The Sabbath Sentinel

Nov-Dec 2026



Should Christians Vote?

BSA—The Bible Sabbath Association

"look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom..."

The Sabbath Sentinel November-December, 2026

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Should Christians Vote?

The Bible does not command Christians to vote, nor does it forbid political participation. Instead, Scripture provides principles that we can apply when deciding whether and how to engage in elections.

Let's begin with some reasons why Christians choose to vote. Christians who vote often see it as a way to seek the welfare of their community. Jer 29:4, 7 states as follows: *Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon; ...*

And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.

Another reason a Christian might choose to vote is to pursue justice and protect the vulnerable, guided by passages like Isaiah 1:17 and Proverbs 31:8.

Isa 1:17 advises us, *Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow*. Choosing which candidate has the better record of helping the helpless would be a consideration since those things are favored by God. Of course, this does not relieve the responsibility we all have of doing our part.

Pro 31:8 also instructs us to *Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction*. Essentially, Solomon is tell us to speak for those who can't speak for themselves. One such situation is the case where our legislators can either support or act against abortion—but there are other spiritual bases for our decisions.

Some brethren believe that voting helps to fulfill the command to Love their neighbors by considering how policies affect others. We read in Mat 22:39, when Christ was speaking of the two great commandments, *and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*.

It might be the case that in voting the Christian is exercising stewardship of opportunities God has given to them. We can read about that in Matthew 25:14–30.

Voting can also be seen as a way for the Christian to participate peacefully in shaping society. We read in 1Ti 2:1-2 *I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty*. This isn't a command to vote, but in many cases voting leads us to a situation where we can make a difference.

Acts 6 provides a model of communal selection of leaders based on character, wisdom, and service, offering principles relevant to evaluating candidates, though also we do not find a command to vote.

In short, we don't find a command to vote but we find good reasons to do so. There is also no command to refrain from voting! Certainly, if we are going to vote, we ought to do our due diligence to locate the individual who will best act for the benefit of the people, and not their own pocketbook of which we have seen entirely too much in the United States.

Reasons Some Christians Choose Not to Vote

There are also valid reasons why Christians abstain from participating in voting. They often do so because: their primary allegiance is to God's kingdom, not earthly systems. In Jhn 18:36 we read, *Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence*. The idea that we are not part of the world leads some to completely abstain from the selection of leaders.

Some believe that political power can become an idol, tempting misplaced trust. Because we don't have the insight of God, some fear voting for evil—and with good reason. In Psa 20:7 we find this admonition, *Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God*. Does voting indicate that we forget the name of our God?

Voting may violate the conscience of a dedicated follower of Christ when all options seem to be morally compromised. This is related to our believing that we can faithfully ascertain the moral rectitude of those seeking office. In Rom 14:23 we find, *And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin*. In short, if we are not sure whether we should vote, or for whom we should vote, then the better

option would be to refrain from engaging in that practice.

Some brethren might believe that by abstaining from voting they are witnessing that hope for this world is not found in politics. Certainly, we all know that our only hope lies in our Savior who will bring His Kingdom as He promised. It will be then that the political problems of this world will be brought to and end by the rule of the One who will rule for the benefit of all. Jesus explains the following in Mrk 10:42-45: *But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.* Nobody wants to vote for someone who forgets his oath of office and why he or she was elected, and instead sets themselves up as rulers instead of servants!

It is certainly possible that political involvement can harm Christian character, fostering anger or division. Politics can be one of the most divisive discussions one can have with another brother. Notice what we read in Jas 1:20 *For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God*. If we find that we get too worked up over political choices through voting, then perhaps we should not discuss voting at all.

None of us is gifted with the insight of Jesus that allows us to see into the hearts of political candidates. For this reason, Christians should not judge one another on disputable matters (Romans 14 in its entirety). Paul was adamant that we keep our moral clarity in all things, and that would certainly pertain to whether or not we vote, and for whom we might vote.

Both voting and nonvoting followers of Christ must remember that political effectiveness is not the measure of faithfulness; love and service are.

When determining whether voting is proper, Christians should ask:

What choice best serves my neighbors?

Can I act without violating my conscience?

Am I motivated by love rather than fear?

Am I trusting God rather than political power?

Am I treating others with dignity despite disagreement?

Am I pursuing justice and service beyond voting?

These are all important considerations for us when determining whether we should be voting and if so then for whom should we cast our ballot.

In the election of this November, if we choose to vote, we should make certain as much as is possible to cast votes only for those who will not promote evil. We can easily determine who wants to advocate for killing children or who speaks against the God of Abraham. Our choice would be clear in that case. Candidates who espouse socialism and communism, ideologies that openly proclaim hatred for Christianity, should be avoided. But, when the choice is cloudier, we should ask God for the wisdom we need. In Jas 1:5 we are advised to do exactly that: *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.* God will not only give us wisdom liberally for the asking, but will not chastise us for having done so.

Whether or not one votes, and for whom one might vote if so inclined, is a matter for wisdom. It is not a matter for division amongst brethren and we should never be reduced to allowing division over such. Paul writes in 1Co1:10 *Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*. If we can't engage politically without losing that peace God wants us to have in our congregations, then wisdom certainly ordains that we either do not get involved or do not discuss such.

In conclusion, we find that Scripture does not make voting a universal Christian duty. Neither does Scripture forbid it. Both voting and abstaining can be faithful responses when guided by conscience, love, justice, humility, and trust in God. A Christian's faithfulness is measured not by whether they vote, but by whether they follow Christ with integrity and compassion, seeking always to access the peace which passes all understanding.

BSA Annual Fundraiser & Board of Directors' Report

As we rush toward the end of the year, we on the Bible Sabbath Association (BSA) board have reached that annual point where we ask our members and friends for support to continue this great work.

As you probably know, the BSA has as its mission the proclaiming of Jesus as our Savior, promoting the Commandments of God, especially God's Sabbath Day, and encouraging of fellowship across the artificial boundaries that separate us.

Over the years the BSA has come to grips with the changing communication cultures of our brethren. This has led us to shed costly services that were not paying their way, *i.e.*, the book and periodical store. Instead, we've gone to linking to online sources for books and other periodicals via our website in order to continue to serve everyone.

We've also discontinued printing the Directory of Sabbath Keeping groups, a book that was usually outdated by the time it was printed, in favor of keeping track of those groups at no charge and making the information freely available to all via the biblesabbath.org website. Please check that site to be sure your group is listed! If not, let us know and we'll have you included!

We've also streamlined our subscriber list for this magazine to be sure that only those who really want to receive this magazine are sent a copy.

We have also taken advantage of social media via Facebook pages, *i.e.*, Bible Sabbath Association and The Sabbath Sentinel group pages. The Sabbath Sentinel blog also is used to promote those ideals that form the basis of our Mission.

A subtle change in the format of this magazine is being made which we hope will make it of even greater value to those of us who support this mission, and those who would like to know more about our Way of life.

All of these changes have worked wonders in lowering our costs, moving us closer to goals long held but not yet achieved. One such goal is to re-establish our annual Scholarship contest for graduating seniors. Another goal is to begin reaching areas outside of North America to help bring the idea of fellowship in Christ across boundaries to all.

As you probably know, the BSA is not a Church. We have no congregations. What we have is a deep desire to promote fellowship, understanding that the truth of God which we share is far more important than the differences in our understanding. But, when compared to how God wants us as His Children to treat one another, those differences are easy to overcome with the Love God wants us to have for one another.

