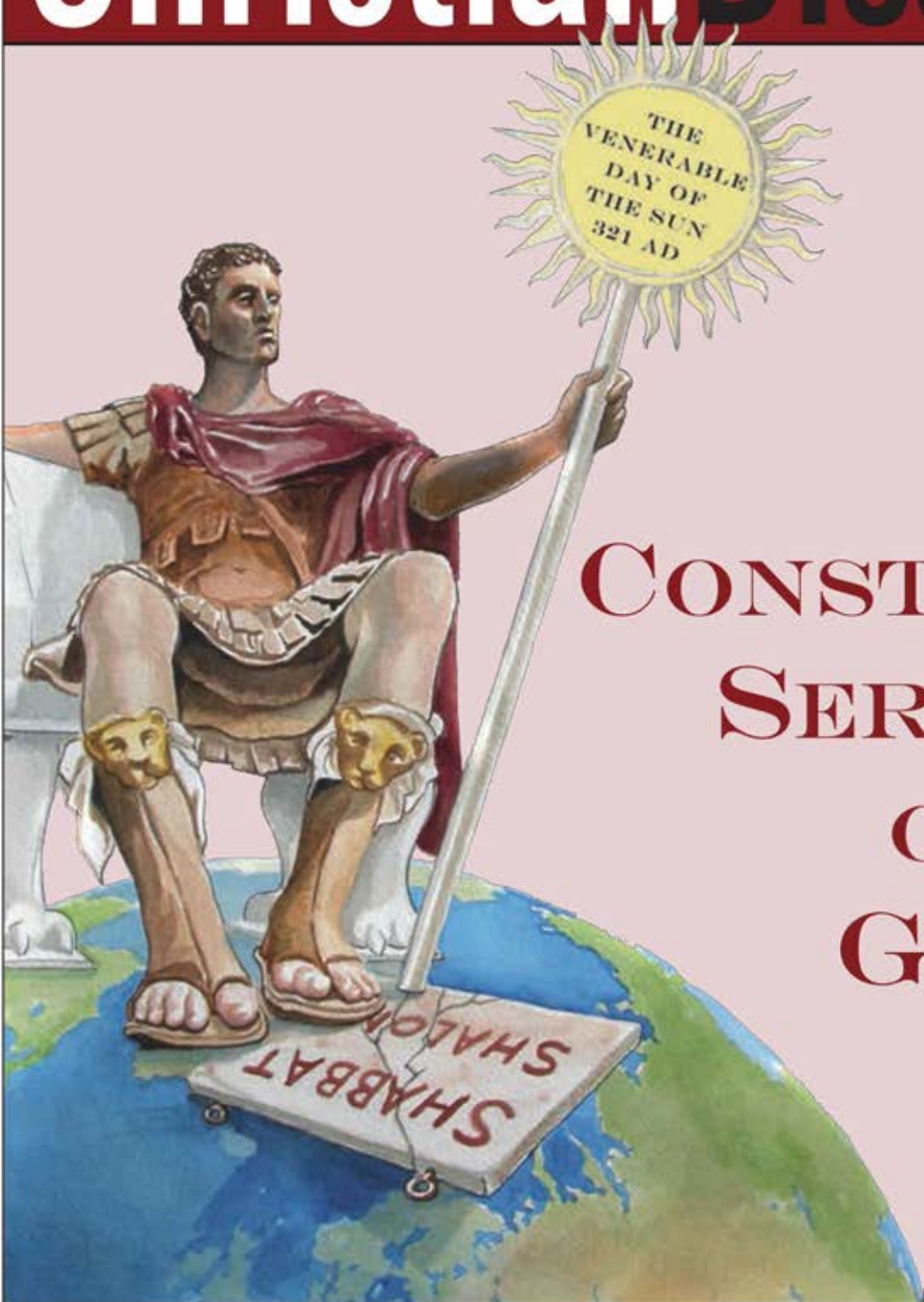


# Christian Dissenter



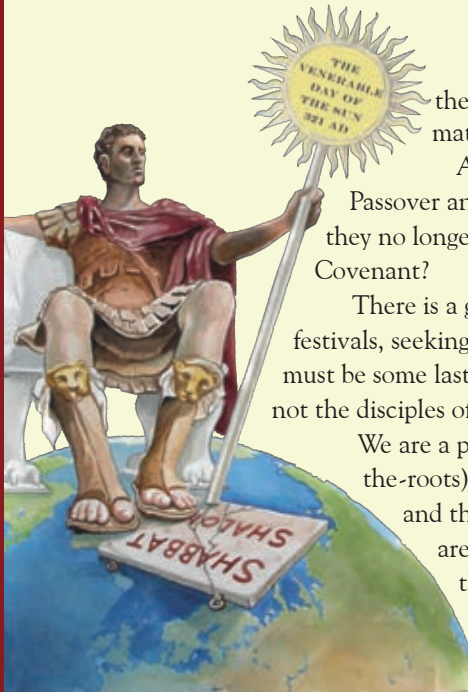
## CONSTANTINE: SERVANT OF GOD?

FREE

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# SHABBAT SHALOM?



Have you ever wondered why the vast majority of Christians don't keep the Sabbath, even though it is one of the Ten Commandments? Does it really matter to God which day His people honor above all the others?

And what about the festivals that God commanded Israel to keep, such as Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and the Feast of Booths? Are they no longer important to Him, or were they somehow fulfilled or nullified by the New Covenant?

There is a growing movement in Christianity to restore Sabbath keeping and the festivals, seeking to get back to the Hebrew roots of the New Covenant faith. Surely there must be some lasting significance to the rich heritage of the faith of Abraham. After all, are not the disciples of the Son of God supposed to be Abraham's offspring by faith?

We are a people who follow Yahshua\* the Messiah in the most radical (i.e., back-to-the-roots) way we know how. We live together in communities called *clans*, and the clans in a particular geographic region function together as a *tribe*. There are twelve tribes of our people, and together we aspire to be the spiritual Israel that Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has always wanted.

We keep the Sabbath together in all of our dwelling places, on the seventh day of the week, from sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday. And every day, morning and evening, we gather in all of our

households to worship our Creator, and to hear from Him by His Spirit speaking through each other and teaching us from the Scriptures.

One of the things we are coming to understand from His word is the deep significance of the Sabbaths and the Festivals that He commanded Israel to keep. It is from this understanding, in the context of our life together as a tribal people, that we write this paper, from our hearts to yours, hoping to find others who desire to "share in the nourishing root of the olive tree." (Romans 11:17) ✨

\*See *The Name Above All Names* on page 12.

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# THE SIGN OF THE SABBATH

*And He gave to Moses, when He had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God. (Exodus 31:18)*

Imagine being there, at the top of Mount Sinai, and receiving those two stone tablets engraved with the ten most important instructions from the heart of the Creator to His highest creation, *man*. Wouldn't your heart have been pounding? Wouldn't you have read them very carefully, and cherished them in your heart, and felt an urgency to pass on His words to everyone you loved so that they would be able to please their Creator? What could be a greater treasure than to have your Creator's infinite wisdom condensed into ten simple commandments, given out of His great love for His people?

Perhaps you haven't thought of the Ten Commandments in that way before. You may not even remember them all, or know where to find them in the Bible. Most people have forgotten at least one of them. Ironically, it is the only one that begins with the word, "Remember..."

*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy... (Exodus 20:8)*

If you are a Christian, you are probably already saying to yourself, "Oh, the Sabbath was for the Jews. For Christians, Sunday has replaced the Sabbath as our day of rest." Perhaps you have been taught that Jesus fulfilled the Law, therefore the commandment to keep the Sabbath is no longer binding upon Christians. You may remember that Jesus said to His disciples:

*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 until all is fulfilled. (Matthew 5:17-18)*

But there is a problem with this line of reasoning. If Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets, and if that means that His followers are released from keeping the Sabbath, then are we not also released from honoring our father and

mother? Are we now free to murder and to commit adultery? Can we now worship other gods, and make idols, and take His name in vain? After all, we're free from the Law. Ridiculous! Yes, but why is it not also ridiculous to set aside the fourth commandment? After all, right after the verse quoted above, Jesus also said:

*Whoever therefore breaks 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 5:19)*

So even if you consider the keeping of the Sabbath to be the least of the commandments, shouldn't these words of the Savior cause you to pause?

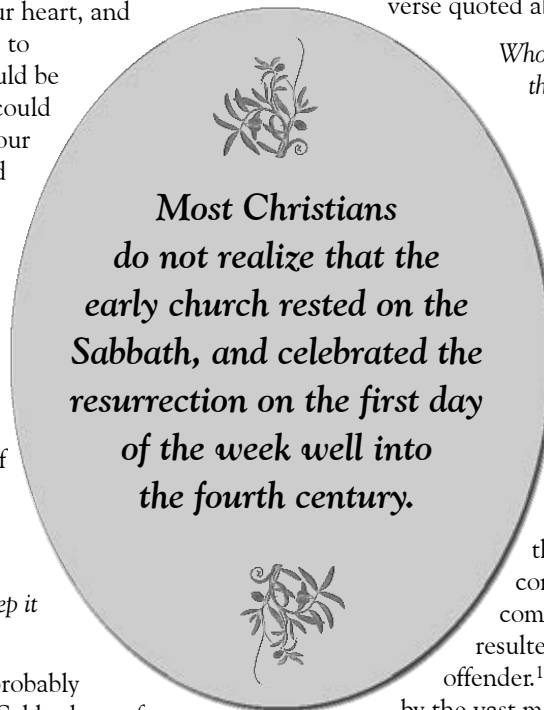
Ironically, the commandment to keep the Sabbath is the one about which *more* instruction is given in the Bible than any other commandment. It is also the first commandment which, when broken, resulted in the death penalty for the offender.<sup>1</sup> Why, then, is it routinely ignored by the vast majority of Christians?

Actually, there is a very good reason lurking in the pages of church history.

Most Christians do not realize that the early church kept the Sabbath. According to the New Testament, the first disciples rested on the Sabbath, and then after the sun had set, marking the beginning of the first day of the week,<sup>2</sup> they gathered to break bread, as is clear from Acts 20:7-8.<sup>3</sup> It became the custom for the early church in the second century to rest on the seventh day and then have a festival

<sup>1</sup> Numbers 15:32-36    <sup>2</sup> Each day was considered to span from sunset to sunset, as in Genesis 1:5,8,13, Leviticus 23:32, etc. If you read this passage carefully, you will see that it was evening — the eve of the first day, not Sunday morning. See also Luke 4:16, "...as was His custom, He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day..."

<sup>3</sup> See also *The Best of Complements* on page 9 for more about this.



on the first day of the week, at which there would be teachings and other ways of celebrating the resurrection. Ignatius wrote early in the second century: “And after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord’s day as a festival, the resurrection day...” As late as the early fourth century it is recorded that Christians observed both the Sabbath and the “Lord’s Day” in their different ways.<sup>3</sup> But by the end of the fourth century, Sunday had replaced the Sabbath in the minds and habits of most Christians.

## A SIGN BETWEEN GOD AND HIS PEOPLE

“So what’s the big deal?” you might ask. “What difference does it make whether I go to church on Saturday or Sunday?”

It doesn’t make any difference at all for those who are not His people, but for His people, it makes a *big* difference! But the Sabbath is much more than a day of the week to cease working and attend a religious gathering. For God’s holy people, it is actually a prophetic event of great significance, which this passage expresses in the strongest terms:



*And the LORD said to Moses, “You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, ‘Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you.*

*You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death.*

*Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. It is a sign forever between Me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.”*

*And He gave to Moses, when He had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God. (Exodus 31:13-18)*

The Sabbath is a sign between God and His people that He has set them apart unto Himself, and is purifying them, which is what *sanctify* means. Israel was always intended to be a set-apart people, as even Balaam reluctantly

prophesied: “Behold, a people who dwell apart, and will not be reckoned among the nations.”<sup>4</sup> That meant that they were to dwell together and not live according to the cultures and the values of the nations around them. Instead, their tribal life, characterized by care for one another and trust in their God, was to be a light to the nations around them. According to the prophet Isaiah, being this light was Israel’s prophetic purpose, for by it they would bring salvation to the ends of the earth.<sup>5</sup> Paul carried this right over into the New Covenant as the purpose of the church.<sup>6</sup>

Their keeping of the weekly Sabbath would be a profound expression of that care and trust as they set aside their regular work, with its potential to increase their income, and focused their attention on their relationships with one another and their God. Even their servants and their livestock were to rest, as well as any visitors who were within their gates.<sup>7</sup> It wasn’t an individual thing, as if one person could keep the Sabbath alone, or by merely going to a religious service on Saturday. The Sabbath was a set-apart day for God’s holy people to keep *together*,

“in all your dwelling places”<sup>8</sup> — a stipulation that was based on the assumption that they dwelt together as a people set apart from the cultures around them. As a people, they had been delivered from slavery in Egypt, and as a people they were to enter into rest, experiencing the spiritual liberty of the sons of God, set free from anxiety and restless energy. That would be a sign that their God was winning their hearts and making them into His holy nation.

## THE SABBATH AS TRAINING GROUND

But the Sabbath *day* was also a training ground to prepare them for the Sabbath *year*, which was an even greater test of their willingness to trust their Creator and live in peace with their brothers:

*Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: “When you come into the land which I give you, then the land shall keep a sabbath to the LORD. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather its fruit; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to the LORD. You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard. What grows of its own accord of your harvest you shall not reap, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine, for it is a year of*

<sup>4</sup> Numbers 23:9 <sup>5</sup> Isaiah 49:6 <sup>6</sup> Acts 13:47

<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy 5:12-15 <sup>8</sup> Leviticus 23:3

*rest for the land. And the sabbath produce of the land shall be food for you: for you, your male and female servants, your hired man, and the stranger who dwells with you, for your livestock and the beasts that are in your land — all its produce shall be for food.” (Leviticus 25:2-7)*

Imagine that, for an agricultural society! To the natural mind, it would seem foolish and irresponsible for the whole nation to take a year off from planting and harvesting. But those with spiritual understanding saw that their God had promised them that He would command a blessing in the sixth year so that the land would produce a crop sufficient for three years.<sup>9</sup> Would they trust Him enough to obey this radical command?

And if that were not enough to test their trust for Him and their love for their brothers, they were also commanded to forgive all debts every seventh year:

*At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release. And this is the manner of the release: every creditor shall release what he has lent to his neighbor. He shall not exact it of his neighbor, his brother, because the LORD’s release has been proclaimed... If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. Take care lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart and you say, “The seventh year, the year of release is near,” and your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the LORD against you, and you be guilty of sin. You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. (Deuteronomy 15:1-2,7-10)*

## THE SABBATH DEPENDS ON LOVE

How on earth could anyone ever attain to such a high standard? Certainly old Israel never did! They reasoned their way around the clear intent of the commandment regarding the Sabbath, but the God of Israel never forgot. The prophets tell the sad story of Israel’s mistrust and unbelief. Jeremiah foretold seventy years of exile — one year for each of the years the land did not have its Sabbath rest.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Leviticus 25:21 <sup>10</sup> Jeremiah 25:11-12; 2 Chronicles 36:21

In at least some sincere hearts, the question must have burned, “Would Israel ever keep all the Sabbaths, including the Sabbath years? Or would it only be reduced to rote ritual and an opportunity to point the finger?”

So when you consider all that the Sabbaths entailed, it is not hard to see why, many years later, Jesus made such a sweeping statement to the Pharisees when they asked Him which was the greatest commandment:

*“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:36-40)*

In other words, it is impossible to fulfill the righteous requirements of the Law<sup>11</sup> and all that the Prophets have spoken without loving God with all of your heart, soul, and strength<sup>12</sup> and loving your neighbor as yourself.<sup>13</sup> It is easy to think that you love God supremely, but it is tested by how you love those closest to you, which is what neighbor actually means.<sup>14</sup> Or as the Apostle John put it:

*If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.*

*And this commandment we have from Him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. (1 John 4:20-21)*

*By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:16-18)*

Apart from this high standard of love being lived out among a spiritual people who dwell together as a distinct society, there is no possibility of keeping the Sabbath days or years in sincerity. For if I truly love my neighbor as myself, how can I find rest unless my neighbor also finds rest? It’s not a matter of what day religious activities are scheduled; it’s a matter of sharing a life of love and care for one

<sup>11</sup> Romans 8:4 <sup>12</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4-5 <sup>13</sup> Leviticus 19:18

<sup>14</sup> Neighbor comes from *nigh*, meaning near, and *gebor*, meaning dweller, hence, “one who dwells near.”



another, based on a radical trust in God.

That is why Jesus was continually making a point of healing and otherwise caring for people on the Sabbath in full view of the religious leaders of His day.<sup>15</sup> Their indignation exposed the empty ritual to which the Sabbath had been reduced, devoid of compassion or concern for one another, and full of lawlessness, malice, and the pointing of the finger.<sup>16</sup> They had set aside the very purpose of the Sabbath, and His desire was to restore it:

*And He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27-28)*

*"And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath." (Matthew 12:7-8)*

For three and a half years the Lord of the Sabbath labored to form in His disciples a heart of compassion and care for one another, and to write the spirit of the Law on their hearts so that they could fulfill its righteous requirements and bring about all that the Prophets have spoken. He was raising them up to be apostles, to be the very "finger of God" by which the Law could be written on the hearts<sup>17</sup> of a new spiritual Israel of twelve tribes<sup>18</sup> who would be a light to the nations,<sup>19</sup> showing them the Father's lovingkindness and the good fruit of keeping His word.

### A LIFE WORTHY OF THE SABBATH

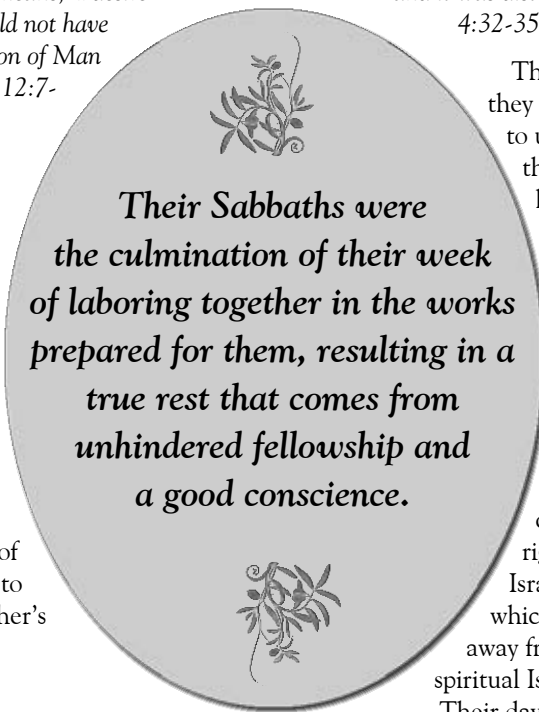
It is no accident that the result of Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost was the birth of that New Covenant Israel as a commonwealth:

*So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were*

*together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. (Acts 2:41-45)*

*Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.*

*There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4:32-35)*



***Their Sabbaths were  
the culmination of their week  
of laboring together in the works  
prepared for them, resulting in a  
true rest that comes from  
unhindered fellowship and  
a good conscience.***

The people had responded to what they heard,<sup>20</sup> which gave them the faith to utterly abandon their old lives and throw their lot in together to be a living demonstration of the heart of the Law and the Prophets.<sup>21</sup>

Contrary to what most Christians have been led to believe, that common life of love and unity continued and multiplied throughout the Mediterranean world for several decades through the ministry of Paul<sup>22</sup> and the other apostles. The life of the early church began to bear the fruit of righteousness and justice that old Israel had never consistently borne, which is why the kingdom was taken away from them and given to this new spiritual Israel.<sup>23</sup>

Their days, weeks, and years were punctuated by the appointed times and feasts that had been given to old Israel,<sup>24</sup> to be expressed in a new and living way.<sup>25</sup> They gathered daily,<sup>26</sup> every morning and evening, as a spiritual priesthood<sup>27</sup> to offer up spiritual sacrifices of praise and

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 12:1-13; Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; John 5:2-17; 7:22-24; 9:13-17 <sup>16</sup> Isaiah 58:9,13  
<sup>17</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:3 <sup>18</sup> 1 Peter 2:9-10; Galatians 6:16; Acts 26:7  
<sup>19</sup> Matthew 5:14-16; Acts 13:47; Isaiah 49:6

<sup>20</sup> Acts 2:40 <sup>21</sup> Jeremiah 32:38-39; Ezekiel 36:26-27. These verses speak of the natural seed of Abraham being restored to their land in the next age, but they must first be fulfilled by spiritual Israel in this age, so as to move a remnant of the Jews to jealousy (Deuteronomy 32:21; Romans 10:19) and prepare their hearts for the return of the Messiah, that they might mourn over Him whom they pierced (Zechariah 12:10). <sup>22</sup> 1 Thessalonians 2:14

<sup>23</sup> Matthew 21:43 <sup>24</sup> Acts 20:6,16; 1 Corinthians 5:7-8; 16:8

<sup>25</sup> Hebrews 10:19-25 <sup>26</sup> Acts 2:46; Hebrews 3:13,15; 10:25

<sup>27</sup> 1 Peter 2:9; 1 Chronicles 23:30 (The spiritual priesthood of the New Covenant was the reality to which the Old Testament Levitical priesthood pointed.)

prophecy.<sup>28</sup> Their Sabbaths were the culmination of their week of laboring together in the works prepared for them,<sup>29</sup> resulting in a true rest that comes from unhindered fellowship and a good conscience.<sup>30</sup> That kind of spiritual rest made room for the good deeds that love demanded on the Sabbath, such as reaching out to the lost.<sup>31</sup>

For such a people, their keeping of the Sabbath in spirit and truth was a clear sign that they belonged to Yahweh,<sup>32</sup> the God of Israel, who had established the Sabbath as a perpetual covenant<sup>33</sup> between Him and His set-apart people. If they remained faithful, the Sabbath days would lead them into keeping the Sabbath years, which would lead them to the Sabbath age — the return of the Messiah and His millennial reign. But it would take them, as His body on earth,<sup>34</sup> putting all of His enemies under His feet<sup>35</sup> — the spiritual enemies like selfishness<sup>36</sup> and pride that divide and degrade mankind.

