

# **A New Attack Against The Sabbath - Part 2**

**Endtime Issues No. 77**

**19 November 2001**

Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.

Retired Professor of Theology, Andrews University

## **Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:**

Every newsletter generates a variety of comments which offer me insights into the different reactions of our readers. The last newsletter (No. 76) on the latest attack against the Sabbath was no exception. The many comments and reactions received can be broadly divided into three groups.

The first group of comments from about 200 readers, express appreciation for my efforts to refute some of the arguments used by Pastor Taylor and most Evangelicals to negate the continuity and validity of the Sabbath for today. A good number of Bible teachers from different parts of the world who received the last newsletter (No. 76) from friends, subscribed immediately because they want to share these studies with their students. Several pastors also informed me that they are eager to receive my response to the latest anti-Sabbath attacks, because they are facing the same challenge with some members of their congregation. These encouraging messages motivate me to put forth my best efforts in producing these Bible studies.

The second group of comments are from a dozen readers, who advise me not to waste my time responding to those who have already decided to reject the Sabbath truth. They believe that no amount of arguments will convince these people to reconsider their decision. It may be true that my response will have a limited impact on those whose mind is already made up. But I am thinking of those whose minds have been confused by reading anti-Sabbath literature, and are looking for answers to questions that have risen in their minds. These Sabbath newsletters may provide the very answers these fellow believers are looking for.

The third group of comments come from a half-a-dozen readers who feel that it is inappropriate for me to analyze Pastor Taylor's "Open Letter." They maintain that if the Holy Spirit has led him to reject some of the fundamental Adventists beliefs, especially the Sabbath, I have no business to criticize what he has done. Somebody wrote: "Let the Holy Spirit take care of Pastor Taylor."

Rest assured that I have no desire to undermine the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of Pastor Taylor. Instead, my intent is to examine if his anti-Sabbath arguments are legitimately supported by Scripture. After all, the Holy Spirit does not contradict what he has already revealed in the Bible.

After reading the gracious message Pastor Taylor emailed me in response to the last newsletter, I have no doubts in my mind that Pastor Taylor sincerely believes that he did the right thing in rejecting some fundamental Adventist beliefs and resigning from the ministry. He wrote: "I am a man of deep love for Jesus and a close walk with Him. My intentions were not to harm the Church, but to encourage greater openness and discussion. Even though I still have no work lined up, the Lord has sustained me and my family."

Frankly, I admire sincere people like Pastor Taylor who stand for their religious convictions, even if it means suffering financial loss and an uncertain future. Like him, through the years I have suffered for taking a stand on such unpopular issues as women's ordination and the use of rock music for church worship. My admiration for Pastor Taylor must not deter me from examining his "New Covenant" theology in the light of the normative authority of the Bible.

It is my fervent hope and prayer that the Lord may use this response to Pastor Taylor's anti-Sabbath arguments, to help many to understand more fully what the Bible teaches regarding the Law in general and the Sabbath in particular. It could very well be that Pastor Taylor's desire "to encourage greater openness and discussion" of the Sabbath, may ultimate result in his coming to a fresh and deeper appreciation of the validity and value of God's Holy Day for our Christian life today. Let us keep Pastor Taylor in our prayers.

## DOCTOR JAMES KENNEDY'S ATTACK AGAINST THE SABBATH

On Sunday November 4, 2001, Dr. James Kennedy, popular speaker of the Coral Ridge Ministry in Florida, delivered a sermon in his nationwide TV network, entitled "The Gift of Rest." Several subscribers to our newsletter emailed me a synopsis of this sermon, urging me to respond to Dr. Kennedy's anti-Sabbath arguments, especially his negative references to the Seventh-day Adventist Church

To avoid misrepresenting what Dr. Kennedy actually said in his sermon, I contacted Coral Ridge Ministries and paid for a transcript of the 14 pages sermon which he delivered. My analysis will be based on the printed transcript of the sermon which I have on hand. It is unfortunate that Dr. Kennedy, a man whom I greatly admire as one of the best expository preachers in America today, made numerous serious mistakes regarding the time and the reasons for the change from Sabbath to Sunday in early Christianity.

To do justice to Dr. Kennedy's sermon, I will devote a whole newsletter (most likely No. 79) to a comprehensive response to his allegation that Christ and the Apostles changed the Sabbath to Sunday. I plan to examine his arguments and his use of sources to support his contention of an Apostolic origin of Sunday.

Two major reasons compel me to respond to Dr. Kennedy's sermon "the Gift of Rest." The first is the fact that his sermon was televised across America by the "Coral Ridge Hour," and has reinforced the popular misconception that Sundaykeeping is an apostolic institution binding upon Christians. The second reason is my sincere desire to help Dr. Kennedy to see some of the glaring inaccuracies of his arguments and documents cited. I will be sure to mail him a copy of the response with a complimentary copy of my book *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE*. It is hard to tell how Dr. Kennedy will receive the response and the book. The fact that Dr. Kennedy had earned six doctorates according to letters after his name, gives me reason to believe that he has been trained to reason logically. Real scholars are usually humble enough to recognize their mistakes. Thus, it is possible that Dr. Kennedy may apologize for his inaccurate statements, and will avoid repeating them in future sermons on the Sabbath. I will keep you updated about any future development.

The reason I plan to mail to Dr. Kennedy a copy of *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE*, is because this book has proven to be most effective in helping over 200 clergymen during the past two years to accept the Sabbath. Every week I receive calls from pastors who have accepted the Sabbath after reading this book. Last week I received a very encouraging phone call from Rev. Harrison Wilson of the First Allen African Methodist Anglican Church, in Laurel, Mississippi. I spoke with him again this morning on the phone. He explained to me that the reading of this book has helped him to accept Sabbath. He ordered additional copies which I mailed him together with my video Sabbath seminar. At present he is gradually introducing the Sabbath to his congregation. He promised to keep me updated on the future developments.

I would like to express my gratitude to those churches that have sponsored copies of *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE* to their local clergy. Let me remind you that on our part we offer this timely book for this worthy project for only \$190.00, postage paid, for a complete case of 32 copies. This translates into only \$5.90 per copy, instead of the regular price of \$20.00 per copy. Together with the books I will supply you with a cover letter to be attached to every book mailed out. If your church has not yet ordered a supply, feel free to call us at (616) 471-2915.

## WORSHIP WARS IN SDA CHURCHES

It is a painful experience for me to constantly receive messages and phone calls from Adventist fellow believers who are greatly distressed over the adoption by their churches of extreme forms of contemporary worship with drama, dancing, and loud beat music. A young lady (22 years old) called me to order a supply of our book *THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC*. She told me that she has accepted to serve as a local elder (a rather young elder), hoping to influence the new worship style that sometimes gets out of hand in her church. An older man told me in a telephone conversation that he and his wife have not attended church for the past year because they are greatly offended by the beat music played by the band during the worship service. They prefer to worship God peacefully in their home, listening to the Sabbath School and sermon on 3 ABN.

It is hard to believe that some of our fellow believers can no longer attend their own local Adventist Churches because the worship service has become irreverent and offensive to them. In my view this is the most critical challenge facing the Adventist Church today, namely, how to bring about worship renewal without turning the worship service into a time of entertainment.

Some of our church leaders are very concerned over the divisions caused by the introduction of new worship styles with drama and pop music. Sometimes they do not quite know what to do. On the one hand they want to encourage our pastors to try new methods to make the worship service more appealing to both Adventists and non-Adventists. Yet, on the other hand they are very concerned when the experimentation goes too far.

Let me share with you a letter I received from a Ministerial Secretary who gave me permission to use his letter, but without mentioning his name or the name of his conference where he serves. He wrote:

Dear Sam,

I hesitate to write you because I know you're so busy and receive hundreds of responses, but this time I must! Thank you for articulating the issues related to the "church growth" challenges we face today in Adventism.

When I was a young pastor in 1976, the "church growth" concepts from Fuller and other places began to "hit" the Adventist scene. For reasons I couldn't put my finger on I was uncomfortable. I went with the flow and invited the union "church growth" leader to my church for a weekend seminar and it was reasonably attended.

As time went on, the church growth concepts gradually moved more and more toward marketing the church to "felt needs" and doing what people wanted rather than what people need. The music scene began to gradually change—the enemy is very subtle, isn't he?

We've come to the place today where there is increasing pressure to do whatever is necessary to get people through the door—which amounts to entertainment in many cases. Last Sabbath, the largest church in our conference "lost" about 60 members who are wanting to start their own church because, as the leader said to me, "We're tired of having the sanctuary blasphemed every Sabbath!" I said, "What do you mean 'blasphemed'?" He replied referring to the rock music, foolish drama and so forth.

