

Sabbath Under Crossfire A Biblical Analysis Of Recent Sabbath/Sunday Developments

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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues List:

Over six weeks has passed since I emailed you the first essay of the new **Endtime Issues series**. You may recall that in the first essay I dealt with the theological and practical implications of the popular dualistic view of human nature manifested especially in the belief in conscious life after death. Since you have not received any further essay, you may be wondering if I gave up on this ambitious project to post every two/three weeks a Bible study on current theological issues.

Rest assured that this project is still very much alive. What caused this delay has been the urgent need to complete my new book **The Sabbath Under Crossfire: A Biblical Analysis of Recent Sabbath Sunday Developments**. The book came off the press on January 13, 1999 and has already been featured in numerous national newspapers. The **WASHINGTON POST** published on January 23 an excellent article quoting my research to challenge Pope John Paul's attempt to make Sunday the Biblical Sabbath in order to enforce Sunday observance by means of canonical and civil legislations.

Don't you think that all of you members of this Endtime Issues list deserve to be the first people to receive a copy of this very timely book? I fully agree with you. After all you have taken the time and interest to read all my lengthy essays during the past six months. To show my appreciation for your interest in my ministry of research, we want to serve you first and give you a special offer on this timely book. The details and the order form are at the end of this report. To be sure you receive your copy of **The Sabbath Under Crossfire** as soon as it comes off the press by the end of December, fill out the order form below and mail it to us at your earliest convenience. Let me know if you want me to autograph your copy. I would be glad to do it for you.

The reason I have worked intensively to complete and deliver the manuscript to the printer by December 10, is because beginning with the New Year I have been invited to share the highlights of this research across North America and overseas. For example, The Greater New York Conference has invited me to lecture on the subject of my book, "The Sabbath Under Crossfire: A Look at Recent Developments" on Thursday, January 7, at their workers meeting. Two days later, on Saturday, January 9, the same conference is organizing a special rally for the churches in the New York City area.

The following weekend on Sunday, January 17, the North American Division has asked me to deliver the same lecture at their annual Ministerial Advisory Council meeting in San Diego. For me it will be a great personal satisfaction to be able to place a "**fresh**" copy of the book in the hands of our pastors and church leaders at the very time they are inviting me to lecture on its content. During the rest of 1999 I will be conducting about 25 Sabbath Conferences at major rallies across North America.

The interest for a fuller understanding of recent crossfire of controversy surrounding the Sabbath extends beyond North America. In fact, I have received already 10 overseas invitations to share this research during 1999 in such countries as Germany, Sweden, Croatia, Italy, Indonesia, Philippines, Chile, Bahamas, Tasmania, Australia, New Zealand. I look forward to help fellow believers and Christian friends of all

persuasions in these countries to understand, experience, and proclaim more fully the Sabbath at the very time when this vital biblical truth has come under the crossfire of controversy.

Sometimes the story behind a book is as interesting as the book itself. In this second installment of **Endtime Issues**, allow me to share with you how this writing of this book came about. It may surprise you to learn that I had taken a firm decision not to write a book in 1998. When my previous book **Immortality or Resurrection? A Biblical Study of Human Nature and Destiny** came off the press on December 1997, I solemnly promised my wife that I would not start another book in 1998.

The reason is simple. During much of 1997 I had neglected my wife and the many odd jobs that need to be done inside and outside the house. The same has been true during the previous three years during which I publish three major books of 300-plus pages each. I felt that in good conscience I could not undertake another major research project in 1998 after a four years stretch of intense research. Spending again seven months of unpaid leave-of-absence from teaching at Andrews University, buried in my basement office from 5:00 a. m. to 10:30 p.m., would not be fair to my wife and to my need for a more balanced life style. Thus, I was determined not to become involved in another major research project in 1998.

Two important events mentioned below caused me to change my plans. Thank God for an understanding wife who has accepted such sudden changes without much complaining during our 37 years of married life. She deserves much of the credit for whatever good has come from my ministry of biblical research. Without her loving support most of my books would have never seen the light of day.

The Pope's Pastoral Letter. The first event that compelled me to write this book is the promulgation of the Pastoral Letter **Dies Domini** (about 30 pages) by Pope Paul John II on May 31, 1998. This document has enormous historical significance because for the first time the Pope makes a passionate plea for a revival of Sunday observance by appealing to the moral imperative of the Sabbath Commandment. By making Sunday observance a moral obligation "inscribed" in the Decalogue, the Pope provides what he believes to be a most compelling justification for calling upon Christians every where "to strive to ensure that civil legislation respects their duty to keep Sunday holy."

