

THE SABBATH QUESTION

A Pharisaical Controversy Revived in These Last Days

JESUS, during His three-and-a-half-years' ministry, was constantly meeting with the opposition of the religionists of His day over questions of the Old Testament Law. And the chief bone of contention of these legalistic hecklers was the keeping of the Jewish Sabbath. The hypocrites could easily pass over "the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith" — but the Sabbath! it must be kept according to their idea and interpretation of the Law, or a man was forever damned!

Unfortunately, the Pharisees did not become extinct with the dispersion of the Jews. We have their exact counterpart today in the Seventh Day Adventists. Someone has well termed them the "lineal descendants" of the scribes and Pharisees. In spite of all that is said in the Bible about the passing away of the Law with the dawning of the Christian dispensation, these modern Judaizers have dug up the old controversy that Paul and the other Apostles settled centuries ago, and they are still maintaining that except ye keep the Law, "ye cannot be saved." Like their ancient predecessors, the Pharisees, their chief bone of contention is also the Jewish Sabbath. "Unless," they insist, "you observe the Old Testament Sabbath, the seventh day of the week instead of the first, you have taken the 'mark of the beast' and will be annihilated with the wicked." (The Seventh Day Adventists have eliminated "hell" from their creed.)

Since the members of this sect, by their zeal, and also their cunning, in the spread of their propaganda, are deceiving many sincere believers in these last days, it is needful that their heresies be exposed. They have incorporated many false doctrines into their creed; but since they make the Sabbath question their hobby, the doctrine on which they hang their all, we shall confine our attention to this one issue, and see if it will stand the acid test of God's Word.

The "Moral" and "Ceremonial" Law

At the outset the Seventh Day Adventists divide the Old Testament Law into what they call the "moral" and the "ceremonial" code, a convenient yardstick which thenceforth they invariably apply to all references in the Bible to the Law, classifying it either as "moral" or "ceremonial" as it may serve their ends. The "moral" law, they "explain," is summed up in the Ten Commandments which in their very nature are eternal and have never passed away. The Law, which is referred to in Scripture as passing away, they further "explain," was only the "ceremonial" code — the rites and sacrifices of the temple service. Then they quite cleverly argue that because the fourth commandment, concerning the Sabbath Day, is included in the Decalogue, therefore it, too, must be eternal and unalterable.

All this sounds very reasonable, especially as it is true that both moral and ceremonial laws are found in the Old Testament. But the facts of the matter are that no such distinction is drawn by any of the Biblical writers. Nowhere throughout Scripture is the term "moral" law or "ceremonial" law used, nor are any equivalents for these expressions employed. Jesus and the New Testament writers frequently refer to the Law, quoting both from the Books of Moses and the writings of the prophets; but whether it be the moral or ceremonial, they simply call it the "law." When Jesus said, "I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil [the Law]," are we prepared to say with the Seventh Day Adventists that the Savior of the world fulfilled only the "ceremonial" law? If not, then He fulfilled all the Law, and in so doing He became "the end of the law [all the Law] for righteousness to every one that believeth," as Paul asserts. When the Psalmist wrote, "The law of the LORD is perfect," he certainly had in view all the Law as a grand whole. It is obvious then that the term "Law," so-frequently employed in the Bible, means the whole Law, moral, ceremonial, and civil, without distinction; and this "moral" and "ceremonial" scheme is purely a man-made device, an expedient to which the Seventh Day Adventists have resorted to serve the ends of their pet doctrine.

The Law Intended for Israel Alone

From the time Israel was brought out of Egyptian bondage God's dealings were confined exclusively to His chosen people, other nations being only remotely involved; and the affairs of the nation thenceforth orient in and take shape from this great deliverance, an event which concerned Israel alone and was of little moment to other nations. The Jewish calendar was changed in commemoration of their deliverance: "This month [Abib] shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you" (Exodus 12: 2). The Law itself was given on the basis of what God had wrought: "I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exodus 20:2). Even the weekly Sabbath was expressly instituted and its observance enjoined upon Israel in commemoration of their deliverance (Deuteronomy 5:14,15). In fact, the whole tenor of Scripture on the subject of the Law is that it was framed exclusively for the Israelites. It was to constitute their moral, ceremonial, and civil code when they became established as a nation in the Promised Land, and it was known as God's covenant with Israel: "The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day" (Deuteronomy 5:2, 3). The Law was never imposed on any other nation.