### THE SAD FACTS OF CHURCH HISTORY

It is a sad fact of history that the early church did not maintain the light of that life of love and unity for very long,<sup>37</sup> for the very reason their Master stated in Matthew 22:37-40 — they did not love their God with all their heart and soul, nor did they love their neighbor as themselves.

These two commandments are like two solid signposts from which hang a sign identifying an establishment, and below that sign hang many smaller signs that identify the services of this establishment. The sign of the Sabbath signifies a people set apart by their love for their God and for each other, and the signs hanging from it encompass all that the Law and the Prophets say Israel must fulfill. And Jesus told us how His set-apart people would do this great feat — by upholding those two solid signposts of love.

But the early church left that first love<sup>38</sup> — their wholehearted love for God and for one another — and as a result, all that “hangs” on that love fell by the wayside. (And remember, *everything* in the Law and the Prophets

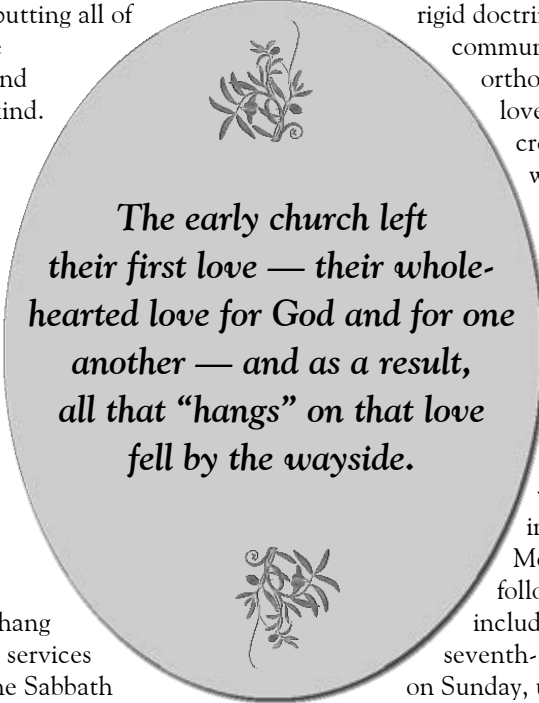
hangs on that love!) They ceased living together in community, since they were unwilling to pay the high cost of loving<sup>39</sup> and forbearing with one another<sup>40</sup> and sharing their lives and possessions. Their gatherings became stale weekly rituals at which only one “Nicolaitan”<sup>41</sup> would speak, and their Sabbaths were reduced to a dry religious form<sup>42</sup> that lacked the social warmth and evangelistic power that it had in the days of the apostles.<sup>43</sup>

Rather than fulfilling the Law and the Prophets and bringing about the return of their Master, they drifted away from the apostolic faith.<sup>44</sup> Thus they effectively “cut off” the finger of God that could engrave the spirit of the Law on their hearts.<sup>45</sup> This internal falling away from love was the necessary precursor to what was to come. Cold, rigid doctrine replaced fervent love and community as the litmus test of

orthodoxy.<sup>46</sup> The once-solid signposts of love rotted and were eaten away by creeping things, and eventually gave way, and the sign<sup>47</sup> that used to signify a set-apart people fell to the ground. Nothing remained but a form of godliness, increasingly shrouded in ritual.

But it is amazing how enduring rituals can be. By the end of the third century, the church had splintered into almost 2000 bishoprics whose bishops were divided from one another by innumerable controversies.

Meanwhile their parishioners dutifully followed their well-established rituals, including resting and fasting on the seventh-day Sabbath and going to church on Sunday, unaware that their religion was virtually unrecognizable when compared with its original form.<sup>48</sup> But God was not unaware of the difference, and soon He would act to make the distinction very clear.



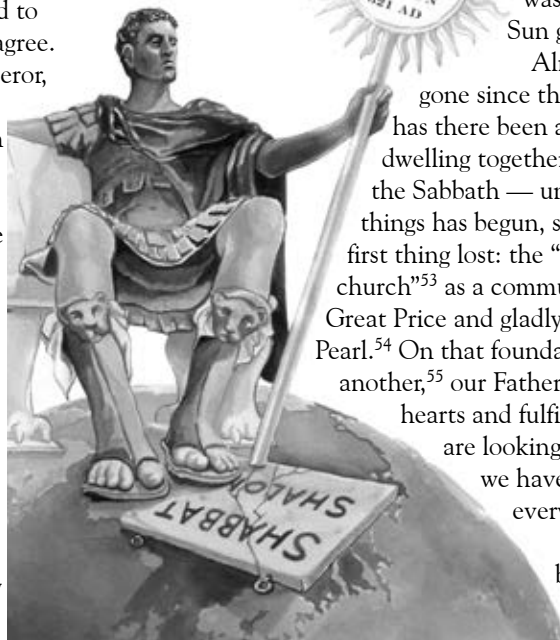
<sup>28</sup> Hebrews 13:15; 1 Peter 4:11; 1 Corinthians 14:26 <sup>29</sup> Ephesians 2:10; 4:16 <sup>30</sup> Hebrews 4:9-12 <sup>31</sup> Acts 13:42,44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4 <sup>32</sup> Exodus 31:13; Ezekiel 20:12,20 <sup>33</sup> Exodus 31:16 <sup>34</sup> Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18,23 <sup>35</sup> Hebrews 10:13 <sup>36</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 <sup>37</sup> John 1:4; Acts 5:20 <sup>38</sup> Revelation 2:4

<sup>39</sup> 1 John 3:14,16,23 <sup>40</sup> Ephesians 4:1-3 <sup>41</sup> Revelation 2:6,15 — The word *Nicolaitan* is derived from *nikao*, meaning “to conquer,” and *laos*, meaning “people,” hence, “people conquerors” — a professional clergy that replaced the spontaneous outspokenness of all the people in the lively gatherings of the early church. The clergy is a system that God hates. <sup>42</sup> 2 Timothy 3:5 <sup>43</sup> Acts 13:42,44; 16:13 <sup>44</sup> Hebrews 2:1-3 <sup>45</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:3-6 <sup>46</sup> John 13:34-35; 17:21-23; 1 John 3:14,16 <sup>47</sup> Exodus 31:13; Ezekiel 20:20 <sup>48</sup> “Between the years AD 100 and AD 500, the Christian Church changed almost beyond recognition.” Tony Lane, *The Lion Book of Christian Thought* (Lion Publishing Company, Batavia, Illinois, 1984), page 8.

## ENTER CONSTANTINE, SERVANT OF GOD!

At least, Christianity thinks of him that way. After all, he ended state-sanctioned persecution of the church and gave it official status and legal protection throughout the empire. Not only that, but he rolled up his sleeves and got to work trying to unify all the bickering bishops, helping them hammer out a doctrinal creed to which they could all substantially agree. Yet this sun-worshipping pagan emperor, who declined to be baptized a Christian until he was on his death bed, unwittingly did his greatest act of service to God when he got rid of the fallen sign that they were God's people.

In 321 AD, Constantine issued an edict proclaiming "the venerable day of the Sun" to be the official day of rest in the Roman empire, and the process he unleashed by sanctioning the church and recognizing the authority of the bishops soon brought an end to the Sabbath in the life of the church. Indeed, they instituted a literal "Anti-Fourth-



Commandment," forbidding rest on the Sabbath and mandating work instead!<sup>49</sup> Thus, through the agency of Constantine, God officially disowned the fallen-away church by taking away the sign of the covenant<sup>50</sup> that they were set apart for Him, and a new religion was established under the sign of the Sun god. That religion is Christianity. Almost 1700 years have come and gone since that time, and never in all that time has there been a spiritual nation of twelve tribes<sup>51</sup> dwelling together in love and unity under the sign of the Sabbath — until now. The restoration of all things has begun, starting with the restoration of the first thing lost: the "first love"<sup>52</sup> that formed the "first church"<sup>53</sup> as a community of those who saw the Pearl of Great Price and gladly sold everything to obtain that Pearl.<sup>54</sup> On that foundation of love for Him and for one another,<sup>55</sup> our Father is faithfully writing His Law on our hearts and fulfilling the words of the Prophets. We are looking for others who desire this treasure we have found, and are willing to forsake everything to have it.

We gather every Friday evening to bring in the Sabbath together. Come and enter in with us! ✨

<sup>49</sup> At the Council of Laodicea, c. 364 AD, there must have still been a remnant of Sabbath-keepers who needed to be brought into line, since Canon 29 from that council reads, "Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honoring the Lord's Day; and, if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ." <sup>50</sup> "between Me and you" — Exodus 31:13; Ezekiel 20:20 <sup>51</sup> Acts 26:7; 13:47; Isaiah 49:6; James 1:1 <sup>52</sup> Revelation 2:4; Ephesians 6:24 ("undying love" in the NIV); John 13:34-35; 1 John 3:14,16 <sup>53</sup> Acts 2:44-15; 4:32-35 <sup>54</sup> Matthew 13:44-46 <sup>55</sup> Matthew 22:37-40

***"On the venerable Day of the Sun  
let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest,  
and let all workshops be closed. In the country, however,  
persons engaged in agriculture may freely and lawfully continue their pursuits:  
because it often happens that another day is not so suitable for grain sowing  
or for vine planting: lest by neglecting the proper moment for such operations  
the bounty of heaven should be lost."***

***~Constantine, 321 AD***

***"Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on Saturday (Sabbath),  
but shall work on that day: but the Lord's Day, they shall especially honour,  
and as being Christians, shall, if possible, do no work on that day.  
If however, they are found Judaizing, they shall be shut out from Christ."***

***~Catholic Church Council of Laodicea, c. 364 AD***



# THE BEST OF COMPLEMENTS

## SABBATH AND FIRST DAY FESTIVALS IN THE EARLY CHURCH

If the early believers did not honor the seventh day Sabbath (as so many say), then it certainly matters very little what day believers gather together. But if they did, and if those gatherings were full of spiritual and prophetic meaning, then the Sabbath is just as important to New Covenant Israel as it was to Old. While it would be strange if it weren't, given its importance in the Old Covenant scriptures (which is all the church had in the beginning), so many say it isn't. And what they point to more than any other fact of history is the way the early church observed the first day of the week.

However, what if all these fine scholars have missed something very significant? What if the two days, the Sabbath and the First Day (Sunday), were *not* in competition for the affection and loyalty of the early believers? What if they actually complemented each other?

Today, Sunday certainly has the sanction of an enormous weight of tradition, but in the first centuries of the church it was something else, something very special. It was the *complement* of the Sabbath, fulfilling another need in the lives of individual churches and believers beyond the weekly *Sabbath rest*. The day of the Savior's resurrection was both festive and instructive, a day clothed with vision of His eternal reign to come.

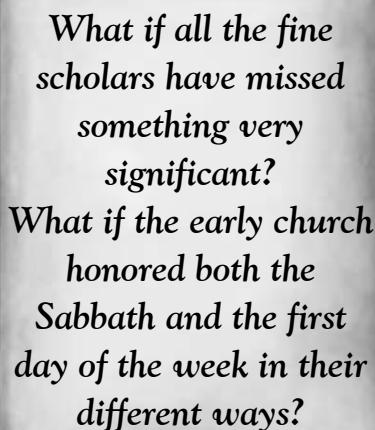
## THE WEIGHT OF HISTORY

To understand what we find in these ancient documents, we have to go further back, all the way back to when God called His people out of Egypt. At Mount Sinai, He gave them the Law that established them as a distinct and peculiar people. In that Law, the day itself did not begin at midnight, but at sundown — as one day was ending a new day was beginning.<sup>1</sup> This is the basis of all reckonings of time in the New Covenant scriptures, too. Acts 20 records the famous breaking of bread in the city of Troas, where the

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:5,8,13,19,23,31; Leviticus 23:5,32

unfortunate boy, Eutychus, fell out of the upper window sound asleep. The gathering *began* at sundown, immediately upon the end of the Sabbath. Remember, the Sabbath is the *seventh* day of the week.

*Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together. (Acts 20:7-8)*



**What if all the fine scholars have missed something very significant?  
What if the early church honored both the Sabbath and the first day of the week in their different ways?**

The “Teachings of the Twelve Apostles,” a document dating somewhere between 80 and 120 AD, taught this very thing:

*But every Lord's day do ye gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure.<sup>2</sup>*

Not long after this, a new thing developed. Sometimes those in smaller communities would travel to a nearby larger community that could accommodate a “First Day Festival.” We know this from several accounts, the first by Ignatius, who died in 107 AD:

*And after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's day as a festival, the resurrection-day...<sup>3</sup>*

The Epistle of Barnabas, written around 130 AD, emphasizes the joyful aspect of this festival — and the reason for it:

*Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead.<sup>4</sup>*

The gathering of believers all around is seen in this quote from Justin, born c. 110, and writing this about 150 AD:

*And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the*

<sup>2</sup> *The Lord's Teaching through the Twelve Apostles*, chapter VIII.

<sup>3</sup> Ignatius, *Letter to the Magnesians*, Ch. IX. Ignatius lived from 30 to 107 AD. <sup>4</sup> *The Epistle of Barnabas* in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I, Chapter XV. *Wikipedia* states, “Many scholars today believe it was probably written in the years 70 – 131...”

country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits... Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly.<sup>5</sup>

Obviously, Sunday was not their day of rest, for if it were they would not travel so far to gather together in one place on that day. Sunday was a festival day after the Sabbath, which they also kept. In a story that happened just a few short years after this, the Hebrew reckoning of days is clearly part of the church's understanding. In Smyrna, Polycarp was martyred, uttering his celebrated words before the Roman ruler of that place in 155 AD:

*And when the proconsul pressed him, and said, "Swear, and I will release thee, revile Christ;" Polycarp said, "Eighty and six years have I served him, and in nothing hath he wronged me; and how, then, can I blaspheme my King, who saved me?"<sup>6</sup>*

Immediately before this in the account of his final days, the author notes two key terms relating to the Sabbath: the "day of preparation" and the "great Sabbath."

*Having, therefore, with them the lad, on the day of the preparation, at the hour of dinner, there came out pursuers and horsemen, with their accustomed arms, as though going out against a thief.*

*And when he had finished his prayer, having made mention of all who had at any time come into contact with him, both small and great, noble and ignoble, and of the whole catholic church throughout the world, when the hour of his departure had come, having seated him on an ass, they led him into the city, it being the great Sabbath.<sup>7</sup>*

These two terms are both found in the New Covenant. The day of preparation is the day before the Sabbath, when all is made ready so all can rest on that day. The great Sabbath specifies the Passover, just as in John's gospel:

*The Jews therefore, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. (John 19:31)*

Tertullian again writes of festivals on the first day of the week in about 200 AD:

*Others, with greater regard to good manners, it must be confessed, suppose that the sun is the god of the Christians, because it is a well-known fact that we pray towards the east, or because we make Sunday a day of festivity.<sup>8</sup>*

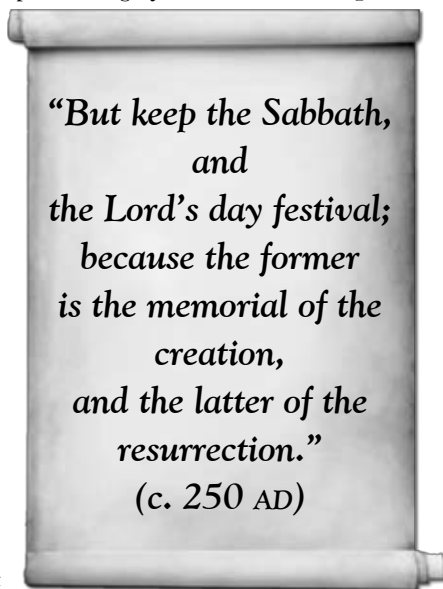
And about fifty years after this, a compilation called the "Apostolic Constitutions" explicitly makes the connection between the two special days:

*But keep the Sabbath, and the Lord's day festival; because the former is the memorial of the creation, and the latter of the resurrection.<sup>9</sup>*

The significance of both days was obviously alive and well in the hearts of the churches. "Keep the Sabbath" and equally so, "keep the Lord's day festival," for doing so set their minds on heavenly things and gave them the rest their bodies and souls needed. A few chapters later, the vision they had for the Sabbath is written in the following amazing words:

*O Lord Almighty, Thou hast created the world by Christ, and hast appointed the Sabbath in memory thereof, because that on that day Thou hast made us rest from our works, for the meditation upon Thy laws. Thou hast also appointed festivals for the rejoicing of our souls, that we might come into the remembrance of that wisdom which was created by Thee...*

*On this account was there appointed one week, and seven weeks, and the seventh month, and the seventh year, and the revolution of these, the jubilee, which is the fiftieth year for remission, that men might have no occasion to pretend ignorance... For the Sabbath is...the inquiry after laws, and the grateful praise to God for the blessings He has bestowed upon men.<sup>10</sup>*



## HOSTILITY TOWARDS THE SABBATH

Sadly, in the face of this revelation, excitement, and encouragement about the Sabbath and the First Day Festivals, and the sense of fellowship that brought them together from their different places, another powerful trend was at work in the early church. It began in only a few

<sup>5</sup> Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, Ch. LXVII, written between 147-161 AD. <sup>6</sup> "Martyrdom of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna," Verses 9.3. Charles H. Hoole's 1885 translation. <sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, Verses 7.1 and 8.1.

<sup>8</sup> Tertullian, *Ad Nationes*, Book I, chapter XIII. <sup>9</sup> *Apostolic Teaching and Constitutions*, Book VII, Chapter XXIII. <sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, Book VII, Chapter XXXVI

places, principally Rome and Alexandria, but they were both centers of imperial power. As such, the wealth and status of the “believers” there tended to exceed considerably the smaller, poorer places. With that wealth went influence, and with the education and refinement of the philosopher-theologians of the second and third centuries went a growing appeal to non-Christians of the same class and outlook — including their negative outlook on the Jews.

Violent Jewish uprisings in the years 66-70, 115-117, and 132-135 had turned the Roman elite permanently against the Jewish people. The respect of the old Republic and even the first emperors towards them and their ways vanished. This was clearly noticed in the church, especially in Rome, where a distaste and then a hostility developed towards the Jews as a people. In a short time, this was followed by a highly negative view towards the sacred scriptures themselves. The Jews faced first mockery from both the Romans and the Christians, then special taxation,<sup>11</sup> and with the rise of Christianity as the new religion of the Empire, active persecution. The woes of many centuries began.

