

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“. . . Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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WHAT ABOUT THE SABBATH DAY?

by Barry O'Dell

I have seen bumper stickers that read, “Keep the Sabbath Day” and “Keep the Ten Commandments.” There seem to be many people in our society who are sincerely interested in doing what God commands in His word. While sincerity should be a part of one’s service to God, it must not be the ultimate, determining factor when it comes to pleasing Him. So, what about the Sabbath Day? Must one observe this commandment today in order to be pleasing to God? Is this command a part of the New Covenant of Jesus Christ?

If God mentions something one time it is important! The terms “Sabbath” and “Sabbaths” appear 171 times in the Bible. They appear 111 times in the Old Testament and 60 times in the New Testament. Clearly this is a topic that must be studied and understood! Here are some questions that must be answered in understanding the Sabbath Day.

When was the command to observe the Sabbath Day given by God? The first mention of the Sabbath is found in Exodus 16:22-30. According to the Biblical record, Israel had been delivered from Egyptian captivity two and a half months prior and was on her way to Mount Sinai (Exo. 16:1). God commanded them to gather

manna for six days and, on the sixth day, gather twice as much because, “. . . on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, in it there shall be none” (Exo. 16:26). Exodus 16:30 then states, “So the people rested on the seventh day.” The first time that God commanded man to observe the Sabbath day was during the wilderness wandering.

To whom was the command to observe the Sabbath Day given? Is this a command that stands for all people, for all time? Again, God’s word must be consulted to find the answer. Exodus 31:12-17 provides the answer. Notice the following statements: “Speak thou also unto **the children of Israel**, saying, Verily my Sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign **between me and you throughout your generations** . . . Wherefore **the children of Israel** shall keep the Sabbath . . . It is a sign **between me and the children of Israel** forever” (Exo. 31:13, 16-17). Also, consider Deuteronomy 5:1-3, “And Moses called all **Israel**, and said unto them, Hear, O **Israel**, the statutes and judgments which I speak in **your ears** this day, that **ye** may learn them, and keep, and do them. The Lord God made a covenant with **us** in Horeb. The Lord made not the covenant with our fathers, but with **us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day.**”

Does the New Testament command God’s people today to observe the Sabbath Day? It is rather evident that observation of the Sabbath was an integral part of the Law of Moses. It is a fact that, God Himself, during the time of the Old Covenant stated that a New Covenant would be established. Jeremiah 31:31-32 states, “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt . . .” Under that New Testament there is never a command for Christians to observe the Sabbath Day. There are several mentions in the New Testament of the Sabbath Day. Throughout the gospel accounts of the life of Christ the writers recorded Jesus preaching and performing miracles on the Sabbath. The book of Acts mentions the Sabbath Day 9 times (1:12; 13:14, 27, 42, 44; 15:21; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4). The term “Sabbath” is found only once after the book of Acts and that is in Colossians 2:16. In all 60 references found in the New Testament there is not one command given to God’s people today to, “Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy” (Exo. 20:8).

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THE END OF THE OLD COVENANT*by John Gaines*

The most basic meaning of the word "covenant" is simply an agreement. Thus in the Bible, covenants are agreements between God and His people. God made several covenants with individuals in Old Testament times including Noah (Genesis 6:6) and Abram (Genesis 15:8). Circumcision was introduced as a token of the covenant God had made with Abraham (Genesis 17:9-11).

When we speak of the "Old Covenant," however, we usually refer to the written agreement or law given by God to Moses at Mount Sinai. In this article, the term has the same meaning as "Law of Moses."

The ending of the Law of Moses when Jesus died has been a major point of doctrine in the

Restoration Movement. Alexander Campbell in 1816 preached his famous Sermon on the Law to a meeting of Baptists. He maintained that we cannot make distinctions among ceremonial, judicial, and moral laws in the Old Testament. All are part of the Law that ended with the death of Christ. While the Old Testament is useful for our learning (Romans 15:4), it cannot be used as a rule of life for Christians. This issue was often debated with denominationalists but it was widely accepted by members of the Lord's church.

In recent times, teaching what once seemed clear has become blurred in the writing and preaching of some within the church. They tell us that we are missing the continuity of God's dealings with sinful people if we insist on dividing His revelation into two distinct covenants. Yet, the Old and New Covenants are clearly distinguished in the Scripture. Jeremiah prophesied that the Lord would "make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (Jeremiah 31:31). In verse 32, God contrasts this New Covenant from "the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt." He had a better covenant planned for His people. Paul explained the benefit of this New Covenant when he said that the minds of those reading the Old Testament were blinded by a veil. But that veil was done away in Christ (2 Corinthians 3:12-16). Careful Bible students should be able to see clearly that Jeremiah's prophecy promised a change of covenants that would be fulfilled with Jesus' death.

WHY THE OLD COVENANT WAS GIVEN

God had dealt directly with the fathers of families through the times of Noah, Abraham and Jacob, but by the time when Moses led the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery, the need for a written law was critical. Galatians 3:19 says that the Law was added because of transgressions. A written law from God exposes man's sinfulness. Kenneth Boles helps our understanding with a good illustration of one way this works: "It functions as a flashlight might help to identify what has gone wrong with an automobile. The flashlight could call attention to a broken fan belt, but would be of little use in actually fixing the problem. The law spotlights man's broken, sinful state, but the law is not the tool we need to fix our brokenness" (*Galatians and Ephesians*, 87).

The Law served as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24). "Schoolmaster" might not be the best rendering of a Greek word that originally referred to a slave who guarded the children as they went to and from school. Hugo McCord thought that "school bus driver" was the best modern-day equivalent of the word. In any event, the Law of Moses served to help maintain Israel's identity as the people of God through the centuries from Sinai to the Cross.

