

CHAPTER D32

THE SABBATH

The Old Testament ordered God's people to keep the sabbath, the seventh day of the week, Saturday. (Sunday is the first day of the week.) In the gospels it is clear that Christ kept Saturday because He was a Jew living at a time when the Old Testament had not yet been replaced by His New Testament. Because of **He 9:17** it is not possible to construe Christ's Saturday-keeping as a New Testament commandment, example, custom, or suggestion that Saturday be kept today. Once **the New Testament era was started by the death of Christ**, He had His disciples record His life and His will in the writings that constitute the New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The fact that Christ's death instituted the New Testament before anything was written means, just as with the Old Testament, the New Testament existed first and *then* His saints wrote according to the already-existing will or law. And His saints wrote absolutely nothing in His New Testament after His death that tells us to keep the sabbath. Aside from two or three reports of the disciples preaching to Jews in their synagogues on the sabbath (which was the best day to catch the Jews assembled in order to introduce them to the New Testament) the Scriptures are silent. In fact, the Fourth Commandment is conspicuous only because it is the sole Commandment of the Ten given to Moses that is *not* repeated in the New Testament! Many believe this omission to be an error on God's part for the simple reason that He made keeping the sabbath a perpetual, everlasting, permanent covenant (**Ex 31:16,17**). And if keeping the sabbath is an everlasting covenant, they think we should be, starting at sundown Friday and lasting until sundown Saturday, keeping the sabbath by going to church, not working, not traveling too far, not picking up sticks, etc. (Actually what I just said is not accurate because different groups pick and choose different items from that list that they think should "apply today." For example, some ignore the sundown-to-sundown timing, some work, some travel, and some keep the sabbath as completely and as strictly as they can only "when it's convenient.")

Since Saturday worship is not a New Testament institution like it was in the Old, is it still OK for people to go to church on Saturday? Yes, the New Testament says we can worship God on any day of the week.

But we need to deal with the fact that the sabbath is an *everlasting* covenant. In doing so I hope to help you see how to live in this New Testament era by learning from the Old Testament and applying it to your life. We can depend on God's consistency by comparing the two Testaments in order to further our knowledge of His will. Let me show you what I mean with an easy example – circumcision.

Christ's disciples knew **circumcision** was an *everlasting* covenant (**Ge 17:10-14**). Therefore some sabbath groups today believe the Apostles made a grievous error when they terminated the requirement to circumcise the penis in the New Testament (**Ac 15:1-11,23,24**). But because these groups cannot come right out and reject that plain but (to them) offensive New Testament teaching that keeping the law and circumcising your penis actually *subvert your souls* (v.24), they often publicly downplay circumcision, while in private hypocritically advising the continuance of the subversive doctrine. They simply cannot understand how the Apostles could end a covenant God made everlasting while at the same time claiming God thinks we'll do well (**Ac 15:28**) as long as we keep the strange list in **Ac 15:29**.

The fact is the Apostles did not frivolously and suddenly do away with penis cutting. They had been taught by Christ how to study and apply the Bible. Therefore they knew circumcising the penis was merely a type of something else. The real circumcision was the circumcision of the *heart* (**Je 4:4; Ac 7:51; Ro 2:28,29; Ga 5:2,3,6; 6:12-15; Co 2:11**), just like ripping garments was supposed to be a picture of repentance in the heart (**Joe 2:13**). The only reason the Lord made His people cut their penises and rip their garments was they couldn't cut and rip their hearts. (The Bible makes it clear that our Natural tendency is to hide behind a superficial action like tithing, circumcision, and Saturday church attendance while ignoring *the heart*.) The Apostles may have figured out the unimportance of penis cutting by thinking: "Hmm, God rebuked us for not having our *hearts* circumcised even though He told us to circumcise our *penises*. The fact that we *did* physically circumcise our penises together with the fact that we *cannot* physically circumcise our hearts means God is actually interested in some other action on our part. What He really wants from us is *submissive obedience*. It is therefore OK to eliminate physical circumcision completely."