Our Board consists of volunteer, unpaid Sabbath keepers from many different organizations. This allows us to discuss how we can better serve all of our brothers and sisters who love God's Way of life and want to know and understand their other brethren.

To continue this great mission, we are engaging in a two-pronged fundraising effort this year. This report and open letter to you, our brethren, is one of the prongs. The second prong is via email to those who have provided us with their email addresses. We are eliminating the costly mailing campaign of the past!

We humbly ask that you, if you can afford it, go to our biblesabbath.org/donate-join webpage and use our secure link to make a donation to support this effort. Of course, mailed donations are also welcome to our mailing address: Bible Sabbath Association, P.O. Box 372, Stevens Point, WI 54481. Those of you who can receive email can support this effort via the link at the email.

As we close out the year, we find that we have been very successful at reducing costs so that we can be more effective. With the exception of our office support, all of us serve at no cost. But, there is so much more we would love to do for the brethren. Please join us in our mission-today! Without your loyal support, it is not possible to serve the brethren with this ministry.

Dr. Royce Mitchell, President

More Christians Killed in Previously Attacked Area in Nigeria

Reprinted *with permission from Christian Daily International-Morning Star News*

ABUJA, Nigeria (Christian Daily International–Morning Star News) – Following attacks on Sunday (Sept. 20) that left a church pastor and others dead, Fulani herdsmen killed at least 15 more Christians in the same county in Plateau state, Nigeria from Monday through Friday (Sept. 21-25), sources said.

Solomon Mwantiri, a lawyer and community leader in Barkin Ladi County, identified as "Fulani terrorists" those who attacked Barkin Ladi town and Chit, Gassa, Bet, Rakwok, Razat and Rakung villages.

A Christian high school, Bethany Christian Academy on the outskirts of Barkin Ladi town, was threatened during the attacks as a Christian was killed a few meters away from the school. The school belongs to the Great Commission Movement, a global evangelical ministry whose mission is to reach students of universities and colleges with the gospel.

"On Friday (Sept. 25), three communities of Chit, Gassa and Barkin Ladi were attacked by Fulani terrorists," Mwantiri told Christian Daily International-Morning Star News. "Three Christians were killed in Gassa community."

The killing of the Christian near the Bethany Christian Academy occurred on Wednesday (Sept. 23), he said.

"The shooting close to Bethany Christian Academy threatened the institution, and resulted in the death of a Christian. This aside, two Christians who were killed in Barkin Ladi town," Mwantiri said.

In Rakwok village, another predominantly Christian community, the attorney said the Fulanis ambushed and killed five Christian commuters.

"In the incident at Rakok, also known as Kafi Abu, five Christians were also killed. The vehicle they were traveling in was ambushed, and the five Christians were killed," Mwantiri said. "This is aside from three other Christian that were killed in that same community."

Fulani terrorists on Monday (Sept. 21) carried out coordinated attacks on the predominantly Christian communities of Rakwok, Bet, Razat, Gassa and Rakung, he said.

"The attack occurred at night while the Christian villagers were sleeping," Mwantiri said. "A Christian, Henry Elisha, 22, from Rakwok village was brutally killed during the attack. He was buried on Tuesday, September 22."

More Christians were killed in Nigeria than in any other country from Oct. 1, 2024 to Sept. 30, 2025, according to Open Doors' 2026 World Watch List.



Fulani herdsman in north-central Nigeria in screenshot from video obtained by Morning Star News.

Of the 4,849 Christians killed worldwide for their faith during that period, 3,490 – 72 percent – were Nigerians, an increase from 3,100 the prior year. Nigeria ranked No. 7 on the WWL list of the 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian.

Numbering in the millions across Nigeria and the Sahel, predominantly Muslim Fulani comprise hundreds of clans of many different lineages who do not hold extremist views, but some Fulani do adhere to radical Islamist ideology, the United Kingdom's All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom or Belief (APPG) noted in a 2020 report.

"They adopt a comparable strategy to Boko Haram and ISWAP and demonstrate a clear intent to target Christians and potent symbols of Christian identity," the APPG report states.

Christian leaders in Nigeria have said they believe herdsmen attacks on Christian communities in Nigeria's Middle Belt are inspired by their desire to forcefully take over Christians' lands and impose Islam as desertification has made it difficult for them to sustain their herds.

In the country's North-Central zone, where Christians are more common than they are in the North-East and North-West, Islamic extremist Fulani militia attack farming communities, killing many hundreds, Christians above all, according to the report. Jihadist groups such as Boko Haram and the splinter group Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), among others, are also active in the country's northern states, where federal government control is scant and Christians and their communities continue to be the targets of raids, sexual violence, and roadblock killings, according to the report. Abductions for ransom have increased considerably in recent years.

The violence has spread to southern states, and a new jihadist terror group, Lakurawa, has emerged in the northwest, armed with advanced weaponry and a radical Islamist agenda, the WWL noted. Lakurawa is affiliated with the expansionist Al-Qaeda insurgency Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin, or JNIM, originating in Mali.

If you would like to help persecuted Christians, visit https://morningstarnews.org/resources/aid-agencies/ for a list of organizations that can orient you on how to get involved.

If you or your organization would like to help enable Morning Star News to continue raising awareness of persecuted Christians worldwide with original-content reporting, please consider collaborating at https://morningstarnews.org/donate/?

We at the Bible Sabbath Association ask that our friends cry out to God to end this horror!



Merged in Faith:

How Two Congregations Became One

By Dr. Royce Mitchell

On April 22, 2017, the Hawthorne Seventh-day Adventist Church in Hawthorne, California, experienced a transformation few congregations ever attempt: a full merger with Carson International Group, an unaffiliated Sabbath-keeping fellowship that had worshiped independently for years. The union brought 46 new members into the Hawthorne church—40 by profession of faith, with another dozen preparing for baptism—marking one of the most significant membership expansions in the region that year.

A Vision for Unity
The merger was shepherded by Gerard Kiemeney, Director of the Los Angeles Metro Region of the Southern California Conference. Kiemeney recognized that Carson International Group, though not formally part of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, shared its core doctrines and had even hired an Adventist pastor. Bringing the two congregations together, he believed, would strengthen both communities.

Kiemeney described the process as a *"delicate task,"* noting that the right pastoral leadership would be essential to blending two culturally distinct groups into a single worshiping body.

That leader emerged in Filemu T. Filemu, affectionately known as *Pastor Mu*, who had previously shepherded Carson International Group. After the merger, he became pastor of the newly expanded Hawthorne church, guiding a congregation that represented an extraordinary range of cultural backgrounds—Filipino, African-American, Caucasian, Hawaiian, Indonesian, Fijian, Hispanic, Tongan, and Samoan.

The Cultural Mosaic
Pastor Mu acknowledged the unique diversity of the merged congregation, noting that *"the church and community represent so many cultures."* This multicultural identity became both a defining strength and a source of complexity as the two groups learned to worship, serve, and govern together.

The merger also required Carson International Group to transition from independent operation into the formal structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church—adopting denominational governance, membership systems, and conference oversight. For members accustomed to autonomy, this shift meant adjusting to new expectations and organizational rhythms.

Challenges Beneath the Celebration
Public reporting on the merger emphasized its success, but several contextual clues reveal the challenges that naturally accompanied such a significant integration:



A delicate cultural blend: Kiemeney's insistence on finding "the right pastor" suggests that cultural mismatch and differing worship styles were anticipated hurdles.

Structural transition: Carson International Group had never operated under denominational authority, making the shift to Adventist governance a learning curve for many members.

