

The Discerner

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A QUARTERLY EXPOSING
UNBIBLICAL TEACHING & MOVEMENTS

Volume 32, Number 4

October • November • December 2012

Eckankar

Confucianism

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Humanism

Jainism

Judaism

Neopaganism

MOONIES

Universalism

Wicca

Islam

Exposed!

MORMONS

BAHA'I FAITH

Buddhism

Scientology

Satanism

In This Edition:

Office Notes2
RAS Team

Dear Friend3
by Rev. Laurence J. Sutherland

With This Issue4
by Rev. Laurence J. Sutherland

The Sabbath and the
Seventh Day Adventists.....5
by Rev. Steve Lagoon

Obituary for the American Church26
by Mike Breen

QUIZ: Writing and Writers30



*"Hereby know we the spirit of truth
and the spirit of error" 1 John 4:6*

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116 E 2nd St., Suite 102
Chaska, MN 55318
612-331-3342 / 1-800-562-9153
FAX 612-331-3342

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OFFICE NOTES

First, HAPPY NEW YEAR ! May you be blessed and be a blessing to relatives, friends, colleagues, and neighbors this year!

We have a new address for our RAS headquarters: Please note and make this change in your address lists:

Religion Analysis Service, Inc.
Box 206
Chaska, MN 55318

Our telephone number 612-331-3342 and website www.ras.org remain the same.

Chaska is a town southwest of Minneapolis with a population of 22,952.

Thank you for your continued subscription and also for any added donations toward this ministry. God has blessed us in 2012 with many generous gifts that enable us to carry on this work as a ministry. All gifts are tax-deductible.

RAS Team

DEAR FRIEND

What did you think of the Mayan prediction of the end of the world on December 21, 2012? Were you concerned that it might happen or relieved that it didn't happen? If so, why? Don't the Scriptures warn against such predictions? Haven't the multiplied examples throughout church history taught us the futility and folly of such prophecies? I think, for instance, of the great Reformer Martin Luther. He opined that since the heathen were almost ready to conquer Vienna and the Pope in Rome was the Antichrist, the Lord would return in 1534. In America, William Miller, a Baptist minister, calculated that the Lord would return in 1843 and then again in 1844. Most egregious are the predictions by the Jehovah's Witnesses in 1914, 1918, 1925, 1975, etc. We have had the recent apocalyptic doomsday forecast for December, 31, 1999. All these prophecies have miserably failed because they are not biblically substantiated and documented.

The hope of the Christian is not based on the worst or wildest human machinations with their social and political utopias or religious and philosophical musings and speculations. The hope of the Christian is the Blessed Hope (Titus 2:11-14), the glorious, literal, personal, and bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring His believers into everlasting bliss and to establish His eternal kingdom. This is the sure word of prophecy. It is the word of the Lord of Heaven and Earth. God has the last word. And yet we believe that it might be very soon as the Scriptures give us strong indications that portend His coming: Israel is back again in its own land, we are experiencing worldwide cataclysmic events such as wars and rumors of wars, pestilences, disturbances in nature, and spiritual apostasy of great proportions, etc. Without making any foolish and high blown predictions, we are safe to say, because the Bible says so, that the Lord is coming soon. I like the words of the songwriter:

*Jesus is coming to earth again, what if it were today?
Coming in power and love to reign, what if it were today?
Coming to claim His chosen bride, all the redeemed and purified,
Watch, for His coming draweth nigh, what if it were today?*

— “Jesus Is Coming Again,” Leila Morris, 1912

Let us continue to watch, wait, and occupy till He comes.

Laurence J. Sutherland

WITH THIS ISSUE

What about the Seventh-day Adventists? Here and there we see their churches. Generally we hear positive things about them. They are very health-conscious, they are good-givers to charitable purposes, they carry on extensive worldwide mission work, and they love the Bible and are well-versed in prophetic themes. It's the issue of their Sabbath theology that makes it difficult to accept them in the evangelical camp. Our lead article on the SDA by RAS president, Steve Lagoon, deals comprehensively with their Sabbath theology that is clothed in legalism and the so-called "Galatian" error. How serious is this theological diversion from mainstream Evangelicalism? Lagoon "cuts to the chase" and covers the central core arguments of sabbatarian thinking with incisive biblical analyses and corroborating literature. He supplies us with solid answers to this age-old problem of legalism that has occupied exegetes and theologians since the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15.

We are splitting Lagoon's article into two parts; the second part will be in our next issue.

While grazing over literature relating to missiology I came upon our second article. "The Obituary of the American Church", by Mike Breen. Not only is the title eye-catching but the substance provokes us to heart-stopping reflection. This is not only a rhetorical flourish about the status of the American church but a blunt and candid status report as viewed by a leader in the Anglican church. This article should elicit reaction from many readers. Please share your thoughts with us as feedback for our next issue.

The quiz is designed for the reader who is skilled in a number of disciplines – history, languages, archaeology, and religion. If you receive 80% or better, please inform us, and you will be duly rewarded with a modest but challenging booklet.

Laurence J. Sutherland

THE SABBATH AND THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

By Steve Lagoon

As we begin our discussion of the Sabbath question, we do well to heed the wise admonition of former Seventh-day Adventist Dr. Jerry Gladson:

Now it is almost axiomatic that, on biblical matters where there is a diversity of theological opinion, the Bible itself either may be unclear or is capable of more than one honest interpretation. The Sabbath question is a good example of this predicament.¹

With humility and proper caution, we will proceed to examine one of the key teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist church. In order to improve understanding in this article, quotes from Seventh-day Adventist authors and publications will be italicized.

Three Basic Positions on the Sabbath Question

Swartley succinctly states three basic positions on the Sabbath question: “(1) the Sabbath position, the seventh day holy; (2) the Sabbath-Sunday position, one day in seven holy; and (3) the Lord’s day position, all-days-in-one holy.”²

The Lord’s Day Position

We begin by summarizing the last position Swartley described, the Lord’s Day position. This view states that the Sabbath as an institution is no longer in effect for Christians. This is because the fourth commandment formed a central place within the Mosaic Covenant which has been wholly superseded by the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. The Sabbath was among those things that were a shadow that find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:16). Further, this position suggests that the unique day of worship for Christians is Sunday, primarily in honor of the resurrection of Jesus Christ on that day.

About this view Swartley states:

The Sabbath began at the time of Moses; it was and is a Jewish institution. Jesus transcends the Sabbath, declaring himself to be Lord of the Sabbath. The Sabbath’s true intentions are expressed

1 Jerry Gladson, *A Theologian’s Journey: From Seventh-day Adventism to Mainstream Christianity*, Glendale AZ (Life Assurance Ministries, 2000) 319.

