

Debating The Sabbath

A conversation between Jim McClarty of Grace Christian Assembly
and Paul Wong of Ark International

It all started rather innocuously, really. A reader/listener in Malaysia sent me this question:

What is the correct day for observing the Sabbath Day? I am sure you are aware that the Seven Day Adventist Church as well as the True Jesus Church have their Sabbath on Saturday, whereas other churches seem to have their day of worship on Sunday. I would appreciate if you could give me a background into this sort of teaching and how it all comes together with the teaching in the Bible that God rested on the 7th Day and since the 7th Day is a Saturday, it stands to reason that many church congregations are all resting and worshipping on the wrong day. If you have one (a teaching CD) on the Sabbath covering the background as to how we ended up having our Sabbath on Sunday instead of Saturday and the importance of keeping this day holy and how it relates again to our Eternity would be extremely useful.

These are good questions that deal with a substantial biblical issue. So, I responded:

You asked about the Sabbath and how we ended up worshiping on Sunday rather than Saturday. To answer that question biblically, we need a bit of background.

Every time that God forms a covenant with a person or group of people, He adds a sign or "token" of the covenant. For instance, when God promised Noah that He would never again flood the world, He added the token of the rainbow.

"And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every

living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth." (Genesis 9:12-17)

Likewise, when God established His covenant with Abraham, He added the sign of circumcision.

"And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you." (Genesis 17:9-11)

The next major covenant we run into in the Old Testament is the Law of Moses; a covenant between God and the people of Israel. The sign of that covenant is the seventh-day observance; the Sabbath.

"And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you. Ye shall keep the Sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Wherefore *the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath*, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign *between me and the children of Israel* for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed." (Exodus 31:12-17 italics added)

Now, this is a very important (and often overlooked) concept. The requirement to observe the seventh day of the week was a sign of the covenant between God and the children of Israel specifically. Only people who are under the requirements and ordinances of Moses' law are required to observe the Sabbath as a covenant sign.

When Jesus died, the New Covenant went into effect. At the Last Supper, Jesus told His apostles that the wine they drank was "my blood of the new testament" (Mat. 26:28, Mark 14:24, Luke 22:20, 1 Cor. 11:25). This is an absolutely vital distinction which cannot be missed if we are going to

understand salvation history correctly. The writer of the Hebrews epistle said,

"And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator." (Hebrews 9:15-16)

With that background, let me answer your question succinctly. Only Israel was ever required to observe the Sabbath as part of their covenant relationship with God. We Gentiles have been introduced into the covenant of salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ; commonly known as the New Covenant. But, being Gentiles, we were never under the Old Covenant; the Law of Moses. As such, we were never required to observe the Sabbath. And, inasmuch as we are not under the Law of Moses for our salvation, but under the law of Christ, we would only be required to keep the Sabbath if the New Covenant required it. But, what does the Apostle Paul write concerning the Sabbath? He says:

"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: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." (Col. 2:16-17)

In other words, the Sabbath pointed toward the arrival of Christ, in whom we would all rest from our works and trust in His finished work for our full and complete redemption. Now that Christ has come, there is no point or purpose to the shadow. We follow and worship the substance that cast the shadow. So, the writer of Hebrews concluded:

"There remaineth therefore a rest (*sabbatismos*) to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his." (Heb 4:9-10)

What we lose in the English translation of Hebrews 4:9 is that the author used the word "*sabbatismos*," translated "rest." It is a derivative of the Hebrew word "Sabbath." In other words, despite the fact that the redeemed people who come to God through Jesus Christ are not under the Law of Moses, we do indeed fulfill the type and shadow of the Sabbath when we enter into Christ's rest. We cease from our work (in this case, a reference to works of the Law, designed to accomplish our personal

justification), just as God ceased from His work on the seventh day of creation. When we trust in Christ for our salvation, we are fulfilling the Sabbath.

Now, as to how the day of Christian observance became Sunday (whereas the Jewish day of rest was Saturday, the seventh day), it appears that the early church began meeting on the first day of the week probably because it was the day of our Lord's resurrection. The only reference we have to what day they met is this one:

"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight." (Acts 20:7)

[In Paul's first letter to Corinth, he includes an order that he gave to all the churches of Galatia instructing them to lay up money on the first day of the week. Paul may have given this order knowing that the churches normally met on that day. "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." (1 Cor. 16:1-2) Nevertheless, the Acts 20:7 reference is the only verse that demonstrates a New Testament church meeting on the first day of the week.]

But, from that verse it is obvious that the tradition of meeting on Sundays developed very early in the church's history.

So, all in all, the argument concerning the Sabbath, or what day is appropriate for the church to meet, becomes a moot point. As long as we are resting in Christ, we are fulfilling the type and shadow cast by the Sabbath. We, as Gentile believers, are not under the Old Covenant and are not bound by its rudiments or restrictions. And Paul wrote that holy days, new moons, and Sabbaths - which Jews would have observed fastidiously - were not an issue for the New Covenant Church.

Lastly, you may ask what the sign or token of the New Covenant is. It is the Holy Spirit. Prior to Pentecost and the inception of the church, the Holy Spirit of God had been external to people. But, once Christ died and returned to the Father, the Holy Spirit came to indwell the people of God, securing them until the full and final redemption, preserving and teaching them, guiding them in the paths of righteousness. Only God's elect

receive the Holy Spirit, whom "the world cannot receive." (John 14:17)
And that Spirit is the sign and evidence of one's election.

I hope that helped clear up the Sabbath issue. Thanks for asking and feel free to send any other questions my way.

The recipient of this email is also a subscriber to an Internet-based forum called "The ARK Forum." Since the subject of the Sabbath had been under discussion in that forum, he posted my comments to the group. The director of the ARK Forum, Paul Wong, replied to my comments and posted them on his website. His entire response is included in this article, but if you would like to read it without my current insertions and retorts, you may see it here:

http://www.geocities.com/sabbath_ark/sabbathobjections.html

I would like to say at the outset that Paul Wong and I have had several email exchanges and I have found him to be a very gracious and civil fellow. He has now made my original comments available to his forum readers in their entirety and has also included a link to the "Salvation by Grace" website. In all these matters, he has shown himself to be a fair and equitable gentleman.

Nevertheless, his response to my comments was exegetically unsound and his interpretive principles were typical of the mix-and-match approach to Scripture that I find so frustrating and (not to employ too strong a word) so loathsome.

The question of the Sabbath need not be a divisive or contentious subject. If we follow the typical Pauline thinking on the subject, there is room for every man's convictions. But, when the injunction to observe the Sabbath is applied to the conscience of New Covenant Christians and includes threats of judgment, it becomes a watershed issue in the matter of legalism versus grace. So, it seemed incumbent on me that I reply to his comments, both in defense of my original comments and in order to demonstrate the failure of his argument.

You may want to get a sandwich. This is going to take a while.

In Reply to Paul Wong's Article Entitled, "Response to Objections to the Seventh Day Sabbath"

Dear Paul Wong,

I greet you in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Let me first apologize for the length of this article. In all, it runs 54 pages. But, there was much to cover and I think the material we are discussing deserves our best efforts.

Inasmuch as you have undertaken to demonstrate the flaws in my theology concerning the Sabbath, I felt it was fair and appropriate to reply in kind. Please understand that the argument I'll present here is directed solely at the topic under discussion and is not meant to impugn you personally. However, I will be taking issue with many of your assumptions. Please read this article charitably and recognize that my intention is simply a defense of Biblical truth.

That being said, I will walk through your response piece-by-piece. My comments are directed toward you, so I will be addressing "you" throughout. In order to reduce any confusion for our readers, my original text will be in brown, your responses in green, and my current comments in black.

I thank you again for the civil and Christian manner in which you have conducted this discussion thus far.

Paul Wong writes:

Response to Objections to the Seventh Day Sabbath

During the course of this ARK Forum ministry there are several subscribers that write to me on various subjects. Just recently one subscriber emailed me an article in which the author known as Pastor Jim has several objections to the Seventh Day Sabbath. His article is lengthy so I selected his main objections and responded to them objectively.

I would like to clarify that although I strongly believe in the observance of the Seventh Day Sabbath, but I am absolutely certain God will accept our worship any time on any day as long as we worship Him in Spirit and truth (Jn. 4:23-24). This does not mean that we can completely neglect or ignore the Seventh Day Sabbath. It is God's Commandment therefore we shall be accountable to Him on Judgment Day (Ecc. 12:13-14).

Jim:

There is a commonality among all the arguments in favor of Sabbath-keeping. At their root, they all fail to make the necessary distinctions between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. This is their “fatal flaw,” so to speak. We must remember to read the Bible in its historic/redemptive context. We must recognize the differences between those covenants and also understand how those differences effect our standing before God. As Solomon was writing in Ecclesiastes (Ecc. 12:13-14, which you cite), the Sinai Law was in full force. The only means that the people of Israel had for approaching God was through the sacrificial system prescribed in the Law. Their understanding of God and their relationship to Him was defined by that Law.

However, once the New Covenant of salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ came into effect, the Law was fully set aside. It is no longer a valid means of approaching God. Jesus Christ has become the new, and only, way to God. That’s a huge change. And everything – literally everything – about the Law was similarly changed.

The failure to recognize such changes leads to the sort of confusion we read in your opening comments as you attempt to modify people’s behavior in order to bring it into conformity with the Law. Only if we believe that the Law is binding on the conscience of blood-bought, fully-redeemed, “perfected forever” Christians (Heb. 10:14) can we threaten them to keep God’s commandments or be held accountable on judgment day.

And that puts the burden of proof squarely on the shoulders of the advocate of Sabbath-keeping. He must not only prove that the Sabbath is required of all Christians, he must also prove that God will mete out some form of judgment against the body of Christ if they fail to do so. The only way to create that paradigm is to argue that some facet of the Law given at Sinai is still active and enforceable. That sort of thinking completely undermines the “newness” of the New Covenant; all of which leads inexorably to the first question that you, Mr. Wong, and all advocates of Sabbath-keeping under threat of judgment must answer:

If Christ has indeed fully redeemed, justified, sanctified and “perfected for ever” those for whom He died, why is it necessary to impose further requirements on the conscience of Christians, especially by implying that we can be further sanctified (avoiding judgment) by our willful actions? The implications of Sabbath-keeping go beyond mere intellectual/theological debate. They cut at the very heart of the New Covenant.

Pastor Jim wrote:

The next major covenant we run into in the Old Testament is the Law of Moses; a covenant between God and the people of Israel. The sign of that covenant is the seventh-day observance; the Sabbath.

Paul Wong responds:

It is a great fallacy to think that the Seventh Day Sabbath is not to be observed by Christians because of the following reasons:

1. It is in the Old Testament

Our Lord Jesus Christ said, *“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.”* (Jn. 5:39)

The Scriptures that Jesus referred to are in the Old Testament. The New Testament had not been written at that time. All the Scriptures that the apostles and Christians in the Early Apostolic Church read and understood were in the Old Testament. We cannot dismiss the Seventh Day Sabbath just because it was written in the Old Testament otherwise we will have to dismiss many other important truths that were also first written in the Old Testament.