The next logical question about the Apostles is, even though they figured out that penis cutting is a superficial type or picture of *submissive obedience*, by what authority did they do away with the actual, physical penis cutting that God Almighty established? Shouldn't they have *submissively* obeyed the penis cutting established in God's Old Testament and simply made it clear that physical circumcision is just a symbol of submissive obedience? These questions are very important because the issue in the Bible is authority.

Anything God does has His authority behind it. That's why, when He made kings masters over their subjects, husbands masters over their wives, parents masters over their children, etc., He expected those under authority to obey their authorities as if the authorities were God. When God gave Moses authority over Christians, He expected those Christians – including Aaron – to obey Moses as if he were God (**Ex 4:16**). That's how Moses knew he had the authority to invent rules (such as those concerning divorce), and that's why God then supported Moses. Paul and the other Apostles understood they were like Moses and the prophets who were used by God to write His Old Testament, and therefore knew New Testament Christians were expected by God to obey them as if they were He. That's how Paul, even though he hadn't received any specific commandments from God, knew he had God's *permission* to invent guidelines (**1 Co 7:6**). Paul spoke with the authority of God. Therefore, any and all writings of the Apostles that God put in His Bible are God's writings. That Moses-like authority is why the Apostles rebuked Christians who practiced circumcision and who kept the Old Testament law by saying *we gave no such commandment* (**Ac 15:24**)! It was the same as saying, "God didn't tell you to do that."

The reason the Apostles didn't continue to obey the "penis cutting" of the Old Testament's Fourth Commandment is they understood a simple fact that many Christians today don't seem to be able to grasp: When **Christ's death instituted His New Testament** it superseded/replaced/did away with any previous testaments of His. In other words *there was no longer a Fourth Commandment to obey!* The Apostles had to discern which, if any, of the old Ten Commandments God wanted to be included in His New Book of Rules. It is obvious to the man of faith that God wanted the other nine repeated in the New Testament era because they appear in the New Testament. And the absence of the Fourth Commandment about the sabbath in the New Testament means God did not want it included.

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In D19 *Law and Grace* we saw that there are only two real Laws (because the Lamb only died twice to create Testaments), and we saw that it is not possible to be under both Laws. There are also two written Testaments and, as with any wills and testaments, it is not possible for more than one to apply to family members at the same time. The Old Testament represents the bad Law, the Law of sin and death. The New Testament represents the good Law, the Law of grace. That's why the "bad" Old Testament had to be replaced by the New. We saw on page D19-4 that the New Testament uses the following to describe the Old Testament and its laws: Weak, curse, carnal, unprofitable, and faulty. Knowing we New Testament saints could not be under both Testaments, and could not even be under *parts* of both Testaments, and knowing we would correctly brand Old Testament rules as faulty, subversive curses, God had to move anything that was still good in the Old Testament – like the Nine Commandments – into the New Testament. He also showed us we should still today draw upon and apply the *principles* behind the rules of the Old Testament. For example, the old faulty, unprofitable, subversive penis cutting of the Old Testament is gone, but the underlying principle of *submissive obedience* to God remains. That's what **Mt 22:40** and **Mk 12:32,33** are all about.

But why does God consider His Old Testament rules like physical circumcision, indeed, the *entire law* (Ac 15:24) to be *troubling* and *subversive*? Subversion means to overthrow, to corrupt, to undermine, to cause the downfall of. Therefore nothing in God's Old Testament can remain in effect if His New Testament is to be authoritative. If all or some of the Old Testament did remain in effect, we could pick and choose things to obey or ignore from both the Old and New Testaments whenever we felt like it. In that way *we* would become the authority, *we* would make the decisions, *we* would be the head – thereby subverting God's authority. Because of the way wills work, the New Testament has replaced the Old: If our Father writes a will at one point, later changes His mind and writes another, and then dies, it doesn't matter which will we prefer; we are stuck with the new one! And anything He liked in His first will He had to repeat in His second will or it would become ineffective along with the entire first will. God's *New Testament* is now in effect. And *it had better be the only one in effect* if we are to be saved because the only thing the *Old Testament* did was curse and condemn. (That fact is behind verses like Ac 15:24 and **Ga 5:4**.) The only will in effect before the cross was the condemning Old Testament – as illustrated by God's Old Testament good saints going to Abraham's bosom. But when Christ's death on the cross instituted His New Testament, His Old Testament died with Him – as illustrated by the Old Testament saints being freed from Abe's bosom.

