

# Dr. Ford Responds

I agree with most of Dale's theology, and he has clustered our few disagreements in his brief reply to my book review. I now respond.

## GNU masthead

Dale's first criticism is that our stress on a Christian's obligation to obey the fourth commandments of the Decalogue contradicts our GNU masthead. He writes:

The masthead of *Good News Unlimited* is "Christ Alone, Grace Alone, Faith Alone, Scripture Alone"; but the comments made in connection with the review of *Sabbath in Crisis*, seem to imply that to all these "alones" one must **add** Sabbath observance.

Surely Dale cannot mean this inferential comment. He is pastor of a church. Surely he teaches in his church that justified Christians should not commit adultery, steal, or lie. Has he thereby invalidated his theology of grace? I think not.

The fact is that our obedience to none of the commandments earns **justification**. However, sanctification is always manifested by wholehearted obedience to the known will of God.

## Crisis in Galatia

Second, Dale writes of the crisis Paul faced in Galatia.

From his comments in his book *Sabbath in Crisis*, I think Dale does not really know what that crisis was.

Those interested should read *Galatians-Dialogical Response to Opponents* (SBK Dissertation Series). This learned volume points out that the old view of who Paul's Galatian opponents were is wrong!

They were actually apocalyptic Judaizers influenced by a theology similar to that of Qumran. This theology, like the heresy at Colossae, was associated with worship of the "elemental spirits of the universe" (see Galatians 4:3; Colossians 2:8, 20 RSV). See also, *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, edited by D.A. Carson, page 367.

This adoration involved the observance of calendrical times such as set out in 1 Enoch 82:7: "for the luminaries, and months, and festivals, and years, and days." (See also Jubilees 6:9–10, and chapter 6.)

These superstitious times of the pagans (see Galatians 4:8) should not be equated with the sacred times of the Jews—which mistake Dale has made in his book. It is strange that people should interpret Galatians 4:10 without reading Galatians 4:8.

## Wholehearted committal to Christ

I find it difficult to follow Dale when he says under "Four disagreements" that he is "**not** against Sabbath-keeping"—then declares later under the same heading that "Sabbath-keeping is not **required** or **expected** of new-covenant Christians."

My own view is that God requires only one thing in those who are justified: a constant, wholehearted desire to know the will of God and do it.

I think Dale and I are in full accord in holding that only wholehearted committal to Christ as Savior and Lord is the sign of the true church. The seal of that commitment is the gift of the Holy Spirit who leads us in the path of sanctified obedience (John 14:15).

## Moral imperatives in Old Testament

Under "One law," Dale writes: "It is my conclusion that God gave Israel only **one** law which comprised both moral and ceremonial aspects."

That's my conclusion also. It is a commonplace in scholarship.

So Dale **does** believe that eternal moral commandments are to be found in the Old Testament, and that these remain for Christians.

I agree, wholeheartedly.

The moral imperatives run through the Old Testament as gold runs through ordinary soil. And yet even the ceremonial aspects of the law had glory (2 Corinthians 3:10–11). That is because they prefigured the cross—the cross that made atonement for the violation of the moral aspects of the law.

The covenantal blood was sprinkled over the moral heart of Israel's law, not over the ceremonial. (Read the record in Exodus 24:1–12.)

The ceremonial precepts were given **after** the sealing of the covenant—and from the tabernacle by Moses, not from Sinai by God.

## Ten Commandments preeminent

Concerning the Ten Commandments, they are given a preeminent place in the Scriptures for they are spoken by God's own voice and written by God's own finger, "and he added no more" (Deuteronomy 5:22 KJV).

Then, as the "Ten Words" (Deuteronomy 4:13 NEB, RV) they were placed at the center of Israel's worship—alone in the Ark on the mercy seat.

It was on the mercy seat that the atoning blood was sprinkled. The ceremonial aspects of the law only existed because of the violation of the moral aspect, and they prefigured the remedy.

## The Sabbath and moral law

Dale writes further under "One law" that "The fact that the Sabbath is included with the moral laws in the Ten Commandments does not **necessarily** make the Sabbath a moral law."

This is strange.