Still, more than a hundred years after Constantine made Sunday (the day of the sun god) the official day of rest in the Roman empire, a historian named Socrates could write that everywhere except Rome and Alexandria the Sabbath and First Day Festival pattern endured. He wrote this in about 450 AD:

*The people of Constantinople, and almost everywhere, assemble together on the Sabbath, as well as on the first day of the week, which custom is never observed at Rome or at Alexandria.*<sup>12</sup>

People just would not lightly give up their allegiance to the wonderful two-day pattern that culminated one week and began the next — not even when the Council of Laodicea excommunicated *all these people* in 364 AD. They were anathema!

*Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honoring the Lord’s Day; and, if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ.*<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The  *Fiscus Judaicus* was introduced by Vespasian (69-79 AD) which was intensified by Domitian (81-96 AD) first, and by Hadrian (117-138 AD) later. (S. Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, Chapter 6.) <sup>12</sup> *Ecclesiastical History of Socrates Sozomen – Comprising a History of the Church, from A.D. 323 to A.D. 425*, Chapter XIX.

In time, the might of the Church, often backed by emperor and king, prevailed, and the well-known pattern of Sunday-go-to-church Christendom became the norm. But consider how long the *true* pattern endured even long after the purity of first-century church was lost! How tenaciously they held on to that special pattern of Sabbath and First Day, of rest and festivity.

Yes, the love that had once caused them to share all things in common, to lay down the sword, and to live very humble and godly lives before their neighbors had long since been lost. Communal living was clearly a fading memory by the time James wrote his epistle early in the second century. So Constantine was right to take the sign down, for however firmly many held onto the Sabbath, it was only an outward form. They were no longer God’s people, obedient to the gospel.<sup>14</sup>

However, the very tenacity with which so many held onto the Sabbath testifies to their confidence that it went back to the apostles and the Messiah Himself. The early church kept the Sabbath until its leaders compromised with the Roman power that hated both the Jews and their religion. That Constantine hated them, let there be no doubt. His words to the churches in 325 AD make this point abundantly clear:

*And in the first place, it seemed very unworthy of this most sacred feast, that we should keep it following the custom of the Jews; a people who having imbrued [drenched] their hands in a most heinous outrage, have thus polluted their souls, and are deservedly blind...*<sup>15</sup>

This “most sacred feast” was the Passover of Exodus 12 and Leviticus 23. The same hostility worked in Constantine and his churchmen towards the Sabbath, and to the same end. It was not hard for him to take down the sign of the seventh-day Sabbath in favor of the day of the sun god (Sunday) for his favored, pet religion.<sup>16</sup>

## THE SIGN OF THE SABBATH TODAY

Once again, in our day, among all of life’s struggles and difficulties, the sign of the Sabbath is being lifted up over a people. It is hanging upon its twin signposts: the love of God

<sup>13</sup> “Synod of Laodicea,” Canon 29, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3806.htm> <sup>14</sup> John 14:15, 21,23; who loved as John 13:34-35, and who obeyed the good news as John 3:36 (NAS). <sup>15</sup> Socrates Scholasticus, *The Ecclesiastical History*, Book I, Chapter IX, “Constantine Augustus, to the Churches” <sup>16</sup> Which happened in 321 AD with the decree making Sunday the official day of rest for the Roman Empire.

and the love of one's neighbor.<sup>17</sup> Those posts are what everything in the Law and Prophets depends on, including the Sabbath, the festivals, and all the prophecies.<sup>18</sup> Yes, everything depends on loving God with all of our heart, soul, and strength, and in the same, wholehearted fashion,

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 22:37-40    <sup>18</sup> Including, if people could realize it, the Jews returning to their land!

loving our neighbor. Your *neighbors* are the ones closest (*nigh*) to you, your brothers and sisters in the community of faith — the ones with whom you share all things in common.<sup>19</sup> Why?

Because you love them! ❁

<sup>19</sup> This sharing of all things in common forever marks those who believe — see John 3:16 and Acts 2:44. They are the exact same word in Greek, and in the heart of the believer.

## THE NAME ABOVE ALL NAMES

In the days of John the Baptist and the Son of God, the preserved language of the devout Jews was Hebrew. So, when the angel Gabriel brought the good news to the Hebrew virgin, Miriam (or *Mary* in English), that she would give birth to the Savior of the world, and told her what His name would be, what language do you suppose he spoke? Hebrew, of course! And certainly Miriam and Yoceph (or *Joseph* in English) named the child just as the angel had commanded them — *Yahshua*.

In Matthew 1:21, your Bible probably reads, "...and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." But the name *Jesus* is a modern English adaptation of the Greek name, *Iesous*, which is itself a corruption of the original Hebrew name *Yahshua*. The name *Jesus* or *Iesous* has no meaning of its own, but the Hebrew name *Yahshua* literally means *Yahweh's Salvation*,<sup>1</sup> which makes sense out of what the angel said in Matthew 1:21, "...you shall call His name Yahshua [*Yahweh's Salvation*], for He shall save His people from their sins."

If you look in an old King James Bible, you will find the name *Jesus* in these two passages:

*Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David... (Acts 7:45)*

*For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. (Hebrews 4:8)*

However, if you look in any modern translation of the Bible, including the New King James, you will find

<sup>1</sup> *Yah* is the personal name of God, and *shua* is from a Hebrew root word that means "to save." God identified Himself to Moses as *YAH* (meaning "I AM") in Exodus 3:14, as in Psalm 68:4 ("whose name is *Yah*"), and as most familiar in the word *Halleluyah* ("Praise *Yah*"). And in John 5:43 and 17:11, *Yahshua* says that He came in His Father's name, "the name which You have given Me" (NASB), so it is not surprising that the Father's name would be incorporated into the Son's name, *Yahshua*.

that in place of the name *Jesus* they use the name *Joshua*, for in the context it is clear that it is speaking there of Moses' successor and not the Son of God. But in the Greek manuscript the name in both of these verses is *Iesous*.

You see, *Joshua* is the popular English transliteration of the Hebrew name *Yahshua*. *Joshua* of the Old Testament had the same name as the One called *Jesus* in the New Testament, for *Joshua* was the prophetic forerunner of the Son of God, bringing Israel into the Promised Land and leading them to victory over their enemies. But since the translators obviously know this fact, why do they only translate *Iesous* as *Joshua* in these two verses, and as *Jesus* everywhere else?

The NIV New Testament even has a footnote supporting this fact under Matthew 1:21: "*Jesus* is the Greek form of *Joshua*."

But the fact is, the name of God's Son was not even written or pronounced as "Jesus" in English until the 1600s, simply because there was no "J" sound or letter in English before then.<sup>2</sup> The modern letter "J" developed from the letter "I" which began to be written with a "tail" when it appeared as the first letter in a word. So in old English the name now written as *Jesus* was actually written and pronounced much like the original Greek *Iesous*. Eventually the hard "J" sound crept into the English language to accompany the different way of writing the initial "I" in the name.

You may also find it interesting that in Acts 26:14-15, it says that the apostle Paul heard the name of the Son of God pronounced "in the Hebrew tongue" by the Son of God Himself, so he certainly didn't hear the Greek name *Iesous* or the English name *Jesus*, but rather the Hebrew name, the name above all names, *Yahshua*.<sup>3</sup> ❁

<sup>2</sup> *Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 1496,1507    <sup>3</sup> Philippians 2:9; Acts 4:12

# THE YEAR OF JUBILEE

*You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years. Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month — on the Day of Atonement — you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land. And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family.*  
(Leviticus 25:8-10)

Every seventh year in faithful Israel was to be a sabbath year, when the land would lay fallow, debts would be forgiven, and slaves would be released. Every seven sevens of years was even more special, demanding far more from the hearts of the Israelites than even the sabbath years. That monumental time in the life of Israel was the Year of Jubilee. We know very little how it (or even the sabbath years) would actually affect a people,



because old Israel always found some way around the righteous requirement of the law, but it is very dear to our Father's heart. There will be a people who keep this command and who do so because they take on His heart.

The land in modern Israel can now be "sold" to someone else for the Sabbath year for a token amount of money, and then bought back after the year is over. This allows them to still benefit from the produce of the land without "breaking the Law" by farming it themselves. They get around the Law in that way, which is to say they get around trusting our Father in that way. Keeping the Law and trusting our Father is the same thing. There are two other things that go together, also.

## LOVE AND JUSTICE GO TOGETHER

In Leviticus 25:10, God Most High commanded that the trumpet would be blown in all the land when the fiftieth year, the year of Jubilee, had come. The fiftieth year was to have been a time to restore the way our Father called Israel to live. God commanded that all land be restored to its original owners in Leviticus 25:10.

*There is no such command anywhere in the world.*

All the buying and selling of the previous forty-nine years was to be undone. At the Year of Jubilee, all the land was to return to the families Yahweh had given it to when Israel conquered their land. Doubly so was it the Promised Land — promised to Abraham in Genesis 15:18, and promised again to the individual families when Joshua divided the land. Israel never understood how close the two promises were in our Father's

heart.

*No other religion of men has dared to address the hold that possessions and lands have on men's souls. Indeed, they cannot, since all prosperous religions depend on the good will of rich and powerful men. They could only obey such a radical set of commands as Yahweh gives in Leviticus 25 if they actually believed in Him.*

Our Father commanded that they forgive all debts from their brothers. All those born into slavery or sold into it must be freed.<sup>1</sup> He proclaimed liberty to all in the moving words, "Each of you shall return to his family."

Above all else, the fiftieth year was a time to remember the One to whom the land belonged. This is why He said they could not sell the land permanently to anyone.

*The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is Mine and you are but aliens and My tenants. (Leviticus 25:23)*

What a celebration that would be! This is the society the God of Israel intended, one where love and justice would rule every human relationship. There is no true

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<sup>1</sup> Leviticus 25:39-43

justice unless it arises from real, heart-felt love. Love and justice go together like man and wife. Love is the motive; justice is the result.

At every Jubilee celebration, the whole people were to come together to celebrate the greatest accomplishment any nation had ever known: *the triumph of love-based justice*. They were to restore what the poor had lost to their more gifted or even more aggressive brothers. As Moses said in Leviticus 25:17, “Do not take advantage of each other, but fear your God.”

They only bought the land until the next Jubilee.<sup>2</sup> Just think how rich would be the land that a true Israelite would give back to its original owner! That is, if he realized who the real and permanent owner of the land was — Yahweh Himself. Oh, if only they had such a heart!<sup>3</sup> But they never kept this law because they did not truly fear their God.

Only a society of people determined to carry out these two commands — the greatest commands in all the law — would be able to obey Leviticus 25:

*“Hear, O Israel: the Sovereign our God, the Sovereign is one. Love the Sovereign with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”*  
(Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

*“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* (Leviticus 19:18)

Any society determined to put these words into practice will have the help of Heaven and a life of faith to produce it. This help and this faith will produce a brand new culture.

#### ONCE LONG AGO AND ALMOST FORGOTTEN...

Once, a long time ago, there was a band of Jews who lived this way. They followed the teachings of Yahshua. As a man’s spirit inhabits his body, so Love lived and expressed itself on the earth in Him. The fruit of His life was a completely new society. There were literally thousands of men, women, and children living together in peace. They had true peace, with no needy among them. Thus, they fulfilled Deuteronomy 15:4-8, that there were no poor and

needy in the land.

His Spirit enabled them to love, and justice was the result. But what happened? That life waned. Love could not stay where He was no longer welcomed. He left those communities and walked on. For nearly two thousand years He longed for a new body of people to live in. The terrible words of Daniel the prophet came true, “Messiah was cut off and had nothing.”<sup>4</sup>

#### AND WHEN THE SOIL WAS READY...

Now, He must still have a people for His very own. It is what He has always longed for. We cannot belong to Him and Mammon at the same time; Leviticus 25 makes that perfectly clear.<sup>5</sup> There must be a nation expressing His character to the ends of the earth or the end cannot come.<sup>6</sup>

Once again, Love dwells in a body on the earth. He has found a new and lasting home; this is where we live.

Israel was to keep this body of law in Leviticus 25. If it had, it would have been a light to the world. *Torah* also means the body of prophetic instruction. Keeping it would have led them to fulfill their prophetic destiny as a people. And this has not changed; indeed, it cannot change. Only those who keep Sabbath years until the Year of Jubilee will prove to be the Israel of God. Then *all the land* goes back to its rightful owner — our Father.<sup>7</sup> The trumpet of the Year of Jubilee is the *last* trumpet of this age, of which Paul prophesied:

*Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)*

We invite you to come and be a part of the people to whom the mysteries are being unfolded. The glory of God, which is love, is the highest goal and aspiration of our life together. That is why we share all things in common, that is why we struggle to carve a culture, a new way of life, out of this fallen world. And that is why we open our homes to all those who long for these things, too. ✨

<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 25:14-16    <sup>3</sup> This was the hope Yahweh expressed in Deuteronomy 5:29.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel 9:26    <sup>5</sup> Matthew 6:24    <sup>6</sup> Matthew 24:14

<sup>7</sup> Revelation 11:15-18





# FORGOTTEN LAW, FORGOTTEN PURPOSE

The Sabbath is the commandment the world has forgotten, even most of those claiming somehow to be Israel. This is all the more striking, even ironic, in that it begins with the words, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.”<sup>1</sup> And no other command in the Law of God receives more explanation than this, or has more prophetic vision attached to it, and which culminates in the stirring words, “Proclaim liberty throughout all the land.”<sup>2</sup>

It is so strange that this most significant command — the very sign of who God’s people are<sup>3</sup> — has been forgotten by nearly the entire Christian world for seventeen centuries. And for even longer in the Jewish world it has been detached from all that it pointed to — the Sabbath years and the Year of Jubilee. So significant were these to the God of Israel that He sent His people into exile in Babylon so as to give the land rest — seventy full years of rest.<sup>4</sup> That was the number of Sabbath years they did not keep from the time they entered into the land under Joshua.

Whoever Israel is, they will be the keepers of the holiness of the Sabbath.<sup>5</sup> Israel keeps the seventh day holy not simply out of respect for the One who commanded it, but because it is so deeply woven into the purpose of Israel to be a light to the world. As history shows, God’s people have not mastered the Sabbath.<sup>6</sup> They are either under the Law, worried about how many steps they may lawfully take, or lawless, setting the Sabbath aside to become Gentiles. They must do what is good on that day, desisting from the normal busyness of life, resting in the care their God has for them.

The Sabbath day is in the *custody* of man. It is something very significant that *belongs* to him. Man *needs* the Sabbath. Without a day of rest each week, life soon loses its meaning. This loss of meaning first happened at the fall of man. It remains the condition of all men who don’t know

why they are living or what they were created for. Without a *purpose* to life, we are just breathing air until we die, and life has no meaning.<sup>7</sup> Strife and the pursuit of fleeting, selfish pleasures has ever been the sign of who God’s people are not.<sup>8</sup> The sign of who they are is found in these words to Israel:

*Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: “Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.” (Exodus 31:13)*

On this day, once a week, they were to remember what He was doing in their lives, which was sanctifying them. When they forgot that He was seeking to make them free from sin, cleansing them from moral corruption, and purifying them from every love of the world, they also forgot to keep the Sabbath. But why should they do so out of mindless ritual? The Sabbath day apart from its meaning is like life without purpose: “Let’s eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.”<sup>9</sup>

## THE SIGN POSTS TOPPLED

There is a simple reason why both old Israel and the early church stopped keeping the Sabbath. Their love for their Maker and for one another grew cold. They forgot that love was the key to everything they did, from God’s point of view:

*“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 22:36-40)*

It’s amazing: God has entrusted the fulfillment of His word to His people. If only they would love Him! So, the

<sup>1</sup> Exodus 20:8    <sup>2</sup> Leviticus 25:10    <sup>3</sup> According to Exodus 31:13, the Sabbath is the sign of the people for whom Yahweh cares: “Speak also to the children of Israel, ‘Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you.’”

<sup>4</sup> 2 Chronicles 36:20-21    <sup>5</sup> *Keep* means to preserve and maintain; to observe or fulfill; adhere to or not swerve from or violate, not neglect, to watch over and defend from danger, harm, loss.

<sup>6</sup> As Yahshua did, calling Himself its Lord in Mark 2:27-28.

<sup>7</sup> Philosophy and religion vainly search for the meaning they will not find and cannot create.    <sup>8</sup> The Romans, for instance, were quite proud of their seven-day-a-week business, condemning the Jewish people for their day of rest: “By introducing one day of rest in every seven, they lose in idleness almost a seventh of their life, and by failing to act in times of urgency they often suffer loss.” — Seneca, *De Superstitiones*, cited by Augustine, *The City of God* 6, 1.    <sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:32

love of God and the love of neighbor were the two signposts, as it were, on which hang all the signs of who God's people are. Two of those signs were the Sabbath and circumcision. Both of these became mere laws of the Jewish people, outward observances lacking the inner reality. Later, Christians simply rejected them.

What would the Sabbath day matter to God if His people had not love? It would be a charade, a sign signifying nothing. The Sabbath is simply a sign of where God dwells in a people, where He is free to work in their hearts, purifying them. It's a sign of the people who trust Him enough to rest one day a week.<sup>10</sup>

**THE SABBATH (AND ALL THE LAW) MUST BE FULFILLED**

*Thus says the LORD: "Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon My salvation will come, and My deliverance be revealed. Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath, not profaning it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil." (Isaiah 56:1-2)*

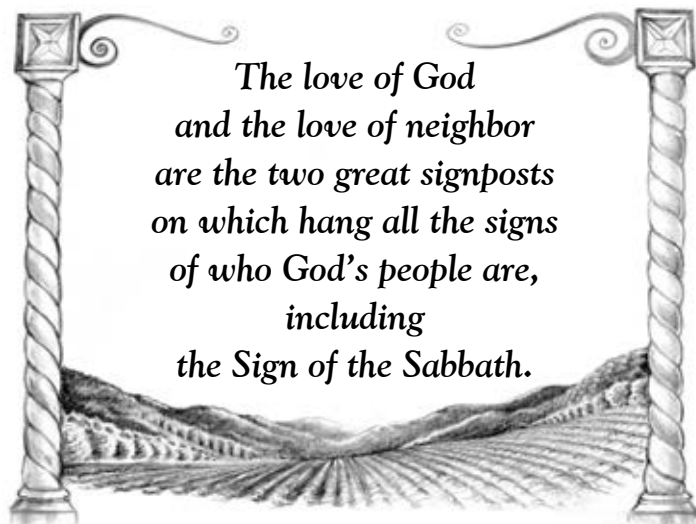
The God of Israel needs keepers of the holiness of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is part of the light Israel was to be to the rest of mankind. It is not just a day of rest that matters; the Sabbath is part of a much larger picture. No part can be taken away from that picture without *ruining* the whole.

The weekly Sabbaths point to the Sabbath years — one year of rest out of each seven. During the Sabbath year the land would rest. The people would trust the bounty God gave them in the sixth year to sustain them through the Sabbath year and on until the next harvest came in. And the Sabbath years point to the Year of Jubilee, which was to happen every fifty years, after seven cycles of Sabbath years.

Then all the busy buying and selling of the preceding forty-nine years would be undone and the land would return, every parcel, to the families who first owned it — who were first given it when Israel entered the Promised Land. There is no such command anywhere in the world's religions. And so far, it has also proved too great for all those who have called themselves Israel.

When this troubled age comes to an end, a new age will dawn — the Sabbath age. It will be a thousand years of peace. The Jubilee of ancient Israel connects to this time prophetically. They were supposed to celebrate the Jubilee and proclaim liberty throughout the land<sup>11</sup> because everyone, whether slave or free, was to return to their own land. But a greater cry will go up from new Israel at the end of this age when *all the earth goes back to its rightful owner!*<sup>12</sup>

*Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Revelation 11:15)*



Israel never did celebrate a year of Jubilee, and obviously the Christian Church has not proclaimed Revelation 11:15. The reason, in light of the Law, need go no further than Leviticus 25, where these things were commanded. You see, there is no record of Israel even keeping the Sabbath years. So, who will fulfill this great law? Only those who love God with all of their heart, mind, soul, and strength, and in the

same way, their neighbor as themselves.<sup>13</sup> Who else would give the land back which they had purchased and labored over? Who else would acknowledge in their hearts that everything comes from God, even their abilities, and give it back to Him by returning it to their neighbors?

It is only when all that is recorded in the Law and Prophets has been fulfilled that the original purposes of God in creation, now in abeyance, can resume. This entire age, this tragic time of death and suffering for mankind, was the necessary interlude to deal with the fall of man and to accomplish both his redemption and restoration.

**WHY MESSIAH CAME**

So the Sabbath is the sign of God purifying or sanctifying a people who do what He says to do. Many totally miss the point Messiah came for, which was to save a people and equip them to do the will of God. Without that purpose being accomplished, all that the Law and Prophets foreshadow will never come into reality. God never

<sup>10</sup> The Sabbath is only given to a *nation*, not to individuals.

