

**QUESTION OF THE SABBATH:
ARE CHRISTIANS BOUND TO THE MOSAIC LAW? ©**

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I. Introduction:

Why do not Christians keep the Sabbath since it is part of the Ten Commandments? Why do we believe that it is wrong to murder, to commit adultery, to steal, to covet, and yet we do nothing to maintain the Sabbath? Therefore, are Christian under the Ten Commandments and particularly, are we presently violating the Mosaic Law of the Sabbath?

Those who answer affirmatively to the question that we are to keep the Ten Commandments point out that all of them, except the fourth commandment, are re-stated in the New Testament and therefore, must apply to all Christians.

It has often been said that Christians are released from the Sabbath Commandment because it is the singular command not repeated by Jesus Christ. As a Jew, Jesus Himself was bound to the Mosaic Law and followed it in its entirety without sin. His repeating the Mosaic Law, any law, was the expectation of that particular dispensation. But just because He did not repeat the Sabbath Law in the Four Gospels does not mean that He never repeated it at all. He was a faithful Jew. In fact, I contend that this argument, namely, not following the Sabbath based upon omission, lacks explanatory comprehensive power. Rather, as Jewish or Christian believers in Jesus Christ, my argument is twofold: First, I contend we are not bound to the Sabbath Commandment as stated in the Mosaic Law. And second, we are obligated to sincerely worship God, offering our utmost to God-which involves actively participating in the local church. Therefore, if we stack the following six arguments up using a cumulative case approach, we not only have a better understanding of our obligation to the Mosaic Law and therein, the Sabbath Commandment, but we also be motivated to allow God to enable us to live for Him in the most dynamic ways.

II. Six reasons why we are not obligated to follow the Sabbath Commandment but are commanded to offer God our utmost worship to Him:

First, the Mosaic Law was made between Israel alone and God alone (Ex. 19:3-5). This covenant in no sense superseded or canceled the other Biblical Covenants (e.g., Abrahamic Covenant) but was added as a temporary institution until Christ should come to earth as demonstrated by the First Advent of Jesus Christ (cf.

Gal. 3:19). Both Israel and God bound themselves to certain stipulations of the Mosaic system (Exodus 19-24; Deuteronomy 28-30), which are for them and for them only. Even though the purposes of the Mosaic Law were multifarious, they were given to a redeemed people (Exodus 19-24; Hebrew 11:28-29). The Mosaic Law was terminated with the Christ's death when God tore the veil to the Most Holy Place in the Temple from top down, thus demonstrating that Jesus is that predicted Messiah with whom life, grace, and truth is found (Matthew 27:51). How can that be? Jesus is the image of the invisible God; He is the God-Man, undiminished deity and perfect humanity as predicted in Isaiah 9:6-7.

To be sure, salvation has always been means of faith (Genesis 15:6; Hebrews 11:8-19; John 12:11). The Mosaic Law was based on works, never designed to bring about justification or salvation (Galatians 2:16). Rather, the Mosaic Law was intended to be only a means to an end (Galatians 3:23-25) such as disclosing the holiness of God (1 Peter 1:15-16), sinfulness (Galatians 3:19, 22), the standard of holiness required by those who are in fellowship with God (Psalm 24:35), and preparing the way for ultimate freedom in the Messiah, the final Lamb (Isaiah 52:13-53:12) by making temporary provision for forgiveness of sins, fellowship (Leviticus 1-7), and worship (Leviticus 23).

Like the apostle Paul affirmed in Romans 7, the Mosaic Law is inherently good, urging the Israelites to obey. The Mosaic Law is good because it is sourced in God who is infinitely and perfectly good! But the Mosaic Law by itself could not empower a sinful person to obey. While the Mosaic Law caused frustration, it did not cause death. In fact, the apostle Paul confesses in the same chapter that even the best of good intentions and best effort to obey resulted in failure because in and of himself, he could not defeat sin and do what the Mosaic Law requires. See, the Mosaic Law convinces people of their spiritual deadness (Galatians 2:19). That is why Paul cried out in a state of exhaustion in Romans 7:24-25, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue from this body?" Interestingly, Paul's encounter with Jesus and subsequent conversion to Christianity on the road to Damascus is an answer to this cry for help. How did Jesus answer Paul's prayer? Jesus Himself fulfilled the Mosaic Law because He was the only one who could. Thus, Paul was able to exclaim in Romans 7:25 and Romans 8:1: "I thank God-through Jesus Christ our Lord.... There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus,..."

