

The Latest Attack Against The Sabbath

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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Forum:

I am posting this issue with some delay primarily because I was away in Jamaica for the past 10 days. Our Jamaica church leaders invited me to speak at four major rallies in three of their conferences. The response surpassed my fondest expectation. Truly I can say that I have never seen such a deep commitment to the Lord, the church, the Bible and our message.

Last Sabbath March 27 I was in Kingston, the capital city, I spoke briefly in three SDA churches before preaching in the morning and lecturing in the afternoon at the fourth church, the Kencot SDA Church. Over 2000 people attended both the morning and afternoon sessions. What impressed me most was the beautiful churches, solidly built with reinforced concrete, all of them filled to capacity. Elder Leon Wellington, the President of the West Indies Union, drove me to the various churches. We came to the first church at 9:15 a. m. and I could not believe my eyes to see that beautiful church already filled with about 1000 members 15 minutes before the beginning of Sabbath School.

A gage of the keen interest of our Jamaica pastor and members for a deeper understanding and experience of Biblical truths is the orders they placed for the 15 books, 20 cassettes and 8 videos which I have produced during the past 20 years of Biblical research. Though the price was substantially reduced, it was still a major financial investment for many of them whose income is very small. Truly I can say that I have never received so many orders from any country I visited during the past 20 years of itinerant ministry. On Wednesday March 24 I spoke for six hours to all the pastors of the Western Jamaica Conference and each one of them without exception ordered the complete set of my books, tapes, and videos. The dedication and commitment of our Jamaica fellow believers will serve for me as a constant source of inspiration.

For this particular issue I decided to post the article I wrote before leaving for Jamaica at the request of Dr. William Johnsson, the Editor of ADVENTIST REVIEW. On Tuesday, March 16, I received an email message from Dr. Johnsson, asking me to rush in an article by March 31 for ADVENTIST REVIEW dealing with the recent attacks against the Sabbath. The sense of urgency derived from the public meetings organized in a high school auditorium by Richard Frederick, a former Pastor of the Damascus SDA Church in Maryland (560 members), who recently established his own independent Damascus Road Community Church (DRCC). I am told that 500 members left the Damascus SDA Church to join the newly formed DRCC. Some of the members are now returning to the Damascus SDA Church.

On March 9, 11, 16, and 18 Fredericks gave four presentations in which he attempted to show that "the overall package that is Adventism is fatally flawed, very often cultic and destructive to building a true Biblically functioning community." The major issue that Fredericks addressed is Sabbathkeeping, which for him consists primarily in a daily spiritual experience of salvation rest and not in the physical observance of the seventh day.

In view of the urgency of the request, I worked almost non-stop for 23 hours to complete the article and email it to the ADVENTIST REVIEW before leaving for Jamaica on Friday March 19. Dr. Johnsson was delighted to receive it in such a record time and called me few moments before our departure to express his gratitude.

This article represents a summary of the highlights of the book THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE which offers a compelling Biblical refutation of the major popular arguments used to negate the continuity and validity of the Sabbath. You should find the article helpful because it does provide concise responses to the most frequent objections against the Sabbath.

COMMENTS ON THE SABBATH SCHOOL FOR APRIL 3-9 "Our Physical Nature"

The response to the suggestion of my posting few comments on the current Sabbath School Lesson, has been overwhelming. Many of our 6000 subscribers are Sabbath School teachers who appreciate scholarly insights into the lesson of the week. Consequently, I will do my best to continue to offer this service as well.

The second lesson for April 3-9 focuses primarily on the manner in which God created human nature, emphasizing the personal involvement of God in forming and vivifying the body of Adam. An important aspect ignored by the lesson, is the theological significance the Bible attaches to our physical nature. Many scholars recognize that the Biblical account of the material creation of this planet and of human nature, constitute a strong protest against the ancient pagan dualistic view which saw the material body as evil and the spiritual soul as good.

Since I have addressed this issue in my book IMMORTALITY OR RESURRECTION? I will post here few pages from chapters 2 and 3 which are relevant to this lesson. Feel free to contact me if you wish to receive the whole chapters or book itself. I would be glad to email them to you.

IMMORTALITY OR RESURRECTION? pp.58-59 and 106-107

It is unfortunate that during much of Christian history the physical aspect of human nature has been depreciated and even vilified as undesirable and evil. The word "flesh" has been associated with immorality. The "sins of the flesh" invariably means sinful indulgences. The reason for this negative view is that "flesh" is a synonym for the body, and the body, according to classical dualism, which has enormously influenced Christian life and thought throughout the centuries, is bad, or at least suspect.

It is true that in the Bible "the flesh" does not represent the highest and noblest aspect of human nature. Paul especially speaks of the enmity that exists between the flesh and the spirit. But this does not mean that Paul or the rest of the Bible condemns the flesh or the body as ethically evil per se. Rather, the flesh is used metaphorically to represent the whole unregenerated person acting according to his natural sinful desires and propensities.