Mind you Sam, the pastors of this church in our conference are sincere, hard working ministers who genuinely believe in what they're doing—which doesn't detract from the evil of the work—and I love them very much but I am brokenhearted for what is happening.

“Church growth” focuses on getting people through the door at almost any expense. One of my former conference presidents said, “If it works, we’ll use it.” How sad. It reminds me of Ellen White’s comment, “Christ’s method alone will bring true success in reaching the people...” It should be obvious to us that there is such a thing as perceived success which is not true success. And the corollary is, “There is work which may seem to give little success at the moment that will reap a great harvest in the future.”

Remember her statement, “...[Jesus] knew that the life of His trusting disciples would be like His, a series of uninterrupted victories, not seen to be such here, but recognized as such in the great hereafter” (DA 679).

God bless you Sam.

-----  
Ministerial Secretary

Quite a strong letter! I decided to post it because it gives us something to think about. May the methods we use to reach people with the Gospel be recognized by God as legitimate and successful both now and in the great hereafter.

## **SPECIAL OFFER ON *THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC***

The controversies caused by the adoption of "pop music" for worship in some Adventist churches, often generate more heat than light, reflecting personal taste or culture rather than a grasp of the biblical principles of music. To meet this challenge seven scholars of six different nationalities have contributed to the symposium *THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC: A STUDY OF BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF MUSIC*. All the contributors, except myself, are professional musicians academically trained and dedicated to enrich the worship service of their congregations.

This timely book offers a balanced and biblical analysis of the use of Contemporary Christian Music for worship and evangelism. The book has two major objectives. The first is to help people understand the true nature of the various styles of rock music popular today. The second objective is to define those biblical principles that should guide Christians in making good musical choices.

The aim of this symposium is not to dismiss all contemporary music as "rock," because there are contemporary songs with music and words which are suitable for divine worship. Rather, the aim is to clarify how the music, words, and the manner of singing should conform to the Biblical principle of worship music.

To make it possible for many people to benefit from this timely book at this critical moment, we are making an **UNPRECEDENTED ONE TIME SPECIAL OFFER**. You or your church can order a **COMPLETE CASE OF 26 COPIES OF *THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC* FOR ONLY \$150.00, POSTPAID**. This means that you pay **only \$5.76 per copy, instead of the regular price of \$20.00**. This **ONE TIME SPECIAL OFFER** expires December 31, 2001.

You can order ***THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC*** by calling us at (616) 471-2915 or by mailing your check to: BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES, 4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49103. We guarantee to process your order immediately.

## **UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS**

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the months of November and December 2001. Every Sabbath it is a great privilege for me to meet our subscribers who travel considerable distances to attend the seminars. Feel free to contact me at (616) 471-2915 for a special seminar in your area sometimes during 2002. All the weekends for 2001 are now taken, but I do have openings for 2002. Each of the three seminars on the Sabbath, Second Advent, and Christian Life-style are now presented with PowerPoint slides which add a visual dimension to our message.

### **NOVEMBER 2-3: ORLANDO - MT. DORA SDA CHURCH, FLORIDA**

Location: 18440 Us Highway 441, Mt. Dora, FL 32757

For information call Pastor David Canther at (352) 383-4100 or (352) 728-4880

### **NOVEMBER 9-10: MIAMI, FLORIDA: MARANATHA SDA CHURCH**

Location: 18900 N. W. 32nd Avenue, Miami, FL 33055

For information call Pastor Keith R. Harding at (305) 620-9091

### **NOVEMBER 16-17: ERIE SDA CHURCH, PENNSYLVANIA**

Location: 190 Hunter Road, Erie, PA 16509

For information call Pastor Thomas Cusack at (814) 864-8124 or

Elder Lowell Freeman at (814) 739-2360

### **NOVEMBER 23-24: HENDERSONVILLE, NC - UPWARD SDA CHURCH**

Location: Youth Activities Building of the Bonclarken Conference Center

located at 500 Pine Drive, Flat Rock, North Carolina

For information call Pastor John A Sweigart at (828) 697-9876 or (828) 696-7922

### **NOVEMBER 30–DECEMBER 1: DALLAS, TEXAS - RICHARDSON SDA CHURCH**

Location: 1201 W. Beltline Road, Richardson, Texas 75080

For information call Pastor Paul Hunt at (972) 231-3254

### **DECEMBER 7-8: ROCK HILL SDA CHURCH, SOUTH CAROLINA**

Location: 255 Neely Store Road, Rock Hill, SC 29732

For information call Pastor Werner Gil at (803) 329-4740

### **DECEMBER 14-15: WENATCHEE, WA - VALLEY VIEW SDA CHURCH**

Location: 1201 NE 10th Street, East Wenatchee, WA 98802

For information call Pastor John Witcombe at (509) 667-1177 or (509) 670-0580

### **DECEMBER 21-23: ORLANDO, FLORIDA - HAITIANS SDA RALLY**

Location to be given in the next newsletter

For information call Pastor Ronald Jean Baptiste at (407) 296-8941

### **DECEMBER 28-29: DAYTONA BEACH SDA CHURCH, FLORIDA**

Location: 401 N. Williamson Boulevard, Daytona Beach, Florida 32114

For information call LaDonna Bond, at (386) 749-2777 or

Dr. James Arocho at (386) 672-4085

## **THANK YOU FOR INVITING YOUR FRIENDS TO SUBSCRIBE**

Every week we process over 150 new subscriptions from people who received an ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER from a friend. Thank you for sharing these Bible studies with your friends. Just let them know that they can receive this newsletter directly simply by emailing us their request at: <sbacchiocchi@qtm.net> As a result of your promotional endeavors over 14,000 people are already benefiting from these Bible studies.

**ENDTIME ISSUES 77: A NEW ATTACK AGAINST THE SABBATH - Part 2**  
**Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,**  
**Retired Professor of Theology, Andrews University**

In the last newsletter (No 76) we examined Pastor Greg Taylor's religious journey, focusing especially on his characterizations of Adventism, the Sabbath, Ellen White, and the Willow Creek Community Church. We concluded that Pastor Taylor upbringing in a legalistic Adventist Home where, according to his testimony, there was too much law and too little grace, could well have predisposed him negatively against the Sabbath, Ellen White, and the Adventist Church in general. Most likely the Sabbath came to symbolize for him all what he hated most about the Adventist church.

In addition to his legalistic upbringing, two other factors seem to have contributed to Pastor Taylor's gradual rejection of the Sabbath. The first was the study done by a church growth specialist indicating that the Sabbath is a "stumbling block" to implement the outreach strategies promoted by institutions like the Willow Creek Community Church. The second was the reading of anti-Sabbath literature produced especially by former Adventists, like Dale Ratzlaff. This literature had a devastating impact on his beliefs about the Sabbath, causing him eventually to reject its validity and value for Christians today.

In the second part of his "Open Letter" entitled "The Biblical Journey," Pastor Taylor sets forth what could be called his anti-Sabbath theological construct. In this and the following newsletter, I examine Pastor Taylor's methodology, arguments, and conclusions. Readers not accustomed to this kind of analysis, may find these two Bible studies too technical. I would urge you to be patient. Do not give up when you read something deeper than you are accustomed to. This may prove to be a growing experience for you.

Keep in mind also that there are many fellow believers who have been confused by these anti-Sabbath arguments and are seeking for answers. In fact, a good number of pastors have requested specifically these Sabbath newsletters, because they have to face the same anti-Sabbath arguments in their churches. These prevailing concerns make it imperative for me to examine Pastor Taylor's anti-Sabbath arguments in greater depth than I would do under normal circumstances.

### **A LOOK AT PASTOR TAYLOR'S METHODOLOGY**

Pastor Taylor introduces his "Biblical Journey" by setting forth his methodology which consists essentially of two major assumptions. First, the Old Testament must be interpreted by the New Testament, because like in human Wills, the latest one supersedes the previous ones. Second, the latest Will or Testament of God, which is found in the New Testament, especially the Epistles, teaches us that Christ came to fulfill much of the Old Covenant, by terminating the function of institutions like the Sabbath. On the basis of these working assumptions, Pastor Taylor "went back to the Old Testament to see if what is written there agrees with the epistles and Jesus on the subject."