Jim:

I agree that the mere fact that the Sabbath first appears in the Old Testament is not sufficient reason to ignore it. The whole of the Bible testifies of Christ, certainly. However, as with many Old Covenant practices, we must read what the New Testament apostles and authors had to say about the Sabbath. If they argue for a change from the absolute and authoritarian position that the Sabbath held in Israel under the Old Covenant, then we have solid Biblical evidence that God did not intend for the Seventh Day Observance to hold such prominence in the Christian era.

Our understanding of Old Covenant practices must be moderated by the doctrine of the New Testament authors. For instance, the book of Hebrews argues that Christ is a better high priest than the priests of Israel’s history. It also states that Christ mediated a better covenant based on better promises. Therefore, the blood of goats and bulls, which could never truly atone for sin or make anyone perfect, has been superseded by the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ, which genuinely perfected those for whom He died. That’s a radical difference. But, we only know about this difference because the New Testament authors explained it to us.

Likewise, our position concerning the Sabbath cannot be formed exclusively from Old Testament/Old Covenant writing. It must be defined by what the New Testament writers had to say about it.

So, we are in agreement that the “*It is in the Old Testament*” argument is not definitive.

But, I also contend that the “*It is not part of the New Covenant*” argument surely is.

Paul Wong writes:

2. It is the Law of Moses

We need to make a clear distinction between the Law of God and the Law of Moses. The Seventh Day Sabbath is the Law of God and it is definitely not the Law of Moses which Christians do not have to observe.

Here are the basic differences:

Law of God	Law of Moses
Given to mankind (Ecc. 12:13)	Given mainly to Israel (Ex. 35:1-4)
Spoken directly by God (Deut. 5:1-22)	Spoken by Moses (Ex. 24:3; Lev. 1:2)
Written by God (Ex. 24:12; 31:18; 34:1)	Written by Moses (Dt. 31:9; 2 Chr. 35:12)
Fulfilled by Jesus Christ (Mt. 5:17)	Not for Gentile Christians (Acts 15:23-29)
Seventh Day Sabbath was established by God at the time of Creation (Gen. 2:1-3)	The Feasts of the LORD are also called “Sabbaths” (Leviticus chapter 23)
Seventh Day Sabbath is the Fourth Commandment (Ex. 20:8-11; 16:25-30)	The penalty for breaking the Sabbath law is death (Ex. 31:14. This law was abolished)

The Law of God is given to mankind and it is the basis of God’s judgment, whereas the Law of Moses is given mainly to the Children of Israel and is not applicable to Gentile Christians. The Seventh Day Sabbath is the Fourth Commandment and the Law of God therefore it is given to mankind. The Lord Jesus Christ said: “*The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.*” (Mk. 2:27-28)

Jim:

I do not know where you found this chart, or if it is your own design, but it is quite arbitrary. In the Bible, the terms “Law of God” and “Law of Moses” are interchangeable. They both refer to the Law given to Israel at Mt. Sinai. For instance, Joshua 24:26, Nehemiah 8:8, 8:18, and 10:28, as well as Romans 7:22, 7:25, and 8:7 all use the phrase “Law of God” in reference to the document written by Moses, commonly referred to as the “Law of Moses.” In 1 Corinthians 9:21, the Apostle Paul equates “God’s law” with “Christ’s law.” The distinction that you posit simply is not borne out in the pages of Scripture. More to the point, they are both referred to in the New Testament simply as “the law.” The New Testament writers never needed to delineate which law they were referring to because their audience was familiar with only one – THE law.

Also, since they are one-and-the-same and you recognize that the Law of Moses was abolished, then it is axiomatic that those practices required by that Law were also abolished unless they are specifically repeated and enforced under the New Covenant. We will return to that thought later.

Let me just add that your proof-text, Mark 2:27-28, does not say that the Sabbath command is given to all mankind, as you suggest. In its original context, it is Jesus’ reply against the Pharisees who condemned His disciples for picking corn, or heads of grain, on the Sabbath day. If you were correct that the Sabbath is universally imposed on all mankind, then Jesus was clearly in the wrong for allowing His disciples to do such work. Remember, in the Old Covenant a man was stoned just for picking up sticks! (Num. 15:32-36) But, Jesus consistently condemned the Pharisees for their abuse of the Law. In this case, they were making too much of their legalistic approach to observing the Sabbath, leaving no room for mercy and sound judgment. Consequently, Christ replied that man was not made for the Sabbath – in other words, man does not live to serve the Sabbath command – rather, the Sabbath was instituted for man, to give him rest from his labor.

But, He wasn’t finished there. Jesus went on to declare that He was the “Lord of the Sabbath,” meaning that He could allow His followers to break the Sabbath requirements with impunity. It is, after all, His creation and the Law is His Law. So, I could easily argue from this same text that we who are in Christ serve the Lord of the Sabbath rather than the Sabbath itself. After all, we were made for Him, not for the Sabbath.

The Apostle Paul follows that exact line of reasoning in Colossians 2:15-16 (which we will address later), arguing that the feasts, new moons, and Sabbath days were only a shadow of things to come. But, Christ is the substance that cast that shadow. Our focus needs to be exclusively on Him, the One to whom those Old Covenant practices pointed, rather than on the practices themselves.

That passage from Colossians is a perfect example of what I mean when I say that we must let the New Testament writers form our theology concerning Old Covenant observances.

Also, you offer Mark 2:27-28 as proof that Christians should continue keeping the Sabbath, based on Jesus' remark that He is "Lord of the Sabbath." But, that was not His meaning or purpose in using that phrase. In context, Jesus used that designation to defend His disciples in NOT keeping the Sabbath. They were breaking the Sabbath work rules and Jesus' defense was based on His own Lordship over the Sabbath. To use that phrase in defense of Sabbath-keeping argues the exact opposite of the very point Christ was making.

Pastor Jim wrote:

Now, this is a very important (and often overlooked) concept. The requirement to observe the seventh day of the week was a sign of the covenant between God and the children of Israel specifically. Only people who are under the requirements and ordinances of Moses' law are required to observe the Sabbath as a covenant sign.

Paul Wong responds:

Although the Seventh Day Sabbath was "a sign of the covenant between God and the children of Israel", that Old Covenant is now replaced by the New Covenant which has a wider scope to include the Gentile Christians as well. Isaiah prophesied;

"Also the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants – Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and holds fast My covenant – Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My House of Prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar, For My House shall be called a House of Prayer for all nations." (Isa. 56:6-7)

This prophecy has already been fulfilled for decades even up to our present time. God had the original intention that Gentile Christians - "sons of foreigner who join themselves to the LORD"- would observe the Seventh Day Sabbath and hold fast to God's covenant. This is the evidence that God's Church is definitely a Sabbath-keeping Church that not only consists of the children of Israel but also the Gentile believers as well, and therefore it "shall be called a House of Prayer for all nations."

Jim:

Several things here ---

First, you've ignored the succession of covenant tokens I included in my original statement, which succession makes my point quite concretely. The Sabbath observance was indeed a sign given to Israel exclusively as a token of the covenant struck at Sinai. That covenant, as you yourself admit, is "taken out of the way" by Christ (Col. 2:14). Axiomatically, if the covenant is done away with, the required token is similarly done away with.

Second, in context the passage you cite from Isaiah is speaking of foreigners (non-Israelites) and eunuchs who chose to live among the nation of Israel. God promised to accept their sacrifices, provided they kept His Sabbaths and held fast to His covenant. What covenant was that? It was the Mosaic/Sinai Covenant established by the Law, of course. And, what was the sign of that covenant? Sabbath-keeping. Naturally, anyone who joined themselves to Israel would be required to live by the commands imposed on Israel.

While this passage from Isaiah is certainly looking forward to the arrival of Messiah Jesus, He had yet to appear, as Isaiah said, "For my salvation is about to come." (Isa. 56:1) Isaiah's prophecy was looking forward to the arrival of the New Covenant and its attendant higher, better principles. But, in the meantime, any foreigner or eunuch who joined himself to the Lord was required to keep the standard of Moses.

So, to be clear, this passage is not speaking of foreigners joining Israel in the New Covenant; it is speaking of foreigners joining Israel while the Old Covenant was yet active. To conclude that this passage is speaking of New Covenant Gentiles keeping the Sabbath is simply eisegetical. The attendant references to "burnt offerings and sacrifices" should be sufficient proof of that fact.

This type of mixing-and-matching of Old Covenant Israel with the New Covenant Church does a great deal of damage to the historic/redemptive flow of Scripture. When you say things like, "This is the evidence that God's Church is definitely a Sabbath-keeping Church," you equate Israel and the Church in a way the New Testament writers never do. Context matters. Isaiah's words are not directed at the New Covenant Church. Despite your proclamation that "**this is the evidence that God's Church is definitely a Sabbath-keeping Church,**" nothing in that passage imposes the Sabbath on New Covenant believers. It merely says that those who joined Israel in looking forward to the salvation to come were required to follow the Law of Moses. And, that is consistent with everything we know and read about the Old Covenant. But, we must get our New Covenant teaching from the New Testament writers.

Third, by mixing Old Covenant principles with the New Covenant Church you are arguing for a New Covenant that is not qualitatively "new." It becomes simply an extension of the Old Covenant with additional people added to its ranks. But, that is not the Biblical position. The New Covenant is utterly distinct and separate, utterly new and unique.

Pastor Jim wrote:

"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: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." (Col. 2:16-17)

Paul Wong responds:

Opponents of the Seventh Day Sabbath often use Colossians 2:16-17 to point out that the Sabbath is no longer binding on the Gentile Christians. In actual fact there is nothing in the verses that suggests such a situation. The apostle Paul could not have written that the Seventh Day Sabbath had been abolished because it would be a direct contradiction to his beliefs and personal Sabbath observance.

Jim:

Actually, I didn't write that. The Apostle Paul did. ☺

This is one of the most unconvincing forms of argument there is. It essentially says, "I know that's what the Apostle wrote, but I'm telling you that it's not what he meant." You are going to have to include substantial exegetical evidence to convince any reader that the words on the page do not convey the meaning they evidently express.

I am aware that you are going to build your argument on the assumption that Paul was a strict Sabbatarian who could never teach contrary to his own convictions. But, that is a shortsighted view of Paul's theology. We'll get into that momentarily.

Paul Wong writes:

We must understand that the apostle Paul kept the Seventh Day Sabbath regularly. *"Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures."* (Acts 17:2). The phrase *"as his custom was"* indicates Paul observed the Seventh Day Sabbath regularly, just as our Lord Jesus Christ attended Sabbath services regularly from childhood. *"So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read."* (Lk. 4:1) There are several passages from the Acts of the Apostles that prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that the apostle Paul was a faithful Sabbath-keeper (Acts 13:42-44; 16:13; 18:4).