Historically, much of Christian spirituality and piety has been influenced by a negative view of the body as the seat of sin. The mortification of the flesh by depriving the body of food, warm clothing, or even the physical pleasure of a warm bath has been seen as indispensable for cultivating the spiritual life.⁴³ Thus, to straighten our Christian spirituality, it is imperative to recover the Biblical wholistic view of human nature, especially the positive view of the physical aspect of our existence.

Body Created by God. The creation story provides the logical starting point for the study of the Biblical attitude toward the physical aspect of human nature. The story tells us that matter, including the human body, was created by God. Matter is not an eternal principle of evil antagonistic to God, as in Plato's Timaeus, but part of God's good creation to accomplish His eternal purpose. The whole physical order, including the human body, has been created by God according to His eternal purpose.

Repeatedly, throughout the creation story we are told that God looked at what He had created and "saw that it was good" (Gen 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25). After He created man in His own image God, admired everything He had created and declared it "very good"

(Gen 1:31). On the basis of the Biblical account of creation, we can assert that this material world is God's good creation and it has a fitting place in His eternal purpose.

It is important to note also that God created man not of some divine spiritual substance, but "of dust from the ground" (Gen 2:7) and "in the image of God" (Gen 1:27). "There is no part of man that is of divine origin and that comes down to take up temporary residence in the alien 'body.' Man in no way participates in the divine nature. He is made of the dust of the ground, and his relationship to God is not that of a spark to the fire or a drop of water to the ocean but rather that of an image to the original. Thus there is nothing in man that establishes an identity or even a continuity between him and God, as the rational 'soul' does in the 'religious [dualistic]' view. Instead of identity, there is merely likeness; instead of continuity, there is radical discontinuity, as between creature and Creator."⁴⁴

Physical Body Is Not Evil. The fact that the human body was created out of the material substance of the earth does not mean that matter is the source of evil in human life. In Platonic dualism, matter is the source and origin of evil. Evil is identified with matter, which is an eternal principle independent of and antagonistic to the good God. The identification of evil with matter has led to a pessimistic view of the body and of physical existence. It is unfortunate that this pessimistic view of the body has greatly influenced Christian thought and practice.

In the creation account of Adam and Eve, there is not the slightest hint that the physical body is to be blamed for their disobedience and fall. One popular Christian tradition interprets the original sin as consisting of an illicit act of sexual intercourse. Such an interpretation is totally devoid of Biblical support. The temptation to which Adam and Eve yielded was not the desire to have sex but to act as though they were God. Sex is God's good creation in the same way as all the other physiological functions of the human body.

The temptation was, "You will be like God" (Gen 3:5). The origin of sin in human life has nothing to do with sexual intercourse or any other physical act of the body. Rather, it is to be found in the fact that man succumbed to the temptation to be like God, instead of being a reflector of God's image. This has been the fundamental manifestation of sin, namely, to place oneself, rather than God, at the center of everything.

In the Bible, the origin of sin is found not in some defect in the physical constitution of the human body, but in the wrong, self-centered choice made by free human beings. Humanity today is in a sinful condition because people live self-centered lives rather than a God-centered existence. Because of this self-centeredness, the tremendous possibilities inherent in our human nature created in the image of God have been realized in a disastrously wrong way. "What are godlike possibilities become demonic actualities."⁴⁵

The Biblical account of the creation and Fall of mankind locates the origin of sin not in the body, but in the mind, namely, in the desire to act and to think of oneself as being God. Sin is volitional, an act of the will, and not a biological condition of the body. The Bible has a healthy view of the body as the object of God's creation and redemption. This point becomes clearer as we examine the Old Testament meaning and usage of "flesh-bashar."

Christ and the Human Body. To appreciate the New Testament positive estimate of the human body, we need to reflect on its central doctrine of the incarnation. For example, the Gospel of John announces at the outset that the eternal Son of God "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). The very idea that the eternal Son of God entered human time and space and assumed a full human nature, including a body, was incomprehensible to the Greek mind. In fact, Gnosticism, an influential sectarian Christian movement largely influenced by Greek dualism, openly rejected the incarnation of Christ. This forcefully illustrates the difference between the Biblical wholistic view of

human nature, which places value on the body, and the Greek dualistic view, which regards the body as the prison house of the soul to be discarded at death.

Anyone who fully accepts the New Testament doctrine of the incarnation can never accuse New Testament writers of denigrating the human body or the physical order. The fact that the divine Son of God took on a human body in order to live on this earth gives dignity and importance to the body and to the whole physical realm.

