

Is Sabbath observance required for New Covenant Christians?

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Summer, 2000

From time to time sincere Christians who want to know and do God's will have asked the question: *Is Sabbath observance required for New Covenant Christians?* Since the Old Testament clearly commands that the seventh day Sabbath should be kept holy, this question deserves a careful and thorough investigation of Scripture. Let's begin with a statement by the apostle Paul to the Christians in Galatia:

Gal. 4:10-11

10 *You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!*

11 *I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.*

What is the apostle Paul saying in Galatians 4 about observing "special days..." and why does this observance make him fearful that he may have wasted his efforts on the Christians in Galatia?

In order to understand these verses it is important to review the immediate context. In Galatians 3 Paul argued that salvation has always been through faith in God's grace initiative -- never through works of the law (3:1-14). In fact, the temporary law-era came long after the faith promise was given. The law was "added" 430 years after God gave the promise to Abraham -- the promise of justification by faith and a coming "seed" (Christ) who would bless the world. The law-era was to last only "until" the Seed -- until the coming of Christ (3:15-20).

The law was not another method of salvation, but a pedagogue or tutor to lead us to Christ by showing the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man and the need for a savior. The law could not save. In fact it locked people up as *prisoners* and *slaves* under its *curse*. The law could not save -- but it could lead us to Christ (3:21-24). And Christ can and does save!

Once we come to Christ we are no longer under the law (3:25). It has served its purpose. We are no longer slaves, but in Christ we are **sons** (3:26-29)! In Christ we are grown-up sons who are no longer under a tutor for we have come of age and received the inheritance of the kingdom. We have full rights as "heirs." And the Spirit of God confirms that in us by enabling us to call God "Father" (4:1-7).

Now, after becoming a child of the king, who would want to go back to slavery? It is hard to imagine anyone wanting to return to slavery, but although it may not make sense for a son to become a slave it is possible. And in fact, that is the very thing the Galatians were doing by following the false teachers who were insisting on allegiance to old covenant Jewish requirements and obligations (See Galatians 1,2 and Acts 15).

So Paul lovingly and earnestly appeals to the people he loves:

Gal 4:8-10

8 *Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods.*

9 *But now that you know God-- or rather are known by God-- how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?*

10 *You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!*

Paul's heart appeal -- both to the Galatians and to all of us who have responded to the Gospel of God's grace in Christ Jesus -- is PLEASE DON'T GO BACK INTO LEGALISTIC BONDAGE AND SLAVERY! Live as children of the King. Live in freedom. Live in joy. Become mature. Let Christ form his image in you (4:8-20).

That's the basic message of these verses. It is an appeal that all of us need to listen to regularly. The natural drift of humanity is back toward some kind of works-orientation where we get credit and recognition.

As Christians we need to keep reading the New Testament and soaking up the Gospel promises. We need to keep reminding ourselves that in Christ we are **sons not slaves!** We must never forget who we were and who we are in Christ!

For the purpose of this study let's focus now on the key example that Paul gives as evidence of the fact that the Galatians were becoming enslaved with legalism.

Even though they had been delivered from slavery to paganism, they were in a sense going back to "*weak and miserable principles*" by trying to tack-on Jewish law observance to their Christianity.

Gal 4:8-9

8 *Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods.*

9 *But now that you know God-- or rather are known by God-- how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?*

In verse 3 of this same chapter the LAW was called "*the basic principles of the world.*" That's a phrase that means the ABC's – just the basics for little kids to learn before they grow up. If kids just stay with the ABC's and never grow up, they become "*weak and miserable principles*" because they are not fulfilling their role, which is to lead to son status.

Now look at the key example that Paul gives as evidence of legalistic slavery replacing gospel freedom:

Gal 4:10-11

10 *You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!*

11 *I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.*

What are these *days, months, seasons and years* that the Galatians had started observing?

Occasionally it is suggested that they were pagan observances that the Galatian Christians had gone back to. But the whole context of Galatians is about the *Jewish law* – not paganism. Therefore many Bible scholars understand this statement to be referring to the important *holy days of the Jewish calendar*.

After all, the Judaizers were insisting that the new Christian converts conform to the Law of Moses. Therefore they especially stressed the outward boundary markers of Judaism. Most notably: ***circumcision, food laws and holy days.***

Notice the sequence: *days, months, seasons and years*. It is very apparent that Paul is describing the required holy days, convocations, or feasts of Judaism:

- ◆ **Days** – refers to the weekly Sabbath day
- ◆ **Months** – refers to New Moon celebrations
- ◆ **Seasons** – refers to the annual seasonal observances of Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, Feast of Weeks, Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement and Feast of Tabernacles.
- ◆ **Years** – refers to the sabbatical years

Notice how these are all laid out as a part of a ceremonial package for Israel in Leviticus 23-25.
Lev 23:1-2

1 *The LORD said to Moses,*
 2 *"Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'These are my appointed feasts, the appointed feasts of the LORD, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies.'"*

Who were these appointed feasts for? Israel.

This statement at the beginning of Leviticus 23 is a broad heading or introductory statement for the list that follows. In the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible the following headings are found in the text to show the various sections:

The Sabbath (v. 3)
The Passover and Unleavened Bread (vs. 4-8)
Firstfruits (vs. 9-14)
Feast of Weeks (vs. 15-22)
Feast of Trumpets (vs. 23-25)
Day of Atonement (vs. 26-32)
Feast of Tabernacles (vs. 33-43)
The Sabbath Year and Year of Jubilee (ch. 25)

Notice that the weekly seventh day Sabbath was a Jewish ceremonial day which was a part of a package of days, months, seasons and years. After summarizing them side by side, the text says:

Lev 23:44

So Moses announced to the Israelites the appointed feasts of the LORD.

All the Jewish holy days were a combined package that stand or fall together – including the weekly Sabbath.

Historically there have been basically three different approaches that people have taken theologically in regards to the Sabbath:

1. Continuance
2. Transference
3. Fulfillment

Those who hold the **Continuance** view are the distinct minority who view the seventh-day Sabbath as a Creation ordinance that continues into the New Covenant and even throughout eternity in the New Earth.