Jim:

Let's take these one at a time. Yes, of course Jesus attended Sabbath services. He was a Jew. He was also fulfilling the Law (in our place, as our substitute). But, as we just saw, He is also the Lord of the Sabbath, which means that He was following the Law of Moses voluntarily, not as a means of righteousness. He also never sacrificed an animal, since He had no sin. He never appears to have paid tithes to the sons of Aaron. Inasmuch as the Law was in fact HIS Law, He was not beholden to it, beyond His voluntary humility.

Nevertheless, the question before us is: Does the fact that Jesus kept the Sabbath prove that all Christians are required to observe the seventh day rest, under fear of judgment from God? That question is answered by the New Testament writers. The answer is universally "no" (evidence forthcoming).

Secondly, was Paul a "faithful Sabbath-keeper"? And, does that prove that all Christians, Jew and Gentile alike, are required to keep the Sabbath?

Let's read Acts 17:2, which you cite, in its context. It says:

"Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.'" (Acts 17:1-3)

A simple, straight-forward reading of that passage says that Paul's custom was to go into synagogues along the way to reason with the Jews concerning Christ. It does not, as you infer, say that Paul's custom was to keep the Sabbath. Naturally, he discussed with them for three successive Sabbaths, since that was the time that the Jews would be gathering. But, the emphasis in this passage is on Paul's evangelistic method, not his commitment to the Sabbath.

Acts 13:42-44 follows the same line of thought:

"As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath. Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God. The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord."

The "meeting of the synagogue" naturally took place every Sabbath day. So, Paul entered the synagogue to contend for Jesus (as was his custom). We would expect to find Jews keeping the Sabbath, the sign of the Old Covenant.

And we would expect to find Paul contending with such Jews that Christ had freed them from the requirements of the Law, which is precisely what the preceding verses describe when recounting Paul's argument:

"Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses." (Acts 13:38-40)

Meanwhile, Acts 16:13 (your next citation) reads in context:

"And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate [of Philippi] to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled. A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.' And she prevailed upon us." (Acts 16:13-15)

This was an odd choice on your part because it undermines your contention. Though this passage mentions "the Sabbath day," it is only as a reference point, a calendar event. But, Paul did not go into a Synagogue, but went outside the city and talked with some women. Lydia's heart was opened by God so that she could understand Paul's teaching and then Paul completely profaned the Sabbath by entering the house of a Gentile. So, this verse does very little to support your contention that Paul was a strict Sabbath-keeper.

Then you cite Acts 18:4. This passage recalls Paul's six month stay in Corinth, where he worked as a tentmaker. The context reads:

"And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, 'Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.' Then he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue." (Acts 18:3-8)

Again, what we find here is that Paul went into the synagogue to contend for Christ, not to keep the Sabbath, per se. On this particular Sabbath day, Paul cursed the local Jews and once again entered the house of a Gentile.

All in all, the passages that you claim prove your contention that the Apostle Paul was a Sabbath-keeper do very little to prove your point. The emphasis in all of these passages is on Paul's zeal for evangelism, not his zeal for the Sabbath. Just as he went to the Jews in the synagogue on some Sabbaths, he also went to women outside the city on other Sabbath days and to Gentiles who knew nothing of the Law or the Sabbath rules.

Now, here is an important point, not to be misunderstood. Paul was a Jew. In order to bring more people to Christ, he mingled among the Jews, the people of his own race, and contended earnestly that they would recognize the Messiah. In order not to offend his Jewish brethren, he followed Jewish customs. But, when he was among Gentiles, he acted according to their customs. He was "all things to all men."

"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it." (1 Cor. 9:19-23)

1 Corinthians 9:19-23 is Paul's own explanation of his actions and intentions. When he was among the Jews he acted like the Jews. That is why he went to the Synagogue on the Sabbath, when he was in a city that had a local synagogue. But, when he was in Philippi, he went outside the city and acted like the local Gentiles, even residing with them. When Paul was with weaker brethren who would not eat meat sacrificed to idols, he restrained himself for their sakes. But, when he was on his own, he ate what he wanted, because "an idol is nothing" (1 Cor. 8:4).

Paul's theology is steeped in freedom of conscience. We who have the Holy Spirit of Christ abiding in us are free to follow the dictates of our convictions, just as Paul did. And, that concept is fundamental to understanding Paul's words in Colossians 2:16-17.

Paul Wong writes:

Here in Colossians 2:16-17 the apostle Paul was not referring to the Seventh Day Sabbath but to the *"meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:"*

If you study the twenty third chapter of Leviticus you will find the Feasts of the LORD were also called “*Sabbaths*” (Lev. 23:24, 32,38). Those feasts required offerings and sacrifices consisting of animals and drinks that have been abolished in the New Testament (Lev. 23:8, 10-14, 15-20, 36-39; Heb. 9:9-10) That is what Paul was writing about.

How can we be sure that the apostle Paul was not writing about the Seventh Day Sabbath. If Paul had meant in Colossians 2:16-17 the Seventh Day Sabbath was abolished it would be self-inflicting like shooting himself in the foot. Moreover, there would be a much greater controversy than the abolishment of circumcision in the Early Apostolic Church. Nothing about the abolishment of the Seventh Day Sabbath is mentioned in the New Testament.

Jim:

This is not exegesis. At best, it’s wishful thinking. Yes, the Feasts of the Lord included Sabbaths and “high days.” But, those feasts are referred to as “an holyday” in this verse. The word translated “holyday” is the Greek “*heorte*.” Literally, it means, “a festival.” This same word appears 17 times in John’s gospel. Every time it is a reference to a Feast of the Jews, particularly Passover.

Paul is going right down the list of required calendar observances dictated in the Law of Moses. And, being free from the Law, he admonished the believers in Colossi not to let any man judge them by what they ate or drank. In other words, the Old Covenant dietary rules concerning clean and unclean foods were suspended. Likewise, believers are not to let any man constrict their conscience concerning holydays (or feasts), new moons (the lunar cycles that dictated the beginning of the religious calendar, particularly designating the Feast of Unleavened Bread/Passover on the first new moon of the year) or of keeping Sabbath days.

In this passage, the word translated “Sabbath days” is “*sabbaton*,” as we would expect. In every instance where Paul utilizes this word, it refers to the seventh day observance enjoined upon Israel. To argue that in this particular instance it has changed its meaning and now refers to the yearly Feasts exclusively would require that something *within the text itself* actually make that distinction. But, any indication that Paul meant something different in this particular employment of the word “*sabbaton*” is markedly absent. To argue that Paul’s reference to “Sabbath days” is narrowly restricted to only those occurring in concert with the Feasts requires more than your insistence; it requires some exegetical proof. But, the exegesis is clearly and decidedly on our side.

Therefore, I stand by my original comments. The Apostle Paul insisted that Christians should not allow any man to judge them according to their stand concerning the distinctly Jewish/Mosaic customs.

Now, may I take a moment to point out, Mr. Wong, that this is exactly the charge of which you stand guilty? While you are free to follow the dictates of your own conscience, you have no Biblical impetus whatsoever to bind your convictions on the conscience of fellow believers. Nor do you have any biblical grounds to threaten God's judgment upon those who disagree with you.

This same Apostle Paul wrote:

“Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. **Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.** He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.” (Rom. 14:1-8)

These are very plain words that describe Paul's attitude toward matters of conscience. “Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.” There is no preference for the one who observes certain days above the one who esteems every day the same. You must really wrestle and wrangle with the Apostle's clear dictates to come to some other conclusion. Nevertheless, I did notice that you attempt to undermine the Apostle's words on your website, twisting these words like a wax nose. On your site you write:

“A careful study of these verses will show this quotation [Rom. 14:5] is out of context with the Seventh Day Sabbath issue. The text is discussing the choice of days for eating and abstention and there is absolutely no mention of Sabbath observance at all. It does not really matter to God which day each Christian chooses to fast or abstain certain foods, after all *“the Kingdom of God does not mean food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”* (Rom. 14:17).

Honestly, Mr. Wong, I mean you no disrespect. But, is this really “careful study of these verses”? Knowing Paul's background in Mosaic observances, do you honestly believe that he invested all this ink on the question of what day it was okay to eat certain foods? There is nothing in the Law prohibiting certain foods on certain days (outside of removing the leaven from Israel during the week of

the Spring Feasts). If this was truly the Apostle's point, it is an utterly moot point. It is senseless for him to argue something that is not an issue. But, the Sabbath day was indeed an issue because it was a sign of the Old Covenant as a whole. Therefore, the question of observing a certain day meant only one thing to his First Century readers: the Sabbath. To redefine his meaning into something as illogical and meaningless as "which day each Christian chooses to fast or abstain certain foods" does a terrible injustice to the Apostle's inspired words.

But, it is precisely this sort of eisegetical thinking and writing that causes confusion where these matters are concerned. Just as you have adjured me to consider observing the Sabbath right away, I would earnestly adjure you to treat God's word with greater respect. Let the words on the page say what they say. Consider the framework, the context, and the historic/redemptive purpose of the epistle and let the original author speak, even if his words rub contrary to your own long-held traditions. Adjust your thinking according to the clear word of Scripture, rather than molding the Bible to suit your presuppositions.

Also, you wrote above: **Nothing about the abolishment of the Seventh Day Sabbath is mentioned in the New Testament.**

That is simply inaccurate and it fails to take into consideration the historic reality of the First Century Church. Here's what I mean. Most of the Apostle Paul's epistles were written to Gentile converts. Gentiles, by nature, had no knowledge of the Law of Moses and would not have been observing Sabbath days. In order for them to begin observing the Sabbath, it would be necessary to *teach them* that requirement. Yet, not only do we find no such teaching in the Apostle's letters, we find him saying things to the complete contrary, such as:

"One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind."

And

"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."

It was necessary for Paul to write such things to his Gentile converts in order to counter the influence of the Judaizers who attempted to add legal requirements to the faith of Christ, as we read in the Epistle to the Galatians. However, the Apostle did want the new converts to hold the Jewish Christians in contempt, therefore he left open the "freedom of conscience" that allowed "each person must be fully convinced in his own mind."

As well, I would contend, in response to the notion that nothing in the New Testament abolishes the Sabbath, that the writer of Hebrews argues that the

Sabbath commandment is fulfilled when we trust in Christ and turn from our works (which we will address momentarily).

But, that aside, it is patently obvious that the Apostle Paul (1) never taught Sabbath-keeping to his Gentile converts and (2) DID teach them that they had the freedom of conscience NOT to keep the Sabbath.

The textual evidence unfailingly drives us to that position and it allows for no other conclusion.

Pastor Jim wrote:

"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: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." (Col. 2:16-17)

In other words, the Sabbath pointed toward the arrival of Christ, in whom we would all rest from our works and trust in His finished work for our full and complete redemption. Now that Christ has come there is no point or purpose to the shadow. We follow and worship the substance that cast the shadow.