If, as the Seventh Day Adventists maintain, the Old Testament Law is binding on us today, where is there a tittle of evidence in either the Old or New Testament in which it was commanded, or even hinted, that any Gentile should keep the Law? On the contrary we hear Moses, in his address to Israel, saying, "What nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all 'this law [moral, ceremonial, and civil], which I set before you this day?" (Deuteronomy 4:8). When the Apostles and elders met in Jerusalem to consider this very question of keeping the Law, which the Judaizers of that day were trying to force upon the Gentiles, Peter rose up, and after rehearsing how God had visited the Gentiles, "purifying their hearts by faith," he concluded with these words, "Now therefore why tempt Ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" (Acts 15:10). "When the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves" (Romans 2:14).

We have also the evidence from the very nature of the Law itself, in certain of its provisions, showing that it was purely local and impossible of universal application. The Jewish day, for example, was measured by the sun, "from even unto even" (Leviticus 23:32). And the Seventh Day Adventists themselves insist that the Sabbath shall still be so reckoned, from sunset to sunset. What then are their followers to do in lands of the midnight sun, like Norway, where for the greater part of the year they have few sunsets and sunrises? One of the favorite Scriptures of the Seventh Day Adventists is James 2:10: "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." Yet if they kept the entire Sabbath law alone, they would kindle no fire on that day (Exodus 35:3). But what then would their followers do in sub-zero climates? Also a breach of the Sabbath law was punishable by death (Numbers 15:32-36), and we are left to wonder in this case who the executioner would be. The fixed Jewish Sabbaths, such as the Passover, the feast of weeks, and the feast of tabernacles, beginning the 15th of Abib with the first ripe fruits of harvest, were all determined by the seasons peculiar to Palestine. Now these were all "holy convocations," Sabbath days which were just as sacred and just as binding as the weekly Sabbaths. And were the Seventh Day Adventists to observe these Sabbaths also, which they should certainly do if they are not to "offend in one point," then their followers would have to move into northern latitudes and into climatic areas similar to that of Palestine, for all the seasons in the southern hemisphere are reversed.

From the Scripture cited above and from other facts presented we may safely conclude that the Law delivered to Israel was intended for Israel alone, was purely local, and was never binding on any other nation.

The Old Covenant Revoked

Because Israel failed to keep the commandments and broke the Covenant made at Horeb, God promised that He would make a new Covenant with the house of Israel in which He would write His law in their hearts. This promise is recorded in Jeremiah 31:31-34. The writer of Hebrews, in the 8th chapter, quotes this passage and proceeds to show that the "new covenant" of which Jeremiah speaks is the

Gospel; and then in reference to the old Covenant the Apostle remarks, "In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away" (Hebrews 8:13).

Now the question is: What was "ready to vanish away"? The Seventh Day Adventists tell us that it was the "ceremonial" law. But Paul tells us it was the "old" Covenant, the Covenant made at Horeb (Deuteronomy 5:2, 3). And what did this Covenant consist of? It consisted of that which was delivered at Horeb, the Law, the whole Law, moral, ceremonial, and civil; for, as we have shown above, the term "Law" means the whole Law. This then was what was "ready to vanish away," the entire body of Law delivered to Israel at Horeb. And that this included the commandments written upon stones Paul confirms in another place, "If the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, ... which glory was to be done away: how shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? . . . For if that which is done away [the commandments written upon stones] was glorious, much more that which remaineth [the Gospel] is glorious" (II Corinthians 3:7, 8, 11).

