

ARE WE BOUND BY MORAL LAW  
TO OBSERVE A SABBATH DAY?

THE  
SABBATH  
SYLLOGISM

Matthew  
12:1-8

The Sabbath Syllogism  
by Harvey Bluedorn

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“You shall not muzzle an ox while it is threshing grain.”

“The worker deserves his just compensation.” (1 Timothy 5:18)

“You shall not steal.”

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Romans 13:9)

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author's. Wherever the singular and the plural are distinguished in Greek, but not in English, a single dagger † marks a singular (†you, Go†!), and a double dagger ‡ marks a plural (‡you, Go‡!). Words in braces { } are added to the translation for sense or style. Brackets [ ] enclose alternate translations or comments. A forward slash [/] marks an alternate translation. A back slash [\] marks a more literal translation.

# The Sabbath Syllogism

## What This Booklet is About

In Matthew 12:1-8, Jesus constructed a deductive syllogism in order to prove to the Pharisees that the observance of the seventh day as the Sabbath was ceremonial law, and not moral law. His purpose was to prove that even though His disciples were in violation of the ceremonial law, nevertheless, because the moral law took precedence over the ceremonial law, they were guiltless. His logic is clear and concise and conclusive.

This syllogism is used as the counter-example against those who argue inductively that the Ten Commandments are pure moral law. The Ten Commandments as a whole cannot be pure moral law if one of those Ten Commandments is not pure moral law. If the observance of the seventh day as a Sabbath is a ceremonial law which is clearly superseded by moral law, then the Fourth Commandment is not pure moral law, and neither is the Ten Commandments pure moral law. It is further demonstrated by deductive exegesis that though the observance of the seventh day as the Sabbath was ceremonially binding upon the Jewish nation, such observance was never morally binding upon all mankind in general, and since the close of the age of Israel and the end of the jurisdiction of the Old Covenant, it is not ceremonially binding upon anyone at all. This does not leave mankind without moral command regarding the use of time, nor does it forbid the voluntary observance of the seventh day – or any day – as a Sabbath.

## Two Kinds of Reasoning

There are two methods of reasoning: *inductive* and *deductive*. These two methods of reasoning move in opposite directions. *Deductive* reasoning moves from the general to the particular, while *inductive* reasoning moves from the particular to the general. These two methods of reasoning will produce two kinds of theology.

## Inductive Reasoning

Inductive reasoning moves from the particular to the general. It gathers together particular observations in the form of premises, and it reasons from these particular premises to a general conclusion. In an inductive argument, the conclusion goes beyond what the premises actually say. For example, we might inspect 10,000 particular dogs, and every single dog which we inspect has fleas. From the particular premise that “10,000 dogs have fleas” we might extrapolate the conclusion that “all dogs have fleas.” Our conclusion is a speculation, a conjecture or a prediction. Further evidence may support or deny our conclusion. The 10,001<sup>st</sup> dog may not have fleas. Therefore with an inductive argument we can affirm the premises (“10,000 dogs have fleas”) and yet we may deny the conclusion (“all dogs have fleas”) without involving ourselves in a logical contradiction. The conclusion does not necessarily follow from the premises. If someone were to say, “Some dogs may have fleas, maybe most dogs have fleas, but I don’t believe all dogs have fleas,” there is no logical response which we can make. The logical certainty of the conclusion (“all dogs have fleas”) is entirely dependent upon the correct interpretation of the evidence and the consistency of the evidence with the remainder of the phenomena – phenomena which was not, is not, or may not ever actually be observed. Maybe we had fleas, and we inadvertently transferred them to each of the 10,000 dogs, so the dogs actually had no fleas except when we examined them. We would have to examine all dogs at all times under thoroughly monitored conditions in order to “prove” our conclusion. But this would be an impossible task. Therefore our conclusion can never be proven. It can, however, be disproved. Find one dog without fleas. Then we will be left with the conclusion which we should have arrived at to begin with, “Some dogs have fleas.” Remember, an inductive argument concludes more than the premises actually warrant.