It is significant also to note that the same eternal Word through whom "all things were made" (John 1:3) at creation came into this world to redeem and restore, not just "the soul," but the whole man and the whole world. "This is the significance of the strange doctrine of the resurrection of the body which more than anything else horrified and repelled the Greek world. This doctrine served to emphasize, in the strongest possible way, the New Testament view that it is not some part of man (his rational 'soul') that is destined for fulfillment in eternity; it is the whole person that has his place in God's purpose."³⁹

The doctrine of the resurrection of the body, which is examined in chapter 7, teaches that our physical nature and the material world which play a vital part in shaping our earthly existence have eternal significance in the divine scheme of things. This teaches us, as Ronald Hall aptly puts it, that "even in the afterlife, the body is no mere adornment of the spirit but an essential element in the being of the person. It is difficult to understand why Paul would have hinged faith on the belief in the resurrection if he thought otherwise. If he thought, for example, that salvation had to do only with a disembodied soul liberated from the body, he would certainly not have pressed so hard for the resurrection of the body; he would have been content with the Greek notion of an immortal soul."⁴⁰

The belief in the resurrection of the body is grounded in the bodily resurrection of Christ. "If Christ has not been raised," Paul exclaims, "then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished" (1 Cor 15:17-18). Christ's incarnation in a human body and resurrection in a glorified body (John 20:27) tells us that the body has eternal significance in God's purpose for this world. It tells us that the body is not a temporary prison house or proving ground for "souls" destined for ultimate annihilation. Rather, it tells us that the body is our total personality that God is committed to preserve and bring back to life on the day of the resurrection.

The resurrection of the body is necessary for the life in the world to come because the New Testament never accepted the belief in the immortality of the soul. Life without the body is inconceivable. Since the body is our the concrete human existence, its resurrection is indispensable to ensure a full personality and life in the new earth.

Christian Faith Is "Materialistic." At this point it is worth remembering that the Old Testament hope for the world to come is extremely "materialistic." While the Greeks were looking forward to the eventual escape of the soul from this earth to an ethereal region, Old Testament believers were awaiting the establishment of God's kingdom on this earth (Dan 2:44; 7:27). The Messianic kingdom will bring to consummation human history on this planet in accordance to God's creative purpose.

The same belief is prominent in the New Testament. Christ came down to this earth to redeem both the human and subhuman creation (Rom 8:22-23) and He will return to this earth to establish a new physical order. "I saw a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1). The whole earth, including the human body, is not annihilated but perfected. "He [God] will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away" (Rev 21:4). "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God" (Rev 21:2).

The ultimate renovation of this earth is the cosmological counterpart of the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. Just as the individual believer at the end will not escape from the body but receive an imperishable body (1 Cor 15:53), so the redeemed will not

be raptured away for ever from this earth to heaven, but will be established on this earth, restored to its original perfection as the place of God's glorious and everlasting kingdom.

"There is no suggestion here," writes D. R. G. Owen, "of disembodied 'souls' painfully making their way up to heaven, there to exist for all eternity as pure 'spirit.' Just the opposite: God comes down to man; the Word became flesh; heaven comes down to earth; the holy city comes down from God out of heaven. . . . Thus at the end of the Bible, in its doctrine of the last things, as at the beginning, in its doctrine of the first things, the eternal significance of the whole realm of the physical is unmistakably asserted."⁴¹

Owen concludes by noting that "the implications of this Biblical materialism for Biblical anthropology-implications that are underlined by the doctrine of the resurrection of the body as opposed to the doctrine of the immortality of the separated soul-are as follows: first, the 'body' is an essential aspect of human personality and not a detachable part eventually to be cast aside; and secondly, the whole person, and not a disembodied 'soul,' is destined for eternal life."⁴²

Bodily existence is the normal and proper mode of existence. Thus, the body is an essential element of human existence. The life of the body is not contrasted with the life of the soul or the spirit, as though body was an obstacle to the full realization of the higher life of the soul or spirit. The body can become an obstacle when it is used as an instrument of sin, but it is not a hindrance of itself. The body is not necessarily evil, because it is part of God's good creation. This is also indicated by the fact that no evil was present in Christ, though he was a partaker of our human body.

Since the body can become an instrument of sin, the aim of the Christian life is to exercise self-control over it to prevent it from dominating one's spiritual life. Paul sets forth this truth clearly in 1 Corinthians 9 where he compares himself to an athlete in training who exercises rigorous self-control to prevent his body from gaining the upper hand over his spiritual life. "I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified" (1 Cor 9:27).

Self-control over the body is attained especially by consecrating it to God as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1). This is accomplished, not by ascetic practices and the mortification of the body itself, but rather by making it sensitive to the dictates of the Word of God. The Christian recognizes that his body is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). To cultivate the presence of the Spirit in one's body means to make all our physical enjoyments and activities subservient to spiritual ends.

THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE A LOOK AT RECENT DEVELOPMENTS Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D., Professor of Theology, Andrews University

Few Bible doctrines have been under the constant crossfire of controversy during Christian history like that of the Sabbath. In this century alone over 1000 major treatises have been published on the Sabbath/Sunday question, besides the countless number of articles. Truly it can be said that the Sabbath has had no rest.