<sup>11</sup> Leviticus 25:10    <sup>12</sup> 1 John 5:19; Daniel 7:27 (NRSV)

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 22:36-40

intended for His will, His heart towards mankind, to remain shadowy and indistinct. He wants His nature of love to bloom in full, dramatic color. But, He is waiting on a people who will do all His will.

Whoever fulfills all that pertains to the Twelve Tribes of Israel is Israel. They are the suitable companion for the Messiah, because He fulfilled all that pertained to Him in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms.<sup>14</sup> He did not come to abolish these things, but to fulfill them:

*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. Whoever therefore breaks 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)*

In these stirring words He points us to our great purpose of fulfilling His Father's words,<sup>15</sup> just as He did. It is the path of greatness for all true disciples, that we would both *keep* His commands and *teach* others to do so. Such men and women will be great in the kingdom of heaven. So God's people must come to know why *He* rested; that is, what gave Him rest. Otherwise, as the Proverbs say, even they will go unrestrained.<sup>16</sup> Only what gives Him rest can truly give His people rest.

### THE DAWNING OF ETERNITY

So His people will not regard this day of rest lightly, for it is certainly *the shadow of things yet to come*.<sup>17</sup> This is the revelation Paul gave the Colossians, which has been preserved for us to give us vision of what's ahead in the coming ages.

*Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body [is] of Christ. (Colossians 2:16-17, KJV)*

Note this: the King James Version *italicizes* the word "is," which means the word is not in the Greek manuscript, but added by the translators to make things clear (according to their slant on the text). In this case, the translators did just the opposite, obscuring its plain meaning instead.

Omitting the word "is," you see clearly what the text really means: "Let no man therefore judge you ... but the Body of Christ." The festivals,<sup>18</sup> the new moons, and the Sabbaths,

<sup>14</sup> Luke 24:44 <sup>15</sup> His words commanded in the Law and spoken through the Prophets. <sup>16</sup> Proverbs 29:18 <sup>17</sup> Matthew 5:18, just quoted, says not one aspect of the Law will pass away until it is fulfilled.

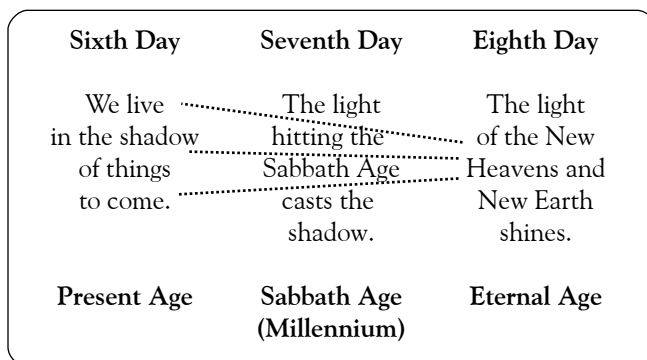
especially, are a shadow of things to come — so don't let anyone else judge you about them. What they point to has not yet come. They are prophetic events to prepare God's people for the ages to come.

Mankind will one day live in the light forever, in the fullness of God's love and His purpose for man in creation. Men and women will fill the universe with life, restored from every ill effect of the Fall, and bearing God's image as they were always meant to. They will have children forever and ever, as the Scriptures say:

*To Him be glory in the church and in Messiah Yahshua to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:21)*

This is the destiny of the righteous people of the nations.<sup>19</sup> The holy people, on the other hand, will be as the angels, not marrying or having children.<sup>20</sup> They are the Wife of the Lamb, who made herself ready for His return by doing the deeds prepared for her.<sup>21</sup>

The following diagram explains "the shadow of things to come" in Colossians 2:16-17.



The light is shining from the Eighth Day upon the Sabbath Age of the Seventh Day, thus casting a shadow into our day. So the perfect age is only known indistinctly to us, as a shadow lacks the substance of what the light shines upon. Since the Eighth Day has not yet come, the Seventh Day of the week is still a sign. The Sabbath Age will be the glorious age of peace the prophets foretold, yet it will pale before the Eternal Age.<sup>22</sup> The shadow does not pass away until the reality comes, which is the Seventh Day.<sup>23</sup> That is why Hebrews 4:9 says that there *remains* a Sabbath-keeping for the people of God.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>18</sup> As other translations such as New King James Version translates *holyday*. <sup>19</sup> They are the sheep in the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46. <sup>20</sup> Luke 20:31-38 <sup>21</sup> Revelation 19:7-8; Ephesians 2:10 <sup>22</sup> Revelation 21:1-4 <sup>23</sup> That reality is the anti-type, the fulfillment of the type. <sup>24</sup> In spite of devious translations and concordances, Hebrews 4:9 says just this: "There remains a Sabbath keeping for the people of God." #4520, *sabbatismos*, means "Sabbath keeping," just as *Thayer's Lexicon* says.

## THE SHADOW OF THINGS TO COME

Festivals, new moons, Sabbaths, and Sabbath years — these are a shadow of things to come. None of them have arrived in their fullness yet. The thrilling, wonderful reality of the *whole* earth keeping the festivals, feast days, new moon festivals, and Sabbaths in the next age is the “object” that casts the “shadow” in this age. This is just what the prophet Isaiah foretold:

*And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD. (Isaiah 66:23)*

As Matthew 5:17-18 says, not until heaven and earth pass away will the Sabbath day as a sign also pass away from the Law. Messiah did not come to nullify the Law, but to fulfill it. He will do so through His people, those set free from living for themselves.<sup>25</sup>

It is those under the Law who cannot fulfill it. Only those who walk by the Spirit and are under grace can and will fulfill the Law.<sup>26</sup> It is prophesied that there will be such a people.<sup>27</sup> Only after mankind is fully restored and death is no more will the Sabbath pass away. Then there will be a new heavens and a new earth.<sup>28</sup> They will never wear out, just as the righteous of the nations will never die. Eternal men dwelling on eternal planets circling eternal suns, spreading from solar system to solar system, galaxy to galaxy, super cluster of galaxies to super cluster in an unending, ever expanding universe full of life...

Yet only when the Twelve Tribes are raised up as a light to the nations, and the Sabbath is a true sign of who God's people are, will the *Seventh Day rest* be ushered in for all men. In the next age, the millennial Kingdom, the Sabbath will continue to be observed, but it will not be a shadow of things to come then. The rest and peace the world knows then will no longer be *foreshadowed* in the Communities of Messiah as it is now. Rather, that peace will *fill the earth*. That is why those who are learning to do these things — keep the Sabbaths and the festivals — must let no man judge or deter them from doing them, for they are a shadow

of what is to come. Those who would judge them would have the same spirit as Peter when he attempted to deter Yahshua from going to Jerusalem to be the sacrifice for our sins, deserving the same response Messiah gave him.<sup>29</sup>

## WHY DID GOD REST ON THE SEVENTH DAY?

If we see that God rested in a certain thing, then we know that it is something He wanted, something He was after from the beginning. So we must not regard the seventh day lightly. We must not regard any of the Ten Commandments lightly!<sup>30</sup> He did not rest the first six days because He did not get what He desired, and He was not satisfied until He did. The seventh-day rest says that He accomplished something very significant, that His labor brought forth His heart's desire. He delighted in what He had done in making *man*, male and female.

His work in making man was such that it could not have possibly been better. This is why we are to *remember the Sabbath Day* to keep it holy, too, *because it tells us why He rested* — He had what He needed to accomplish His purpose in the physical creation of all that we see. This extended to all the works of His hands, to the very limits of the starry heaven. And in man, God also had what He needed

to deal with His enemy in the spiritual realm, Satan, and all of his accusations.

With the Fall, the earth became God's testing ground for man, the place to see who feared Him enough to obey his conscience, God's quiet voice within them. It is not given to natural man to defeat the spiritual enemy of God and man. It is enough that they turn from his voice and listen to their consciences. This tests their belief in the God who sees all things to the uttermost. But God never lost sight of His ultimate purpose for man or for the earth. The testing ground of the earth was only for the purpose of regaining mankind and the earth for its real purpose — as the launching pad for the colonization of the stars, the galaxies, and the entire universe. It is restored mankind who will rule the physical universe under the loving care of redeemed man.<sup>31</sup>



<sup>25</sup> Romans 8:2-4   <sup>26</sup> Romans 6:14; Galatians 5:16,18   <sup>27</sup> Daniel 2:44-45   <sup>28</sup> Hebrews 1:10-12

<sup>29</sup> Matthew 16:21-27   <sup>30</sup> Exodus 20:8-11   <sup>31</sup> Revelation 22:1-5

But after the Fall, only redeemed man could accomplish what man was created for, as God's champion, which was to destroy the works of the evil one.<sup>32</sup> Yahshua accomplished as the "second man" what Adam didn't, what Adam lost when he sinned and fell.<sup>33</sup> In His life, death, and resurrection, Yahshua broke the evil one's legal claim over mankind due to the Fall. But the evil one's power to deceive was not destroyed,<sup>34</sup> and he will not be cast into the bottomless pit<sup>35</sup> until there is a people who overcome all things as Yahshua did.<sup>36</sup> He waits for us to do just that:

*But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. (Hebrews 10:12-13)*

Now, in the restoration of all things prophesied by the Son of God Himself,<sup>37</sup> His enemies are being put under foot by brothers and sisters living together in unity, loving each other, and making an acceptable, spiritual sacrifice of their lives day by day.<sup>38</sup> They are those who *remember* the Law of Moses,<sup>39</sup> so as to fulfill it by the power of love. ✨

<sup>32</sup> Genesis 3:15 <sup>33</sup> Romans 5:12-19 <sup>34</sup> Revelation 12:9; 20:3  
<sup>35</sup> Revelation 20:1-3 <sup>36</sup> Revelation 12:11

<sup>37</sup> Mark 9:11-12 <sup>38</sup> Romans 12:1-2 and 15:16 <sup>39</sup> Malachi 4:4; Matthew 22:36-40; Romans 8:4

## SPIRITUAL SIGNS

**K**ing David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, sung of the glory of God revealed in the creation all around him.<sup>1</sup> The apostle Paul spoke of how the nature and attributes of the invisible God could be grasped through the visible creation.<sup>2</sup> Paul even told the citizens of Lystra long ago that God never left mankind without a witness of His personal love for all mankind. He always wanted us to know of His goodness and care:

*He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. (Acts 14:17)*

Indeed, the rainbow has ever spoken to sensitive men of the unseen yet very real God.<sup>3</sup> Only fools have ever said in their heart, "There is no God"<sup>4</sup> — yet how many of the world's most outwardly religious men and women have walked as fools, denying in their hearts that there is a God who *expects* them to *obey* Him?<sup>5</sup>

Yet all too often men have gone on in life assured of their righteousness by faith before God while looking down on the "sinners" around them who obviously disobey their conscience. But which is worse, to disobey conscience (God's quiet voice within each man) or to disobey His very Word? Let God be the judge! Even as the Savior said using the "fire and brimstone" proverbial lesson known to all:

*"It will more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city."<sup>6</sup>*

And "*that city*" was full of religious Jews who rejected His preaching and miracles He did.<sup>7</sup> Sodom and Gomorrah rejected conscience, loved pleasure, and hardened their hearts to the sufferings of the poor.<sup>8</sup> But the Son of God

said more mercy would be shown to them in the judgment than to those who ignore and disobey His word.<sup>9</sup>

So what of the great sign of the Sabbath? Shall we esteem it very highly or set it aside? Far from being the least of the commandments, it is the *longest*,<sup>10</sup> often the subject of prophecy,<sup>11</sup> and even more often the reason for prophetic rebuke to the people of Israel.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, anyone seeking to be great in the kingdom of heaven will keep it and teach others to do so as well.<sup>13</sup> It is the one commandment the Savior highlighted above all the rest by saying, "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."<sup>14</sup> So, did He then come to set aside the observance of that day of which He especially is Lord? Was that really the reason He made a point to do good on the Sabbath, setting men free from the bondage of sin and sickness?

And remember, the Master's commanded His disciples who would be alive at the end of this age to pray that their flight "would not be in winter or on a Sabbath."<sup>15</sup> Will you be one of the people fervently praying this prayer as the day draws near? It's a hard prayer to relate to from your pew on Sunday, isn't it? ✨

<sup>1</sup> See such passages as Psalm 19:1-6; 65:9-13; 147:4-9; etc.

<sup>2</sup> Romans 1:19-20 <sup>3</sup> Genesis 9:9-17 <sup>4</sup> Psalm 14:1-3 is the context for the *none* and the *no one* who seeks to do what is good in Romans 3:10-12. <sup>5</sup> That is His way, articulated clearly in both the Old and the New Covenants: Exodus 20:5-6, from which the Savior clearly understood what He passed on to His disciples in John 14:15, 21, and 23. <sup>6</sup> Matthew 10:15 <sup>7</sup> Matthew 10:13-14 <sup>8</sup> Ezekiel 16:48-50 <sup>9</sup> 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8 <sup>10</sup> Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:13-15 <sup>11</sup> Isaiah 56:1-2, 6; 66:22-24; Ezekiel 46 <sup>12</sup> Isaiah 58:13-14 (whose context is from verse 1 on); Jeremiah 17:21-27; Nehemiah 13:15-22; Amos 8:5 <sup>13</sup> Matthew 5:19 <sup>14</sup> Matthew 12:8, Mark 2:28, and Luke 6:5 <sup>15</sup> Matthew 24:20

# THE BEST DAY FOR BUSINESS

Each person's life reveals his beliefs — sometimes uncomfortably so... when what he does contradicts what he claims to believe. One outstanding belief that should affect people's lives in a noticeable and outward way is Sabbath-keeping. Both Jews and an increasing number of Christians say that the seventh day of the week is the Sabbath. And they know the seventh day has the common name of Saturday, not Sunday. Shouldn't Saturday be a much different day for them, given the Sabbath's great importance in the Scriptures?

Sabbath-keeping results from believing that the fourth commandment on the Sabbath is still a command to be obeyed, just like honoring parents, not stealing, and the rest of the commandments. Further, it is a sign to be held up to the world of who God's people are. Therefore, in the case of Sabbath-keeping, obeying and believing are the same thing.

*Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: "Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you." (Exodus 31:13)*

Surely Jews and "Sabbath-keeping" Christians own many businesses, so you should see "Closed on Saturday" or "Closed on the Sabbath" signs everywhere. Even though it's the best day for doing business and making money (since everyone takes this day off to go shopping, go out to eat, and have a good time), all those who honor their Creator rest on this day. Interestingly, according to the words of the commandment in Exodus 20, they give their servants (employees) rest, too. Yes, that is what the *Word of God* says quite clearly.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, you can't use hired hands to "work around" the prohibition of laboring on the Sabbath!

Look around. There aren't many closed-on-the-Sabbath signs, are there? I've hardly seen *any* in my lifetime, let alone *anything near* the number of businesses that should be closed if "Sabbath-keepers" actually kept the Sabbath. Remember, real faith is revealed by one's life — the deeds he does. Pretended faith needs no visible or tangible expression.

What of the virtually innumerable Christians<sup>2</sup> who have an ancient tradition (at least 17 centuries old) that Sunday is the "Lord's Day"? By this they mean that for Christians Sunday is the new Sabbath. For them, the first day of the week has replaced the seventh day as the holy,

set-apart day. Then shouldn't Christian businesses be closed on Sunday? Or maybe there is no rest for Christians, since the Savior did *everything* for them, including *rest*?

There have been times when businesses were closed by *law* in Christian nations.<sup>3</sup> But what of grace — the desire and the power (from God) to do His will, to honor *His* day simply because you love Him? It seems, then, that most Christians and Jews share at least this one thing in common: business takes precedence over beliefs.

Or is the Sabbath vs. Sunday controversy only about which day to go to church (or synagogue or mosque)? After all, each religion has its day — the Jews have the Sabbath, the Muslims have Friday, and the Christians have the day of the Sun God (Sunday). And what *does* it matter if it's just a religious observance, and not the sign of who God's obedient people are?

On our businesses you will see a cheerful sign that says something like, "Closed for the Sabbath," and right below it, the words, "Shabbat Shalom — Welcome." Yes, our doors (and hearts) are open for guests and visitors on this most special of days, but we are resting. This is what believers do on the Sabbath: they close shop, come in from the field, and put their hammers down. They do so because He has given them rest from the relentless cares and worries of life that drive this world and all of its inhabitants. This is the salvation that comes to those who seek first His Kingdom:

*Therefore do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." (Matthew 6:31-33)*

This is possible for us just as it was for the first believers in the Book of Acts because we share all things in common.<sup>4</sup> And our rest is based on and maintained by the forgiveness we've received and that we extend to one another. Apart from the active flow of forgiveness, just like the lifeblood of a human body, our rest, indeed our life together as a people, would end. We would find "better" things to do than celebrate the Sabbath. ✠

*So then, there remains a Sabbath-keeping<sup>5</sup> for the people of God... (Hebrews 4:9)*

<sup>1</sup> Exodus 20:8-11 includes the words, "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor the stranger within your gates."

<sup>2</sup> Some say *two billion!* <sup>3</sup> Such as the "Blue Laws" of Puritan New England. <sup>4</sup> Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-37. This is the fulfillment of Deuteronomy 15:4, too. <sup>5</sup> The Hebrew word usually translated as "Sabbath rest" in this verse literally means *Sabbath-keeping*.



# WHO TOOK DOWN THE SIGN?

*And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,  
“Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: ‘Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep,  
for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations,  
that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.  
Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath,  
to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.  
It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever;  
for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth,  
and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.’ ”  
And when He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai,  
He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone,  
written with the finger of God.  
(Exodus 31:12-13,16-18)*

**W**ho are these words spoken to today? The Jews in Israel or the Christians around the world? Both? Or can either really claim them? The answers depend a lot on whether the “sign between Me and you” is just a matter of which day people go to synagogue or to church or is something much deeper.

## THE SIGN OF THE SABBATH... WAR?

Yet what promise, what hope these words in Exodus 31 have! And what passion they inspire to this very day! Christians and Jews are no longer arguing with each other about it as they did long ago, but with themselves. Riots are happening in Israel over whose views of the Sabbath should prevail, and headlines like, “Jerusalem Shaken by Riots — Sabbath War Escalates,” shout from the news-stands.<sup>1</sup> In America, a popular conservative website has a major article called, “Deception: Christians War over the Sabbath.”<sup>2</sup>

What is the significance of these wars over the Sabbath? Do they mean that God cannot give His people

<sup>1</sup> Ronen Medzini, *ynet news*, June 28, 2009, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3737787,00.html>. There have been many riots in Israel over such issues. For example, a few years ago pay phones were locked up in Ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods on the Sabbath: <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3153991,00.html>

<sup>2</sup> Joe Kovacs, *WorldNetDaily*, March 16, 2008, <http://www.worldnetdaily.com/index.php?fa=PAGE.view&pageId=57978>.



the same mind and the same heart? Or can they not even agree on the Ten Commandments, which are “the words of the covenant” He made with them at Mount Sinai?<sup>3</sup> Perhaps they must really be one as He is one in order to hear Him, and must really love Him with all their hearts before His words can be in their hearts.<sup>4</sup> Intellectual arguments over the meaning of Scripture never seem to settle such disputes, do they?

The call of these verses in Exodus 31 to be God’s people still remains and still grips the minds and hearts of people all over the world. For most, though, the passion of the Jews about the Sabbath is more understandable — it’s their day, after all.<sup>5</sup> The basic Christian position for many centuries has agreed with this, maintaining that Sunday superseded or even annulled the Sabbath of old Israel, being the day of the Savior’s resurrection.

Yet many individuals and many groups in Christianity have not been satisfied with this dismissal of the Fourth Commandment, no matter how well founded it seems in the basis of their religion. They simply cannot get past the stirring words, “*a sign between Me and you... a perpetual covenant... written with the finger of God.*”

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 34:28 <sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4-6 (quoted below). <sup>5</sup> This is not to say that to many, both Jews and Christians, these debates are meaningless and strange.

They sense inside themselves the terrible sacrilege of cutting off the finger of God, as it were, by failing to set aside the seventh day of the week as special — a day of rest or worship. Most others have found nothing alarming in regarding every day the same.<sup>6</sup> Yet, in theory, both Jews and Christians live in the hope that what was once written on tablets of stone would finally be written on their hearts:

*Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah...But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. (Jeremiah 31:31,33)*

What would such a society, such a culture, look like?