The principle of interpreting the Old Testament in the light of New Testament teachings, is a valid and accepted principle of Biblical interpretation. In many ways, the New Testament provides the key that unlocks problematic passages and teachings of the Old Testament. The progressive revelation of the Scripture, makes the New Testament the prism that sheds lights on many aspects of the Old Testament.

The problem with Pastor Taylor's methodology is his arbitrary distinction between the Old and New Covenants. He compares the two Covenants to two human Wills or Testaments, where the second supersedes the first one. He writes: "The word Testament or Covenant means the same thing as a Will, or some other legal contract. My wife and I have made out several Wills during our marriage. We had a Will before we had kids. We had a Will made after the birth of our first child. We made another after the second child, and recently we updated our Will again. Now if we were to die in some tragedy,

which Will would be binding for our executor to follow? The most recent or newest one of course. The same is true of the Old and New Testaments or Wills.”

**Are the Old and New Covenants Two Different Wills?** Comparing the Old and New Covenants to two different Wills, is inaccurate and misleading. Wills are legal documents that give directives on how to dispose of persons’ estates at the time of their death. In the ancient world Wills or Testaments were generally drawn when death was approaching and thus were regarded as Death-Wills. Its terms could be changed while a person was still alive.

The imagery of a Death-Will can hardly be applied to God, because he has never given directives on how to dispose of His estate at His death, nor He has ever changed His provisions of salvation. This is why the Bible speaks of the “God of the everlasting covenant” (Heb 13:20). The Old Covenant is not a Death-Will, but an agreement between God on the one hand, and Israel as the chosen people on the other hand. There is an abundance of scholarly literature that explores the similarities between God’s covenant with Israel and the ancient suzerainty treatises between lord and vassal, conqueror and the conquered.

Hebrews refers to the covenant with ancient Israel as the “first,” or “old,” covenant, and that with Christian believers as the “second” or “new” covenant (Heb 8:7,13). Essentially the provisions and objectives of the two covenants are identical. The major difference is that the “old” covenant was made with Israel as a nation and taught the people through the sacrificial system to look forward to Christ’s atoning sacrifice, whereas the “new” covenant is made with individual believers, and teaches them to look back at the Cross and accept Christ’s atoning sacrifice.

The “new” covenant is God’s “everlasting” covenant, that is, the plan of salvation which became operative in Eden when man sinned, and was ratified by Christ’s blood shed on the Cross. The “old” covenant was ratified at Sinai with the blood of animals (Ex 24:3-8) and served as a temporary arrangement to enable the people to receive the blessings of salvation of the “new” or “everlasting” covenant.

Pastor Taylor’s misunderstanding of the “old” and “new” covenants, as two different “Wills” or “Testaments,” derives from the mistranslation of the Hebrew and Greek terms for “covenant” (*Berith, diatheke*). These terms were mistakenly translated by Tertullian (about A. D. 200) as “*Testamentum*,” which means a “Death-Will.” Eventually, the term “Testament” was adopted by the Latin translation of the Bible, known as the Vulgate (about A.D 400), and since then it has become the common designation of the Bible as “The Old and New Testaments,” that is, “The Old and New Death-Wills of God.”

Pastor Taylor’s assumption that the Old and New Covenants are like two different Wills, in which the new one annuls the old one, grossly misrepresents the relationship between the two. His assumption reflects the faulty Dispensational construct, according to which God has offered salvation on different bases to different people during the course of human history. God started out by offering salvation to Abraham *unconditionally* on the basis of faith; but at Mt. Sinai He agreed to save the Israelites *conditionally* on the basis of obedience to His commandments. When God discovered that such an arrangement did not work, because the Law could not change their hearts, He reverted to the “faith arrangement” He had with Abraham. To make things easier, in the New Covenant, God did away with most of the Old Testament laws, including the Sabbath, and decided this time to work in the heart through the Holy Spirit.

## **ARE THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS TWO DIFFERENT METHODS OF SALVATION?**

If this popular dispensational scenario, adopted by Pastor Taylor, were true, it would surely open to question the consistency and fairness of God’s saving activities. It would imply that during the course of redemptive history, God has offered salvation on two radically different bases: on the basis of human obedience in the Old Covenant and

on the basis of divine grace in the New Covenant. It would further imply, presumably, that God learned through the experience of His chosen people, the Jews, that human beings cannot earn salvation by obedience because they tend to disobey. Consequently, He finally decided to change His method and implement a New Covenant plan where salvation is offered to believing persons exclusively as a divine gift of grace rather than as a human achievement through obedience to commandments.

Such a theological construct makes God changeable and subject to learning by mistakes as human beings do. The truth of the matter, however, is that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever” (Heb 13:8). Pastor Taylor fails to understand that salvation has always been in the Old and New Covenants, first and foremost a divine gift of grace and not a human achievement. This is why the Bible speak of the “everlasting” covenant” (Gen 17:13; Heb 13:20).

Before examining the four New Testament texts arbitrarily used by Pastor Taylor to prove that the Sabbath is part of the Old Covenant package of laws fulfilled by Christ, it is important to clarify the relationship between the Old and New Covenants. The question are: Does the Old Covenant differ from the New Covenant in the method of salvation? To put it differently, is salvation offered in the Old Covenant on the basis of obedience to the Law and in the New Covenant on the basis of faith in God’s saving grace? What aspects of the Old Covenant were terminated by Christ’s coming?

Pastor Taylor and former Adventists who recently have embraced the so-called “New Covenant” theology, emphasize the radical distinction in the method of salvation between the Old and New Covenant. Such a distinction is foreign to the Bible and contrary to common sense. It ignores that the Sinai Covenant reveals God’s gracious provision of salvation just as much as the New Covenant does. God revealed to Moses His plan to deliver Israel from Egypt and to set her up in the land of Canaan (Ex 3:7-10, 16) because Israel is “His people” (Ex 3:10). God’s deliverance of the Israelites from the bondage of Egypt reveals His gracious provision of salvation just as much as does His deliverance of New Testament believers from the bondage of sin. In fact, in Scripture, the former is a type of the latter.

The Israelites responded with *faith* to the manifestation of salvation: “Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians . . . and the people feared the Lord; and they *believed* in the Lord and in his servant Moses” (Ex 14:30-31). When the Israelites *believed*, God revealed to them His covenant plan: “Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:5).

These words show the gratuity of the divine election of Israel. God chose Israel without merit on her part (Deut 9:4ff), simply because He loved her (Deut 7:6ff). Having separated her from pagan nations, He reserved her for Himself exclusively. “I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself” (Ex 19:4). Through the Sinai covenant, God wished to bring people to Himself by making them a worshipping community dedicated to His service, living by the principles of His Law, and thus revealing His saving grace to the nations. This divine plan revealed at Sinai was ultimately realized at the Cross when types met antitypes.

The prophets appeal to the Sinai Covenant with emotional overtones drawn from human experiences to explain the relationship between God and His people. Israel is the flock, and the Lord is the shepherd. Israel is the vine, and the Lord the vinedresser. Israel is the son, and the Lord is the Father. Israel is the spouse, and the Lord is the bridegroom. These images, as Pierre Grelot and Jean Giblet bring out, “make the Sinaitic covenant appear as an encounter of love (cf. Ez 16:6-14): the attentive and gratuitous love of God, calling in return for a love which will translate itself in obedience.” All of this hardly supports the assumption of Pastor Taylor and dispensationalists, that something was seriously wrong with the Old Covenant.

## Faith Is Not Alone

The obedience called for by the Sinaitic covenant was meant to be a loving response to God's provision of salvation, not a means of salvation. After centuries of faithlessness to their promise to cooperate with God, Israel was allowed to go into captivity as an indication that the provisions of the covenant were no longer operative (see Jer 11:1-16; Ez 16; Heb 8:9). Upon returning from captivity, God promised to "make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah" (Jer 31:31-34). This new covenant is the everlasting covenant which consists in God's arrangements for the salvation of all believers through Christ's atoning sacrifice. Note that this new covenant is already given to the Jews in the Old Testament.

Unfortunately, during the intertestamental period, the Law did come to be viewed by the Jews as a means of salvation, just as faith alone is considered by many Christians today as the only basis for their salvation. But a saving faith is never alone because it is always accompanied by loving obedience (Gal 5:6). Can a person truly obey God's laws without faith? Is there such a thing as a saving faith that is not manifested in obedience to God's commandments? Is the problem of legalism resolved by changing the method of salvation? Such distortions can only serve to make both the Old and New Covenants ineffective for many people.

## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS

At Sinai, God invited His people to obey His commandments because He had already saved them, not in order that they might save themselves by observing His commandments. Moreover, God revealed to the Israelites, not only the *principles* of moral conduct but also the *provision* of salvation through the typology of the sacrificial system. It is noteworthy that when God invited Moses to come up on Mt. Sinai, He gave him not only "the tables of stone, with the Law and the commandment" (Ex 24:12), but also the "pattern of the tabernacle" (Ex 25:9) which was designed to explain typologically His provision of grace and forgiveness.

The major difference between the Old and New Covenants is *not one of methods of salvation*, but of *manner in which salvation was offered*. The difference is one of *shadow versus reality*. The Old Covenant was "symbolic" (Heb 9:9) of the "more excellent" redemptive ministry of Christ (Heb 8:6). Consequently, it was necessary for Christ to come "once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb 9:26).

Greg Bahnsen rightly notes that "If we allow the Bible to interpret itself and not infuse it with a preconceived theological antithesis between the Old and New Covenants (Law and Gospel), we are compelled to conclude that the Old Covenant—indeed the Mosaic Law—was a covenant of *grace* that offered salvation on the basis of grace through faith, just as does the Good News found in the New Testament. The difference was that the Mosaic or Law-covenant looked ahead to the coming of the Savior, thus administering God's covenants by means of promises, prophecies, ritual observances, types, and foreshadowings that anticipated the Savior and His redeeming work. The Gospel or the New covenant proclaims the accomplishments of that which the Law anticipated, administering God's covenant through preaching and the sacraments [baptism and the Lord's Supper]. The substance of God's saving relationship and covenant is the same under the Law and the Gospel."

The Old Testament does not offer a way of salvation or teach justification differently than the New Testament. Justification is grounded in the Old Testament in "the Lord our Righteousness" (Jer 23:6). The saints of the Old Testament were people of *faith*, as Hebrews 11 clearly shows. Abraham himself, the father of the Jews, was a man of faith who trusted God's promises (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6). The prophet Isaiah proclaimed, "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified" (Is 45:25; KJV). Paul came to understand that in the Old Testament "the righteousness of God is revealed through

faith for faith; as it is written [in Hab 2:4], ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live’” (Rom 1:17. cf. Gal 3:11).

The result of Christ’s coming is described as “setting aside” (Heb 7:18), making “obsolete” (Heb 8:13), and “abolishing” (Heb 10:9) all the Levitical services associated with the Old Covenant. It is unfortunate that these statements are interpreted as meaning that Christ by His coming abrogated all the Mosaic Law, including the Sabbath. This interpretation, which is at the heart of the misguided thinking about the Law by Pastor Taylor and most Evangelicals today, ignores the fact that the *termination* statements found in Hebrews refer to the Levitical priesthood and services of the Old Covenant, not to the principles of God’s moral Law which includes the Sabbath Commandment. Of the Sabbath the Book of Hebrews explicitly states that “a Sabbathkeeping is left behind for the people of God” (Heb 4:9). This important text which affirms categorically the permanence of seventh-day Sabbathkeeping will be examined in the next newsletter.

Summing up, Pastor Taylor’s methodology is based on the faulty assumption that there is a radical distinction between the Old and New Covenant in the method of salvation. The distinction, as we have seen, is not in the *method of salvation*, but in *manner in which salvation is offered*: typologically through the sacrificial system in the Old Covenant and realistically through Christ’s sacrifice in the New Covenant.

## **PASTOR TAYLOR’S USE OF PAULINE TEXTS**

To defend his assumption that the New Testament teaches us that Christ came to fulfill much of the Old Covenant, by terminating the function of institutions like the Sabbath, Pastor Taylor submits as his first text Colossians 2:16-17. Before examining his interpretation of this controversial passage, a comment must be made again about Pastor Taylor’s methodology.

To understand Paul’s view of the Law in general and of the Sabbath in particular, Pastor Taylor should have examined first of all the relevant Pauline passages, and then consider the controversial passages of Colossians 2:16-17, Galatians 3:16-29, Galatians 4:9-11, and Romans 14:4-5. His proof-texts approach hardly does justice to Paul’s overall teachings on the Law and the Sabbath.

In chapter 5 of my book *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE*, I present an extensive survey of Paul’s teachings about the Law. I would urge any reader interested in this subject to read this pivotal chapter. The conclusion of my analysis is that before his conversion, Paul understood the Law like a Pharisee, that is, as the external observance of commandments in order to gain salvation (2 Cor 5:16-17). After his conversion, he came to view the Law from the perspective of the Cross of Christ, who came “in order that the just requirements of the Law might be fulfilled in us” through the enabling power of His Spirit (Rom 8:4). From the perspective of the Cross, Paul rejects the Pharisaic understanding of the Law as a means of salvation and affirms the Old Testament view of the Law as a revelation of God’s will for human conduct.

It is important to note that for Paul *the Law is and remains God’s Law* (Rom 7:22, 25). The Law was given by God (Rom 9:4; 3:2), written by God (1 Cor 9:9; 14:21; 14:34), contains the will of God (Rom 2:17, 18), bears witness to the righteousness of God (Rom 3:21), and is in accord with the promises of God (Gal 3:21). Repeatedly and explicitly Paul speaks of “*the Law of God*.” “I delight in *the Law of God* in my inmost self” (Rom 7:22); “I of myself serve *the Law of God* with my mind” (Rom 7:25); the carnal mind “does not submit to *God’s Law*” (Rom 8:7). Elsewhere he speaks of “keeping the *commandments of God*” (1 Cor 7:19) as being a Christian imperative.

## **Christ Coming and the Law**

For Paul the purpose of Christ’s redemptive mission, is not to terminate the function of the Law by substituting it with principles of love, as Pastor Taylor assumes, but to enable believers to live out the principles of God’s Law in their lives. The Apostle

explains that in Christ, God does what the Law by itself could not do—namely, He empowers believers to live according to the “just requirements of the Law.” “For God has done what the Law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirements of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:3-4).

The new life in Christ enables the Christian to keep the Law, not as an external code, but as a loving response to God. This is the very thing that the Law by itself cannot do because, being an external standard of human conduct, it cannot generate a loving response in the human heart. By contrast, “Christ’s love compels us” (2 Cor 5:14) to respond to Him by living according to the moral principles of God’s Law. Our love response to Christ fulfills the Law because love will not commit adultery, or lie, or steal, or covet, or harm one’s neighbor (Rom 13:8-10).

The permanence of the Law is reflected in Paul’s appeal to specific commandments as the norm for Christian conduct. To illustrate how the principle of love fulfills the Law, Paul cites several specific commandments: “The commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,’ and any other commandment, are summed up in the sentence, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the Law” (Rom 13: 9-10).

Paul’s reference to “any other commandment” presupposes the rest of the Ten Commandments, since love fulfills not only the last six commandments that affect our relationship with fellow beings, but also the first four commandments that govern our relationship with God. For example, love fulfills the Sabbath commandment because it motivates Christians to truly love the Lord by giving priority to Him in their thinking and living during the hours of the Sabbath.

Central to Paul’s understanding of the Law is the Cross of Christ. From this perspective, he both negates and affirms the Law. Negatively, the Apostle repudiates the Law as the basis of justification: “if justification were through the Law, then Christ died to no purpose” (Gal 2:21).

Positively, Paul teaches that the Law is “spiritual, good, holy, just” (Rom 7:12, 14, 16; 1 Tim 1:8) because it exposes sin and reveals God’s ethical standards. Thus, he states that Christ came “in order that the just requirements of the Law might be fulfilled in us” through the dynamic power of His Spirit (Rom 8:4).

Three times Paul states: “Neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision;” and each time he concludes this statement with a different phrase: “but keeping the commandments of God . . . but faith working through love . . . but a new creation” (1 Cor 7:19; Gal 5:6; 6:15). The parallelism shows that Paul equates the keeping of God’s commandments with a working faith and a new life in Christ, which is made possible through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

Had Pastor Taylor understood that Paul repudiates the Law as the basis of salvation (Gal 2:21), but affirms the Law as the standard of moral conduct for the Christian life, he would have approached the study of the four controversial texts from a different perspective. He would have fitted whatever Paul teaches in these texts, within the context of the Apostle’s overall understanding of the role of God’s moral Law in the life of a believer.

