

Doctrine of the Sabbath, Part 2

We continue our study of the Sabbath, focusing on the weekly Sabbath from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown, as commanded for the Jews to observe with the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai. There are other Sabbaths, also called “Feasts,” observed throughout the year. These were also commanded under the Law of Moses, but they are not the subject in view here. Our focus is on the weekly Sabbath.

We have seen that the Sabbath symbolizes the seven days of creation, with God “working” six days and “resting” on the seventh. Man is to have a day of rest, and that applies to servants and working animals. The command to observe this day of rest was stated in the Law given to Moses on Mt. Sinai before Israel entered the land. As part of the Law, the command has been in effect since then, but observance has ranged from strict to lax to not at all.

Sabbaths During the Apostolic Period

What about Sabbath keeping and teaching during the time of Acts and the epistles? First and foremost, the Law, as a rule of conduct, is not once applied to the Christian era in any of these writings. In fact, quite the opposite is emphasized. Through overwhelming revelation, it is stated that the Law has ceased both as a means of achieving judicial righteousness and as a rule of life. The moral code part of the Law remains in effect and has always been so. It is the civil code and the worship code that have ceased, mainly because there is no nation, no Temple, and no priests to serve in the Temple.

John 1:16 For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.
17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

“Grace upon grace” is an idiom that means abundant grace—grace that overflows. The Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth “came through” Christ. “Came through” is *ginomai* and means brought into existence, fulfilled, or made to happen. Grace is brought into effect through Christ as a result of what Christ did on the Cross.

Romans 6:14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Grace has replaced the Law, and sin no longer controls the believer because we are not under the Law and its weakness through the flesh. We are under grace, where the Holy Spirit dwells within us and empowers us to overcome sin. Such a victory was impossible under the Law, because obedience to the Law relied solely on human effort, with the Holy Spirit indwelling only in a few, such as prophets and some kings, like David.

Romans 8:3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who **walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.** (Emphasis mine)

Pay attention here, because Paul is speaking on multiple levels. He's saying one thing while referring to another.

Romans 7:4 Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. ⁵ For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. ⁶ But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

Verse 4 states that we, as New Testament believers, have died to the Law so that we might be united with another, “Him who was raised from the dead,” which is Christ. When under the Law, all it did was arouse our sin nature and produce the “fruit of death”—sin (v.5). However, verse 6 says we are “released from the Law” and have “died to that which held us captive to serve Christ and not in the old way of the written code” (the Law).

Galatians 3:19 Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an

intermediary. ²⁰ Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.

²¹ Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. ²² But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

²³ Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,

The Law was added because of our sinfulness until “the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made.” Christ! Verse 21 tells us that the Law was unable to impart eternal life (“give life”). The Law could not save anyone. If it could have, then the Law would have been the end of it, but it wasn’t. It is through faith in Christ Jesus that we gain the very righteousness of God imputed to our accounts in Heaven.

Verse 23 explains that the Law served as our moral guide, and verse 24 states that the law was our “guardian.” The word used is *paidagogos*, which is transliterated as “pedagogue,” referring to a trusted slave responsible for teaching, caring for, and disciplining young children in wealthy households. The Law functioned like a caretaker—teaching and protecting to lead us to Christ.

Verse 25 tells us that now, with Christ, faith has come; we are no longer under a guardian (some translations say “tutor”). When children reach the age of maturity, they assume adult responsibilities. Similarly, believers today are not under the tutor or guardian (the Law) but have the responsibilities of adults under grace, because we have the indwelling Spirit and Spirit enablement. The Law could never provide this kind of victory. It was a merit system and is no longer in effect. The church, under “grace and by grace,” can now fulfill the Law.

We should also consider that if the Sabbath was such a vital issue for man, then we need to ask ourselves two questions –

1. Why is there no instance of it being a requirement for Christians in the NT?

2. Why is it not a significant issue in NT teachings on grace?

Sabbath in Acts

The word “Sabbath” appears nine times in Acts, and each time it is used in connection with being observed by unbelieving Jews. It was part of the Law, and, from the Jewish perspective, they were still bound by the Law. The Apostle Paul visited Jewish synagogues on the Sabbath to teach. Sabbath keepers immediately charge, “See, Paul is keeping the Sabbath!”