Those who hold the **Transference** view believe that Christ and the apostles transferred the Sabbath of the fourth commandment to Sunday as a Christian Sabbath in honor of the resurrection. They believe that the reason for observing Sunday is still based in the Ten Commandments even though the actual day has changed in the New Covenant.

Those who hold the **Fulfillment** view believe that Christ fulfilled the Sabbath just as he fulfilled all the other types and shadows of the law that pointed forward to him. Therefore **HE** is our Sabbath who gives us perfect rest when we receive his Gospel of grace and trust in his finished work. Regardless of what day we worship on, no day is more holy than another day for New Covenant Christians – our focus is on Christ, not a day.

I have friends whom I respect who favor each of these three views. So regardless of which view you hold, we can still be Christian friends if you and I end up disagreeing with each other!

The view that makes the best sense to me in the light of the NT gospel is the third view – the *FULFILLMENT* view. I believe the Bible teaches that the Sabbath was a ceremonial day that pointed forward to Jesus.

Just as with all the Jewish holy days it was necessary to offer *sacrifices* on the Sabbath in order to truly keep it.

Num 28:9-10

9 "*On the Sabbath day, make an offering of two lambs a year old without defect, together with its drink offering and a grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil.*

10 *This is the burnt offering for every Sabbath, in addition to the regular burnt offering and its drink offering.*

It is interesting to look at the paragraph headings in the NIV translation in Numbers 28 and 29: "*Daily offerings, Sabbath offerings, Monthly offerings, Passover, Feast of Weeks, Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles.*"

There were particular sacrifices determined for each holy day or season which were necessary in order to keep them properly. The Sabbath was a part of the package of days, months, seasons and years.

In fact, the Sabbath was referred to repeatedly along side the other holy times. It was one of the "*appointed feasts.*"

When the Israelites rebelled against God, he said the following through his prophet Hosea:

Hosea 2:11

I will stop all her celebrations: her yearly festivals, her New Moons, her Sabbath days-- all her appointed feasts.

Notice that the Sabbath is one of the "appointed feasts." It is clustered continually throughout the OT as a part of a weekly, monthly, yearly package of Jewish holy days.

Notice also, that the Sabbath was in a different category from moral principles of the law (such as don't murder, steal or commit adultery). The Sabbath was in a category of things that could "*stop.*" If Israel was unfaithful to the covenant; there was no reason for continuing with the covenant signs and observances. God says, "*I will stop*" them.

In fact, the covenant signs and observances made God "sick" if they were observed by people whose hearts were not in it.

Isa 1:13-14

13 *Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations-- I cannot bear your evil assemblies.*

14 *Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.*

Nowhere does God say, "I'm tired of you guys staying away from idols and murder and adultery – it's meaningless – I hate it." Why? Because those moral principles were not specific to Israel and the old covenant. The Sabbath and other appointed feasts WERE!

Now, an astute Bible student could be sitting there thinking, "Hmm... it may say that at the *beginning* of Isaiah, but I remember something else at the *end* of Isaiah... doesn't it say there that we will observe the Sabbath in the New Earth... and if so, doesn't that make it an eternal ordinance?"

Good question. Let's look at that text.

Isa 66:22-23

22 *"As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure.*

23 *From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me," says the LORD.*

At first glance that text seems to say that all people will worship on the Sabbath in the life to come.

Before we talk about what this text is saying about the Sabbath, let me point out an important detail. If you understand this text to be saying that we will worship on the Sabbath in heaven, therefore, we must also worship on Sabbath now... *then to be logical you should conclude that you must also observe the **New Moon festival** each month as well!*

Keep that in mind. Be consistent.

In order to understand this passage one must read the extended context. Isaiah is giving a prophecy of what *could be* if Israel remained faithful to the covenant. When the old covenant was given to Israel, God gave a list of blessings that would occur if there was obedience to the covenant and curses that would happen if there was disobedience.

The blessings included a "new earth" type utopia developing where people came from all over to learn about the true God of Israel. Israel's crops would prosper, no one would be sick and everyone would live to an old age – God's special blessing would be supernaturally manifested.

That kind of situation never developed because Israel was repeatedly unfaithful to the covenant. As a result they experienced mostly the curses instead – especially dispersion from the land into captivity.

That's what Isaiah 65 and 66 are describing. That becomes very clear if you scan back to where the section on the "new earth" starts in chapter 65.

Isa 65:17-23

17 *"Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth...*

20 *"Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed..."*

23 *They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them.*

If we are going to use this extended passage to say that in the new heaven and new earth we will keep the Sabbath, then we need to conclude also that most of us will live to be a hundred before we die – *but we **will** die!* Obviously that can't be referring to the heaven. We're promised eternal life!

You see, these promise made to Israel were conditional promises which will never be fulfilled in exactly the way they were given because Israel failed her part of the covenant and that covenant has passed away now with the coming of the new covenant.

In the new covenant all the promises made to Israel are fulfilled in Christ and his church – but they are expanded, spiritualized and universalized. Revelation picks up on this language and promises a "new heaven and new earth" *but no one will ever die there* (Rev. 21:1-4). And things that were specific to Israel – such as the Sabbath and New Moons – are no longer a part of the promise.

“Wait a minute,” someone might be say, “wasn’t the Sabbath a part of the moral law – the Ten Commandments?”

It is important to understand that *all of the law* (written out by Moses in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible) -- *all of the law* contained a mixture of moral, civil and ceremonial principles. You can’t divide the Ten Commandments from the rest of the law and compartmentalize them into moral and ceremonial laws.

The Law of Moses contained both moral principles that are as eternal as God himself, and it also contained ceremonial, ritual features – some of them serving to separate Israel from the other nations, some of them pointing as shadows and types toward fulfillment in Christ, the Messiah. Both elements – moral principles and ceremonial aspects – are present in the Ten Commandments as well as throughout the rest of the law.

Some people have gotten the impression that the Ten Commandments are God’s moral law and the rest was a temporary ceremonial package. This view assumes that there is a clean distinction between the moral and ceremonial laws within the Law of Moses. Some have even gone so far as to call the Ten Commandments the “Law of God” and the other laws the “Law of Moses.”

There is a big problem with that view, though. The Scriptures do not support it! The totality of all God’s laws for Israel are spoken of repeatedly as the “Law of God.” The Law of God and the Law of Moses are the same thing, one package. Both moral and ceremonial aspects are intermingled constantly throughout the whole law.

