

# Should Christians Keep The Sabbath?

© 1990, 2020 Samuel G. Dawson

“Should Christians keep the Sabbath?” is, in reality, the most controversial question in the realm of religion. The reason sabbath-keeping is so controversial is simply because so few understand and teach the truth on the subject.

Sabbatarians (who believe Christians should keep the seventh day of the week as a holy day) believe that God has always commanded everyone (Jews and Gentiles) to keep the seventh day of the week as a holy day. Next to the sabbatarians, we have the Roman Catholic position. Catholics maintain, like the sabbatarians, that Christians are to keep the sabbath. However, they maintain that, for Christians, the sabbath is now the first day of the week. With that, most protestants agree that Sunday is somehow the “Christian Sabbath.” In this study, we will show that none of the above positions are scriptural. The Bible's position is that sabbath-keeping was strictly an institution for participants in the religion of physical Israel and, therefore, that *God never enjoined Christians to keep the seventh day of the week as a holy day*. If this position is correct, then the Catholic claim is not according to scripture, the sabbatarian position is also out of harmony with scripture, and the protestant denominations, in their agreement with the Catholic position, are also at odds with scripture on this subject. Thus, this is a most controversial subject that affects nearly all religious groups.

## What The Issue Is Not

As we begin this study, we can appreciate more clearly what the issue is if we note what the issue is not. For instance, the issue is not whether Sunday is the sabbath, for both sabbatarians and we agree that, in the New Testament, the sabbath and the first day of the week were two different days (Lk. 23.56, Mt. 28.1) and they still are. Likewise, the Bible nowhere teaches that Sunday is the Christian sabbath. In fact, the issue before us is not whether Sunday is a pagan day of worship (as sabbatarians teach) or, for that matter, whether or not Christians are to worship on the first day of the week. Simply stated, the issue before us

is: *where did God ever command Christians to keep the seventh day of the week as a holy day of rest?*

## **The Importance of The Issue**

As we study various church problems in the New Testament, we soon become impressed that the greatest problem in the church of the first century was the attempted incorporation of parts of the Mosaic law into the New Testament way of Christ. Some tried to bring circumcision from the Old Covenant into the church. Some would observe the feast days of the Old Covenant and try to involve other Christians in this activity. This was precisely why the books of Romans, Galatians, Hebrews, parts of II Corinthians, and other sections of the New Testament were written—to deal with the relationship of Christians to the Old Covenant. This is the reason why we prepared this material: to deal with the same problem in the religious world today.

## **Spectrum Of Beliefs on The Sabbath Question**

Before we turn to the teaching of the Bible on this important question, we want to notice the spectrum of beliefs in the religious world about the sabbath. To illustrate the confusion on this question, we have documented below some authoritative statements from the creeds and catechisms of the religious world.

### **The Roman Catholic Position**

You may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and you will not find a single line authorizing the sanctification of Sunday. The Scriptures enforce the religious observance of Saturday, a day which we never sanctify. (James Cardinal Gibbons, *The Faith of Our Fathers*, 16th Ed., New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1880, p. 111, *cited in Authentic Quotations on The Sabbath and Sunday*, Los Angeles: Voice of Prophecy, n.d., p. 7.)

If the Bible is the only guide for the Christian, then the Seventh-day Adventist is right in observing the Saturday with the Jew. But Catholics learn what to believe and do from the divine, infallible authority established by Jesus Christ, the Catholic Church. Is it not strange

that those who make the Bible their only teacher should inconsistently follow in this matter the tradition of the church. (*The Question Box*, Conway, 1903 Edition, pp. 254, 255, cited *Ibid.*, p. 8.)

Nowhere in the Bible do we find that Christ or the apostles ordered that the Sabbath be changed from Saturday to Sunday. We have the commandment of God given to Moses to keep holy the Sabbath day, that is, the seventh day of the week, Saturday. Today, most Christians keep Sunday because it has been revealed to us by the church Roman Catholic—SGD] outside the Bible. (*Catholic Virginian*, October 3, 1947, cited *Ibid.*, p. 9.)

