

Christ In You -- the Hope of Glory!

By
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Scripture teaches that the resurrected saints will *share in the glory of Christ!* "...we are God's children; and if children, then also heirs, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ -- if in reality we share His sufferings, so that we may share his glory too" (Romans 8:16-17, Williams Translation). What does it mean to have glory or to be glorified in the Biblical sense? The glory of God signifies the divine splendor, honor and majesty of his person, and the showing forth of his attributes. The glorified saints will share in the divine nature of God (II Peter 1:4), receiving the gift of eternal life (Romans 2:5-10). Yes, unbelievable as it may seem, given our fragile and transitory nature, like a "vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (James 4:14), we created and limited beings will be given *his* eternal life.

William Barclay in his book *New Testament Words* displays remarkable insight in discussing *eternal life*. "...the word *aionios* [eternal] is the word of eternity in contrast with time, of deity in contrast with humanity, and...therefore *eternal life is nothing less than the life of God himself*" (p. 37, italics in original). The life that God offers us, *God life*, his life, is quantitatively different from our temporary physical existence. Unlike the latter, eternal life is without beginning and without end, as God is, and he shall share that never ending, self-inherent life with the children of his kingdom. But eternal life is also qualitatively different from mere human life, else how could we bear it? The saints shall live eternally in sublime joy and peace. They shall be "in the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24). David wrote of God, "In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11). As Barclay put it, "Life is only of value when it is nothing less than the life of God -- and that is the meaning of eternal life" (p. 41).

Though forever remaining subject to the Father and Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:24-28), the glorified saints shall share many of God's attributes, his power, his honor and splendor, his brilliance. Daniel 12:3 and Philippians 4:21 show that the bodies and faces of the glorified saints will shine forth with supernatural brilliance, just as that of the resurrected, glorified Christ, symbolically described in Revelation 1. There are not a few who might consider such a teaching blasphemous, but that nevertheless is the true teaching of Scripture. David wrote, "As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness" (Psalm 17:15). John wrote, "...we know that when he [the Father] is revealed, we shall be like Him..." (I John 3:2). Your destiny, if you're a true Christian, and if you remain faithful, is to become like God, sharing in his glory for all eternity.

What assurance do you have that this magnificent, astounding purpose will be fulfilled in you? What is the basis for your hope of glory in God's Kingdom? Paul said he was made a steward of "the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is *Christ in you, the hope of glory*" (Colossians 1:26-27).

As this Scripture points out, the purpose of God is largely hidden from the world. To most it is a mystery in the sense that the term is commonly used in English. But the Greek term *musterion*, as used in the Scriptures, actually means spiritual truth hidden from the world in general but *revealed* to the elect of God. *Musterion* comes from the word *mueo* which means to initiate into the mysteries, or secret knowledge. (See *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, p. 424). The secret of God's purpose for mankind, hidden from the world, is revealed to his special people, his chosen ones.

Both your destiny as a true Christian, and the means of its accomplishment, is reflected in the phrase, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Your destiny, if you are a true Christian, is to be glorified with God. And that can be accomplished only by Jesus Christ living in you through the Spirit of God. If Christ is living in you, and as long as Christ continues to live in you, you have the hope and the promise of glory with God.

Assuming you have believed the true gospel, repented and received the Holy Spirit, what can you do to assure that Christ will abide in you, dwell in you, to the end, so that the hope you presently have is fulfilled? I want to discuss briefly just two things you can do to assure that your hope of glory is fulfilled. Jesus Christ does not now dwell in everyone. There are certain conditions to his dwelling in a person. This does not mean that we -- through our own efforts -- "qualify" ourselves for salvation. We are to give "thanks to the Father who *has qualified* us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through the blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:12-14). Salvation is a gift which we could never "earn" regardless of how much effort we might expend. Nevertheless, effort is required to fulfill our part in the covenant with God. We must "fight the good fight of faith" to "lay hold on eternal life" (1 Timothy 6:12, 19). Lacking that effort we become subject to sin and deception, and may become *disqualified* for the inheritance reserved for the faithful (compare 2 Corinthians 13:5; Titus 1:16; 2:11-15; 3:8).

There are more tools to help us remain steadfast than the two I will discuss. But they will point you in the right direction and help assure that Christ remains in you. They are: study and obedience. The rabbins taught that "it is in the power

of each wholly to overcome sin, and to gain life by study and good works" (See *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, p. 117, or 1.167 in the original edition). Standing by itself, this assuredly is misleading. Without Christ, without God's Spirit, all the study and good works in the world are to no avail, as far as eternal salvation is concerned. At the same time, Christ will not continue to abide in someone who never studies or hears his word and does not obey it.

Bible Study

To assure that Christ continues to dwell in you, study God's word diligently, daily, consistently. One need not be a great Biblical scholar to be a Christian. Most of what one needs to know is plain enough to anyone *willing without reservation to believe and act on God's word* (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 15:32).

Bible study of itself does not produce true spirituality. But it can produce spiritual literacy. It can provide necessary food for nurturing the spirit. The Scriptures are a "who, what, how, and why" book for the works of God. They are also a "how to" book for real Christians. Bible study can make a difference in salvation, but only if we *practice* what the Scriptures teach. James wrote that "the implanted word...is able to save your souls." The word of God is like a "mirror" that can show us what we look like spiritually, and what we need to become (James 1:21-25). God communicates his will to us through the Scriptures, Jesus Christ having loved the Church and given himself for it, "that he might *sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word*" (Ephesians 5:26).

You can't be like Christ if you don't know what Christ is like. Study the Scriptures to learn what God is like, and strive to imitate him, to follow his thinking, his teaching, his way of acting. You can't have real, genuine faith and belief in God if you don't know him and what he's about. You can't follow Christ's teachings unless you know what they are. You can't obey God if you don't know what he requires. So study God's word to learn who he is, what he is like, what he is doing for you and with you, what he wants you to do. *Jesus Christ will live in you only if his words live in you.* Jesus said, "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). He said, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32). If you want to *indeed* be a disciple of Christ -- a real Christian -- and not one in name only, you *must* abide in God's word, and it in you (compare John 15:7). Study God's word with the view in mind of making it a part of you, the guide to your thoughts, your words, your deeds.

Obey God's Commandments

Another thing you can do to assure your hope to the end is commit yourself to obeying God's commandments. Many who claim to

be Christian have stumbled at the commandments of God, either collectively, thinking the law of God is done away, or individually, thinking they can selectively obey God, keeping some commandments but rejecting ones they don't like, such as the Sabbath, or tithing, or perhaps other commandments.

