

Misuse of God's Commandments

Commentary for April 1, 2025 — Dr. Ernest L. Martin, July 1975

The greatest errors in Christendom today stem from a use of the Bible. This may seem like an absurd statement to make but it is true. Let me hasten to add that the problem is in the wrong use of the Bible. The most inaccurate handling comes from an indiscriminate application of Biblical commands (both in the Old and New Testaments) to Christian duty today. Some people look on all God's commandments as fitting for every Christian for all time. They often cite scripture in support of their claims. **"Faithful are all His precepts, Supported into the future, for the eon, Worked out in truth and uprightness"** (Psalm 111:7-8 CLV). But the truth is, all the commandments that pertain to us are sure and stand fast forever, but some commandments are not always relevant.

It is not possible to apply all of God's commands of the Bible to the Christian and be within the will of God. Let us look at some notable examples! God once commanded physical circumcision to Abraham and his descendants, but that ceremony is no longer necessary for Christians. Animal sacrifices are presently in the same category of redundancy. The feast days given to ancient Israel are not necessary for Christians. And even the physical sabbath day itself has been cancelled as a command for Christians to observe.

There is conclusive Biblical proof that the seventh day sabbath is no longer a physical requirement for the Christian. The Exposition shows a Biblical law in the Gospel of John which is seldom mentioned by those who demand sabbath observance for the Christian. And when they do mention the reference, they usually add words to the text which destroy the original teaching of the apostle John. But letting the plain words of God have their simple and complete meaning, we find New Testament legislation that shows the sabbath has been abolished as a Christian requirement. [See Dr. Martin's article: "[The Ten Commandments.](#)" DWS]

To keep it as a day of rest, without any religious significance being attached to it would be fine, but to demand its observance as a major sign for the true Christian is simply not proper. Indeed, it is a fundamental error. It would be misapplying an earlier command of God into our present Christian dispensation.

I must point out one thing concerning the sabbath, lest people misunderstand. We in no way wish to denigrate the physical sabbath, nor should we. The sabbath was a beautiful institution which God commanded from the time of Moses until Christ. We merely wish to point out what is the present requirement of God in regard to it. Many people who observe the sabbath are some of the finest Christians we know. But we realize there are excellent Christians who never kept a physical sabbath in their lives. It is essential to point out, and the New Testament makes it clear, physical sabbath keeping has nothing to do with real Christianity.

We should, however, keep the sabbath in a spiritual sense through Christ because He has become our spiritual rest (Matthew 11:28). Christians are also spiritually circumcised, but they do not have to submit to circumcision of the flesh (Philippians 3:3). The spiritual message of the holy days: **"YOU are UNLEAVENED"** (1 Corinthians 5:7) is a reality to a Christian,

but he no longer needs to observe the days in an actual sense. Why fast every year to remind one of sins, when our sins were completely forgiven and dealt with over 1900 years ago by Christ on the cross? These ceremonies were imposed on Israel until the redeemer would come (Hebrews 9:10). Now that Christ has accomplished salvation for us, our belief and trust in Him now satisfies all the physical ceremonies of the Old Testament period.

Sabbath Keeping Can Be Idolatrous

A simple resting on the sabbath, or even holding church services on that day, would be completely compatible with New Testament revelation. But if ministers begin to demand that the sabbath be kept and that the keeping of the day is linked to salvation, it becomes a perversion of the Gospel. Paul said that believing in the efficacy of physical circumcision or the scrupulous observance of days, times, seasons, and years as essential to salvation was a rejection of the Christ, who alone harbors all the factors of salvation! There was no middle ground with Paul on this matter. Those ceremonies, though commanded in the Old Testament, were being used by the Galatians as substitutes for Christ and the salvation found only in Him.

When people put circumcision (an ancient command of God) as a substitute for Christ, it becomes idolatry. When people recognize animal sacrifices as completely competent to forgive sins (such a belief becomes a substitute for the only Saviour, Christ), it is idolatrous. Reckoning the observance of holy days or sabbaths as a necessary means to salvation, shows that Christ has some physical partners, equal with Him, in the granting of salvation. It is like having a group of contributing elements who are all participants in securing salvation for the Christian. Christ, and His death by crucifixion would be only one element among those of the sabbath, circumcision, holy annual sacrifices in the bestowal of salvation. This is nonsense!

All the elements of salvation are lodged solely in Christ. There are NO OTHER partners. In fact, any physical or spiritual factor (whether a ritual, ceremony, or command) which man requires as a necessary constituent to salvation, other than Christ Himself, is idolatry! Even the early physical commands of God can themselves become idolatrous if man requires their observance as necessary to salvation. This includes all Old Testament physical requirements of God — including the seventh day sabbath!

Misusing God's Commands

Now note how definite commands of God can become idolatrous in the hands of man. While Israel was in the wilderness, some were bitten by serpents. God commanded Moses to make a serpent made of copper and put it on a pole (Numbers 21:9). When any were bitten, Israelites looked on the serpent and received healing. The forging of this image was a direct command from God, and Israel obeyed it. Some 700 years later the Israelites began to misuse that copper image. They thought the "act" had divine power within it. One of God's early commands became a means to idolatrous worship by Israel. But righteous King Hezekiah destroyed the image, ground it to powder because of its idolatrous use (2 Kings 18:4).¹

¹ The name *Baal* was a perfectly good word to describe the true God in early parts of the Old Testament as being the owner or husband of Israel. But by the time of Hosea, the word became so intimately associated with the false gods of the Tyrians, that God forbade its use in application to Him from that time forth (Hosea 2:16). This good word became connected with idolatry. *ELM*

Some Israelites in Christ's time, looked on animal sacrifices as powerful enough to save them from sins. After all, the ceremonies on the Day of Atonement seemed to have the clear approbation of God that all the sins of Israel were completely cleansed from their records by offering two goats (Leviticus 16:30, 34). But Paul made it clear that the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins (Hebrews 10:4) even though God earlier said they could cleanse them of sins. After the death of Christ — who only can cleanse us of sins (1 John 1:9) — it became wrong for Christians to put any animal in the place of Christ for the forgiving of sins.