It is strange that many scholars and leaders in Protestantism agree with this claim of Roman Catholicism that they changed the sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. Notice the following statements from various Protestant sources:

## **The Baptist Position**

There was and is a commandment to keep holy the Sabbath day, but that Sabbath day was not Sunday. It will be said, however, and with some show of triumph, that the Sabbath was transferred from the seventh to the first day of the week. Where can the record of such a transaction be found? Not in the New Testament—absolutely not. There is no scriptural evidence of the change of the Sabbath institution from the seventh to the first day of the week. (Dr. Edward T. Hiscox, author of *The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*, in a paper read before a New York minister's conference held November 13, 1893, cited in *Authoritative Quotations on the Sabbath and Sunday*, Los Angeles: The Voice of Prophecy, n.d., p. 5.)

The Sabbath was established originally (long before Moses) in no special connection with the Hebrews, but as an institution for all mankind, in commemoration of God's rest after the six days of creation. It was designed for all the descendants of Adam. (*Adult Quar-*

terly, Southern Baptist Convention series, August 15, 1937, cited *Ibid.*, p. 5.)

## The Congregationalist Position

The Christian Sabbath (Sunday) is not in the Scriptures, and was not by the primitive church called the Sabbath. (*Dwight's Theology*, IV, p. 401, cited *Ibid.*, p. 12.)

## The Episcopal Position

Is there any command in the New Testament to change the day of weekly rest from Saturday to Sunday? None. (*Manual of Christian Doctrine*, p. 127, cited *Ibid.*, p. 13.)

Where are we told in Scripture that we are to keep the first day at all? We are commanded to keep the seventh; but we are nowhere commanded to keep the first day. The reason why we keep the first day of the week holy instead of the seventh is for the same reason that we observe many other things, not because of the Bible, but because the church has enjoined it. (Isaac Williams, D. D., *Plain Sermons on the Catechism*, I, pp. 334, 336, cited *Ibid.*, p. 14.)

We have made the change from the seventh day to the first day, from Saturday to Sunday, on the authority of the one holy Catholic Church. (Bishop Seymour, *Why We Keep Sunday*, *Ibid.*, p. 14.)

## The Lutheran Position

I wonder exceedingly how it came to be imputed to me that I should reject the law of Ten Commandments. Whosoever abrogates the law must of necessity abrogate sin also. (Martin Luther, *Spiritual Antichrist*, pp. 71, 72, cited *Ibid.*, p. 16.)

They [the Catholics—SGD] allege the Sabbath changed into Sunday, the Lord's Day, contrary to the decalogue, as it appears, neither is there any example more boasted of than the changing of the Sabbath day.

Great, say they, is the power and authority of the church, since it dispensed with one of the Ten Commandments. (Martin Luther, *Augsburg Confession of Faith*, Art. 28, Par. 9, cited *Ibid.*, p. 16.)

## The Methodist Position

This “handwriting of ordinances” our Lord did blot out, take away, and nail to His cross (Colossians 2:14). But the moral law contained in the Ten Commandments, and enforced by the prophets, He did not take away. The moral law stands on an entirely different foundation from the ceremonial or ritual law. Every part of this law must remain in force upon all mankind and in all ages. (John Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions*, 2-Vol. Edition, I, pp. 221-222, cited *Ibid.*, p. 18.)

The moral law contained in the Ten Commandments, and enforced by the prophets, He [Christ—SGD] did not take away. It was not the design of His coming to revoke any part of this. This is a law which never can be broken. Every part of this law must remain in force upon all mankind and in all ages; as not depending either on time or place, or any other circumstances liable to change, but on the nature of God and the nature of man, and their unchangeable relation to each other. (*Ibid.*,)

## The Moody Bible Institute

The Sabbath was binding in Eden, and it has been in force ever since. This fourth commandment begins with the word “remember,” showing that the Sabbath already existed when God wrote the law on the tables of stone at Sinai. How can men claim that this one commandment has been done away with when they will admit that the other nine are still binding? (Dwight L. Moody, *Weighed and Wanting*, p. 47, cited *Ibid.*, p. 19.)

I honestly believe that this commandment [the fourth, or sabbath commandment—SGD] is just as binding

today as it ever was. I have talked with men who have said that it has been abrogated, but they have never been able to point to any place in the Bible where God repealed it. When Christ was on earth, He did nothing to set it aside; He freed it from the traces under which the scribes and Pharisees had put it, and gave it its true place. "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." It is just as practicable and as necessary for men today as it ever was, in fact, more than ever, because we live in such an intense age. (*Ibid.*, p. 46.)