"This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it. For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist" (2 John 6-7). Notice that love *is* walking in the *Father's* commandments. God is love (1 John 4:8). That is, love is the epitome of his nature and character. The commandments of God are intended to give practical definition to God's way of love. Jesus said the "first and great commandment" is, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." And the second, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." All the law hangs on, or is summed up in, these two commandments (Matthew 22:34-40). Jesus also said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Love towards God is expressed through spiritually motivated obedience to his commandments (compare Deuteronomy 11:13, 22; 13:3-4; Joshua 22:5; Nehemiah 1:5; Daniel 9:4). Love is the motive force behind God's law, and it in it's full intent and purpose shows us how to love. Hence, love should be our motive for obedience.

Next we find in 2 John 6-7 a very interesting statement. Those who do not confess Jesus Christ coming in flesh are deceivers and *anti*, against or in place of (the meaning of the Greek prefix), Christ. What does this mean? It's much deeper than one might think, and goes to the very heart of our subject.

The Greek word translated "confess" is *homologeō*. It means much more than an empty statement of belief. One might think that just "confessing" or stating that Christ came in the flesh makes one a Christian. But that is emphatically *not* what John is teaching. The original meaning of the word, as pointed out in *Vine's Expository Dictionary* (under "confess," p. 120) is "being identified in thought or language." *Homologeō* literally means to same-think (by the concept of thought as internal speech) or same-speak.

In this verse both the Greek word for "confess," or as we have learned to "same-think, same-speak," and the Greek word for "coming" are in the form of the *present participle*. The present participle in this instance implies *present and continuing action*. As the Greek scholar A. T. Robertson notes, the sense of the phrase is that of "treating the Incarnation as a continuing fact" (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. VI, p. 253). The meaning is that deceivers are not now and continually thinking the same and speaking the same Jesus Christ who is right now and continually coming in flesh. The flesh being spoken of is *the flesh of every true Christian now living*.

This thought is repeated in a slightly different form in 1 John 4:1-3. There it says, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world" (1 John 4:1-3). The New King James, as other translations of these verses, does a rather poor job of reflecting their real meaning. First, the translators have added some words not in the Greek which tend to somewhat distort the meaning. "Jesus Christ" appears twice in these verses and in both instances the translators have misleadingly preceded the name with "that." "The" is supplied before the word "flesh," leaving a narrower implication than John intended. Most importantly, the English translations I have consulted do not effectively reflect the full implications of certain *perfect participles* used in the Greek. And there are some other nuances of the Greek which enrich the meaning when properly understood.

The Greek perfect indicative and perfect participle as a general rule (there are exceptions) emphasize an *existing state*. The perfect is called the "long tense" because it commonly expresses *past action with results extending into the present*. Often the sense expressed by the perfect tense is *virtually indistinguishable from that of the present tense* (see remarks on the tenses in the *Analytical Greek Lexicon*, p. xii).

With this background let's consider the verses in question. "Confesses" (*homologeō*) is in the present tense, implying *present and continuing action*. "Come" (*erchomai*), with respect to Jesus Christ being in the flesh, is in both instances in the form of the perfect participle (the most accurate translation of which is "having come"). The emphasis is not on the past, but on the *present, here and now*.

The true Spirit of God inspires one to think the same thoughts -- speak the same words -- and by implication -- do the same deeds -- as Jesus Christ dwelling in the flesh. Because the true Spirit of God *is Jesus Christ dwelling in our flesh!* But the spirit of anti-Christ does not believe, speak and act according to Jesus Christ dwelling in the flesh. The "confession" John and other writers of the New Testament speak of is not a mere acknowledgment -- but a *conviction compelling commitment, surrender, and obedience*.

True Christians think the same, speak the same, act the same as Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ -- through the Spirit of God -- dwells in their flesh. This is the message of God's word. Paul wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me..." (Galatians 2:20). Yes, those of genuine faith have been justified -- that is, deemed free of

guilt -- through the blood of Christ. But having been thus reconciled to God, "we shall be saved by His life" (Romans 5:9-10). *Christ living in us is the key to salvation and eternal life!* (compare for illustration Galatians 2:20; Isaiah 8:20; Matthew 10:38; Ephesians 5:1-7; 1 Peter 2:21; 4:11; 1 John 2:3-6; 3:1-4). Churches, ministers, people who do not think, speak and act as Christ are of another spirit, the spirit of deception and anti-Christ. If then, Christ agreed with God's law -- and he did (John 4:34; 5:30; 8:29) -- if he taught God's law -- and he did (Matthew 19:16-19; Luke 10:25-27) -- and if he obeyed God's law -- and he did (John 14:31; 1 Peter 2:22) -- then he is now doing the same thing in the flesh of the people of his Church. He is the same "yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 10:8).

How can one know for sure if Christ is living in him? Scripture answers: "Now *by this* we know that we know Him, *if we keep His commandments*. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:3-6).

The Sabbath Sign for Christians?

Recently a dispute has arisen within the Church as to whether the Sabbath is a "sign" identifying Christians. This is an important question pertinent to our subject because it bears directly on how -- or *if* -- the Sabbath fits into our relationship with God and Christ. Is the Sabbath a commandment for Christians? We are admonished in Scripture to, "Prove all things; *hold fast* that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:22, KJV). We dare not look to men. Like the Bereans, we should search "the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things are so" (Acts 17:11). But we must be careful to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15), knowing that Scripture can be handled deceitfully (2 Corinthians 4:2; 2 Peter 3:16), sometimes even by ourselves without our awareness, if we are not honest and thorough. Even for those of us for whom the Sabbath question was settled long ago, it can be profitable now and again to renew and strengthen our faith by reviewing its foundation.

It's been stated that the Sabbath is *not commanded* as part of the New Covenant. And that *not keeping* it does not make one less of a Christian. (*Pastor General's Report*, 12/21/94, p. 20). It's alleged that the Sabbath is a "sign" pertaining to Israel only. But strangely, Israel *almost never* faithfully kept the Sabbath throughout its history! It was not only the weekly Sabbath that was given as a "sign" to Israel. It was all the Sabbaths, most especially the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Why did God give the Sabbaths as a sign for the Israelites? One of the ways in which the Hebrew word *'owth* (sign) is used is of a token or "sign" as a reminder of one's duty (see *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, p.