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

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

The grave theological and legal implications of the Pastoral Letter, compelled me to prepare a preliminary response in July 1998. I posted my initial analysis of **Dies Domini** in various discussion groups on the Internet. The response surpassed my fondest expectations. In a few weeks, over 5,000 people subscribed to a "Sabbath Discussion" list where I examined important Sabbath/Sunday developments. Several editors of religious magazines who subscribe to the list requested permission to publish my response to the Pastoral Letter. In fact the response has already appeared in **Liberty, Ministry, Signs**, and other magazines.

The surprising interest shown by people of different persuasions in various parts of the world for an in-depth analysis of recent Sabbath/Sunday developments made me forcefully aware of the need to take up my pen again and write a book on these critical issues. Thus, my promise not to write a book in 1998 went out of the window. Thank God for a wife who does not remind me of broken promises. Incidentally, I promised my wife that no matter what happens in 1999, I will **not** be tempted to write another book.

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

You should find this chapter of great value because it provides a brief but compelling refutation of the major arguments used not only by the the Pope, but also by most Christians today to justify Sundaykeeping as a biblical and apostolic institution. For example, I am dealing at some length with the alleged role of Christ's Resurrection in causing the change from the Sabbath to Sunday. The biblical and historical evidences I submit clearly show that the Apostolic church attributed no liturgical significance to the day of Christ's Resurrection simply because the Resurrection was seen as an existential reality experienced by living victoriously by the power of the Risen Savior, and not a liturgical practice associated with weekly-Sunday or annual Easter-Sunday worship. Historical documents indicate that these practices were introduced by the Bishop of Rome over a century after the death of Jesus.

You should find very informative my analysis of the Pope's rationale for defending the enforcement of Sunday observance, both by the Catholic Canon Laws and by civil legislation promulgated the international community of nations. In my response I am showing that the authority of the Catholic Church to enforce Sunday observance derives not from Biblical precepts or examples, but from questionable church traditions.

The final part of the chapter discusses the global vision of Pope John Paul II in protecting and promoting the rights of the Catholics to practice their faith. The influence of the Pope in the international arena is far greater than most people realize. At present the Holy See maintains full diplomatic relations with over 160 nations. It receives and sends ambassadors all over the world. It has signed formal agreements with sovereign nations. It participates in dozens of international organizations concerned with moral, social, humanitarian, and cultural affairs.

In a speech entitled "The Vatican's Role in World Affairs: The Diplomacy of Pope John Paul II," J. Michael Miller, CSB, President of Catholic University of St. Thomas and former member of the Secretariat of State of the Holy See (1992-1997), states: "John Paul does have what we might call an 'agenda' for world affairs which he works systematically to promote through his preaching, his speeches to political leaders, his major writings, his endless globetrotting-which does not avoid trouble spots."

Miller rightly points out that the goals of John Paul's agenda "are, admittedly, a mixture of the religious and the more narrowly political. John Paul, however, is not constrained by American ideas of the separation between church and State, but pursues what he regards as the common good of all humanity." What this means is that if the Pope believes that Sunday Laws are for the common good of humanity, he will push for them, irrespective of any conflict with the American constitutional principle of the separation between church and state.

This mixture of religious and political goals can be detected in reading the Pastoral Letter where John Paul calls for Sunday rest as a religious and social necessity. For example, he writes: "The link between the Lord's Day and the day of rest in civil society

has meaning and importance which go beyond the distinctly Christian point of view." By calling for a civil Sunday legislation on the basis of the common good of all humanity, John Paul knows that he can gain considerable support for his agenda from the international community of nations. This important aspect of the Pope's strategy is discussed at some length in the chapter, where I also examine the same strategy advocated by the Lord's Day Alliance. This is indicated by an article on "The Constitutionality of Sunday Laws," published in the **Sunday** magazine, the official magazine of the Lord's Day Alliance.

Debate With Dale Ratzlaff. The second event that influenced the writing of this book is the debate on the Sabbath that took place Monday, June 15, 1998, between Dale Ratzlaff and myself on KJSL, a Christian radio station in St. Louis, Missouri. Ratzlaff had served as a Seventh-day Adventist Bible teacher and pastor before leaving the church because of doctrinal differences. Ratzlaff claims that several months of Bible study convinced him that the Sabbath is not a creational institution for mankind, but a Mosaic, Old Covenant ordinance for the Jews.