With this plain statement of the Apostle, is anyone prepared to say that Paul meant any less than that the commandments "engraven in stones" passed away with the dawn of the Gospel dispensation? The principles enunciated in the Decalogue, we confess, have long been accepted as the foundation of all moral law, and right they should be, for such they are. The thought therefore of the passing away of the commandments may come as a distinct shock to many. But this need not be if we bear in mind that Paul had reference only to their Old Testament form, as "written and engraven in stones." Then again it must be remembered that the moral principles embraced in the Ten Commandments were in existence long before the Law was given at Sinai, and the revoking of that Law, which thing was done with the coming in of a better Covenant, in nowise affected those principles — they are still in force and will so continue forever.

Upon the authority of God's Word, therefore, we may safely assert that with the passing away of the old Covenant, the Ten Commandments in their Old Testament form went, too, including the fourth concerning the Jewish Sabbath. And this latter fact is further confirmed by Hosea who prophesied that their Sabbaths should cease: "I will also cause all her [Israel's] mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts" (Hosea 2:11).

The New Covenant

Some may wonder, then, what we have left in the way of moral teachings under the new Covenant if the Ten Commandments passed away with the old. Well, if anyone cares to make a study of the parallel Scriptures arranged below he will find all the commandments reaffirmed in the New Testament, some upon a higher plane than in the Old, and under which Covenant God promised to write them in the heart rather than upon stones —all are reaffirmed, we say, with the notable exception of the fourth commandment. Nowhere in the New Testament is the commandment concerning the Jewish Sabbath reaffirmed. On the contrary, Jesus and His disciples did not hesitate to break it, and the Lord defended their actions on the grounds that "the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath" (Mark 2:28), intimating that He who instituted the Sabbath had power also to revoke it, which thing He did under the new Covenant. The Seventh Day Adventists are fond of flinging out the challenge, "Where in the New Testament are we commanded to keep the first day of the week?" We, with equal propriety, may also ask, "Where in the New Testament are we commanded to keep the seventh day of the week?"

For the sake of comparison we are appending in parallel columns a list of the commandments as found in Exodus under the old Covenant, and a list of the same as reaffirmed in the new Covenant. It will be noted that the space opposite the fourth commandment is conspicuously blank. No commandment concerning the observance of the seventh day of the week is to be found in the New Testament.

OLD COVENANT

I "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3).

NEW COVENANT

Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose

up to play. . . . Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry (I Corinthians 10:7-14). Little children, keep yourselves from idols (I John 5:21).

II "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thin& that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and chewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments" (Exodus 20: 4-6).

III "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain" (Exodus 20:7).

IV "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it" (Exodus 20:8-11).

V "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (Ex_odus 20:12).

VI "Thou shalt not kill" (Exodus 20:13).

VII "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14).

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24).

Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: but I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil (Matthew 5:33-37).

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth (Ephesians 6:1-3).

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire (Matthew 5:21, 22).

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath

VIII "Thou shalt not steal" (Exodus 20:15)

IX "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour" (Exodus 20:16).

X "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's" (Exodus 20:17)

committed adultery with her already in his heart (Matthew 5:27, 28).

Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth (Ephesians 4:28).

."Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another" (Ephesians 4:25).

And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth (Luke 12:15).

We must conclude, then, that with the ushering in of the new Covenant the whole Jewish economy of the Old Testament with its laws —moral, ceremonial, and civil — with its sacrifices, feasts, and sabbaths, forever passed away. The whole tenor of the New Testament, especially of the Epistles, but confirms our contention that we are no longer under the Law, but under grace. "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Romans 10:4). "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3: 24). "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight" (Romans 3:20). "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it" (Luke 16:16). Under grace the commandments of God are no longer written upon tables of stone, but upon the fleshy tables of the heart, and a new law is in operation, the law of love, for "love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13 : 10) .

Legalists Denounced

The Bible is unsparing in its censure of those who try to substitute the Law for grace and would bring into bondage those whom Christ has set free. The only caustic utterances the Lord employed were those directed against the legalistic Pharisees who were continually harping over minute points of the Law and were binding heavy burdens upon men's shoulders. Toward the ordinary sinner Jesus showed nothing but compassion, but against these Pharisees He hurled the most stinging denunciations: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! . . . Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel." "Ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves."

