on November 1, 1992. In his letter dated August 3, 1992, Kiesel writes: “During this meeting our brethren are going to discuss the basic topic of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in order to establish a new Sabbathkeeping Church of God. . . . I hope you can find time to come to this meeting as one of the best Western Sabbath theologians and help us in the process of the creation of the new Church.”

Kiesel’s letter and invitation was sent to me through Przemyslaw Waliszewski, a scientist in the Department of Cancer Biology of The Cleveland and Clinic Foundation, an internationally known cancer research center. In his accompanying letter, Prof. Waliszewski (a non-SDA) urged me to accept the invitation and asked permission to translate my Sabbath books into Polish and Russian. On such short notice and with such limited information about the actual location of the meeting, it was impossible for me to attend. My absence from the meeting does not detract from the fact that 1500 leaders of Polish Unity Brethren Church in Poland and Western Ukraine came together to establish a new Sabbathkeeping Church of God.

More recently I received a letter (October 3, 1997) from Pastor Glen Howard, of the International Church of Budapest in Hungary. Pastor Howard is apparently an American missionary sponsored by a Sundaykeeping de-



nomination, as indicated by his fluent English and ability to pay for my books with a check drawn on an American bank.

In his letter, Pastor Howard informed me that he has read and shared with his congregations my two Sabbath book *From Sabbath to Sunday* and *The Sabbath in the New Testament*. According to the letter, “several people in our congregation have become quite interested in the subject of the Sabbath and would like to get a copy of these books. . . .Do you have a special price for churches of mission organizations?” Rest assured that I was delighted to ship to them a case of my Sabbath books. It is heart-warming for me to receive letters almost every week from individuals and church leaders informing me that through the printed page the Lord has brought conviction to their minds as to the biblical validity and value of Sabbathkeeping for their Christian lives.

**Conclusion.** The foregoing fragmentary report on the rediscovery of the Sabbath by scholars, church leaders, and religious groups known to me hardly does justice to the swelling interest in the Sabbath on the part of many other religious groups that have not been mentioned.

This partial report suffices to show that interest in the Sabbath has hardly been suppressed by the crossfire of controversy. The truth is that we are experiencing today a swelling interest for Sabbath. Christians of all persuasions are rediscovering that the Sabbath is indeed “a gift waiting to be unwrapped.”<sup>33</sup> Many today are unwrapping this gift by accepting God’s invitation to stop their work on the Sabbath day in order to allow Him to enrich their lives with a larger measure of His divine presence, peace, and rest. Many more can receive the gift of the Sabbath if those of us who experience weekly the blessings of this divine gift will share with others the benefits this day brings to our lives.

### PART 3

#### THE SABBATH AS CHRIST’S REST

#### FOR HUMAN RESTLESSNESS

Rediscovering the Sabbath is not just a matter of accepting the Sabbath commandment by resting and worshipping on the seventh day. It also involves learning how through the Sabbath, we can enter into God’s rest (Heb 4:10). Our tension-filled and restless lives today more than ever before need the rest and renewal the Sabbath is designed to provide. In this, the conclusion of this book, it is well for us to reflect on how the Sabbath can enable us to experience the awareness of Christ’s presence, peace, and rest in our lives. So

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far I have endeavored to reaffirm the *validity* of the principle and practice of Sabbathkeeping by refuting the major attacks launched against this divine institution. At this juncture, by way of conclusion, I would like to focus on the physical and spiritual *value* of the Sabbath for our lives.

**The Search for Inner Rest and Release.** We live in a tension-filled and restless society where many people try to work off tension by joining athletic clubs, and meditation groups, or by taking tranquilizers, drugs, and alcohol. Some seek release from their tension by taking vacations to some fantasy island. Experience tells us, however, that even fabulous vacations or magic pills provide at best only a temporary relief and not a permanent quieting of inner tension and restlessness.

True rest is not to be found in *places* or through *pills*, but rather in the right relationship with a *Person*, the Person of the Savior who says: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28, NIV). Perfect rest and peace are not a human achievement but a divine gift. It is an experience that comes to us when we allow Christ to harmonize our lives (“I will give you rest”—Matt. 11:28).

Perfect rest does not come about accidentally but is the result of an harmonious accord of the physical, mental, and spiritual components of our being. Can we by ourselves harmonize these three, that is, our body, mind and soul? We can stretch our tired body on a bed, but if our mind and soul are troubled, we have not rest but agitation, tension, or even nightmares. As the various components of an orchestra need the direction of a skilful *maestro* to blend them into harmonious music, so the physical, mental and spiritual components of our being need the direction of our supreme *Master* in order for us to experience harmonious rest and peace.

Augustine expresses this truth eloquently in the opening paragraph of his autobiography entitled *Confessions*: “Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee.” How can we enable Christ to harmonize and quiet our restless lives? Our study shows that God gave mankind before and after the Fall a vital institution, the Sabbath day—a day specifically designed to free us from our daily work in order to allow God to work more fully and freely in our lives (Heb 4:10).