Extreme diversity: With nearly ten cultural groups represented, the congregation faced the ongoing task of honoring varied traditions while building a unified identity.

Human nature at play: In his closing blessing, Southern California Conference President John Cress prayed that the church's doors would be "wide enough to welcome all who hunger for love and fellowship, and narrow enough to shut out pettiness and pride," a gentle acknowledgment that unity requires intentional effort.

Despite these complexities, the merger was celebrated as a model of cooperation and shared faith—proof that Adventist beliefs could bridge cultural and organizational divides.

A New Chapter in Hawthorne
Today, the Hawthorne Seventh-day Adventist Church stands as a testament to what can happen when congregations choose collaboration over separation. The merger not only expanded membership but also enriched the church's cultural tapestry, creating a community where worship reflects the global nature of Adventism itself. The rest of our organizations would do well to learn from this happy event!

The source for this information is located at:

https://scc.adventist.org/news/carson-international-group-merges-with-hawthorne-church.

For more information on the joining of these churches, please go to that webpage.



The time is short.

There is a website out there dedicated to encouraging folks to READ their Bibles instead of just listening to teachers.
How can you search the scriptures and prove all things if you don't read it (1 Thessalonians 5:21)? We should be reading to "prove" what is true and what is not, challenging what is commonly taught in the world.
May our Heavenly Father guide and direct all to draw them closer to Him!
Check it out:
https://scripturenews2use.org



MAN'S GOVERNMENTS

Darl Arbogast

We Sabbatarians believe in the government of God and are looking forward to it anxiously. At present many of us are stuck with one or more or a combination of types of the governments of man.

The following is a list with a brief definition of eight of man's attempts to govern himself, many without God.

Pacifism: A belief that international disputes should be settled by peaceful means, not war.

Republic: A state or nation ruled by the supreme power of its citizens through their elected representatives.

Democracy: A state or government run by elected officials with a practice of majority rule.

Marxism: A system of government developed by Karl Marx serving as a basis for socialism and communism.

Socialism: All ownership and operation of industry is by the society not by private individuals industry.

Communism: All ownership and control are by the community not by individuals.

Fascism: A totalitarian system of government led by a dictator as they are nationalistic and often racist. The number of this kind of system throughout the world is unknown.

Oligarchy: A form of government in which the power is vested in a few people.

When North America's Constitution was finalized, they said, 'We have given you a Republic if you can keep it'.

Today we have some politicians calling our system of government a democracy and others calling it a republic. When shaken down to reality it is an oligarchy at this point in time.

It is very clear in the past few years that this oligarchy is comprised of 51 individuals, all of which were top-ranking employees of the C.I.A and F.B.I in the past. They own the Democrat Party and are ruling America from the shadows called the 'deep state.'

Years ago, there was a radio program that always began with this quotation 'Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?'

It has become known a leading member of this oligarchy penned a vicious fictitious letter designed to hopefully unseat our President Trump hoping to have him impeached and was signed by all 51 members of the oligarchy. It took quite a while for investigators to sift through and expose the motive behind the lie, but they did and now the public knows the truth. These exposed culprits had previously been respected and admired by the American public for their service but now they are disgraced never to be believed again. It took many prayers of the praying public for God to expose them because of their stellar reputation of the past. It seemed incredulous that these men would do such a thing.

These 51 members own the 'party' that tried to remove "One Nation Under God" from the pledge of allegiance to the flag at the DNC 2016. Keep in mind that if God is thrown out of the picture everything regarding Satan is fair game. We all need to be praying for our country as Satan and his henchmen are very close to gaining control with no peace for anyone.

Many understand that a country without borders is not a country of law and order, but a territory run over by the wicked: bandits, robbers and every kind of evil thinking there are. Gangs of foreigners have already today formed in many of our cities running people out of their homes and taking over apartment buildings *etc*. have been exposed.

Our government is not perfect and has never been but it is the best government that exists for the people, at the present time. Any government run by men will never be flawless. God gave this country to us and our founding fathers who were inspired by the Almighty God and Satan who has many times have tried to take her down.

A perfect system of government is in the future during the Millenium; Jesus Christ, the King of the world and we His people will take part. Righteousness will dwell and Kind David will govern New Israel. The 12 Apostles will eat and drink at His table in the Kingdom judging the twelve tribes of Israel as written in Luke 22:30.

PETS AND SCRIPTURES

DJ Wellington

What does scripture say about pets? I could not find the word “pets” in the Scriptures but there are a number of verses dealing with animals specifically and allusions to having pets—though I suspect most “pets” back then were “working” animals as well. Such as a dog protecting your home (we know Yahweh is our ultimate “Protector,” but He also gives us tools and a mind to work within His boundaries) or alerting you to strangers coming around. Other examples would be a lamb for wool or hunting dogs.

Before going too far into this study, it must be stated that dogs and many other domesticated “pets” are absolutely, positively “unclean” TO EAT! Many of those animals, when they die, and you touch their CARCASS (dead body), you will be unclean until evening (Leviticus 11:27-28). Being unclean is not a sin but you must bathe after, for instance, burying your pet. Now, this is a separate topic. Suffice it to say that the writer is not claiming common pets are “clean.”

Yahweh made all the animals and He gave them “instincts,” as opposed to our “common sense.” In fact, Job 12:7 instructs us to “*ask the beasts and they will teach you; and the birds of the air, and they will tell you*.” They are not human and, in many ways, may be more intuitive than humans. Many of them know when a storm is coming, for example. They sense danger and try to escape. Yahweh does not want animals to suffer which is why He gives specific instructions on animals. He cares greatly for the animals, which He made! In fact Proverbs 12:10 says, “*A righteous man has regard for the life of his animal*, …” Yahweh communicates with animals and, perhaps, through the animals as indicated with the donkey that talked in Numbers 22!

James 3:3 indicates how we put bits in horses’ mouths that they obey us—doesn’t that seem to indicate that we “train” our animals? Once upon a time, all the animals were more “friendly” and that will be again when the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, a leopard will lie down with a young goat, the calf and young lion will eat together and a little child shall lead them (Isaiah 11:6)! James 3:7 says how every kind of beast and bird, reptile and creature of the sea, has been tamed by mankind! Consider a trip to a zoo or preserve to observe this in action. They are all treated as “pets,” cared for by mankind.

What about having pets, like dogs, in our homes even perhaps sleeping in our beds? Many find that deplorable, but is that how our Heavenly Father looks at it? Read the account in Mark 7 when the Greek woman came to Yahshua asking Him to heal her daughter of an unclean spirit, the Master said to her, “*Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs*.” The woman responded with, “*Yes, Master, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children’s crumbs*.” What is notable here is the dogs were UNDER THE TABLE! Wouldn’t that indicate they were in the home? Now this appears to have been a metaphor but, personally, I don’t think a metaphor would be used in His words which was inappropriate or in violation of His instructions.

In 2 Samuel 12, Yahweh sent Nathan the prophet to King David to show the King how displeased Yahweh was with his sin of having Uriah killed. The scenario Nathan presented King David with concerned a poor man with few possessions and Verse 3 says: "But the poor man had nothing except one little ewe

lamb which he bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and his children. It would eat of his bread and drink of his cup and lie in his bosom, and was like a daughter to him." Again this is a metaphor, but notice how the man took the lamb, fed it of his bread and drink and laid with it! In fact, it "was like a daughter" to him! How many times do you see people who look at their animals (especially dogs) as their "children," part of their family! Now, regardless of it being an example, if it was not proper I find it hard to believe it would be given as such.