2 Willard M. Swartley, *Slavery Sabbath War & Women: Case Issues in Biblical Interpretation*, Scottsdale PA (Herald Press, 1983) 65.

in Jesus' ministry. Hence, the Sabbath has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.³

This is the view that will be advocated in this article.

Sunday-Sabbath Position

The second view commonly held today is often described as transference theology because it is believed that the Sabbath of the Mosaic Law is still in effect, but that the day of honoring the Sabbath has been transferred from Saturday to Sunday for Christians. Gladson identifies this position as "Sunday Sabbatarianism."⁴ Swartley explains this "Sabbath-Sunday Position" quoting Waffle: "The Sabbath as an institution is perpetual . . . it existed before and survives the Jewish Sabbath, and . . . it appears in its most perfect form in the Lord's Day (Sunday)."⁵

Very often a distinction is made between the moral and ceremonial aspects of the Sabbath commandment. The moral aspect of rest and worship on one day in seven is retained for Christian believers while the ceremonial aspect of observing the Sabbath being transferred from Saturday to Sunday. This is a popular and legitimate view among Christians though we find the arguments for the first view more compelling.

Seventh-Day Sabbath Position

The third view we will examine, and the focus of this article, is that advocated by the Seventh-day Adventist denomination which simply affirms that the Sabbath law is still binding on Christians today. In fact, seventh-day advocates believe the Sabbath law has been in force since man's creation and will be throughout all human history. Seventh-day Adventists believe that Sunday worship is not only unscriptural, but is also a most serious violation of God's word.

Gladson informs us: More than forty-denominations, apart from the Seventh-day Adventists, adhere to the seventh-day Sabbath . . . Of more recent origin are the various groups calling themselves 'Messianic Jews,' consisting mainly of converts to Christianity from Judaism who have intentionally revived a form of Jewish-Christianity.⁶ Swartley adds that in addition to the "Seventh-day Adventists and the Seventh-

3 Willard M. Swartley, *Slavery Sabbath War & Women: Case Issues in Biblical Interpretation*, Scottsdale PA (Herald Press, 1983) 66.

4 Jerry Gladson, *A Theologian's Journey: From Seventh-day Adventism to Mainstream Christianity*, Glendale AZ (Life Assurance Ministries, 2000) 320.

5 Willard M. Swartley, *Slavery Sabbath War & Women: Case Issues in Biblical Interpretation*, Scottsdale PA (Herald Press, 1983) 66.

6 Jerry Gladson, *A Theologian's Journey: From Seventh-day Adventism to Mainstream Christianity*, Glendale AZ (Life Assurance Ministries, 2000) 320.

day Baptists, A small group of Sabbatarian Anabaptist in the sixteenth century also held this view.”⁷

The Unique Position of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church

Gladson sums up the Seventh-day Adventist position on the Sabbath:

The Sabbath, for practical purposes, is the sine qua non of the denomination, its principal teaching . . . They believe which day Christians observe—Saturday or Sunday—will eventually become the final, decisive test for the entire world . . . She [Ellen G. White] sees the tables containing the Ten Commandments in heaven, with ‘a halo of glory’ around the Sabbath Commandment . . . She writes ‘I saw that the holy Sabbath is, and will be the separating wall between the true Israel of God and unbelievers; and that the Sabbath is the great question to unite the hearts of God’s dear, waiting saints.’⁸

Indeed, according to the Seventh-day Adventists,

*The Sunday Sabbath must be the mark of the beast . . . Thus God has a seal, which is His Sabbath. The beast has a mark, which is a counterfeit Sabbath. One is the seventh day; the other is the first day. Christendom will at last be divided into just two classes: those who are sealed with the seal of the living God—that is, have His sign, or keep His Sabbath; and those who receive the mark of the beast—that is, have his sign, or keep his counterfeit Sabbath.*⁹

It is important to note that Seventh-day Adventists deny that the mark of the beast is applied to Sunday worshippers today, but will only be true in a future eschatological crisis.¹⁰ Yet, this is a hollow denial in light of Seventh-day Adventists severe judgment of Sunday worship.

Former Seventh-day Adventist Wallace Slattery mentioned the common practice of Sabbath observance amongst Seventh-day Adventists: “Disallowed activities include TV watching, secular radio listening, sports, one’s vocation (with exception of medical services and the ministry), and school study.”¹¹

7 Willard M. Swartley, *Slavery Sabbath War & Women: Case Issues in Biblical Interpretation*, Scottdale PA (Herald Press, 1983) 66.

8 Jerry Gladson, *A Theologian’s Journey: From Seventh-day Adventism to Mainstream Christianity*, Glendale AZ (Life Assurance Ministries, 2000) 321-322. The reference to Ellen Whites comment is: Ellen White, *Early Writings*, pp. 32-33.

9 Uriah Smith, *The Prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation*, Revised and Newly Illustrated, Takoma Park, Washington D.C., Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1944) 614, 672.

10 Uriah Smith, *The Prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation*, Revised and Newly Illustrated, Takoma Park, Washington D.C., Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1944) 615.

11 Wallace D. Slattery, *Are Seventh-Day Adventist False Prophets? A Former Insider Speaks Out*, Phillipsburg NJ (Presbyterian Publishing Company, 1990) 18.

Concerns about Seventh-Day Adventist Legalism

While it is important to understand the unique position of the Seventh-day Adventists, the focus of this article will be specifically on the Sabbath question itself rather than a full rebuttal of their Sabbath teachings. However, what is most concerning about the Seventh-day Adventist position is not the belief in the Saturday Sabbath itself, but the legalism associated with their position and practice. Gladson summed up his concerns this way:

Throughout their history Adventists have had difficulty integrating their obligatory view of the Sabbath with the freedom of the gospel . . . Biblical students who haven't grown up with this claim find it bewildering, for it seems to shift the emphasis of the New Testament from the good news of the Christ-event to an entirely different principle, a specific religious observance. It appears to turn the Christian church back toward a legal form of Christianity out of harmony with the freedom in Christ proclaimed in the gospel . . . To add something to faith in Christ [Sabbath-keeping] as a test or prerequisite for salvation appears to subvert the very gospel itself.¹²

Dale Ratzlaff, also a former Seventh-day Adventist, agrees: "The SDA 'traditional evangelistic method,' as mentioned above, undermines the gospel. It takes the gospel out of the center and makes Sabbath observance 'the testing truth.'"¹³