## PASTOR TAYLOR'S INTERPRETATION OF COLOSSIANS 2:16-17

The first text used by Pastor Taylor to support his rejection of the Sabbath as an Old Covenant institution is Colossians 2:16-17. This is not surprising, because historically this text has been interpreted as the death knell of the Sabbath. Pastor Taylor writes: "In the book of Colossians, Paul is addressing a syncretistic heresy that is a mixture of angel worship, and ascetic practices. But mixed into it all is the judaizing element (Jewish legalists who were pushing Jewish law) that is trying to influence these new Christians. In the Colossians two passage, the focus is on the Jewish part of the heresy. Starting with verse 11, Paul focuses on the fact that circumcision has been replaced by baptism so circumcision is no longer required. Then He points out that the record of our sins has been nailed to the cross as soon as we accept Jesus. Finally, Paul discusses the last two Jewish distinctives. Notice verses 16 and 17. 'Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.'"

For Pastor Taylor in this passage "Paul is saying that the Colossians should not let these Judaizers lay a guilt trip on them about the food laws, or the festivals, new moons, or Sabbaths because these were part of the system that prefigured or pointed forward to Christ. . . . These religious holidays, including the Sabbath, were symbols pointing forward to Jesus. They were typological prefigurations of Jesus. How could the perversion of a symbol be a shadow or prefiguration of Christ? The most reasonable rendering of the text is that the weekly Sabbath is included in the ceremonial/sacrificial system that was FULFILLED IN CHRIST! No other explanation made sense to me. No other interpretation does justice to the context or the Old Testament construction."

There are two major problems with Pastor Taylor's interpretation of Colossians 2. The first is his definition of the Colossian heresy refuted by Paul. The second is his interpretation of Colossians 2:16-17. Let us take a look at these two problems in their respective orders.

Pastor Taylor believes that in Colossians 2 "the focus is on the Jewish part of the [Colossian] heresy." He alleges that Paul argues in this chapter that "circumcision is no longer required" and that the same goes for food laws and festivals, including the Sabbath. Is this what Paul teaches in this passage? A careful reading of this chapter shows otherwise.

### The Colossian Heresy

The Colossian heresy refuted by Paul in Colossians 2 contained some Jewish elements, but was primarily syncretistic, drawn mostly from gnostic speculations. In fact most of the catch phrases point to gnostic influences. The Colossian heresy had both a *theological* and *practical* aspect.

*Theologically*, the Colossian "philosophy" (Col 2:8) was competing with Christ for believer's allegiance. Its source of authority was human "tradition" (Col 2:8), and its object was to impart true "wisdom" (Col 2:3, 23), "knowledge" (Col 2:2-3; 3:10) and the assurance access to and participation in the divine "fullness" (Col 2:9-10; 1:19). To attain divine fullness, Christians were urged to do homage to cosmic principalities (Col 2:10, 15), to "the elements of the universe" (Col 2:8, 20), and to angelic powers (2:15, 18), following ritualistic ascetic practices (Col 2:11-14,16,17,21-22).

To gain protection from these cosmic powers and principalities, the Colossian "philosophers" urged Christians to offer cultic adoration to angelic powers (Col 2:15,18,19,23) and to follow ritualistic and ascetic practices (Col 2:11,14,16,17,21,22). By that process, one was assured of access to and participation in the divine "fullness—*pleroma*" (Col 2:9,10, cf. 1:19). Essentially, then, the theological error consisted in interposing inferior mediators in place of the Head Himself, Jesus Christ (Col 2:9-10, 18-19). Note that none of these beliefs can be traced to Old Testament teachings.

The *practical* outcome of the theological speculations of the Colossian heretics was their insistence on strict asceticism and ritualism. These consisted in “putting off the body of flesh” (Col 2:11—apparently meaning withdrawal from the world); rigorous treatment of the body (Col 2:23); prohibition to either taste or touch certain kinds of foods and beverages (Col 2:16, 21), and careful observance of sacred days and seasons—festival, new moon, Sabbath (Col 2:16). Note that only the last practice is derived from Judaism.

Christians presumably were led to believe that by submitting to these ascetic practices, they were not surrendering their faith in Christ but rather, they were receiving added protection and were assured of full access to the divine fullness. This may be inferred both from Paul’s distinction between living “according to the elements of the universe” and “according to Christ” (Col 2:8) and from the Apostle’s insistence on the supremacy of the incarnate Christ. “In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col 2:9); therefore Christians attain “the fullness—*pleroma*” of life not by worshipping the elements of the universe, but through Christ, “who is the head of all rule and authority” (2:10; cf. 1:15-20; 3:3).

This bare outline suffices to show that the circumcision and the Sabbath are mentioned in the passage, not in the context of a direct discussion of the Old Covenant law, as Pastor Taylor assumes. It is surprising that the term “law” (*nomos*), which is fundamental to Paul’s discussion of salvation, does not appear a single time in Colossians. The reference to food and festivals appears in the context of syncretistic pagan beliefs and practices, which included few elements from the Old Testament. Presumably the latter provided a justification for the ascetic principles advocated by the Colossian “philosophers.” We are not informed what type of Sabbath observance these teachers promoted; nevertheless, on the basis of their emphasis on scrupulous adherence to “regulations,” it is apparent that the day was to be observed in a most rigorous and superstitious manner.

### **Circumcision and Baptism**

To combat the above false teachings, Paul chose to extol the centrality and superiority of Christ who possesses “the fullness of deity” (Col 2:9) and provides full redemption and forgiveness of sin (Col 2:11-14). To emphasize the certainty and fullness of Christ’s forgiveness, Paul utilizes three metaphors: circumcision, baptism, and “the written document” (Col 2:11-14).

Of the first two metaphors, Paul says: “In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of the flesh, God has made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses” (Col 2:11-13).

To support his contention that the Sabbath is part of the Old Covenant nailed to the Cross, Pastor Taylor interprets Paul’s reference to the circumcision and baptism in this passage as indicating that the “circumcision has been replaced by baptism so circumcision is no longer required.” The problem with this interpretation is the failure to recognize that Paul is not discussing the termination of circumcision which was still in effect for Jewish-Christians, but is affirming the benefits of Christ’s death and resurrection through the imageries of circumcision and baptism.

The imageries of circumcision and baptism are used by Paul, not to teach the replacement of circumcision with baptism, but to affirm the fullness of God’s forgiveness, accomplished by Christ on the cross and extended through baptism to the Christian. Indeed, the proclamation of God’s forgiveness constitutes Paul’s basic answer to those attempting perfection by submitting to worship of angels (Col 2:18) and of the “elements of the world” (Col 2:8) by means of ascetic practices.

To further emphasize the certainty and fullness of divine forgiveness explicitly mentioned in verses 11-13, Paul utilizes a legal metaphor in verse 14, namely that of God as a judge who “wiped out, . . . removed [and] nailed to the cross . . . the written document—*cheirographon*.”

The meaning of *cheirographon*, which occurs only once in Scripture (Col 2:14), has been clarified by recent studies on the usage of the term in apocalyptic and rabbinic literature. The term is used to denote the “record book of sins” or a “certificate of sin-indebtedness” but not the moral or ceremonial law. By this daring metaphor, Paul affirms the completeness of God’s forgiveness. Through Christ, God has “cancelled,” “set aside,” and “nailed to the cross” “the written record of our sins which because of the regulations was against us.” The legal basis of the record of sins was “the binding statutes,” or “regulations” (*tois dogmasin*), but what God destroyed on the Cross was not the *legal ground* (law) for our entanglement into sin, but the *written record* of our sins.

By destroying the *evidence* of our sins, God also “disarmed the principalities and powers” (Col 2:15) since it is no longer possible for them to accuse those who have been forgiven. There is no reason, therefore, for Christians to feel incomplete and to seek the help of inferior mediators since Christ has provided complete redemption and forgiveness.

Some readers will be quick to ask, “If God has cancelled and nailed our sins to the Cross, doesn’t this act do away with the pre-Advent judgment?” The answer is “NO!” Why? Because Paul is talking about the totality of God’s forgiveness, and not about the basis of God’s judgment. Various images are used in the Bible to reassure believers of the totality of God’s forgiveness. We are told that God places our sins in the depth of the sea (Mc 7:19); He removes our transgressions from His sight as far as the East is from the West (103:12); He blots out our sins (Act 3:19). These imageries of the totality of God’s forgiveness do not erase the record of our lives kept in heaven for the purpose of the final judgment. They simply teach believers not to worry about our past confessed sins, because God forgiving grace has taken care of them. The record of forgiven sins will vindicate believers on the day of judgment.

### **Approbation or Condemnation of Sabbathkeeping?**

Having refuted the *theological* speculations of the Colossian false teachers by reaffirming the supremacy of Christ and the fullness of His redemption (Col 2:8-15), Paul turns to some *practical* aspects of their religious practices, saying: “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. These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ” (Col 2:16-17).