Paul Wong responds:

There are two parts of the Sabbath law. The first part is the Fourth Commandment that is given directly by God to mankind (Ex. 20:8-11; 24:12; Ecc. 12:13-14; Mk. 2:27-28). This part is permanent and it is fulfilled by the Lord Jesus Christ (Mt. 5:17-18; Lk. 4:16). Then there is a second part of the Sabbath law that is called the ordinances (Ex. 31:14-15). This part is temporary and given only to the Children of Israel in the Old Testament time. This ordinance has been abolished when Christ died on the Cross (Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:14-17).

Jim:

Let me make sure I'm following you, here. You contend that the Sabbath Law has two parts. (By the way, the Bible never refers to the Sabbath commandment as "the Sabbath Law." Let's use Biblical words to describe Biblical things.) The first part is the 4th commandment, which you contend is incumbent on all mankind. Yet, historically-speaking, this commandment was only ever given to Israel, as part of their covenant. There is nowhere in the Bible where the Sabbath commandment is universally enjoined to all the people of Earth. In fact, prior to God delivering Israel from Egypt and taking them to Mt. Sinai, there is no mention of any people anywhere either receiving or observing this commandment, nor being punished for their failure in regard to that commandment. That means that prior to around 1440 B.C. no one on Earth had

either heard or was observing a command you claim is “given directly by God to mankind.”

You also state that this “permanent” commandment is fulfilled by Christ. I wonder then, what is the significance of Christ’s fulfillment of this command if it is still binding on the conscience of all people everywhere? I mean, if He was our substitute and He fulfilled the requirement, why is it still a requirement? I don’t follow your logic.

Then, the second part of the Sabbath Law you call “ordinances.” You contend that these “ordinances” are somehow different than the permanent commandment. Not only is this division un-biblical, it is as artificial as your division between the “Law of Moses” and the “Law of God.” You cite Exodus 31:14-15 to prove this contention. So, let’s read that passage in context.

“The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death. So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed.’ When He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God.” (Ex. 31:12-18)

This is the standard Sabbath commandment, given to Israel specifically, connected with “the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God,” which you previously differentiated as “the permanent commandment” as opposed to “the ordinances.”

If I am following your line of reasoning (and a circuitous route it is), you are saying that the fourth commandment, given to Israel at Mt. Sinai, included in the Ten Commandments as part of the covenant formed between God and Israel exclusively, constitutes a “permanent commandment” to all people everywhere. BUT, the consequences of breaking that Sabbath commandment, like being cut-off or stoned, are merely “ordinances” which were abolished at Calvary.

Again, this is an arbitrary (and somewhat violent) encroachment on the clear words of the Bible. The commandment and the consequences connected to the

commandment are one complete whole. It's a total package. You cannot divide them. If you insist on continuing the Sabbath on the basis of the fourth commandment emanating from Mt. Sinai, then you must of necessity also include the consequences for breaking the commandment. If you insist that the consequences are done away with in Christ, you must equally recognize that the punishment is abated because the command itself is no longer binding.

You cannot have it both ways. It's theologically confusing, exegetically chaotic, and results in placing undue burdens and legal requirements on the people Christ has already freed.

Paul Wong writes:

The Old Covenant Sabbath ordinances have curses on them and were difficult, if not impossible, to observe.

“Ye shall keep the Sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.” (Ex. 31:14-15)

Praise and thank God *“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree)’* So now Christians are no longer under the law but under grace (Rom. 6:14). The Pharisees were judging the disciples of Christ for breaking the Old Covenant Sabbath Law.

“At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, ‘Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!’” (Mt. 12:1-2)

The Colossian Christians have also encountered similar situations in which they had been judged by others for not keeping the Old Covenant Sabbath laws. The apostle Paul then wrote to them that by His death Christ has *“wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”* (Col. 2:14) *“Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths.”* (Col. 2:16) It must be emphasized and fully understood that whilst the Sabbath laws that have curses were removed by the death of Jesus Christ, the Seventh Day Sabbath continued to be observed by Christians in the New Covenant.

Jim:

Wait, wait, wait ... so if I understand what you're writing, Christ has redeemed us and we are no longer under the Law --- except the fourth commandment, which you pull from the whole of the Law and contend that it is the single exception to everything else Christ did. (??!!!)

The Apostle Paul argues that the method by which Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law was by taking the Law itself out of the way. Having no Law to condemn us, we are free from its curse, Christ being made a curse in our place.

“When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us (the Law), which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” (Col. 2:13-15)

This is vital. Christ did not only redeem us from the curse, He took away the very instrument that caused the curse. Our redemption is complete and the Law that was contrary to us was removed in its entirety.

I admit that I do not know what your citation of Mat. 12:1-2 is meant to convey at this juncture. We've already addressed it above, so we will let those comments stand.

Also, these two sentences perplexed me as well:

“The Colossian Christians have also encountered similar situations in which they had been judged by others for not keeping the Old Covenant Sabbath laws.”

And,

“It must be emphasized and fully understood that whilst the Sabbath laws that have curses were removed by the death of Jesus Christ, the Seventh Day Sabbath continued to be observed by Christians in the New Covenant.”

The only reference to Colossian Christians encountering judgment for not observing the Sabbath is in Chapter 2:16-17. We've dealt with that above. It is the Apostle's instruction that they *not let* anyone judge them in regard to Sabbath.

And, though you say it must be emphasized, this idea that the curse for breaking the Sabbath is removed while the command remains intact is utterly unbiblical. While we do find New Covenant Jewish believers, like Paul, going to the synagogue on the Sabbath to contend for Christ, you do not find a single, solitary example of even one New Covenant Gentile believer ever observing the Sabbath

in keeping with the 4th commandment. It's simply not there. Not once. Not anywhere. *You* may wish to emphasize it, but the Bible is utterly silent on the matter.

It occurs to me that the Apostle Paul encountered a similar debate to this one in which we are currently engaged. In Galatia, Gentile converts were being encouraged by those who had come from Jerusalem to be circumcised and keep parts of the Law of Moses in order to be truly justified and righteous. The Apostle wrote stinging words in reply:

“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” (Gal. 5:1-4)

Look at again at what you wrote in your introduction to this article:

“This does not mean that we can completely neglect or ignore the Seventh Day Sabbath. It is God’s Commandment therefore we shall be accountable to Him on Judgment Day.”

You are adjuring people to keep a commandment (not just *any* commandment, but the particular commandment that was the token of the whole Law of Moses!) in order to avoid judgment. In other words, you warn people to keep a portion of the Law in order to be justified before God. Now read the Apostle Paul’s words again: “You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.”

Mr. Wong, you must take these warnings from Scripture seriously. There is no difference between the Judaizers who bewitched the Galatians and your attempts to impose the Sabbath on the conscience of 21st Century believers. I adjure you in Christ to cease, for your sake and for the sake of those who follow after your leadership.

Paul Wong writes:

The arrival of the Lord Jesus Christ did not do away with the Seventh Day Sabbath. Here is the proof. “*So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read.*” (Lk. 4:16) Throughout His earthly life Jesus kept the Sabbath even until His death.

Jim:

The New Covenant went into effect at Christ's death, not His birth.

“For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives.” (Heb. 9:15-18)

This is basic, Mr. Wong. Of course Christ observed the Sabbath during His life. The Law was still in effect until His death and resurrection. He was raised in a faithful Jewish family. And, as our substitute, He adhered to every command of the Law. But, the fact that Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath says nothing whatsoever about New Covenant believers and their relationship to the Sabbath after His death, burial, resurrection, and the infilling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Paul Wong writes:

The Bible records very clearly that when the Lord Jesus Christ died His Spirit was resting in Paradise on the Sabbath day (Lk. 23:43).

Jim:

Very clearly? What Luke 23:43 actually says is:

“And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise." Luke 23:43

It's quite an extrapolation to deduce from those words that Jesus was in Paradise “resting” on the Sabbath day. {That conclusion also assumes, rather tenuously, that Jesus died on a Friday, rested all day Saturday, and rose early Saturday night or Sunday. But, we won't get into that at this juncture.}

According to the Apostle Paul, Jesus was quite active during His three days' journey into the belly of the Earth.

"When he ascended on high, he led captive a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men. Now this expression, 'He ascended,' what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He

who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)” (Eph. 4:8-10)

The apostle Peter also tells us:

“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.” (1 Peter 3:18-20)

It is a fanciful idea that Jesus was “resting in Paradise on the Sabbath day.” There is nothing in the Bible to confirm it and plenty to counter it.

Paul Wong writes:

The body of Jesus was resting in the tomb on the Sabbath day (Lk. 23:52-54). The disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ – “*the women who had come with Him from Galilee*” were resting on the Sabbath after the burial of the Lord Jesus Christ. “*Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the Commandment.*” (Lk. 23:56) The death of our Lord Jesus Christ did not do away with the Seventh Day Sabbath.

Jim:

Yes, of course the Jewish women would have kept the Sabbath observance. The whole theology of the New Covenant had yet to be declared. And, the fact that Jesus’ dead body was “resting” is really reaching for a non-existent point. Of course dead bodies rest. I agree. Everyone buried in every graveyard in the world does rest every Sabbath, just as they rest the other six days of the week.

But, to prove your contention that the death and resurrection of Christ, leading to the implementation of the New Covenant did not do away with the requirement to observe the Sabbath will require more evidence than the women who visited His tomb while the Old Covenant was still in force.

Pastor Jim wrote:

So, the writer of Hebrews concluded:

“There remaineth therefore a rest (sabbatismos) to the people of God. For he that is

*entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his."
(Heb 4:9-10)*

What we lose in the English translation of Hebrews 4:9 is that the author used the word "sabbatismos," translated "rest." It is a derivative of the Hebrew word "Sabbath." In other words, despite the fact that the redeemed people who come to God through Jesus Christ are not under the Law of Moses, we do indeed fulfill the type and shadow of the Sabbath when we enter into Christ's rest. We cease from our work (in this case, a reference to works of the Law, designed to accomplish our personal justification), just as God ceased from His work on the seventh day of creation. When we trust in Christ for our salvation, we are fulfilling the Sabbath.

Paul Wong responds:

Many Bible scholars think the author of the Book of Hebrews was the apostle Paul. The people he addressed were Jewish believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Today they are called either Hebrew Christians or Messianic Jews. No writer in his right mind would ever think of writing even a single line to dissuade the Hebrew Christians from keeping the Seventh Day Sabbath. In the same way any Gentile Christian writer who uses any portion of the fourth chapter of Hebrews and try to show that the Seventh Day Sabbath is no longer observed by the Jewish Christian does not know what he is writing about. His attempt will be as ineffective and futile as a little boy trying to attack with a pea-shooter an army that consists of armored tanks.