Sadly, in a sense, since humans have taken animals out of their natural environment, many times pet owners are faced with a decision to take an animal's life. It is not an easy one and this writer has been faced with that decision several times over a lifetime. We know that it is Scripturally wrong to take a life, your own or another's. However, what I also realized is if that animal were in its natural environment, he/she would have either died or have been killed due to whatever ailment it has been faced with so putting the animal out of its misery does not violate the Scriptures. We know that the killing of clean animals for food is permitted so, again, they are animals (despite many treating them as humans).

I would welcome any comments on this topic as it has been indicated to me over the years that some folks who look to the Scriptures for authority, claim having dogs (especially indoors and eating/sleeping with humans) is in violation of Yahweh's words. That was the motivation for this study.



Do You Want to Learn More About the Sabbath?

Are You or is Someone You Know New To the Sabbath?

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We have short, 1 or 2 minute audio clips on topics such as:

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1. **Go to our website: www.biblesabbath.org**
2. **Click on the Products Menu**
3. **Click on the "Free Resources" Link**

Primal Worship

President Greg Lincoln, Church of God, Seventh Day

Then God blessed the seventh-day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made (Genesis 2:3, NKJV throughout).

We live in a world that seems to be spinning faster as sunrise and sunset rise and fall before us with ever-increasing speed.

In the midst of full days and restless nights, God calls us to rhythm and renewal. From the beginning this was God's design. "In the beginning" God created and on the seventh-day He rested (Genesis 1:1; 2:2). So important was this paradigm that God did something unusual and unexpected: Out of seven, He sanctified one.

We read, "*God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it*" (2:3). The seventh day became God's day of rest - and was declared sacred (Exodus 20:10). Six days were good; one day was made holy.

As God's revelation in redemption history unfolded, His sacred Sabbath of rest enjoined both the gathering and worship of the people of God (Isaiah 58:13; Leviticus 23:3; Acts 17:2). Rest, rhythm, renewal and relationship; expressed through gathering and worship, were the divine order.

This aligns well with the fourth of our ten critical vision points: Sabbath Celebrating. Since our inception as an assembly of believers and a fellowship of churches; commitment to the divine order in worship has served as a foundational mark of who we are in Christ. Far from obsolete under the new covenant, Sabbath is both primal and eternal (Isaiah 66:23), both a gift for the present (Mark 2:27) and a perpetual recognitional act of worship by the saints in honor of the God who is (Revelation 4:8, 11).

Far from dimming, Sabbath celebration shines brightly: guiding our souls to rest, our communities to fellowship, and our hearts to worship - remembering both Creator and creation. Far from abandonment, the holy church of Christ must defend, teach, and hold to this gift, and she must stand among those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Christ (Revelation 14:12). By His grace, may it be so!

This article is reprinted by permission from the Church of God (Seventh Day) October-November issue of Churchright.



Standing Firm:

New Legal Support for Sabbath-Keeping Christians

Church of God Network has partnered with Gevura to help believers navigate Sabbath and Holy Day accommodations, religious discrimination, and the legal protections available to them.

For many Sabbath-keeping Christians, the conflict can arise with a simple sentence:

“We need you to work Saturday.”

For others, it may be a new job whose schedule conflicts with the Sabbath, an employer who suddenly refuses time off for the Biblical Holy Days, or a school that schedules an exam or required activity during a time of religious observance.

What happens next can be difficult to navigate.

How should a believer explain his or her convictions? How should an accommodation be requested? What is an employer or school required to consider? What happens when an accommodation is denied? And if the situation becomes more serious, where can someone turn for help?

These are questions Sabbath and Holy Day keeping Christians have faced for generations. While the law provides meaningful protections for religious observance, knowing what those protections are—and how to make effective use of them—is another matter entirely.

That is why Church of God Network (CGN) has launched a new partnership with Gevura, one of the nation’s leading nonprofit organizations fighting religious discrimination.

Building a Path to Help Before the Crisis

The purpose of the partnership is straightforward: when believers encounter problems because of their religious convictions, they should not have to navigate those challenges alone.

Through the partnership, CGN can help connect brethren with specialized expertise, practical guidance, and, when appropriate, experienced legal assistance.

That can include guidance for requesting Sabbath and Holy Day accommodations; information about legal protections; practical resources such as sample accommodation letters; individual assistance evaluating potential discrimination; and connections to experienced attorneys and law firms when legal intervention becomes appropriate.

The partnership is also intended to help believers before a crisis develops.

CGN and Gevura will collaborate on webinars, articles, podcast episodes, and other educational resources addressing Sabbath and Holy Day accommodations, religious discrimination, and the legal protections available to believers.

The goal is not to turn every workplace or school conflict into a legal dispute. Quite the opposite. Better information and knowledgeable guidance can help believers approach these situations wisely, respectfully, and effectively from the beginning.

The goal is simple: to give brethren the tools and support to stand firmly by their conviction and to understand and appropriately use the protections available to them when those convictions are challenged.

Why Sabbath Keepers Face Unique Challenges

For those who have observed the seventh-day Sabbath for many years, it can be easy to forget how unfamiliar our beliefs are to much of the world around us.

A request to have Saturday off may be understood as a scheduling preference rather than a religious conviction. The Biblical Holy Days may be entirely unfamiliar to an employer or school administrator. Other beliefs and practices common within Sabbath-keeping communities may also fall well outside what many Americans associate with Christianity.

These differences can leave believers particularly vulnerable when their religious obligations conflict with workplace or academic expectations.

The consequences can be significant.

A person committed to observing the Sabbath or Holy Days may face the possibility of losing a job, sacrificing opportunities for advancement, receiving disciplinary action, or suffering academic penalties rather than violate his or her convictions.

Believers should be prepared to make sacrifices for their faith. But standing firm in what we believe does not mean we must unnecessarily surrender protections the law already provides.

There is a Biblical precedent for that distinction.

The Apostle Paul willingly suffered for the Gospel, yet he also invoked the legal rights available to him as a Roman citizen when circumstances warranted it. He did not view faithfulness to God and the appropriate use of civil protections as incompatible.

Sabbath keepers today should likewise not be afraid to respectfully and wisely make use of the protections available to them.

Expertise No Single Congregation or Organization Can Easily Build

One reason this partnership matters is the specialized nature of the problem.

The Sabbatarian community is spread across hundreds of congregations and organizations. A local congregation (and even most larger organizations) cannot reasonably be expected to maintain expertise in employment law, religious accommodation, discrimination claims, and the network of attorneys and organizations equipped to handle these cases.

CGN was created in part to address challenges like these: identifying needs shared across the Church, developing relationships with trusted experts, and making those resources accessible to brethren wherever they fellowship.

The partnership with Gevura is just one more way we put that model into practice.

Gevura is led by Tina Snider, a leading philanthropist who is passionate about the fight against religious discrimination. Through years of philanthropic leadership, her and the staff at Gevura have developed relationships with organizations, attorneys, and experts working in this field. The partnership allows CGN to connect the Sabbath-keeping community to a network of expertise that would be extraordinarily difficult for individual congregations or organizations to build on their own.

Instead of waiting until someone is in danger of losing a job and hoping that person happens to know the right attorney—or even knows what questions to ask—the relationship exists before the crisis occurs.

That may prove to be the most important aspect of the entire effort. A connection made at the right moment could help a brother or sister keep the Sabbath, observe Holy Days, protect a livelihood, and remain faithful to deeply held convictions.