Consider this: it would be the fulfillment of all that the Law commanded and all that the Prophets spoke — nothing less. There would be no poor among them,<sup>7</sup> each man would love his neighbor as himself,<sup>8</sup> the Law would be a delight to them as it was to King David,<sup>9</sup> and their life together would be a light to the world, bringing salvation to the ends of the earth.<sup>10</sup> And so much more! Yes, even fulfilling all that the Law and Prophets and the Psalms have already spoken of Israel, His people.

## A NEW COVENANT

Two thousand years ago, the people who believed that Messiah had come were few in number and powerless, sustained only by their faith in the God of Israel. They had nothing in this life but one another, having forsaken all in obedience to the gospel they had heard and believed.<sup>11</sup> In reality, those first disciples are just as much strangers to Christians today as to Jews, having so little in common with

<sup>6</sup> Even having a Bible passage Romans 14 on their side, which says in verse 5, “One person esteems one day above another, another esteems every day alike.” But they do not notice that the entire context of these verses, 1-23, concerns eating and fasting and not causing your brother to stumble by what you eat, and not the Sabbath at all. <sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy 15:4 <sup>8</sup> Leviticus 19:18 <sup>9</sup> Psalm 19:7-11 <sup>10</sup> Isaiah 49:5-6 <sup>11</sup> Stories such as the rich young ruler in Mark 10:17-31 taught them to trust Him with all their things, all their life, and all their possessions, which He spelled out very clearly in Luke 14:26-33 (and in many other passages, too). It is not that giving that shows true belief, but the trusting. Giving can be done without trusting, and no salvation results.

either group. Their greatest spokesman, Paul, described their conduct and mission in life in these terms:

*And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. For this hope’s sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews. (Acts 26:6-7)*

They lived their lives to fulfill the promises made by their God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They did everything “for them,” as one translation puts it — even the Jewish people who were persecuting them.<sup>12</sup> Thus, they did not see themselves replacing or dispossessing the Hebrew people, but serving them as a spiritual nation. The Israel they served were the natural descendants of Abraham, while the *spiritual* twelve tribes which Paul spoke of were gathered from *beyond* the borders of Israel,<sup>13</sup> as well as within them.

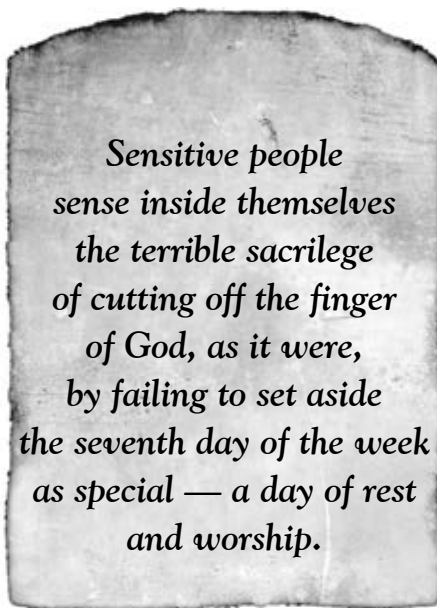
They were “Servant Israel,” as the prophet Isaiah had foretold.<sup>14</sup> And it was just such service, such worship of God Most High, manifested in the life of love they had for one another, that validated the Sabbath rest they took week by week. That rest is for *His people* who are even now, in this life, *being sanctified*. It is more than a matter of which day to worship, or even to rest.

The *sign* signifies something *significant*.

The rest God’s people take shows their trust that God will do all He has promised to do in their lives.

*Sanctified* means *set apart*, and they, His holy people, were set apart in communities like the first one in Jerusalem,<sup>15</sup> followed by similar communities all around the ancient world of the Roman Empire. They were what Paul wrote of in 1 Corinthians 1:2 — a people set apart from the world, who were in the world but not of it. Thus, love for one another marked them as disciples of their Master.<sup>16</sup> It was only such intense love that could ever fulfill the first and greatest commandment:

<sup>12</sup> The *Williams New Testament* translation of Acts 26:7 reads: “...which promise our twelve tribes, by devotedly worshipping day and night, hope to see fulfilled for them. It is for this hope, your Majesty, that I am accused by some Jews.” <sup>13</sup> Malachi 1:5,11 <sup>14</sup> See such passages as Isaiah, chapters 41-44. <sup>15</sup> As recorded in Acts 2 and 4. The Levites in Israel had once set the pattern for this, having Yahweh only as their portion (Numbers 18:20-26). <sup>16</sup> John 13:34-35. He was the one despised and rejected by men. (Often, His followers were no more popular than He!)



Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. (Deuteronomy 6:4-6)

the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:17-19)

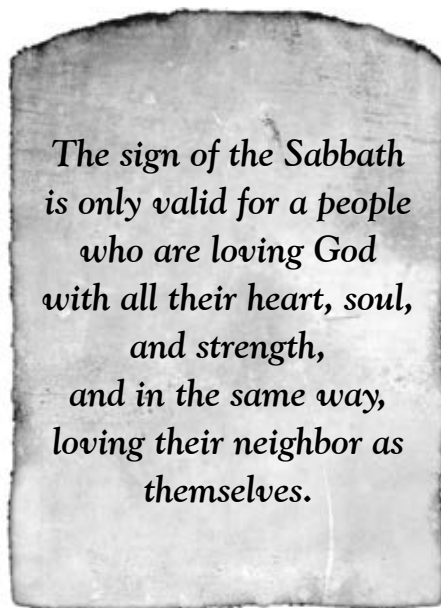
## FULFILLING THE LAW AND PROPHETS IS THE FRUIT OF LOVE

These words were brought into the New Covenant by Yahshua, who taught and commanded His followers to obey them as an urgent necessity in fulfilling their purpose: Yahshua said to him, “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:37-40)

Indeed, only such love could ever fulfill *all the Law and all the Prophets*. Such love may be compared to a living tree, and the living fruit which hangs and depends on it, which fulfills the Law and Prophets. Apart from such wholehearted love, God’s words through Moses and the Prophets would fall to the ground in vain. And those who allow His words to fall also take His name in vain if they still insist on calling upon Him but do not devote their lives to doing what He said.<sup>17</sup>

The early disciples were inspired both to know and do His commandments, so to be great in the Kingdom. (See Matthew 5:17-19 quoted below.) They did this for the same reason they gave up all things — because they loved their Savior. They did all they did for His sake and for His gospel’s sake.<sup>18</sup> You honor and obey those you love. You do not obey whom you do not love.<sup>19</sup> Thus, they could teach others to obey Him as they did. They saw their purpose in life *exactly* as He saw His — *fulfilling every word spoken by the mouth of God in the Law and Prophets*:

*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. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in*



This is why they kept the Sabbath (which is much more than a mere jot or tittle of the Law<sup>20</sup>) — because they wanted to bring about His kingdom. It’s what they were living for. This brought rest not only to His heart as their Father, their Abba, but to the hearts of their brothers, too. Love, and only love, can bring about the fulfillment of the words of Jeremiah, “They shall all know Me.”<sup>21</sup>

The practical, day-to-day *salvation* they received, not just the gift of faith expressed in their baptism into His community, was the proof that He was sanctifying them as Exodus 31 says. In other words, their rest on the seventh day of the week had *significance* — it wasn’t a “go-to-church-on-Sabbath” sign detached from their life together as believers. Truly, all who believed were together, just as at the first in Jerusalem.<sup>22</sup> And so it has ever been. Those *not* together are those who do *not* believe.

## THE SIGN INVALIDATED

Sadly, even tragically, the cares and worries of life and the deceitfulness of selfishness (sin) first changed the nature of their communities, and then destroyed them. The sign of the Sabbath is only valid for a people who are loving the Lord with all their heart, soul, and strength, and in the same way, loving their neighbor as themselves. Resting on the seventh day became increasingly meaningless to many in the early church as the decades turned into the first few centuries of the Christian era. Others, however, could not give it up, and would have edicts and laws passed against them for a long time to come. One example was the degree of Council of Laodicea (circa 363 AD), actually *forbidding Christians from resting on the Sabbath*.<sup>23</sup>

The churches divided internally into clergy and laity, and rich and poor,<sup>24</sup> and externally over many, many issues. Malice and wickedness pervaded the lump<sup>25</sup> like leaven, and the sincere were silenced by the powerful clergy. So, the

<sup>20</sup> See *The Sign of the Sabbath* on page 3. <sup>21</sup> Jeremiah 31:34

<sup>22</sup> Acts 2:44 <sup>23</sup> For a brief synopsis of the “festivities” see: [http://www.bambooweb.com/articles/c/o/Council\\_of\\_Laodicea.html](http://www.bambooweb.com/articles/c/o/Council_of_Laodicea.html).

<sup>24</sup> The first harbinger of this were Paul’s words to the Corinthians about the rich and poor in their midst (1 Corinthians 11); the last words, no longer of warning, but condemnation, were in James 5.

<sup>25</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:7-9

<sup>17</sup> This is the larger meaning of the Third Commandment, “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.” (Exodus 20:7) <sup>18</sup> Mark 10:29-30 <sup>19</sup> John 14:24

hope of the end of the age faded within them, as it must among those who lose their connection to God. It was clear from James 1:26-27 that they had broken their link to Him. The widows and orphans had to fend for themselves with the end of community. As the apostles died off, the leading intellectuals of the church soon showed their unbridled tongues in the harsh, insulting comments they made in defense of their faith.<sup>26</sup>

When their faith became another religion — even a “correct” one — the measure of faith became “correct” doctrine. Love was left behind. Love, as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13, is not rude; it does not seek its own way; it is not even able to push dogma aside — it has not the strength. Love only lives where it is warmly welcomed, where it has *first place* in the hearts of the people.<sup>27</sup>

As love was left behind like a divorced wife, naturally, so were the children.<sup>28</sup> “*Command your children and your household after you to keep the way of Yahweh by doing righteousness and justice*”<sup>29</sup> was no longer being fulfilled by parents turning their hearts to their children.<sup>30</sup> This meant the great goal of Genesis 15:18 was left behind, that God would give Abraham’s offspring their land in peace. This was the vital connection between their life and their purpose. Once broken, they had nothing left to live for but their own interests.

The vibrant early church became another world religion, shepherded (if the word can be used of them) by masters of Greek philosophy and rhetoric (the so-called “Early Church Fathers”). They exalted themselves over the people even in the last days of the apostles.<sup>31</sup> They turned the church into something that would catch the attention of a political genius like Constantine. Not surprisingly, the further they got from their Hebrew roots, the more acceptable they became to the Roman elites and educated Greeks around them. In time these men filled more and more positions of authority in the “church.”

<sup>26</sup> The first was Ignatius, “the incarnation of... the hatred of heresy” according to Christian historian Philip Schaff. (*History of the Christian Church*, Vol. II: Ante-Nicene Christianity A.D. 100-325, 3rd Edition, 1910, by Charles Scribner’s Sons, page 417). Iranaeus made up one of the first lists in “Against Heresies” between 182 and 188 AD. Another list, thirty-two in number, was drawn up by Hippolytus (before the year 217 AD) in his book, *The Refutation of All Heresies*. This was just the beginning. <sup>27</sup> Love is not the handmaid of correct doctrine, as some say. (1 John 4:8)

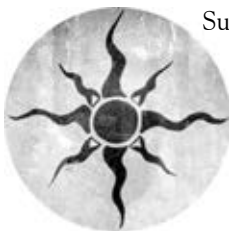
<sup>28</sup> Hebrews 12:5-11 <sup>29</sup> Genesis 18: 19 <sup>30</sup> Malachi 4:6

<sup>31</sup> The Nicolaitan system the apostle John condemned in Revelation 2:6,11. Nicolaitan is #3532 in *Strong’s Greek Concordance* and means “victorious over the people.” They were silenced, and together, both clergy and laity went down into spiritual darkness and death (Psalm 115:17). See the articles in the freepaper, *A Felled Tree Sprouting* for more on this.

## CONSTANTINE THE GREAT

In due time, Constantine came onto the scene, uniting the Roman Empire under his rule by force of arms. At the same time, he struggled with a more difficult task: uniting the fractured Christian Church by enticement, persuasion, and if need be, by the same sword that had always served him so well. Driven by political ambition, he first set the Christian Church free from persecution. Then, he began to set them on high, to a place of influence, wealth, and power they could scarcely have dreamed of twenty years before.

However, Constantine still had a very large empire to rule over, the vast majority of whom were not Christians. How to appease both groups, each uneasy about the other, was the challenge. One part of the solution was put into effect on March 7, 321 AD, when Constantine made Sunday the official day of rest for the Roman Empire:



*On the venerable Day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed.*<sup>32</sup>

The Christian world gratefully followed him, thankful for the blessing of peace, prosperity, and power, and it still follows him (and most any ruler) to the present day.

Let no one doubt that he did well in changing the Sabbath to Sunday — in changing the day of rest from the Seventh Day to the First Day. He did well because the early church had long since left their first love.<sup>33</sup> What else but love could be the sign of God’s presence in a people? So Constantine took the sign away, the sign that had already been invalidated. It was a sign, yes, but one with no reality to it. Resting on the Sabbath makes a claim to the world — that you are the “you” in Exodus 31:13, “a sign between Me and you.” There was no witness fulfilling Matthew 22:37-40, which is loving Him with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself.

God’s people were to do Genesis 18:19, raising their children in the way of Yahweh. This was what Abraham’s offspring were to do, but rarely did. This was “the way” in which the early church walked for a brief time,<sup>34</sup> but not beyond its first generation. Neither old Israel nor the early church bore the fruit of the kingdom of God, so both were cut off.<sup>35</sup> ❀

<sup>32</sup> *Codex Justinianus*, lib. 3, tit. 12, 3; translated in Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 3, p. 380, note 1. The language is very telling when you realize that the “Day of the Sun” was the day the pagan world worshiped Apollos and the Christians worshiped Christ. <sup>33</sup> About forty years after Paul told the Ephesians that grace would always be theirs if their love was incorruptible, Yahshua told them in Revelation 2:4-5 they had left their first love. <sup>34</sup> Acts 9:2, 19:9, etc. <sup>35</sup> Matthew 21:43

# THE FAVORED RELIGION

Most Christians today have no idea that the basic tenets of their faith, religious practice, and doctrine come from the *integration of the church and the state*<sup>1</sup> during the reign of the Roman Emperor Constantine. That may not initially seem so alarming, but actually it has had a very significant effect on what Christians have believed down through history, and how they have lived, even to the present day. Although Christians would universally say they are taught from the words of Christ himself, the effect of those words is radically different than it was two thousands years ago. The gospels and epistles have been carefully preserved, yes, but their influence, interpretation, and application stem *not* from the pattern of the first-century church, but from the writings and councils of the early “church fathers” of the third and fourth centuries. It was a time when the church was in its last phase of *transition* into its current form.<sup>2</sup>

## CONTENDING FOR “THE FAITH”

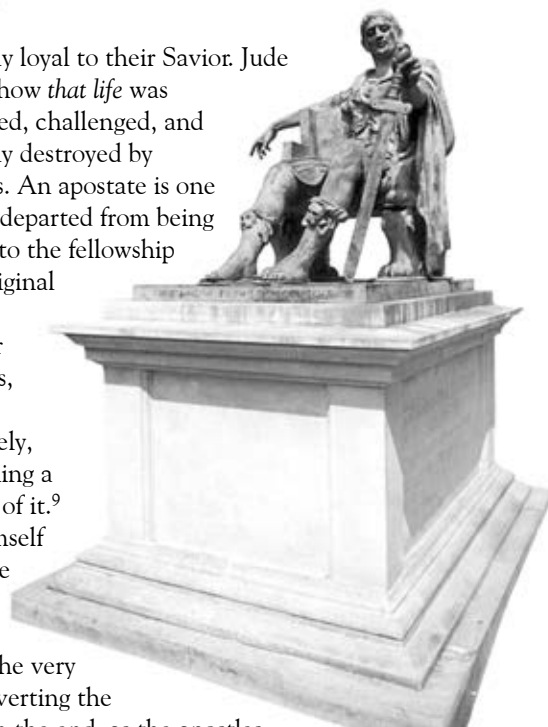
For nearly two centuries the church had experienced a steady decline from its original vibrancy of living together in *community*, when love was the glue which held their life together.<sup>3</sup> That love, resulting in the real unity of “having all things in common,”<sup>4</sup> was the fruit of the gospel first preached by the apostles. Yet the book of Jude already records, near the end of the first century, the writer’s alarm and distress, as Jude pleads with all the churches to contend earnestly for “the faith” that was delivered to them once for all by the apostles themselves.

That term “once for all” means there was no other foundation upon which a valid church could be established.<sup>5</sup> “The faith” delivered to them by the apostles was their spiritual foundation, the result of the gospel they had received. It was expressed through the visible and tangible life they shared together, having a community of goods. This was the outward expression of their “obedience from the heart”<sup>6</sup> to the good news of salvation they had received.<sup>7</sup>

Jude describes it as their “common salvation” which all the churches universally held, having been established by the apostles. These men, God’s special ambassadors,<sup>8</sup> were

<sup>1</sup> The *Edict of Milan*, early in 313. <sup>2</sup> *Transition* — a process or period in which something undergoes a change from one state, form, or activity to another. <sup>3</sup> John 13:34-35 <sup>4</sup> Acts 2:44 and 4:32 <sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:9-11; Ephesians 2:20-22; 1 Corinthians 12:12 <sup>6</sup> Romans 6:17 <sup>7</sup> They had embraced the terms of peace in Luke 14:31-32 and made peace with the coming king, Luke 14:33. <sup>8</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

supremely loyal to their Savior. Jude 1:4 tells how *that life* was threatened, challenged, and ultimately destroyed by apostates. An apostate is one who has departed from being devoted to the fellowship of the original apostles and their teachings, while, deceptively, maintaining a pretense of it.<sup>9</sup> Peter himself says these apostate “brothers” were the very ones perverting the gospel. In the end, as the apostles testified, it would result in their destruction, according to their deeds.<sup>10</sup>



*For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ... These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage.” (Jude 1:4,16)*

The second letter to the Corinthians also speaks of Paul’s alarm over the imminent loss of the original simplicity and purity of “the faith” he had passed on to them. Through craft and scheming the apostates twisted the scriptures, even the very gospel of the Lord, delivered through the apostles. They rejected the authority of the apostles and sought to promote themselves as those who are first among their brothers.<sup>11</sup>

*For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not*

<sup>9</sup> 1 John 1:3; 2:19,20,27; Jude 1:17-19 <sup>10</sup> 2 Peter 2:1-3,19; 3:16; 2 Corinthians 11:15; 1 John 1:3; 2:19 <sup>11</sup> 2 Peter 2:10; Jude 1:8; 3 John 1:9-10

accepted, you bear this beautifully!... For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For even Satan transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no surprise if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works. (2 Corinthians 11:4,13-15)

There is a consistency in the writings of the apostles in the way these treacherous apostates (self-proclaimed apostles) are described. They held to a form of godliness, but did not have revelation or power from the Holy Spirit. They were natural men, not spiritual, and like brute beasts they ravaged the sheep, causing confusion and division within the church and its leadership.<sup>12</sup> They knew well the hardships of the churches in every place and played upon this very fact to captivate a receptive audience.

Subtly, these false ministers gained an advantage, motivated by selfish desires, not seeking the welfare of the sheep or its fold, but only to promote themselves, their own name, for their own glory.<sup>13</sup> With self-sacrificing love no longer being the standard by which a true believer's confession of faith could be judged, another standard had to be found. So it was no wonder these "deceitful workers"<sup>14</sup> were able, through their speech and persuasion, to captivate the mind and intellect of the fallen church remnant. Community was no longer the "litmus test" by which the authenticity of their faith could be judged, but *doctrine* was hailed as the standard to determine whether one "believed." Their gospel required nothing more than mental assent, producing a dead religion of "belief" only. Hence, by the end of the third century, the church was splintered by bickering bishops and a docile laity, ready for a new era.