Illustrating the Seventh-Day Adventist Sabbath Legalism

In this section we will document the Seventh-day Adventist legalism concerning Sabbath keeping by examining quotes from their Sabbath School lesson Quarterly. Notice that the issue of observing Saturday (Sabbath) or Sunday (the Lord's day) is not merely taught to be a matter of conscience as the apostle Paul taught that it should be (Romans 14:4-5; Colossians 2:16). Rather, the Seventh-day Adventists assert that Sabbath keeping is a necessity for a good relationship with God. Consider then the following quotes from the Seventh-day Adventists Sabbath School publication *Christ and the Sabbath*:

When a Christian knows the Sabbath truth, but still keeps Sunday, whom is he obeying in this respect? Many Sunday keepers honestly think that they are obeying Christ because he arose from the dead on this day . . . When a Christian keeps Sunday after he has been enlightened about it, he is obeying the apostate power . . . He is honoring the papacy above the

12 Jerry Gladson, *A Theologian's Journey: From Seventh-day Adventism to Mainstream Christianity*, Glendale AZ (Life Assurance Ministries, 2000) 325, 339.

13 Dale Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Crisis*, Revised Edition, Glendale AZ (Life Assurance Ministries, 1990, 1995)302.

*Lord Jesus Christ.*¹⁴

*“In direct opposition, the god of this world has erected a sign inscribed, ‘Sunday is the Lord’s day’”*¹⁵

*“The observance of the seventh day is one step in our accepting Christ . . . Christ has appointed the keeping of the seventh day as a sign whereby we honor and worship Him as our creator and savior.”*¹⁶

*“To dishonor or repudiate the Sabbath is to dishonor and repudiate Him as our creator and savior.”*¹⁷

*“Thus Sabbath keeping is a distinguishing mark between true and false worship.”*¹⁸

*“Every soul settles his eternal destiny, for heaven or hell, by whether his faith in Christ leads him to choose to obey Christ . . . This issue of whether a person keeps the seventh day or the first means far more than whether a person rests on Saturday or Sunday. It involves a choice between acceptance of the rightful supremacy of the Son of God over one’s life and submission to the assumed supremacy of the papal power. It means a decision for or against Christ as our supreme Lord.”*¹⁹

*“The substitution of any other day than the last day of the week for the Sabbath is disobedience to our Lord Jesus Christ. This difference between keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, when we perceive its validity, and a man-made Sabbath on any of the other six days is the vital difference between obedience to the Lord and disobedience to Him. This involves one’s eternal destiny.”*²⁰

*“What greater promise could God make to those who hallow His Sabbath than to give them the heritage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob . . . How much is it worth? What an encouragement for every true Sabbath keeper! ‘It means eternal salvation to keep the Sabbath holy unto the Lord.’—*Testimonies*, Vol. 6, p. 356.”*²¹

14 Christ and the Sabbath, Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly, July-August-September, Mountain View CA (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1972)104.

15 Christ and the Sabbath, Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly, July-August-September, Mountain View CA (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1972) 5.

16 Christ and the Sabbath, Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly, July-August-September, Mountain View CA (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1972)10.

17 Christ and the Sabbath, Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly, July-August-September, Mountain View CA (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1972)13.

18 Christ and the Sabbath, Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly, July-August-September, Mountain View CA (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1972) 3. It should be noted that this quote is not in an eschatological context.

19 Christ and the Sabbath, Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly, July-August-September, Mountain View CA (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1972) 51.

20 Christ and the Sabbath, Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly, July-August-September, Mountain View CA (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1972) 54.

21 Christ and the Sabbath, Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly, July-August-September, Mountain View CA (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1972) 75

The above quotations are truly alarming and it cannot be denied that they speak to a spirit of extraordinary legalism. Amazingly, Sabbath keeping is said to be “*one step in our accepting Christ,*” and to “*repudiate the Sabbath is to . . . repudiate Him as our creator and savior.*” Indeed, the decision to observe the Sabbath is “*a decision for or against Christ as our supreme Lord,*” and that “*It means eternal salvation to keep the Sabbath.*”

It is interesting that in talking with Seventh-day Adventists, they will sometimes try to minimize their judgment of Christians who do not keep the Sabbath by a sort of ignorance is bliss argument. In an effort to avoid directly condemning others, they will grant that many dishonor the Sabbath out of ignorance. Of course, they meticulously avoid stating what the consequences are for those who have looked into the issue and simply reject the Seventh-day Adventist position. Nevertheless, the foregoing makes it clear that rejection of the Sabbath is a matter “that involves one’s eternal destiny.”

Levels of Legalism

There are certainly levels or degrees of legalism. In the most extreme case something is substituted for the gospel and claimed to be necessary for salvation. Paul condemned in the strongest terms possible those who added works of the law to the gospel message (Galatians 1:8-9; 3:1-5; Ephesians 2:8-9).

Another level of legalism exists when one is judgmental of others in areas that should be matters of conscience and where Christians should agree to disagree. Often such legalists go so far as questioning the status of Christians with whom they disagree. Sadly, as the above quotes have demonstrated, Seventh-day Adventism is guilty of both types of legalism.

Tracing the Sabbath in Biblical History from Creation to the Mosaic Law

We begin our examination of the Sabbath in the Old Testament in Genesis, the book of beginnings. Genesis 2:1-3 states:

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

From this passage, Seventh-day Adventists assert that from the time of creation the Sabbath was instituted perpetually for all mankind.

For instance, their publication *Questions on Doctrine* states, “*So the Sabbath, established in Eden, was kept by the patriarch, prophet, and people of God throughout the centuries of pagan darkness.*”²²

In reaction to this claim, Dressler states: “Genesis 2 does not mention the word ‘Sabbath’ . . . There is no reference to Sabbath here. Genesis 2 does not speak about a religious cult feast day or any institution at all. There is no direct command that the seventh day should be kept in any way.”²³ Theodore Epp agrees: “It cannot be overemphasized, however, that this was God’s rest. No obligation on man’s part to keep the Sabbath is even implied in this passage [Gen 2:3].”²⁴

Against the claim that righteous men from creation to Moses kept the Sabbath, Richard W. De Haan quoted Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer’s observation: ‘It is incredible that this great institution of the sabbath could have existed during all these centuries and there be no mention of it in the Scriptures dealing with that time.’²⁵

Charles Feinberg notes that the seventh day of creation week was about God’s rest: “It will be noted that there is no hint that God gave this Sabbath to man. He alone rested . . . the original Sabbath could not logically have been given to man, because as yet he had not labored.”²⁶

Marriage and the Sabbath in Eden?