The Sabbath was a day when Jews gathered for worship, and Paul, a visiting Pharisee from Jerusalem, was expected to speak. This presented a great opportunity for Paul to evangelize the lost Israelites, and he seized it.

The Sabbath’s in the Epistles

Since the early church was deeply Jewish in character, some Jewish believers probably chose to observe the traditional Jewish Sabbath (from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset). However, the Holy Spirit has omitted any mention of such practices from Scripture. There is no indication that a Christian's failure to keep the Sabbath is considered a sin. You would think that someone somewhere would have been corrected about it. Likely candidates for correction would have been the Galatians, who, for a time, became entangled in Law practices due to a group called the “Judaizers.” Yet, in Paul’s letter, when correcting them, the issue of Sabbath observance is not mentioned. Nowhere in the New Testament are sinners ever labeled as “Sabbath-breakers.”

The word Sabbath is mentioned only once in direct connection to teaching, and the term “seventh day” appears only once. Let’s look at those two instances.

Colossians 2:10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. ¹¹ In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh,

God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

¹⁶ Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

Paul warns believers to beware of getting involved with the Law or any works-based covenant. This passage states that they have been “made complete.” In this state, nothing can be added—you are complete. Therefore, the goal of all meritorious works is already achieved through faith in Christ. The Jew was circumcised as a sign of identification with his ethnicity and the Law. It was a symbol of the covenant between Israel and God, and between the individual Jew and his Creator. The Church Age believer is also said to be circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands—by our position “in Christ.”

Note that the ritual of circumcision took place on the eighth day, Sunday, after the first full week of life. Interesting coincidence, isn't it? Circumcision was symbolic of deliverance from the old creation, which would be accomplished for believers through the resurrection of Christ from the dead, which took place on the first day of the week.

Connect the dots! Isn't it amazing how God ties all these little details together? The believer is not called to celebrate any aspect of the old creation, which is represented by the Sabbath (v.11), and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ. The “body of the flesh” is the old sin nature, the old creation, our fallen nature, the power of which is removed by this “circumcision, not made with hands.” The “circumcision not made with hands” is the new birth—regeneration, born again, which gives us a new nature. Thus, we are “a new creature in Christ.”

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

The Law and Sabbath observance were a “shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ” (v.17). The law was a shadow or type meant to teach us details about the coming of the Savior. The reality has arrived “in Christ,” and the type is no longer valid. Where the Church Age believer’s obligations to God are outlined for us, the only mention of the Sabbath is a prohibition against its observance, and that Sabbath observance conflicts with grace.

Hebrews 4:1 Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. ² For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. ³ For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, “As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest,’ ” although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. ⁴ For he has somewhere spoken of the **seventh day** in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” ⁵ And again in this passage he said, “They shall not enter my rest.” ⁶ Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, ⁷ again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” ⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. ⁹ So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰ for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. (Emphasis mine)

This is the only passage among all the epistles where a reference to the “seventh day” appears (v.4). There is a lot happening in this passage, including many references to other passages and different types of rest. The first thing we need to consider is the audience of this epistle—its context. It was written to Jewish believers, and its purpose was to properly orient these Jews, whose lives had revolved around the Law, were driven by it, and even after salvation, they often remained very Law-focused. This isn't unusual because of their ethnic, national, and religious heritage. They struggled to distinguish between the Law and grace. Additionally, due to their background, the writer of Hebrews frequently references these points to clarify Christian doctrines for the Jewish readers. Throughout the

passage, there are numerous references to “rest,” and four different kinds of “rest” are in view.

1. The Sabbath seventh day rest.
2. The rest offered to Israel in the wilderness when God would lead them into Canaan.
3. The rest under Joshua.
4. Israel in the land and under the merit system of the Law was promised abundant blessings with a rest from the labors of slavery in Egypt. That rest depended on faith in God to deliver as promised and obedience to the Law.