To grasp more fully this important function of the Sabbath, we now consider, by way of conclusion, seven significant ways in which proper Sabbathkeeping enables the Savior to bring rest and peace to our restless lives.

### (1) The Rest of Creation

The Sabbath brings Christ's rest to our souls by constantly reassuring us that our lives have meaning, value, and hope because they are rooted in God from creation to eternity. We may call this "Christ's creation rest" for the human soul. It is the rest that Christ brings to those thinking persons who are searching for meaning and value in their lives—to those who wonder if their existence as well as that of the whole cosmos is the result of *chance* or of *choice*, that is, of a *merciless fate* or of a *merciful God*. To these persons, through the Sabbath, Christ offers His restful assurance that their ancestral roots are good because they are rooted in God Himself (Gen 1:26-27) and that their existence has value because it is not the product of chance but of a personal creation and redemption by a loving God.

This reassuring message of the Sabbath is found in the creation story where on and through the seventh day God declares His creation "finished" and "done." Three verbs characterize God's assessment of His creation on the seventh day as being fully "done" (repeated thrice), "finished," or "created" (Gen 2:2-3). Another three verbs describe how God celebrated His magnificent accomplishments: "He rested . . . blessed . . . and hallowed" the seventh day. These verbs emphasize that on and through the seventh day God proclaimed the good news that His creation was "finished" and fully "done." To dramatize the importance of such glad tidings, twice we are told in Genesis 2:2-3 that God "rested" in recognition of the fact that everything was very good and there was no need of further improvement.

The Sabbath invites believers to renew their faith in the perfect Creator by delighting in the beauty of His creation. To celebrate God's perfect creation on the Sabbath means to experience Christ's rest of creation. It means to rejoice in the divine assurance that human existence, in spite of its apparent futility and tragedy, has value because it proceeds from God and moves toward a glorious divine destiny.

Augustine expresses this truth poetically: "Thy resting on the seventh day after the completion of Thy works foretells us through the voice of Thy Book, that we also, after completing our works through Thy generosity, in the Sabbath of eternal life shall rest in Thee."<sup>34</sup> To celebrate the Sabbath in this restless world means to experience a foretaste of the future rest and peace that awaits God's people in the world to come; it means to rest in the assurance that "he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6).

**Resting as if All Work Were Done.** To celebrate the completion and perfection of God’s original creation it is important to rest on the Sabbath as if all our work were done. This may sound unrealistic since we often find ourselves at the end of a work week frustrated over unfinished tasks. In spite of our best efforts, we often accomplish during the six days only part of what we set out to do.

A vital function of the Sabbath is to give a sense of “completeness” to our incomplete work and life. A rabbinical comment on Exodus 20:9 (“Six days you shall labor, and do all your work”) hints at this function of the Sabbath: “Is it possible for a human being to do all his work in six days? Does not our work always remain incomplete? What the verse means to convey is: Rest on the Sabbath as if all your work were done. Another interpretation: *Rest even from the thought of labor.*”<sup>35</sup>

True, the Sabbath often seems to arrive earlier than expected. We may feel disappointed with ourselves because of unfinished tasks. This is a forceful reminder of our human finiteness and limitations. By enabling us to detach ourselves from our daily tasks, the Sabbath gives a sense of completion to the work of the previous six days and to life itself. In some weeks, the result of our labor seems greater than in others, but it is a fact that whether our best efforts have produced much or little, during each Sabbath God invites us to celebrate His creative and redemptive accomplishments on our behalf by entering into His Sabbath rest. He invites us to interrupt our daily routine and rest as if all our work were done in order that we may enter into the joys of His “finished” creation and salvation (Gen. 2:2; John 19:30).

It would be impossible on the Sabbath to praise God for His marvelous accomplishments while living under a deep sense of personal failure and frustration because of work that remains undone. Thus, on and through the Sabbath, God invites us to view our work in the light of His accomplishments. He tells us, “Whether your hard work has produced little or much, rest on the Sabbath as if all your work were done, because My grace is sufficient for you.” The sense of completeness that the celebration of the Sabbath brings to our life gives meaning and direction to what otherwise would be a continuous, meaningless, and linear existence.

**Renewing Faith in a Perfect Creator.** We celebrate on the Sabbath the perfection of God’s original creation by renewing our faith in God as our perfect Creator. Faith in God as Creator is the cornerstone of Christian beliefs. The first article of the “Apostles’ Creed” which most Christians recite and/or accept, states: “I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Creator of heaven and

*earth—creatorem caeli et terrae.*” Such a belief is implied in the opening declaration of the Bible: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1).