The Bible never gives the impression that the Ten Commandments were one hundred percent moral laws which are eternal and the rest of the Mosaic laws are secondary and temporary ceremonial laws. In fact, *both elements* – moral principles, and ceremonial aspects -- are present in the Ten Commandments, as well as throughout the rest of the law.

If you read carefully the Ten Commandments you’ll notice that in the fourth and tenth commandments there are references to slaves (certainly not an eternal, moral principle!); in the fifth commandment, there is a promise about land related specifically to Israel in Canaan (Ex. 20:8-17). These aspects of the Ten Commandments are neither eternal nor moral principles.

Another ceremonial aspect in the Ten Commandments was the Sabbath. The Sabbath was declared by God to be a special *sign* of the covenant for Israel (Ex. 31:13).

Just as the Ten Commandments were a mixture of moral principles and ceremonial aspects, so with the rest of the law.

When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandments (Matt. 22:36-40), he responded by quoting two commandments from the Law of Moses which were not a part of the Ten Commandments: Love God with all your heart, soul and strength (Deut. 6:5); and Love your neighbor as yourself (Lev. 19:18).

That second command is a moral principle which is restated by Jesus as the heart of the new covenant, but in Leviticus 19 it is right in the context of countless temporary ceremonial laws specific for Israel. The very next verse is a law about not mixing two kinds of material in one’s clothes!

Here is the point: God’s law, given to Israel at Sinai, was the basis of his covenant with Israel. It contained both eternal, moral principles as well as temporary, ceremonial aspects which defined Israel from the other nations or pointed to the coming Messiah.

The law was given by God, but it was never intended to be his supreme revelation. What was his supreme revelation? JESUS CHRIST!

Heb 1:1-3

1 *In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways,*

2 *but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.*

3 *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being...*

What is the supreme revelation of God's character, the exact representation of his being? The law? No, the Son! Jesus. Now that Jesus has come and revealed the gospel in its fullness, this side of the glorious cross, New Covenant Christians look to JESUS, not the law. The ceremonial aspects of the law have passed away.

All the eternal moral principles of the law are restated in the New Testament and continue as God's expectations, but we are not motivated by the law. The Spirit of God lives in our hearts to motivate and guide us to fulfill God's will. And we are only able to live for God because we have been released from the penalty and condemnation of the law through Christ (Rom. 8:1-4).

Most of the Ten Commandments are basic moral principles that even people who do not have the written law will still agree to (Rom. 2:14,15). The Sabbath, though, is not a moral principle. It is not an easily recognizable law of the universe. There is nothing about the seventh day that sets it apart from the other days so that anyone can observe it is special. God picked it as an arbitrary expectation for the people of Israel.

The Sabbath was embedded in the Ten Commandments because it was the **SIGN** of the covenant.

Exod 31:12-14

12 *Then the LORD said to Moses,*

13 *"Say to the Israelites, 'You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy.*

14 *"Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people.*

Why would there be such a serious penalty associated with breaking the Sabbath – *death*?

While you're thinking about that let me gently insist that those who uses the Old Testament as the authority for continuance of the Sabbath should think long and hard why they don't also require *everything* that was commanded concerning the Sabbath: The Sabbath must be kept from sunset to sunset, no work should be done, no buying or selling, no fires should be built, no cooking should be done, no travel, the priests must sacrifice two lambs that day, everyone in an entire city must be compelled to keep the Sabbath, and anyone who breaks the Sabbath should be stoned to death!

So why so severe a penalty for breaking the Sabbath? Because as a **sign** of the covenant the Sabbath **represented the covenant** (just as a flag represents a country and should be treated with respect).

Exod 31:15-17

15 *For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to death.*

16 *The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant.*

17 *It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested.*

Notice that the Sabbath is actually called a *covenant*. That's how fully it represented the covenant as an ongoing remembrance sign. The text says very specifically *WHO* the Sabbath was for – “the Israelites.”

Yes, it is called a “lasting” covenant, but so was circumcision (Gen. 17:13) and no Christians teach that circumcision is still required today.

Circumcision as the entry sign and the Sabbath as the ongoing remembrance sign were to be everlasting as long as the covenant between God and Israel existed. When the old covenant ceased, so did the signs of that covenant!

The Sabbath was specifically for Israel. Not that taking a day off once a week to focus on God doesn't have merit or value for anyone. But the *required seventh day* Sabbath was invented for Israel as a part of the old covenant that has passed away.

Now I can hear someone saying, “Wait just a minute, wasn't the Sabbath instituted at Creation?”

The first mention of the word “Sabbath” is in Exodus 16:23. It's the story of God's miraculous provision of the manna as the children of Israel were on their way out of Egypt and approaching Mount Sinai. God used the way he gave the manna to institute the Sabbath for the first time to prepare the people for the weekly observance of the covenant sign that he was ready to establish.

Exod 16:23

[Moses] said to them, "This is what the LORD commanded: 'Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.'"

If you continue reading in Exodus 16 you will notice that the people knew nothing of the Sabbath so it had to be explained and defined for them with detail and repetition.

When God included the sign of the covenant --the Sabbath -- as a part of the Ten Commandments, he communicated it in words that were very specific to Israel.

Exod 20:8-11

8 *"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.*

9 *Six days you shall labor and do all your work,*

10 *but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.*

Notice a number of features that were very specific to Israel:

- ◆ They were not to do *any* work. Not even the good work that Jesus would later do as he was showing himself to be the fulfillment of the Sabbath.
- ◆ They were to observe a specific day. It worked well for people in one geographic location to observe the same day from sunset to sunset, but it doesn't have the same impact when applied to people all around a round world where Saturday in one place is Friday or Sunday in another, or where days become very long or short near the extreme poles.
- ◆ This command extended to servants or slaves. Obviously, not an eternal principle.
- ◆ Notice that the decree extended to animals suggesting a rural, agricultural audience.
- ◆ The decree extended to the alien's within the gates. “Within the gates” referred to the whole city in Bible times. The Sabbath was to be mandated for everyone in the city.