Did the Almighty act haphazardly? Or, rather, is it the path of wisdom to concede the principle that what God has joined together we should not put asunder? (Matthew 19:6)

The commandments to the right and the left of the Fourth are seen as being moral, and for all people, and from the beginning. Why not the one that is thus fenced in and guarded by the others? And prefaced with a warning to "Remember"?

Is not worship of the Creator the most moral of all duties? Is not worship the source from which power to fulfill all other duties flow?

## Observance is a "thank you"

I agree with Dale when he writes in "One law," that "baptism and the Lord's supper for new-covenant believers, are not moral **in themselves**, and have value only as they are celebrated as signs of the covenant **to which they are attached.**" The Sabbath is moral only as seen in relationship to the covenant of salvation.

We must remember that the Ten Commandments were given to a redeemed people in the wilderness. They were not given in Egypt or Canaan, but in a wilderness symbolic of our whole world.

They were declared and spoken by "Elohim," not Yahweh (LORD). Elohim is God's name as Ruler over all humankind and all races. (Compare the name given to the Creator in Genesis 1.)

These commandments can be read as promises to God's people. For example:

**Thou** shalt not kill.

**Thou** shalt not commit adultery.

**Thou** shalt not steal.

**Thou** shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

(Exodus 20:13–16 KJV. All emphases mine.)

Similarly, the observance of baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the Sabbath is a "Thank You!" for such a blessed redemption.

## Context of Colossians 2:16

Regarding Colossians 2:16, it seems to me that Dale never gives appropriate weight to the whole context.

Here, at least, is some of the immediate context.

I say this in order **that no one may delude you** with beguiling speech. (Colossians 2:4 RSV)

See to it that **no one makes a prey of you** by philosophy and empty deceit, according to **human tradition**, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. (Colossians 2:8)

Therefore let **no one pass judgment on you** in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. (Colossians 2:16)

Let **no one disqualify you**, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, taking his stand on visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, . . . (Colossians 2:18)

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations, "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" (referring to things which all perish as they are used) according to **human precepts and doctrines**? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh. (Colossians 2:20–23. All emphases mine.)

## Human philosophical rules

When we read Colossians 2:16 in this fuller context, it becomes clear that Paul is warning against heretical teachers who were trying to legislate human philosophical rules for those desiring to find visions of angels through ascetic fasting. (See Carson's book, pp. 173, 182, 367, which differs with Dale though Carson wrote the Foreword to Dale's *Sabbath in Crisis*.)

This—according to the heretics—was best pursued on holy days. But Paul reminds us that both the Jewish shadowy elements (including those attached to the seventh-day Sabbath—see Numbers 28) and the philosophical regulations are shadows without substance. Only in Christ do we find the supreme and genuine article our heart seeks.

Colossians 2 no more does away with all Sabbath-keeping than it does away with all eating and drinking!

Dale is incorrect in his parallel with Ezekiel 45:17. The eating and drinking of Colossians 2 has nothing whatever to do with the grain offerings and libations of the sanctuary. They have to do with fasting, as Colossians 2:21–23 (and the original Greek) make clear.

(See any commentary which discusses the original language of this sixteenth verse. No scholar of New Testament Greek that I know of invokes Ezekiel 45:17 as a parallel. With

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certainty it can be said that most reject Dale's position.)

It is significant that the Greek word for "law" never occurs in Colossians!

## Words of Christ

In Paul's day, when it came to Sabbath-keeping, it was a bridle that was needed, not a spur. That was because Paul lived when Pharisaism ruled the most religious people on earth.

Yet that Pharisaism in no way obviated the very clear implications of Paul's Master, Christ:

Then he [Jesus] said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."  
(Mark 2:27 NIV)

"It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."  
(Matthew 12:12 see Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9)

Such guidance for readers of the New Testament would not have been necessary where there was no Sabbath-keeping going on.

## Non-mention significant

We do not find—from Job to the Song of Solomon—any "instruction on how to keep the Sabbath" or any reproof of "perverted Sabbath-keeping." Even circumcision is not mentioned for 800 years after Joshua.

Often, non-mention means the matter is taken for granted. For example, consider how rarely the Lord's Supper is referred to in the Epistles; and immersion as the method of baptism is never mentioned!

When James finished his few rules for Gentile believers (Acts 15:19–20), he added that it was not necessary to say more. That was because those same Gentiles, in every city, heard Moses read every Sabbath.