Pastor Taylor interprets this passage as a warning against the Old Testament food laws and festivals, including the Sabbath. He writes: “Paul is saying that the Colossians should not let these judaizers lay a guilt trip on them about the food laws, or the festivals, new moons, or Sabbaths because these were part of the system that prefigured or pointed forward to Christ. . . . The most reasonable rendering of the text is that the weekly Sabbath is included in the ceremonial/sacrificial system that was FULFILLED IN CHRIST! No other explanation made sense to me.”

The fundamental problem with Pastor Taylor’s interpretation is his failure to recognize that in this text Paul warns the Colossians not against the observances of the five mentioned practices as such, but against “anyone” (*tis*) who passes judgment on how to eat, to drink, and to observe sacred times. The judge who passed judgment is not Paul but the Colossians false teachers who imposed “regulations” (Col 2:20) on how to observe these practices in order to achieve “rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body” (Col 2:23). Presumably the “judge” wanted the community to observe these practices in a more ascetic way (“severity to the body”—Col 2:23, 21); to put it bluntly, he wanted the Colossian believers to do less feasting and more fasting.

## Approbation of the Sabbath

By warning against the right of the false teachers to “pass judgment” on how to observe festivals, Paul is challenging not the validity of the festivals as such but the authority of the false teachers to legislate on the manner of their observance. The obvious implication, then, is that Paul in this text is expressing not a condemnation but an approbation of the mentioned practices, which include Sabbathkeeping.

It is noteworthy that even Douglas R. De Lacey presents this conclusion in what is regarded as the most scholarly symposium published in defense of Sundaykeeping. The symposium was sponsored by the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research in Cambridge, England. Seven Sundaykeeping scholars contributed to this symposium, published by Zondervan under the title *FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY: A BIBLICAL, HISTORICAL, AND THEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION*. In spite of his view that Paul did not expect Gentile converts to observe the Sabbath. De Lacey writes: “Here again (Col 2:16), then, it seems that Paul could *happily countenance Sabbathkeeping* . . . However, we interpret the situation, Paul’s statement ‘Let no one pass judgement on you,’ indicates that no stringent regulations are to be laid down over the use of festivals.”<sup>18</sup>

It is encouraging to see scholars finally recognizing that, contrary to the traditional and popular interpretation advocated by people like Pastor Taylor, Colossians 2:16 is not the death knell of Sabbathkeeping in the New Testament. Instead, it is a proof of its Pauline approbation. “Paul could *happily countenance Sabbathkeeping*.” Why does Pastor Taylor ignore the conclusion of Prof. De Lacey (and others), though he cites the symposium in his “Open Letter”? Most likely because he does not want readers to learn about anything that contradicts his anti-Sabbath interpretation of Colossians 2:16. This methodology is hardly reflective of responsible scholarship which requires the examination of opposing views before presenting one’s own conclusions.

## The Manner of Sabbathkeeping

What is the nature of the “regulations” promoted by the Colossians false teachers regarding food and festivals, including the weekly Sabbath? Regrettably, Paul gives us only few catch phrases such as “self-abasement and worship of angels,” “rigor of devotion . . . severity to the body” (Col 2:18, 23) and their teachings—“Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” (Col 2:21). These catch phrases indicate that the regulations did not derive from the Levitical law since nowhere does the latter contemplate such an ascetic program. Though the designation of the festivals is Jewish, the motivation and manner of their observance stems from pagan, syncretistic, and gnostic ideologies.

In the ancient world there was widespread belief that ascetism and fasting enabled a person to come closer to a deity and to receive divine revelation. In the case of the Colossian heresy, the dietary taboos and the observance of sacred times were apparently regarded as an expression of subjection to and worship of the cosmic powers (elements) of the universe.

Paul’s warning against the “regulations” of the false teachers cannot be interpreted as a condemnation of Mosaic laws regarding food and festivals, since what the Apostle condemns is not the teachings of Moses but their perverted use by Colossian false teachers. A *precept* is not nullified by the condemnation of its *perversion*.

## Shadow of the Reality.

Paul continues his argument in the following verse, saying: “These are the shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ” (Col 2:17). Pastor Taylor claims that this text discredits my conclusion just given. He writes: “The clear biblical problem with Bacchiocchi’s theory is that the text continues by describing these Sabbaths and festivals as ‘shadows of things to come,’ the ‘reality is Christ.’ These religious holidays, including the Sabbath, were symbols pointing forward to Jesus. They were typological prefigurations of Jesus. How could the perversion of a symbol be a

shadow or prefiguration of Christ? The most reasonable rendering of the text is that the weekly Sabbath is included in the ceremonial/sacrificial system that was FULFILLED IN CHRIST!"

There are three major problems with Pastor Taylor argument. First, it ignores that the verb "*are (estin) a shadow*" is *present tense*, NOT *past tense*. Like many evangelicals, Pastor Taylor changes the verb into a past tense as "*were a shadow*," in order to support his contention that their function had absolutely ceased with the coming of Christ. But the verb is a *present tense*, not a *past tense*. This means that whether the relative pronoun "these" refers to the five mentioned practices or to the regulations regarding these practices promoted by the false teachers, Paul is not disputing about their legitimacy, but places them in their proper perspectives with Christ, by means of the "shadow—body" contrast.

The second problem is the failure to define the relative pronoun "these" (*ha* in Greek). Does it refer to the five practices mentioned in the previous verse or to the "regulations" (*dogmata*) regarding these practices promoted by the false teachers? Pastor Taylor lumps them all together, jumping to the conclusion that "the weekly Sabbath is included in the ceremonial/sacrificial system that was FULFILLED IN CHRIST!" This conclusion is unwarranted because Paul is not saying that "these" (whether they be the festivals or the regulations) WERE fulfilled in Christ, but rather that they ARE a shadow, pointing to the realities of the world to come. The orientation is toward the *future*, not toward the *past*.

The third problem is Pastor Taylor's failure to recognize that Paul is not warning against the merits or demerits of the Mosaic law regarding food and festivals, but against the "regulations" regarding these practices advocated by the false teachers. Thus, it is more plausible to take "the regulations" rather than the actual practices as the antecedent of "these."

This conclusion is supported by the verses that immediately follow, where Paul continues his warning against the deceptive teachings, saying, for example, "Let no one disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement . . ." (Col 2:18); "Why do you submit to regulations, 'Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch'?" (Col 2:20-21). Since what precedes and what follows that relative pronoun "these" deals with the "regulations" of the Colossian heretics, it is most likely that Paul describes the latter as "a shadow of what is to come" (Col 2:17).

The proponents of the Colossian "philosophy" presumably maintained that their "regulations" represented a copy which enabled the believer to have access to the reality ("fullness"). In such a case, Paul is turning their argument against them by saying that their regulations "are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ" (Col 2:17). By emphasizing that Christ is the "body" and the "head" (Col 2:17, 19), Paul indicates that any "shadow" cast by the regulations has limited value.

In the light of the above considerations, we conclude that in Colossians 2:16-17 Paul is not declaring the Sabbath to be part of "the ceremonial/sacrificial system that was FULFILLED IN CHRIST." Rather, Paul warns against the regulations about foods and festivals promoted by the Colossians heretics, by limiting their values to a "shadow" of better things to come. It is important to remember that Paul was not against religious practices which did not undermine the centrality of the Cross. He himself participated in a sacrificial ritual of purification at the Temple in occasion of his last visit to Jerusalem (Acts 21:22-28). Rather, the Apostle was against the promotion of religious practices as means of salvation, because such teachings undermined the Gospel, by making salvation a human achievement, rather than a divine provision.

## PASTOR TAYLOR'S INTERPRETATION OF GALATIANS 3 AND 4

To support his interpretation of Colossians 2:16-17 that the Sabbath is part of the ceremonial law fulfilled by Christ, Pastor Taylor turns to Galatians 3 and 4. He believes that these chapters teach that the Law, and specifically the Sabbath, "do NOT have value because the law was a temporary institution. Christians are accepted on the basis of Jesus fulfillment of the law and treated as pre-law Abrahamic descendants!"

For the sake of those unfamiliar with these chapters, it is helpful to summarize what Paul is saying there, before examining Pastor Taylor's interpretation. In Galatians 3:15-25 Paul makes some negative statements about the Law which, taken in isolation, can lead people like Pastor Taylor to believe that Christ terminated the function of the Law as a norm for Christian conduct. For example, he says: "The Law was added because of transgressions, till the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made" (Gal 3:19). "Now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian" (Gal 3:25).