Seventh-day Adventist George Vandeman argued that just as marriage was instituted in Eden, so also was the Sabbath, and hence both were to be perpetual in nature:

*“He gave the Sabbath along with marriage, and the Sabbath is no more Jewish than is marriage. The Sabbath and marriage, two roses plucked from the Garden of Eden, have come down to us from a sinful world. And the enemy of God is determined to distort and destroy both.”*²⁷

We have already shown that there was simply no command whatsoever to observe the Sabbath in Eden (or in Genesis). But for the sake of argument, it must be remembered that along with the marriage mandate (Genesis 2:18-25), was also the mandate to procreate, fill the earth, and subdue it (Genesis 1:28).

22 Seventh-day Adventist Answer Questions on Doctrine: An Explanation of Certain Major Aspects of Seventh-Day Adventist Belief, Washington D.C. (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1957) 151.

23 Harold H. P. Dressler, *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation*, D.A. Carson Editor, Grand Rapids MI (The Zondervan Corporation, 1982) 28

24 Theodore H. Epp, *The Sabbath or the Lord’s Day: Which?*, Lincoln NE (Back to the Bible, The Good News Broadcasting Association, Inc., 1958, 1986) 4.

25 Richard W. De Haan, *Why Christians Worship on Sunday*, Grand Rapids MI (Radio Bible Class, 1974) 3.

26 Charles L. Feinberg, *The Sabbath and the Lord’s Day*, Fourth Edition, Whittier CA (Emeth Publications, 1957) 12.

27 George Vandeman, *Planet in Rebellion*, Nashville TN (Southern Publishing Association, 1960) 284.

If, as Seventh-day Adventists argue, the Sabbath as a creation mandate was perpetual, then we must ask if the command to procreate and fill the earth was also perpetual? If, as they teach, they are perpetual, then the use of birth control is also a sin. This would directly contradict the Seventh-day Adventist's position approving of birth control in marriage. It is also interesting that the command to procreate and fill the earth is repeated to Noah after the flood, yet no similar institution or re-institution of the Sabbath command is provided, which casts doubt on the claim that it had been a perpetual institution since creation.

The Sabbath as a Sign for Israel

If the observance of the Sabbath was a universal command for all mankind since creation, how could it also be a distinctive sign for Israel as the Scriptures declare?

“It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested”(Exodus 31:17).

We see the same truth in Ezekiel: “I am the LORD your God; follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. **Keep my Sabbaths holy, that they may be a sign between us**” (Ezekiel 20:19-20). Further, if as the Seventh-day Adventists maintain, the Gentiles were to keep the Sabbath since creation, were they now expected to drop Sabbath keeping, so that it could serve as a special sign between God and Israel?

Along the same lines, if the Sabbath was already being observed since creation, why did it have to be given to Israel after the exodus? The Scriptures make it clear that the Sabbath was a new thing given to Israel in the Sinai. Through Moses, the Lord says: “Bear in mind that the LORD has given **you** the Sabbath” (Exodus 16:29).

Nehemiah states the same truth: “You came down on Mount Sinai; you spoke to them from heaven. You **gave them** regulations and laws that are just and right, and decrees and commands that are good. **You made known to them your holy Sabbath** and gave them commands, decrees and laws through your servant Moses” (Nehemiah 9:13-14).

Again the Lord said through Ezekiel, “Therefore I led them out of Egypt and brought them into the desert. I gave them my decrees and made known to them my laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. Also I **gave them my Sabbath** as a sign between us so they would know that I the Lord made them holy” (Ezekiel 20:10-12).

These Scriptures make it clear that the Sabbath was a new command for Israel and not a perpetual command being observed throughout the

world. This further establishes that the Sabbath is a uniquely Jewish institution.

The Sabbath and the Mosaic Law

The first mention of the Sabbath in the Bible is in Exodus 16 which describes the time just after Israel's exodus from Egypt and just before receiving the law at Sinai. In the context of commands concerning the gathering of manna:

'This is what the Lord commanded [to Moses]: 'Tomorrow is to be a day of Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.' So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. 'Eat it today,' Moses said, 'because today is a sabbath to the Lord. You will not find any of it on the ground today. Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any' (Exodus 16:23-26).

Some point out that these commands concerning the Sabbath were technically before the giving of the Mosaic Law which occurred a short time later, and suppose that this shows the perpetual nature of the Sabbath. However, the context makes it clear that this is in fact the beginning of the giving of the Mosaic Law. Since they are laws given to Moses and Israel in Sinai by God, it seems obvious that they form part of the Mosaic Law.

Exodus 31 provides a full description of God's institution of the Sabbath for Israel:

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy. "Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it is to be put to death; those who do any work on that day must be cut off from their people. For six days work is to be done, but the seventh day is a day of Sabbath rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day is to be put to death. The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed'(Exodus 31:12-17).

The command is clearly to Israel and not to the nations. Indeed, it is

a sign distinguishing Israel from the nations since only they keep the Lord's Sabbath.

The Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments (sometimes called the Ten Words or the Decalogue) are stated in two places in the Law, Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, and it is interesting how they each have a slightly different emphasis.

The more well-known version from Exodus first:

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy (Exodus 20:8-11).

The Sabbath is primarily a day of rest, not only for Israelites, but for their servants and even their animals. As a template for the Sabbath, the Lord looks back to His own rest on the seventh-day of creation week, and commands Israel to follow His example. For the Israelites under the Mosaic Law, the Lord had blessed the Seventh-day and made it holy.

Some Sabbatarians object noting that the fourth commandment says, "Remember the Sabbath day" (Exodus 20:8). Doesn't that imply that it was known before? But the emphasis is not on the past, but is instead focused upon the ongoing responsibility to observe, and not forget, the Sabbath as they live their lives from week to week.²⁸

The second stating of the Sabbath in the Ten Commandments is in Deuteronomy:

Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has

²⁸ D. M. Canright, *Seventh-Day Adventism Renounced: After An Experience of Twenty-Eight Years by A Prominent Minister And Writer Of That Faith*, New York (Fleming H. Revell Company, 1889, 1914) 250.

commanded you to observe the Sabbath day (Deuteronomy 5:12-15).

What is noteworthy here is that rather than looking back to God's rest on the seventh day of creation week, Israel is reminded of their slavery in Egypt, a time when Israel knew no rest. With the Sabbath, Israel would now find rest. They would find rest each Sabbath day, they would find rest in the Promised Land, and ultimately, they would find rest in whom the Sabbath pointed to, Jesus Christ.