If the Old Testament has been replaced by the New, should we ignore the Old? No, even though we are not bound by the laws in the OT, God made it the largest part of His Bible because it contains a wealth of information about Him, His people, His laws, and how His saints pleased and displeased Him. In fact, without the OT, the NT would lose much of its value; the things we learn in the NT allow us to unlock the secrets of the OT, and to understand the reasons and the principles behind the actions and laws in the OT. The way the two Testaments complement each other is an excellent example of the kind of "precept upon precept, line upon line; here a little, and there a little" Bible study required if we are to be weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts by growing into doctrinal maturity. But don't forget, maturity is not a product of Bible study alone; two other ingredients are required. The first is faith/belief; we *must* believe the Bible is the inspired, inerrant word of God with no contradictions. That belief allows us to understand that any contradictions in our doctrines are indications that we haven't gotten it right yet and need more study. The second ingredient is works; maturity is a result of doing the word.

Before I get too far away from Ac 15:29 let's see if we can act like mature disciples of Christ by discerning the meaning and importance of its seemingly strange commandments. We shall use the fact that the obvious, physical, superficial meaning of things in the Bible is often but a type, figure, or shadow of a deeper everlasting truth that can easily apply in any era whether it be the Old Testament era, New Testament era, or eternity. Based on what I know at this stage of my Christian development, I believe the following about those commandments: "Abstain from *meats* offered to idols" refers to *works* (**Jn 4:31-34**; **Is 55:1-3**) that are not performed for the true God in accordance with His will. In other words, it means abstain from any works that do not constitute *submissive obedience* to Him. The next commandment, "Abstain from blood", has to do with **Le 17:11,12** and **Ro 7:18**; **8:4-7**; it means, "don't be carnal." And, as we know, carnality is the opposite of *submissive obedience*. "Abstain from things strangled" means, "separate yourself from things that are carnal." This gets to the issue of who are "the dead." Obviously dogs are dead because they have no (true) life in them. Less obvious is the fact that carnal Christians who have been cut off from the inheritance – like Satan – are dead because they are under the Law of sin and death. A "strangled" person, therefore, is someone who has not properly died to self via Christ's substitutionary bleeding (strangled people don't bleed) on the cross – someone who is still carnally walking in flesh and blood (Le 17:11,12). We should separate ourselves from the carnal influence of those who are not *submissively obedient* to Christ in accordance with His word. And "Abstain from fornication" simply means, "don't defraud the brethren."

As you can see, any Christian who lived according to the deeper truths of those four commands would always be pleasing God, but any Christian who kept the superficial meaning while ignoring the deeper meaning would be damned. Now use **Co 2:20-3:2** to add to your understanding.

So, let's move on to see how Old Testament Christians who kept the superficial meaning of the Fourth Commandment displeased God and lost their everlasting inheritance.

Going to church and resting on Saturday is, like circumcising your penis and ripping your garments, a picture of something else. Saturday is a picture of the seventh day, the one-thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ on earth (**2 Pe 3:8**). That's why the Millennial Reign is called "the Lord's day" and "the day of the Lord" (**Joe 1:15**; **Ac 2:20**; **Ezek 30:3**; **Mal 4:1,5**; **1 Co 5:5**; **2 Co 1:14**; **1 Th 5:2**; **2 Pe 3:10**; **Zep 1:14**; **Re 1:10**).