To celebrate the Sabbath means to subscribe to this fundamental biblical teaching by confessing, not merely with words but also with corresponding actions, belief in God as the perfect Creator. It means to recognize that the existence of this world itself is an absolute gift from God. George Elliott eloquently writes: “Against atheism, which denies the existence of a personal God; against materialism, which denies that this visible universe has its roots in the unseen; and against secularism, which denies the need to worship, the Sabbath is an eternal witness. It symbolically commemorates that creative power which spoke all things into being, the wisdom which ordered their adaptations and harmony, and the love which made, as well as pronounced, all ‘very good.’ It is set as the perpetual guardian of man against that spiritual infirmity which has everywhere led him to a denial of the God who made him, or to the degradation of that God into a creature made with his own hands.”<sup>36</sup>

Skepticism can be an outgrowth of forgetfulness. A person who neglects the Sabbath, the memorial of creation, is liable to forget and become skeptical about the God of creation. This can be true also in human relationships. I was engaged to be married for four years, which to me seemed like an eternity because much of the time my fiancée and I were separated by an ocean. During the prolonged separation, I was tempted to forget and to doubt who my fiancée was and how much she loved me. How did I overcome my incipient skepticism? I would take time to read and reread her loving letters and to look at her pictures. That helped me to overcome my incipient skepticism and to renew my commitment to her. In a similar fashion the Sabbath provides a weekly opportunity to overcome any incipient skepticism by inviting us to “remember” God as our perfect Creator.

Through the Sabbath, God invites us week after week to hear and to celebrate His perfect creation by contemplating His handiwork and thus renewing our faith in Him as our perfect Creator. Because this vital function of the Sabbath meets a continuing human need—greater today than ever before—no Sabbath discontinuance can ever be sanctioned or ever be legitimately contemplated. Thus, any human attempt to invest another day of the week with the symbolic-memorial function of the creation-Sabbath would mean to disregard the event for which the day stands.

**Delighting in God’s Creation.** A tangible way in which we renew our faith in God as our perfect Creator on the Sabbath is by taking delight in

the beauty of His creation. The Sabbath invites us not to prostitute the world but to delight in its beauty. It invites us to look above and beyond the cloud of sin and suffering that darkens our world and recapture in thought the astonishment, the joy, and the admiration experienced by the first human pair.

The Sabbath offers us the opportunity to look at the world through the window of eternity. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Sabbath has been regarded as a day of joy and jubilation. Isaiah calls the Sabbath “a delight,” and a day to “take delight in the Lord” (Is 58:13-14). To ensure the festive atmosphere of the Sabbath, the Jews prepared themselves for the event with special clothing, meals, and a proper frame of mind. No fasting was permitted and even the seven-day mourning period was to be interrupted.<sup>37</sup>

Everything is more beautiful and delightful on the Sabbath. The divine services seem richer, the people friendlier, the food more delicious, ladies, gentlemen, and children more beautiful internally and externally. The reason is that the Sabbath offers not only the time but also the spiritual resources to perceptibly enjoy God, people, and things. By renewing faith in a perfect Creator and Redeemer, the Sabbath enables the believer to view things not merely as they are but as they must have been originally and as they ultimately will be again. It is like putting on for 24 hours a pair of spectacles that make flat pictures look three-dimensional.

Christians who love the Lord of the Sabbath find the Sabbath to be a day of joyful celebration of God’s marvelous accomplishments in the world and in their personal life. When Friday evening comes, they gratefully say: “Thank God it is Sabbath!” They rejoice at the thought that another Sabbath has come—a day to taste and know that the Lord is good; a day to thank God for the accomplishments of a week that is past; a day to renew one’s faith in and commitment to the perfect Creator and Savior; a day to sing the Psalmist’s Sabbath song, “Thou, O Lord, hast made me glad by thy work; at the works of thy hands I sing for joy. How great are thy works, O Lord!” (Ps 92:4-5—A Song for the Sabbath).

## (2) The Rest of Divine Presence

Proper Sabbathkeeping brings Christ’s rest to our lives by enabling us to experience the awareness of His divine presence. It is Christ’s presence that brought stillness to the stormy lake of Galilee (Matt 8:23-27) and it is also the assurance of His presence that brings peace and stillness to troubled lives. This is basically the meaning of the holiness of the Sabbath which is frequently stated in the Bible.

We have found that the holiness of the Sabbath consists in the special manifestation of God's presence through this day in the life of His people. Believers who on the Sabbath lay aside their secular concerns, who turn off their receivers to the many distracting voices in order to tune in and listen to the voice of God, experience in a real sense the spiritual presence of Christ. The heightened sense of the nearness of Christ's presence experienced on the Sabbath fills the soul with joy, peace, and rest.

Relationships, if they are to survive, need to be cultivated. This is true both at a human and a human-divine level. I vividly recall the A, B, C privilege-system that governed the social relationships among students of the opposite sex at Newbold College, England, where I received my college education. A couple with an "A" status was entitled to a weekly encounter of about one hour in a designated lounge. However, those couples who qualified for a "B" or a "C" privilege could officially meet only biweekly or monthly. Frankly, I did my best to maintain the "A" status because I viewed those brief weekly encounters with my fiancée as indispensable to the survival of our relationship.