## The Mormon Position

In this, a new dispensation, and verily the last—the dispensation of the fullness of times—the law of the Sabbath has been reaffirmed unto the church. We believe that a weekly day of rest is no less truly a necessity for the physical well-being of man than for his spiritual growth; but primarily and essentially, we regard the Sabbath as divinely established, and its observance a commandment of Him who was and is and ever shall be, Lord of the Sabbath. (James Talmadge, *Articles of Faith*, 25th Ed., Art. 13, Chap. 24, pp. 449, 451, 452, cited *Ibid.*, p. 20.)

The acceptance by the Latter-day Saints of what is usually called the "Christian Sabbath," or "Lord's Day," as the proper day of special service and worship of the Lord is sometimes challenged; it must still be confessed that it falls somewhat short of being absolutely conclusive. It cannot be made out clearly and positively that Jesus or the apostles by direct, official action authorized the observance of the first day of the week as a day of public worship, dedicated to the service of God, and designed to take the place of the Jewish Sabbath. (Brigham H. Roberts, *The Lord's Day*, pp. 10-11, cited *Ibid.*, p. 20.)

## The Presbyterian Position

The Sabbath is a part of the decalogue—the Ten Commandments. This alone forever settles the ques-

tion as to the perpetuity of the institution. Until, therefore, it can be shown that the whole moral law has been repealed, the Sabbath will stand. The teaching of Christ confirms the perpetuity of the sabbath. (T. C. Blake, D. D., *Theology Condensed*, pp. 474, 475, cited *Ibid.*, p. 21.)

Interestingly, *none of these denominations* whose scholars and leaders maintain that Christians should keep the seventh day of the week as a holy day *do it*. This shows the obvious confusion in the religious world and the need for this study.

## **Sabbath Never Commanded of Any But Participants in The Religion of Israel**

As we begin our study of the scriptures on the subject of the sabbath, a principle with which we all agree, whether consciously or unconsciously, will aid us. *God's covenants apply only to those who* are named as party to them. Most of us have probably heard the story of the man impressed with his need to obey God's word. So he determined that he would close his eyes, open his Bible, flip through the pages, and at some random point, he would stick his finger on the page. Then he would open his eyes and do what the Bible said at that verse. On the first try, he opened his eyes and read, "And Judas went away and hanged himself." Not to be outdone, he determined that he would try this approach one more time and see if he didn't get better results. On the second try, he turned to the passage that says, "Go thou and do likewise." He decided that he would give the procedure one more trial before he quit entirely; he again closed his eyes, flipped the pages once again, and stuck his finger on the page. When he opened his eyes, he read, "What thou doest, do quickly."

This story illustrates the principle that God's instructions and covenants *apply only to whom they're given*. For a Bible example, we might notice the covenant God made with Noah in Gen. 6.13-22. In verse 18, God said to Noah, "I will establish My covenant with thee." To take the covenant God made with Noah, in which He instructed Noah to build an ark and bind it on anyone else, whether they lived before or after Noah, or a Christian today, would be a misapplication of the instruction.

Similarly, in Gen. 17.10-12, when God made the covenant of circumcision with Abraham and his descendants, that covenant applied

only to those named party to that covenant and, for someone to attempt to bind circumcision on anyone before Abraham and his descendants, would again be sinful. If we understand that God's instructions and covenants apply only to those specifically named as party to them, we are now ready to consider the covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai:

## **The Covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai**

In Exodus 19-24, we find the covenant God made with the nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai after He had miraculously brought them out of the land of Egypt. In Ex. 19.5, God said "If ye will keep My covenant," then you will be My people. Even though the people at that time had not heard one word of the covenant, in Ex. 19.8 they agreed, "All that Jehovah hath spoken we will do."

The covenant was revealed, beginning with the ten commandments, in Ex. 20.1. God revealed the covenant through chapter 23. In Ex. 24.3, "Moses came and told the people all the words of Jehovah." In Ex. 24.4, Moses "wrote all the words of Jehovah." In verse 7, Moses read the book of the covenant to the people and, in verse 8, he sprinkled the blood of the covenant on the book of the covenant and on the people (Heb. 9.19).