In recent times the Sabbath/Sunday controversy has been rekindled by three significant developments: (1) Pope John Paul's Pastoral Letter *Dies Domini* released on May 31, 1998, where he makes a passionate plea for a revival of Sunday observance by appealing to the moral imperative of the Sabbath commandment in order to justify the enforcement of Sunday observance. This represents a significant departure from the historic Catholic position stated for example by Thomas Aquinas: "The observance of the Lord's Day took the place of the observance of the Sabbath not by virtue of the [Biblical] precept but by the institution of the church."¹ (2) Numerous doctoral dissertations and articles written by Catholic and Protestant scholars who argue for the abrogation of the Sabbath in the New Testament and for the apostolic origin of Sunday. (3) The abandonment of the Sabbath by former Sabbatarians such as the leaders of the Worldwide Church of God and few former Adventist pastors.

This article focuses specifically on the major arguments used by former Sabbatharians to explain away the continuity and validity of the principle and practice of seventh-day Sabbathkeeping. An in-depth analysis of these arguments is found in my newly released book **THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE: A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS OF RECENT SABBATH/SUNDAY DEVELOPMENTS**. The length limitations of the article allows only for a summary response.

The Protagonists. Early in 1995 the leaders of the Worldwide Church of God declared the Sabbath to be a Mosaic, Old Covenant institution, given to the Jews, fulfilled by Christ and consequently, no longer binding upon New Covenant Christians. The result of the abandonment of the Sabbath and other doctrines was a mass exodus of over 70,000 members which has caused the near meltdown of the church.

In our Seventh-day Adventist Church the so-called "New Covenant Theology" has been popularized especially by Dale Ratzlaff, a former Adventist who served as Bible teacher at Monterey Bay Academy and as pastor of two churches in Southern California. His 345 pages book **SABBATH IN CRISIS** is the most influential presentation of the "New Covenant" and anti-Sabbatarian theology, produced and used by former Sabbatharians.

Ratzlaff is actively promoting his anti-Sabbatarian views through radio talk-shows and advertisements in local papers where he offers his book free. KJSL, a St. Louis Radio station, invited me to respond to Ratzlaff's anti-Sabbath arguments in their radio program on June 15, 1998. We had an animated discussion, but the one-hour time limitation, prevented a thorough discussion of the major issues. We agreed to continue the discussion in cyberspace where I posted twenty one essays refuting Ratzlaff's major arguments against the continuity and validity of the Sabbath for "New Covenant" Christians. In few weeks over 5000 people signed up for the Sabbath Discussion list. The enormous interest convinced me to expand, edit, and published these essays in the newly released book **THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE**.

The influence of the "New Covenant" theology promoted by Ratzlaff has been felt among Sabbatarian churches, including our own SDA church. One example is the book **New Covenant Christians** by Clay Peck, a former Adventist pastor who pastored the Damascus SDA Church in Maryland with Richard Frederick. Currently Peck serves as senior pastor of the newly established non-SDA Grace Place Congregation in Berthoud, Colorado. In the "Introduction" to his book, Peck acknowledges his indebtedness to Ratzlaff: "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."

Another example is Richard Frederick, a former Pastor of the Damascus SDA Church in Maryland, who recently established the Damascus Road Community Church (DRCC). On February 4, 1999 Frederick mailed a newsletter to the members of his congregation inviting them to attend four special evening sessions on March 9, 11, 16, and 18. At these sessions, Frederick attempted to demonstrate, as stated in his newsletter, that "the overall package that is Adventism is fatally flawed, very often cultic and destructive to building a true Biblically functioning community."

At the heart of the debate is Sabbathkeeping, which for Frederick consists primarily in a daily spiritual experience of salvation rest and not in the physical observance of the seventh day. In his newsletter Frederick wrote: "At the emotional heart of these discussions for many is the question of the Sabbath. I will attempt to show biblically that our Lord Jesus is the reality of the Sabbath (Colossians 2:16-17)-its fulfillment and expansion and the only Source for the true rest of soul that is offered to every genuine Christian (Matthew 11:28-30)." He continues saying that for him the essence of Sabbathkeeping is "to be seven day a week Christians who daily experience the wonder of our spiritual rest in Him," rather than a literal observance of the 24 hours of the seventh day.

In view of the fact that the anti-Sabbath arguments presented by Frederick and Peck, are largely drawn from Ratzlaff's book *Sabbath in Crisis*, I will briefly respond to four major anti-Sabbath arguments as presented in the book itself.

(1) The Sabbath is not a Creational Ordinance

The first argument used to negate the universality and continuity of the Sabbath is the denial of its creation origin. Ratzlaff attempts to prove that the Sabbath is not a creation ordinance for humanity but a Mosaic institution given to the Jews. His major argument to support this thesis is the absence of an explicit command to observe the seventh day in Genesis 2:2-3. "There is no command for mankind to rest in the Genesis account."² "Nothing is expressly mentioned regarding man in the seventh-day-creation rest."³

This argument ignores six important considerations. First, Genesis is not a book of commands but of origins. None of the Ten Commandments are ever mentioned in Genesis, yet we know that their principles were known because we are told, for example, "Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Gen 26:5). It is evident Abraham knew God's commandments and laws, though no reference is made to them in the book of Genesis.