The Sabbath is in a sense a special weekly encounter with our Creator-Redeemer. This encounter lasts not merely *one hour* but a *whole day*. It is a sobering thought that to enter into the holy Sabbath day means in a special sense to enter into the spiritual presence and communion of the Lord. Believers who cultivate Christ's presence during the Sabbath time and activities experience His rest and peace every day of their lives.

**An Experience of God's Presence.** I vividly recall the many Sabbaths I spent in the town of Fano, Italy, worshiping God alone in the seclusion of my room or out in nature. At that time I was a teenager selling Christian literature during the summer to earn a scholarship. During the weekdays, I had to face considerable hostility from various quarters—from the local religious and civil authorities who constantly threatened to punish me for distributing unauthorized literature; from superstitious customers who feared being contaminated by the unendorsed literature I was selling; and from my relatives who gave me hospitality but viewed me as a heretic to be rescued from hellfire.

When Friday night arrived, I rejoiced at the thought that for one day I could forget the hostile world around me and enter into the peace of God's presence. Since no fellow believers lived in the immediate area, I would worship God alone, but not lonely, in the privacy of my room or in an open field. So the Sabbath has been for me, as for countless believers throughout

history, a truly portable sanctuary—a day to forget human misery through the experience of the closeness of God’s presence.

The experience of God’s presence on the Sabbath reminds us of the purpose of Christ’s coming into this world to become “Emmanuel, God with us.” The Incarnation fulfills blessing and sanctification of the Sabbath, which, we have seen, consist in God’s assurance to His creatures of abundant life through His presence. What God promised to His creation by blessing and sanctifying the Sabbath, He fulfilled by sending Christ into this world to become “Emmanuel—God with us.”

“How often have we heard,” writes Herbert W. Richardson, “that Jesus Christ abolished the Sabbath so that men may be truly free! But this suggestion is sheer theological nonsense. The work of Jesus Christ cannot contradict the purpose for which God created the world. To assert such a contradiction, by explicitly or implicitly opposing the Sabbath, is to reiterate the old Gnostic claim that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament are two different ‘Gods.’”<sup>38</sup>

Richardson continues by rightly affirming that “the Sabbath Day was created by God, so that He Himself might enter into the world and sanctify it by His personal presence.”<sup>39</sup> God’s sanctification of the Sabbath represents a most telling revelation of God’s concern for this world. It tells that God so loved this world, not only by entering into the limitation of *human time* on the seventh day of creation to bless this world with His Holy presence, but also by entering into the limitations of *human flesh* at the Incarnation to become again “Emmanuel—God with us.”

### (3) The Rest from Competition

True Sabbathkeeping brings Christ’s rest to our lives by releasing us from the pressure to produce and achieve. The pressure that our competitive society exerts on us can cause untold frustration. Competition can dishearten, dehumanize, and demoralize a person. It can turn friends into foes.

In order to keep up with the Joneses, some Christians today, like the Israelites of old, choose to “moonlight” on the Sabbath (Ex 16:27), hoping to secure added income and goods. But Scripture points to the senselessness of such an effort when it pointedly says “they found none” (Ex 16:27). That is to say, one misses obtaining both the material and the spiritual manna by doing extra work on the Sabbath, consequently finding restlessness and dissatisfaction.



**The Sabbath and Gratefulness.** The Sabbath teaches our greedy hearts to be grateful—to stop for one day looking for more and to start instead to gratefully acknowledge the blessings received. A person who learns gratitude experiences inner peace, inasmuch as a grateful heart is the abiding place of Christ and of His peace.

The Sabbath rest teaches that the chief end of life is not, as advocated by Marxism, to work to transform nature, but to rest to enjoy God’s presence and creation. The Sabbath rest also teaches freedom from things. One of the most difficult lessons to learn is how to have things without becoming addicted to them—how to live with people without losing one’s independence. On the Sabbath, by abstaining from the production or purchase of goods, we learn detachment and independence from matter and attachment to and dependence on the Spirit.

By freeing us from work, the Sabbath makes us free for God. It invites us, to use Aquinas’ happy expression, to have “a day of vacation with God”—*ad vacandum divinis*.<sup>40</sup> How sour the weekdays would be without the Sabbath vacation with God and fellow beings! Weekdays without the Sabbath are like spaghetti without sauce or food without salt. As a spicy sauce gives gusto to spaghetti, so a joyful Sabbath radiates a festive gleam to every day of the week.