To understand these passages, it is important to remember that Paul's treatment of the Law in Galatians is conditioned by the crisis caused by the false teachers who had come in to "trouble," "unsettle," and "bewitch" his Galatians converts (Gal 1:7; 3:1; 5:12). Apparently they were leading his converts astray by teaching that in order to be saved, one needs not only to have faith in Christ, but must be circumcised. They taught that the blessings of salvation bestowed by Christ can only be received by becoming sons of Abraham through circumcision. Faith in Christ is of value only if such faith is based upon circumcision.

That the message of the agitators was primarily built around the requirement of circumcision, is underscored by Paul's warning: "Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all" (Gal 5:2, NIV). Paul exposes the motives of the false teachers, saying: "Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the Cross of Christ. Not even those who are circumcised obey the Law, yet they want you to be circumcised, they may boast about your flesh" (Gal 6:12-13).

The emphasis of the false teachers on circumcision reflects the prevailing Jewish understanding that circumcision was required to become a member of the Abrahamic covenant and receive its blessings. In his response, Paul turns his opponents' argument on its head by arguing that God's covenant with Abraham was based on his faith response (Gen 15:6; Gal 3:6) *before* the sign of circumcision was given (Gen 17:9-14).

In all probability, the false teachers appealed to the institution of circumcision in Genesis 17 to argue that circumcision was indispensable to become a son of Abraham. Paul also points to Genesis—*not* of course to Genesis 17 *but* to Genesis 15:6 which says: "He [Abraham] believed the Lord and he reckoned it to him as righteousness." From this Paul concludes: "So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham" (Gal 3:7).

Paul develops this argument further by setting the promise given to Abraham (in Genesis 18:18) against the giving of the Law at Sinai which occurred 430 years later (Gal 3:15-18). The fact that the covenant with Abraham was one of promise based on faith excludes the possibility of earning righteousness by works. "For if the inheritance is by the Law, it is no longer by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise" (Gal 3:18).

If salvation was by way of promise (faith) and not Law, what then was the role of the Law in God's redemptive purpose? Paul's answer is both novel and unacceptable to Judaism. The Law "was added because of transgressions, till the offspring should come to whom the promises had been made" (Gal 3:19). The Law was not added to save men from their sins, but to reveal the sinfulness of their transgressions. In this context, Paul speaks of the Law in its narrow, negative function of exposing sin, in order to counteract the exaltation of the Law by its opponents.

## Was the Moral Law Temporary and Terminated by Christ?

From these Galatian passages, Pastor Taylor draws this conclusion: “What Paul is saying is that the promise of Christ came BEFORE the Law. It is independent of the Law. The Law was ADDED to show us our need of Christ. It was our tutor to bring us to Christ that we might be justified by FAITH. Clearly Paul is pointing out that the Law was a TEMPORARY institution to show us our need of Christ. But when we accept Jesus, we are under the covenant which was pre-circumcision and pre-law, the covenant with Abraham. The Christian now stands with righteous Abraham, an heir of the promise, bypassing the entire Law era! I had never seen the significance of this passage before! I had to read and re-read it. I encourage you to sit down with the book of Galatians and read and digest this for yourself. The message is so powerful and liberating! “

Did Paul really teach that the moral Law given at Sinai, which included the Sabbath, was a “TEMPORARY institution,” fulfilled by Christ and consequently no longer binding upon Christians? If that is what Paul taught, why does he write in 1 Corinthians 7:19: “For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God”? Why does he state in Rom 8:3-4 that God “sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh . . . in order that the just requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit”? Why does Paul say: “I delight in the Law of God in my inmost self” (Rom 7:22); “I of myself serve *the Law of God* with my mind” (Rom 7:25); “the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good” (Rom 7:12).

A responsible study of Paul's view of the Law calls for an analysis of all his references to the Law, and not only of few Galatian texts where the Apostle speaks of the law in its narrow, negative function of exposing sin, in order to counteract the exaltation of the Law, especially circumcision. In Galatians 3 Paul is not speaking of the broad moral Law, which he characterizes as “holy, just, and good” in Romans 7:12, but of the “bare Law” understood in a narrow sense as the Law seen apart from Christ which was a temporary custodian until the coming of Christ.

To explain the function of the “bare Law” before Christ, Paul compares it to a *paidagogos*, a guardian of children in Roman and Greek households. The guardian's responsibility was to accompany the children to school, protect them from harm, and keep them from mischief. The role of a *paidagogos* is an apt illustration of how certain aspects of the Law served as a guardian and custodian of God's people in Old Testament times. For example, circumcision, which is the fundamental issue Paul is addressing, served as a guardian by constantly reminding the people of their covenant commitment to God (Jos 5:2-8). Any Jew tempted to have a sexual intercourse with a pagan woman was reminded by looking at his circumcision that he belonged to a covenant community, a holy nation.

When God called Israel out of Egyptian bondage, He gave them not only the Decalogue that they might see the sinfulness of sin, but also ceremonial, religious Laws designed to exhibit the divine plan for the forgiveness of their sins. These Laws, indeed, functioned as a guardian (*paidagogos*) by protecting and guiding the people until the day of their spiritual deliverance through Jesus Christ. With the coming of Christ, the ceremonial, sacrificial Laws ended, but the Decalogue is written in human hearts (Heb 8:10) by the ministry of the Holy Spirit who enables believers to “fulfill the just requirement of the Law” (Rom 8:4).

It is difficult to imagine that Paul would announce the abolition of the Decalogue, God's great moral Law, when elsewhere he affirms that the Law was given by God (Rom 9:4; 3:2), was written by God (1 Cor 9:9; 14:21; 14:34), contains the will of God (Rom 2:17,18), bears witness to the righteousness of God (Rom 3:21), and is in accord with the promises of God (Gal 3:21). So long as sin is present in the human nature, the Law is needed to expose its sinfulness (Rom 3:20) and reveal the need of a Savior.

Three times Paul states: "Neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision;" and each time he concludes this statement with a different phrase: "but keeping the commandments of God . . . but faith working through love . . . but a new creation" (1 Cor 7:19; Gal 5:6; 6:15). The parallelism shows that Paul equates the keeping of God's commandments with a working faith and a new life in Christ. This means that Paul distinguished between the temporary aspects of the Law, like circumcision, and the permanent nature of the Decalogue which reflects the moral standard of a new life in Christ. We wish that Paul had made this distinction clearer. No doubt this would have helped sincere people like Pastor Taylor, not accustomed to analyze all what Paul has to say about the law.

On the basis of the above considerations, we conclude that Paul's negative comments about the Law in Galatians 3, must be understood in the light of his polemic against the false teachers who were exalting the Law, especially circumcision, as a *means* of salvation. In refuting the perverse and excessive exaltation of the Law, Paul is forced to depreciate it in some measure, especially because the issue at stake was the imposition of circumcision as a means of salvation.

In his penetrating study on "St. Paul and the Law," published in the *Scottish Journal of Theology* (March 1964), C. E. Cranfield rightly warns that "to fail to make full allowance for the special circumstances which called forth the [Galatian] letter would be to proceed in a quite uncritical and unscientific manner. In view of what has been said, it should be clear that it would be extremely unwise to take what Paul says in Galatians as one's starting point in trying to understand Paul's teaching on the Law." It is unfortunate that Pastor Taylor failed to heed this warning by taking Galatians as the starting point for defining Paul's view of the Law. The tragic result of this mistake is a gross misinterpretation of Paul's view of the Law.

#### **DOES PAUL CONDEMN SABBATHKEEPING IN GALATIANS 4:8-11?**

Pastor Taylor believes that Paul continues in Galatians 4 his criticism of the observance of the law, by condemning specifically Sabbathkeeping. His conclusion is based on Galatians 4:8-11, which reads: "Formerly, when you did not know God, you were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods; 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 beggarly elemental spirits, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days, and months, and seasons, and years! I am afraid that I have labored over you in vain."

Pastor Taylor's interpretation of this passage reveals again his tendency to read into Bible texts his gratuitous assumptions. He writes: "I could hardly believe my eyes as I read this scripture. I had read it many times before, but never understood it. This time the words seemed to jump off the page for me much like the 'Hidden Pictures' I mentioned in the letter portion. Could Paul have been any clearer? Knowing the pattern for religious holidays in the Old Testament, it suddenly clarified for me what was at issue here. The judaizers had been teaching these new Christians that they had to keep the Sabbaths and the rest of the feasts as part of their commitment to Christ. The days, months, seasons, and years follow the same pattern of the Jewish holiday system including the Sabbath. The judaizers were telling the Galatians that they MUST keep Sabbath and the other feasts. Paul is clearly saying that observing these holidays is NOT REQUIRED for Christians. He sees that doing so could be DANGEROUS to their maturity as Christians. He is saying that these things do NOT have value because the law was a temporary institution. Christians are accepted on the basis of Jesus fulfillment of the law and treated as pre-law Abrahamic descendant! The message of Galatians seemed to literally come to life for me. Those hard to understand passages suddenly made perfect sense!"