In the Old Testament God's people did not all rest on the sabbath. The priests viewed the sabbath as a day of work (**Mt 12:5**). And, of course, we now realize all saints are priests. Therefore expect to do a lot of work on the seventh day, the Thousand-Year Reign. If that is true, why did God clearly tell His people to rest (not *work*) on the sabbath? We need to carefully look at the sabbath in order to understand *rest* doesn't mean the superficial kind – lying around all day. It means calmly and trustingly basing your submissive obedience on faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

God's people assembled in His house on the sabbath and observed a day of rest in accordance with the Fourth Commandment. This assembly on the seventh day of the week is called in **Joe 1:14,15** "the day" and "the day of the Lord" and is a reference to the Thousand-Year Reign. Now, let's carefully notice that God calls it "the day" in v.15 as distinguished from "To day." You and I live in "To day" (which applies to any of the first six days, the first six thousand years of this war) and we look forward to "the day" of the Lord. "To day" we must repent, study, work, and fill our lamps with oil because when "that

day” or “the day” arrives it will be too late to do those things. “To day” represents the day of *preparation* (Mk 15:42; Lk 23:54) for the coming sabbath.

In He 4:4 God says He spake “of the seventh day” when He said in v.5, “If they shall *enter into my rest*.” That means “His rest” is talking about a “day.” But is it talking about *Saturday* in accordance with the superficial meaning of the Fourth Commandment in the Old Testament? In He 3:7-10 we see that God’s circumcised, Saturday-keeping people did not repent, did not fill their lamps with oil “To day”, and learned only His superficial Commandments but not “His ways.” Did they err with their penises? Did they err on Saturday? No, they erred “in their *heart*” (v.10). For that reason God will not allow them to enter “His rest” (He 3:11), which in He 4:4,5 we saw is “the seventh day.” Take a moment and see if you can find a way to make any of that apply to the superficial meaning of the Fourth Commandment. That’s what the Saturday-go-to-meetin’ groups think! But, of course, they don’t understand the Bible, and in their well-meaning attempts to preserve what *God calls* their *subversive doctrine* they make it look like God is saying in He 3:11, “They won’t live to see Saturday.” At any rate it is clear that God did not consider those Saturday-keepers to be keeping the sabbath. Keeping the sabbath means to enter into “His rest” which He defines as “the seventh day.” Those Old Testament saints who fell in the wilderness will not be allowed to enter the seventh day; they will not participate in the Millennial Reign.

With all of that in mind read He 3:12-4:5, which is an exhortation/warning to be faithful during this To day of preparation so we might be counted worthy by Him to enter into His rest during the seventh one-thousand-year period of this war. He 4:7-9 again makes it clear the sabbath rest God has in mind is not any day of any week during this “To day” period; it is “another day.” The real sabbath, the real day of rest, is *future* (v.9). Skip v.10 for now and focus on the *works* spoken of in v.11 that are necessary in order to be considered by The Judge as *prepared* for the future seventh day.

The same type of exhortation is found in He 4:14. Now notice that the same exhortation is repeated verbatim in He 10:23, and that He 10:24 is a repeat of He 4:11. These exhortations to remain faithful lest we not be counted worthy to enter into His sabbath of rest lead into the infamous He 10:25, used so often by ignorant preachers as they attempt to convince the saved (and the unsaved) that God wants them in church: “Don’t forsake the assembling (this is the future assembly of Joe 1:14) of yourselves together, like some others do (those of He 3:11,17 and Jude 19 for example); but *exhort* one another To day; and exhort so much the more as ye see the day approaching.” The exhorting part is obviously a repetition of He 3:13. But notice that many Christians wrest the Scriptures and make themselves hypocrites with He 10:25: They teach that “the day” is Sunday (or Saturday). If they are correct, the verse says they are to exhort each other on Mondays to be in church on Sunday. Then on Tuesdays their exhortations are to become more urgent, and by the time Fridays and Saturdays roll around the urgency of their “and so much the more” exhortations to be in church on Sunday would be at maximum fervor! In other words, the last part of He 10:25 shows these preachers do not know what the verse says. That’s why when they use the verse they ignore the last part. Tradition truly does make the word of God of none effect.