229). The Feast of Unleavened Bread was to be kept to remind Israel that it was God who redeemed them from slavery. It was a sign and a memorial "that the LORD's law may be in your mouth" (Exodus 13:8-9). It was, therefore, to be a reminder *both* of God's grace and of their obligation of surrender and obedience to him. (Paul used it thus in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8). The Feast of Unleavened Bread -- and all the Sabbaths -- serve the very same purpose for God's Church today! Thus they are a sign for faithful Christians today in exactly the same way they were intended to be a sign for the nation of Israel.

The Sabbaths (plural) were a sign to remind Israel that it is *God who sanctifies* us (Exodus 31:13). Humans have no power to make anything holy. They cannot make a day holy, and they cannot make themselves holy by observing days and religious customs *they* have chosen. The Sabbath was not made only for the Jews, nor only for Israel, but for all mankind (Mark 2:27). All mankind needs to learn that it is God who sanctifies. Hence the Sabbath is obligatory for all. Especially those who are Jews inwardly (Romans 2:29), and are of the "Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16), should keep the Sabbath faithfully in acknowledgment of the Eternal God who sanctifies them -- and as a *sign* between him and them. The "sign" of the Sabbath, reminding us of who it is that sanctifies us, applies every bit as much -- and more -- to the Church now as it ever did to physical Israel. After all, our sanctification is spiritual, while theirs was largely only physical.

Moreover, it was not just the weekly and annual Sabbaths that were given to Israel as "signs," or reminders of who the true God is, of his grace, and of their obligations to him. *All the words God commanded them* were to be bound in their hands as a sign (Deuteronomy 6:8; 11:18). The binding of the law in the hands as a sign is symbolic of the obligation for undeviating obedience to the law in all that the hands find to do, as wearing the commandments as frontlets before the eyes is a figure of speech meaning to have them at the forefront of one's thoughts continually. Comprehensive, consistent obedience to God's commandments would be a "sign" evident to all of one's relationship with God.

Now some will no doubt object that the Pharisees observed God's commandments rigorously, yet they were not approved of God, as evidenced by their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. Contrary to the false but popular teaching, however, the Pharisees of Jesus' day *did not* obey God's commandments. Jesus said to the leaders of the Jews, which included many Pharisees, "Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keeps the law?" (John 7:19).

It has been suggested that the Holy Spirit is the New Testament "sign" of God's people. And that faith and love, and Jesus Christ, are also such "signs." A major point of this writing is the truth that it is Christ dwelling in and leading

one through the Holy Spirit that makes one a Christian, and is the basis for the hope of eternal life (Romans 8:9-14). But is the Holy Spirit a "sign" of God's people?

The Holy Spirit is invisible. It can be neither seen, nor heard, nor felt (*'owth* also denotes "the sign of anything which cannot itself be seen" -- *Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*). The Holy Spirit, while it can't be seen, can be discerned. Unusual and miraculous signs have on rare, special occasions accompanied the giving of the Holy Spirit, as is recorded in Acts 2, for example. But the usual way in which the Holy Spirit is manifested is in the *deeds* it motivates and empowers one to perform, namely, obedience to God's commandments (Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:26-27; Romans 8:4-5, 13-14).

Ephesians 1:13 has been used as a proof text that the Holy Spirit is a sign of God's people. "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit" (NIV). The common Greek word for "sign" (*semeion*) is *not* found in this verse. The literal translation of the Greek is, "...you were sealed [*sphragizo*] with the Holy Spirit of promise...." In the Roman world a letter or scroll to be carried in the mail was sealed with a wax seal. An imprint was made in the wax. The wax seal served several purposes at once: (1) It identified the author or owner of the document. (2) It provided security against tampering or being read by unauthorized persons. (3) It authenticated the document as the work of the one whose seal it bore. Hence the metaphor conveys the concept of the Holy Spirit being, among other things, a mark or identifying sign of God's people. However, it's not an either/or situation. The Holy Spirit being a sign of God's people does not nullify other signs, such as the Sabbath, or obedience to the commandments. Indeed, they are complementary. They all work together.

It's not a matter of an "Old Testament sign" and a "New Testament sign." Ezekiel -- in the Old Testament -- used the metaphor of a "mark on the foreheads" as symbolic of the identifying seal of God's Spirit (Ezekiel 9:4; compare Revelation 7:2-4; Ephesians 1:13). The same prophet also spoke of God's Sabbaths as "a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God" (20:19; also verse 12). Isaiah prophesied that not *just* Israel, but *Gentiles* faithful to God will also keep the Sabbath *holy*, and *not* defile it (Isaiah 56:1-8). The setting for this prophecy of Isaiah's is *our time*, now, (before the return of Jesus Christ) when, says the Eternal, "...My salvation is *about to come*, and My righteousness to be revealed" (verse 1, compare Hebrews 9:28), and when salvation has been opened fully to the Gentiles (verses 3, 6-8; Acts 11:18; Ephesians 3:1-7). These conditions taken together can apply *only to today's age*, and none other!

Furthermore, Ezekiel prophesied that *when* the time comes that God has poured out his Spirit on Israel, *then* they will

faithfully keep his Sabbaths (39:29; 44:23-24; 46:3). And we find also in Isaiah during the millennium, "...from one Sabbath to another, *all flesh* shall come to worship before Me, says the LORD" (66:23). These prophecies are in the Old Testament. But the setting for their fulfillment is during the time of the New Covenant regime -- when, to repeat, salvation is opened fully to Gentiles. These Scriptures provide proof positive that the Sabbath is a New Covenant law and that it is not a sign of a right relationship with God for physical Israel only, but for all who faithfully serve him!

As further evidence that these signs are *not contrary to one another*, but go hand in hand, consider 2 Timothy 2:19, "Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal [*sphragis*]: The Lord knows those who are His, and, Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity." Notice the dual aspect of this seal. God knows those who are his, having sealed them with the Holy Spirit, as we saw earlier. And the second part of the seal identifying true Christians (this Scripture falls in the context of apostate members teaching false doctrine), is that those who name the name of Christ are to depart from iniquity -- simply another way of saying they must keep God's commandments! ("Let...depart" in this verse -- *aphistemi* -- is in the imperative mood; it's a positive command for those who name the name of Christ to depart from iniquity).