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

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

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

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

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

"New Covenant" Theology. It is hard to estimate the far-reaching influence of the "New Covenant" theology championed among Sabbatarians by people like Ratzlaff. The Worldwide Church of God has experienced a massive defection of over 70,000 members who have refused to accept the doctrinal changes demanded by the "New Covenant" theology.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church also has been affected by the "New Covenant" theology promoted especially by **Sabbath in Crisis**. One example is the book **New Covenant Christians** by Clay Peck, a former Adventist pastor who currently

serves as senior pastor of the Grace Place Congregation in Berthoud, Colorado. In the "Introduction" to his book, Peck acknowledges his indebtedness to Ratzlaff, saying: "While I have read and researched widely for this study, I have been most challenged and instructed by a book entitled Sabbath in Crisis by Dale Ratzlaff. I have leaned heavily on his research, borrowing a number of concepts and diagrams."

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

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

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

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

Experience has taught me that simplistic answers do not satisfy people with inquiring minds. Thus, I have endeavored to examine each anti-Sabbath argument as thoroughly as possible. For example, in Chapter 5 I devoted 55 pages to "Paul and the Law." There you will find a clear and compelling analysis of the key Pauline text commonly used to negate the validity of the law and the Sabbath. Before writing this chapter I spent a solid month reading some excellent scholarly research, including two enlightening doctoral dissertations on "Paul and the Law."

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

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

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

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

A Special Acknowledgment. Words fail to express my gratitude to Gregory and Annita Watkins for designing a most attractive cover for the book. Gregory and Annita are a young couple currently serving as student missionaries in China. They signed up for the "Sabbath Discussion" list and were so impressed by the essays they received in China via email, that they offered to design the cover for the book. When I accepted their offer I never anticipated that they would design such a splendid cover.

The cover conveys the message of the book in a masterful way. You can see that the crossfire has attacked the Sabbath, but it has burned only the superficial veneer. The reason is because the Sabbath is at the heart of the two granite tables of the Decalogue that remain unscathed by the crossfire of human controversy. What a creative way to portray this fundamental biblical truth brought out by the book! Thank you, Gregory and Annita for designing such an attractive and suggestive cover.

To make it possible for you members of the **Endtime Issues list** to admire the beautiful cover designed by Gregory and Annita, I am emailing you as an attachment a low-resolution of the front cover of the book. I hope that most of you can receive it without problems.

Importance of the Book. There is no doubt in my mind that **The Sabbath Under Crossfire** will prove to be more important than the previous three volumes I have authored on the Sabbath—including my doctoral dissertation **From Sabbath to Sunday** for which I received a gold medal from Paul VI for earning the academic distinction of *summa cum laude*. The reason is that this new book responds to the latest attacks launched against the Sabbath by the Pope, Sundaykeeping scholars, and former Sabbatarians, in a clear, user-friendly, and compelling way.

Former and current members of the Worldwide Church of God, should find this book of special interest, because it provides a compelling biblical refutation of all the major anti-Sabbath arguments presented by their church leaders. If you ever find yourself caught in the crossfire of the Sabbath/Sunday controversy, **The Sabbath Under Crossfire** will prove to be valuable resource because it deals with popular attacks launched against the Sabbath.

My sincere hope is that this book, fruit of months of dedicated research, will help many Christians of all persuasions to discover the Sabbath as God's gift of freedom to mankind. Freedom from work in order to be free before Him and hear His voice. Freedom from the world of things in order to enter into the peace of God for which we were created. Freedom to look at the world through the eyes of eternity and recapture some measure of Edenic delight. Freedom to taste and know that the Lord is good. Freedom to sing the Psalmist's Sabbath song: "Thou, O Lord, has made me glad by thy work; at the work of thy hands I sing for joy!" (Ps 92:4-5-A Song for the Sabbath).

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A SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT:

It gives me pleasure to introduce you to the special monthly magazine ENDTIME ISSUES, that shares the same name of our list. To be honest I borrowed this name

with the permission of the editor, Franklin S. Fowler, M. D. Dr. Fowler visited me in our home in Michigan and has offered me the opportunity to contribute articles to this timely magazine-which I already did.

I have found the ENDTIME ISSUES magazine to be balanced and timely. Dr. Fowler is a committed, level-headed Seventh-day Adventist who avoid fanaticism and sensationalist.

You can receive a free sample copy of ENDTIME ISSUES ... by calling (360)691-7936 or (360) 691-4524. Or you can request your free copy via email: chf@accessone.com Try it. Chances are you will like it.

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