By restricting temporarily our productivity, the Sabbath teaches us not to compete but to commune with one another. It teaches us to view fellow beings not *quantitatively* but *qualitatively*, that is, not in terms of their income but in terms of their human worth. If Mr. Jones lives on social security, during the week we may be tempted to think of him in terms of his small income. On the Sabbath, however, as we worship and fellowship with Mr. Jones, we appreciate not the little that he makes but the much that he offers to the church and community through his Christian witness and example.

By releasing us from the pressure of competition and production, the Sabbath enables us to appreciate more fully the human values of people and the beauty of things. This free and fuller appreciation of God, people, and things brings joy, harmony, and rest to our lives.

#### (4) The Rest of Belonging

Genuine Sabbathkeeping brings Christ’s rest to our lives by reassuring us of our belonging to Him. At the root of much human restlessness is the sense of alienation and estrangement. The sense of not-belonging to anyone or anything will cause a person to feel bitter, insecure, and restless. On the contrary, in a relationship of mutual belonging, one experiences love,

identity, security, and rest. To enable human beings to conceptualize and experience a belonging relationship with Him, God has given helpful signs and symbols such as the rainbow, the circumcision, the Passover lamb and blood, the bread and wine, and the Sabbath.

The Sabbath occupies a unique place among these various God-given covenant signs or symbols, because it has functioned as the symbol *par excellence* of the divine election and mission of God's people. It is unique in its *origin*, because it is the first sign given by God to reveal His desire to fellowship with His creatures. It is unique in its *survival*, because it has survived not only the Fall but also the Flood, the Egyptian slavery, the Babylonian exile, the Roman anti-Sabbath legislation, the French and Russian temporary introduction of the ten-day week, blank-day calendar proposals (disrupting the weekly cycle), antinomianism, and modern secularism. The day still stands for God's people as the symbol of God's gracious provision of salvation and of belonging to Him.

**Divine Ownership.** The Sabbath constantly reminds believers of their belonging to God, because it is the seal of divine ownership. The meaning of ownership is explicitly expressed both in the Fourth Commandment and in its sister institutions, the sabbatical and the jubilee years. In the Sabbath Commandment, believers are invited to “remember” that “in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them (Ex 20:11; 31:17). As Creator, God is the only legitimate Owner of this world. In the sabbatical and jubilee years, the Israelites were enjoined to relinquish the use of the land and to liberate their fellow beings from poverty and bondage (Lev 25; Deut 15:1-18) in order to acknowledge that Yahweh is the only rightful owner of the land (“The land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants”—Lev 25:23, NIV).

As the symbol of divine ownership, the Sabbath enables believers to realize constantly and effectively that this world and their very lives belong to God. This recognition of God's ownership of one's life is indispensable for a total commitment and belonging to God. This is true also at the human level. Husband and wife truly belong to each other when they are willing to say to each other, “I am yours and you are mine.”

One of the pitfalls of a life style characterized by husbands, wives, and children working to earn separate incomes (often irrespective of need) is the false sense of independence and separate ownership it fosters. It often leads a member of the family to say: “This is my money, my car, my house. I have worked for it, so I am free to do with it whatever I wish.” This deceptive sense

of ownership, which sometimes strains and even destroys human relationships, also can weaken the very connection between a person and God. The wealth and abundance of goods which a person may acquire as a result of diligent work can easily induce a false sense of autonomy and independence from God.

**Sign of Dependency upon God.** Are not autonomy and independence—living one's own life without any regard to God—the essence of a sinful life? The Sabbath, symbol of divine creatorship and ownership, is designed to aid the believer in overcoming any incipient feeling of self-sufficiency. As the first couple observed Sabbath on their first full day of life, standing before their Creator empty-handed, acknowledging their indebtedness for all, so believers who on the Sabbath cease from their own work acknowledge their indebtedness and dependency upon the workings of God.

To observe the Sabbath means to confess God as Creator and Owner of all life and wealth. It means to recognize that God's total claim over one's life is expressed by consecrating the Sabbath time to God. Ownership implies boundaries; there is to be no trespassing. God has chosen to set in time the boundaries of His dominion. Believers who accept God's claim over the last day of the week—the Sabbath—accepts God's claim over their whole lives and world. Those who accept this particular sign of God's ownership, stopping their work on the Sabbath in order to allow God to work in them, demonstrate and experiences a total belonging to God.

**Divine Commitment.** The Sabbath reminds us of our belonging to God because it effectively expresses the mutual commitment that binds God and His people. A mutual belonging relationship can endure only if both parties remember and honor their respective obligations. The Sabbath expresses both divine and human commitments.

The Sabbath stands first of all for divine commitment. God's last creative act was not the fashioning of Adam and Eve but the creation of *His rest* for mankind (Gen 2:2-3). Such a divine rest has a message for the creation as a whole as well as for human beings in particular. With regard to creation, as noted in Chapter 2, God's rest signifies His satisfaction over the completion and perfection of His creation. With regard to humanity, God's rest symbolizes His availability to His creatures.