### THE FATAL TRANSITION: EMPEROR CONSTANTINE

According to some scholars, this new era brought the completion of a *fatal transition* from which the church would never again recover its original Judean pattern.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Acts 20:28-30 <sup>13</sup> John 7:17-18; Jude 1:8,12,13,17-19  
<sup>14</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:13 <sup>15</sup> "Between the years AD 100 and AD 500 the Christian Church changed almost beyond recognition. [At first] the organization of the church was still fluid... there were no creeds to be recited, no set forms of worship... [By AD 500] the worship of the church was entirely liturgical with fixed, set forms of prayer." (Tony Lane, *The Lion Book of Christian Thought*, Lion Publishing Company, Batavia, Illinois, 1984, p. 8)

Community, which had long ago dissolved,<sup>16</sup> was the only means by which those first disciples had shared a "common salvation." Its original structure and spiritual foundation was a *communal life*, yet by the fourth century the church had become entirely different in nature from the original pattern that is explicit in Acts 2:41-47 and 4:32-37, and assumed throughout the epistles.<sup>17</sup>

After a lengthy period of persecution, spiritual decline, and constant friction from within, Constantine baited the already-weakened ranks of the church. The Roman world during the second and third centuries had long been divided by the continual unrest of civil war, foreign invasion, and disorder of every sort. Constantine sought a means to unify the crumbling empire. At the same time, the churches of the western and eastern provinces suffered tremendously under the strain of both the Empire and the constant influence of apostates. Over two hundred years of factions from within and persecutions from without held the church continually in the place of compromise and hypocrisy.

Early in the fourth century, Constantine resolved to protect himself and his own provinces against the threat of other challenging Roman rulers and marauders who contended for control of the weakened empire. He went to war against Maxentius in order to secure his territories. The account of Bishop Eusebius, an ardent admirer of Constantine and a devout Christian, says that as Constantine approached Rome he was given a vision to conquer under the sign of the Cross. He had this emblem affixed to the shields of his soldiers (most of whom were pagans) as they went into battle. Far outnumbered by Maxentius' army, Constantine won a decisive victory. From then on, he worked tirelessly to unite the fractured church and bring it into intimate fellowship with the Roman state. This merger of church and state set the stage for Christianity's development over the next 1700 years.

### CONSTANTINE'S MANEUVER

Seizing the opportunity, Constantine maneuvered the church and its leaders through flattery, luring them into an

<sup>16</sup> Dissolve — 1) to fade away gradually and disappear, or make something gradually fade away and disappear; 2) to break up, or break something up, into smaller or more basic parts; 3) to bring a legal relationship, for example, a business partnership or a marriage, formally to an end. <sup>17</sup> 1 Thessalonians 2:14



inescapable relationship with that of the state. Eusebius proudly notes Constantine's gifts of money, property, and a massive church building program as the blessing of God to His once-struggling, persecuted church.<sup>18</sup> Publicly acknowledging the Christian God for the victory gained, Constantine believed this same God would now protect the Roman Empire from harm as long as the emperors worshiped Him and the church remained both united and devoted to the Empire. Sniffing the hope of an end to persecution and a path to prosperity, the leaders of the fourth-century church swallowed the bait, hook, line, and sinker.

Constantine called a series of church councils to bring unity among the bickering bishops. He didn't simply command them to come; he paid their expenses and even provided their means of getting there. Then, while still holding his position as the head of the state pagan religion, Constantine presided over the councils and enforced their decisions. These councils and the creeds that came forth from them are held in the highest regard in Christianity. They formed the basis of identifying what is and what is not Christian faith, practice, and doctrine ever since. From then on, they have been the foundation for all orthodox Christian faith and practice, both of which are far different from the life of the apostolic churches as recorded in the New Testament.<sup>19</sup>

After nearly three centuries of struggle, the walls between the church and the world came tumbling down,<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Eusebius, *The Church History of Eusebius*, Book X, Chapters VI and VII. As the Encarta 2000 article on Constantine puts it: "He gave huge estates and other gifts to the Christian church." And he did none of this, it should be noted, without expecting an ample return of loyalty and obedience on his investment.

<sup>19</sup> This exactly parallels the training of lawyers today in constitutional law. They are not taught the Constitution, but rather, the judicial interpretations of it, especially Supreme Court case law. Anyone comparing the two would be quite surprised by the difference. But as the saying goes, "The Constitution is what the Supreme Court says it is." Surprisingly, the same is true for the Bible. It is what the interpreters say it is, whether the early church fathers, the reformers, or the popes. If you don't think so, see whether you can find Christmas, complete with gift-giving and Santa Claus, in the Scriptures. Find a command to wage war in the New Testament. Look for the encouragement to gain worldly wealth and power. Find the educated clergy and silent laity. None are there, but rather, just the opposite. <sup>20</sup> As Roger Williams put it, "The Christian Church or Kingdom of the Saints, that Stone cut out of the mountain without human hands, (Daniel 2) now made all one with the mountain or Civil State, the Roman Empire,

completing its transformation.<sup>21</sup> Constantine promoted Christians to positions of prominence within the state and surrounded himself with Christian advisers. He exempted the clergy from the heavy and difficult duties of Roman citizenship.<sup>22</sup> After all, ethically and morally speaking, the Christians' code of living raised the standard of Roman society. Before long Constantine even had Christian bishops accompany his troops into battle to ensure God's favor and to strengthen the moral character of his armies. He built magnificent cathedrals and Roman buildings in honor of the Christian God and began paying salaries out of the state treasury to church leaders. He passed laws in favor of the church in exchange for obligatory state service.<sup>23</sup> He believed that a united and loyal church would ensure God's blessings on the entire empire.

### A NEW GOD, A NEW SIGN

One of the main reasons the religion of Christianity became the favored religion of governors and emperors was that it allowed Christians to be totally involved in nearly everything that any average citizen of the empire was involved in. Constantine groomed Christianity as his "pet religion" because of its docile, compromising nature.

While in the past the church had been persecuted for its stance against the Empire's evils, it was now accepted as both church and empire "turned over a new leaf" in their development.

It was no little change when the "pinch of incense" previous emperors had demanded (but usually not received)

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from whence it is cut or taken: Christ's lilies, garden and love, all one with the thorns, the daughters and wilderness of the World." [Bloudy Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience (1644), p. 174] <sup>21</sup> Transformation — a complete change, usually into something with an improved appearance or usefulness; a permanent change in the genetic makeup of a cell when it acquires foreign DNA. <sup>22</sup> Eusebius, *The Church History of Eusebius*, Book X, Chapters VI, which Frank Slaughter expounds on: "At the time of the Edict of Milan, the *clerici*, or clergy, had been recognized as a separate class of individuals and freed from many of the onerous duties devolving upon Roman citizens. As a result, there had been an immediate rush of wealthy people into the ranks of the clergy and from time to time it had been necessary to issue edicts controlling this trend." (Slaughter, *Constantine — The Miracle of the Flaming Cross*) <sup>23</sup> This is where the word *liturgy* came from! "The service of the state (*leitourgia*) became the ritual, or liturgy, of the church;" and "the decree of the assembly and the opinions of the philosophers (*dogma*) became the fixed opinion of Christianity;" and "the correct opinion (*orthodoxa*) about things became orthodox." [Encyclopedia Britannica, Macropaedia, v. 12, p. 785 (1979)]

was now freely given for the sake of imperial protection and support. Indeed, what other emperors had never gained from Christians by the sword — the recognition of their own divinity — the church now freely gave to Constantine! As the Catholic Encyclopedia article on Constantine the Great puts it:

*The imperial power was increased by receiving a religious consecration. The Church tolerated the cult of the emperor under many forms. It was permitted to speak of the divinity of the emperor, of the sacred palace, the sacred chamber and of the altar of the emperor, without being considered on this account an idolater... For what his predecessors had aimed to attain by the use of all their authority and at the cost of incessant bloodshed, was in truth only the recognition of their own divinity; Constantine gained this end, though he renounced the offering of sacrifices to himself. Some bishops, blinded by the splendor of the court, even went so far as to laud the emperor as an angel of God, as a sacred being, and to prophesy that he would, like the Son of God, reign in heaven.<sup>24</sup>*

Thus, as the American visionary Roger Williams wrote, “Christianity fell asleep in the bosom of Constantine, and the laps and bosoms of those Emperors who professed the name of Christ.”<sup>25</sup>

In this sleepy state, the distinction between Christians and non-Christians was broken down, and more and more pagans became “believers,” since Christianity was now the favored religion, offering a greater hope of worldly success and prosperity. Nor was Constantine insensitive to the vast pagan population of his empire. To ease their way into his new, but up-and-coming Roman religion, Constantine set aside the “venerable day of the Sun” as the official day of rest of the Roman Empire. This was the first day of the week, which we know as Sunday, and the day on which most of his people already worshiped the sun god.<sup>26</sup> He did this in A.D. 321 in the following very clear words:

<sup>24</sup> Herbermann, C., & Grupp, G. (1908). “Constantine the Great” in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*. NY: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved June 23, 2010 from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04295c.htm> <sup>25</sup> Williams, *Bloudy Tenent*, p. 184 <sup>26</sup> “Sun worship with its Sun-day became dominant in Rome and in other parts of the Empire from the early part of the second century A.D. The Invincible Sun-god became the chief god of the Roman Pantheon and was worshiped especially on the Dies Solis, that is, “the Day of

*On the venerable day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed.<sup>27</sup>*

But it was no mere political concern that empowered Constantine... something far greater was at work. In *this* act, ironically, Constantine was an *instrument of God* to do His will. In taking the sign of the Sabbath down he was only proclaiming what had long been true — that Christians were no longer God’s people, loving His word and keeping His commandments — including the Ten Commandments! The fourth commandment, the longest of the ten, is certainly more than a mere “jot or tittle” of the Law, the

setting aside of which makes you least in the kingdom of heaven.<sup>28</sup> The

Ten Commandments were, according to Exodus 34:28, “the very words of the covenant” between God and His people. And the Sabbath was explicitly “a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you.”<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, changing the day of rest could only be done by the authority of “another

Jesus” and “another spirit,” as Paul warned in 2 Corinthians 11:4. The authority of the gentle Lamb of God, who came “not to destroy men’s lives but to save them,”<sup>30</sup> was set aside for the *new savior* — the one who proclaimed from the heavens on the eve of battle, “In *this* sign, conquer.” Truly, Constantine “did not know what manner of spirit”<sup>31</sup> he was of to think that the Savior was validating or commanding the killing of those He came to save. Tragically, those who should have known better enthusiastically joined Constantine in his quest for world dominion. Those who gain the whole world lose their own soul.<sup>32</sup>

Proclaiming the Day of the Sun to be the new day of rest for Rome, Constantine and the church leadership were busy creating a new religion, one the world calls Christianity. And this new sign of who God’s people are has taken hold the world over, hasn’t it? Constantine’s

the Sun,” known in our calendar as Sunday.” Essay by S. Bacchiocchi, “From Sabbath to Sunday: How Did It Come About?” <sup>27</sup> *Codex Justinianus* lib. 3, tit. 12, 3; trans. in Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 3, p. 380, note 1. <sup>28</sup> Matthew 5:17-19 <sup>29</sup> Exodus 31:13 <sup>30</sup> Luke 9:56 <sup>31</sup> Luke 9:55, which was said when His own apostles wanted to call fire down on the Samaritans for their insulting treatment of the Savior. <sup>32</sup> Luke 9:23-26

“venerable day of the Sun” is everywhere recognized as the set-apart day of Christians — no less than the Jewish Sabbath, or Friday as the Muslim day of prayer.<sup>33</sup> As one encyclopedia article notes:

*Thus, Constantine, who had been a pagan solar worshiper, now looked upon the Christian deity as a bringer of victory. Persecution of the Christians was ended, and Constantine’s co-emperor, Licinius, joined him in issuing the Edict of Milan (313), which mandated toleration of Christians in the Roman Empire. As guardian of Constantine’s favored religion, the church was then given legal rights and large financial donations.<sup>34</sup>*

Hailed as the deliverer and emancipator of the church, Constantine was then and still is viewed as a savior, securing the church’s position in the world that would span the centuries. Most of the Christianized world today is content with the doctrines of faith that came down through the spiritual lineage of a nationally recognized Roman religion, never questioning very deeply the roots of their Christian religion or the foundation of the gospel they have trusted in.

<sup>33</sup> There are some “Sabbath-keeping” Christians around the world, but they are a tiny minority of her two billion strong. As they themselves would admit, they live lives virtually indistinguishable from their neighbors. <sup>34</sup> “Constantine the Great,” *Encarta* 2000.

The legacy of Constantine is a church at one with the world that it was commissioned to call others out of. That legacy remains.

So, is this intimate cooperation and compromise with worldly power a good tree from which to pick good fruit? The Son of God said that a tree is known by the fruit it produces.<sup>35</sup> He said His disciples would be known by their love.<sup>36</sup> And this love is what all the Law and the Prophets hang on, as the Savior said:

*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 22:37-40)*

Not only did *He* come to fulfill the Law and Prophets;<sup>37</sup> but obviously, *He* commands *us* to fulfill them also. Therefore His words condemn both Constantine and Christianity, and *all who claim to believe in Him* are exposed as false if they do not keep these words: loving God with all their heart, soul, and strength, and in the same way, loving their neighbor as themselves. ✱

<sup>35</sup> Matthew 7:16-20 <sup>36</sup> John 13:34-35 <sup>37</sup> Matthew 5:17-19

## THE CHURCH COUNCILS OF THE EMPEROR

The high drama of the first council of Nicaea has sadly been much neglected by playwrights. Not only is this event called “one of the most important in the history of Christianity” by *Encyclopedia Britannica*, but its powerful images cry out for the Shakespeares of the world to imprint them on the human imagination. Here is the regal emperor, casually retaining his leadership of the Roman state pagan religion, even its title *Pontifex Maximus*, as he coolly calls one major gathering of Christian bishops after another. He first exercised his power to gather the bishops to do his bidding because of a controversy in the Church, as though the emperor should have anything to do with it.

This was no ordinary gathering of clerics. Constantine didn’t simply command them to come; he paid their expenses and even provided their means of getting there. This “imperial injunction” was the compelling force that brought about the Council of Nicaea. Was the very setting of the councils their message? If so, then their statements of faith are insignificant in the history of Christianity in comparison to their setting. The bishops gathering at imperial expense, presided over by the emperor himself, whose decrees were upheld by his power, then becomes the essential message of the council. Almost every historian says the church married the state under Constantine, but maybe it did far more than that. Maybe it actually merged with the world.

These councils and the creeds that came forth from them are held in the highest regard in Christianity. They form the basis of identifying what is and what is not Christian faith, practice, and doctrine ever since. From then on, they have formed the foundation for all orthodox Christian faith and practice, contempt of the Savior’s words: “*By this all men will know that you are My disciples: if you have love for one another.*” (John 13:35)

# UPON THIS ROCK

*Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

*Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:16-18)*

Many have quoted this verse to prove the impossibility of the gates of Hades (the realm of the dead) prevailing against the church. They assume that regardless of the spiritual and moral condition of the church, God has never withdrawn His Holy Spirit from her, for a body without a spirit is dead, and that would mean the gates of death had prevailed against the church. But this is not what Yahshua was promising to Peter that day.

What Yahshua confirmed in Peter was that he was hearing from the Father — receiving revelation — not merely repeating what other men might have said. Peter had heard in his heart that Yahshua was the Messiah, and that revelation caused him to pledge his utter devotion and obedience to Him. Now that was something Yahshua could work with — people who could hear from His Father and obey what they heard. Upon such revelation He could build an eternal dwelling place for His Father's Spirit, for that, after all, is what the church is supposed to be (Eph 2:20-22).

The Master said things like this to His disciples many times, such as in this familiar passage:

*Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it. (Matthew 7:24-27)*

Hearing and obeying is the foundation of the house that will endure all that comes against it, and wise is the man who builds on that rock. But foolish is the man who builds his house on those who hear but *do not obey*. That house will not withstand the test. The floods of deception and the shifting winds of doctrine will prevail against that house.

So was Yahshua, the Son of the Living God, a wise man or a foolish man? Was He contradicting Himself by saying that the house He was building would endure *regardless* of whether it was built on the foundation of hearing and obeying His words?

Many years later, in the waning days of the first-century church, the writer of Hebrews wrote this to the church:

*But Christ was faithful as a Son over His house — whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end. (Hebrews 3:6)*

The Greek word translated as "confidence" literally means *freedom in speaking; unreservedness in speech*. It is an outspokenness that comes from the confidence that one is hearing and obeying Messiah's words. Such outspokenness characterized the gatherings of the early church (1 Cor 14:26), when they were devoted to the apostles' teachings, but as the first century drew to a close and the churches were drifting from the simplicity of their first devotion (2 Cor 11:3-4), their gatherings degenerated to rote ritual and a professional clergy. That is the record of history. So, were they still "His house" in spite of Hebrews 3:6?

Here's another promise Yahshua made to His disciples:

*He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will reveal Myself to him... If anyone loves me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. (John 14:21,23)*

Those who truly love Him obey Him, and He reveals Himself to them, which causes them to love and obey Him all the more. It is with such as these that He makes His home. He went on to say, "Whoever does not love Me does not keep My words." What can be said about them? Are they also His dwelling place? ❀

*If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. (1 Corinthians 16:22)*



# THE RISE AND FALL OF THE EARLY CHURCH

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common... And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.*  
(Acts 2:42-44; 4:32-35)

What was the church like when it began in the first century? What image do you picture in your mind? Probably a very common one that you've seen drawn many times by artists, maybe even in a movie. Jesus is walking on the shore of the Sea of Galilee with His twelve apostles, teaching these rough-looking fishermen to become "fishers of men." But then flash ahead to today. Why is the image so different, so less radical today than it was then? It's an image of comfort now, with rows of nicely-dressed people bowing their heads as the priest or the preacher leads them through the liturgy.



circle, as in Mark 3:34. In fact, they were together every day, working together, and sharing their new life with others.<sup>2</sup> These communities were organized into twelve tribes in their different geographical locations, which formed a new spiritual nation called *Israel*.<sup>3</sup>

Although they lived in normal towns and were not *isolated* from society, they were *insulated* from the fallen culture of the society around them.<sup>4</sup> They were set apart, having a different culture altogether.<sup>5</sup> Where the Romans were devoted to entertainment and pleasure, the disciples were devoted to loving one another, especially caring for widows and orphans.<sup>6</sup> There were no poor among them,<sup>7</sup> because those who had means gladly shared all they had.

Love was the primary message of the early church. But their message was not a mere sermon from a pulpit. (They didn't even have a pulpit or a single person doing all the talking — *all* came prepared to share thanksgiving, a song, a teaching, even a prophecy.<sup>8</sup>) No, the message was lived out by all. Every day was spent caring for each other in practical ways, and laying down their lives for each other. This was the substance, the visible reality of the new commandment

## THE EARLY CHURCH WAS A COMMUNITY

You may be surprised to find out that the early church was not a weekly gathering in a church building, looking at the backs of the heads of people you rarely see during the week. In fact, there is no record of a church building for the first two hundred years.<sup>1</sup> No, the early church was a community of people, a group of disciples sharing a common life together, who gathered every morning and evening in a

<sup>1</sup> The earliest known "church" building dates from AD 232. "As Christian congregations grew in size, they began to remodel their homes to accommodate their growing numbers... The earliest identifiable Christian meeting place was simply a private home remodeled as a Christian gathering place around AD 232... [It] was essentially a house with a wall torn out between two bedrooms to create a large living room." (*Pagan Christianity*, F. Viola and G. Barna, Tyndale Publishing, 2002, p. 15) <sup>2</sup> Acts 2:42-48; 4:32-37

<sup>3</sup> Acts 26:7; Isaiah 49:6; James 1:5; Revelation 21:12; Galatians 6:16; Ephesians 2:12 <sup>4</sup> As the royal priesthood of 1 Peter 2:9, they kept themselves pure, just as the apostles instructed them (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1). <sup>5</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:16-18 <sup>6</sup> James 1:29-31 <sup>7</sup> Acts 4:34 <sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:24-26

of their Lord: “Love one another as I have loved you. By this all men will know that you are My disciples.”<sup>9</sup>

This love created a new social order called *community*. Those disciples with wealth sold their assets and laid the entire sum at the feet of the apostles.<sup>10</sup> This simple act revealed their belief as nothing else could. Because of the love of God that had been poured into their hearts,<sup>11</sup> they gave all they had — all they’d gained in life, all that supported them. The generosity they had for their poorer brothers, their radical forsaking of material wealth, and their affectionate trust for their shepherds were part and parcel of their faith. Such acts were not just the noble zeal of a few impulsive zealots, but a *way of life* practiced by all.<sup>12</sup> Community was the result of love in action. Who were and weren’t believers then was very clear.<sup>13</sup>

As they obeyed the new commandment to love one another as their Master had loved them, each disciple was assured in his own heart that he had truly passed out of death and into life.<sup>14</sup> They knew our Master was pleased with them, for He had prayed for His disciples to be one, just as the Father and the Son are one.<sup>15</sup> This confidence grew as the watching world observed the visible demonstration of their love for one another.<sup>16</sup> But more than that, the Holy Spirit communicated to their hearts an assurance that they had eternal life<sup>17</sup> because they were loving their brothers and living together in unity — the very place where God commands the blessing of eternal life.<sup>18</sup> If they ever lost their love and drifted apart, they would lose this confidence as well. That could only come from *another spirit*<sup>19</sup> — not the Holy Spirit.