Canright also observes: "One reason given why they should keep it [the Sabbath] was because they had been delivered out of Egypt. Of course they would not keep it till the reason existed for keeping it."²⁹ In other words, how can one argue that the Sabbath was a perpetual commandment for men since creation when God states that it is a memorial of their recent escape from slavery in Egypt?

Jesus and the Sabbath

As we move into the New Testament, we must keep in mind that it is a time of transition. Jesus' ministry occurred while still living under the Mosaic dispensation, yet the grounds were being prepared for the coming of the Church age.

Seventh-day Adventists note that Jesus Christ regularly kept the Sabbath, and suppose from this that Christians must do likewise as their master. Luke tells us that "On the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom" (Luke 4:16). Of course, Jesus kept the Sabbath since He was a Jew living under the Mosaic Law. The apostle Paul stated: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law"(Galatians 4:4-5).

Therefore, it should not be a surprise that as a Jew living under the law, Christ observed the Sabbath. However, Jesus never commanded Christians to observe the Sabbath. Furthermore, if the fact that Christ regularly observed the Sabbath means Christians must also, then consistency demands that Christians should also observe all aspects of the Mosaic Law, as Christ Himself did.

The Sabbath for Man!

The Gospel of Mark records these words of Jesus about the Sabbath: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath"(Mark 2:27). Seventh-day Adventists suggest that this shows the universal applicability of the Sabbath since Jesus said it was for man or mankind

²⁹ D. M. Canright, *Seventh-Day Adventism Renounced: After An Experience of Twenty-Eight Years by A Prominent Minister And Writer Of That Faith*, New York (Fleming H. Revell Company, 1889, 1914) 256.

and not just for the Jews.

However, in this account, Jesus was not arguing the extent to which the Sabbath command applied to the peoples of the world, but rather He was arguing about the purpose of the Sabbath. And that purpose was to help and not to harm those who observed it. In the context, the Jews were not objecting to Jesus bringing the Sabbath to Gentiles, an idea simply foreign to the setting of the passage. Rather, He was showing the Pharisees that they were actually missing the real purpose of the Sabbath by stridently enforcing their rules at the expense of the needs of hurting people.

Matthew 5:17-20

In response to non-sabbatarians, Seventh-day Adventists will often point to Jesus words in Matthew 5:17-20 to prove that the Ten Commandments, and particularly the Sabbath, are still binding for Christians today.

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen; will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:17-20).

But appealing to this passage in support of the continuing observance of the Sabbath proves too much. D. A. Carson shows why:

Certainly the phrase ‘an iota or a dot’ excludes any interpretation of the passage that claims that only ‘moral’ law is in view. . . it must be vigorously insisted that sabbatarian appeal to the eternal validity of the Old Testament law - including Sabbath law - on the basis of Matthew 5:17-20 bristles with problems. If ‘abolish’ in 5:17 is given absolute force, for example, consistency demands the conclusion that our Lord’s abolition of the food laws was a mistake.³⁰

In verse 17, when Jesus uses the phrase “the Law or the Prophets,” it refers to the whole of the law. There is no justification to assume

30 D. A. Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation*, D.A. Carson Editor, Grand Rapids MI (The Zondervan Corporation, 1982) 79.

that Jesus was referring only to moral aspects of the law. D. A. Carson makes this point: “For that is what ‘Law or the Prophets’ here means: the Scriptures. The disjunctive ‘or’ makes it clear that neither is to be abolished”³¹

In other words, if one wants to argue that the Sabbath is still binding for Christians today based on this passage, consistency demands that the entire Mosaic Law is still binding for Christians today, not only moral aspects of the law, but ceremonial and civil aspects as well, all of it!. “Not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear.”

Jesus’ point then is that He didn’t abolish the law as though it had no purpose, but rather, by His death and resurrection, He fulfills all that the law pointed to. Consider this analogy: When someone makes the final payment on a car they are purchasing and receives the pink slip, the contract is fulfilled. All the payments that were made were made with the purpose that one day the purchaser would become the owner, and no further payments would be needed.

On the cross, Jesus satisfied all the demands of the law and purchased eternal life for all who place their faith and trust in Him. The payment has been made; it is finished. We don’t have to satisfy the demands of the law anymore, because Jesus has met them in our behalf. We can learn much from the Mosaic Law, but because of Christ’s sacrifice, we are not under its demands, and that includes the Sabbath law.

Now let’s take the analogy one step further. After a while, the owner of the car decides to give it to his son. The son would appreciate the car that much more when he sees all the payments his father made and he would be thankful that he won’t have to pay anything himself. In the same way, Christians can read from the Mosaic Law and notice all of its demands, and yet be thankful that on the cross Christ Jesus has relieved us of the yoke of the Law. This is at the heart of the apostle Paul’s message:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:1-4).

31 D. A. Carson, *Matthew, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Grand Rapids MI (Zondervan, 1984)142.

Matthew 24:20

Seventh-day Adventists point to Jesus' words in the Olivet Discourse about difficulties believers will encounter having to flee on the Sabbath during a future eschatological crisis. Jesus said: "Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath" (Matthew 24:20).

However, we should note that this verse contains no command to observe the Sabbath. It does show that during a future crisis it would be difficult for believers to flee, if necessary, on the Sabbath. This is true, for among other reasons, the city gates are usually closed on the Sabbath, hindering an emergency exit.

Scholars are divided over their interpretation of the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21) depending on their eschatological systems of interpretation. However, it seems clear that there is an initial fulfillment of Jesus' predictions in the Olivet Discourse in the events surrounding the Jewish revolt from Rome and the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70.

Jesus was quite correct that the Sabbath would still be observed at this time, not only by Jews in general, but indeed, by most Jewish Christians living in Israel (who also celebrated Christian worship on Sunday). History shows that Jesus's words in Matthew 24:16 about Christians fleeing to the mountains was fulfilled in an exodus of Christians to Pella. Keener stated: "Early Christian tradition indicates that the Jerusalem Christians fled to Pella at the base of the mountains to the north."³²

The foregoing shows that while the Sabbath was still being observed up to the time of the Jewish wars and Titus' destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70, yet there is no suggestion or command that Christians are obligated to observe the Sabbath.

The Sabbath and the Apostolic Church

Just as Seventh-day Adventists appeal to Christ's words in Matthew 5:17-20 to suggest the continuing validity of the law including the Sabbath, they also point to many other passages in the New Testament that they also interpret as proving the continuing validity of the Law (and the Sabbath). And the same answer applies to them as applied to Matthew 5:17-20. If one wants to argue that the Mosaic Law is applicable to Christians, they cannot arbitrarily keep some and reject others as though the Law was so much silly putty to bend and shape as they would.

³² Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary—New Testament*, Downers Grove IL (InterVarsity Press, 1993) 113.

The Commandments

For example, in most places in which the New Testament refers to the need to keep commandments, Seventh-day Adventists, in almost a knee-jerk reaction, assume the biblical author is speaking about the Ten Commandments, and therefore assume the Law (along with the Sabbath commandment) is still in force for Christians.

For instance, several times in his first epistle, the apostle John speaks of the need for believers to keep the Lord's commands: "We know we have come to know him if we obey his commands . . . The man who says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3-4). But is this a reference to the commandments in the Mosaic Law, and particularly the Ten Commandments?

Canright observes³³ that Seventh-day Adventists read the Ten Commandments and the Law into these passages. He notes that we should place more value on how John himself defines what he means by commandments in the very same epistle and then quotes 1 John 3:23: "And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us."

John shows the same truth in his gospel. He quotes Jesus words to His apostles that "If you love me, you will obey my commands" (John 14:15). Is Jesus referring to the Ten Commandments? John suggests otherwise. Jesus repeats the command to obey His commands in John 15:10 and then defines it in the very context: "My command is this: love each other as I have loved you." To emphasize it, a short time later Jesus again says, "This is my command: love each other" (John 15:17). Jesus could not possibly be referring back to the Ten Commandments, because He said it is "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34). Jesus, then, is not acting to place His disciples under the yoke and bondage of the Law, but rather was emphasizing a new ethic for His followers, the "law of love" or the "law of Christ."

James 2:10 and the Place of the Law

Ellen G. White stated:

Whether this be accomplished by casting aside the law altogether, or by rejecting one of its precepts, the result will be ultimately the same. He that offends 'in one point,' manifests contempt for the whole law; his influence and example are on the side of transgression; he becomes

33 D. M. Canright, *Seventh-Day Adventism Renounced: After An Experience of Twenty-Eight Years by A Prominent Minister And Writer Of That Faith*, New York (Fleming H. Revell Company, 1889, 1914) 392-393.

'guilty of all.' James 2:10.³⁴

Ellen White quoted from James 2:10 to support her belief in the continuing validity and binding nature of the Sabbath for Christians. By rejecting Sabbath-keeping, argued Mrs. White, Christians were in effect, guilty of breaking the whole law. Let us see the passage in context:

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:8-13).

It is easy to see why some think that James affirms that Christians are under the Mosaic Law and will be judged by it. But several points must be made.

First, we must understand why James would refer to the Law if Christians are not under it. It must be remembered that the only Scriptures the apostolic church had were the books of the Old Testament. Eventually, the apostolic letters would be gathered together to form the New Testament. While Christians were not directly under the authority of the Mosaic Law (as Israel was), yet the Law indeed had a place in the life of the Church. The apostles used the example of the Israelites to teach important truths to the Christian Church. For instance, Paul said:

Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: ‘The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry,’ We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test Christ, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come (1 Corinthians 10:6-11).

Paul distinguishes between Israel and the Christian Church, and says that what happened to Israel was written for the benefit of the church.

³⁴ Ellen White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan: The Conflict of the Ages in the Christian Dispensation*, Omaha NE (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1888, 1950) 582.

So, despite the fact that we are not under the same covenant as Israel was (Mosaic versus the New Covenant), yet Christians have much to learn by studying the Mosaic Covenant. Paul taught the same truth in the Book of Romans: “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us” (Romans 15:4). So even though Christians are not under the law as such, it is quite proper for us to learn from it, or to teach from it as James did. Indeed, studying the Law reminds Christians of the importance of physical rest.

It must also be remembered that though we are not under the Mosaic Law, yet, the moral or ethical code for Christians is quite similar to it. For instance, of the Ten Commandments, nine are repeated for Christians in the New Testament. An analogy may help to illustrate how different moral codes were in force during different dispensations, and why the Sabbath could be in force for Jews and not for Christians.

A Dispensational Analogy

A couple adopted a child and raised it. The child got in a fair bit of trouble, but the parents managed somehow to raise him and set him off to a good start in life. They adopted a second son and decided they needed to lay down the law right from the start with this child. They hung up a set of rules for the child in his bedroom and they were very strict in enforcing them. Unfortunately the child was constantly breaking these rules and creating problems in the home. Finally, they adopted a third and final son. When he moved into his bedroom, he saw the rules for the previous boy hanging on the wall. He asked his parents about them and they told the boy that those rules were for the previous son and didn't apply to him. Instead, they gave him a new scaled back and simpler set of rules.

The meaning of the analogy is as follows. The first child represents people living before the time of the Mosaic Law. And just because the Mosaic Law had not been given does not mean that there were not moral standards based on God's own character.

The second child represents Israel under the Mosaic Law. All the rules only put on display Israel's inability to keep them. Though animal sacrifices are made as a temporary cover for Israel's sins, they all ultimately point to the atoning sacrifice of Christ which will pay for sins once and for all.

The third child represents Christians under the New Covenant. Like the child who sees the rules that were for the child before him, Christians study the Mosaic Law and learn how far short they fall of God's moral requirements which drive them to the saving arms of Jesus Christ.

Paul agrees with this saying “So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ” (Galatians 3:24). Set free from the demands of the Mosaic Law, Christians, under the law of love and led by the Holy Spirit obey God’s moral requirements out of love.

Also, although there are a lot fewer rules for the third child than there were for the second, yet many of the rules applied to both. The church is not required to obey all the commandments of the Mosaic Law any more than the third son needed to obey all the rules meant for the second child. For instance, Christians are bound to obey nine out of the Ten Commandments since they are repeated in the New Testament for Christians. But since the fourth commandment concerning the Sabbath is not repeated as a command for Christians, they do not need to observe it. But the difference between them is actually greater than just the one concerning the Sabbath since by most counts the Mosaic Law contained 613 commandments.

Yet, some struggle with the idea that there are different moral codes in different dispensations. But consider the following. In at least the first generation, Adam and Eve’s children had to marry each other. Also, Abraham married his half-sister (Genesis 20:12). Neither is condemned despite that marrying a sibling was prohibited in the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 27:22).

The foregoing shows that James’ appeal to the Law in exposing the hypocrisy of those who were showing favoritism to the rich in no way implies that Christians were bound by that law. But James does show that if they were being judged by the Mosaic Law, they were guilty of breaking the whole thing, just as a rock striking a window in one place can shatter the whole window. But thankfully, because of God’s grace, they were to be judged instead by the royal law of love.