Jim:

Words mean things. The Hebrews' author, himself obviously a Hebrew writing to Hebrews, admonished his readers not to turn back to the old elements of the Law. Chapter after chapter he recites the superiority of Christ in all things; the better Mediator of a better covenant based on better promises.

Beginning in Chapter 4 of his epistle, the Hebrews' author reminds his readers that good news had been preached to Israel during their forty years in the wilderness, but they failed to enter the rest of God. The first generation out of Egypt all died in the wilderness due to their lack of faith. In contrast, he writes in verse 3:

“For we who have believed enter that rest ...”

Then, he reminds them of God's statement,

“... just as He has said, ‘as I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest.’”

Closing that verse, the author adds a note concerning God's sovereignty, saying,

“... although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.”

In verses 4-5, the author again contrasts the two statements of God concerning His own rest and the declaration that faithless Israel would not enter into it.

“For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: ‘and God rested on the seventh day from all his works,’ and again in this passage, ‘they shall not enter my rest.’”

So, in verses 6-7 the author deduces that, inasmuch as God does intend for some people to enter His rest and the Israelites failed to enter it because of their disobedience, God still holds out the promise and “fixes” a certain day when that rest will be accomplished. Then he quotes from King David to make his point.

“Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He again fixes a certain day, ‘Today,’ saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, ‘Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.’”

In verse 8 the author concludes that even Joshua leading the children of Israel into the Promised Land did not accomplish the rest God spoke of, or else God would not have spoken of yet another day.

“For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that.”

In verse 9, the author contends that there remains a Sabbath rest available for the people of God. In this context, it is a rest commensurate with God's rest from His labors mentioned in verse 4.

“So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.”

Then, in verse 10, the author ties together the two concepts, stating,

“For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.”

In other words, the rest that Israel failed to achieve because of their unbelief, the New Covenant believers have indeed achieved, not in observing the commandments of the Law or observing a particular day, but in resting from our works just as God rested from His.

From that context (simply allowing the author to make his case), it is obvious that the Sabbath of God is not fulfilled by observing every seventh day and resting from our physical labors. Even the Israelites did that, but they failed to enter into the genuine rest of God. In faith, we rest from the works required by the Law (the theme of the entire Hebrews epistle), thus entering God's "Sabbath rest."

That is the force of the argument in Chapter 4 of Hebrews. If your claim is true that "No writer in his right mind would ever think of writing even a single line to dissuade the Hebrew Christians from keeping the Seventh Day Sabbath" then the author of Hebrews was out of his mind.

You further contend, "... any Gentile Christian writer who uses any portion of the fourth chapter of Hebrews and try to show that the Seventh Day Sabbath is no longer observed by the Jewish Christian does not know what he is writing about."

The fourth chapter of Hebrews does not say that Jewish Christians do not observe the Sabbath. What it says is that it is *not necessary* for Jewish Christians to observe the Sabbath. Again, as Paul said, let every man be convinced in his own mind.

But, if Jewish Christians are keeping the Sabbath in order to avoid God's judgment, or in a vain attempt to justify themselves before God, then their Sabbath-keeping is of no affect whatsoever.

And I am perfectly willing to continue attacking with the pea-shooter of God's Word against the armored tanks of your tradition. ☺

Paul Wong writes:

The main theme of Hebrews chapter 4 is the Seventh Day Sabbath and why believers must observe it.

"For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: 'So I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest.' Although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: 'And God rested on the seventh day from all His works; and again in this place: 'They shall not enter My rest.' Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience." (Heb. 4:3-6)

In explaining Hebrews 4:9-10 Pastor Jim's first sentence is correct. "What we lose in the English translation of Hebrews 4:9 is that the author used the word "sabbatismos," translated "rest." It is a derivative of the Hebrew word "Sabbath."

After that first sentence the remainder of his explanation and interpretation is completely out of the context. Here is the simple and straightforward interpretation of this verse. *“There remains therefore a (Sabbath) rest for the people of God.”* *“There remains”* can mean “There is” or “There exists”. The *(Sabbath) rest* clearly means the Seventh Day Sabbath. He admits the word *“rest”* that is translated from the Greek word *“Sabbatismos”* which is *“a derivative of the Hebrew word “Sabbath.”*

Some twist the truth by misinterpreting the word *“rest”* by writing or saying that it is the *“rest”* that Christ gives to believers in Matthew 11:28, 29. The *“rest”* in Matthew 11:28, 29 is translated from another Greek word – *“anapausis”* that has the meaning of “cessation, refreshment”. This word *“anapausis”* can be used appropriately in the context like “After a marathon race we need a rest - *“anapausis”*. The Lord Jesus Christ gives Christians *“anapausis”* but He does not replace the *“Sabbatismos”* with it.

Jim:

I will defer to the scholarship of James Murphy and Albert Barnes to clear up the language questions.

Concerning Hebrews 4:9 -

It followed, therefore, that there was something besides that [Joshua’s leading of the Children of Israel into Canaan]; something that pertained to all the people of God to which the name “rest” might still be given, and which they were exhorted still to obtain. The word "rest" in this verse - sabbatismos (NT:4520) - "Sabbatism," in the margin is rendered "keeping of a Sabbath." It is a different word from sabbaton (NT:4521) - "the Sabbath;" and it occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, and is not found in the Septuagint. It properly means "a keeping Sabbath" from sabbatizoo (NT:4520) - "to keep Sabbath." This word, not used in the New Testament, occurs frequently in the Septuagint; Ex 16:30; Lev 23:32; 26:35; 2 Chron 36:21; and in 3 Esdr. 1:58; 2 Macc. 6:6. It differs from the word "Sabbath." That denotes "the time - the day;" this, "the keeping," or "observance" of it; "the festival." It means here "a resting" or an observance of sacred repose and refers undoubtedly to heaven, as a place of eternal rest with God. It cannot mean the rest in the land of Canaan - for the drift of the writer is to prove that that is "not" intended. **It [sabbatismos] cannot mean the "Sabbath," properly so called - for then the writer would have employed the usual word sabbaton (NT:4521) - "Sabbath."** It cannot mean the Christian Sabbath - for the object is not to prove that there is such a day to be observed, and his reasoning about being excluded from it by unbelief and by hardening the heart would be irrelevant.

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The point being made is that, quite contrary to your contention, the word “*sabbatismos*” in Hebrews 9:4 cannot be a reference to the weekly Sabbath. It is referring to a unique “rest” which the people of God acquire when they cease from their own work as God ceased from His. Both the grammar employed and the thrust of the Hebrews’ author’s argument undermine your contention.

Also, you seek to establish a difference between “*sabbatismos*” and “*anapausis*.” “*Anapausis*” (which does not appear in this passage at all) has the meaning of a temporary rest, an intermission for a brief repose. The Hebrews’ author uses a version of that word, replacing the prefix with “*kata-*,” giving it a much more final meaning. And he uses that ‘final rest’ word in parallel with the word “*sabbatismos*.” In other words, he is emphasizing exactly and precisely the rest that our Lord Jesus Christ gives to believers, but putting it in a more final and definite form than in Matthew 11.

“For if Joshua had given them rest (*katapauo*, to settle down or desist completely) He would not have spoken of another day after that. So there remains a Sabbath rest (*sabbatismos*) for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest (*katapausis*, utterly reposing down) has himself also rested (*katapauo*) from his works, as God did from His. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest (*katapausis*), so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience.” (Heb. 4:8-12)

All in all, the exegetical evidence continues to support our side and utterly undermines your contention that the author’s choice of the word “*sabbatismos*” refers to the seventh day Sabbath.

Pastor Jim explained:

“We cease from our work (in this case, a reference to works of the Law, designed to accomplish our personal justification),”

Paul Wong responds:

This is a clear case of a “*private interpretation*.” (2 Pet. 20-21). Nowhere in Hebrews 4:9-10 does it mention “works of the Law, designed to accomplish our personal justification”. Let us read again. “*For he (the believer) who has entered His (God’s) rest (Greek – katapausis) has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.*” This verse has nothing to do with the “works of the Law”. The believer is strongly urged to rest on the Seventh Day Sabbath and not to work as God did during the Creation (Heb. 4:4-5; ref. Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 20:8-11). This is plain and simple.

Jim:

I assume you meant to cite 2 Peter 1:20, which reads in the KJV:

“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.”

But, what I am offering is far from “private interpretation.” The whole tone and tenor of the book of Hebrews is a contrast between the Law and the New Covenant.

“For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.” (Heb 7:19)

“For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

...

But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” (Heb 10:1, 13-14)

That is the purpose of the entire epistle. When the Hebrews’ author states that our faith allows us to enter the rest of God by ceasing from our works, just as God rested from His work, the parallel creates the context. And, as we read from James Murphy and Albert Barnes above, grammatically the word “*sabbatismos*” cannot be referring to the weekly Sabbath, despite your contention that “**The believer is strongly urged to rest on the Seventh Day Sabbath and not to work as God did during the Creation.**”

Remember, this entire epistle lifts up the superiority of Christ’s Covenant over that of Moses. The children of Israel observed the Seventh Day Sabbath, but they did it without faith. Consequently, they failed to enter His rest. Faith in the finished atoning work of Christ is the theme of all New Covenant theology and writing. And especially in a Hebrew mindset, among people who believed that the regulations of Moses would establish their relationship with God, the declaration to rest from their works went far beyond merely extolling the virtues of taking it easy every seven days. It was, in keeping with the whole context of this epistle, a declaration of a higher, better way; the way of faith, without the works of the law.

Notice the Apostle Paul’s treatment of this same theme, drawing the same parallels:

“But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the **works of the law**. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.” (Rom. 9:31-33)

“We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the **works of the law**, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the **works of the law**: for by **the works of the law** shall no flesh be justified.” (Gal. 2:15-16)

“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. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, the just shall live by faith.” (Gal. 3:10-11)

Notice the consistency with which Paul contrasts faith and “works of the law.” It is not “private interpretation” to conclude that the Hebrews’ author’s reference to “works” (especially in a context where it is being contrasted with “faith”) refers to “works of the Law.” That is simply consistent Biblical comprehension, letting the words on the page speak and adjusting my theology accordingly.

I stand by everything I wrote initially and though you claim your view is “plain and simple,” I remain unconvinced by your assertions.

Pastor Jim wrote:

Now, as to how the day of Christian observance became Sunday (whereas the Jewish day of rest was Saturday/ the seventh day), it appears that the early church began meeting on first day of the week, probably because it was the day our Lord's resurrection. The only reference we have to what day they met is this one:

Paul Wong responds:

The Lord Jesus Christ did not resurrect on Sunday morning as taught by many traditional churches. Here is the proof. *“On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.”* (Jn. 20:1) According to the Bible the day begins at twilight in the evening when the sun has set. *“So the evening and the morning were the first day”* (Gen. 1:5; 8, 13, 19, 23, 31) “. . . from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your Sabbath.” (Lev. 23:32) The first day of the week begins on our present Saturday evening. *“On the first day of the week*

Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark,” When Mary Magdalene came to the tomb the Lord Jesus Christ had already resurrected because she *“saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.”* From these biblical facts one can see that those who teach the Seventh Day Sabbath has been abolished by the crucifixion of Christ and replaced by Sunday worship because of Jesus’ resurrection have absolutely nothing to stand on. If Christians really want to celebrate Christ’s resurrection accurately they should do so on Saturday evening. But God has never given such a commandment at all.