Love produced a full-featured culture based on the teachings of the Messiah. He had said that all of the Law and the Prophets hang on two commandments: to love God with all of your heart, soul, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself.<sup>20</sup> All of the prophecies yet unfulfilled depended on this love being expressed first and foremost. All of the instructions in the Law were impossible to fulfill without clinging to love just as a climber scaling a cliff clings

to every handhold in the rock. No benefit would come from trying to obey the Law without love. The scribes and Pharisees had demonstrated that all too well. But as the first disciples hung on to love, a new and living way to fulfill the Law opened up to them.

## THE SABBATH WAS A SIGN OF BEING “SET APART” FROM THE WORLD

They kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the same way they kept all the feasts and sabbaths: in a new and living way.<sup>21</sup> The early disciples understood that they were set-apart from the world into communities in order to be made holy.<sup>22</sup> The process of being made holy or pure meant learning to overcome their iniquities and to love one another from a pure heart.<sup>23</sup> The Sabbath was a sign between Yahweh and His people that He was doing this work of purification, called sanctification.<sup>24</sup> That is why there was a command in the New as well as the Old Testament to keep the Sabbath:

*There remains therefore a Sabbath-keeping for the people of God. (Hebrews 4:9)<sup>25</sup>*

At first, most of the early disciples were Jews who had grown up keeping the Law, many with the zeal of Peter, who could say as a mature adult and disciple, “I have never eaten anything common or unclean.” When they became disciples, they continued keeping the Law, not in the legalistic way of Judaism, with its man-made regulations, but with revelation and joy, knowing that it was their Father’s wise instruction to His people.<sup>26</sup>

For example, they understood that the Sabbath was an important sign, coming from the Law of Moses which they knew so well: “Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you [set you apart].” Now more than ever, the early disciples were set apart for a special purpose — to love. This was how they would fulfill Israel’s prophetic purpose of being “a light to

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Those disciples with wealth  
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<sup>9</sup> John 13:34-35 <sup>10</sup> Acts 4:34-35 <sup>11</sup> Roman 5:5 <sup>12</sup> When one couple merely pretended to give all in Acts 5:1-11, their sudden death was a sobering object lesson to all. <sup>13</sup> Malachi 3:16-18 <sup>14</sup> 1 John 3:16,24 <sup>15</sup> John 17:21 <sup>16</sup> Matthew 24:14; 1 Peter 2:12 <sup>17</sup> Psalm 133; 1 John 3:24 <sup>18</sup> Psalm 133:1-3 <sup>19</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:4 <sup>20</sup> Matthew 22:37-40

<sup>21</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:7-8; Acts 20:6 and in Acts 20:7-8 they gathered to break bread at the end of the Sabbath, after the sun had set, marking the beginning of the first day of the week. Paul departed the following morning, not wanting to travel on the Sabbath.

<sup>22</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:2 <sup>23</sup> 1 Timothy 1:5 <sup>24</sup> Exodus 31:13-18

<sup>25</sup> It is not “rest” as many translations say, but literally “Sabbath-keeping.” The problem in translation for this verse does not lie in the Greek, but in the translator’s theology. <sup>26</sup> Romans 8:4



the Gentiles” and “bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”<sup>27</sup>

Because of their great importance prophetically,<sup>28</sup> Paul instructed the disciples that they were not to let anyone but the Body of Messiah judge them about how they kept the Sabbath or the New Moon festivals.<sup>29</sup> As their new culture developed, the early disciples also began to gather on the first day of the week for festivals. The Sabbath was for resting and for evangelism, while the first day of the week was for celebrating the resurrection, beginning on the evening of the first day (what we call Saturday night). Sometimes those in smaller communities would travel to a nearby larger community that could accommodate a “First Day Festival.” We know this from several accounts, the first by Ignatius, who died in 107 AD:

*And after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord’s day as a festival, the resurrection-day...<sup>30</sup>*

The second, and later account was by a man named Justin Martyr. He was a Samaritan philosopher who grew up pagan. After becoming a believer in Christ, he defended the beliefs of the early church to governors and officials. Somewhere around 150 AD, he described what the church did then:

*And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits... Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly.<sup>31</sup>*

## CHANGE BRINGS LETTIERS OF CORRECTION

The first community was in Jerusalem, but the gospel quickly spread around the Mediterranean Sea, north to

Turkey, west to Greece and Italy, and south to Egypt and Africa. The pagan influences in the new places pulled much harder on the souls of the new disciples. These people did not have the background in the Law of Moses as the first disciples in Jerusalem did, but had been steeped in the idolatry and immorality of the day. They required more care and instruction to remain set apart and not slip back into the popular culture, but it was a constant battle — one that was often lost.

In the beginning, the communities were self-governing clans, loosely connected in a confederation under the care of the apostles. Local elders ruled the clans,<sup>32</sup> watching over their flocks and themselves to preserve the unity and love

between them, both within and between their communities. Yahshua had said, “The kings of the nations lord it over them; but you are not to be like that. The greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.”<sup>33</sup>

In a short time, charismatic bishops arose to keep the flock in check.

Their power came through the force of their great intellects, both within and without the church.

They often had a philosophical or legal background, which equipped them to engage in complex

arguments to attempt make *their* religion agreeable to the governors and philosophers of the day. The

apostles noticed a change, and wrote letters of correction and warning. The

most outstanding of these is First John, but the letter of Jude addresses the same

issues, and so do the opening chapters of the Book of Revelation. Their first love was fading,

but only a few overcomers noticed.

A paradigm shift took place: right doctrine replaced brotherly love as the “litmus test” of true belief.<sup>34</sup> “Keeping the faith” used to mean holding fast to the love they had at first, which was the basis for everything a disciple did.

Eventually, “the faith” was reduced to intellectual argument about words and doctrines.<sup>35</sup> The prevailing Greek culture was known for its love of debate, its rhetoric, and its logic.

These aspects seeped into the church undetected, as the precious but fragile culture of love collapsed under the spiritual blows of those who loved “to have the preeminence among them.”<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Titus 1:5 <sup>33</sup> Luke 22:26 <sup>34</sup> See the article, *The Paradigm Shift from Community to Doctrine* on page 36. <sup>35</sup> 1 Timothy 6:4; 2 Timothy 2:14; 4:3 <sup>36</sup> 3 John 1:9-10

**A paradigm shift  
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They left their first love,  
and soon the light in them  
became darkness.**



The disciples in the different places abandoned the love they had at first. Paul had exhorted the Ephesians to “love our Master Yahshua the Messiah with an undying (or incorruptible) love.”<sup>37</sup> But forty years later, the Revelation the Apostle John received included a solemn warning from Yahshua Himself to the church in Ephesus:

*But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. (Revelation 2:4-5)*

In just forty years, the church had nearly completed the process of losing its lampstand. The fuel for these lampstands was the love between brothers, shining for the world to see. The churches were out of oil. Since there was no light, the lampstand would be removed, too, and most would not even notice the difference. The Holy Spirit was not confirming the disciples for their life of love, and soon He would depart completely. Millions of new converts would come in over the coming centuries, but none would receive the Holy Spirit.

It is not known when all the lampstands of the early church were taken out of the way, but it seemingly started with the Corinthians. Paul noted in *his lifetime* that they received “another Jesus...a different spirit...a different gospel” — that they even “bore it beautifully!”<sup>38</sup> And the Savior Himself took note of the fall of the Ephesian church. They fell out of love with their Savior and one another, and fell into what it is now: a weekly meeting where everyone looks at the backs of each other's heads, rather than daily gathering in a circle to speak and sing to one another, discerning the Body of Messiah.

The key to understanding what happened is realizing that everything hangs on obedience to the two greatest commandments He spoke of Matthew 22:37-40. When love left, only ritual remained, and the cancer spread like gangrene throughout all of the clans and tribes. Along with the change from love to doctrine came the Nicolaitan (clergy/laity) system, dominated by bishops who did most of the talking and ruling, lording it over their flocks. With the rise of the Nicolaitan the priesthood of all believers ceased to have any reality in the churches, which

is true to this day. These mutated churches were warned that God *hates* this system, as it suppresses the full participation by each and every member.<sup>39</sup> In the face of such a stern warning, the bishops seized more and more power, gaining clout over large areas that would eventually take on the Roman name of *diocese*. The same Ignatius quoted earlier was a chief early proponent of such ruling bishops.<sup>40</sup> He wrote after the death of the last apostle, John, that the churches were to:

*Do nothing without the bishop... It is not lawful to baptize without the consent of the bishop. On the other hand, whatever has his approval is pleasing to God.*

A new religion was beginning, one far from the simple life of love the Community in Jerusalem had known.

Out of the fifty “Early Church Fathers” whose writings remain, only two make even a passing reference to the commandment of our Master to “love one another as I have loved you.”<sup>41</sup> Beginning in the second century, creeds and catechisms of faith became increasingly important as keystones in Christianity. Surprisingly, *none* of these contains a single reference to the Master’s “new commandment” or the two greatest commandments on which hang all the Law and the Prophets. In fact, even the words, “love one another” are strangely absent from all of them.

Over time, the communities lost their distinction of being set-apart from the surrounding society. They were not being purified in their love. Divisions were rampant and bitter, especially among the leadership as they strove to prove their points. Their weapons became carnal, and as history shows, soon enough they became physical. Those who had been rich or poor outside the church remained rich and poor inside.<sup>42</sup> Pagan customs and rituals slipped into the church. Of course, they stopped living in community. One can hardly blame them — without love, community is a torture chamber for the flesh.



<sup>37</sup> Ephesians 6:24    <sup>38</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:2-4

<sup>39</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:26    <sup>40</sup> There were be many more after him in the rise of the episcopate system that culminated in the greatest Nicolaitan of all — the bishop of Rome. He would (and does) claim authority over the entire church as the living voice of Peter the apostle.    <sup>41</sup> These scholars came to be called the “Early Church Fathers.”    <sup>42</sup> James 5:1; and so the great hope and calling of Deuteronomy 15:4 ended, along with the rest of the prophecies of how God’s people would be a light to the world.

## THE LAMPSTANDS ARE OUT

A fire broke out in Rome in 64 AD, destroying much of the city and the Emperor's palace. The disciples were blamed for it, unleashing the wrath of the Romans against them. Three years later, the Jewish people in Palestine revolted, and three years after that the city of Jerusalem was flaming ruins. These events worked together to effect a change between the two groups.

In the beginning, it was convenient for the early church to be known as a "sect of the Jews,"<sup>43</sup> as it gave them legal status in the midst of Roman culture. But when the Jewish uprising against Roman rule unleashed fierce persecution upon them, many in the church wanted to distance themselves from their Hebrew roots.

Paul's warnings against Jewish legalism were a good excuse to jettison any unnecessary Jewish baggage. Within several generations, many Christians saw little benefit to keeping the Sabbath anymore. The process was much more noticeable in Rome than in the East. But from our Father's perspective whether they kept the Sabbath on the seventh day mattered far less than whether they loved one another as the first disciples had in Jerusalem. Without that self-sacrificing love and sharing, the sign of the Sabbath was invalid, as it no longer signified that Yahweh was their God

<sup>43</sup> Acts 24:5

and that they were His set-apart people whom He was purifying. In many places, they stopped keeping the Sabbath. Instead, the Christians were known for their faithful attendance in the pagan festivals of the day. The farther they were from the days of the apostles, the faster things changed. Tertullian writes in 197 AD:

*To we Christians nowadays, the Sabbaths are strange, and the new moons and festivals are just a memory of what was formerly beloved by God. But alas, we frequent the Saturnalia and New-Year's and Midwinter's festivals and Matronalia. Presents come and go — New-Year's gifts — games join their noise — banquets join their din! We do everything that the nations do. Alas, they are more faithful to their own sect than we to ours. They would not have participated in the Lord's day, nor Pentecost, even if they were invited, for they would be afraid of appearing to be Christians. But we are not the least bit worried about appearing to be heathens!<sup>44</sup>*

So Christianity remains to this day! ❄

<sup>44</sup> From Tertullian, *Of Blasphemy*, ANF03, Ch. Xiv in *Apology*. Many of these festivals from ancient Rome live on in Christendom today, but under assumed names. Saturnalia is now Christmas, New Years remains New Years, and Matronalia became Mother's day.

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and the new moons and festivals are just a memory of what  
was formerly beloved by God. But alas, we frequent the Saturnalia  
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But we are not the least bit worried  
about appearing to be heathens!”  
~Tertullian, 197 AD***

# THE PARADIGM SHIFT FROM COMMUNITY TO DOCTRINE

*Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation,  
I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith  
that was once for all delivered to the saints.  
(Jude 1:3)*

After the first century, right doctrine became the “litmus test” for faith instead of loving as Yahshua<sup>1</sup> commanded.<sup>2</sup> Late in the first century, Jude urged the believers to *contend* for the faith delivered once for all to the saints. This word translated as *faith* means the persuasion to do what the Master commanded, for this was the purpose for the faith the 3000 received by hearing the gospel on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:36-45.<sup>3</sup> The word *love* was defined by Yahshua in John 14 and 15 in the same terms, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments,”<sup>4</sup> which is amplified in John 15, “Keep my commandments... just as I have kept My Father’s commandments.”<sup>5</sup>

Faith, trust, and obedience were the guiding lights of the first disciples, whose faith turned the world upside down.<sup>6</sup> But today the word *faith* in Jude 1:3 is taken to simply mean the knowledge and assent to religious truths, without regard to good works, which is therefore a false faith.<sup>7</sup> In reality, the only assurance of faith is Ephesians 2:10 and 4:16 — doing the good works one was saved to do in order to build up the Body. These things are the very reason one is saved!

<sup>1</sup> Yahshua is the Hebrew name of the Savior; see *The Name Above All Names* on page 12. <sup>2</sup> John 13:34-35; 1 John 3:14,16,23; 5:12-13 <sup>3</sup> Romans 10:17 where *faith*, #4102 in Strong’s Greek Concordance of the New Testament, comes from #3982, which means *persuasion*. The latter word is often translated *trust* in the KJV in places such as Mark 10:24 and Luke 20:6. <sup>4</sup> John 14:15, also verses 21 and 23 strike the same note, a threefold repetition by the Savior of the same theme in just a few words. Obviously obedience was something He considered of vital importance for His disciples. <sup>5</sup> John 15:10, which is itself an amplification of some of His first words to His disciples in Matthew 5:17-19 about keeping His Father’s word and teaching others to do the same.

<sup>6</sup> Acts 17:6 in the KJV. <sup>7</sup> James 2:14-26



*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)*

## HERE IS AN AMAZING THING!

So Jude 1:3 has nothing whatsoever to do with doctrinal correctness, as the context in verse 4 proves:

*For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. (Jude 1:4)*

Here Jude speaks of grace being turned into license to do your own thing,

doing what is right in your own eyes. This started to overtake the early church when there was no longer true authority from God in the church.<sup>8</sup> There was no restraint; each one did whatever he wanted, but still maintained a form of godliness, although denying its power.

This reveals an amazing thing: doctrine, or the right theology, requires no *faith* to believe.<sup>9</sup> All it takes is mental assent, and all it gives in return is mental confidence. Such “faith” results historically (and currently) in living lives indistinguishable from the surrounding world — living independently rather than together with other believers.<sup>10</sup> In this truly applies the wisdom of the ancients, “He who separates himself seeks his own desire.”<sup>11</sup>

Yes, true faith is for the purpose of doing the works prepared for one to do in the Body of Messiah, which is the Community of the Redeemed, and which must be just as real and alive as the community in Jerusalem described in Acts 2 and 4. Theology requires no faith, but John 13:34-35

<sup>8</sup> Judges 17:6; 21:25 <sup>9</sup> James 2:19 <sup>10</sup> Acts 2:44 <sup>11</sup> Proverbs 18:1

does require faith, for it transcends what any man can do naturally:

*“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

## THE LITMUS TEST

John the Apostle spelled out the true “litmus test” of faith in his first letter. A litmus test decisively proves the presence or absence of a particular ingredient. The litmus test of 1 John reveals the presence or absence of God’s love, which is the evidence of true faith. 1 John 3:14 reveals the truth or falsehood of one’s claim to have passed from death into life:

*<sup>14</sup>We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. <sup>16</sup>By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. <sup>23</sup>And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.*

1 John 3:16 and 23 also require faith, without which even someone with the right doctrine won’t pass the litmus test of 1 John 3:14 — regardless of whether he says he believes.<sup>12</sup> Believing the right doctrine requires no faith, no love, and no laying down of one’s life for his brothers.

*“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” (Romans 12:1-2)*

No one can do Romans 12:1 unless he obeys verse 2 by faith as well. Otherwise, the faith of Jude 1:3 is merely doctrine, the theology of theologians, learned men who can quote many scripture verses, but laying down their lives as 1 John 3:16 says is far from them. They can only teach their flocks the same “faith” as they have. A student, when fully trained, will be like his teacher. So their empty “faith” has

<sup>12</sup> John 5:24

been passed down ever since theological Bible schools have existed on earth. They have no relationship with the true Messiah<sup>13</sup> and can only foster mental assent to theological terms, concepts, and decrees thought up by the apostates of the fourth century.<sup>14</sup>

These apostate leaders valued doctrine higher than love, and three centuries after Messiah’s death began persecuting people, deposing bishops, and banishing into exile those considered to have the wrong doctrine. Ultimately, they started killing those they deemed heretics. So why is it always those with the right doctrine who end up killing those with the wrong doctrine? They obviously didn’t understand 1 Corinthians 1:10 in the right spirit:



*The church turned from being the persecuted to being the persecutor.*

*Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

Paul is pleading for the brothers in Corinth to be in unity; he is pleading in the very name by which they were saved. He is *pleading*, not *forcing* — you can’t force unity. Forced unity is not the right spirit. As 2 Corinthians 11:4,13-15 clearly

states, only Satan’s servants or ministers could ever do what the Christian theologians did to dissenters. All this was in absolute violation of the Master’s words to leave them alone, to let them be.<sup>15</sup>

The reason Jude so urgently said to *contend* for the faith that was imparted in the beginning was because he saw change coming in — a terrible change away from the pattern in Acts 2 and 4 and toward what would become the state church of Constantine. We can see the change in the way Christians thought, being persuaded and influenced by a different spirit, propagated by a different gospel, and ending up with a different Jesus from the one they accepted in the beginning.<sup>16</sup>

## THE TRAGEDY OF CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Starting with their acceptance by Emperor Constantine, the church turned from being the *persecuted* to being the

<sup>13</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:4,15 <sup>14</sup> See *The Church Councils of the Emperor* at <http://theblackboxspeaks.org/church-councils.html>

<sup>15</sup> John 12:47-48; Luke 9:54-55, NKJV; Acts 5:34-39, and the apostle Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 5:12-13. <sup>16</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:2-4; Galatians 1:6-7

persecutor. But by that time, the Holy Spirit had long ago left the church.<sup>17</sup> No longer could anyone truthfully confess that Messiah “is come in the flesh” at their church, since it was no longer a community where all things were held in common.<sup>18</sup> Neither could anyone say from his *experience* that he served the Savior *where He is*,<sup>19</sup> but only from his mind. As the church declined in its love in every place,<sup>20</sup> in spite of Paul’s exhortation to them in Ephesians to love Messiah with an undying, incorruptible love,<sup>21</sup> none seemed to be able to pass the litmus test of 1 John 5:13. This was because active, real, sacrificial love of one’s brothers and sisters was no longer the emphasis,<sup>22</sup> but rather mental assent to a list of doctrines now called “The Faith.” So this doctrinal “faith” replaced the works true faith was meant to energize, as James later wrote in the second century.<sup>23</sup>