God promised rest to Israel when they entered the promised Kingdom. The Kingdom is the seventh dispensation or period in human history. Israel will experience rest and abundant blessings under the rulership of the Messiah. That rulership will be with an “iron scepter”—it will be strictly enforced. Righteousness will be rigorously upheld, and sin will not be tolerated during the Kingdom. This is Israel’s perspective—their context for this epistle.

Their Sabbaths served as a “type” to teach them about the Kingdom rest. The writer connects these “rests” to show they are pictures of a greater and more significant “rest.” This rest is the main focus of this passage. The “rest” I am talking about is the rest of the believer in Christ, resting from his own works.

Matthew 11:28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

That rest created a sense of confidence or an “assurance rest,” similar to the feeling of security in the One who, through grace, grants the rest. This blessed rest is promised to him apart from human works.

Romans 4:5 And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

The Law was a merit system—works produced reward. It provided rest *after* six days of work. Unlike the Law, this rest comes not from working but through faith.

Now pay very close attention! The Christian, under grace and indwelt by the Spirit, and hopefully in right relationship with God, thus filled with the Spirit, does not have a Sabbath day in the traditional sense because *every day* is set aside for the Lord. Unlike Israel under the Law, where they were required to set aside one day for rest and worship, Christians are in *full-time* Christian service. Christians in this dispensation do have a day that we worship in an “official capacity,” and that is what we call the “Lord’s Day.” We will spend more time developing this concept later.

Galatians 4:9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? ¹⁰ You observe days and months and seasons and years!

Understand the background of this epistle! This letter was written to Gentile believers in the Galatian churches (modern-day Turkey). These believers had been misled by Jewish believers who came after Paul and taught that to be a Christian, they had to follow the Law and “enter” Christianity through it, including being physically circumcised. This letter was written around the time of the Jerusalem Council, where it was decided that Gentile converts did not have to “enter” through the Law, nor did they have to keep the Law, nor be circumcised.

Galatians 3:23 Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

As previously mentioned, this is metaphorical, comparing the system where children of a wealthy household are tutored and trained by a “guardian,” *paidagogos*, a trusted slave. The household in question is God’s household. Believers are children through faith. Even Israel, under the Law, was a child of God through faith, not by following the Law. The Law was meant to teach Israel and prepare them for the coming of the

Messiah, showing them that righteousness was impossible without faith in Christ. The Law could not produce righteousness in people!

Galatians 3:29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Since Abraham "believed and it was credited to him for righteousness," Gentile believers are part of Abraham's "spiritual seed" because we show the same faith Abraham demonstrated. As "Abraham's offspring" (spiritual seed), Gentile believers are coheirs to the promises just like Jewish believers.

There is more than one Israel.

- We have Israel, the national entity, both believers and unbelievers alike. The Law applies to this bunch—both saved and unsaved Israel.
- And then we have regenerate Israel, born again Israel, those Jews who believe just like their father Abraham. These are both the "physical seed" and the "spiritual seed" of Abraham. Physical by virtue of being physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and spiritual seed by virtue of faith in the Messiah. The promises of the four unconditional covenants were offered to Abraham's physical seed, but only his spiritual seed will receive the final blessings.
- Gentile believers in Christ are coheirs to the promises because of our relationship to Abraham through faith in Christ. We are Abraham's spiritual seed.

Galatians 4:1 I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything,

Returning to a comparison with the Law, even though he is the child of the master, under the guidance of the pedagogue, he is like a slave. When mature, the child is declared an adult and ready to assume adult responsibilities as the master's heir.

Galatians 4:2 But he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. ³ In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.

The Law kept the Jews in bondage. Gentiles are under the bondage of Cosmos Diabolicus.

Galatians 4:4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

Note that even Israel must be redeemed from under the Law to receive the “adoption as sons.” This pertains to the responsibilities and new freedoms that come with salvation and the new system of Grace.

Galatians 4:6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

Believers in this Church Age have the indwelling of not only the Spirit but also Christ, as the Fruit of the Spirit.

Galatians 4:7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Paul explains that, because of their salvation through faith, they are no longer under the Law, but are mature children of God, with all the privileges and responsibilities that come with that position in Christ.