For a community that has faced these challenges for generations, believers now have something that has rarely existed at this scale: a trusted pathway to specialized help when their religious convictions come into conflict with the demands of an employer, school, or other institution.

Church of God NETWORK | GEVURA

Facing a Religious Discrimination issue?

You don't have to figure this out alone.

Religious Accommodation & Legal Support now available for Church of God brethren.

www.churchofgodnetwork.org/religious-accommodation-legal-support/

A Short Review and Outline:

Who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord? A biblical theology of the book of Leviticus

Craig M White

In this article I attempt to summarise L. Michael Morales' *Who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord? A Biblical theology of the book of Leviticus*. InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois (2015). Any summary cannot give justice to this technical work. So, I shall attempt to summarise each chapter and include a number of quotes that should be of interest to the reader.

When I came across this book in a religious bookstore, it was obvious to me after flicking through it, that it threw further light on aspects of God's Word. After reading this book I can only admire L. Michael Morales' learned capacity and astuteness when it comes to in-depth understanding of the book of Leviticus.

Morale's poses the question based on Psalm 24:3: "Who may ascend the mountain of YHWH?" and sets out to answer it.

To him the major issue that Leviticus is all about "is the way in which humanity may come to dwell in the house of God … the theme of dwelling with God in the house of God, and how that reality is finally made possible" (p. 20) and thus "YHWH's opening a way for humanity to dwell in the divine presence" (p. 23). For "humanity's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever … Entering the house of God to dwell with God, beholding, glorifying and enjoying him eternally, I suggest, is *the* story of the Bible" (p. 21).

The book is contained within 8 chapters which I summarise below and provide (hopefully) helpful highlights.

The subject matter he explores is difficult and complex and his book, this book may be described as daunting reaching into the heart of difficult-to-understand rituals, sacrifices and other peculiarities – at least to the Western mind unschooled in Old Testament theology: "We can cite the choice bits ('Love your neighbour as yourself'), but we have no feel for the book, little grasp of its structure and movement …" (p. 7).

Finally, while there would be some aspects of the book one might disagree with, the overall majority of it is helpful for striving toward a deeper Biblical understanding.

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Chapter 1. Leviticus within the Pentateuch: a theological structure

Leviticus must be seen within the context of the other books of the Pentateuch – at its centre – as part of a chiasm (pp. 25-30). In turn the Day of Atonement in chapter 16 is the literary centre of Leviticus' theological structure ("capstone of the sacrificial rituals" (p. 29)) – an overall theme that concerns holiness or holy living for the people of God: "it is preferable to discern holiness not as an end in itself but rather as a means to an end, which is the real theme, the abundant life of joy with God in the house of God" (30).

The fundamental concern of Leviticus is that God is providing a means or avenue for mankind to dwell in harmony with Him, in His glorious presence (p. 23).

NB: of interest to Sabbatarians is his statement on page 44: "mo'adim which is the plural for mo'ed which is often "mistranslated as 'seasons', mo'ed refers most often (135 out of 160 times in the Pentateuch) to the 'tent of meeting'" and the rest of the time (mostly) to the holy days or a synonym for them (p. 44).

Many protestant scholars know the paramountacy of sacred time, but cannot bring themselves to come into God's presence during the times He has created for special communion with Him. That is such a pity.

What may prove to be angst for some of his protestant fellow academics, Morales admits that "The seventh day is not only the first day to be blessed, and the only day mentioned three times, but it is also the first object ever to be set apart as holy by God. Moreover, the seventh day is the only object of sanctification in the entire book of Genesis" (p. 45) which is evidently not temporary nor insignificant as any reader of this book can quickly ascertain. Later on he quotes Blocher: "So we see linking together the meaning of the Sabbath and the theme of the image of God, which are in a manner interdependent " (quoted on p. 48, H. Blocher, *In the*

Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis (1984), pp. 57-58).

Chapter 2. Longing for Eden: Genesis, the narrative context if Leviticus

Morales reveals that the apex of man's relationship with God commences at Eden (sacred space) where Adam and Eve enjoy communion with their Creator on the Sabbath day (pp. 45-47). Since that time mankind has been longing for Eden, its peace, abundance and prosperity.

Following on from this there is a downward movement as mankind moves further from God's presence which one can observe in Genesis – which culminates in the death and burial of Joseph (pp. 49 -51). Israel's rebirth after leaving Egypt is symbolic of coming out of a grave and into communion with Him – into His presence at the tabernacle (sacred space).

Chapter 3. Returning to Eden: Exodus, the narrative context of Leviticus

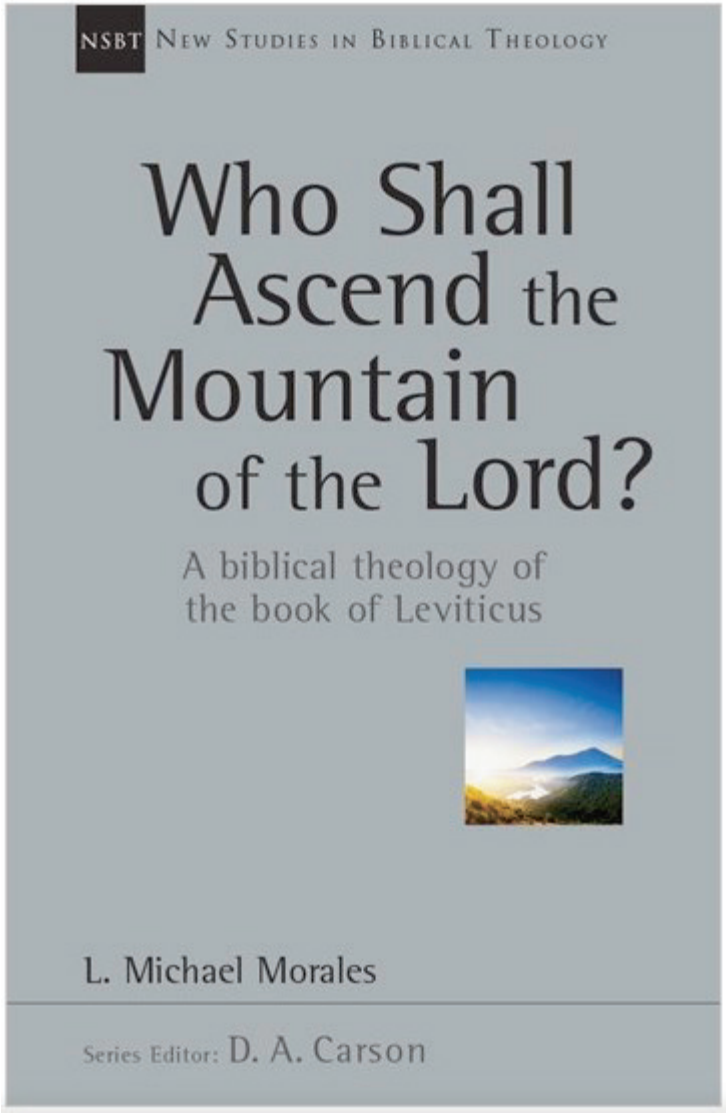
The death sentence found in Genesis is being reversed in Exodus according to Morales: "The book of Exodus ... narrates how Israel is reborn out of this grave and ushered into the divine Presence, reversing the movement of Genesis" (p. 74). And "It is as if Israel was delivered from the chamber of death in the depths of the sea (and from the sea monster embodying that kingdom [of Satan]) and then conveyed to God's abode upon his holy mountain" (p. 86) and "the ultimate purpose of the tabernacle being Sabbath union and fellowship with God" (p. 90).