Jim:

Umhhh ... yes? And all this proves what exactly?

Jesus rose on the first day of the week. That is uncontested. Inarguably, the first day of the week starts at Saturday sundown on the Jewish lunar calendar. And I agree with you that Christ emerged from the tomb Saturday evening, not Sunday at sunrise. In fact, I contend that Jesus died on a Wednesday, the Passover. He was in the tomb at sundown, just as the Feast of Unleavened Bread commenced. He remained in the tomb until sundown Saturday, just as the Feast of Firstfruits commenced. I believe it was an actual three-day, three-night, 72 hour process. We have a great deal of agreement here; but none of this has any direct bearing on the subject at hand.

When asked why the early church moved the day of worship from the seventh day to the first day of the week, I merely made the assertion that it was likely a result of Jesus’ resurrection on that day. And, that’s historically accurate. The rest of this conversation about Saturday night versus Sunday morning is inconsequential.

Paul Wong writes:

After the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ He “had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” (Acts 1:1-3) Just think very clearly.

The Lord Jesus Christ was with His disciples for forty days between His resurrection and His ascension to heaven. If He had wanted to change the day of worship from the Seventh Day Sabbath to Sunday this would be the best time to let His disciples know about it. There is not a single word to indicate this at all. Why? There was no change of the day of worship from the Seventh Day Sabbath to Sunday. This change was made many years later, and after the Church had fallen.

Jim:

Historically/biblically it's undeniable that we have a record of early believers meeting on the First Day of the Week. Acts 20:7 says as much. What concerns me here is your contention that the change to Sunday worship occurred "after the Church had fallen." I assume you mean after Rome's influence became more widespread. But, even in the darkest days of Rome, God had His own remnant on Earth. God has never been without a people. The true Church of Jesus Christ can never be referred to as "fallen." It is built by Christ himself and "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Mark 16:18)

Nevertheless, the notion that the period between the resurrection and Pentecost was the optimal 'missed opportunity' for Jesus to instruct His apostles about a change in the day of worship is, at best, an argument from silence. There is no record that He told them to stop slaying beasts in the temple or supporting the Aaronic priesthood during that period either. Nevertheless, the New Testament authors did write in great detail about the changes in worship that occurred as a result of the New Covenant's inception. Their arguments are no less valid just because Jesus didn't mention them during that interim period.

For instance, Saul of Tarsus (later known as the Apostle Paul) was not converted until well after Pentecost and he declared such mysteries as the introduction of Gentiles into the New Covenant. So, it's very hard to argue that every change of worship and doctrine brought about by the change of covenants needed to be declared and exposed in the first 50 days after the resurrection.

But, more to the point, the earliest church, cited in Acts, met on the first day of the week, the Apostle Paul among them. That's a simple fact of history and it clearly did no harm to their relationship with God, nor did it prove any state of "fallen-ness."

Again, remember the principle that Paul taught where matters of conscience were concerned: let every person be convinced in their own mind.

Paul Wong writes:

After the Lord's ascension to heaven the disciples "*returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey.*" (Acts 1:12) Why did Luke write about "*a Sabbath day's journey?*" It is because the disciples were still keeping the Seventh Day Sabbath and "*a Sabbath day's journey*" is a very short distance that they normally travel on the Sabbath day.

Jim:

I don't mean to sound condescending, Paul, but your proofs are becoming awfully thin. This reference to "a Sabbath day's walk" simply informs Luke's readers of how close the Mount of Olives was to Jerusalem, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile. The fact that the word "Sabbath" was used in this verse does nothing to bolster your contention that New Covenant Christians are required to observe the 4th commandment.

Nevertheless, I will concede that, inasmuch as the apostles were all Jews, and given the fact that Peter, John, and James initially resisted the introduction of Gentiles into the New Covenant, the good likelihood is that, at this point in time (just prior to Pentecost) the disciples were indeed observing the Sabbath. The question before us is whether they continued it as they grew in the grace and knowledge of Christ and whether they taught Gentiles to also observe it. That's where the argument remains. And, at the risk of being redundant, the New Testament includes no such teaching whatsoever.

Paul Wong writes:

Here is another proof that the Disciples of Christ and the Early Apostolic Church had kept the Seventh Day Sabbath even up till 70 A.D. when the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem. The Lord Jesus Christ had anticipated the destruction of Jerusalem therefore instructed His disciples to "*pray that your flight may not be in the winter or on the Sabbath.*" (Mt. 24:20). Winter time and the Sabbath are not good for evacuation. Winter is cold and the Sabbath is a day of rest and the length of journey has to be very short. The Lord Jesus Christ could foresee His disciples keeping the Seventh Day Sabbath even up till 70 A.D. There is a lot of compelling biblical evidence that the Early Apostolic Church had kept the Seventh Day Sabbath. Sunday worship is a post-apostolic change that is not sanctioned by God.

Jim:

Matthew 24 is one of the most eschatological passages in the gospels and we certainly cannot delve into all the background and doctrine connected with this passage. But, suffice it to say that Matthew's gospel is the most "Jewish" of the four. Jesus' ministry prior to His crucifixion was exclusively to Israel (Mat. 10:6, 15:24, John 1:11). When teaching among the Jews concerning the Day of Lord, (prophesied by Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel and others) Jesus naturally framed it in a completely Jewish setting. Inasmuch as the Day of the Lord judgments were all predicted to fall on unbelieving Israel, it would be natural to find them following the dictates of the Old Covenant rather than the New. Hence, Jesus added to

their emotional affliction with the caveat that having to flee on the Sabbath would cause them a crisis of conscience --- keep the Sabbath or flee for their lives.

Whether you assume that the prophecies in Matthew 24 were fulfilled in 70 A.D. or remain until some future date, the whole of Jesus' teaching in that chapter occurred under the Old Covenant, long before the Church was even in existence, well prior to the introduction of Gentiles into the covenant. So naturally, when Jesus spoke among the Jews He related to Jewish customs. But, none of this proves anything at all about Gentile converts keeping the Sabbath. And, inasmuch as the followers of Christ are not appointed to the wrath of God that accompanies the Day of the Lord (1 Thes. 5:9), the entirety of Christ's comments in Matthew 24 were not directed to them.

Let me take a moment here to talk about hermeneutics; the art and science of interpretation. We all have our presuppositions. One of the most difficult things to do when reading/interpreting the Bible is to not be guided by our presuppositions. We must allow the original authors to make their arguments and adjust our own thinking in accordance with what they have actually said. Far too often, people approach the Bible with a firm set of assumptions about what it says, what it means, and what they believe. For instance, you are convinced that all Christians (if not all people everywhere) are required to set aside the seventh day of the week to worship God. But that contention is not clearly and precisely borne out in the pages of Scripture (otherwise we would not even be having this debate). Nevertheless, when you read the Bible, you have that Sabbath presupposition firmly entrenched in your conscience, so when you read passages like Matthew 24:20 (or the vast majority of your other proof-texts), you think they are saying much more than the words actually convey when read at face value.

Hermeneutics can be tricky business. When we are led by our traditions, presuppositions or assumptions, we are not playing fair with the text. Rather, our theology must be constantly reformed and adjusted to fit with the thrust and context of those ancient words. All in all, it appears to me that you make too much of inferences from passages that are not genuinely connected to your topic. It is a common error that comes from assuming certain doctrines and then digging for proof of those assumptions from the pages of Holy Writ. Admittedly, it is extremely difficult for us to put our assumptions aside when we approach the Bible; but it's absolutely vital if we are going to have a genuinely Biblical theology.

This portion of your argument is a perfect case-in-point. The assumption that Jesus' warning to Jews in Jerusalem to pray that their flight during the Day of the Lord does not fall on the Sabbath proves that "The Lord Jesus Christ could foresee His disciples keeping the Seventh Day Sabbath even up till 70 A.D." effectively annihilates every hermeneutical rule and principle there is. This text simply does not say, or prove, what you insist.

Pastor Jim wrote:

Now, as to how the day of Christian observance became Sunday (whereas the Jewish day of rest was Saturday/ the seventh day), it appears that the early church began meeting on the first day of the week, probably because it was the day of our Lord's resurrection. The only reference we have to what day they met is this one:

"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight." (Acts 20:7)

But, from that verse it is obvious that the tradition of meeting on Sundays developed very early in the church's history.

Paul Wong responds:

Pastor Jim is uncertain about his interpretation of this verse when he uses the words "It appears" and "probably". "It appears that the early church began meeting on first day of the week, probably because it was the day our Lord's resurrection." If the Early Christians were celebrating the Lord's resurrection during that meeting why did Luke, the writer of Acts, not write about it?

Jim:

Mr. Wong, my use of qualifiers did not concern my "interpretation of this verse." The verse is exceedingly plain. The disciples gathered on the first day of the week, broke bread, listened to Paul preach prior to his departure, and he spoke until midnight. That's all the verse says. It's very hard to misinterpret.

What I was cautious about stating was whether that change to meeting on the first day of the week had a direct correlation to Christ's resurrection, because (as you point out) the text does not plainly state it. In other words, where the text is obvious, I am dogmatic. In those matters that the text does not address, I qualify my statements accordingly.

In all candor, in even the most cursory reading, what I wrote is very plain. The only way to misunderstand my meaning is on purpose, in order to create the false impression that I do not know what I'm talking about. But, any reader with a basic understanding of language and sentence structure is going to understand my statements and recognize your purposeful misconstruction of them. You do yourself and your argument no favor when you stoop to this sort of tactic.

Paul Wong continues:

As I have explained before, the biblical day begins in the evening. That meeting took place on a Saturday evening. How do we know that? The following verse tells us, *“There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together.”* (Acts 20:8). It was a farewell sendoff meeting for the apostle Paul who was *“ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.”* (Acts 20:7) A certain young man named Eutychus fell down from the third story and died. Paul prayed for him and Eutychus’ life was restored. The apostle Paul *“talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed.”* (Acts 20:11) The narrative on this meeting is very clear. It began on Saturday evening and ended at daybreak on Sunday morning. This is not a regular Sunday Church Service like many traditional churches are holding nowadays. It was a special farewell sendoff meeting for the apostle Paul who was leaving Troas at daybreak on Sunday morning.

Jim:

The text says what it says. I’ll let it stand.

Pastor Jim wrote:

“But, from that verse it is obvious that the tradition of meeting on Sundays developed very early in the church's history.”