Godly faith, too, is characteristic of a Christian, and is elemental to a right relationship with God. But faith is a quality of mind apparent to others only through the works motivated by it. As James wrote, "Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works" (James 2:18). Faith is not somehow exclusive of or in opposition to obedience to God's commandments. The true saints -- the Church against which Satan rages -- are "those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12; also see 12:17). The verses imply the distinct but inseparable character of God's commandments and the faith of Jesus. In the Greek in both of the verses referred to "keep" -- *tereo* -- is in the present participle, "those keeping," implying present and continuing action. *Tereo* "expresses watchful care and is suggestive of present possession" (*Thayer's*). In these verses it implies not only observing the commandments of God *and* the faith of Jesus but *holding fast* to them, significant in light of the context of the verses and the message to the Church of Philadelphia: "*Hold fast* what you have, that no one may take your crown" (Revelation 3:11).

Jesus said, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Surely this means that love is the -- or at least a -- sign of a Christian. And indeed it is. But what is love, that is, godly love, termed *agape* in the Greek New Testament? As William Barclay points out in *New Testament Words*, "*Agape* has to do with the *mind*: it is not simply an emotion which arises unbidden in our

hearts; it is a principle by which we deliberately live. *Agape* has supremely to do with the *will*" (p. 21). Love is *choosing* to keep God's commandments. As John wrote, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 John 5:3).

Another idea has been broached that it is not the Sabbath that is a sign of a Christian, but Jesus Christ, and that Jesus Christ has "replaced" the law (including the ten commandments) with himself. The proof text used for the idea that Jesus is a sign is Luke 2:34, "Behold this Child is destined...for a sign which will be spoken against." There are actually a number of ways in which Jesus Christ might be viewed as a sign. One of the names of God used in the Old Testament is "Yahweh-Nissi," the Eternal my Banner, or sign (Exodus 17:15). Jesus Christ is God. He led Israel through the wilderness, providing for their needs, showing them where and how to walk (1 Corinthians 10:1-11, compare Deuteronomy 8:1-3; 32:3-15; Psalm 78:15-35; Jeremiah 23:5-8). It is prophesied of him that he would be a banner, an ensign, a sign for the Gentiles and the Israelites to lead them into the millennial rest, the very rest typified by the Sabbath day (Isaiah 11:10,12; Hebrews 4:1-10). The concept of our Lord and Savior being a "sign" for us to follow is not peculiar to the New Testament, but is found in the Old Testament, too. Jesus does not lead people to break the Sabbath but to keep it. A careful reading of the Scriptures reveals that he, the preincarnate Jesus, spoke the commandments from Mt. Sinai. He does not replace the law. He and the Father together comprise the one God who *authored* the law. He does not replace the law, but he *embodies* it, a *living example* of the law in action (1 Peter 2:21; 1 John 2:3-6). He does not replace the law, but, it was prophesied, "He will magnify the law and make it honorable" (Isaiah 42:21).

We've discussed Scriptures showing that "Christ in you" is the hope of glory (i.e., becoming a glorified son in God's Kingdom). And that the true Spirit is discerned from the false in that it leads one to follow Christ's example in thought, word and deed. And we've read that "by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments" (1 John 2:3). Who is it that stumbles at the "living stone," Jesus Christ? "Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are *disobedient*, the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone, and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense" (1 Peter 2:7). Genuine belief in Christ is inseparable from obedience to him. It's not enough to merely mouth Christ's name and claim belief in him while rejecting his teachings and his example. Jesus prophesied, "For many will come *in My name*, saying, I am the Christ, and will *deceive* many" (Matthew 24:5). These are not people claiming that they themselves are Christ. They are *many* coming in *his name*, saying he, Jesus, is Christ, yet *deceiving* many! And so it has happened!

If we think of a sign as tangible evidence of one's standing as a Christian, it is to be found in his faithful, heartfelt obedience to all of God's commandments, as applicable under the

New Covenant. After all, one of the two cardinal points of the New Covenant is "I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts." And the result is that the Eternal "will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Hebrews 8:10). This is as much a part of the Covenant whereby we become God's people as is the forgiveness of sins. And it will be accomplished through the power of God's Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:26-27). Christians carry the mark of all the other signs discussed *also*. But, again, they complement one another -- they *do not* cancel one another out!

Different Commandments?

Another controversial assertion that needs to be discussed is that the commandments of Christ are different from the ones revealed in the Old Testament. The Sabbath, tithing and certain other laws, the reasoning goes, are not included in the commandments Christ was referring to when he said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). This idea is hardly a new one. It was taught by second century teachers such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, and numerous others who followed down through the centuries. But what does God's word say? Did Jesus teach a *different* set of commandments?

When a rich man asked Jesus, "...what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered, "You know the commandments" (Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-23). And he then named some commandments from the Old Testament. We too know the commandments from the Scriptures of the Old Testament (which for years were the only Scriptures the Church had) as well as the New. Every single one of the ten commandments, and many others from the Old Testament, are directly discussed and established within the context of the New Testament. Jesus never suggested to his followers that the Sabbath and other commandments did not apply to them. Much of the four gospels is a record of how Jesus observed the Sabbath, teaching us by example how to observe it (not according to Jewish tradition but according to the true meaning and spirit of the Sabbath). It was still a *commandment*, and a day on which to rest from one's own labors, *after* our Savior's death: "...they rested on the Sabbath according to the *commandment*" (Luke 23:56; see also Hebrews 4:9-10).

Whether or not to keep the Sabbath was not an issue in the Church of the original apostles. Evidence concerning the early Church reveals that the Jerusalem Church kept not only the Sabbath well into the second century (having moved to Pella prior to the destruction of Jerusalem), but many of its members observed Jewish traditional law as well. The controversies between some of the converted Pharisees and others within the Church over keeping "the law of Moses" was not over the ten commandments but what was plainly at issue was physical circumcision, and certain laws of the Old Covenant as kept by Jewish tradition.

In the conference recorded in Acts 15 it was believers among the Pharisees who raised the issue of circumcision and the "law of Moses" (verse 5). As the Pharisees used the term the "Law of Moses," it included their oral tradition because they asserted that not only the written law but the oral law, too, was given to Moses at Mt. Sinai. As it's stated in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "...while the phrase 'Torah (given) to Moses at Sinai' may be understood in a restricted sense [i.e., as the Pentateuch], the Pharisaic-rabbinic tradition (originated by the Pharisees and continued by the Talmudic rabbis) viewed it as referring to a wide body of teaching. According to this position, which dominated Jewish thought until the modern era and still commands the allegiance of traditionalists, the encounter between God and Israel at Sinai deposited not only a written Torah (*Torah she-bikhtav*) but also an oral Torah (*Torah she-be 'al pe*) that was transmitted from generation to generation" (Fifteenth Edition, vol. 10, "Judaism," 1978, p. 286). Edersheim adds, "According to the Jewish view, God had given Moses on Mount Sinai alike the oral and the written Law, that is, the Law with all its interpretations and applications. From Ex. xx. 1, it was inferred, that God had communicated to Moses the Bible, the Mishnah, and Talmud, and the Haggadah, even to that which scholars would in latest times propound" (p .69). When the Pharisees among the brethren wanted to require Gentile converts to "keep the law," it meant they wanted to impose upon them the entire weight of their extra-Biblical oral tradition, not just the commandments written in the Torah.