And it is in the symbolic mountain of the Lord – the tabernacle (a sort of moving abode or mount) is where Israel can have a limited mount (Edenic) experience – which is communion with God (p. 102).

Chapter 4. Approaching the house of God: the dramatic movement of Leviticus 1-10

In this chapter to demonstrates that the sacrificial system is the resolution to Exodus 40:34-35 because even Moses could not enter into God's holy and over-whelming presence. However, the complex and difficult-to-understand first ten chapters of Leviticus show that Israel can at last fellowship with their Redeemer.

Further, he explains that "the way to God's house, that is, the way to God himself, [is] to engage with him in fellowship" (p. 109) which all of mankind must do over time (p. 125) and "One's approach to God is the surest dissection and deepest revelation of the



heart" (p. 126). Be very careful in your relationship with God as the clear lesson is that "an unclean person must not have contact with the holy – lest such a one dies (Lev 15:31)" (p. 131)

The tabernacle itself mirrors the basic, overall design of Eden giving further credence to his arguments.

Chapter 5. Cleansing the house of God: the dramatic movement of Leviticus 11-16

It is rather obvious from a casual reading of the Scriptures dealing with cleanness including those contained within Leviticus, that to be clean is really to be suitable or good enough to appear in God's presence.

Morales now moves to communicating his ideas on "how near one [who is clean] may approach God in his house" and the adjoining concept of "how God's house may be cleansed regularly from inevitable

defilement" (p. 152). This is done via the Day of Atonement which symbolises (amongst other things) the "reversal of Eden's expulsion" (p. 177) facilitating communion with God and typological of a return to Eden.

Holiness is similar but adds the dimension of belonging to God Himself (p.155).

But to enter God's holy and awesome presence is to die – no one can live within such a presence without being fit to do so. We have sinned and deserve to die like Adam (Genesis 3) but Leviticus 1-10 shows that death can and will be abolished.

However, the High Priest could enter His presence on an annual basis – on the Day of Atonement.

So, Morales poses the question again: "Here, then, at the heart of the Pentateuch we find an answer to the question *Who shall ascend the mountain of YHWH?* The one able to ascend is the Adam-like high priest, with blood, on the Day of Atonement. This is the way YHWH has opened for humanity to dwell in his Presence" (p. 177).

Chapter 6. Meeting with God at the house of God: the dramatic movement of Leviticus 17-27

In addition to sacred space, there is sacred time (the sanctuary or tabernacle) which He has established for Israel to meet with Him. Israel, as a nation of 'priests' which are "a sure signal that the dwelling of God has indeed become the tent of meeting between Israel and God" (p. 185).

For "the annual festivals must be divinely appointed. Though, increasingly, the idea of sacred time has become elusive in modern culture, we have already seen that it is key to understanding the creation account …" (p. 185).

Further, Morales believes that the Day of Atonement with the cleansing of the tabernacle may indicate an eschatological cleansing of everything in this world (p. 171).

Once again he shows the utter theological importance of the Sabbath in the Bible (p. 189, 211): "the creation account, let us recall, is structured by a Sabbath principle, opening with a seven word sentence, containing seven paragraphs with seven days, and climaxing on the seventh day of divine rest" (p. 198).

Chapter 7. Establishing the earthly house of God: from Sinai's tabernacle to Zion's temple

Here he spends time exploring the depths of Leviticus religious system and discusses the longing of Israel to return to Mount Zion, which is comparative to a return to Eden, metaphorically. As such he compares Zion and Sinai in the theology and system as revealed in Leviticus and goes on to develop the "mountain theology."

Pages 224-237 dwells on the import of Zion and the exile and restoration theme (pp. 236-54). On page 252 he summarises brilliantly what the restoration of Israel involves. The Church of God would label this the second exodus and Israel's role under the Messiah during His millennial reign on earth.

Chapter 8. Entering the heavenly house of God: from the earthly to the heavenly Mount Zion

In this chapter the author draws parallels with Christ's life, death and resurrection as the absolute offering which comes into the abode of the Father Himself (p. 270).

He explains that Christ as High Priest provides our entrance into eternal communion with God (p. 259). Christ's work on earth and in heaven enables us to "ascend the mountain of Yahweh."

"Together united with the Godhead, there also are all the saints enjoying friendship with one another, bonded by the Spirit of love, seeing the image and likeness of God in each other's faces, radiant with the fires of his everlasting glory – the holy temple of God, the bride of Christ. That is life in the new Zion, the final mountain of God. That is what it means to bask in the Sabbath-day light of God's countenance. That is what it means to dwell in the divine Presence" (p. 306). He hints at our divine destiny on page 261, but shies away from detailing what this ultimate glory is.



Knowing God is With Us

Tommy Willis

Sometimes when we go through trials, we think that God is not there, especially if those trials are severe. If we look at the Psalms, we see this more than once; the Psalmist even feels forsaken at times.

"*How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart?...*" (Ps 13:1-2) niv.

"Why, LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?" (Ps 10:1) niv.

To feel like God is not there can be agonizing; I think most of us can relate to this. I remember the trials I went through in caring for my invalid dad; and because I have health problems myself, at times I didn't think I was going to make it.

In 2 Cor 12:7-10 we read how Paul pleaded three times with God to be relieved of his suffering and torment. Paul says he was tormented to keep from getting proud. Yes, we will have to let God teach us how to suffer.

Many scholars feel this thorn was an eye ailment that Paul had. Having had health problems for decades, God has used the above Scripture to edify me over the years. Part of the lesson of the above Scripture was getting to know that God being with him was sufficient. Paul thought he could serve God better without the affliction. But he had to learn, as we all do, that it is God's strength that gets the job done. Our problem is we pray to be made stronger in ourselves; and this can cause pride.

Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord." (1 Cor 1:31) niv

We have to learn that the resurrected life of Christ is what gets the job done.

We think that if we were just stronger we could overcome this or that problem. But His power is made perfect in our weakness. God crucifies the self-life (Gal 2:20, 6:14). He does not improve it. It is beyond repair. It's held in place of death. Not dead, but crucified, that's why we can still keep sinning. We come of the cross to resume our sinful reign. But when we are held in place of death, then the New Life in Christ can be manifest in our vessels. We are made weaker not stronger, so that Christ can work through us. God's answer is to remove the sinner from the scene of the action, not by making the self-life stronger. Yet as long as we try to do God's work with our own strength, we will fail to see our need for Christ. God allowed these afflictions in Paul's life so that he would learn to rely on Christ.

"*Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* (2 Cor 12:8-9). Paul had to learn that Christ being with him was all he needed.

Over the years, when I went through some afflictions with my physical health, I felt so weak with these ailments. God often did not relieve the physical suffering; but I was healed by knowing God was with me. This is part of the lesson above with Paul's thorn. You find you may not be healed physically; but you are aware of the fire within healing you spiritually and mentally, and then you realize you can go on in peace with the physical ailment.

While caring for my invalid dad, because of my high blood pressure, and other health afflictions, I thought was going to have a heart attack because of all the stress. I kept increasing my medications. I cried out to God for weeks; and finally, I felt His presence—and all fear left; and I experienced the joy of knowing he was with me again! The peace that passes understanding then tented over me. When you truly realize God is there--all fear leaves!

The closer I drew to God, and kept my mind on Him, the more Psalm 16:8-9 became a reality; which says: "*I keep the LORD in mind always. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my spirit rejoices; my body also rests securely*." HCSB.