Paul Wong responds:

Nothing is obvious that it was a regular Sunday Church Service.

Pastor Jim wrote:

“The only reference we have to what day they met is this one:”

Paul Wong responds:

If this is *“the only reference”* that Pastor Jim has on a Sunday Church Service then you can say there is absolutely no reference in the New Testament at all.

Jim:

So, now *“the only reference”* is tantamount to *“absolutely no reference”*? One equals zero?

Let's test that theory. The only reference to Jesus' speech on the necessity of being "born again" in the Bible is found in John 3:3-7. None of the other gospels record that conversation or even use the phrase "born again." So, inasmuch as that's the only reference to Jesus' words on the topic, would you be willing to argue that there is "absolutely no reference in the New Testament at all" to Jesus ever saying "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"?

No, of course you would not. How many times does God need to say something in order for it to be true? The answer is: Only once. But, if you can discount evidence that is not to your liking by claiming that only one instance is the same as no instance at all, we need to rewrite all the standard rules of evidence.

Judge:

How many times did the defendant stab his wife?

Attorney for the Prosecution:

Once, your honor!

Attorney for the Defense:

Only once! So then you can say that there was absolutely no stabbing at all!

Judge:

Correct! Paul Wong has established that one is equal to none!

I find the defendant innocent!

Okay, that bit of silliness aside, you really have a much larger problem with your argument, Mr. Wong. While we do find New Testament evidence of Christian meetings and offerings taken on the first day of the week (to say nothing of John 20:19 where the disciples assembled on the first day of the week and Jesus appeared in their midst), you cannot show a single, solitary example of Gentiles meeting on the Sabbath or observing any of the Sabbath rules. Neither can you provide even one, single, solitary example of the Apostle Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, teaching that the Church should keep the fourth commandment, rest on the Sabbath, or risk God's judgment for failure to do so.

But, what we do indeed find is Paul teaching the Gentiles not to let anyone judge them in such matters and that every man needs to be convinced in his own conscience. You have failed to produce a shred of New Covenant evidence to support your contentions and even those places where you attempt to present such evidence, your exegesis and grammatical usage utterly fails.

While I have at least some evidence, you truly and genuinely have none.

Pastor Jim wrote:

So, all in all, the argument concerning the Sabbath, or what day is appropriate for the church to meet, becomes a moot point. As long as we are resting in Christ, we are fulfilling the type and shadow cast by the Sabbath. We, as Gentile believers, are not under the Old Covenant and are not bound by its rudiments or restrictions. And Paul wrote that holy days, new moons, and Sabbaths - which Jews would have observed fastidiously - were not an issue for the New Covenant Church.

Paul Wong responds:

The Seventh Day Sabbath was established by God at the time of Creation (Gen. 2:1-3). On the Seventh Day Sabbath God rested, blessed the day and sanctified it. On the Fourth Commandment God commanded us to “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. . . .” (Ex. 20:8-11) How can anyone argue on “what day is appropriate for the church to meet”?

Jim:

Even as you write your concluding statements, you continue to confuse the Old and New Covenant distinctions. You write, “On the Fourth Commandment God commanded us ...”

Yet, the Bible says,

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words **I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel**. And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.” (Exodus 34:27-28 KJV)

“Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Wherefore **the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath**, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. **It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever**: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.” (Exodus 31:14-17 KJV)

In order to continue your argument you must – absolutely *must* – provide us with a text on par with those cited here that says Gentiles under the New Covenant are equally required to keep the fourth commandment, the sign of the covenant established between God and national Israel.

And that text, as you well know, simply does not exist.

Short of that, you have no real argument. The rest is all smoke, mirrors, huffing and puffing.

Paul Wong continues:

It is man's doctrine that teaches "As long as we are resting in Christ, we are fulfilling the type and shadow cast by the Sabbath." Our Lord Jesus Christ did not teach that as long as you are resting in Him you do not have to observe the Seventh Day Sabbath. The disciples of Christ had been resting in Him and yet they kept the Seventh Day Sabbath.

Jim:

I know we have referred to this passage a couple of times, but here I want to expand the context. The Apostle Paul does speak about "man's doctrines," but I think you'll be surprised at what falls under that heading in his estimation:

"Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day -- things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!' (which all refer to things destined to perish with use) -- **in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?** These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.” (Col. 2:16-3:4 NASU)

First and foremost, it is the Apostle Paul’s teaching that equates the Sabbath with a mere shadow, of which Christ is the substance. In fact, Paul equates Sabbath Day observance with the worship of angels, standing on visions, and being puffed up in our fleshly minds, rather than exercising appropriate allegiance to “the head,” who is Christ. If we have died in Christ (our substitute), then we are not to live according to clean/unclean rules (like meats, drinks, etc.) That’s what Paul calls “the teaching of men” – rules that perish with the doing. That is self-made religion that has only “the appearance of wisdom.” Now, keep in mind, the observance of Sabbath days is part of this whole context!

So, what is the antidote to such fleshly religion? Keep seeking the things above, where Christ is! Set your mind on things above, not on the things that are on the earth. And, everything in his list, including the Sabbath, falls under the heading “things that are on the earth.”

You see, Mr. Wong, I did not invent this notion of Christ’s superiority over the Sabbath. The contrast between keeping Old Covenant rules and placing our whole mind and reliance on Christ is strictly Pauline. His theology is that we have died in Christ, and therefore we have died to ourselves, we are no longer slaves to our flesh and are therefore free from rules that can only affect our fleshly bodies while not renewing our minds and hearts. Now, instead of performing feats of “will worship,” our lives are hidden in Christ. That is the Apostle Paul’s paradigm, not mine.

And you would do well not to characterize his doctrine as merely man-made.

Paul Wong continues:

It is true that “we, as Gentile believers, are not under the Old Covenant and are not bound by its rudiments or restrictions.” **But don’t forget that we still have to keep all the Ten Commandments that include the Seventh Day Sabbath.** The Lord Jesus Christ said *“If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.”* (Mt.19:16-19) We cannot choose to keep nine and leave out one commandment.

“If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself, you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole

law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law." (Jas. 2:8-11)

If you keep all the nine commandments but break the Fourth Commandment concerning the Seventh Day Sabbath then by God's judgment you have broken all the Ten Commandments. Actually it is not difficult to keep all the Ten Commandments. *"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome."* (1 Jn. 5:3)

If you make a firm commitment and determination to keep the Seventh Day Sabbath commandment, you can do that very easily. Just do it!

Jim:

To fully reply to your closing paragraph would require an article longer than what I have already written. But, I will address the highlights, so to speak. I'll start with the theological issues and then address your choice of proof texts.

You have made the presumptive leap from the suggestion that Christians ought to observe the fourth commandment to the assumption that all Ten Commandments are binding on all Christians with the threat of God's judgment awaiting those who fail to keep them in their entirety. You do not refer to the Sabbath as merely a voluntary observance, but you argue that it is a commandment imposed on the conscience of all believers. This despite the fact that the Ten Commandments constitute the contractual document that ratifies the Law of Moses; a covenant struck between Israel and God *exclusively*.

In other words, despite your artificial division between the Law of God and the Law of Moses, and despite the popular notion that the Law can be divided into three large categories (civil, ceremonial, and moral), such divisions cannot be found in the Bible and are usually the result, or necessary consequence, of theological systems rather than genuine exegesis.

The actual term "Ten Commandments" is only found three times in the whole Bible. {And if "only one reference" equates to "absolutely no reference," that leaves only two. Sorry, couldn't help it.} All three references are in the Old Testament. The first place in the Bible where the Ten Commandments appear is at Mt. Sinai.

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.' So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 34:27-28 NASU)

Notice that the terms “words of the covenant” and “the Ten Commandments” are used synonymously in this passage. These ten rules are inextricably tied to the whole of the Law of Moses. The other two mentions of the “Ten Commandments” in the Bible are these:

"So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone." (Deut. 4:13)

"He wrote on the tablets, like the former writing, the Ten Commandments which the LORD had spoken to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly; and the LORD gave them to me." (Deut 10:4)

Notice yet again that the terms “His covenant” and “the Ten Commandments” are synonymous terms in Deuteronomy 4:13. That same connection is made in Deuteronomy 9:9-11.

"When I went up to the mountain to receive **the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant** which the LORD had made with you, then I remained on the mountain forty days and nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water. The LORD gave me the two tablets of stone written by the finger of God; and on them were all the words which the LORD had spoken with you at the mountain from the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly. It came about at the end of forty days and nights that the LORD gave me the **two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant.**" (Deut. 9:9-12)

Those ten rules are referred to in Scripture by seven other names:

- 1) The Tablets of Stone (Ex. 24:12,4:13, Deut. 9:10, 1 Kings 8:9, 2 Cor. 3:3)
- 2) The Tables of Testimony (Ex. 31:18, 34:29)
- 3) The Testimony (Ex. 25:15-16)
- 4) The First Covenant (Heb. 8:7, 9:1)
- 5) The Old Covenant (Heb. 8:6-7, 8:13, 2 Cor. 3:14)
- 6) The Words of the Covenant (Ex. 34:28)
- 7) The Tables of the Covenant (Heb. 9:4)

The point I am making is that these words written in stone constitute a unique and specific covenant made with Israel exclusively. They do not represent a

moral law that existed for all time, imposed on all men (as we'll see in a moment). This point is made more obvious when we recognize that Moses was told by God to put the tablets of stone containing the Ten Commandments into a golden box that would be housed in the Holy of Holies. That box was not called "The Ark of the Moral Law" or "The Ark of the Law of Moses." It was called "The Ark of *the Covenant*." God viewed the Ten Commandments as the foundation document of His covenant with Israel.

Now, it is important, if we are going to recognize the Old/New Covenant distinctions, that we see the Law for what it was. It was a legal covenant based on performance and obedience to a set of rules. That fact stands in stark contrast to the New Covenant which is wholly a matter of grace. If it can be demonstrated that the Law of Moses has been done away with, or replaced with a better, newer covenant, then the Ten Commandments are similarly set aside, inasmuch as they are part and parcel of the covenant as a whole. And, germane to the topic at hand, the fourth commandment, the sign and token of the whole covenant (Ex. 31:12-18, Ezek. 20:20), is equally abated along with the cessation of the entire Mosaic system.

The Ten Commandments, as a covenant document, is said in Scripture to have a historic beginning and a historic ending. On this point, let me defer to John Reisinger's comments in his book "Tablets of Stone." (All italics are in the original text.)

The moment we say that the Ten Commandments are finished as a covenant, it is impossible for some people to understand what we are actually saying. In their confusion, they think they hear us saying, "Away with the moral law!" It does not matter how often or how loudly we affirm our belief in both moral law *per se* and specifically the enduring moral principles of nine of the Ten Commandments written on the tablets of the covenant. That is not enough for these people. They insist that we acknowledge that the Ten Commandments *as written on the tablets of stone at Mount Sinai* are "the eternal unchanging moral laws of God." It is all or nothing. It is impossible to even discuss the clear biblical reasons we have for rejecting such a theological view.