By taking "time out" on the first Sabbath to bless the first couple with His holy presence, God committed Himself to be available for His creatures. As aptly expressed by A. Martin, "The promise to which God commits Himself through the Sabbath is to have time for mankind. God is not an idea

but a Person who assures all creation of His presence. The Sabbath is the sign of this promise. However, this is not limited solely to the Sabbath time. In the same way as Christ's presence is not limited to the space occupied by the bread, so the Sabbath reminds mankind of the permanence of God's [presence]."<sup>41</sup>

This divine commitment becomes explicit in the covenant relationship in which the Sabbath is presented as God's assurance of His sanctifying presence among His people (Ex. 31:13; Ezek. 20:12). Human disobedience did not alter God's original commitment. On the contrary, when the estrangement caused by sin occurred, God through the Sabbath guaranteed His total commitment to restore the broken relationship.

**Human Commitment.** The Sabbath stands not only for divine but also for human commitment. It signifies not only "that *I*, the Lord, sanctify you" but also that "*you* shall keep my sabbaths" (Ex 31:13). By reassuring human beings that God is available and "working until now" (John 5:17) to accomplish the ultimate restoration of this world to His eternal fellowship, the Sabbath invites the believer to assume his responsibility by making himself available for God. By accepting God's invitation to keep the Sabbath with Him, the believer enters into a special relationship with God.

The free offering of time to God is a supreme act of worship because it means acknowledging God with the very essence of human life: time. Life is time. When "time is up" life ceases to be. The offering of the Sabbath time to God enables believers to acknowledge that their whole life, not just one-seventh, belongs to God. It represents the Christians' response to God's claim on their lives. By bringing all routine work to a halt for one day, Christians act out their commitment to the Lord.

Sabbath, then, on the one hand, symbolizes God's commitment to be available for His creatures. On the other hand, Sabbathkeeping expresses the believers' acceptance of the Creator and Redeemer's claim upon their lives. In a sense, the Sabbath is the insignia of the believer, a sort of badge worn at God's request in order to recall God's loyalty to us and our loyalty to God. It is a placard we carry to show the world what we stand for and whom we serve.

During the week a person may feel frustrated by a sense of anonymity. "Who am I?" he may ask, as he lives and moves among the crowd. The answer that often echoes back is, "You are a cog in a machine and a number in the computer." On the Sabbath, the answer is different. The Christian hears the Lord saying, "You may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you" (Ex 31:13).

Being the symbol of divine ownership and sanctification, the Sabbath assures believers of their own divine election and sanctification. By renewing the sense of belonging to our Creator-Redeemer, the Sabbath restores to us a sense of human dignity, identity, peace, and rest to our lives.

### (5) The Rest from Social Tensions

True Sabbathkeeping enables us to experience Christ's rest by breaking down social, racial, and cultural barriers. The inability or unwillingness to appreciate and accept another person's skin color, culture, language, or social status is a major cause of much unrest, hate, and tension in our contemporary society.

After the Fall, an important function of the Sabbath has been to teach equality and respect for every member of the human society. Every seven days, seven years (sabbatical year), and seven weeks of years (jubilee year), all persons, beasts and property were to become free before God. Genuine freedom leads to equality.

The uneven divisions of Hebrew society leveled out as the Sabbath began. Samuel H. Dresner rightly notes that the equalizing function of the Sabbath has seldom been recognized. "Although one Jew may have peddled onions and another may have owned great forests of lumber, on the Sabbath all were equal, all were kings: all welcomed the Sabbath Queen, all chanted the *Kiddush*, all basked in the glory of the seventh day. . . . On the Sabbath there were neither banker nor clerk, neither farmer nor hired-hand, neither rich nor poor. There were only Jews hallowing the Sabbath."<sup>42</sup>

It is noteworthy that Isaiah reassures the outcasts of Israel, specifically the eunuchs and the foreigners of whom the Assyrian and Babylonian wars had produced a great number, that by observing the Sabbath they would share in the blessings of God's covenant people, "for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (Is 56:1-7).

Many social injustices could have been avoided in the ancient and modern society if the concern for human rights expressed by the Sabbath (and its sister institutions) had always been understood and practiced. The Sabbath forces upon us the important issues of freedom and humanitarian concern for all, from our son to our servant (Ex 20:10; 23:12; Deut 5:14). By placing such issues before us at the moment of worship—the moment when we are truest to ourselves—the Sabbath cannot leave us insensitive toward the suffering or social injustices experienced by others.

It is impossible on the Sabbath to celebrate Creation and Redemption while hating those whom God has created and redeemed through His Son. True Sabbathkeeping demands that we acknowledge the Fatherhood of God by accepting and strengthening the brotherhood of mankind.