Galatians 4:8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods.

Now we examine the Gentile perspective. While the Jews were bound to the Law, Gentiles were also enslaved to false gods—“enslaved to those that by nature are not gods.” Do you see the comparison Paul is making here? One form of slavery is just as severe as the other because it remains slavery.

Galatians 4:9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

Paul is speaking to Gentiles who are about to submit themselves to a form of slavery—the Law—after being freed from another form of slavery—false

gods. He asks, as former slaves, why do you want to submit yourselves to slavery again, which he describes as “weak and worthless elementary principles.” The Greek term literally means “poverty-stricken,” implying a state of lack in comparison to the riches of grace. Israel was enslaved to the Law, while you, Gentiles, were enslaved to false gods. Why do you want to trade one form of slavery for another?

Galatians 4:10 You observe days and months and seasons and years!
11 I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.

Here is our main point: Under the Law, you will observe “days and months and seasons and years.” “Days” refers to the Sabbaths, both the weekly seventh-day Sabbath and the special Sabbaths. If this is what you are doing, then Paul essentially says in verse 11, and I paraphrase, “I spent all this time on you to get you out of one form of bondage to false gods, and you are right back into another form of bondage to the Law! Have I wasted my time?”

The Law, including its Sabbath days, is not intended for the Church. There is no support for Sabbath observance in the New Testament. It has been discontinued.

But Sabbath keeping will be restored. To do so, it must first be removed. We see in Galatians where Paul indicates it has been removed. Is this supported elsewhere? Yes, it is.

Sabbaths Stopped

In Hosea Chapter 2, the prophet warns Israel of impending judgment, referring to their apostasy as “harlotry.” Israel was unfaithful to the Word given to them and failed to fulfill their part of the covenant with God. They did not keep the Law as promised when God gave it to them through Moses. They sought other gods like Baal. Verses 2 through 13 depict God divorcing His “wife” (Israel) due to her “whoredom,” and all He will do to “her” as discipline.

This passage, like most prophecies, has both near and far fulfillment. Its near fulfillment was the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions, when Israel was taken into captivity and removed from the land. No Sabbaths were

observed during this period. Israel was eventually returned to the land temporarily.

The prophecy also points to a distant fulfillment when Israel will reject God, reject God's plan, and kill its own Messiah. Israel will once again face judgment and be cast out of the land in AD 70, but will eventually be restored, remarried by God, and welcomed into the Kingdom.

Verses 14-23 depict God wooing His wayward wife back, symbolizing Israel's recovery and God's act of "remarrying" her. Verses 18-20 illustrate the Kingdom Age that follows Israel's final discipline during the Tribulation — "I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety." This clearly points to the Kingdom when "swords will be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, and man will learn war no more," signifying Israel's return to the land and living under the Messiah's rule.

Israel is depicted as guilty of adultery, divorced, then reclaimed and blessed again. This does not illustrate the Church replacing Israel, because the Church is not Israel. Verse 23 describes the Church — "I will say to Not My People, 'You are my people'" — while referencing Israel at the same time, proving that the Church has not replaced Israel.

But notice verse 11.

Hosea 2:11 And I will put an end to all her mirth, her feasts, her new moons, her Sabbaths, and all her appointed feasts.

God will put an end to "her Sabbaths." There will be no *sanctified* Sabbath observance during Israel's captivity or between the Cross and the Kingdom when Israel, once again under judgment, is scattered from the land.

Near fulfillment was the Assyrian invasion, and far fulfillment was the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in AD 70. Verse 11 looks to the interruption of the Age of Israel. With the ascension of the resurrected Christ on Pentecost, the Church Age was inserted into the Age of Israel, and Israel was removed from the land just as Moses predicted in Deuteronomy. During this almost 2000-year period of banishment, Israel has had no Temple, no system of worship under the Law, no sacrifices, and no rest,

neither the rest from fear nor the rest of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was not observed under the Law because the Law was effectively set aside during this period of the Church.

As previously mentioned, the Sabbath will be reinstated; however, we will explore this subject further next time when we examine how the Sabbath relates to the Church.