The "yoke" referred to by Peter (verse 10) is not the ten commandments, not the Sabbath, but the Jewish traditional laws, referred to by Jesus as "heavy burdens" (Matthew 23:4; Luke 11:46). Jesus never upbraided the Pharisees nor anyone else for keeping the Sabbath or other of the commandments of God. He did assail the Pharisees because through their traditions -- the "commandments of men" -- they transgressed God's commandments and made them of no effect (Matthew 15:1-9; Mark 7:1-13). Joachim Jeremias (pp. 246-267) discusses the Pharisees' traditional laws regarding tithing, purification and other matters which went far beyond Biblical requirements. Jesus rebuked the scribes for imposing these burdensome laws when he said "they...will not move [or remove] them with one of their fingers" (Matthew 23:4). The burdens of these rules of men "could be laid on, or moved away, according to the varying judgment or severity of a Rabbinic College" (Edersheim, p. 71; or 1.103 in the older two volume edition). In a similar way, the judgment made by the conference of Acts 15 had to do not so much with the spiritual and everlasting precepts of the law (Romans 7:14; Psalm 111:7-8), but with ceremonial aspects of the law pertaining primarily to the temple service and Jewish traditional law (compare Acts 15:24-29; 21:18-19; 28:17; Galatians 1:14; 2:3-4, 10-14; 3:3; 6:12-13; Hebrews 9:9-10).

Jewish Pharisaic Rabbis had disagreed among themselves whether adult proselytes should be required to be circumcised to

be fully accepted as citizens of the commonwealth of Israel. By the time of Christ they had adopted the affirmative view (Edersheim, p. 1014, or 2.746). However, among the Western diaspora ("Hellenists," or "Hellenistic Jews"), Gentiles were accepted into the assembly as proselytes without circumcision. "...Hellenistic Jews, ...renounced circumcision [as necessary for the acceptance of proselytes] but not the immersion that washed away the impurity of heathenism" (*New Shaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, vol. ix, "Proselytes," p. 280-281). While circumcision was not required of Gentile converts in the West, "no concessions were made in monotheistic faith or in moral requirements, but solely in liturgical [ritual] matters" (*ibid.*, p. 281). The Sadducees, too, held that only future male children of converts must be circumcised, since no other day than the eighth after birth is specifically commanded in Scripture. Part of the *Gerim Halakhah* (binding rules of tradition relating to Gentile proselytes) concerned five specific conditions prerequisite to *entering into* full citizenship among the Jews. These five conditions, all from the Pentateuch, were circumcision (Exodus 12:48), and abstention from the following: idol sacrifices, blood, food (meat) not bled properly, and sexual immorality (Leviticus 17:7, 10, 12-13; 18:1-26). The decision resulting from the conference of Acts 15 *ruled out* adult male circumcision, but *confirmed* the remaining requirements (representing separation from spiritual and physical defilement or uncleanness) for full acceptance into the community of disciples. Some sources add obedience to Jewish authority, and avoidance of blasphemy, murder and theft to the list of laws obligatory for Gentiles from Leviticus 17-20. In reality, all the laws mentioned in these chapters were to be followed by Israelites and the Gentiles living among them alike (17:8, 10, 12, 13, 15; 18:26; 20:2), and every single one of the ten commandments are given binding authority in the laws laid down in these chapters.

The primary concern being addressed in Acts 15 is how may a Gentile be purified from spiritual uncleanness and hence be fit for acceptance into the congregation. To the Pharisees, in particular, strict observance of laws pertaining to ritual purity was extremely important. Certainly for a Gentile, from the Pharisaic point of view, circumcision would a fundamental first step. Beyond that, however, Pharisaic communities had strict rules of admission. "Before admission there was a period of probation...during the course of which the postulant had to prove his ability *to follow the ritual laws*."

.....
 "Once this period was over, the candidate committed himself to observe the *rules of the community*.... The new member of the community bound himself to observe the *Pharisaic laws on purity and tithes*" (Jeremias, p. 251, emphasis added). Note the emphasis is on ritual laws, and their own traditional laws, which the Pharisees equated with "the law of Moses." The point of Acts 15 is that -- contrary to Pharisaic demands -- spiritual purity is not accomplished through circumcision of the flesh and adherence

to physical rituals of purification, but rather, as the Church had learned, "God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and *works righteousness* is accepted by Him" (Acts 10:34-35). And that God "made no distinction between us and them [Jew and Gentile], *purifying their hearts by faith*" (Acts 15:9; compare also Acts 21:24-25, note the issue there also is ritual purification). The "necessary things" imposed on Gentile converts in Acts 15 is not intended as a complete list of their obligations to God. For example, baptism, which was required of Gentile converts (Matthew 28:19; Acts 10:48) is not mentioned in Acts 15:29. What is mentioned are common heathen practices -- referred to as "abominable customs" (Leviticus 19:30) -- by which the nations were defiled. "Purity of the heart" requires separation from these practices, as commanded in Scripture. When we place Acts 15 in its proper context with the rest of Scripture, we see that the approach of the New Testament Church in accepting Gentile converts was similar to that of the synagogues of the Western diaspora. Physical circumcision and ritual purifications revolving around the temple service were not required. But there was no compromise in faith and moral law, including Sabbath observance.

With regard to the Sabbath, much has been made by some of the seven so-called laws of Noah (from Leviticus 17-20, same as listed above but arranged somewhat differently) which were obligatory for so-called "half-proselytes" (a concept originated by the Rabbis). But overlooked, perhaps deliberately, is the fact that, as *Easton's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* points out, "Besides these laws, however, they were required to abstain from work on the Sabbath, and to refrain from the use of leavened bread during the time of the Passover" (CD version, 1994, on *SeedMaster Holy Bible* CD ROM, White Harvest Software, Inc.). In fact the common term for "half-proselytes" -- proselytes "of the gate" -- comes from the language of the Sabbath law, which specifically requires Gentiles ("your stranger who is within your gates") to observe the Sabbath (Exodus 20:10; Deuteronomy 5:14). There was never a question, either among the Jews nor within the New Testament Church, as to whether a Gentile convert should keep the Sabbath, since it was specifically commanded of them.