Second, the absence of a command to keep the Sabbath in Genesis may be due to the cosmological function of the seventh day in the creation story. The divine act of resting on the seventh day is designed to tell us how God felt about His creation. It was "very good," and to dramatize this fact, twice we are told that "He rested" (Gen 2:2-3), literally, "He stopped." Why? Simply because there was no need of finishing touches to improve His perfect creation.

Third, the establishment of the Sabbath by a divine example rather than by a divine commandment, could well reflect what God wanted the Sabbath to be in a sinless world, namely, a free response to a gracious Creator rather than an alienating imposition. By freely choosing to make themselves available for their Creator on the Sabbath, human beings were to experience physical, mental, and spiritual renewal and enrichment. Since these needs have not been eliminated but heightened by the Fall, the moral, universal, and perpetual functions of the Sabbath precept were repeated later in the form of a commandment.

Fourth, a principle established by divine example is no less binding than one enunciated by a divine command. Actions speak louder than words. What is it that makes any divine precept moral and universal? Do we not regard a law moral when it reflects God's nature? Could God have given any stronger revelation of the moral nature of the Sabbath than by making it a rule of His divine conduct?

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

Sixth, the clinching proof of the creation-origin of the Sabbath is the testimony of Jesus Himself. In refuting the charge of Sabbath-breaking leveled against His disciples, Jesus referred to the original purpose of the Sabbath: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Christ's choice of words is significant. The verb "made-ginomai" alludes to the original "making" of the Sabbath and the word "man-anthropos" suggests its human function. Thus to establish the human and universal value of the Sabbath, Christ reverts to its very origin right after the creation of man. Why? Because for the Lord, the law of the beginning stands supreme (see Matt 19:8).

The consistent witness of the Scripture is that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance for the benefit of humanity. We have our roots in the Sabbath from creation to eternity.

(2) The Sabbath is an Old Covenant Institution that Terminated at the Cross

The second major anti-Sabbath argument is taken from the aging munition dump of Dispensational literature. The stock weapon of their aging arsenal is the allegation that the Sabbath is an Old Covenant institution given to the Jews and terminated at the Cross. Their strategy is to make the Cross the line of demarcation between the Old and New Covenants, Law and Grace, the Sabbath and Sunday.

To a large extent Ratzlaff repropose this theological construct by arguing that there is a radical distinction between the Old Covenant which was based on a package of laws and the New Covenant which is based on principles of love. He argues that the distinction between "Law" and "Love" is reflected in the covenant signs. "The entrance sign to the old Covenant was circumcision, and the continuing, repeatable sign Israel was to 'remember' was the Sabbath. . . . The entrance sign of the New Covenant is baptism [and] the remembrance sign [is] the Lord's Supper."⁴

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

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

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

The New Covenant consists not in the replacement of the Ten Commandments with simpler and better laws, but in the internalization of God's Law. "This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my Law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God" (Jer 31:33; emphasis supplied). This passage teaches us that the difference between the Old and New Covenants is not a difference between "Law" and "love." Rather, it is a difference between failure to internalize God's Law, which results in disobedience, and successful internalization of God's Law, which results in loving obedience.

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

In God's relationship with believers, the moral Law reveals His will and character, the observance of which makes it possible to maintain an orderly and meaningful

relationship. Law is not the product of sin, but the product of love. God gave the Ten Commandments to the Israelites after showing them His redeeming love (Ex 20:2). Through God's law the godly come to know how to reflect God's love, compassion, fidelity, and other perfections.

The Decalogue is not merely a list of ten laws, but primarily ten principles of love. There is no dichotomy between law and love, because one cannot exist without the other. The Decalogue details how human beings must express their love for their Lord and for their fellow beings. Christ's new commandment to love God and fellow beings is nothing else than the embodiment of the spirit of the Ten Commandments already found in the Old Testament (Lev 19:18; Deut 6:5). Christ spent much of His ministry clarifying how the love principles are embodied in the Ten Commandment. He clarified especially that the essence of Sabbathkeeping is people to love and not rules to obey.

Ratzlaff's attempt to divorce the law of the Old Covenant from the love of the New Covenant ignores the simple truth that in both covenants love is manifested in obedience to God's law. Christ stated this truth clearly and repeatedly: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me" (John 14:21). "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love" (John 15:10).

Under both covenants, the Lord has one moral standard for human behavior. He wants His people to love Him and their fellow beings by living in harmony with the moral principles expressed in the Ten Commandments. These serve as a guide in imitating God's character. The Spirit does not replace these moral principles in the New Covenant. Rather, He makes the letter become alive and powerful within the hearts of the godly.