In this brief review of the declaration of the covenant to Israel at Mt. Sinai, it is important to notice that *only one covenant was made at that time*. The Bible never conveys the idea of more than one covenant given to Israel but, rather, it always speaks of "My covenant," "the covenant," "the book of the covenant," etc. It is important to remember this because many times sabbatarians try to give the impression that more than one law was given at Mt. Sinai. The Bible teaches that only one covenant was given and that covenant was made with the nation of Israel.

## **Only One Covenant Was Given at Mt. Sinai**

In Galatians 4.24, Paul spoke of the allegory of Hagar and Sarah:

Which things contain an allegory: for these women are two covenants; one from mount Sinai, bearing children unto bondage, which is Hagar.

Paul obviously understood that only one covenant was given at Mt. Sinai. Similarly, in Heb. 9.1-4, the author used exclusive language to speak about the single covenant made at Mt. Sinai:



Now even the first covenant had ordinances and the ark of the covenant and the tables of the covenant.

In Numbers 15.16, God affirmed that only one covenant was given when He said:

One law and one ordinance shall be for you, and for the stranger that sojourneth with you.

Other Bible passages declare that only one covenant was given at Mt. Sinai, but notice here the elements of that one covenant:

The TABLES of the COVENANT	Dt. 9.9
The BOOK of the COVENANT	Ex. 24.7
The ARK of the COVENANT	Dt. 31.26
The BLOOD of the COVENANT	Ex. 24.8
The MEDIATOR of the COVENANT	Gal. 3.19

From an examination of scripture like this, we can see that only one covenant was made with Israel at Mt. Sinai. That one covenant included the ten commandments and, hence, the commandment to keep the sabbath.

## **The Importance of This Point**

We need to take special cognizance that the Bible teaches only one covenant was made with Israel at Sinai, because some in the religious world try to break that covenant into several parts. Some try to make a distinction between the moral law and the ceremonial law, even though the Bible makes no such distinction. The words “moral” and “ceremonial” are not even in the Bible. Some try to make a distinction between the “law of God” and the “law of Moses.” Were these distinctions even scriptural, it doesn’t make any difference how many ways we divide the covenant. It was still only one covenant.

## **The Ten Commandments Were Part of That One Covenant**

In Dt. 9.9, we find the ten commandments were part of that covenant, Moses said:

When I was going up into the mount to receive the tables of stone, even the tables of the covenant, which Jehovah made with you

Likewise, in Ex. 34.27-28, we find:

Jehovah said unto Moses, “Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel.” And he was there with Jehovah forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.

Then, in Dt. 4.13:

And He declared unto you His covenant, which He commanded you to perform, even the ten commandments; and He wrote them upon two tables of stone.

Finally, in II Chron. 6.11, Solomon understood that the ten commandments were part of that one covenant given at Mt. Sinai. As he spoke of the temple he dedicated, Solomon said:

And there have I set the ark where is the covenant of Jehovah, which He made with the children of Israel.

The covenant here was the tables of stone, on which God wrote the ten commandments. From all these passages, we can see that the ten commandments were part of the one covenant God made with Israel at Mt. Sinai. For us to try to divide the covenant up violates all these passages.

## **God Reveals The Sabbath for The First Time**

The sabbath commandment was given to man after the deliverance from Egypt. The word sabbath doesn't even occur in the entire book of Genesis. God mentioned it for the first time in Exodus 16, where He introduced the Israelites to the seventh day of the week as a day of rest. In Neh. 9.13-14, Nehemiah recollected:

Thou camest down also upon Mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments, and madest known unto them Thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them commandments, and statutes, and a law, by Moses Thy servant.

Similarly, in Ezek. 20.10-12, God recalls:

So I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them My statutes, and showed them Mine ordinances, which if a man do, he shall live in them. Moreover also I gave them My sabbaths, to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am Jehovah that sanctifieth them.

## **The Sabbath Was a Sign Only to The Participants in The Religion of Israel**

In passages like these, God identified the sabbath as *a sign* between Israel and Himself. Surely we can see that if God commanded both Jews and Gentiles to keep the sabbath, it could not possibly be a sign between God and the Jews!

When my wife and I married, I gave her a wedding band as *a sign* that she was my wife, that she bore a special relationship to me that she had to none other. If I bought ten rings on sale and gave them to ten ladies, the ring I gave my wife would lose its significance to her.