Is Pastor Taylor shedding new light on Galatians 4:8-11? Or is he reading into it his gratuitous assumptions? Is Paul rebuking the Judaizers for teaching that new Christians "had to keep the Sabbaths and the rest of the feasts as part of their commitment to Christ"? To answer these questions we need to determine whether the

Galatians' observance of "days, and months, and seasons, and years" refers to superstitious pagan holidays or to the biblical festivals, including the Sabbath.

### **Pagan Superstitious Days or Jewish Holy Days?**

A careful analysis of the context leaves no doubt that Paul is talking about pagan superstitious days. The Apostle reminds the Galatians that in their pre-Christian days they "were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe" (Gal 4:3). The "elemental spirits—*stoikeia tou kosmou*" have nothing to do with the Old Covenant since the Mosaic Law was unknown to the Corinthians in their pagan days. Most scholars interpret the "elements" as the basic elements of this world, such as the earth, water, air, and fire, or pagan astral gods who were credited with controlling human destiny.

The context clearly indicates that Paul rebukes the Galatians for turning back to their pagan days by reverting to their pagan calendar. Thus, the issue is not their adoption of Jewish Holy Days but their return to observing pagan superstitious days. Two recent articles by Troy Martin, published in *New Testament Studies* and the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, make a significant contribution to the understanding of the passage under consideration. Martin points out that the time-keeping scheme found in Galatians 4:10 ("days, and months, and seasons, and years") is clearly different from that found in Colossians 2:16 ("a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths"). He shows that while the list in Colossians 2:16 is unquestionably Jewish, because the temporal categories of festival, new moon, and Sabbaths are characteristic of the Jewish religious calendar, the list in Galatians 4:10 of "days, and months, and seasons, and years" "describes a pagan calendar unacceptable to Paul and his communities."

Martin reaches this conclusion by examining not only the time structure of pagan calendars, but also the immediate context where Paul condemns the Galatians' attempt to return to their pagan practices (Gal 4:8-9) by reverting to the use of their pagan calendar. "As the immediate context clearly states, Paul is worried that he has labored for the Galatians in vain since they have returned to their former pagan life as evidenced by their renewed preconversion reckoning of time. Because of its association with idolatry and false deities, marking time according to this pagan scheme is tantamount to rejecting Paul's Gospel and the one and only true God it proclaims (Gal 4:8-9). Galatians 4:10, therefore, stipulates that when the Galatians accepted Paul's Gospel with its aversion to idolatry (Gal 4:8), they discarded their pagan method of reckoning time. . . . A comparison of these lists demonstrates that the Gentile conversion to Paul's gospel involves rejection of idolatrous pagan temporal schemes in favor of the Jewish liturgical calendar."

### **Gentiles' Adoption of Jewish Calendar**

Troy Martin's conclusion, that the Gentiles' conversion to the Gospel involved the rejection of their pagan calendar built upon the idolatrous worship of many gods and the adoption of the Jewish religious calendar which had been transformed by Christ's coming, represents in my view a significant breakthrough in our understanding of the continuity between Judaism and Christianity.

Paul's time references clearly reflect his adoption of the Jewish religious calendar, though modified and transformed by the coming of Christ. For example, in 1 Corinthians 16:2, Paul recommends a fund-raising plan for the Jerusalem church consisting of laying aside at home some money *kata mian sabbaton*, that is, "every first day from the Sabbath." The fact that Paul refers to the first day of the week by the Jewish designation "first day from the Sabbath," and not by the prevailing pagan name *dies solis*—Day of the Sun, reveals that he taught his Gentile converts to regulate their lives by the Jewish calendar.

In the same epistle, Paul builds an elaborate argument based upon the festival of Passover and unleavened bread in order to exhort the Corinthians, "Let us keep the festival" (1 Cor 5:6-8). The whole argument and exhortation to keep Passover would have been meaningless to the Gentile congregation of Corinth unless Paul had taught

about the Jewish religious calendar. In the light of these considerations we conclude, with Martin, that “ although the temporal references in Paul’s letters are sparse, 1 Corinthians provides strong evidence for the Pauline adoption of the Jewish practice that marked time by festivals and Sabbaths.”

The Christian adherence to the Jewish calendar is especially evident in the book of Acts. Repeatedly, Paul proclaims the Gospel in synagogues and in the outdoors on the Sabbath (Acts 13:14, 44; 16:13; 17:2). In Troas, Paul speaks to the believers on the first day from Sabbath (*mia ton sabbaton*) (Acts 20:7). “The portrayal of Paul in Acts,” as Martin points out, “supplies clear evidence that Christians mark time by segments of festivals and Sabbaths.” This conclusion is clearly supported by Colossians 2:16 where we find the standard Jewish nomenclature of annual feasts, monthly new moons, and weekly Sabbaths.

The fact that Paul taught his Gentile congregations to reject their pagan calendar, where the days were named after planetary gods and the months after deified emperors, and to reckon time according to the Jewish religious calendar, does not necessarily mean that he taught them to practice Jewish religious rituals. The Romans themselves replaced just before the origin of Christianity their “eight day week—*nundinum*” with the Jewish seven-day week and adopted in the first century the Jewish Sabbath as their new day for rest and feasting, without the concomitant adoption of the Jewish rituals. By the same token, Paul taught his Gentile converts to reckon time according to the Jewish religious calendar without expecting them to practice the rituals associated with it. A good example is Paul’s discussion of the new meaning of the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread in the light of Christ’s event (1 Cor 5:6-8).<sup>44</sup>

In the light of the preceding observations, we conclude that the temporal categories of Galatians 4:10 (“days, and months, and seasons, and years”) are pagan and not Jewish, like the list found in Colossians 2:16. To argue, as Pastor Taylor does, that the Galatians were taught by the false teachers “to keep the Sabbaths and the rest of the feasts as part of their commitment to Christ,” means to ignore the immediate context where Paul speaks of pagan temporal categories to which the Galatians were turning back again.

The Galatians’ observance of pagan sacred times was motivated by superstitious beliefs in astral influences. This is suggested by Paul’s charge that their adoption of these practices was tantamount to a return to their former pagan subjection to elemental spirits and demons (Gal 4:8-9).

Paul’s concern is not to expose the superstitious ideas attached to these observances but to challenge the whole system of salvation which the Galatians’ false teachers had devised. By conditioning justification and acceptance with God to such things as circumcision and the observance of pagan days and seasons, the Galatians were making salvation dependent upon human achievement. This for Paul was a betrayal of the Gospel: “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace” (Gal 5:4).

It is within this context that Pastor Taylor should understand Paul’s denouncement of the observance of days and seasons. If the motivations for these observances had not undermined the vital principle of justification by faith in Jesus Christ, Paul would only have recommended tolerance and respect, as he does in Romans 14. The motivation for these practices, however, adulterated the very ground of salvation. Consequently, the Apostle had no choice but strongly to reject them.

In conclusion, Pastor Taylor’s attempt to interpret the Galatians and Colossians texts as a Pauline condemnation of the principle of Sabbathkeeping, is totally devoid of textual and contextual support. We have seen that what Paul opposes is not the principle of Sabbathkeeping, but rather the perverted use of cultic observances which were designed to promote salvation as a human achievement rather than as a divine gift of grace.

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

The failure to understand that Paul rejects the law as a method of salvation but upholds it as a moral standard of Christian conduct has been the root cause of much misunderstanding about Paul's attitude toward the law, in general, and the Sabbath, in particular. May this study contribute to clarify this misunderstanding and allow many sincere people like Pastor Taylor, to discover, as Paul puts it, that "the law is good, if any one uses it lawfully" (1 Tim 1:8).

### **Contact Information**

Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.  
Retired Professor of Theology and Church History  
Andrews University  
4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, MI 49103

Phone (616) 471-2915 Fax (616) 471-4013  
E-mail: [sbacchiocchi@qtm.net](mailto:sbacchiocchi@qtm.net) or [sbacchiocchi@csi.com](mailto:sbacchiocchi@csi.com)  
Web site: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com>