(3) Christ Fulfilled the Sabbath by Becoming Our Salvation "Rest"

The third argument commonly used to negate the continuity of the Sabbath is based on the assumption that Christ fulfilled and terminated the messianic typologies of the Sabbath by becoming our Sabbath rest. Consequently, Ratzlaff and his supporters contend that Christians no longer need to observe the Sabbath literally by resting physically on the seventh day, because the Savior, to whom the Sabbath rest pointed, has come and fulfilled His typological function. Christ offers believers everyday the salvation-rest typified by the Sabbath. "The new covenant believer is to rejoice in God's rest continually. He does not have to wait until the end of the week."⁵

To defend this thesis Ratzlaff devotes five chapters (6 to 9) to the Sabbath material of the Gospels. His conclusion is that Christ's provocative method of Sabbathkeeping was designed to show "how old covenant law, including Sabbath law, points to Him," and not to clarify "appropriate Sabbath behavior or a correct interpretation of old covenant Sabbath law."⁶ "Jesus broke the Sinaitic Sabbath, but in doing so He brought in the 'true' rest."⁷

There are four major problems with this popular view defended by Ratzlaff. First, it misinterprets the meaning of the Sabbath in the Gospels. An objective reading of Christ's provocative manner of Sabbathkeeping reveals that His intent was not to nullify but to clarify the meaning of the Fourth Commandment. Repeatedly in the Gospels Christ acts as the supreme interpreter of the Law by attacking external obedience and human traditions which often had obscured the spirit and intent of God's commandments (Matt 5:21-22, 27-28; 9:13; 12:7; 23:1-39).

It is noteworthy that in all instances where Christ or His disciples were accused of Sabbathbreaking, He defended their conduct-often by appealing to the Scripture ("Have you not read . . ."-Matt 12:3, 5)-and thus showing that their actions were in harmony with the divine intent of the Sabbath. An attentive reading of the Sabbath pronouncements where Christ declares the Sabbath to be a day "to do good" (Matt 12:12), "to save life" (Mark 3:4), to show "mercy" rather than religiosity (Matt 12:7) and "to loose" men and women from physical and spiritual bonds (Luke 13:16), offers an unmistakable proof of Christ's intent to clarify and not to nullify the Sabbath.

Second, to contend that the weekly experience of the Sabbath rest and liberation from work was intended only for the Jews to aid them in commemorating creation and in experiencing the future Messianic redemption to come, means to be blind to the fact that Christians need such an aid just as much as the Jews. The difference between the two is simply that while for the Jews the Sabbath rest pointed forward to the redemption rest of the Messiah to come, for the Christians the Sabbath rest points backward to the redemption rest of the Savior who has come and forward to the final restoration rest that still awaits for the people of God (Heb 4:9).

Third, to maintain that "New Covenant" Christians observe the Sabbath spiritually as a daily experience of salvation-rest, and not literally as the observance of the seventh day, means to fail to recognize that the spiritual salvation-rest does not negate, but presupposes the physical Sabbath rest. God invites us to cease from our physical work on the Sabbath so that we may enter more fully and freely into 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 not superfluous. They are designed to help us conceptualize and internalize the spiritual realities they represent.

Fourth, the charge leveled by Frederick in his newsletter, that literal seventh-day Sabbathkeeping reflects "a cultic, sectarian," and legalistic mentality that "distorts the Gospel of Christ and the authority of Scripture," ignores that a correct Biblical understanding and experience of the Sabbath can be a most powerful antidote against legalism and sectarianism. Why? Because the Sabbath teaches us not to work for our salvation (legalism), but to cease from all our works, in order, as Calvin so well expresses it, "to allow God to work in us."⁸

To rest on the Sabbath to give priority to God in our thinking and living, means to resign to our human effort to gain salvation, in order to allow the omnipotent grace of God to work more fully and freely in our lives. Indeed, properly understood and observed the Sabbath epitomizes the Gospel, the Good News of God's invitation to cease from our works in order to enter into His rest (Heb 4:10).

Summing up, the coming of Christ is seen in the New Testament, not as the termination, but as the actualization, the realization of the redemptive typology of the Sabbath. Through His redemptive mission, Christ offers to believers the expected sabbatical "release" (Luke 4:18) and "rest" (Matt 11:28). In the light of the Cross, the Sabbath memorializes not only God's creative but also His redemptive accomplishments for mankind. Through the physical act of resting on the Sabbath we conceptualize, internalize, and appropriate the reality of salvation-rest. We celebrate God's creative and redemptive love.

(4) Paul Teaches the Abrogation of the Law

The fourth anti-Sabbath argument used by Ratliff and Sundaykeeping Christian in general, is the allegation that Paul teaches the abrogation of the Old Testament Law in general and of the Sabbath in particular.

Throughout his book *Sabbath in Crisis* Ratliff repeatedly makes categoric affirmations regarding Paul's alleged abrogation of the law: "Paul teaches that Christians are not under old covenant Law."⁹ "Galatians 3 states that Christians are no longer under Sinaitic Law."¹⁰ "Romans 7 states that even Jewish Christians are released from the Law as a guide to Christian service. . . . Romans 10 states that Christ is the end of the Law for the believer."¹¹

Gross Misunderstanding. These categoric statements reflect the prevailing gross misunderstanding of Paul's teachings regarding the place of the law in the Christian life. Fortunately, an increasing number of scholars are recognizing this problem and addressing it. For example, in his article "St. Paul and the Law," published in the *Scottish*

Journal of Theology, C. E. B. Cranfield writes: "The need exists today for a thorough re-examination of the place and significance of Law in the Bible."¹² He goes on noting that "recent writings reflect a serious degree of muddled thinking and unexamined assumptions with regard to the attitudes of Jesus and St. Paul to the Law"¹³

I share Cranfield's conviction that shoddy biblical scholarship has contributed to the prevailing misconception that Christians are released from the observance of the Law. There is an urgent need to re-examine the New Testament understanding of the law and its place in the Christian life, because muddled thinking in this area affects a whole spectrum of Christian beliefs and practices. In fact, much of the anti-Sabbatarian polemic derives from the mistaken assumption that the New Testament, especially Paul's letters, releases Christians from the observance of the Law, in general, and the Sabbath commandment, in particular.