The bond of fellowship which the Sabbath establishes through its worship, fellowship, and humanitarian services influences by reflex our social relationships during the week. To accept on the Sabbath those who belong to ethnic minorities or to a lower social status as brothers and sisters in Christ demands that we treat them as such during the weekdays as well. It would be a denial of the human values and experience of the Sabbath if one were to exploit or detest during the week those whom the Sabbath teaches us to respect and love as God's creatures.

By teaching us to accept and respect every person, whether rich or poor, black or white, as human beings created and redeemed by the Lord, the Sabbath breaks down and equalizes those social, racial, and cultural barriers which cause much tension and unrest in our society and, consequently, makes it possible for the peace of Christ to dwell in our hearts.

### **(6) The Rest of Redemption**

A sixth way in which Sabbathkeeping brings Christ's rest to our lives is by enabling us to experience through the physical rest the greater blessings of divine rest and peace of salvation. The relationship between the Sabbath rest and Christ's redemption-rest was examined in chapter 4. There we saw that from the symbol of God's initial entrance into *human time*, the Sabbath became after the Fall the symbol of God's promise to enter *human flesh* to become "Emmanuel—God with us."

The rest and liberation from the hardship of work and from social inequalities which both the weekly and annual Sabbaths granted to all the members of the Hebrew society was understood not merely as a commemoration of the past Exodus deliverance (Deut 5:15), but also a prefiguration of the future redemption-rest to be brought by the Messiah. Christ fulfilled these Old Testament Messianic expectations typified by the Sabbath (cf. Luke 4:21) by identifying His redemptive mission with the release and redemption of the Sabbath, thus making the day the fitting vehicle through which to experience His rest of salvation.

It was on a Sabbath day that, according to Luke 4:16-21, Christ inaugurated His public ministry in the synagogue of Nazareth by quoting a passage from Isaiah 61:1-2 and by claiming emphatically to be the fulfillment

of the sabbatical liberation announced in that passage. In His subsequent ministry, Christ substantiated this claim by revealing His redemptive mission especially through His Sabbath healing and teaching ministry (cf. Luke 13:16; Matt 12:5-6; John 5:17; 7:22-23).

Finally, it was on that historic holy Sabbath that Christ completed His redemptive mission (“It is finished”—John 19:30) by resting in the tomb (Luke 23:54-56). Christ’s Sabbath rest in the tomb reveals the depth of God’s love for His creatures. It tells us that in order to give them life, He was willing to experience not only the limitation of *human time* at creation but also the suffering, agony, and death of *human flesh* during the Incarnation.

In the light of the Cross, the Sabbath is the weekly celebration and jubilation of a liberated people. It memorializes not only God’s creative but also His redemptive accomplishments for mankind. Thus, “the Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God” (Heb 4:9) is not only a physical cessation from work to commemorate God’s perfect creation, but also a spiritual entering into God’s rest (Heb 4:10) made possible through Christ’s complete redemption. The physical act of resting becomes the means through which believers experience spiritual rest. We cease from our daily work on the Sabbath to allow God to work in us more freely and fully, and to bring to our lives His rest of forgiveness and salvation.

### (7) The Rest of Service

The Sabbath brings Christ’s rest to our lives by providing time and opportunities for service. Inner peace and rest are to be found not in *self-centered relaxation* but rather in *God and other-centered service*. The Sabbath provides the time and the reasons for serving God, ourselves, and others. Let us look at each of them.

**The Sabbath as Service to God.** Repeatedly, Scripture reminds us that the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord (see Ex 31:15; 16:23; 20:10; Lev 23:3; Mark 2:28). Obviously, we serve God every day, but our everyday service to God differs from the Sabbath service. During the week we offer to God what may be called the *Martha type of service* in which we acknowledge our Saviour while serving an employer and meeting the many demands of life.

On the Sabbath, however, we offer to God what may be called the *Mary type of service* in which we desist from gainful employment and from secular pursuits in order to fully and wholly honor our Saviour. The deliberate act of resting on the Sabbath for God is a most meaningful act of worship because it signifies our total response to God. It is an act of worship that is not

exhausted in the *one-hour* attendance at the worship service but lasts for *twenty-four hours*.

To appreciate the profound religious significance of the Sabbath rest as service to God, we need to remember that our life is a measure of time, and the way we spend our time is indicative of our priorities. We have no time for those toward whom we feel indifferent, but we find time for those whom we love. To be willing on the seventh day to withdraw from the world of things in order to meet the invisible God in the quietness of our souls means to show in a tangible way our love, loyalty, and devotion to God. It means being willing to tune out the hundreds of voices and noises that clamor for attention in order to tune in our souls to God and to hear His voice. It means not merely sandwiching in one hour of worship for God in a hectic day spent seeking selfish pleasure or profit, but rather serving God wholly during the Sabbath; it means offering to God not only lip service but the service of our total being.

**The Sabbath as Service to Ourselves.** Sabbathkeeping means not only service to God but also service to ourselves. The very service we offer God on the Sabbath by resting and worshiping Him is designed not to add strength or power to God but to enable God to strengthen and empower our personal lives.