That's what we see happening in the book of Nehemiah when the Israelites returned to their land after the Babylonian captivity. They determined to renew the covenant and be obedient to the law. One of the key reforms they made was in regards to the Sabbath. People were bringing loads of produce into the city on the Sabbath to sell. Nehemiah had a problem with that --

Neh 13:17-19

17 *I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this wicked thing you are doing-- desecrating the Sabbath day?*

18 *Didn't your forefathers do the same things, so that our God brought all this calamity upon us and upon this city? Now you are stirring up more wrath against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath."*

19 *When evening shadows fell on the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I ordered the doors to be shut and not opened until the Sabbath was over. I stationed some of my own men at the gates so that no load could be brought in on the Sabbath day. (See also Jer. 17:20-27)*

By returning to the true keeping of the Sabbath, it was necessary to force *even the strangers within the gates* to observe the Sabbath – that was a part of the commandment!

Notice that the gates were closed and guarded on the Sabbath day. That explains why Jesus says what he does to the disciples in Matthew 24 –

Matt 24:19-20

19 *How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!*

20 *Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath.*

He's talking about the coming destruction of Jerusalem which happened in 70 A.D. (about 40 years after he spoke these words). Some have concluded that Jesus was indicating that Sabbath observance would still be required for Christians.

But he wasn't teaching on the Sabbath. He was talking about "*fleeing*" to safety. Pregnant or nursing mothers would be slowed down. In winter, roads and weather conditions could be hazardous. And on Sabbath the gates could be locked up and guarded in the capital city of the Jews.

The Sabbath was specifically for Israel, but even non-Jews who were within the city limits were required to observe it.

Now look at the last verse of the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20 --

Exod 20:11

For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

"There it is!" someone says, "God rested at creation because he instituted the Sabbath back then." No, that's not necessarily what the text says. God instituted the Sabbath *at Sinai* because he had rested *back then* at Creation. The Sabbath was infused with meaning as a reminder of rest – God's rest – both the rest that he experienced after his finished work of creation, and the spiritual rest that he would offer as a result of Christ's finished work of salvation.

Let's look at what the Bible says about God's rest at creation:

Gen 2:1-3

1 *Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.*

2 *By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.*

3 *And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.*

The word Sabbath doesn't appear in the text because it wasn't established until many centuries later. It is never mentioned until God gave it to the Israelites as a sign of the covenant.

Genesis 2:2 just says that when God finished the work, he rested. Then the next verse makes a comment regarding the seventh day being blessed and made holy. *When* did that happen? Right then? Or later? I believe that the Bible clearly teaches that it happened *much later* (and I'll show you that in a minute).

If that is true, why is it written about here in Genesis?

Well, think about it. Who wrote Genesis? Moses.

When did he write it? After Moses' encounter with God at Sinai he wrote out all that God had revealed to him including the book of Genesis. By the end of his life he concluded the book of Deuteronomy. The first five books of the Bible – the Pentateuch -- became known as the Law (the whole thing).

Why is that important to recall? Because Moses includes Gen. 2:3 as an interpretive comment for the readers, all of whom already know about the Sabbath decree of Mount Sinai. Basically Moses is saying in verse 3 *"That's why God LATER blessed the Sabbath and made it holy, because EARLY he had rested on that day."*

Before you tell me that I don't have permission to read the verse that way, let me remind you that there are many verses in the Bible like this that include information known to the readers but not known at the time.

We use language that way all the time. If we say that President Clinton was born in 1946 – we're not saying that he was President then. But we use that title because from our vantage point now, we now know that he later became President.

Consider a couple Biblical examples:

- ◆ Eve is described in Gen. 3:20 as "the mother of all the living." A future fact stated as though it had already happened.
- ◆ When Judas is mentioned for the first time in Luke's gospel in a list with all the disciples, he is described as the one who was a traitor – even though that would happen later. (Luke 6:16)

In fact, it is possible to read Gen. 2:3 as a parenthetical theological statement inserted by the Biblical writer. It could have parenthesis around it.

Biblical writers, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, sometimes added editorial comments within historical narratives. Let me give you one example:

Mark 7:17-19

17 *After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable.*

18 *"Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'?"*

19 *For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.")*

The words in parenthesis are an editorial comment by the writer, Mark. There aren't any parenthesis in the original Greek text because they did not use them. But the modern translators recognized what Mark was doing here. From his theological vantage point years later, he had come to understand that the Jewish food taboos were no longer in force in the New Covenant. So he added an interpretive, theological comment that was true, but only understood fully from his vantage point looking back on the situation.

I believe that *that* is what Moses did in Gen. 2:3 when he mentioned God blessing the seventh day and making it holy. He put that verse in as an editorial comment for his readers who already knew about the Sabbath given at Sinai.

Now someone may be sitting there thinking, “That’s fine for you to interpret that way. But what gives you *reason* to interpret that way. Why do you think that interpretation makes better sense than the assumption that weekly Sabbath observance actually began back there at Creation?”

I arrive at the conclusion based on clear statements from the Word of God, not based on personal preference or opinion.

Let me give you a couple of examples:

Ezek 20:10-12

10 *Therefore I led them out of Egypt and brought them into the desert.*

11 *I gave them my decrees and made known to them my laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them.*

12 *Also I gave them my Sabbaths as a sign between us, so they would know that I the LORD made them holy.*

These verses tell us when, where, who and why:

- ◆ When did God give the Sabbath? When he led the Israelites “out of Egypt.”
- ◆ Where did God give the Sabbath? In the “desert.”
- ◆ Who did he give the Sabbath to? The Israelites (“them”, v.12).
- ◆ Why did he give them the Sabbath? As a “sign” between Israel and himself.

Here’s another text:

Neh 9:13-14

13 *“You came down on Mount Sinai; you spoke to them from heaven. You gave them regulations and laws that are just and right, and decrees and commands that are good.*

14 *You made known to them your holy Sabbath and gave them commands, decrees and laws through your servant Moses.*

God made known his Sabbath when? At “Mount Sinai.” Through whom? Through his servant “Moses.” These statements indicate that the Sabbath was instituted at Sinai as a sign of the covenant made with Israel.

If you read Deuteronomy 5 where Moses restates the Ten Commandments at the end of the 40 years in the wilderness, he begins by clearly saying that the Law had not been given earlier – “the covenant was not made with our fathers, but with us,” he says.