Many scholars recognize that the Jerusalem Church was a model for the Gentile churches in doctrine and practice (excepting extra-biblical Pharisaic tradition which continued to be practiced by some converted Pharisees, but was never imposed by the apostles on Gentile converts). This is alluded to by Paul where he says the Gentiles were "debtors" to the Jerusalem saints, having "been partakers of their spiritual things" (Romans 15:27); and imitators of their sufferings at the hands of persecutors (1 Thessalonians 2:14). In Hugh Smith's *History of the Christian Church* we find the following: "The first Christian church established at Jerusalem by apostolic authority became in doctrine and practice a model for the greater part of those founded in the first century." And he states further, "All Christians agreed in celebrating the seventh day of the week in

conformity to the Jewish converts" (pp. 50-51, 69; cited in *A History of the True Religion*, pp. 44-45). A number of other church historians could be cited drawing the same conclusions. Hurlbut admits, "As long as the church was mainly Jewish, the Hebrew sabbath was kept; but as it became increasingly Gentile the first day gradually took the place of the seventh day" (*Story of the Christian Church*, p. 45).

In addition to Scripture, clear evidence that the apostles, specifically Paul, never taught the Gentiles nor other Christians that they were free to reject God's command to observe the Sabbath and keep as "holy time" any time they chose is provided by Clement, a companion of Paul (Philippians 4:3). Clement wrote when he was pastor of the Church of God at Rome, about 100 A.D.:

These things therefore being manifest to us, and since we look into the depths of the divine knowledge, it behooves us to do all things in their proper order, which the Lord has *commanded us to perform at stated times*. He has enjoined offerings [to be presented] and service to be performed [to Him], and that not thoughtlessly or irregularly, but *at the appointed times and hours*. Where and by whom He desires these things to be done, He Himself has fixed by His own supreme will, in order that all things being piously done according to His good pleasure, may be acceptable to Him. Those, therefore, who present their offerings *at the appointed times*, are *accepted and blessed*; for inasmuch as they *follow the laws of the Lord*, they *sin not*. (First Epistle, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, p. 16).

Samuele Bacchiocchi, a Seventh Day Adventist scholar, spent five years at the Vatican's Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, studying early Christian documents to investigate the early practice of the Church regarding the Sabbath, and the question of when, where and why the practice was abandoned in favor of Sunday worship. He concluded that the change occurred during the reign of Emperor Hadrian (117-135 A.D.), largely as a result of severe anti-Jewish repression and persecution. It should be noted, however, that some Gnostic Christians, who blended Christianity with pagan religion and philosophy, worshipped on Sunday rather than the Sabbath in the first century (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7, p. 379, cited by Fletcher, p. 118). Following the pattern of the first-century Gnostic practices, the change in the "catholic" Church was an adaptation of the widespread practice of honoring the sun-deities on "Sun-day," the first day of the week. "My conclusion," says Bacchiocchi, "...was that the change from Saturday to Sunday did not occur in the Jerusalem church by apostolic authority to commemorate Christ's resurrection. Rather it occurred in the Church of Rome early in the second century as a result of the interplay of political, social, pagan-religious, and Christian factors, similar somewhat to those that gave rise to the December 25 observance of Christ's birth" ("How the

Sabbath Was Changed to Sunday and Why It Matters," *Liberty* magazine, vol. 86, no. 1, January/February 1991, p. 14).

It has been stated that the Sabbath does not "appear in any of the commands or lists of virtues in the New Testament" (*Pastor General's Report*, January 5, 1995, p. 2). And this is used as a rationalization for not having to keep it. One has to wonder, how many times must God repeat himself before men cease their attempts to reason around his law. First, contrary to the above statement, as pointed out earlier, the Sabbath is listed as a command -- *after* Christ's death abolishing the Old Covenant (Luke 23:56). The Sabbath is mentioned more than sixty times in the New Testament, more than any other of the ten commandments. Nowhere is it stated or suggested that it is not to be kept. The majority of the cases involve Jesus' example in the gospel accounts of how to properly observe the Sabbath, not according to the manmade, burdensome and counterproductive rules of the scribes, but instead keeping faithful to its spirit and meaning as a day to rest from our own works and servile labor, and to keep it as a day of spiritual and physical liberation and restoration (Nehemiah 13:15-22; Isaiah 61:1-3; 58:13-14; Luke 13:10-17; Matthew 12:10-13; Acts 16:13; Hebrews 4:9-10). One does not find examples of Jesus, the apostles, or converted Christians spending the Sabbath buying and selling, working at servile labor for wages, engaging in sporting events, nor in general, pursuing their own carnal interests. One does find them resting from their own fleshly labors and preaching, teaching, praying, healing, and doing similar good works in the service of God. How much plainer could it be made, what our obligations are regarding the Sabbath?

In Matthew 24 Jesus uttered a prophecy for *his own disciples*. The prophecy concerns events which would precede his second coming. The words apply specifically and directly to the present era between the first and the second comings of Jesus Christ. He warned that during this age *many* false prophets would deceive many (verse 11). He warned that *lawlessness* would abound. He warned of the coming great tribulation. And he said, speaking to his very own disciples, "...pray that your flight may not be...*on the Sabbath*" (verse 20). Why would Jesus tell his disciples to pray that their flight from the tribulation be not on the Sabbath, unless he expected them to be keeping the Sabbath? Evidently Jesus did not know that his death would render the Sabbath commandment obsolete. Are we more wise than he? How can any honest Bible student contend that Jesus does not expect his own disciples, here and now, to be keeping the Sabbath? (Incidentally, this statement does not necessarily imply that it would be wrong to take flight on the Sabbath if necessary. But certainly it would be preferable not to have to do so).

In the book of Hebrews Paul explains that certain laws of the Old Covenant need not be kept in the letter under the New Covenant. These have to do with physical sacrifices of food and drink (we still sacrifice in to God in other ways), washings, or rites of purification, and other fleshly ordinances having to do

with the temple service (Hebrews 9:9-10). Since there is no physical temple, we could not apply most of these laws in the letter now, even if we wanted to. Had God intended that we not keep the Sabbath -- one of the ten commandments -- would he not have made it at least as plain as these lesser laws that no longer apply in the letter? Notice, however, that we are not told in the book of Hebrews (nor any other book) that the Sabbath is not to be kept. In fact, we are told just the opposite!