Similarly, the blue light on top of a police car is *a sign* that car is special and bears an uncommon relationship to me. If every car in town had such a light on its top, the blue light on the police car would lose its significance.

In Rom. 4.11, Paul said that circumcision was *a sign* of the special relationship Abraham had to God. Again, if God commanded everyone in the world to be circumcised, circumcision would not be indicative of any special relationship between Abraham and God.

Similarly, the sabbath was a sign between God and the Israelites, a commemoration of His bringing them out of Egypt (Dt. 5.15). It was peculiarly given to the participants in the religion of Israel. Had it been given to the Gentiles as well, the sabbath would not have been a sign of any special relationship between God and Israel.

Not only was the sabbath revealed for the first time when God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, but many Bible statements make it clear the sabbath was peculiar to the Israelites. The most fundamental passages on the sabbath question show this. For instance, in Exodus 20, the ten commandments are particularly addressed in verses 2-3 in this way:

I am Jehovah thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, Thou shalt have no other gods before Me

God did not address this commandment to Christians, but to those whom He had miraculously delivered from Egyptian bondage. Also in Dt. 5.1-3, at the time God gave the ten commandments the second time, we have:

And Moses called unto all Israel, and said unto them, “Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinance which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and observe to do them. Jehovah our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. Jehovah made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us who are all of us here alive this day.”

From language like this, we can see that the Israelites were the ones addressed at the giving of these ten commandments.

## **Sabbatarians Mutilate The Covenant That Contained The Ten Commandments**

In Dt. 5.4-6, Moses continued:

Jehovah spake with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the firesaying, “I am Jehovah thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

Notice, when Jehovah spoke the covenant, the covenant included the statement, “I am Jehovah thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” Obviously, this language does not apply to Christians, but only to those Israelites who had been miraculously delivered from Egyptian bondage. Later, of course, it was also commanded of their descendants. Whenever we quote from the ten commandments without this qualifying phrase, we delete part of the covenant which God spoke to the Israelites on that occasion. God prohibited this in the Old Covenant. In Dt. 4.2, God said:

Ye shall not add unto the word which I commanded you, neither shall ye diminish from it, that ye may keep the commandments of Jehovah your God which I command you.

Yet, many times sabbatarians neglect to mention these words of the covenant. They should realize that to quote them would show, be-

yond a shadow of a doubt, that the sabbath commandments were part of a covenant given only to the Israelites.

## **The Sabbath Was a Memorial of Independence from Egypt**

As we continue in Dt. 5.15, God said about the sabbath commandment especially:

And thou shalt remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and Jehovah thy God brought thee out thence by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm: therefore Jehovah thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.

To bind sabbath-keeping upon Christians would be just as inappropriate as the binding of the fourth of July on Indonesians. The sabbath was a memorial instituted by God for the Israelites to cause them to remember His giving them independence from the land of Egypt.

## **Conclusion**

So far we see the sabbath does not apply to Christians because it is part of a covenant which they were never a party to. If we see this, we can understand that it's just as sinful to bind the sabbath on Christians as it would be to bind circumcision or ark-building on them. All these things were parts of covenants God did not name Christians party to. Even if someone could show this covenant was binding today, it still would have nothing to do with Christians. This is important to notice because, in the next section, we will show that the one covenant given at Mt. Sinai was taken away by Christ. However, should everything in the next section be wrong, that covenant would still not bind Christians to keep the sabbath.

## **The Covenant Which Contains The Sabbath Has Been Taken Away**

In addition to the sabbath being only for the Israelites as a sign that God delivered them from Egypt, the covenant which contains it was taken away, superseded, and no Christian (or Israelite for that matter) today is under that covenant.

Many passages, both in the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, teach this principle. We will present just three: (1) Heb. 9.1-5, 10.9; (2) Rom. 7.4, 6, 7; and (3) Col. 2.14, 16:

## **Hebrews 9.1-5; 10.9**

In this passage, the author spoke of the one covenant made with Israel at Mt. Sinai:

Now even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service, and its sanctuary, a sanctuary of this world. For there was a tabernacle prepared, the first, wherein were the candlestick, and the table, and the showbread, which is called the Holy Place. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holy of holies; having a golden altar of incense, and *the ark of the covenant* overlaid round about with gold, wherein was a golden pot holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and *the tables of the covenant*; and above it cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy-seat

Notice that the first covenant had all these elements, which included the ark and tables of the covenant. "Covenant" in these phrases clearly refers to the ten commandments. Now, about this first covenant, notice Heb. 10.9. As he speaks of Jesus, the writer said:

then hath he said, Lo, I am come to do thy will. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.