The day and the assembly of He 10:25 are the same as those in Joe 1:15; He 4:4,8,9,11; 12:22-25; 2 Th 2:1; Re 1:10. They are not the local church – no matter what day of the week it meets.

“Keep the sabbath” means, “keep the Lord’s day”; “labor to be included in the assembly on the day of the Lord”; “don’t forsake the sabbath assembly of the saints by not being prepared To day”; and “labor to have your lamp filled with oil because if it is not you won’t be allowed to participate in the Thousand-Year Reign of Christ” (Ezek 13:2-5,9). Lousy Christians (tares) who are alive on this earth at the beginning of the Thousand-Year Reign will, like the lousy Christians in Noah’s day, be removed (the real “rapture”) from the earth (Mt 24:37-41; 13:24-30,36-43). The tares are gathered and removed first, and then the wheat is called to the assembly of the seventh day (Mt 13:30; 24:31).

I don’t understand fully the end time events and will just have to be expert enough in the Scriptures and close enough to the Lord that He’ll lead me with His word as future events unfold. My purpose in what follows is to exhort you to *be prepared*. I am concerned that theories like eternal security and the rapture are causing Christians to misunderstand “resting in the Lord.” They think they can spend their day of preparation sucking their thumbs and watching television and not end up in the lake of fire. Big mistake.

The day of the Lord, the seventh day, is what we’ve been preparing ourselves for all along. It is when Christ assembles His church. He has a reason for doing so and it is an important one. It will be the first time in history the entire church (which will be shockingly small: Lk 12:32; 13:23,24; 17:17; Is 1:9) is together. And the thousand years will be longer than any saint has ever lived. It will be a time of learning and a time of testing. And we will fail unless we understand the meaning of the sabbath.

I think the key to understanding the sabbath is applying all of the Bible’s teachings to He 3 and 4. Earlier we skipped He 4:10, but let’s now consider how it applies to the fact that the sabbath is to be a *day of rest* during which we priests *do a lot of work*. That can only make sense when we understand the unpopular-but-correct way to live as a Christian as opposed to the popular-but-carnal way to live. The carnal method is of little faith; it utilizes the arm of flesh. In other words, carnal Christians depend on themselves, on their own works. They will want to build societies during the thousand years similar to ours today – a society designed to curtail faith.

In order to truly prosper, however, we must rest in the Lord. That means being willing to die and/or to “fail.” The two witnesses of Re 11 are examples of good Christians who will humbly submit to death while trusting in the arm of the Lord. Many carnal Christians will view their deaths as “a waste” and will prefer the type of “result-producing Christian activism” of the Maccabees and King Asa. But faith means resting in the Lord. It means adhering rigidly to all He teaches – but not necessarily always to some of the superficial meanings of things in the Bible. It means glorifying Him in accordance with His word, which means learning all the lessons in the Bible and incorporating them by making them *who we are and what we stand for*.

The two witnesses will certainly be active for the Lord. They will do many good works in His name, including some violent ones. But they will do all of it in a state of “rest.” *Submissive obedience* is a good definition of “rest.” We, too, must be active for the Lord. But we must have wisdom and discernment. For example, without wisdom and discernment we will not be able to understand how and when to utilize expediency. Carnal Christians will not obey the Bible and will use Reason to conclude they *are* acting properly in accordance with the doctrine of expediency. In order to avoid that and other pitfalls, we must develop the kind of relationship with the Lord in which we interact with Him via all the words in the Bible on a daily basis. If we do that faithfully we need not fear; He will guide and protect us. His Book must be our reality.

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When I talk about “superficial meanings of things in the Bible” I do so thinking it is late enough in this book that you’ll understand what I *am* saying. I am *not* saying it is OK for us to ignore the Bible, something I also tried to make clear in D14 *Expediency*. I’m trying to help you understand why we are given certain thought-provoking clues in the Bible that are supposed to help us develop into mature Christians like David and Esther.