So very early on, as the church careened down its fatal decline, the emphasis shifted to doctrinal correctness, which is now considered the evidence of faith. But Jude, who wrote by the end of the first century, looking into the second, urged that they *contend* or have a vigorous defense of the faith delivered once and for all to God’s people. What he meant by this was the faith that produced the expression of the abundant life recorded in Acts 2 and 4. That was “the faith once for all delivered to the saints.”<sup>24</sup> But faith only came to those who had ears to hear.<sup>25</sup>

When love left, the Holy Spirit left, and the light (the lampstands in each place) was extinguished.<sup>26</sup> Eventually those who were as John 9:41 describes took the word *contend* in Jude 1:3 to mean taking up arms to force their “right doctrine” upon those with “wrong doctrine” under pain of death. This was contrary to the words of the true Messiah, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight.”<sup>27</sup>

## THE “SIGN” OF SANCTIFICATION

Jude echoed the Apostle Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 1:2 in the opening of his epistle, when he wrote to the few who were not yet disqualified:



*To those who are called, sanctified [set apart] in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. (Jude 1:1-2)*



This sanctification was to be an obvious sign of God’s set apart people in the New Covenant *just as it was to have been in the Old*. They were to be separated by God’s purifying work in their lives from the lust and greed and anger and hatred of the world around them. And the sign of this sanctification, both within and without this new Israel, was still the Sabbath, as the writer to the Hebrews made clear:

*There remains therefore a sabbath-keeping for the people of God [i.e., for those who enter God’s rest]. (Hebrews 4:9)*



So Jude’s words were addressed to those who were *still* set apart by God the Father, and kept for Messiah. May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you, who are *sanctified* as in 1 Corinthians 1:2. At that time there were still those separated from the world in the Body of Messiah, the Community, as in Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-37. They were set apart in a *place* where the refining process took place in each one’s life, which cannot be accomplished unless one is separated from fellowship with the world in a place where Messiah actually dwells in His Body.<sup>28</sup> The Sabbath was like a sign over each place where God was sanctifying His people:



*Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: “Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you*

*throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.” (Exodus 31:13)*

<sup>17</sup> Revelation 2:4-5 <sup>18</sup> 1 John 4:2-3 <sup>19</sup> John 12:25-26

<sup>20</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:2 <sup>21</sup> Ephesians 6:24 <sup>22</sup> 1 John 3:16 and 23

<sup>23</sup> James 1:26-27; 2:14-26 <sup>24</sup> Acts 2:44-45 <sup>25</sup> Acts 2:40; John 18:37; 10:27 <sup>26</sup> Revelation 2:4-5 <sup>27</sup> John 18:36

<sup>28</sup> John 12:26

In 1 Corinthians 1:2, “in every place” means in every township where God’s name had been caused to dwell by the direct process of John 13:20 — “He who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” Starting from Jerusalem, the first community swarmed to surrounding towns in Judea, and it was according to this “Judean pattern” that Paul modeled the communities he established.<sup>29</sup> Of course, it was “with persecutions,” as Mark 10:29-30 promises. This is the mark of those who have separated themselves in a place in which they can be made pure as 1 John 3:1-3, “That they may see Him as He is, and everyone who has this hope in them purifies himself as He is pure.”<sup>30</sup>

Mark 10:29-30 was the Master’s answer to His disciples’ question, “Who then can be saved?”<sup>31</sup> It is the answer never given by Christian preachers today. Verse 27 explains how one is saved by *obedience to His gospel*, thus proving they have been persuaded to do His will. Someone has to receive the faith to not only believe in Him, but to do what He required of all whom He would save from this present evil world. Their obedience to the gospel would put them into a place where they could be purified — *where He is*.<sup>32</sup> There, and only there, can anyone serve Him. As 1 Corinthians 1:2 implies, it must be a set-apart place that is in the world but not of it.<sup>33</sup> This takes a *community* in a township where disciples daily love and encourage one another.<sup>34</sup>

The word *sanctify* in John 17:17 is the same as in 1 Corinthians 1:2 — set apart from the evil world system to be made ready (prepared) to rule with Messiah; and John 17:18 is their mission. This is why, several centuries later, the influential leaders of the church could cheerfully go along with Constantine (who was both an unbeliever and the head of the pagan Roman state religion) endorsing their religion. He offered the church worldly acceptance in place of persecution. *Everything* radically changed when the church accepted his proposal.

In 321 AD, Constantine effectively took down the sign of the Sabbath. The mission of the church had changed in the minds of both its leaders and its people. No longer was it called to set people apart from the world. No, much rather it

was now called to send people *into the world* to be judges, governing officials, soldiers,<sup>35</sup> and in time powerful political leaders, even rulers. Friendship with the world became a sign of friendship with God, in sharp contrast to the wisdom of James 4:1-3. This is why the church could now “rest” on the day of the Sun god (Sunday), for *his* domain is truly the kingdoms and affairs of this world.

### WHO THEN CAN BE SAVED?



*What was the final outcome of the shift from love to doctrine? Killing those with “bad” doctrine.*

One would think, reading Christian history, that worldly success and national power are the hallmarks of true faith, contrary to the teachings and example of Yahshua. But the fact is, shocking as it may seem, that for someone to walk down the aisle in the Billy Graham Crusade and be “saved” is impossible. He goes back home and does the very same things as before, except now supposedly he’s going to heaven when he dies, as if that were all the Savior gave up His life for. If you want to see what He *really* paid such a high price for, consider how the church was in the beginning, when all who believed were together. Read about those days with open eyes and an open heart.

So then, hasn’t this “sincere believer” at the Billy Graham Crusade simply believed in vain, as those in John 2:23-25? Was it not only make believe? “Might as well make believe” you love Him, which is to say you do but not obey Him.<sup>36</sup> But this is not what the Master told His disciples they had to do in order to be saved.<sup>37</sup>

“Who then can be saved?” they asked. Only those who hear and obey the gospel, including the “many other words” (the “hard sayings of Christ”) as in Acts 2:36-41 and Mark 10:17-30. The “rich young ruler” wanted to know what he had to do to be saved. The answer is the same now as it was for the 3,000 on the day of Pentecost, who gave up everything in response to the first message of salvation which the apostles preached in obedience to Messiah’s commission.<sup>38</sup> Ask yourself why the preaching of the gospel today doesn’t produce the same results. Could it be a different gospel?<sup>39</sup> ✱

<sup>29</sup> 1 Thessalonians 2:14 <sup>30</sup> Romans 5:3-5; 2 Peter 1:4-11; 1 Peter 5:4 <sup>31</sup> Mark 10:26 <sup>32</sup> John 12:25-26 <sup>33</sup> John 17:14-17 <sup>34</sup> Hebrews 3:13 and 10:24-26

<sup>35</sup> By the end of the fourth century it was difficult to find a soldier who *wasn’t* a Christian. By 416 AD, non-Christians were forbidden to serve in the army! See *Codex Theodosianus XVI x. 21* (<http://www.sfts.edu/ocker/hs1080/paganlaw.htm>). <sup>36</sup> John 14:15,21; 1 John 2:4 <sup>37</sup> Mark 10:17-30 <sup>38</sup> Matthew 28:19-20 <sup>39</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:4

# CALLED TO BE SAINTS



**G**rowing up as a Catholic, the word *saint* only brought to mind spooky-looking figures dressed in robes, with halos around their heads, each with his own particular realm of authority to answer prayers. Sainthood was a classification out of reach of ordinary people,

reserved only for the most devout Catholics who were so holy they could perform miracles even after they were dead. In fact, most of those considered saints had that honor bestowed on them long after their deaths.

Nothing could be further from the truth of what the Apostles taught about becoming a *saint*. On the contrary, *all* believers in the Son of God are *called to be saints*, and the earnest expectation of the Apostles was that *all* would attain to that calling *during their lifetime*. That transformation from helpless sinner to steadfast saint can only occur in a set-apart place where all who believe live together and share all things in common, as the first disciples did in Acts 2:44.

There is a secret hidden in plain sight in the beginning of Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth. Its radical implications are overlooked simply because the life it takes for granted is completely foreign to the vast majority of Christians, yet it reveals the very pattern of discipleship which this apostle considered normal:

*To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those in every place who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours. (1 Corinthians 1:2)*

Paul understood that *all* believers are called to be *saints*, that is, *holy* men and women who are completely devoted to God and who have been purified from anything unclean in His sight. But he also understood that one cannot become a saint *alone*, but only *together* with all those in every place who call on the *same* Lord.<sup>1</sup> That is why they must first be *sanctified*, which means *set apart* from fellowship with the world and brought into fellowship with God *in Christ Jesus* — in the *place* where He dwells.

There are three foundational words Paul uses here that are essential for us to understand or we will completely

*misunderstand* and *misapply* everything else Paul says in his letters.<sup>2</sup> These words are *sanctified*,<sup>3</sup> *saint*,<sup>4</sup> and *place*.<sup>5</sup>

## AS FOR THE SAINTS WHO ARE ON THE EARTH<sup>6</sup>

First, let's establish the objective of discipleship, which Paul made crystal clear in his letter to Titus:

*...who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works. (Titus 2:14)*

Yahshua<sup>7</sup> gave up His life to obtain "a people" for His own possession. His objective was *not* just to save individuals who continue to live independent lives, much the same as all the other decent people in the world except for their new-found personal conviction and a religious gathering to attend on Sunday. "A people," according to Webster's dictionary, is a body of persons that are united by a common culture, tradition, or sense of kinship, having a common language, institutions, and beliefs. Therefore, Yahshua's people must be a recognizable body having the same culture, traditions, structure, and beliefs, who are being purified from all that is foreign to His nature. As Jude wrote,<sup>8</sup> it's all about "our *common* salvation," because Yahshua is not going to return until this *people* is made ready, like a spotless Bride prepared for her King.<sup>9</sup>

The Apostle Peter also wrote about "a people for His own possession" in a way that sheds light on the objective Yahshua had in mind as He was suffering on the cross:<sup>10</sup>

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)*

He was after a *holy nation*, that is, a spiritual nation of *holy* ones (*saints*) who would no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died, and went into death, and rose again on their behalf.<sup>11</sup> They are a full-time royal priesthood of twelve tribes who serve Him night and day,<sup>12</sup> daily offering their bodies as one living sacrifice,<sup>13</sup> daily laying down their

<sup>2</sup> As many have done, to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16).

<sup>3</sup> *hagiazos*, #37 in Strong's Concordance <sup>4</sup> *hagios*, #40 in Strong's

<sup>5</sup> *topos*, #5117 in Strong's Concordance <sup>6</sup> Psalm 16:3 <sup>7</sup> *Yahshua* is the original Hebrew name of the Son of God; see *The Name Above All Names* on page 12. <sup>8</sup> Jude 1:3 <sup>9</sup> Revelation 19:7-8; Ephesians 5:27 <sup>10</sup> Hebrews 12:2 <sup>11</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:15 <sup>12</sup> Acts 26:7

<sup>13</sup> Romans 12:1-2

<sup>1</sup> Not *another* Jesus, as some of the Corinthians called upon later (2 Corinthians 11:4).



lives for one another out of love for Him.<sup>14</sup> Because of their sincere and whole-hearted devotion to Him they have the expectation of being made like Him *in this life* as they give themselves to the purifying fire of their life together.<sup>15</sup>

### SANCTIFIED IN CHRIST JESUS

There is not the slightest possibility of this objective coming about apart from the *sanctification* Paul wrote of in 1 Corinthians 1:2, and which he also described explicitly in his second letter to the Corinthians:

*Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me, says the Lord Almighty. (2 Corinthians 6:17-18)*

To be “sanctified in Christ” means to separate yourself from fellowship with the world and be immersed into the fellowship of His people through baptism into His Body, which is a people who dwell together in unity as a light to the surrounding world.<sup>16</sup> That is where you receive the Spirit of adoption as a son or daughter that enables you to truly cry, “Abba!” (that is, *Father*),<sup>17</sup> being truly “born again” into God’s family, where you can be *fathered* by Him through His people. As Yahshua promised His first disciples who left everything and followed Him:

*Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time — houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands — with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. (Mark 10:29-30)*

Yahshua’s radical gospel of forsaking everything is the means by which we are *sanctified* (set apart) from all that is common and brought into one of the holy *clusters* where our new brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers abide together in the Vine. Yahshua told His apostles that He was the Vine and they were the branches,<sup>18</sup> and if they would abide in Him, they would bear abundant fruit. To abide in Him meant to keep His commandments,<sup>19</sup> and He commanded them to make disciples, teaching them to obey

everything He had commanded them.<sup>20</sup> And that is what they did.

The fruit of the Vine is the *clusters* that come forth from the vitally connected branches — and what rich clusters came forth on the day of Pentecost! Three thousand people were saved, forming many clusters throughout the city of Jerusalem as everyone left behind their old lives and clung together, drinking in the nourishment that came from the branches, that is, the apostles:



*So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. (Acts 2:41-45)*

A grape in a cluster that is vitally connected to the vine through a branch becomes juicy and sweet, while a grape by itself shrivels up and dies. In the same way, it is impossible for a person to become *holy* unless he is grafted into the fellowship of Yahshua’s people. You cannot become a *saint* — a pure, sweet, ripe grape — while living alone in the world. It is impossible.

### IN EVERY PLACE

As Paul said, we are “called to be saints *together* with all those *in every place* who call upon our Lord Jesus Christ...” It does *not* say “all those *everywhere*” as the *New International Version* and some other modern versions incorrectly translate the verse, as if it were speaking of individual believers scattered *everywhere* in the world. The word *place* means a particular *locality* in a township. It is speaking of a *cluster* of true believers living together in unity (having “the *same Lord*,” as Paul stipulated in 1 Corinthians 1:2) in several households in a particular neighborhood<sup>21</sup> — a *community*.

To be “sanctified in Christ Jesus” means to be *where* He is,<sup>22</sup> which is not the slightest bit mystical, but instead very real and practical. He is where “all who believe live *together*”<sup>23</sup> because they hated their lonely, futile lives in this world:

<sup>14</sup> 1 John 3:14, <sup>16</sup> <sup>15</sup> 1 John 3:2 <sup>16</sup> They dwell where God has commanded the blessing of eternal life: “where brothers dwell together in unity” (Psalm 133:3). <sup>17</sup> Romans 8:15,23; 9:4; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5 <sup>18</sup> John 15:5 <sup>19</sup> John 15:10

<sup>20</sup> Matthew 28:19-20 <sup>21</sup> Acts 2:46 — “...breaking bread from house to house...” suggests households in close proximity.

<sup>22</sup> John 12:25-26 <sup>23</sup> Acts 2:44

*Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there will My servant be also. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.* (John 12:25-26)

In that place where Yahshua's Spirit dwells in His people, where His people dwell together in a cluster, where they give themselves to the purifying fire of living together in unity, *there* the Father honors them with the glory of His Son.<sup>24</sup> That glory is the inner worth that demands the respect of others. There they learn to walk in a manner worthy of Him,<sup>25</sup> doing the deeds prepared for them to build up the Body.<sup>26</sup> And in the process, they are purified as their wrong ways are revealed through their constant interactions with each other.<sup>27</sup> The purifying process that happens in the set-apart place where disciples live and work together is expressed in the metaphor of the Bride's wedding garment:

*It was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.* (Revelation 19:8)

What a vivid picture of those "sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together...," and even more vivid is this prophetic vision of the Bride:

*And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.* (Revelation 12:1)

Here is the fully-formed holy nation of twelve tribes, having the radiance of the sun because she has put underfoot all the spiritual enemies that plague the souls of men. The term *lunatic* is derived from *luna*, the Latin word for the moon, recognizing that men's souls are influenced by lunar cycles, being more troubled when the moon is full. That is why having "the moon under her feet" depicts the Bride fully prepared for her King, for it is written that He cannot return "until His enemies should be made a footstool for His feet."<sup>28</sup>

## THE SIGN OF SANCTIFICATION

So the Bride being ready for her King will be a "great sign"<sup>29</sup> that a people have been *sanctified* (set apart), and

<sup>24</sup> John 17:22-23 <sup>25</sup> Ephesians 4:1-3 <sup>26</sup> Ephesians 2:10; 4:16

<sup>27</sup> Community life is the way so many proverbs and verses "come to life" in the lives of disciples. "Iron sharpening iron" (Proverbs 27:17) will not accomplish the complete sanctification Paul spoke of in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 if it only happens once a week at the men's Bible study! <sup>28</sup> Hebrews 10:13 <sup>29</sup> Revelation 12:1

that sanctification has achieved the desired objective of their becoming *saints* — holy ones who are worthy of reigning with their King. This miracle will be able to happen because there are *places* where disciples can be insulated from the defilement and distractions of the world and nurtured in the pure, life-giving fellowship of the community.

They are not isolated in compounds, however. Rather, they live together in the midst of the watching world, reaching out in every way they can, and welcoming guests, for how else can they be a light to the world?<sup>30</sup>

There is another very significant sign spoken of in the Scriptures that has everything to do with sanctification. In fact, it is actually the *same* sign expressed in different terms:

*You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, "Above all you shall keep My Sabbaths, for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you."* (Exodus 31:13)

The most profound sign that there is a people who are truly being sanctified is that we are able to have true rest in our souls and keep the Sabbath together in all our dwelling places.<sup>31</sup> This does not mean merely ceasing from the regular work we do on the other six days. The Sabbath is not a day off on which to pursue our own pleasure,<sup>32</sup> like a "relief valve" from the pressures of living and working together all week long. No, the Sabbath is the culmination of laboring all week long to put our spiritual enemies under our feet — the selfishness and iniquity that hinder

our fellowship with one another and our God. It is a day to enjoy the sweet fruit of repentance and forgiveness — the unstrained relationships with our brothers and sisters as we share our hearts with one another — celebrating, eating together, recalling what our Father spoke to us throughout the week, walking and talking together, writing letters, enjoying a game of volleyball, and yes, taking a nap.

The Sabbath is a time to be refreshed, even as our Creator was refreshed by enjoying the fruits of His six-days' labor in Creation.<sup>33</sup> And as the Sabbath draws to a close, we gather together with one heart to celebrate the resurrection of our Master Yahshua, and to break bread with thankful hearts<sup>34</sup> — a fitting way to begin a new week.

Such is the abundant life of the set-apart people of God, who are called to be saints together with all those in every such place who call on the name of our Sovereign Yahshua, the Messiah — their Sovereign and ours! ❀

<sup>30</sup> Isaiah 49:5-6 <sup>31</sup> Leviticus 23:3 <sup>32</sup> Isaiah 58:13 <sup>33</sup> Exodus 31:17

<sup>34</sup> Acts 20:7-8 — It was after sunset, on the eve of the first day of the week (Saturday night).

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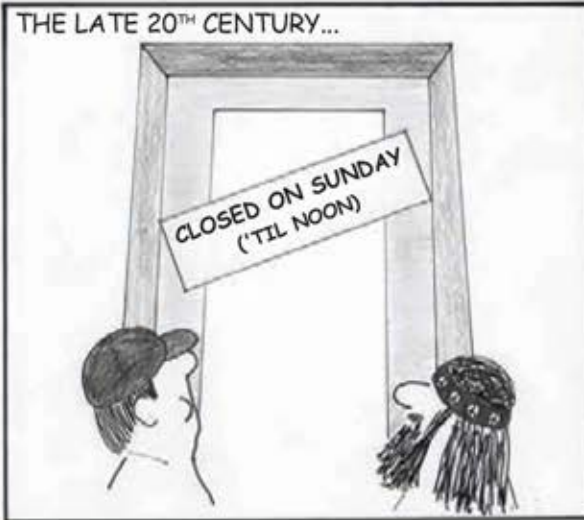
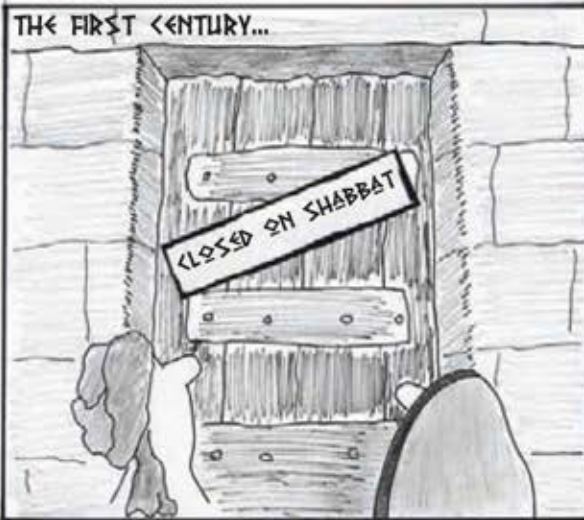
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