This prevailing misconception is negated by a great number of Pauline passages that uphold the law as a standard for Christian conduct. When the Apostle Paul poses the question: "Do we then overthrow the Law?" (Rom 3:31). His answer is unequivocal: "By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the Law" (Rom 3:31). The same truth is affirmed in the Galatian correspondence: "Is the Law then against the promises of God? Certainly not" (Gal 3:21). These statements should warn people like Ratzlaff, Peck, and Frederick, that, as Walter C. Kaiser, a respected evangelical scholar, puts it, "any solution that quickly runs the law out of town certainly cannot look to the Scripture for any kind of comfort or support."¹⁴

A careful study of Paul's writings shows that the law is and remains God's law (Rom 7:22, 25), because it was given by God (Rom 9:4; 3:2), was written by Him (1 Cor 9:9; 14:21; 14:34), reveals His will (Rom 2:17, 18), bears witness to His righteousness (Rom 3:21), and is in accord with His promises (Gal 3:21).

Being a revelation of God's will for mankind, the law reveals the nature of sin as disobedience to God. Paul explains that "through the Law comes the knowledge of sin" (Rom 3:20) because the Law causes people to recognize their sins and themselves as sinners. It is evident that this important function of the Law could not have been terminated by Christ, since the need to acknowledge sin in one's life is as fundamental to the life of Christians today as it was for the Israelites of old.

The function of Christ's redemptive mission was not to abrogate the law, as many Christians mistakenly believe, but to enable believers to live out the principles of God's law in their lives. Paul affirms that, in Christ, God has done what the Law by itself could not do—namely, He empowers believers to live according to the "just requirements of the Law." (Rom 8:3-4).

An understanding of the different circumstances that occasioned Paul's discussion of the law is essential for resolving the apparent contradiction between the positive and negative statements he makes about the law. For example, in Ephesians 2:15 Paul speaks of the law as having been "abolished" by Christ, while in Romans 3:31, he explains that justification by faith in Jesus Christ does not overthrow the law but "establishes" it. In Romans 7:6, he states that "now we are discharged from the law" while a few verses later he writes that "the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good" (Rom 7:12). In Romans 3:28, he maintains that "a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law," yet in 1 Corinthians 7:19, he states that "neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God."

How can Paul view the law both as "abolished" (Eph 2:15) and "established" (Rom 3:31), unnecessary (Rom 3:28) and necessary (1 Cor 7:19; Eph 6:2, 3; 1 Tim 1:8-10)? The resolution to this apparent contradiction is to be found in the different contexts in which Paul speaks of the law. When he speaks of the law in the context of salvation (justification-right standing before God), especially in his polemic with Judaizers, he clearly affirms that law-keeping is of no avail (Rom 3:20). On the other hand, when Paul speaks of the law in the context of Christian conduct (sanctification-right living before

God), especially in dealing with antinomians, then he upholds the value and validity of God's Law (Rom 7:12; 13:8-10; 1 Cor 7:19).

In summation, Paul criticizes not the moral value of the law as guide to Christian conduct, but the soteriological (saving) understanding of the law seen as a document of election that includes Jews and excludes Gentiles. Failure to distinguish in Paul's writing between his moral and soteriological usages of the Law, has led many people like Ratzlaff to fallaciously conclude that Paul rejects the value and validity of the law as a whole. Such a view is totally unwarranted because Paul rejects the Law as a method of salvation but upholds it as a moral standard of Christian conduct.

(5) Paul Teaches the Abrogation of the Sabbath.

The fifth and most popular weapon used to attack the Sabbath are the following three Pauline texts: Colossians 2:14-17, Galatians 4:8-11, and Romans 10:4-5. On the basis of these texts, Ratzlaff and many other Christians conclude that Paul regarded the Sabbath as part of the Old Covenant that was nailed to the Cross. Ratzlaff goes so far as to say that, according to Paul, "the observance of the Sabbath by Christians seriously undermines the finished work of Christ."¹⁵ "In every instance in the epistles [of Paul] where there is teaching about the Sabbath, that teaching suggests that the Sabbath either undermines the Christian's standing in Christ, or is nonessential."¹⁶ "The continued observance of the Sabbath by Christians runs from unimportant-probably for the believing Jew-to a dangerous undermining of one's standing in Christ-for the believing Gentile."¹⁷

Did Paul really find Sabbathkeeping so dangerous? One wonders, in what way could the act of stopping our work on the Sabbath to allow our Savior to work in our lives more fully and freely "seriously undermine the finished work of Christ"?