God does not need our Sabbath rest and worship, nor does He need our weekday work. What He wants is a receptive heart, mind, and soul willing to receive and experience His peace and rest that only can fulfill the deepest longing of our hearts. On the Sabbath we can experience divine peace and rest by taking time to meditate in the climate of stillness and free reflection the day provides.

According to some social analysts, the lack of reflection is a fundamental cause of our restless culture. Many today live intensely active, restless lives without understanding their true selves; thus, they ever sense an inner emptiness and disillusionment. Some often go from one round of activities to another in an attempt to find peace and joy by forgetting their inner tensions. But inner peace and harmony are to be found not in forgetting oneself by doing an endless round of activities but rather in discovering ourselves by being still.

The psalmist expresses this truth eloquently when he says: “Be still, and know that I am God” (Ps 46:10). For many of us, it is difficult to “be still” during the week. The Sabbath, however, by releasing us from the pressure of our daily work, provides us with time and opportunities to restore order and harmony to our fragmented lives. It enables us to restore equilibrium between



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our bodies and our souls, between the material and spiritual components of our being.

During the week as we work to produce, to sell, to buy, and to enjoy *things*, we tend to become materially conscious, to view our *material wants* as more important than our *spiritual needs*. Our bodies seem to become more important than our souls. The Sabbath is designed to restore the equilibrium between our bodies and our souls.

The story is told of some African workers who were hired to carry pieces of heavy equipment on their backs to a remote post in the interior of Africa. After several days of marching, one day they refused to pick up their burdens and go any further. They sat by the side of the road turning a deaf ear to the appeals of the man in charge. Exasperated, the leader of the expedition asked them, “But why don’t you want to go on?” One of the workers replied, “Sir, we are waiting for our souls to catch up with our bodies.”

This story well illustrates the function of the Sabbath to give a chance to our souls to catch up with our bodies—to give a change to our souls, through worship and meditation, to be enriched with new moral and spiritual values. This spiritual renewal that comes to us on the Sabbath through worship and meditation enables us to turn a new page in our life, to start a new week with a fresh provision of divine wisdom and grace.

**The Sabbath as Service to Others.** The Sabbath provides precious opportunities to serve not only God and ourselves but also others. After helping us to find God and ourselves, the Sabbath helps us to reach out to others. After renewing us with a fresh understanding and experience of God’s creative and redemptive love, the Sabbath challenges us to reach out to others, to respond to human needs.

To help us to remember others, the Fourth Commandment gives quite an inclusive list of persons to be remembered on the Sabbath. The list goes from the son to the manservant, from the daughter to the maidservant, and includes also the sojourner and the animals. This humanitarian function of the Sabbath tends to be neglected. We prefer to think of the Sabbath in terms of service to ourselves rather than service to others. Thus, Christ took pains through His Sabbath teaching and ministry to clarify and emphasize this function of the Sabbath commandment.

The Saviour proclaimed the Sabbath to be a day “to do good” (Matt 12:12, NIV), “to save” (Mark 3:4), to liberate people from physical and spiritual bonds (Luke 13:12)—a day to show mercy rather than religiosity

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(Matt 12:7,8). Through His Sabbath ministry, Jesus taught that the Sabbath is not rules to obey, but people to love; it is the day to share God's blessing with others.

During the week, many pressures may cause us to neglect needy persons. On the Sabbath, as we celebrate God's creative and redemptive love, we are motivated to share our concern and friendship with the needy. The service we render on the Sabbath to needy persons not only honors God but also enriches our lives with a sense of joy and satisfaction.

The unique opportunities the Sabbath provides to serve God by consecrating our time to Him; to serve ourselves by experiencing physical, moral, and spiritual renewal; and to serve others make it possible to experience a larger measure of the Saviour's rest in our lives.

### **Conclusion**

At a time when the Sabbath has come under the crossfire of controversy—being attacked not only by Sundaykeepers but also by some former Sabbatharians—it is reassuring to know that there are many Christians who are rediscovering the Sabbath as God's gift to the human family.

Our survey has shown that an increasing number of scholars, religious organizations, and Christians in general are rediscovering the meaning and value of the Sabbath for their lives. These Christians are discovering that the values of the Sabbath as a day for spiritual, physical, moral, and social renewal are essential for revitalizing the religious experience of millions of Christians today.

Rediscovering the Sabbath in this cosmic age provides the basis for a cosmic faith, a faith which embraces and unites creation, redemption, and final restoration; the past, the present, and the future; man, nature, and God; this world and the world to come. It is a faith that recognizes God's dominion over the whole creation and human life by consecrating to Him the seventh day; a faith that fulfills the believer's true destiny in time and eternity; a faith that allows the Savior to enrich our lives with a larger measure of His presence, peace, and rest.

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**NOTES TO CHAPTER 7**

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