Deut 5:2-3

2 *The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb.*

3 *It was not with our fathers that the LORD made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today.*

The Ten Commandments were the covenant written in stone. The Ten Commandments are called the covenant eight times (Ex. 34:28; Deut. 5:3-22; 4:13; 9:9; 9:11; 9:15; 1 Kings 8:21; Heb. 9:4).

After making that statement in Deuteronomy 5, Moses repeats the Ten Commandments but does something interesting. When he states the fourth commandment he says nothing about God’s resting at Creation – which was just one reason for the command – instead he states a very different reason:

Deut 5:15

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

That's interesting. The Sabbath had more than one reason or symbol or reminder associated with it.

How many of us were slaves in Egypt? That's the only reason given in Deuteronomy 5:15 for keeping the Sabbath. "You were slaves...God brought you out... Therefore...observe the Sabbath day." Keep that in mind if you are considering using the wording of the Ten Commandments to enforce Sabbath observance universally.

The weekly Sabbath was a part of the ceremonial package of holy days that were a mandated requirement for the Jews. The Sabbath was a sign of the covenant. Therefore it was even placed in the Ten Commandment summary of the covenant as the sign or seal. Some people have missed the point that the Ten Commandments were the covenant that God made with Israel that we now refer to as the *old covenant*.

Exod 34:28

Moses was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant-- the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments were the words of the covenant, the rest of the covenant was expanded and fleshed out in the *book of the covenant*, and the Sabbath was the *sign* of the covenant.

The Sabbath was a very important part of the covenant with Israel, as were all of the holy days or seasons. Therefore the Israelites were commanded to keep the Sabbath holy.

By the way, if God calls something "holy," at one time, does that make it holy forever? Not necessarily. Consider how many other things were also made holy by God which are no longer considered such in the new covenant. In the law we read about the "holy temple," "holy hill," "holy ark," "holy instruments," "holy vessels," "holy water," "holy perfume," "holy altar," "holy veil," "holy linen coat," "holy ointment," "holy nation," and so on. So the fact that God made something holy at one time does not mean it is eternally so.

The weekly Sabbath was a part of a cycle of "Sabbaths." Each one pointing to the next, ultimately pointing to the full and final rest that would come in the person of Jesus Christ.

Leviticus 23-25 describes this cycle of Sabbaths. Each Sabbath was leading to the next:

Weekly Sabbaths (every 7th day) >

Annual Sabbaths (7 every year)>

Sabbatical Year (every 7th year)>

Jubilee Year (after 7x7 years)

The Jubilee Year was the culmination of all the cycle of Sabbaths. It was called the "*year of the Lord's favor*." Liberty was to be proclaimed throughout the land to all its inhabitants. Debts were forgiven, special provisions were made for the poor, slaves went free, and land went back to its original owners. (You can read about it in Lev. 25).

The purpose of the Jubilee Sabbath Year was to point forward to Jesus who would come as the fulfillment of all that the Jubilee foretold. When Jesus kicked off his public ministry, he did so by reading a Jubilee prophecy and applying it to himself.

Luke 4:17-19

17 *The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:*

18 *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed,*

19 *to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

Notice that phrase in v. 19 *"the year of the Lord's favor."* What was Jesus saying? He was saying that HE WAS THE FULFILLMENT of all that the Sabbath foretold. *He* was the Jubilee!

Jesus was the fulfillment of the Sabbath. He came to restore the rest that had been lost. His ministry brought the Jubilee, the Grand Sabbath.

- ◆ During the Jubilee the people were to return to their hometown (Lev. 25:10), so Jesus goes back to his hometown of Nazareth to make this announcement (Luke 4:16).
- ◆ During the Jubilee the people were not to plant crops. Instead they were commanded to eat directly from the fields (Lev. 25:12), so Jesus leads his disciples through the fields where they publicly pick grain and eat on the Sabbath (Luke 6:1). When Jesus is questioned about his behavior by the religious leaders, he declares that he is *"Lord of the Sabbath"* (Luke 6:5). He has come as the grand fulfillment.
- ◆ During the Jubilee there was release for those who were bound by debt or slavery (Lev. 25:54,55), so Jesus goes about his ministry releasing those in bondage, often on the Sabbath. He casts out demons, heals the sick, opens the eyes of the blind, forgives sin, and proclaims the good news of salvation by grace.

Once when Jesus healed a woman on the Sabbath who had been crippled for eighteen years, the synagogue ruler criticized him, saying that because there were six days for work, he didn't have to heal on the Sabbath.

Jesus replied:

"...should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?" (Luke 13:16)

Jesus used the Jubilee language to show that he was the fulfillment of the Sabbath. He had come to *set free* those who were *bound*. There was no more appropriate time for that than on the Sabbath. After all, the weekly Sabbaths were a part of the cycle that pointed forward to the Jubilee which found its grand fulfillment in Christ.

When Jesus was accused of breaking the Sabbath by plucking grain with his disciples, Mark records Jesus saying the following:

Mark 2:27-28

27 *Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*

28 *So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."*

Some people interpret that text to say that the Sabbath was intended for all mankind – not just the Jews who were given the Sabbath at Mount Sinai. But Jesus is not arguing whether the Sabbath is for Jews only or for all people. That's not the context. What he is debating is the importance the Pharisees were placing on their interpretations and he was showing them that one greater than the Sabbath was talking to them. In Matthew 12:6 Jesus referred to himself as *"One greater than the temple."* Here he shows that he is one greater than the Sabbath.

The Pharisees placed undue emphasis on the Sabbath – as if people were made for *it*. Jesus says, "No, get your perspective straight. People weren't made for this institution, this institution was given to people, and, get this point, I AM LORD OVER IT!"

In other words, Jesus was declaring that he had authority over the Sabbath. Jesus went on to *fulfill* and thus *alter* the Sabbath.

He demonstrated his authority over the Sabbath by going out of his way to perform numerous miracles on the Sabbath, even commanding a crippled man that he had healed to take up his bed and carry it on the Sabbath (John 5:11-16). Nehemiah had instructed the people under the Old Covenant Law *not* to carry a load on the Sabbath, but Jesus insisted that the man get up and carry his bed showing that he was transforming the Sabbath into something new as he fulfilled it himself.