"For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath." (Acts 15:21)

## Sabbath and Gentile Christians

Church history shows, by many ancient documents, that

Gentile Christians kept the Sabbath for centuries after the cross. It was predicted that they would in Isaiah 56:2-8. Thus the New Testament never uses the Gentile name for "week" (hebdomas), but the Jewish word "sabbaton"—sabbath.

Where we read "the first day of the week" in the New Testament, it is always literally "the first of the sabbath" meaning the first day in the succession leading to the Sabbath. Here we see that the Sabbath was familiar to—and practiced by—Gentile Christians.

## Sabbath and circumcision

The Sabbath was far more significant than circumcision. Think of the controversy over the latter in the New Testament!

The noise would have been vastly greater had Paul tried to revoke a practice that was repeated every seventh day (as opposed to the once-in-a-lifetime practice of circumcision on the eighth day).

The Jewish leaders had wished to kill Jesus for healing on the holy day. What would they have done to Paul if they had thought he was abrogating the holy day? (See Paul's own confession in Acts 28:27.)

## Circumcision and whole law

Dale's statement that circumcision stood for the keeping of the whole law is not correct.

Deuteronomy 6:4–5 and Leviticus 19:18 are in the law, yet they are reinforced by Christ himself in the Gospels. (See Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27; Matthew 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31, 33; Luke 10:27.)

Circumcision and the Sabbath are never mentioned in the same breath anywhere in the New Testament—with the exception of John, where Jesus says:

"Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a child on the Sabbath." (John 7:22)

This verse in its context uplifts the superiority of the Sabbath over circumcision.

## Use of Carson's book

Regarding my use of Carson's book, *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, there was never any suggestion on my part that the writers of the book were sabbatarian.

I quoted it only to show that the concessions of nonsabbatarians should be taken very seriously. That is because such concessions as Lincoln had to make in the last chapter he made grudgingly from the weight of evidence.

## Work and rest

Dale writes that "to argue that man must have been given a Sabbath rest because man was given work to do seems overly simplistic."

Do not work and rest always go together? Is not our capacity to work determined by our capacity to rest? (Compare Genesis 1:28; 2:15, with Genesis 2:2, 3.)

Surely Jesus so taught when he said,

Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. (Mark 6:31 KJV)

Is it not also true that such rest should, above all else, make provision for worship? After all, mere idleness is the mother of all evil.

The Sabbath is called a convocation. See Leviticus 23:3.

Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11; 16:4, 28-30; Mark 2:27-28; Hebrews 4:3-4 plainly teach that from the time God himself rested in order to bless and sanctify the seventh day, his people have followed his example of holy rest after toil.

### Paul and the law

Dale surprises me with his last section, “The Gospels and Paul’s epistles.”

Indeed, I everywhere proclaim that Christ made the atonement and Paul explained it. (It could not be fully explained until it was done.)

But this is not the point at issue here. The New Testament itself affirms that the Pauline letters can be misunderstood. Peter says so (see 2 Peter 3:15–16).

I simply stated what many scholars have pointed out: that Paul’s strong statements against the law as a **means** of salvation had been misunderstood by some. Some people had thought

the strong statements were against the moral law as a **standard** of the saved person’s behavior.

Paul, in Ephesians 4–6 and Colossians 3, constantly draws from the Decalogue to guide Christian behavior. Read and see his use of both Tables of the law.

Modern scholars now grant the highly-sophisticated theological nature of the Gospels. The Gospels were obviously written to guide Christian belief and practice.

### Decalogue in Revelation

In Revelation—John’s last book—and in his epistles, John never uses the Greek word for law. (Neither does Paul in his letter to the Colossians.) Rather, John uses three terms used in Exodus 34:28–29: “covenant,” “commandments,” and “testimony.” (See Revelation 11:19; 12:17; 14:12; 15:5.)

Of these three, “testimony,” when used in reference to things connected with the sanctuary (such as the Ark), only, and always, means the Decalogue.

That Decalogue is still central in God’s throne. (Compare Psalm 89:14.)

### Brother in Christ and friend

I refer GNU readers to Dale’s book, *Sabbath in Crisis*, and to my book, *The Forgotten Day*, for extended discussions on the Sabbath topic.

Meanwhile, I salute Dale as my brother in Christ, and my friend. 