Thus, after he identified the first covenant as the one which included the ten commandments, the writer plainly said that Jesus took away that covenant. Even though one may try to split that old covenant up into two, three, five, or a thousand parts, the Bible still says the first covenant was taken away by Jesus Christ so that he might establish the second.

## **Romans 7.4, 6:**

In Rom. 7.4, Paul spoke of the relation of Jewish Christians (converts to Christ from Judaism) to the Mosaic law:

Wherefore, my brethren, ye also were made dead to the law through the body of Christ; that ye should be

joined to another, even to him who was raised from the dead

The word “dead”, according to *Thayer's Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 283, means,

by death, to be liberated from the bond of anything (literally, to be dead in relation to; . . .) Rom. vii.4.

That is the same word used in Rom. 8.13, where Paul said, “Put to death the deeds of the body.” In other words, Christians are separated from the law just as they are to be separated from sin (the deeds of the body). Notice further, if we are not dead to the law, we cannot be joined to Christ (Rom. 7.4):

Ye also were made dead to the law through the body of Christ, that ye should be joined to another, even to him who was raised from the dead

Similarly, in verse 6, Paul said,

But now we have been discharged [delivered—KJV] from the law, having died to that wherein we were held

The word “discharged” means,

to be severed from, separated from, discharged from, loosed from, anyone; to terminate all intercourse with oneGal. v.4,Rom. vii.6. (Thayer, *Ibid.*, p. 336).

This is the same word Paul used in verse 2 of Romans 7:

For the woman that hath a husband is bound by law to the husband while he liveth; but if the husband die, she is discharged from the law of her husband.

We can understand the relation of a woman to the law of her dead husband, i.e., that she is severed from that law, separated from his law, discharged or loosed from his law. We should be able to understand that Christians are severed from, separated from, or loosed from the Old Covenant.

## **What Law Is Spoken of in Romans 7.4, 6?**

Sometimes someone quibbles that the law in Rom. 7.4, 6, is not the law that contained the ten commandments. Paul, in verse 7 of that same context, positively identified what law he spoke about when he said:

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid.  
Howbeit, I had not known sin, except through the law:  
for I had not known coveting, except the law had said,  
Thou shalt not covet.

If we know what law said, "Thou shalt not covet," then we know what law we are dead to and discharged from. Obviously, the covenant made with the Israelites at Mt. Sinai is the one spoken of here. The Bible plainly teaches that we are separated and discharged from that law.

## **We Anticipate An Objection**

Many times sabbatarians say, "Well, if we don't have to keep the fourth of the ten commandments, that means that we could steal or kill or commit fornication?" Not at all, because God commands Christians under the New Covenant not to do those things. We find the teaching of nine of the ten commandments in the pages of the New Testament. (1) Idolatry is forbidden in Ac. 14.11-15, I Thes. 1.9; (2) Graven images are forbidden in Ac. 17, 19 I Thes. 1.9, I Jn. 5.21; (3) The use of God's name in vain is forbidden in I Tim. 1.19, 20, II Tim. 2.16; (4) Sabbath-keeping is nowhere commanded of Christians, as we have seen; (5) To honor one's father and mother is enjoined in Eph. 6.1, 2; (6) Killing is forbidden in I Pet. 4.15; (7) Committing adultery is forbidden in I Cor. 6.9, 10; (8) Stealing is forbidden in Eph. 4.28; (9) Bearing false witness is forbidden in Col. 3.9; and (10) Coveting is forbidden in Eph. 5.3. Thus, when a Christian steals, he does not break the ten commandments, which were never given to him. He breaks the law of Christ, the new covenant. When he kills, he breaks the law of Christ, the new covenant.

## **Colossians 2.14, 16**

In this passage, Paul said about the death of Christ:

having blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us: and he hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross.



