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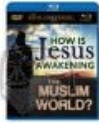
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Is the Sabbath for Today/Part 3

< [Is the Sabbath for Today](#)

By: Dr. Robert A. Morey; ©2003

Sabbatarians argue that Sabbath-keeping is part of God's moral law, and thus is binding on all men. What is the difference between a moral law and a ceremonial law? Which one does the Sabbath-command most closely resemble? What difference does that make? Dr. Morey explains.

Contents: [Is the Sabbath for Today](#)

Part II—An Examination Of The Sabbatarian Arguments (con't)

The "Moral Law" Argument

The Sabbatarian Position—*Sabbath-keeping is a part of God 's moral law and thus is binding on all men.*

Examination Of This Argument

The comparison below illustrates the differences between moral laws and ceremonial laws which reveal that the Sabbath command is a ceremonial law. If the Sabbath has the attributes of a ceremonial law, is treated like a ceremonial law, and is listed with ceremonial laws, the only rational conclusion one can make is that it is a ceremonial law.

Moral Law

It reflects some aspect of the moral character of God, i.e., a moral law tells us what God is like.

Ceremonial Law

It is not a reflection of God's character. It is didactic in the prophetic sense of prefiguring the work of Christ.

Sabbath

It does not reflect some aspect of the moral character of God. It pointed backward to the creative work of God and pointed forward to the redemptive work of Christ.

Moral Law

It is an aspect of the image of God in man, i.e., part of man's moral character as created by God. A moral law tells us how and in what ways we can bear God's moral likeness. It is a part of man's humanity. It makes man *man*.

Ceremonial Law

It is not a part of the image of God in man. It is not a part of man's humanity. It is a tool used by God to teach man spiritual truth.

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Sabbath

It is not a part of God's image in man. It is not a part of man's humanity. It is a tool to teach men spiritual truth.

Moral Law

General revelation from the creation and the conscience reveal a moral law. Special revelation is not needed to know a moral law. It will be anthropologically universal since it is rooted in man's nature and conscience.

Ceremonial Law;

General revelation from creation and conscience cannot give us ceremonial laws. They must be known by special revelation. There is nothing in God, man, or the world to indicate a ceremonial law.

Sabbath

Nine of the Ten Commandments are anthropologically universal. Only the Fourth Commandment depends on special revelation. There is nothing in God, man, or the world to indicate a seven-day week or one Sabbath-day out of seven days.

Moral Law

It is eternally true and it will never be done away with. It will be obeyed in the eternal state because man will always be in God's image.

Ceremonial Law

It is instituted for a specific period of time and then it is fulfilled.

Sabbath

It began with Moses and was fulfilled by Christ. As a day of rest, it is not observed in Heaven now and neither will it be observed in the eternal state.

Moral Law

It is unchangeable and immutable because God's character and the image of God in man cannot change.

Ceremonial Law

Ceremonial laws change from age to age, according to God's appointment.

Sabbath

Christ, as the Lord of Sabbath fulfilled it and set it aside. Christian Sabbatarians admit that it changed from the seventh day to the first day of the week. It is thus neither unchangeable nor immutable.

Moral Law

It is universally binding on all men in all ages.

Ceremonial Law

It is binding only on those to whom it is given. Unusually, it is directed only to the people of God and not binding on the Gentiles.

Sabbath

It was binding only for Israel. No Gentiles were ever commanded or condemned concerning the Sabbath law. It was not universally binding on all men in all ages. It was a covenant sign to Israel.

Moral Law

A moral law always has precedence over a ceremonial law.

Ceremonial Law

It is always subservient to a moral law if any contradiction arises (i.e., David's eating of the shewbread, Matt. 12:1-6)

Sabbath

The Sabbath command was subservient to moral laws (Matt. 12 9-12). It was subservient even to other ceremonial laws (John 7:22-23).

Moral Law

Since God's character is harmonious, moral laws never contradict each other in that you must break one to obey the other.

Ceremonial Law

There will be conflict at times between moral and ceremonial laws.

Sabbath

There have been occasions when the Fourth Commandment was broken in order to keep the Sixth (Mark 2:23-28). It cannot, therefore, be a moral law.

Moral Law

A moral law is valid regardless of the situation because it is a moral absolute. We can never deal with it from the perspective of situational ethics. I Cor. 10:13 teaches that we never have to sin.

Ceremonial Law

Whether you obey or disobey a ceremonial law depends on the situation (Matt. 12:1-6)

Sabbath

The priests "broke" or desecrated the Sabbath. But because of the circumstance and the situation, they were declared innocent (Matt. 12:5). No moral law has "except" clauses. If the Sabbath is a moral law, why is it a situational law?

Moral Law

A consistent violation of moral law is inconsistent with a Christian profession and must be dealt with by church discipline, even unto excommunication.

Ceremonial Law

The punishment depends on the situation and circumstances surrounding the violation of a ceremonial law.

Sabbath

Sabbath-breaking depends on the situation. There are all sorts of "I had to" exceptions for breaking the Fourth Commandment. They are called "works of mercy, charity, or necessity." No moral laws have such exceptions.

Moral Law

A moral law does not assume man's fall into sin. God's and man's nature at creation is sufficient to account for a moral law.

Ceremonial Law

It assumes the fall and prefigures redemption. Thus, it is eschatological in character.

Sabbath

The Sabbath was eschatological in that it pointed forward to the Messianic age of the rest of faith (Heb. 5). We cease trying to work for salvation and rest instead in Christ's work.

One of the most telling reasons for rejecting the Sabbath as a moral law is that few modern Sabbatarians treat "violations" of the Fourth Commandment as constituting serious sin. You would be excommunicated for consistently breaking the other nine commandments. But to break the Fourth Commandment does not lead today to any church discipline. Indeed, we know of situations where the pastor is a strict Sabbatarian, but his fellow elders go out to eat on Sundays!

If it is a moral law, why is it not applied like one? Since the punishment for Sabbath-breaking was death in the Old Testament, on what grounds can anything less than excommunication be done to those who consistently "break" the Fourth Commandment today?

We might also add that what constitutes a "violation" of proper Sabbath-keeping is determined in a variety of ways and ends up in "do's" and "don'ts" which are purely subjective and arbitrary. Thus what constitutes Sabbath-breaking in one church will be found to be unacceptable in another church.

[To be continued.](#)

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