Further, it would be unthinkable that the apostle James would teach that Christians were under the Mosaic Law when he was a leader at the Jerusalem Council described in Acts 15 in which the apostle Peter stated concerning the Mosaic Law: “Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?”(Acts 15:10).

Romans 3:31

But what about New Testament passages that appear to teach that the Mosaic Law is still in force? For instance, Seventh-day Adventists appeal to Romans 3:31: “Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.” This passage, however, does not state that the Law is still in force for Christians, but rather, by his death and resurrection Christ fulfilled or upheld all that the Law pointed to.

This is in agreement with what Paul had just stated a bit earlier in the same letter: “But now righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe” (Romans 3:21-22). So Paul is in agreement with what Jesus said in Matthew 5:17-20 that Jesus did not come to set aside the Law but to fulfill it.

The Law Not Applicable for Christians

The evidence that the Law is no longer binding for Christians is overwhelming. Let’s review it, beginning with Paul’s comments about the Law.

Romans 6:14 says: “For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.” Likewise, in Romans 7:4, Paul stated: “So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead.”

Continuing the thought a couple of verses later, Paul stated: “But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.” Clearly, Christians are not under the law having been released from it. We have been set free by Christ: “because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death”(Romans 8:2). Romans 10:4 says: “Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”

1 Corinthians 9:20-21 is a key verse in which the apostle Paul explained his understanding of the Mosaic Law’s place in his life:

To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law.

Paul very clearly believed that he was not bound by the Law, yet for the sake of ministry to Jews, he lived as though he was. Though he was free from the Law, yet in order to keep doors of ministry open to Jews, he abided by it.

In 2 Corinthians 3:7-11 Paul stated:

Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it

was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

Clearly, that which was “engraved in letters on stone” were the Ten Commandments, and as Paul wrote, they were “fading away.”

Yes, there was a purpose for the Law. Paul stated: “What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator” (Galatians 3:19). But, says Paul: “Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law” (Galatians 3:25).

Recalling that Peter refers to the Law as a yoke (Acts 15:10), Paul stated: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1). Indeed, a bit later Paul says, “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law” (Galatians 5:18).

Again, Paul taught that Christ abolished the law with his death on the cross: “By abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace”(Ephesians 2:15). Notice that Paul includes among those things abolished, the commandments. He makes a similar point in Colossians:

Having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross (Colossians 2:14-15).

Theologian Charles Ryrie explains the nature of the Christian’s relationship to the Old Covenant and the Mosaic Law:

And today we live under the law of Christ (Gal 6:2) or the law of the Spirit of life in Christ (Rom. 8:2) . . . Now the Mosaic Law was done away in its entirety as a code. It has been replaced by the law of Christ. . . All the laws of the Mosaic code have been abolished because the code has . . . A particular law that was part of the Mosaic code is done away; that same law, if part of the law of Christ, is binding.³⁵

³⁵ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, Wheaton IL (Victor Books, 1986) 305.

The Book of Hebrews and the Status of the Law.

Paul is not the only New Testament author that taught that Christians are no longer bound by the Mosaic Law. Notice the important point about the status of the Law by the author of Hebrews:

If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood—and indeed the law given to the people established that priesthood—why was there still need for another priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? For when the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also (Hebrews 7:11-12).

Charles Ryrie comments on this passage:

In Hebrews 7:11-12 the writer demonstrates the superiority of the priesthood of Melchizedek over that of Aaron. He concludes that if the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood could have brought perfection to the people. There would have been no need for another priesthood based on the Melchizedek. And that change of priesthood necessitated a change in the Law. In other words, if the Law has not been done away, then neither has the Levitical priesthood, and Christ is not our High Priest today. But if Christ is our High Priest, then the Law can no longer be operative and binding on us.³⁶

The author of Hebrews continually emphasized this theme. He stated: “The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God” (Hebrews 7:18-19). He (if indeed it was a he who wrote Hebrews) powerfully and forcefully taught that the Old Covenant and the Mosaic Law are superseded by the New Covenant:

But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises. For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another . . . By calling this covenant ‘new’, he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear (Hebrews 8:6-7, 13).

The foregoing examination makes it clear that the teaching of the New Testament is that Christians are simply not bound by the Mosaic Law and the Old Covenant, since they have been superseded by the New Covenant in Christ.

Continued Next Issue

³⁶ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, Wheaton IL (Victor Books, 1986) 304.

OBITUARY FOR THE AMERICAN CHURCH

By Mike Breen, Anglican Pastor

From time to time I will have the people I'm discipling write out their own pastoral obituary. I ask them to write out how our enemy would take them out, rendering them unable to serve their family and communities. As you can imagine, the answers vary, but it always serves as a really helpful exercise as they are forced to confront issues of character, etc.

Taking the same exercise I've used with pastors, for the past year I've been thinking how the enemy would/might be trying to take down the American church. Now what I've noticed is that the original temptations Jesus faced (which can best be boiled down to Appetite, Affirmation and Ambition) are somehow warped and insinuated into the culture. As each culture is distinct and different, a smart enemy would come at each culture in subtle ways, tempting them in ways they don't see or expect, and with things that would look different from culture to culture.

For instance, the issues the European church deals with are actually quite different than the ones the American church is dealing with... even though often times they are put under the same broad umbrella of "Western Church." Sure, there are some similarities, but the attack is different. More nuanced.

But those original temptations of Appetite, Affirmation and Ambition are slowly insinuating themselves into everything we call CHURCH. We just often don't recognize it or see it.

And so this is how, if our enemy gets his way, the American church could be taken out:

A culture of CELEBRITY (affirmation)
A culture of CONSUMERISM (appetite)
A culture of COMPETITION (ambition)

Celebrity

The idea of celebrity is deeply woven into American culture and values. All you have to do is look at the ridiculous nature of Reality TV and you see how Americans are constantly craving celebrity (either to be a celebrity or to find the next celebrity and stalk their every move). Now there is nothing dark or sinister about "celebrity" in and of itself. You can't find an argument that says Jesus wasn't a huge celebrity in his day.

However, there is a difference between being famous and being significant. If Jesus was famous, it's because he was doing something significant. The problem with many pastors is they make decisions, develop personas and define success from the lens of what will make them a celebrity/famous (even if they don't know it or see that they are doing this). So in American church culture, it's pretty easy to become a celebrity: Grow a HUGE church. Now all in all, it's not terribly difficult to grow to be a giant church if you have the right tools at your disposal...but that doesn't mean the ends justify the means of getting there.

For instance, though Jesus was a celebrity in his day, he was willing to say things that ran people off in droves. In fact, the book of Mark chronicles the way (from about the mid-point of the book on) how people left Jesus to where, at the end, virtually no one was left. No one wants to be associated with him for fear of the consequences. That's not something you see too often in American churches.