Second, Jesus Christ fulfilled (Gk. *pleroo*; completed) the Mosaic Law (cf. Matthew 5:17-18). One of the central purposes of the Mosaic Law was to show our need for faith in Jesus Christ. In essence, the Mosaic Law served as a "tutor" to prepare us for deliverance by Jesus Christ. For example, Jesus Christ Himself was the supreme and final payment for our sins (Romans 3:23-25). He secured our redemption by becoming the final and ultimate sacrifice of sin on our behalf (Hebrews 9:12). Jesus met all Old Testament demands and requirements

(Romans 3:21-31). Jesus Christ Himself is our High Priest (Hebrew 7:23-24). No longer do believers look to the Mosaic Priesthood, the Temple, and Jerusalem itself as the center of worship. Rather, Jesus is ever-present; He is our focus and center of all our worship (John 2:19-21; John 4:21-23; Matthew 18:20; Revelation 5). Because of Jesus Christ, all food is now clean. In fact, even Paul chastised Peter for failing to understand this liberating truth of fulfillment (Mark 7:18-19). Jesus obeyed the Mosaic Law perfectly (Matthew 5:19, 20). And lastly, when Jesus returns, He will fulfill all the remaining prophecies of Scripture such as bringing about the fulfillment of the unconditional Biblical Covenants, namely, the Abrahamic Covenant, New Covenant, and Land Covenant (Zephaniah 3:8-20; Revelation 19-20). God will be in our midst and He will comfort His people. Beautifully stated, Zephaniah 3 states:

¹⁶ In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
"Do not fear;
Zion, let not your hands be weak.
¹⁷ The LORD your God in your midst,
The Mighty one, will save;
He will rejoice over you with gladness,
He will quite you with His love,
He will rejoice over you with singing."

In sum, it is by placing one's faith in Jesus Christ that one finds grace, that is, undeserved favor! Grace begins and ends with Jesus Christ. In Galatians 2, Paul writes:

¹⁵ We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

In his excellent book, *The Grace Awakening*, Dr. Charles Swindoll observed:

Grace overshadowed sin, it outranked it and thereby brought hope. Where sin overflowed, grace flooded in. Where sin measurably increased, grace immeasurably increased. Where sin was finite, grace was infinite. Where sin was colossal, grace was super-colossal. Where sin abounds, grace super abounds. The sin identified by the Law in no way stopped the flow of the grace of God. Jesus' death on the cross was the sufficient payment for sin, putting grace into action that was not simply adequate but abundant.¹

¹ Charles R. Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening*, 22.

Third, 2 Corinthians 3:6-13 declares three times that the Mosaic Law is done away or abolished (vv. 7, 11, 13). The participle used in each of these three verses is from the verb *katargeo*, which means to "abrogate, to cancel, to bring to an end." No stronger term could be found to describe the abolition of the Mosaic Law - which includes the Ten Commandments. In fact, *katargeo* is the very word used to describe the destruction of the Antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2:8. Therefore, we are not bound to the letter of the Mosaic Law.

Fourth, when we placed our faith in Jesus Christ, believing that He is the Son of God who died on the cross for our sins and rose bodily from the dead, we were baptized into Jesus' death. As a result of that identification, the Mosaic Law was terminated. Said differently, just as death breaks the marriage bond and frees us to marry another, according to the apostle Paul in Romans 7:1-6, our identification with Jesus Christ's death frees us from the Mosaic Law and places us under a new law, namely, the authority of the "law of the Spirit" (Romans 8:2). Paul puts it this way in Galatians 2:20:

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Therefore, the Mosaic Law no longer has authority over us; Jesus Christ is our authority as the Head of the Church (Ephesians 5:23 cf. Matthew 16:18).

To be sure, the end of the Mosaic Law including the Ten Commandments, does not cancel, change, or nullify one iota of the *eternal moral law of God* lest we think we should be antinomians. Antinomians are lawless people who believe that because Christ has paid the penalty for their sin, they can now live any way they like. One might even think that if the Mosaic Law was terminated and fulfilled in Jesus Christ, that believers now have a license to sin. However, the moral principles behind the Ten Commandments did not begin with Sinai and Moses but are as eternal and immutable as the character of God. The moral principles embodied in the Mosaic Law the Apostle Paul calls, "the righteousness of the law" (Rom. 8:4). He shows that such principles are the goal of the Spirit-directed life in the same context in which he teaches that the believer is not under the Mosaic Law (Rom. 6-8).