Now, in order to understand what the New Testament says about the Sabbath it is important to consider the three divisions of the New Testament: The Gospels, the book of Acts and the Epistles.

What do each of these sections have to say about the Sabbath?

GOSPELS

The Gospels tell us that it was Jesus custom to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath. Jesus kept the Sabbath. Sometimes the example of Jesus is suggested as a reason that Christians must keep the Sabbath today. But remember, Jesus kept all of the law because he lived under the law. Christians are no longer under the law.

Gal 4:4-5

4 *But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law,*
5 *to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.*

Jesus was born under the law which means he was subject to all its demands. He was circumcised, he kept the Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles – all the Jewish feasts and regulations. The entire package was in force until Jesus fulfilled it all!

Matt 5:17-18

17 *"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.*

18 *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.*

Jesus clearly said that he came to fulfill the Law? What does he mean by *Law*? If you read through Matthew and look at the way he uses the word *Law*, you'll see that it refers to all the writings of Moses – the first five books. Jesus came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets – that is the Old Testament Scriptures.

Later, after his resurrection Jesus showed the disciples how he had fulfilled all of Scripture which pointed to him.

Luke 24:27,44

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself...He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

Can you see what the law was that Jesus came to fulfill? All the writings of Moses.

Now look again at that Matthew 5 text:

Matt 5:17-18

17 *"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.*

18 *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.*

All of the law was in effect UNTIL Jesus had fulfilled, completed and accomplished everything that pointed to himself. That happened when he died as the fulfillment of the sacrificial services, the spotless lamb of God.

Notice that every detail of the Law of Moses was mandated – every jot and tittle – UNTIL it was all accomplished in Christ. That final accomplishment doesn't happen until the end of the story recorded by each of the four Gospel writers.

John 19:28-30

28 *Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty."*

29 *A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips.*

30 *When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

When Jesus had fully completed everything and fulfilled all that had been prophesied in the Law and Prophets, he said *"It is finished"* and died. The old covenant law-era was finished, the new covenant grace-era had begun.

Jesus had just instituted the new ongoing remembrance sign of the New Covenant the night before – the Lord's Supper. Now the covenant transition was complete as Jesus died as the sacrificial lamb.

To signify this historical transition as Jesus died, the veil in the temple was ripped from top to bottom by an unseen hand. The law-era was past.

Jesus rested over the hours of the Sabbath and rose again on the first day of the week. Then 50 days later, once again on the first day of the week, the Holy Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost and the New Testament church was born. That brings us to Acts.

ACTS

The book of Acts tells the story of the birth and early development of the church.

The Sabbath is mentioned nine times in the book of Acts. Every time it is mentioned either in the context of the Jewish Sabbath observance, or Christians trying to reach Jews when they were gathered on the Sabbath.

With the initial evangelistic thrust of the church, the *Jews* were the target.

Rom 1:16

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Paul says the gospel went to the *Jew first*.

As you read through Acts you'll notice that in every new community Paul and his associates went first to the Jews. Where do you find them assembled? In the synagogues on the Sabbath. So that's where they went first -- until they got kicked out (which usually only took a couple weeks) -- then they would preach to the Gentiles.

In Ephesus Paul lasted three months in the synagogues, then he rented a public hall where he could preach daily, every day.

Acts 19:8-9

8 *Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.*

9 *But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus.*

The New Testament Christians were not fixated on just one day as a holy day. When it was possible they met every day for worship:

Acts 2:46

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.

As time went on they were not welcome in the temple or synagogues so they met in homes for worship, teaching, fellowship and to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

Over time, as it was no longer practical to meet every day. History shows that many Christians began meeting on the first day of the week in honor of the Resurrection – they didn't call it the Sabbath and didn't observe it as a Sabbath. They called in "The Lord's Day."

If you read the earliest Christian writers from the first and second century – they repeatedly mention the first day of the week as the Lord's Day. In some cities believers worshiped on the Sabbath *and* the Lord's Day. In other places they worshiped only on the Lord's Day.

History shows that one of the reasons the church as a whole moved toward the Lord's Day for worship was to get completely away from the old covenant and not be confused with Jews or Judaizers (see the sample quotations by early church writers that I have supplied at the end of this article).

Throughout history there have been various groups who have held that seventh-day-Sabbath-observance was still mandated in new covenant times. But those splinter groups historically have tended towards legalism and fanatical heresies of one kind or another. Most such groups also held to other old covenant laws as mandatory and separated themselves from Christians who didn't share their convictions. They were fringe groups with questionable theology.

It is assumed by some that the early Christians *must* have continued to observe the Sabbath since there is no indication of a Sabbath controversy like there was regarding circumcision. That argument, though, misses the point of the circumcision controversy. It wasn't just about circumcision.

Acts 15:5

Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses."

Notice that the issue discussed at the Jerusalem Council was circumcision *AND THE LAW OF MOSES*. Circumcision was the entry sign into the covenant. Once you took the sign you were obligated to all of the law – including the Sabbath.

When the Apostles decided that the new Gentile converts would not be subject to the Law of Moses *that included the Sabbath*.

The only time the Sabbath was mentioned during the discussion was to reference the fact that the Law was read in the Jewish synagogues on the Sabbath:

Acts 15:21

For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.

Moses was the focus on Sabbath in the synagogues – not Christ.

In summary, the Gospels describe behavior of Jesus and the disciples consistent with the old covenant law that was still in force at that time. Acts describes an evangelism strategy that involved going to the Jews first with the message of Christ. What about the Epistles?

EPISTLES

The epistles were written years later and they contain detailed theological reflection as well as detailed instruction for the New Testament church.

Do you know how many times the Sabbath is mentioned by name in all of the Epistles? **ONCE!**

John doesn't mention it; James doesn't mention it; Jude doesn't mention it; Peter doesn't mention it. There is zero instruction about how to keep the Sabbath, how to relate to Sabbath keeping in the various cultures around the Roman Empire, how slaves should relate to masters who want them to work on the Sabbath, etc.

The Sabbath is only mentioned specifically one time in all of the Epistles. So we should assume that that one text would be a very important and defining passage.

Before we go there let me remind you of the three different perspectives on the Sabbath that I outlined above:

1. Continuance
2. Transference
3. Fulfillment

Those who hold the **Continuance** view are the distinct minority who view the seventh-day Sabbath as a Creation ordinance that continues into the New Covenant and even throughout eternity in the New Earth.