The New Testament Scriptures are clear that the Ten Commandments are finished as a *covenant contract* between God and Israel. We are NOT saying that the morality *contained* in the individual commandments is finished. But we are talking about the Ten Commandments considered as a legal contract, specifically as a covenant document. The moral duties commanded on the Tablets of Stone did not begin at Sinai, but the use of those duties as the basis of a covenant did begin at Sinai. Nine of the Ten Commandments were known by man and punished by God long before and after God gave them to Israel as a covenant at Sinai. Every specific

duty commanded in the Ten Commandments *except the fourth, or Sabbath*, was punished before Mount Sinai, and likewise, every commandment *except the fourth*, is repeated in the New Testament Scriptures.

We may disagree with each other on many things about "the law" but we cannot deny that the Bible clearly teaches the following things:

1. Some specific "Law" had a historical beginning.
2. This same "law" had a historical end.
3. The historical beginning of this "law" is always associated with the giving of the tablets of the covenant to Israel at Sinai.
4. The historical ending of this "law" is always connected with the coming of Christ and the establishment of the new covenant

It is possible that we totally misunderstand exactly *what specific law* the Bible is talking about but it is not possible to deny that the above four facts are clearly taught in the Bible. The Scriptures make it impossible for that law to be anything other than the Ten Commandments written on the Tablets of Stone and given to Israel at Sinai as the covenant foundation of their relationship to God. It cannot possibly refer to the "ceremonial" law. Nor can it be talking about the "law of conscience." It has to refer to the Law Covenant at Sinai ... there is simply no way to understand the following passages of Scripture if we deny that the law has both a historical beginning and historical ending.

Rom 5:13-14 - "for **until the Law** sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law."

Rom 5:20-21 - "**The Law came in** so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Gal 3:19 - "Why the Law then? **It was added** because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, **until the seed would come** to whom the promise had been made."

Gal 3:23-26 - "But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to

Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, **we are no longer under a tutor.**"¹

John Reisinger's logic is crystal clear. Simply by letting the text speak, it is inescapable that the Ten Commandments are the founding document on which the covenant at Mt. Sinai was established. It had a historic beginning and it likewise had a historic end. Therefore, we find the Apostle Paul stating unflinchingly that the Law stands in stark contrast to the New Covenant of salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ.

"Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; because **by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified** in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. But now **apart from the Law** the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction." (Rom. 3:19-23)

"Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a **law of faith**. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith **apart from works of the Law.**" (Rom. 3:27-28)

"Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. But now **we have been released from the Law**, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter." (Rom. 7:4-6)

"For Christ is the **end of the law** for righteousness to everyone who believes." (Rom. 10:4)

"We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; nevertheless knowing that a **man is not justified by the works of the Law** but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be **justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.** (Gal. 2:15-17)

"I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly." (Gal. 2:21)

“Now that **no one is justified by the Law before God** is evident; for, ‘the righteous man shall live by faith.’ However, **the Law is not of faith**; on the contrary, ‘He who practices them shall live by them.’ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us -- for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’ -- in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” (Gal 3:11-14)

“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.” (Gal 5:18-19)

“And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has **taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.** (Col 2:13-15)

This contrast between faith and the Law was a constant theme of the Apostle’s writing. It was primary and fundamental to his theology and we do him a great disservice when we argue contrary to his clear and didactic words.

Now, just so that there is no confusion, and before the shouts of “antinomian” begin, let me make clear that while we agree that the *moral principles* taught in the Law remain the standard for all generations, the Ten Commandments themselves, as a covenant document, were done away with at Calvary. Therefore, nine of the Ten Commandments are clearly declared and punished both prior to and after the inception and abolition of the Law. However, the fourth commandment, the necessity to observe the Sabbath imposed on people under threat of punishment, cannot be found prior to Sinai or after the inception of the New Covenant.

These are simple, clear facts of Scripture and they make their own case. To argue in favor of Sabbath-keeping in light of the tremendous amount of textual evidence to the contrary requires a stubborn commitment to anti-biblical tradition. Or, to use the Apostle’s words, the teacher of the Law simply does not understand what he is saying.

“But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, **wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions.**” (1 Tim. 1:5-7)

Now lastly (and thankfully) we'll quickly look at the proof texts you offered in your summary statement. The reference to Matthew 19:16-19 is in the context of a conversation between Jesus and a rich, young ruler. It reads:

“And someone came to Him and said, ‘Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?’ And He said to him, ‘Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.’ Then he said to Him, ‘Which ones?’ And Jesus said, ‘You shall not commit murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and mother; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ The young man said to Him, ‘All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?’ Jesus said to him, ‘If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.’ But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property.

And Jesus said to His disciples, ‘Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’ When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, ‘Then who can be saved?’ And looking at them Jesus said to them, ‘With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’” (Matt. 19:16-26)

This conversation took place under the Old Covenant (still in effect until Jesus' death) and it had to do with “doing.” “What good thing shall I do?” Jesus started with the Commandments of Moses, but the young man was convinced that he had accomplished them all without fail. So, Jesus added something He knew the young man could *not* do – sell what he had and give it to the poor.

From that context we can hardly deduce that Jesus' words are universally applicable to all people under the New Covenant and that the way to eternal life is via the Ten Commandments. Not only does that conclusion run counter to all New Covenant teaching, it is also contrary to Jesus' own words when contending with those who wanted Jesus to instruct them in the works of God:

“Therefore they said to Him, ‘What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?’” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.” (John 6:28-30)

Jesus never taught that salvation came via Moses or the Law of Sinai. In the case of the young ruler, Jesus was not commending him for keeping the commandments; He was showing that fleshly works were incapable of producing

genuine perfection by challenging the man with a good, charitable act that he simply could not perform.

Meanwhile, your choice of James 2:8-11 is actually a bit surprising, inasmuch as it says the exact opposite of the conclusion you draw from it. The context has to do with preferring one person over another, especially a wealthy man over a poor man. The context is not a treatise on the value of keeping the Ten Commandments.

“My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ and you say to the poor man, ‘You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,’ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not commit murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.” (James 2:1-13)

There is no mystery as to James’s meaning. He is contrasting two different standards. One he calls “the royal law” and “the law of liberty. The other he calls “the law,” which can only be the Law of Moses. “The royal law” is summarized by James as “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” This idea is drawn directly from Christ’s own words.

“But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?’ And He said to him, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, You shall love your

neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” (Matt. 22:34-40)

That idea, that the whole of the Law and the Prophets could be summarized by loving God and your neighbor as yourself is carried over into Pauline writing as well.

“Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for **he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law**. For this, ‘You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet,’ and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; **therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.**” (Rom. 13:8-10)

“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Gal. 5:13-15)

“Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.” (Gal. 6:2)

James approached this same reality from the opposite direction. He reminded his readers not to show partiality or oppress the poor. He reminded them that such partiality was sin and the Law of Moses would have held them guilty. Whoever stumbles in one aspect of the Law is guilty of the whole Law. So, the better approach is to act humbly, not as those who will be judged by the Law of Moses, but rather by the law of liberty. The contrast is obvious and apparent: mercy triumphs over judgment.

Knowing that both Paul and James admit that those who would be justified by the Law must keep every aspect of the Law, and that a single failure makes one guilty of the entirety of the Law, it is stunning to read your words, “**Actually it is not difficult to keep all the Ten Commandments.**” Admonishing and instructing people to keep the Ten Commandments runs contrary to everything Paul and James taught. By the works of the Law (which includes the Ten Commandments) can no man be justified! Justification is the free and sovereign gift of God, given to those who rest from their own works of righteousness and wholly lean on Jesus’ finished work. Faith in Christ is the end of the law for everyone who believes. And, anyone who starts down the path of keeping the Ten Commandments (especially the Sabbath, which is the sign and token of the whole Mosaic Covenant) is begging God to judge them on the basis of their personal merit and good works. But they will quickly discover that man, in his best state, is altogether vanity (Ps. 39:5) and all their righteous works are nothing but filthy rags (Isa. 64:6). Worse yet, in seeking to establish their own righteousness, they are truly “fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4).

Yet, that is exactly what you advocate.

Finally, you cited 1 John 5:3 as an inducement to keep the Ten Commandments. You assume that John's reference to "His commandments" denotes the Ten Commandments. But, John defined what he meant by that term earlier in this same epistle:

“And **this is his commandment**, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.” (1 John 3:23-24)

This is made all the more obvious by John's description of the commandment in 5:3, "His commandments are not burdensome." That is quite the opposite from the consistent New Testament testimony concerning the Law.

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with **the yoke of bondage**. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the **whole law**.” (Gal. 5:1-3 KJV)

So, John was not referring to the Ten Commandments in 1 John 5:3, but to what James called "the royal law," the Law of Christ (Gal. 6:2) The commandments that are "not burdensome" are to believe on Christ and love one another. That is precisely and exactly the command that John extolled.

In Conclusion

I will conclude this already too-lengthy reply with the words of the Apostle Paul (no surprise there, eh?). He formed a contrast between the Law from Sinai and the liberty with which Christ has set us free. And he claimed that the children of bondage, who were caught up in the legalism that Sinai dictated, would always be at odds with those who exercised their Christian freedom. Yet, said he, we are to stand fast in our liberty and "cast out the bondwoman and her son."

Well, here ... we'll let him say it.

“Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law?”

For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh and the son by the free woman through the promise. This is allegorically speaking, for these women are two covenants: one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is

Hagar. Now **this Hagar is Mount Sinai** in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.

But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. For it is written, ‘Rejoice, barren woman who does not bear; break forth and shout, you who are not in labor; for more numerous are the children of the desolate than of the one who has a husband.’

And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. But what does the Scripture say?

‘Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman.’

So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.” (Gal. 4:21-31)

Mr. Wong, I have no choice but to follow the clear dictates of the New Covenant. Try though you may, you must not succeed in bringing people under the bondage that Mt. Sinai engenders. And I, along with my fellow brethren, the children of the free, will always oppose, and attempt to prevent you in, your cause.

For the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and for your own soul’s sake, I adjure you again to cease from your enslavement and join yourself to the freedom that we have in Christ. As well, in the name of our Lord and Savior, I beg you to teach according to Scripture, not according to tradition. Allow the text of the Bible to lead you, rather than your assumptions and presuppositions. Stand toe-to-toe with the Scripture and align your theology according to what is actually being taught, rather than according to what you wish it said.

All in all, I thank you for the patience required to read this reply and I hope that it has served the cause of Christ and His people.

I remain your servant for His sake,

Jim McClarty

Pastor, Grace Christian Assembly.

www.salvationbygrace.org

¹ Reisinger, John. *Tablets of Stone*. (Crowne Publications, Inc. Southbridge, Mass. 1989) Pg. 79-81. www.soundofgrace.com