David describes resting in God. As trials and struggles come, I learn more to ask God to help me to relax and rest in His peace amidst them. Because by asking for the trial to be removed, we may be missing the lesson God wants us to learn from the trial. But one thing God does promise, is that he will grant us His peace amidst the trial (Phil 4:6-7).

Ps 23: shows how God will care for our every need: "*The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters*." (v 1-2) niv.

I have often meditated on those verses during stressful times, by laying down and repeating it to myself; and have been helped so much. We are often different in how certain words affect us; and it can help to read Psalms 23 in different translations. Years ago, a minister used to tell us "Write your own Psalm." At first, I thought that sounded "arrogant," but he was not trying to tell us to do something out of pride; but in humility—like David did, to express our feelings with God through writing. He was trying to encourage us with our struggles. And some took his advice and found it helpful; we get to express what we are feeling, and talk with God about it as we put it in writing. It actually can help us work out our problems, because there is no growth without thinking; and writing is thinking on paper. The articles I share with the brethren, most are from my journal notes. God often encourages me in the writing; like the Bible says, he will lead and guide us.

I have often thought how David probably went back to read some of the Psalms years after he wrote them, and was edified by what God gave him to write.

"*Even when walking through the dark valley of death I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me, guarding, guiding all the way*." (Ps 34:4) TLB.

The Amplified says: "Even though I walk through the [sunless] valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod [to protect] and Your staff [to guide], they comfort and console me."

David was a shepherd, and he knew the rod and staff meant protection and guidance. Jesus said he was the Good Shepard; and he will not fail to guide and protect us. We learn not to rely on ourselves; but solely upon God's shepherding and our trust in him. Just like sheep depend on shepherds, we humans must rely on God.

"*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding*." (Prov. 3:5). "*casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you*." (1 Pet. 5:7).

The more we come to learn and cling to God's and His promises, the more peace we will have, as we know God is with us. We need to come to learn this, not just as a doctrine or a religious idea; but as a reality. The joy of having a relationship with Him is like a joy of no other.

"*My heart has heard you say, 'Come and talk with me.' And my heart responds, 'LORD, I am coming*.'" (Ps 27:8) NLT.

He promises never to leave us and never to forsake us (Heb 13:5-6). Therefore, let us keep our mind on God: "*You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You*." (Isa 26:3) nkjv.

In the midst of a world of chaos, the above scriptures are comforting indeed, they can be used to help us see more of the reality that God is with us. The Prince of Peace will not fail us. The Good Shepard will see us through every trial and struggle.



Are Christians obligated to keep God's laws and commandments today?

Philip Neal

In mainstream Christianity, Christians are taught that the laws and commandments of God found in the Old Testament have been "done away with." This teaching is based on the mistaken idea that "obedience to the Law" will have a nullifying effect on God's grace. A number of passages written by Paul seem to indicate this—but only because they are greatly misunderstood. We will look at some of these passages and see whether Paul upheld obedience to the Law or not.

But first, what laws are we talking about? No one disputes that we are not to steal, lie, commit adultery, murder, etc. The basic moral laws of the Old Testament are not in question, *i.e.*, the Ten Commandments, certain laws governing interpersonal relationships, etc. And obviously, the laws that revolve around Temple rituals or the priesthood or sacrifices are, for now, suspended (what God will reinstitute in the messianic age to come remains to be seen).

That really only leaves a handful of laws and commandments that have, frankly, proven to be a stumbling block for many. In fact, these laws are held in *contempt* by modern Christianity. The reason is simple: *they look Jewish*. This includes laws dealing with clean and unclean foods; the observation of the seventh-day Sabbath (one of the Ten!); and ordinances outlining God's annual high days (also Sabbaths). There are a few more, but these are the real stumbling blocks.

Mainstream Christianity stems from the thoughts and ideas of "early church fathers" such as Marcion, Ignatius, Origen, Augustine—followed by Martin Luther, whose teachings inspired the Protestant Reformation. These theologians all shared numerous ideas and philosophies, but it was their *antinomian stance* that has largely shaped Christian creeds as we now know them. (Antinomian simply means *against law*.) These scholars held great contempt for the Jews—because they rejected and killed the Christ—and sought to separate Jesus from His Jewishness and worked to disassociate Christianity (as they defined it) from Judaism. So anything that looked Jewish had to go. (Most Christians today have *no idea* of the true origins of their beliefs!)

To be sure, salvation is, ultimately, the result of grace—God's divine favor expressed through Jesus' sacrifice. But does that negate the need for Christians to obey the laws and commandments of God? No one is better qualified to answer this question than Jesus himself. After all, who knows more about salvation than the one who died to make salvation possible? So let's see what Jesus has to say on the matter of our obedience to "Old Testament law."

A good place to start is Matthew 19, where Jesus told a young man that if he wanted to enter into eternal life, he must "*keep the commandments*" (verse 17). Just to make it clear, Jesus went on to list a few of the Ten Commandments. Jesus had earlier said that we are to live by *every word* that comes out of the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4)—and remember, the Ten Commandments were *spoken by God* in Israel's hearing (Ex. 20).

But to make the question super clear, we need only turn to Matthew 5. Here, in His "Sermon on the Mount," Jesus said: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; *I did not come to abolish*…" (verse 17). This should be enough to settle the issue: Jesus did *not* abolish the Law. According to Greek lexicons, the word for *abolish* means what it says: to render vain, deprive of force, discard, annul, etc. *Robertson's Word Pictures* says it means "to loosen down" as one would take down a tent. You get the picture: the Law remains, still in force.

So why would anyone imagine that Jesus came to annul the Law through grace? As we will see, He actually did the exact opposite!

Let's finish the verse: "*I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill*."

Right here is where mainstream Christianity goes off the deep end—teaching that Jesus fulfilled the Law on our behalf by living a perfect, sin-free life. He kept the Law in our stead; His righteousness is *imputed* to us. But is such a thing even possible? If you get a bunch of speeding tickets and I have a perfect driving record, can my record be imputed to you? If I earn a degree in medicine, can I just impute it to you as if you actually earned it?

The Greek for fulfill is *pleroo*, meaning primarily "to make full, to fill up, i.e., to fill to the full; to cause to abound; to render full, *i.e*., to complete; to fill to the top, so that nothing shall be wanting; to make complete in every particular, to render perfect." As Robertson's notes, Jesus came to "reveal the *full depth of meaning* that [the Law] was intended to hold."

While *pleroo* can also mean to *fulfill* in the sense of "bringing something to pass," the meaning here is made quite clear by what Jesus went on to do: He noted several laws from the Old Testament, showing each law's *deeper spiritual meaning* or *intent* behind its mere letter-of-the-law application. Thus, He indeed made the Law fuller, more complete, *more binding*.

Jesus went on to say that as long as heaven and earth stood, no part of the Law—not even the most minute character of the Hebrew alphabet in which it was originally written—would "pass away" until everything had been fulfilled (verse 18). He then warned of dire consequences for anyone who would break even the *least* of the commandments—and teach others to do likewise (verse 19).

Thus, to anyone willing to give these passages an honest read, it seems quite clear where the Author of our salvation stands on obedience to God's laws. And contrary to many Protestant teachers, the obligation that Christians keep the Law did not *change* with the apostle Paul's teachings. Writing late in the first century—long after Paul's death—the apostle John emphasized how we demonstrate our love for God: we "keep His commandments"—which "are not burdensome" (I John 5:3).