WHY THE OLD COVENANT ENDED

Christ accomplished His mission of fulfilling the Law of Moses (Matthew 5:17). The Law was never intended to be permanent since it had always been God's plan to send His Son to achieve our

salvation in a way that was never possible under the Mosaic Law. Back in Galatians 3:19, we're told that the law was added . . . *"till the seed should come to whom the promise was made."* Earlier (verse 16), Paul had made it clear that the word seed was singular and so referred to only one person. That Seed can only be Christ Jesus. Thus, we have learned that the Law of Moses was intended to last until the coming of Christ. When Jesus came, He made possible something much better. Hebrews 7:19 tells us, *"For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God."*

In Christ, we have a better hope because we have a better covenant, one based on better promises and a better sacrifice offered by Jesus through his death (Hebrews 8:6-8). Note verse 7 in that passage: *"For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second."* If the Old Covenant accomplished everything we needed to have eternal life, God would have had no reason to replace it. However, God did find fault with the Old Covenant because he promised to make a New Covenant with Israel and Judah. It is in that New Covenant that we have a new and improved way to gain access to God and obtain forgiveness for sins.

HOW THE OLD COVENANT ENDED

The effectiveness of the Law of Moses ended when Jesus died on the cross. Colossians 2:14 says, *"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his*

cross." The English Standard translation says that He nailed to the cross *"the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands."*

That refers to the requirement inherent in the Law of Moses that its dictates must be followed with exact precision. Back in Galatians 3, Paul called this demand *"the curse of the law"* (Galatians 3:10, *"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them"*). While Jesus was always able to resist the temptation to sin (Hebrews 4:15), you and I are highly unlikely to accomplish that same feat. Regarding law-keeping, if we succeed in keeping "the whole law" while failing in only one point, we are still sinners . . . guilty of all (James 2:10). There had to be a better way and that better way is given to us through the crucifixion of the altogether-innocent, sinless Son of God.

Through the body of Christ, we have become dead to the Law (Romans 7:4). Since Christians are now dead to the law, we are released from it and from its power over us (Romans 7:6). Paul used marriage to illustrate his point in Romans 7. A husband's death frees the wife from *"the law of her husband"* so that she may remarry without being called an adulteress (verses 1-3). In the same way, those who had been under the Law of Moses and had been "married" to that Law are now free to *"be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead"* (verse 4). The Law of Moses has no more power or authority over those who

are in Christ Jesus.

WHAT THE END OF THE OLD COVENANT MEANS FOR CHRISTIANS TODAY

Salvation. *"There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit"* (Romans 8:1). The Old Covenant offered the postponement of guilt through animal sacrifices. *"In those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins"* (Hebrews 10:3-4).

Sacrifice. Jesus gave Himself as the ultimate, once-for-all-time sacrifice. His death on the cross never needs to be repeated. Unlike the animal sacrifices that needed to be offered over and over, Jesus offered up himself once. People generally understand this truth. We do not see many people today attempt to obtain forgiveness by slaughtering lambs on altars.

If the Law of Moses was deficient in its ability to provide genuine salvation and if the sacrifices of sheep and bulls and goats was vastly inferior to the sacrifice of Christ, why should we think that any part of the Old Covenant would still be binding on today's Christians? Why would we think that Sabbath-keeping, worshiping with instrumental music, or any other detail of the lifestyle Israelites practiced under the Old Covenant would be appropriate for Christians living under the better covenant of Christ?

John Gaines preaches for the Skagit Valley Church of Christ in Burlington, Washington.

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What day should God's people observe today? The Lord's church was established in the city of Jerusalem on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:1, 47). Leviticus 23:15-16 reveals that the feast of Pentecost was held on the first day of the week. It was observed on the day after seven Sabbaths were complete, which would be the first day of the week. The New Testament also reveals that the disciples gathered on the first day of the week to break bread (i.e., partake of the Lord's Supper – Acts 20:7). Also, the church of the Bible used the first day of the week to contribute financially (1 Cor. 16:1-2). Revelation 1:10 reads, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day . . ." What day could rightfully be referred to as *the Lord's day*? Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1-2, Luke 24:1-3, and John 20:1-9 all reveal that Jesus was raised from the dead on the first day of the week. This

was the event that Jesus told His disciples about on several occasions (Matt. 16:21; 20:19; Mk. 8:31; 9:31). The first day of the week is the day on which Christians all around the world assemble in order to commemorate the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ!

The command to keep the Sabbath Day was a part of the Law of Moses. Jesus stated early on in His work that He was going to fulfill the law and the prophets (Matt. 5:17-18). The Law was nailed to the cross (Eph. 2:14-16) and Jesus fulfilled the prophecies written down by men like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Micah. Today, God's people assemble to worship Him upon the first day of every week, the Lord's Day. Matthew 28:18 records that Jesus possesses all authority in heaven and on earth. Jesus, in His New Covenant, never authorized or commanded His apostles or us today to observe the Sabbath Day.

**GOD'S AUTHORIZED WORSHIP
– COLOSSIANS 3:17 –**

1. **LORD'S SUPPER** - The New Testament and early church history record that Christians met on the first day of every week (Sunday) to worship God and remember Christ (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23-24; 16:1-2).
2. **PRAYERS** - (Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:6-7, 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18).
3. **SINGING** - God's word authorizes only vocal music and specifically singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12). The New Testament shows no use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to God by the church Christ established. Church history notes no such use for nearly 700 years after the New Testament was completed. It is an innovation of men, not of God.
4. **GIVING** - Free-willed, cheerful, generous, and every week (Acts 20:35; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9).
5. **PREACHING OF THE WORD** - The gospel of Christ, not men's doctrines nor entertainment, saves and strengthens us (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Romans 10:17; 1 Corinthians 1:18-23).

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