Those who hold the **Transference** view believe that Christ and the apostles transferred the Sabbath of the fourth commandment to Sunday as a Christian Sabbath in honor of the resurrection. They believe that the reason for observing Sunday is still based in the Ten Commandments even though the actual day has changed in the New Covenant.

Those who hold the **Fulfillment** view believe that Christ fulfilled the Sabbath just as he fulfilled all the other types and shadows of the law that pointed forward to him. Therefore **HE** is our Sabbath who gives us perfect rest when we receive his gospel of grace and trust in his finished work. Regardless of what day we worship on, no day is more holy than another day for New Covenant Christians – our focus is on Christ, not a day.

I want you to have those three different ways of looking at the Sabbath in mind so that you can ask yourself which view seems to be stated in the *only* passage that specifically mentions the Sabbath in the Epistles:

Col 2:16-17

16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.

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

Of the three views (*Continuation, Transference or Fulfillment*) which view does this text seem to support?

That verse, being the only verse in the Epistles, must be the defining statement regarding the Sabbath for New Covenant Christians.

What Paul is saying to the Christians in Colosse is “Don’t let people judge you if you are no longer observing the Jewish law requirements such as food laws and holy days – seasons, months or days – those were all shadows that pointed to Christ. Now that the reality and substance has come, you don’t need the shadows. You have the real thing!”

Listen to how the New Living Translation reads:

“So don’t let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new-moon ceremonies or Sabbaths. For these rules were only shadows of the real thing, Christ himself.”

You have the real thing, Christians. Don’t stay with the shadows!

Let the truth of that verse define your view of the Sabbath because it is the only place that the Sabbath is mentioned by name in all of the Epistles.

There is one other time in the Epistles that a form of the word Sabbath is used, and two texts where the Sabbath is alluded to. Let’s look at those passages.

A form of the word Sabbath is used in Hebrews 4. The whole chapter deserves in-depth study. Here is just a brief summary:

Even though the Israelites had the cycle of Sabbaths they were still unable to enter God’s rest. God offers a special rest through the gospel for those who have faith. Just as God rested on the seventh day after he finished the creation of the world, now God has “set a certain day called *Today*” for anyone who will enter his rest.

Heb 4:8-10

8 *For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day.*

9 *There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God;*

10 *for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.*

The word here for “Sabbath-rest” is *sabbatismos*. It’s not *sabbaton* which means Sabbath. It is a special word that is used only here which means *a Sabbath-like-rest*.

What it’s saying is that there is a Sabbath-like-rest available for anyone who accepts the gospel and rests in Christ’s finished work. If you will enter God’s rest by depending on what he has done, instead of what you can do, you will experience the beautiful fulfillment of the Sabbath – not just one day a week, but today and everyday – “daily, as long as it is called Today” (Heb. 3:13).

Do you want to experience the fulfillment of the Sabbath in Christ? Then put your trust completely in him and trust him alone. When you do that, you enter God’s rest. *Every day* you live in the joy and refreshing glory of Christ’s finished work. *Jesus* is your Sabbath rest.

That’s what Jesus was intending for us to understand when he said the following:

Matt 11:28-30

- 28 *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*
 29 *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you*
will find rest for your souls.
 30 *For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

The context of this statement is one of those Sabbath controversies where Jesus declared that he was Lord over the Sabbath. Where did Jesus say to go for those who want rest for their souls? Come where? "Come to me," Jesus said. Not a day. *Jesus is our Sabbath rest.* All that the Sabbath anticipated is fulfilled in Jesus who alone can provide rest, not just for our bodies, but "rest for your souls."

In addition to Colossians 2 which mentions the Sabbath being a shadow that pointed to Christ, and Hebrews 4 which shows that full and final Sabbath rest is found in receiving the gospel and trusting in God's finished work, there are two New Testament passages which allude to the Sabbath – each with a completely different tone.

Rom 14:5

One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

As long as people were not trying to make a salvation issue out of "disputable matters" Paul said "don't judge." As long as people were not causing division in the church or fighting over how much of the old covenant to hang onto, Paul said "don't judge."

That's a good attitude for all Christians to maintain! But Paul didn't always adopt this attitude.

Let's go back full circle to the text in Galatians which we began with:

Gal. 4:10-11

- 10 *You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!*
 11 *I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.*

Listen to how different Paul's tone is here! Apparently these Galatian Christians were falling under the spell of false teachers and were demanding observance of the Jewish holy days as a salvation issue, mandating it for others and willing to potentially separate fellowship over it.

Paul lovingly and passionately appeals, "Don't go back into slavery. Be free! Stay free!" A few verses later he says:

Gal 5:1-3

- 1 *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be*
burdened again by a yoke of slavery.
 2 *Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of*
no value to you at all.
 3 *Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey*
the whole law.

Why does Paul warn the Galatians so severely regarding circumcision? Because the legalistic false teachers were insisting that circumcision and all of the Law of Moses (including the Sabbath) were necessary for salvation. They were teaching a Christ-plus-something gospel. There may not have been anything wrong with circumcision in and of itself, but Paul told the Galatian believers to avoid it because for them it had become a sign of old covenant bondage. "Stand firm," he says, "Stay free."