In Hebrews 3 and 4 Paul draws an analogy between the Israelites of the time of Moses and Joshua entering into the promised land and our entering the household (or Kingdom) of God. The time they spent in the wilderness is analogous to our lives now. We are ultimately partakers of the promise of eternal life with Christ only if we remain steadfast in faith *to the end* (Hebrews 3:6-14). Though the Israelites were under God's rule and guidance in the wilderness, they did not enter his "rest" in the promised inheritance because they were disobedient. In like manner, we have not yet received our inheritance in God's Kingdom, but "a promise remains of entering His rest" for us *if we are diligent to obey* (Hebrews 4:1, 11).

Some teach falsely that we have *already* entered that rest, but we have not. The rest we are promised *follows* the return of Jesus Christ, when his Kingdom will rule the earth (and all creation; see Isaiah 14:1-7; 32:16-18; 33:20; Jeremiah 30:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:7; Revelation 14:13; 21:3-4). Paul said he sought to "attain to the resurrection." Not that he had "already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended..." (Philippians 3:11-13). Paul, in Hebrews, refers to the Sabbath as a type of entering God's Kingdom, his rest (4:4). In verse 9 Paul says, "Then remains a sabbath rest to the people of God" (*Interlinear Bible*). The Greek word translated "sabbath rest" is *sabbatismos*. It means a Sabbath keeping. And it applies both to keeping the weekly Sabbath as a type of the millennial rest, and to the millennial fulfillment of what the Sabbath prefigures.

Keep in mind that Paul was writing to Jewish Christians, of whom there is no doubt they were keeping the Sabbath. In Hebrews Paul discusses numerous details of the Old and New Covenants and their relationship. This would have been the ideal place for Paul to tell the Jewish Christians that keeping the Sabbath is no longer necessary. But instead, he does just the opposite. There can be no doubt whatsoever that Paul's statement in Hebrews 4:9, "Then remains a sabbath rest [or sabbath keeping] to the people of God" (*Interlinear Bible*), would have been taken by Jewish Christians as a clear *validation* of their practice of keeping the weekly Sabbath, regardless of any additional meaning the statement was intended to have. Especially in light of the next verse, where it is tied in directly with the example of God resting on the seventh day of the creation week, thus creating the Sabbath (compare Hebrews 4:10; Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:11).

It's not accidental that the apostate Church, after rejecting the Sabbath, in time rejected also the belief in the millennial reign of Christ. Edward Gibbon notes that the early Church taught the second coming of Christ and his millennial reign. It was believed that this age "...would be succeeded by a joyful Sabbath of a thousand years; and that Christ, with the triumphant band of the saints and the elect who had escaped death, or who had been miraculously revived, would reign upon earth till the time appointed for the last and general resurrection" (*The Triumph of Christendom in the Roman Empire*, p. 25). But eventually, as apostasy became more and more firmly rooted, "The doctrine of Christ's reign upon earth was at first treated as a profound allegory, was considered by degrees as a doubtful and useless opinion, and was at length rejected as the absurd invention of heresy and fanaticism" (p. 26).

It's been stated that the annual festivals, or Sabbaths, are "shadows of the reality, who is Christ," hence it's reasoned that they are not commanded under the New Covenant. But is this what Scripture says? Scripture says they are [not were] "a shadow [Greek: *skia*, in this context a sketch, an outline, a representation conveying to our minds a pattern; compare Hebrews 8:5] of things to come" (Colossians 2:17). The Sabbaths are formulated according to the pattern of God's plan for mankind. Because they are a *representation* of a greater reality, does that mean we need not keep them? Baptism is a representation of a greater reality (Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12). Does this mean that baptism is optional, that it's somehow not a requirement for a Christian, because it's a figure or shadow of something else? The same for the Passover symbols of bread and wine, and the Passover itself (1 Corinthians 5:7; 11:23-26). If we did not keep the Sabbaths, would we understand what they prefigure? How much understanding of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, or Trumpets, or Atonement, or Tabernacles does the average Sunday keeping church goer have? Virtually none! Colossians 2:16-17 does not say we need not keep the Sabbaths. It says "let no one judge you" with regard to them. This could mean any of several things. Biblical scholar A. T. Robertson, a Baptist, having little reason to provide support to those who keep the Sabbaths, nevertheless conjectures that Paul has in mind the regulations and practices of certain ascetic Gnostics, or possibly Essenes or Pharisees, whose rules "went far beyond the Mosaic regulations" (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. IV, p. 496). To use an ambiguous Scripture like this to sweep away dozens of clear statements from the Bible is extremely poor exegetical form, to put it mildly!

What is the standard we are being judged by? It is the word of God, the "law of liberty" (John 12:48; James 1:21-25; 2:9-12; Revelation 20:12-13). It is God who judges (Deuteronomy 32:36; Psalm 7:8-11; 96:10-13; Acts 17:31). And it is not the hearers of the law but the doers of the law who will be justified (Romans 2:13; James 2:21-25; Revelation 22:14).

The apostles did not believe that the annual feasts were obsolete relics of the Old Covenant. They had the Church assembled on the day of Pentecost. And God honored their keeping of that annual Sabbath and confirmed it for the New Testament Church in a most powerful way -- by the giving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). Paul gave detailed instructions to the Gentile Corinthian Church regarding how to properly keep the Passover, one of the seven annual festivals commanded in Leviticus 23. Paul wrote to the Corinthians concerning the Feast of Unleavened Bread, "...let us keep the feast..." (1 Corinthians 5:8). "Let us keep the feast" (from *eortazo*) is in the Greek in the form of the hortatory subjunctive; it's an *exhortation* -- virtually a command -- to *keep the feast of unleavened bread* with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. And this letter went to *Gentile* Christians.

Scripture shows that in the millennium, during the regime of the New Covenant, *all nations* will be required to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. Those who refuse will be punished (Zechariah 14:16-19). Why would they be punished if keeping the Feast is not a law, a command, under the New Covenant? Jesus kept the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day (John 7:10, 14, 37-39). Throughout the New Testament we find thematic material relating directly to the various feasts of God. Keeping the feasts can give life to our comprehension of the subtle, penetrating spiritual lessons of both the Old and New Testaments, because they give us the proper framework for understanding God's word. That's one very important reason why Scripture says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who *do his commandments*" (Psalm 111:10).