Let's look at a few passages by Paul that are typically misunderstood in mainstream Christianity. Each of these is used to falsely teach that the laws and commandments of God are obsolete. But first, we need to understand some things about this apostle.

Paul had an unwavering commitment to the laws and commandments of God as presented in the Old Testament. He taught the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27), which would certainly imply that he upheld the Law—including the Sabbath, holy days, food laws, etc. Remember also that Paul was a Pharisee. The Pharisees, like all "religious" Jews, were strict in their adherence to the Law. Long after becoming a convert to Christianity, Paul used his standing as a Pharisee as a means of self defense (Acts 23:6)—indicating that he was still accepted as a Pharisee (see Acts 22:3; 26:5).

Paul said: "*But I confess to you that according to the Way which they call heresy, so I serve the God of my fathers, believing all things that are written in the Law and the Prophets*" (Acts 24:14). Here, "all things" would certainly include the laws and commandments of God. Yet this apostle's words have been unfairly misrepresented in mainstream Christianity in order to justify an *antinomian* stance. As we look at the following passages, what we will see is that Paul was not against God's Law. Rather, he was against the *wrong use* of the Law. He was against using the Law (or any other law) as a means of obtaining "right standing" with God. True "right standing" with God can only be achieved through faith in Christ's sacrifice. So when we read Pauline passages that seem to be anti-Law, they are actually only warning against the *wrong use* of the Law.

Let us first look at a passage in Romans 3. "*Therefore by the deeds* [works] *of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets*" (Rom. 3:20-21; KJV). The phrase "without the law" is taken to mean that law-keeping is irrelevant to the Christian, who now has the "righteousness of God" imputed to him or her. But all Paul is saying is that a person can *only* be justified—put in *right standing* with God—through Christ's sacrifice, not through works of any kind. This justification is the result of God's righteousness, His goodness—and is not dependent on law-keeping. Thus it is "without" (or separate from) the Law. This operation of God's grace does not annul law-keeping—which Paul always upholds; it simply means that justification cannot be earned by law-keeping. Here is a better translation of

the passage: "*Therefore, by works of law there shall no flesh be justified before Him; for through the law is the knowledge of sin. But now, the righteousness of God* [leading to justification] *that is separate from law has been revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets*."

Another misunderstood Pauline text is Romans 6:14—typically taken out of context. Read in isolation, it gives the appearance that Christians are no longer required to keep the laws and commandments of God: "*For sin shall not rule over you because you are not under law, but under grace*." The phrase "you are not under law" is taken to mean that Christians today are under no obligation to keep the Law—for they are under grace. But remember, sin is the breaking of God's Law (I John 3:4). And Paul is adamant here that once we have come under grace, we are to *not* continue in sin—breaking God's laws and commandments. Notice his opening statements, which actually set the context for the entire chapter: "*What then shall we say? Shall we continue in sin, so that grace may abound? MAY IT NEVER BE! We who died to sin, how shall we live any longer therein?*" (verses 1-2). So what does he mean by not being "under law?"

Being *under grace* and *under law* are placed in opposition: either you receive justification by God's grace (under grace) or you achieve that status by works (under law). But as many passages (such as Romans 3:20) show, it is impossible to be justified in God's eyes by works; it can only come by grace via Christ's sacrifice. Being "under law" means you are trying to *earn* justification by your works. But once we are under grace, we are still obligated to obey God's laws and commandments and have good works. We just cannot *earn justification* through them. Here is the entire relevant passage: "*For sin shall not rule over you because you are not under law* [for forgiveness and justification], *but under grace* [for forgiveness and justification]. *What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law, but under grace? MAY IT NEVER BE! Don't you realize that to whom you yield yourselves as servants to obey, you are servants of the one you obey, whether it is of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?*" (verses 14-16).

Paul is most emphatic in his teaching that salvation is through faith in Jesus' sacrifice. Since we have all sinned, we all need the resultant death penalty removed. That is accomplished by faith in Christ's death. But Paul is equally clear that this is only an initial step—achieving justification or "right standing" with God. This "right standing" is often referred to as "righteousness." But it is vital to understand that this "righteousness" is a status (being justified, reconciled to God) conferred on us because of Jesus' death and His role as mediator. Actual "righteousness" is a quality that we must actively develop—through the power of the Holy Spirit. It results from habitually *doing* what is right and good. Thus Paul can declare: "*Therefore, having been justified now by His blood, we shall* [yet] *be* [finally] *saved from wrath* [the death penalty] *through Him* [Jesus' work in our lives]. *For if, when we were* [once] *enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His own Son, much more then, having been reconciled, we shall* [yet] *be saved by His life* [by Jesus living in us]" (Rom. 5:9-10). Thus, only the "*doers of the Law*" will ultimately be deemed righteous in God's sight (Rom. 2:13).

To the end of his life, Paul upheld the laws and commandments of God. He taught obedience to God's Law as a *way of life* to all who professed faith in Christ—whether they were Jew or Gentile. Indeed, Paul made no distinction between Jew and non-Jew, proclaiming that circumcision was irrelevant—but that the keeping of the Law was most relevant: "*For circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; rather, the keeping of God's commandments is essential*" (I Cor. 7:19).

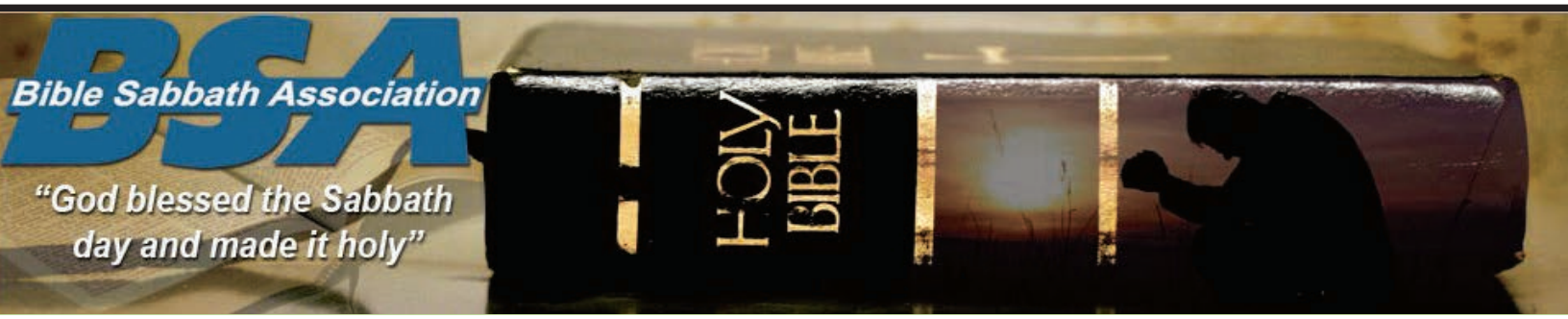
As noted earlier, many aspects of the Law are not relevant today as they are tied to the Temple and priesthood. But many of God's laws are still very relevant—especially the Ten Commandments (including the Sabbath command!), the laws dealing with God's festivals, and those concerning which foods are "clean" and thus *safe* to eat. Think of the Law as a *fence*: it keeps us safe and away from harm! And it tells us how to approach and worship God the way *He* wants to be worshipped—such as what day *He* set apart for worship, the seventh-day Sabbath.

Simply put, the laws and commandments of God describe a way of life based on *loving God* and *loving neighbor* (Matt. 22:36-40). They are God's gift to us, so that by following them we might live a long and happy life!

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