As a result of that action, verse 16 tells us:

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink or in respect of a feast day or a new moon, or a sabbath day.

Some of the Colossian Christians had come under the influence of false teachers who tried to bind certain elements of the Sinai covenant on them. Paul's clear admonition was that they were not to be judged in respect of those things and he specifically mentioned the sabbath days.

We want to notice two objections to our use of this passage. The first one deals with verse 14, where sabbatarians say, "ordinances" cannot refer to the ten commandments, but to the "ceremonial law" or "the law of Moses."

As we've already seen, God didn't divide the Old Covenant in this manner. God gave one covenant at Mt. Sinai and one covenant was taken away by Christ. However, we want to notice, the sabbatarian assumption that "ordinances" cannot refer to a "moral precept", is manifestly false.

The word "ordinance" comes from the Greek word *dogma*, which, according to Thayer (p. 153), means "an opinion, a judgment, doctrine, decree, ordinance." From the definition of *dogma*, no one has the license to assume the word could not include a moral precept. To notice further, the New Testament uses the word *dogma* only five times: (1) Lk. 2.1, "There went out a *decree* from Caesar." (2) Ac. 17.7, "All do contrary to the *decrees* of Caesar." (3) Eph. 2.15, "Commandments contained in *ordinances*." (4) Col. 2.14, "The handwriting of *ordinances*."

The fifth passage where this word occurs is the one that shows the falseness of the assumption sabbatarians make about "ordinance" referring to a moral precept. In Ac. 16.4, as Paul and Silas started out on the second journey:

they delivered them the *decrees* to keep which had been ordained of the apostles and elders that were at Jerusalem

We don't have to guess what was in those *decrees*, for we can read them in Ac. 15.28-29:

For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from things sacrificed to idols,

and from blood, and from things strangled, and *from fornication*

So “ordinances” here referred to fornication, which was contained in the ten commandments. Thus, the assumption that “ordinances”, in Col. 2.14 and Eph. 2.15, cannot refer to a moral precept is manifestly false.

## **SABbath Is Plural in Colossians 2.16**

We conclude this section by examining the sabbatarian claim that Col. 2.16 does not refer to the weekly sabbath. Rather, they say it speaks of various other feast days under the Mosaic law. They based this second objection on the fact that the word “sabbath” in this verse is the plural form, *ton sabbaton*. Since it is plural, they say it cannot refer to the seventh day of the week, but refers to the annual feast days of the Old Covenant. This is just an assumption! Worse than that, a study of this word shows that if sabbatarians are right on this argument, then they're wrong on every other argument they make!

For instance, Mt. 28.1 uses *ton sabbaton*, the very word used in Col. 2.16, (a genitive plural):

Now late on the sabbath [*ton sabbaton*] as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week

Sabbatarians surely recognize that this passage speaks of the weekly sabbath. But in Col. 2.16, they say *ton sabbaton* cannot refer to the weekly sabbath! Similarly, in Lk. 4.16, Luke told us how Jesus

entered, as his custom was on the sabbath (*ton sabbaton*).

This example of Jesus is a favorite passage of the sabbatarians. Yet, Luke used the same word *ton sabbaton* that occurs in Col. 2.16, where they insist it cannot refer to the weekly sabbath!

In Ac. 13.14, Paul “went into the synagogue on the sabbath [*ton sabbaton*].” This is another favorite passage of sabbatarians and, yet, this is the same word Paul used in Col. 2.16. In Ac. 16.13, Luke said, “on the sabbath [*ton sabbaton*] we went forth without the gate by a river side, where we supposed there was a place of prayer.” Sabbatarians point to this example in their arguments that Paul kept the sabbath, yet this is the same word as occurs in Col. 2.16. Thus, we

have adequately shown that when they say Col. 2.16 is not the weekly sabbath, they make an unfounded assumption.

## The Greek Old Testament Has The Same Word Usage

The same thing is true in the Greek Old Testament, the *Septuagint* (so named for the seventy Greek scholars who translated the Hebrew into Greek), from which Jesus and His apostles quoted the most. In Ex. 20.8, we read: “Remember the sabbath [*ton sabbaton*] to keep it holy.” Do sabbatarians dare insist that the word for sabbath here cannot refer to the weekly sabbath because it is plural? Of course not, because this is one of their basic passages to try to bind sabbath-keeping on Christians!