It's been stated that "at creation, God gave no command to human beings regarding keeping the [seventh] day as a Sabbath" (*Pastor General's Report*, January 5, 1995). The same source goes on to say that no Sabbath commandment existed until after the Exodus. Based on what evidence? One will not find recorded in Scripture before the Exodus any specific command about stealing. Does this mean stealing was not a sin until God made the Old Covenant with Israel. The same is true of lying, of covetousness, of idolatry, of blasphemy, etc. Did none of these laws exist until the time of the Old Covenant? I think the absurdity of this argument is readily apparent. Abraham knew God's commandments and kept them (Genesis 26:5).

The law of God did not begin its existence at Mount Sinai. It's existence is implicit in the Bible from cover to cover. Paul wrote, "For until the law [the Old Covenant] sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law" (Romans 5:13). As Paul goes on to explain, however, sin was imputed before the Old Covenant was sealed. Adam and Eve were punished for their sin. The entire antediluvian world was destroyed because of their sins. Sodom and Gomorrah likewise. Egypt was punished because of its sins. So we see clearly that the spiritual law of God was in force before the Old Covenant. God

has always been the Supreme sovereign of his creation. He has always been the "one Lawgiver...able to save and to destroy" (James 4:12).

The covenant was an agreement between God and Israel that they would keep his laws and that they would receive blessings for doing so (Exodus 19:5-6, 8). It was a physical covenant; but based on spiritual precepts. The spiritual precepts of the law were written on stones; the priests were human. But all was according to a heavenly pattern. The New Covenant is better, not because its law is better, but because its promises are better (Hebrews 8:6). How are they better? Because the *same law*, (applied in the spirit and not just in the letter) is written not on stone but in our hearts; and through the primary covenant sacrifice, Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven (2 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 8:4-6, 10-12; 9:11-15). Through the New Covenant is made possible the fulfillment of the promise of eternal salvation (Hebrews 9:11-28).

Are we to believe that God created the Sabbath during the creation week, and "blessed and sanctified it" (Genesis 2:2-3), but did not reveal it to Adam and Eve, nor insist that they keep holy what he had blessed and sanctified? Especially when the Sabbath was *created for man*? (Mark 2:27). Nehemiah wrote that in the wilderness God "made known" to Israel the holy Sabbath (9:14). Remember the Sabbath had been *made holy* at creation. The detailed chronology of the flood found in Genesis 7 and 8 makes it clear that the men who wrote and preserved the source documents for the book of Genesis were meticulous time keepers, and that they knew God's calendar. It's simply not credible to believe that they did not preserve a knowledge of the Sabbath as well. But in slavery, the children of Israel had lost track of it (compare Lamentations 2:6; the Egyptians did not observe a seven day week, but divided the month into three periods of ten days each). So it was necessary that God make known to them the Sabbath day, the day he had made holy at creation. This was done several weeks *before* the Old Covenant was agreed to at Sinai (compare Exodus 16:1; 19:1). The Sabbath was *already* a law and a commandment to be obeyed *before* the Old Covenant came into existence (Exodus 16:4, 23, 25-28).

When God gave Israel his commandments at Mount Sinai he told them to "*Remember* the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). In giving the command he reminds us how the Sabbath came to be holy in the first place. "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it" (verse 11). God hallowed, that is consecrated, set apart the Sabbath for a holy purpose, at the time that he made mankind. The basis for keeping the Sabbath holy is that God made it to be holy at the beginning of man's history.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "...keeping the commandments of God is what matters" (I Corinthians 7:19). Paul knew what the

commandments were. They were those enjoined in the Old Testament law (Romans 13:8-10). Love is not walking in just Jesus' commandments, but in the *Father's* commandments (2 John 4-6). Jesus' commandments and the Father's are the same (John 12:49-50).

Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, *till heaven and earth pass away*, one jot or one tittle will *by no means* pass from the law till all is fulfilled [better translated in this context *come to pass* or *established*]. Whoever breaks [or *looses* or *relaxes*] one of *the least of these commandments*, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever *does and teaches* them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:17-19). It's obvious from this statement that Jesus practiced and taught to be kept *all* the commandments written in the Law and the Prophets. And the commission Jesus gave to the Church included teaching his disciples likewise "to observe *all things* that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20). (A further discussion of the commandments as applicable to Christians is found in my manuscript *The Two Covenants*).

The Old and New Testaments are consistent in teaching that obedience to *all* the commandments is the principle sign of God's elect (see again I John 2:3-6; Deuteronomy 6:8; 11:18). The commandments God is writing in the hearts of true Christians certainly *includes* the Sabbath, but they are not limited to the Sabbath. Merely keeping that one commandment does not identify one as a Christian. But surely no one who willfully refuses to keep the Sabbaths, the days God sanctified, can truthfully claim to be keeping the commandments. And make no mistake, the Sabbaths are among the commandments. They are not mere "window dressing" nor an optional "special blessing" for a limited number of "Christians" who deem them worth keeping. Who is any man to say keeping them is not necessary, when it is God himself -- Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28) -- who *commanded* their observance?

The Sabbath is a test for God's people, "whether they will walk in My law or not" (Exodus 16:4). Almost always the Sabbath is one of the first laws to be rejected or made ineffectual by those who depart from the truth. God asked, with regard to the Sabbath, "How long do you *refuse* to keep My commandments and My laws?" (Exodus 16:28). Instead of obeying God, Israel chose to imitate the peoples around them. God appealed to them, saying, "Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to *all* the law which I commanded your fathers..." (2 Kings 17:13). But they "did not believe in the LORD their God" and "rejected his statutes" (2 Kings 17:14-15). *Disobedience is disbelief!*

Christ dwelling in you empowers you to obey his law (Romans 8:4, 13; Philippians 2:13; 4:13; Ephesians 3:14-21). As long as we are in the flesh we will have to contend with its sinful

nature. But Christians do not reject God's commandments. They are no longer hostile to them. They don't try to reason around them. They hold fast to them and struggle to obey them in the faith of Jesus (Revelation 14:12). And as they grow spiritually they exercise through Christ's power greater control over their minds and actions, and become more like him as they mature spiritually (Colossians 3:1-11; Philippians 4:13; Galatians 5:16-25; Romans 13:11-14; 2 Corinthians 10:1-6; Ephesians 4:13-24). When they sin Christians will in heartfelt repentance acknowledge their sin and sinfulness, and they will be forgiven and cleansed by our merciful God (1 John 1:8-10). We can't, of ourselves, obey God's law (Romans 8:7). Only Christ dwelling in us can! -- if we constantly submit to his will and earnestly seek his help to obey. Study God's word, and obey him. Let Christ live in you, your hope of glory.

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