Let me clarify a couple things:

- ◆ **I'm not saying that time dedicated to God is of no value.** It is a wonderful discipline to take time alone or with others to focus totally on God. Jesus gave us an example of that. I'm not saying that physical rest is not needed and everyone should go out and work seven days a week. Once again,

Jesus gave us an example of that (Mark 6:31). The sabbatical principle is a valuable principle. Regular resting times are needed and healthful – physically, mentally and spiritually. I like Rick Warren’s advice to: *“divert daily, withdraw weekly, abandon annually.”*

- ◆ **I’m not saying that we shouldn’t meet regularly for worship, teaching and fellowship.** The importance of that is clearly taught in the New Testament. We are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Heb. 10:25).
- ◆ **I’m not saying that the God’s eternal moral principles are no longer valid.** God’s basic principles of morality existed long before the law covenant at Sinai – and long after it had served its purpose. They are sprinkled throughout the Old Testament and then restated, expanded and deepened in the New Testament. But whenever Christians are told to obey God’s principles in the New Testament, the Law is not the reason given. The motive in the New Testament is responding to Christ’s sacrificial love displayed at the cross. (See 1 Cor. 6:18-20, for example).
- ◆ **I’m not saying that Christians are free from the law therefore they can go out and live ungodly, flesh-centered lives.** The opposite is true. For New Covenant Christians, the Holy Spirit takes the place of the law (Gal. 5:18) and he leads us to turn away from the acts of our natural sinful nature (Gal. 5:17-21), and produces the fruit of righteousness in our lives (Gal. 5:22-24). When I have presented these principles in the past, some have accused me of throwing out the law. I find it interesting that the early Christians were accused of the same thing. Paul had to keep saying, “No, I am not saying you should go out and live a sinful life now that you are no longer under law” (Rom. 6:1,15). Stephen was accused of speaking “against the law” (Acts 6:13) because he showed how it was fulfilled in Christ.
- ◆ **I’m not saying that obedience to God isn’t important.** Jesus clearly said that if we love him we will keep his commands (John 14:15). He also clearly defined what his new covenant command was: *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”* (John 13:34) With the Holy Spirit dwelling in our lives to guide us and with an appreciation in our hearts of God’s love and grace displayed at Calvary’s cross, we will fulfill God’s moral principles by loving God supremely and loving others as Christ has loved us (Gal. 6:2; Rom. 13:10). The book of Revelation says that God’s people will keep his commandments (Rev. 12:17; 14:12). But John is not speaking of the Ten Commandments on stone. John never uses the word “command” or “commandments” (Greek, *entole*) to refer to the Ten Commandments, the Law. He defines God’s command clearly in 1 John 3:23: *“This is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.”* (See also 2 John 6). Whenever John referred to the Old Covenant Law he used the Greek word for law (*nomos*). For example: *“The law [nomos] was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”* (John 1:17).

I hope this study has been helpful. If you are uncertain what you believe concerning the Sabbath, please take the time to look up all the biblical references included here and study this subject for yourself. Be like the Bereans who wouldn’t take Paul’s word until they studied the scriptures for themselves to see if what he taught was true (Acts 17:11).

If you are interested in further study, let me recommend a few resources:

- ◆ I have written a booklet called *New Covenant Christians* that is available online or in printed form. It provides an in-depth study of the old and new covenants. Contact me at Grace Place, P.O. Box 373, Berthoud, CO 80513, 970-532-9886, www.graceplace.org
- ◆ Dale Ratzlaff has written an excellent book entitled *Sabbath in Crisis*. Contact him at Life Assurance Ministries, PO Box 11587, Glendale, AZ 85318. 800-355-7073 (orders only), 623-572-9549 (information and orders), www.ratzlaf.com
- ◆ Also available through Life Assurance Ministries is a helpful little book by H.M. Riggle called, *The Sabbath and the Lord’s Day*.
- ◆ Another valuable resource available through Life Assurance Ministries is a cassette tape series by Dr. Richard Fredericks entitled, *The Sabbath in Christ*.

I will close with the following quotations which give evidence from the early church fathers that the early church worshipped on Sunday. If you would like to look up these and other quotations from early Christian writers check out the following web site locations:

<http://www.sewanee.edu/Theology/patristicsw/f170/p170.html>

<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~hummm/Resources/Texts/apFat.html>

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/justin-apology2.html>

THE EPISTLE OF BARNABAS about A.D. 100 - "Wherefore, also we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead."

THE EPISTLE OF IGNATIUS - A.D. 107 - "Be not deceived with strange doctrines, nor with old fables, which are unprofitable. For if we still live according to the Jewish Law, we acknowledge that we have not received grace.... If, therefore, those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and By His death."

APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS: Church life in the 2nd Century: - "On the day of the resurrection of the Lord--that is, the Lord's Day--assemble yourself together without fail, giving thanks to God and praising Him for those mercies God has bestowed upon you through Christ."

IRENEAEUS: A.D. 155-202 - "The Mystery of the Lord's Resurrection may not be celebrated on any other day than the Lord's Day, and on this alone should we observe the breaking off of the Paschal Feast."

PLINY'S LETTER, AD 107 - Pliny was governor of Bithynia, in Asia Minor, from AD 106-108. He wrote in AD 107 to Trajan, the emperor, concerning the Christians. This is what he said: "They were wont to meet together, on a stated day before it was light, and sing among themselves alternately a hymn to Christ as God....When these things were performed, it was their custom to separate and then to come together again to a meal which they ate in common without any disorder."

THE EPISTLE OF BARNABAS, AD 120 - " 'Incense is a vain abomination unto me, and your new moons and Sabbaths I cannot endure.' He has, therefore, abolished these things... Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day, also, on which Jesus rose again from the dead"

JUSTIN MARTYR (140 AD) - Justin's 'Apology' was written at Rome about the year 140, only 44 years after the apostle John received the vision of The Revelation at Patmos. The Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge says this about Justin's works: "In these works Justin professes to present the system of doctrine held by all Christians and seeks to be orthodox on all points. The only difference he knows of as existing between Christians concerned the millennium. Thus Justin is an incontrovertible witness for the unity of the faith in the Church of his day, and the fact that the Gentile type of Christianity prevailed." In chapter 67 of his Justin's first Apology, entitled, "Weekly Worship of the Christians," writing to the pagan emperor, Justin states: "And on the day called Sunday all who live in cities or in the country gather together in one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read....But Sunday is the day on which we all hold a common assembly, because it is the first day of the week on which God...made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead." The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1, pp. 185-186

IGNATIUS, the third bishop of Antioch, who died in AD 108, wrote: "If, therefore, those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him... Let us therefore no longer keep the Sabbath after the Jewish manner, and rejoice in days of

idleness; for "he that does not work, let him not eat."...let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's day as a festival, the resurrection-day, the queen and chief of all the days [of the week]" "Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians," The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, pp. 62-63

TERTULLIAN of Africa, wrote around AD 200. In his Apology, Chapter 16, Tertullian says: "We solemnize the day after Saturday in contradistinction to those who call this day their Sabbath, and devote it to ease and eating, deviating from the old Jewish customs, which they are now very ignorant of."