In Ex. 35.2, “The seventh day there shall be to you a holy day, a sabbath [*ton sabbaton*] of solemn rest.” This passage could not possibly refer to anything but the weekly sabbath and, yet, here we have the same word as in Col. 2.16. Likewise, in Lev. 23.37-38, “These are the set feasts of Jehovah, besides the sabbaths of Jehovah.” This is the passage many sabbatarians go to, to try to make a distinction in Col. 2.16 between the “annual” sabbaths, and the “weekly” ones. Yet “sabbaths” here comes from *ton sabbaton*, which they take to be the weekly sabbaths. This is the very word Paul used in Col. 2.16, where they argue it cannot be weekly sabbaths!

In Lev. 24.8, we have “every sabbath day (*ton sabbaton*) an everlasting covenant.” This is another favorite passage of sabbatarians, yet the same word is used there as in Col. 2.16. In Num. 15.32, Israel stoned the man for “gathering sticks on the sabbath (*ton sabbaton*).” No sabbatarian in the world would deny that this speaks of the weekly sabbath and, yet, the same word for sabbath is used here as in Col. 2.16, where they argue it cannot refer to the weekly sabbath.

In Dt. 5.12, at the second giving of the ten commandments, God said, “Observe the sabbath (*ton sabbaton*) to keep it holy.” Would anyone dare assert that this does not speak of the weekly sabbath? Yet, this is the same word as in Col. 2.16. In Isa. 58.13, God spoke of those rebellious Jews who “turn away thy foot from the sabbath (*ton sabbaton*).” Sabbatarians use this passage to show that Christians ought to keep the weekly sabbath and, yet, Paul used the same word in Col. 2.16, where they also argue that it absolutely cannot refer to the weekly sabbath.

Sabbatarians and we agree that *ton sabbaton* can refer to the weekly sabbath on every passage except one and that passage is Col. 2.16. The reason we disagree here is not because Paul used a different word,

but because the word usage in the Bible simply does not agree with the sabbatarian argument on this passage.

## **Suppose Sabbatarians Are Right on Col. 2.16**

If sabbatarians are right on Col. 2.16, that the plural word *ton sabbaton* cannot refer to a weekly sabbath, then they are wrong on every other passage where that word occurs. Their argument on Mt. 28.1 is wrong. Their argument on Jesus in Lk. 4.16 is wrong. Their argument on Ac. 13.14 and 16.13 on Paul goes out. Their use of Ex. 20.8 is incorrect. Similarly, with Dt. 5.12 and all other passages, as we have seen in the above word study.

We understand, then, that the plural form in Col. 2.16 refers to the weekly sabbath. We are not to let anybody judge us about the sabbath that Matthew spoke of in Mt. 28.1, that Luke spoke of in Lk. 4.16, that Paul used in Ac. 13.14 and 16.13, that Moses spoke of in Ex. 20.8 and Dt. 5.12. That is, that we are to let no man judge us with respect to the weekly sabbath as it was commanded to the Israelites in the Old Testament.

## **Summary**

In conclusion, please notice the following points in summary of what we have learned:

- 1. The covenant which included the sabbath was given to Israel only, Ex. 20.2-3, Dt. 5.1-5, 15.**
- 2. God commanded Israel to keep the sabbath as a memorial of their deliverance from Egypt, Dt. 5.15.**
- 3. God revealed the sabbath after deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, Neh. 9.13-14, Ezk. 20.10-12.**
- 4. The sabbath was a sign between God and Israel, Ex. 31.16, 17, Ezk. 20.10-12.**
- 5. God superseded the Old Covenant, which included the sabbath, by the New Covenant, Heb. 8.7-9, 10.9-10.**
- 6. The Old Covenant, which included the sabbath, was abolished by Christ, Eph. 2.15.**

**7. Christians are dead to the law which contained the ten commandments, including the sabbath, Rom. 7.4.**

**8. Christians are discharged from the law which contained the ten commandments, including the sabbath, Rom. 7.6.**

**9. “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a feast day, or a new moon, or a sabbath day,” Col. 2.16.**

This essay is excerpted from *Denominational Doctrines: Explained, Examined, Exposed* by Samuel G. Dawson, available from Amazon.com