See, the moral law of God belongs to all dispensations or ages and its authority extends to all intelligent creatures whether humans or angels. The essence of the eternal moral law is conformity to the character of God as reflected in the statement, "We are to be holy because He is holy" (1 Peter 1:15-16). Likewise, we are called to worship God, offering our utmost to Him. Anything contrary to the character of God is still sin, no matter what dispensation. But in this dispensation

of the church we are under a new authority, namely, the Holy Spirit. Paul states this argument powerfully in Romans 8:1-5:

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. ² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

How can we fulfill this eternal moral law to be like God? Turn to Jesus Christ. Christ alone fulfilled this law; He is the only one who could. His obedience is reckoned unto us who have placed our faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, "For he has made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteous of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Therefore, through Christ and Christ alone we have a perfect standing in Christ-though our actual conduct is often far from perfect. Once again, by means of faith alone in Christ alone, we are crucified with Christ and it is we who no longer live, but Christ lives in us (Galatians 2:20).

Moreover, our sins and imperfections are continually provided for by the advocacy and intercession of Christ (1 John 1:6-2:2), sincere confession of known sins (1 John 1:9), and the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit of God who is conforming us to be more like Him in the details of daily living (2 Corinthians 3:18; John 15). Thus, as Paul states in Galatians 5:16: This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."

This is not to say that the eternal moral law is not the basis of the Mosaic Law. However, only Israel was bound to the Mosaic stipulations of the moral law, which involves certain practical consequences if broken. In fact, the death penalty seems to be mandatory for violation of the first three commandments (e.g., Ex. 22:20; Deut. 27:15; Lev. 24:15, 16); the death penalty for certain overt violations of the remaining seven commandments were given as well (e.g., Num. 15:32-36; Ex. 21:15, 17; Deut. 27:16, 18-21; Matt. 15:3,4; Ex. 21:12; Num. 35; Ex. 21:29; Lev. 20:10; Ex. 21:16, 22:1; Deut. 19:16, 19, 21). No wonder the apostle Paul calls the Mosaic Ten Commandments, "the ministration of death, written and engraved in stones" (2 Cor. 3:7).

See, Israel was called as a unique people group among the other people-groups of the known world to follow the *letter* of the Mosaic Law. But as believers in

Jesus Christ, whether Jew or Gentile believers in Christ in this present dispensation, we are called to yield to the ministry of the Holy Spirit who will bear in and through our lives the fruit of the Spirit as we abide in Jesus Christ in the details of daily living (Romans 8:1-4; Galatians 5: 16-23). Said differently, even if God's people are released from the letter of the Mosaic Law, they are still under subject to Him who is still the same God of the Hebrew Bible.

Fifth, the Jewish Sabbath was the last day of the week or Saturday. This fourth commandment is nowhere affirmed as binding for the new age of grace. As a matter of fact, the Jewish Sabbath is SPECIFICALLY mentioned as one of the ordinances-which is blotted out by the cross. Consider Colossians 2:11-17:

¹¹ In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. ¹³ And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, ¹⁴ having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has nailed it to the cross. ¹⁵ Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. ¹⁶ So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or Sabbaths, ¹⁷ which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

The principle that one day out of seven belongs in a special way to God is re-embodied in the Christian's observance of the first day of the week as the Lord's Day. No specific instruction instituted this new day but its observance seems to have arisen in honor and recognition of the resurrection of Christ. The claim by Seven Day Adventists that the pope changed the day from Saturday to Sunday in 321 A.D. does not bear serious investigation. History shows that Christians observed the first day from apostolic times.

In fact, going to church is a precept Christians should follow as clearly stated in Hebrews 10:24-25. Meditate on these words from the author of the Hebrews:

²⁴ And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, ²⁵ not forsaking the assembly of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

⁴¹ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. ⁴² And they continued

steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. ⁴³ Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, ⁴⁵ and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. ⁴⁶ So continually daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

It is the local church where we receive the preaching of God's Word whereby God uses called men to correct, rebuke, and encourage us with great patience and careful instruction, equipping us with sound doctrine so that we might become all that God has designed us to be, namely, people who intimately exalt, know, pursue, and reflect Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 4:2-4; Hebrews 4:12). The local church, even with all of its flaws and flawed people, is a central place whereby we grow in our sanctification, tasting the goodness of our Lord (1 Peter 2:2), and experiencing many of His spiritual blessings (1 Corinthians 12:12).