There are three fundamental problems with Ratzlaff's interpretation of these three texts (Col 2:14-16; Rom 14:5, Gal 4:10). First, there is his failure to recognize that none of these passages deal with the validity or invalidity of the Sabbath commandment per se. Instead, they deal with ascetic and cultic practices which undermined (especially in Colossians and Galatians) the vital principle of justification by faith in Jesus Christ.

Second, in the crucial passage of Colossians 2:16, Paul is warning the Colossians against those who judged them on "questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath" (RSV). This warning is not a condemnation of the five mentioned practices as such, but of the authority of false teachers to legislate on the manner of their observance. Implicitly, Paul expresses approval rather than disapproval of their observance. Any Pauline condemnation in this passage has to do with the perversion promoted by the false teachers, and not with the practices per se.

This important fact is recognized even by Sundaykeeping scholars. For example, Douglas De Lacey, a contributor to the scholarly symposium *From Sabbath to the Lord's Day*. He concludes his analysis of this passage saying: "Here again (Col 2:16), then, it seems that Paul could happily countenance Sabbathkeeping."¹⁸ Troy Martin, Professor at Saint Xavier University in Chicago, comes to the same conclusion in a recent article published in *New Testament Studies*.¹⁹ It is encouraging to see scholars finally recognizing that, contrary to the traditional and popular interpretation advocated by people like Ratzlaff, Colossians 2:16 is not the death knell of Sabbathkeeping in the New Testament but, instead, a proof of its Pauline approbation.

Third, Paul's tolerance with respect to diet and days (Rom 14:3-6) indicates that he would not have promoted the abandonment of the Sabbath and the adoption of Sunday observance instead. Had he done so, he would have encountered endless disputes with some of the Jerusalem brethren, as he had with regard to circumcision. The absence of any echo of such controversy is perhaps the most telling evidence of Paul's respect for the institution of the Sabbath.

In the final analysis, Paul's attitude toward the Sabbath must be determined not on the basis of his denunciation of heretical and superstitious observances which may have influenced Sabbathkeeping, but rather on the basis of his overall attitude toward the law.

The failure to understand that Paul rejects the law as a method of salvation but upholds it as a moral standard of Christian conduct has been the root cause of much misunderstanding of Paul's attitude toward the law, in general, and toward the Sabbath, in particular. One can hope that recent studies will contribute to clarify this misunderstanding and allow many to discover that "the law is good, if any one uses it lawfully" (1 Tim 1:8).

Conclusion

The Sabbath has been under the constant crossfire of controversy during Christian history, undoubtedly because it summons people to offer to God, not just lip service, but the service of their total being by consecrating the 24 hours of the seventh day to God. It is not surprising that the Sabbath has come under renewed attacks today when most people want holidays to seek for pleasure and profit, and not a Holy Day to seek for the presence of peace of God in their lives.

The renewed attacks against the Sabbath coming from different quarters, including former Sabbatarians, are victimizing not the day itself, but people for whom the day was made. The Sabbath is not in crisis, because it is a divine institution. God is never in crisis. What is in crisis is our tension-filled and restless society that need more than ever before the physical, mental, and spiritual renewal the Sabbath is designed to provide them.

In this cosmic age the Sabbath provides the basis for a cosmic faith, a faith which embraces and unites creation, redemption, and final restoration; the past, the present, and the future; man, nature, and God; this world and the world to come. It is a faith that recognizes God's dominion over the whole creation and human life by consecrating to Him the seventh day; a faith that fulfills the believer's true destiny in time and eternity; a faith that allows the Savior to enrich our lives with a larger measure of His presence, peace, and rest.

END NOTES

1. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theological* (New York, 1947), II, 0, 122 Art. 4, p. 1702.
2. Dale Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Crisis. Transfer/Modification? Reformation/Continuation? Fulfillment/Transformation?* (Applegate, California, 1990), p. 25.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 182, 183, 185.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 247.
6. *Ibid.* p. 110.
7. *Ibid.* p. 141.
8. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids, 1972), vol., II, p. 339.
9. Dale Ratzlaff (note 1), p. 200.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 218.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 219.
12. C. E. B. Cranfield, "St. Paul and the Law," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 17 (March 1964), pp. 43-44.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
14. Walter C. Kaiser, "The Law as God's Gracious Guidance for the Promotion of Holiness," in *Law, The Gospel, and the Modern Christian* (Grand Rapids, 1993), p. 178.
15. Dale Ratzlaff (note 1), p. 174.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
17. *Ibid.*, 173.
18. Douglas R. De Lacey, "The Sabbath/Sunday Question and the Law in the Pauline Corpus," *From Sabbath to Lord's Day. A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. Donald A. Carson (Grand Rapids, 1982), p. 182.

19. Troy Martin, "Pagan and Judeo-Christian Time-keeping Schemes in Galatians 4:10 and Colossians 2:16," *New Testament Studies* 42 (1996), p. 111.

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