Prophecy also shows that a false Christ will come upon the scene just before the Second Coming of Christ to earth (Matthew 24:23–28). This man will claim to have the rank of God and sit in a temple at Jerusalem (2 Thessalonians 2:4). God will send the world great delusion which will allow most people to believe the lie that the man is God (2 Thessalonians 2:11). When he sits in the temple, he will play the role of the Christ to come. Theologians recognize the prophesied Christ will establish a world government at Jerusalem (Isaiah chapter 11). He is also prophesied to reestablish the sabbath, new moons, and holy days (Isaiah 66:23; Zechariah 14:16–19; Ezekiel 45:16–25). And true enough, the real Christ will establish those things in the earth once He returns. But what some have not understood is that the false Christ (to claim he is the prophesied Christ) will seem to establish those same things. He will be convincing for 3^{1/2} years (Revelation chapter 13).

The Antichrist will misuse God's commandments to secure his own ends to rule the world. This is the last great deception God allows Satan to do (2 Thessalonians 2:11). Christ warned Christians that if they have to flee Jerusalem at that time, they had better pray that their flight be not on the sabbath (Matthew 24:20). That is because the Beast of Revelation (mimicking the true Christ) will command the Old Testament rituals be done. But he will stop animal sacrifices soon after he begins to reign. One way the false Christ can claim to be the true Christ is to reintroduce the prophesied rituals of the Old Testament. This subterfuge will be so clever it would almost deceive the very elect at the end of the age (Matthew 24:24).
 [See Dr. Martin's article "[Misuse of Scriptural Interpretation](#)." DWS]

The reintroduction of the sabbath, new moons, and holydays, prior to Christ's true Second Coming in the clouds of heaven all will be a misuse of God's commandments. People can actually use the laws of God to control men, and we need to be aware of what is prophesied to happen for 3^{1/2} years before the true Christ comes back to this earth.

Christian Responsibility

The apostle Paul referred to the Ten Commandments as containing excellent principles for Christians to follow in their conduct, but never once does he mention the physical sabbath among the commands to keep. He came to realize, by the teaching of God's Holy Spirit, that a physical observance was no longer necessary for Christians (Galatians 4:10; Colossians 2:16–17; Hebrews 4:9). Indeed, the fruits of the Holy Spirit are not keeping circumcision, holy days, sabbaths, wearing phylacteries, offering animal sacrifices, wearing non-mixed clothing, tithing, or not touching a menstruous woman. Such physical rituals or ceremonies are not the signs of the Christian today. **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance"** (Galatians 5:22–23).

Still, some questions need to be asked concerning the sabbath. Does the observance of the

day really help one love God and man more? Has it helped a person to have joy, that is, real joy? Has it been an aid in giving peace? Patience? Has the keeping of it helped one to be gentle? Good? To have faith? To be meek? Or have temperance? If it has, then keep on with it. Some people say Sunday does the same thing for them. But the important question that really needs to be asked is this: Has it helped in giving a person salvation? If one says yes to that, then the sabbath has become a partner in salvation with Christ and Christ is not the only element in that salvation. But any substitute for Christ through the efforts of man is idolatrous, whether it be the copper serpent, circumcision, animal sacrifices, holy days, or sabbath keeping. If one today simply says he keeps the sabbath because he loves God, and by it shows his thankfulness for the salvation that is only in Christ, that might be fine. The truth is, however, there is far more to the sabbath to many sabbath keepers, and they feel it is necessary to observe the day for salvation.

Let me give an illustration which shows this to be true. A fine woman who believes in observing the holy days of the Old Testament told me she did not keep them to gain salvation but merely to please God — they had nothing to do with her salvation. This seemed a fine answer to me, but I disagreed with her own appraisal and asked her to prove her belief by a question: **“Since the holy days have nothing to do with salvation, would you go ahead and EAT on the Day of Atonement?”** She thought a moment and said: **“I now see what you mean.”** The fact is, she would not eat on that day. To her, her very salvation was at stake. She was helping to secure that salvation by fasting on atonement.

So, it is with the sabbath day. If any person says he keeps the sabbath only to please God and not to gain salvation, then as a proof of his belief ask him or her to go ahead and work on the sabbath — after all, his salvation would in no wise be in jeopardy (according to that person), and he would have the satisfaction of proving to you his belief that it was only to please God. The vast majority of sabbath keepers would be afraid to work and they would decline. Their refusal to work, even that one time, shows they really do see a salvation factor in their sabbath observance. The keeping of the day has become to some Christians an equal partner with Christ in obtaining salvation.

This is a misuse of the sabbath. It is especially sad when one realizes that the New Testament makes it clear the sabbath has been annulled and abolished. For a Christian to use it as a day of rest without any religious significance might be fine, just as it is all right to be circumcised as long as no religious efficacy is seen in it. But Christ, and the Father, no longer look on sabbath observance as something to perform in order to please or obey them. And certainly, it is not a factor in salvation. Really, it could be said that a person who keeps the physical sabbath, knowing full well it has been cancelled by the Father and Christ, is repudiating their authority to change such a law. But they both have the power to annul the sabbath, and that is exactly what they have done as recorded in the Gospel of John.

Christians today have far more important things to do than watch the sun go down on Friday and Saturday evenings. We need to cultivate the real fruits of God's Spirit and let the obsolete teachings of the Old Covenant be replaced by the truly spiritual teachings of Christ. May God give us wisdom to understand.