I suspect it's because riven deeply into the American psyche is the desire to be a celebrity. And American pastors are very susceptible to this. Many subtle things happen in people who desire to this kind of celebrity status:

They can disengage community and isolate themselves, setting themselves up for moral failure.

They can make decisions that are numbers driven and not always kingdom driven.

They can skew to a shallow understanding of the gospel as opposed to a holistic one that leads people to discipleship.

They can put the good of their church (their personal kingdom) over the good of God's Kingdom.

Question: In what ways are your decisions made by a subtle undercurrent of ambition and a hope for celebrity?

Consumerism

We live in a culture that revolves around consuming.

Every TV commercial, every store, every credit card company, every bank, every TV show or movie...every everything is tailored to fit your desires, needs or personal preference. We are easily infuriated when things don't happen exactly as we want them. We exist in a place that implicitly says this: "We are here to serve you and meet your every whim and desire. Let us take care of you." What's more, it's never enough.

Eventually the house or the car get older and we want new ones. The clothes aren't as fashionable and we want something more in style. That restaurant is getting boring, we must find another. And on and on and on. This is how we are wired to think in the United States. And it is all backed up by this rationale: You're worth it. You deserve to have what you want, how you want it, when you want it. And for the most part, the church plays the exact same game.

We do as best we can to provide as comfortable an experience as humanly possible, using every means at our disposal to attract them in (and then keep them in). So we tailor what we do around their wants and desires. That's Marketing 101, right? The problem is at the end of the day, the only thing that Jesus is counting is disciples. That's it. He doesn't seem to care too much about converts, attendance, budgets or buildings. It's about disciples. And, by nature, disciples are producers, not consumers.

Yet most of our churches are built around feeding consumers. I'd argue 90% of the church's time, energy and resources are linked to this. But the issue is this: The means you use to attract people to you are usually the means you must use to keep them. In other words, if you use consumerism to attract them to your church, it often means you must continue using it to keep them...or else they will find another church that will meet their "needs." And yet...that consumer mentality is antithetical to the gospel and to the call of Discipleship.

Disciples aren't consumers, they are producers. Jesus cared about disciples more than anything else.

Question: In what ways is your church community using consumerism as the means to draw people to a gospel that is, in and of itself, anti-consumerism?

Competition

You will never find a more hyper-competitive culture than you do in the United States. As a foreigner living in this land, I can attest to that with the utmost respect. Americans love to win, they love the struggle of the journey and love holding up the gold medal of victory. Now don't hear me wrong, there's nothing wrong with being competitive, it's just how competition has become warped and twisted within our culture. And it's that, at least in the church, we are competitive about the wrong things.

Much of the American church finds itself competing with the church down the road. "Are we bigger than them? Do we have more influence than them? Do we have the best/biggest youth group in town?" The fact

of the matter is that there is a battle. We do have an enemy and we should be competitive...but against our enemy! What we haven't seen is how crafty he is. This seems to be the alliance he has struck with the American church: "I'll let a good chunk of your churches grow... just not at the expense of my territory." And so what happens? 96% of church growth is due to transfer growth and not churches striking into the heart of our enemy's territory. We'll consider it a win because we have the new service or program that is growing...but that growth is mainly from people coming from other churches. That's not a win! That's a staggering loss. Furthermore, for many pastors, we don't think we've won until we've won and someone else has lost. Seriously?! For sure, we have an enemy and we should be competitive, but we should be competing against our enemy, knowing that the final battle has already been won, and not competing against our own team members.

So gifted and skilled is our enemy, so conniving is he, that he has convinced us that beating the people on our own team is victory while he stands back and laughs, rarely having to ever engage in conflict, protecting his territory. He is beating us with a slight of hand, with a clever distraction, turning us against ourselves.

Question: In what ways are you competing (both in actuality or simply in your mind) against people who are on your own team?

In all honesty, it isn't that the American church will ever truly die or cease to exist. It will always be there. But it is entirely possible that if these three critical issues aren't addressed and dealt with, it will be a hollow shell that is spiritually listless.

If we think through Celebrity, Consumerism and Competition, the anti-body against all of these is sacrifice: learning to lay down what builds us up and giving to others instead. "Learning to serve, rather than to be served." Looking for anonymity rather than celebrity. To build a culture of producers rather than consumers. To live in a vibrant, sacrificial community fighting a real enemy rather than competing against the same community God has given us to fight with. It's about sacrificing what we want for the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom, regardless of our advancement or desires.

Clearly this is what Paul was getting after in Philippians 2:6-11 when describing the attitude of Jesus as taking on the attitude of a servant, willing to sacrifice all acclaim and equality with God. It was a willingness to set aside and sacrifice celebrity, consumerism and competition at the altar of the incarnation.

Will we have the courage to sacrifice as Christ sacrificed? Will we do the things that cost us so that his Kingdom may advance?

QUIZ: Writing and Writers

1. Which came first?
 a. Hammurabi's Code
 b. The Pentateuch
 c. Homer's "Iliad"
 d. Plato's "Republic"

2. Who wrote the Augsburg Confession?
 a. Martin Luther
 b. Martin Eck
 c. Philip Melancthon
 d. John Calvin

3. The use of papyrus for writing originated in
 a. Babylon
 b. Egypt
 c. Assyria
 d. Japan

4. The great Assyrian king with a mammoth library was
 a. Nimrod
 b. Assur-banipal
 c. Nebuchadnezzar
 d. Asar-haddon

5. Jeremiah's secretary was
 a. Zephaniah
 b. Hananiah
 c. Ezra
 d. Baruch

6. Which Bible translation appeared first?
 a. Vulgate
 b. King James
 c. Geneva
 d. Luther

7. The basic alphabet of Eastern Orthodoxy is
___ a. English
___ b. Sanskrit
___ c. Latin
___ d. Cyrillic
8. Which texts are not accepted as canonical by the King James Bible?
___ a. the Apocrypha
___ b. the Catholic epistles
___ c. the Septuaginta
___ d. The synoptic Gospels
9. The Jewish term for the Pentateuch is
___ a. Mishna
___ b. Torah
___ c. Midrash
___ d. Talmud
10. The first Bible printed with moveable type was the
___ a. New Jerusalem
___ b. Rotherham
___ c. Gutenberg
___ d. Wycliff

Answers:

1. (a); 2. (a); 3. (b); 4. (b); 5. (d); 6. (a); 7. (d); 8. (a); 9. (b); 10. (c).

Personal Notes on the Articles:

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