Some of the clues are: Moses permitting divorce for various reasons; David eating the shewbread; the priests working on the sabbath; and certain statements like Je 4:4; **1 Co 7:6,12,19,40; 10:23,24; 11:16**; Mt 22:40; Mk 12:32,33; Ac 15:28,29. It also helps to understand some of the things in D19 *Law and Grace*, such as why the literal Old and New Testaments are pseudo laws. 1 Co 11:16, for example, is said in spite of the fact that Christian men and women have just been told in detail not only to have short and long hair, but also why it is important. The fact that the reason behind it is not clearly spelled out, and therefore requires Biblical insight into things like circumcision, does not obscure the fact that there is a definite reason for 1 Co 11. In fact, comparing the chapter with verses like **Nu 6:5; Ezek 44:20**; and **2 Sa 14:26** will even show that the Bible *defines* what short and long hair are. After all of that is stated and explained so carefully, why are we given v.16? Because, like any and all of the literal laws in the Bible, the hair length law is a pseudo law, it is a type of something else, and v.16 is merely saying the same thing as chapter D14 *Expediency*. I say again, none of this means we *should* ignore any New Testament commandments; it just means we *can* as long as we do so in compliance with the one rule we are never allowed to break or ignore because it is supposed to become *who we are*: Love God and lovingly care for His body. *When we serve His body we are loving Him*.

If that rule does become who we are we’ll be better able to discern when to eat the shewbread and when not to. And get this: We will also be able to either understand why some other Christian is not sinning if *he* decides to eat the shewbread when *we* decide we shouldn’t, or to truly forgive him when he errs. (Christianity requires maturity, and that involves understanding, forgiving, and helping those who are immature.) All of this is related to such concepts as the marital bed is undefiled, expediency, pseudo laws, the sabbath, and resting in Christ. The true importance of the laws is to teach us the principles or concepts behind them in order that we might not be deceived by the subtlety of Satan or stumble as did the Pharisees.

The events surrounding the thousand years of the last day will be difficult. Some Christians will be defeated by Great Tribulation. Some will be defeated by the peace during the long period of Christian dominion. Some will be defeated by Satan’s final effort. Do you know why Satan agreed to fight God, to attempt to destroy the church, to tempt Job, and to fight the saints on the last day? Because he can win. We need to take “To day” seriously by realizing it is a day of “preparation” for “that day” when we must understand how to “rest” in Christ in order to endure to the end.

Christians who have faithfully learned and applied the Bible during their day of preparation will find they need every bit of what they learned – and then some – just to keep up during the eventful thousand years. That’s why knowing all the right doctrinal answers is not as important as having a proper, Scriptural, active relationship with the Lord – we will need to *continue* to learn a lot from Him during the seventh day. And we will need to help each other. Either Satan or the Lord must win the war. Make no mistake about it, the war is real and Christ will not allow slovenly Christians to drag down the church.

The Fourth Commandment is a picture of how we should live every day – by resting in Christ. Our works must not be based on science, carnality, numerical superiority, or other worldly wisdom. Our works must depend on the Lord and be in accordance with His word in order to glorify Him. If we do that, our works are His works, which means we are resting in Him. When Gideon obediently went into battle with a fraction of his available troops *he was resting*. And since Christ has already figured out all that needs to be done to win the war (**Lk 14:28,31**), we need to stop trying to win with our own works and obediently do exactly what He says. We must learn to have the kind of faith that allows us to die to self and lean (rest) on the Everlasting Arms even in the day of battle when we are engulfed by peril and fear. To day is the preparation for the sabbath; let’s use it wisely. If we do, with God’s help we’ll make it through the seventh day. Then on the eighth day, a day without end, we’ll be circumcised when the Lord gives us the new heart that will enable us to faithfully rest in Him with submissive obedience for all of eternity. In that way we will comply with the everlasting covenants of circumcision and the sabbath.