These denunciations were spoken before the day of grace had fully dawned and while the Law to some extent was still in force. What then must be the Lord's attitude toward those who in the full light of this glorious Gospel still try to compel Christians to keep the Law? Therefore we find Paul taking up the cudgel against these same legalists in his Epistle to the Galatians: "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8). It seems that after Paul had preached the Gospel to these Galatians and they had received it with joy, then as usual along came the Judaizers to sow their tares — certain men like those mentioned in Acts who taught the brethren and said, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." The Galatians hearkened to the Judaizers, and what was Paul's reply? "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, . . . This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" (Galatians 3:1, 2). "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye a-re fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:4). The Apostle makes it still stronger: "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Galatians 3:10). If therefore the Seventh Day Adventists

want to turn back to the Law, to any part of it, to work out their salvation, let them keep it all, moral, ceremonial, and civil; otherwise they are under a curse.

Now if these plain Scriptures signify anything at all, they certainly mean that neither the Law nor any part of the Law has any place whatever in the dispensation of grace; not that the Law was in itself at fault, for "the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good," but no unregenerated man ever has kept, nor ever can keep, the Law as God demands, because of the weakness of the flesh.

Jesus Christ is the only man who ever kept the whole Law. Wherefore God made another provision by which the righteousness of the Law should be maintained. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:3, 4).

Yet after all that the Scriptures have to say about the Law, and after the scathing rebukes therein directed against legalists, we, today, still have the Judaizers going about and saying, "Except ye keep the Sabbath after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." Listen to what the Apostle has to say specifically about this Sabbath question: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days" (Colossians 2:16). Paul speaks as pointedly as though he knew all about these modern Judaizers and was thoroughly familiar with their heresies. The legalists of his day had some excuse for their stand, for Pharisaism was dying hard, and the questions of the Law in its relation to the Gospel had not then been fully determined. But today, with the completion of the New Testament, these disputes have been settled once and for all so far as true Christians are concerned. Where then do these modern Judaizers stand when arraigned before the bar of God's Word? They stand condemned and found guilty of handling the Word of God deceitfully, of resorting to trickery, and of perpetrating a fraud upon modern Christendom, whereby they have wrecked the faith of thousands of sincere believers. Their doctrine is one of the satanic delusions of the last days.

The Lord's Day

And now a word as to why Christians observe Sunday, the first day of the week, as the Lord's Day. In the first place, this day is foreshadowed in the Old Testament. In Leviticus 23:9-12 are found the instructions for the offering of "firstfruits," and this offering, we note, was made "on the morrow after the sabbath" (verse 11). Paul in his famous chapter on the Resurrection gives us the significance of this offering: "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept" (I Corinthians 15:20). Jesus Christ, therefore, in His resurrection became the fulfillment of the offering of firstfruits. And when did His resurrection take place? "On the morrow after the sabbath." Here, then, are Scriptural grounds for observing this day. And it is not only set apart to commemorate the glorious resurrection of our Lord, but also to call to mind the "new creation." "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature [new creation] : old things are passed away [including the Jewish law] ; behold, all things are become new" (II Corinthians 5:17). Let those who want to hold to the "old things" observe the Jewish Sabbath if they so prefer.

The "first day of the week" was the day on which Jesus rose; it was the day on which He made His several appearances before His disciples after His resurrection; it was the day on which the power fell (Acts 2), at which time Christ's Church was founded; it was the day on which the disciples met to break bread in commemoration of the Lord's Supper, and brought their offerings unto the Lord; it was the day which the early Church observed from 100 A. D. to 324 A. D., according to the universal testimony of the fathers from Ignatius to Eusebius.

The first day of the week, therefore, was not instituted as the "Lord's Day" by Constantine, by the Catholic Pope, or any other prelate. It became accepted as the day of worship immediately after Jesus' resurrection, and has been observed by all true Christians from that time down to the present day.