It is also the local church whereby we partake of communion, remembering through this precious ordinance, what He has done for us (Luke 22:19 cf. 1 Corinthians 11:26). To neglect communion by forsaking the local assembly says so much about the condition of one's spiritual life!

Moreover, following the example of Jesus, who regularly went to the synagogue (Luke 4:16), and the apostles who established and participated in churches (e.g., Jerusalem Church), we are to regularly, consistently, and diligently corporately worship Him as an expression of our love to Him for the salvation we have received. While not attending church does not make one a Christian, not being involved in a healthy local church will generate greater problems. Said differently, do not pursue the spiritual life alone. We need each other.

Worshipping God corporately not only is a distinguishing mark of a disciple of Jesus Christ, who separates himself or herself from the ordinary daily comings and going of life, but also discloses to all and anticipation and a foreshadowing of our future inheritance we will one day receive (Hebrews 4:4-13). In fact, one day, believers *will* one day give an account to Him and be rewarded accordingly (2 Corinthians 5:9-10; 1 Corinthians 3:9-15; Hebrews 4:13; 2 John 8; Revelation 2-3). Thus, we are called to hold fast to our confession knowing that Jesus is returning to claim and reward His church (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18), and bring forth the millennial kingdom at His Second Coming (Revelation 19-20).

The bottom line is that worshipping God corporately is an expression of loving (*agape*) God from out of our deepest affections (heart), our conscious thought life

(soul), our capacity to think, reason, and deliberate (mind), and our emotional and physical powers (Mark 12:28-34).

And sixth, the penalty for violation of the Mosaic Sabbath law was death. The man found gathering sticks on the Sabbath was stoned to death by the explicit instruction of the God (Numbers 15:32-36). Those who think they are under the Mosaic Sabbath law should realize the awfulness of their position. To maintain the idea that the Sabbath Law abides but its penalties are canceled is an untenable position. But as believers in Christ, we have been redeemed from the curse of the Mosaic Law (cf. Gal. 3:10-25), planted in union with Jesus Christ (Romans 6:5) and called to abide in Christ whereby the righteousness of the Spirit of the law will manifest in and through our lives. Like the Apostle Paul states in 2 Corinthians 3:4-6:

⁴ And we have such trust through Christ toward God. ⁵ Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, ⁶ who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

The letter of the law kills because we all break the law. But as believers who have been given a new heart to love God, a new mind to know God, and a new will to obey God, we are not only free to love our God by serving Him and those He loves, but we are also *enabled* to do so when we align ourselves with Him in intimate fellowship with God (Galatians 6:16-18; Philippians 4:13).

III. Conclusion:

The Mosaic Law included the Ten Commandments was given to Israel alone. In fact, the Mosaic Law was a temporary institution "added" to the Abrahamic Covenant till Christ died on the cross and rose again. Because Jesus Christ became the curse for us on the cross, the curse of following the Mosaic Law was lifted through our faith in Jesus Christ (cf. Deuteronomy 21:23; 27:26; Galatians 3). Therefore, the Mosaic Sabbath Law was done away with the Person of Christ and nowhere are we mandated to specifically follow the Sabbath in the New Testament.

But what undergirds the Mosaic Sabbath Law is the eternal moral principle that we should set apart a portion of our time for the worship and service of God offering our utmost to Him; it doesn't matter what day of the week we should set aside to worship God. However, in keeping with the tradition of the early church that honored and recognized the resurrection of Christ, our Savior, God, and Lord, the history of the church set aside Sundays, the day that Jesus rose bodily from the dead. Never was the Jewish Sabbath or the Lord's Day ever intended to

detract from the broader moral truth that all of the believer's time and service belongs to God.

Therefore, are you worshipping God right now by your words and works? Do your affections desire to honor Him in everything you think, say, and do? I surely hope so. If not, my prayer is that you will invest in Him as much as He has invested in you. Said differently, out of gratitude for the grace you have received, will you not offer your utmost for His Highest? Will you not seize Jesus Christ in the manner that He has seized you?