We use inductive reasoning all of the time. It is very useful. But we must recognize its limits. Most inductive reasoning is not based upon exhaustive evidence, and therefore the form is incomplete. (10,000 dogs are not all dogs.) Unless the evidence or observations are exhaustive (all dogs without exception are examined for fleas), the

conclusion is only a guess. It may be a good guess. The strength of the inductive argument is increased as it approaches completeness. If the evidence we accept represents all possibilities within the whole, our inductive conclusion will be correct. The more we can demonstrate that the evidence is truly representative of the whole, the more compelling will be our conclusion. “10,000 dogs of every variety chosen at random from every country on the earth were examined under controlled conditions, and all of them had fleas. Therefore, it seems likely that all dogs have fleas.”

## Deductive Reasoning

Deductive reasoning moves from the general to the particular. It takes a general premise and deduces particular conclusions. A “valid” deductive argument is one in which the conclusion necessarily follows from the premises. (All dogs have fleas. This is a dog. Therefore this dog has fleas.) The premise may not be “true,” but the form of the argument is nevertheless “valid.” (If indeed all dogs do have fleas, and if indeed this is a dog, then it necessarily follows that this dog has fleas.) An “invalid” deductive argument will contain something in the conclusion wholly new and independent from those things mentioned in the premise of the argument. (If all dogs have fleas, then our dog must have ticks. But ticks are not mentioned in the premise.) Sometimes it is not so obvious that something new has been introduced into the conclusion. (Only man is a rational being. Therefore no woman is a rational being. This argument equivocates on the meaning of “man.” In the premise, “man” means mankind, including women. In the conclusion, the word “woman” is used to designate that portion of mankind which is of the female gender as distinguished from the male gender. So a new concept is introduced in the conclusion.)

Everything in the conclusion of a valid deductive argument must also be contained in the premises. (There are rules about how these things are arranged, but that is beyond our purposes here.) Therefore all valid deductive reasoning is by its nature actually circular reasoning or “begging the question.” That does not mean the conclusion is worthless. (If Johnny rides the bus ninety-six minutes every morning and ninety-six minutes every evening, five days a week, and if Johnny sleeps eight hours every day, then Johnny spends the equivalent of one awake day [sixteen hours] on the bus every week. The conclusion is entirely contained in the premises, but the conclusion restates those premises in a way which causes us to understand more fully the consequences of riding the bus so much.)

The truth value (or verity) of the conclusion of a deductive argument is dependent upon two things: the correctness (or validity) of the form of the argument, and the truth value (or verity) of the premises. The validity of the form is determined by the application of established rules. So the only weakness of a deductive argument is the truth value of its premises. The premises must always be examined for their verity. Our presuppositions will always determine our conclusions.

## Induction and Deduction Compared

The conclusion of an inductive argument can be proven false by finding one contrary example. (All 10,000 dogs have fleas, therefore all dogs have fleas. Find one dog without fleas and this conclusion is proven false.) But the inductive conclusion can never be proven true unless one exhausts all particulars in the premise. (All we actually know is that some dogs have fleas. We have to examine all dogs to conclude all dogs have fleas.)

The conclusion of a valid deductive argument cannot be proven false unless its premises are also proven false, and it cannot be proven true unless its premises are also proven true. In other words, truth or falsehood is dependent upon the premises alone.

Both inductive and deductive arguments require faith. An inductive argument requires faith in its conclusion, while a deductive argument requires faith in its premises. And this is where theological reasoning enters.

## Theological Reasoning

Inductive theological reasoning begins with many specific observations in Scripture, and then it makes a generalization about the teaching of all of Scripture based upon this sampling of observations. Inductive reasoning can never *prove* anything unless the evidence is absolutely exhaustive – which is rare in this world, and impossible regarding many questions of theology. If we apply the inductive or scientific method to everything, we will always be learning, but we will never come to the knowledge of the truth, because we are not able to determine truth by the inductive method. If we place our faith in our inductive conclusions, then we are placing faith in our own speculations and imaginations. These inductive speculations may be based upon many observations from the infallible word of God. However, the fact that the observations (if correct) are infallible does not in any way make our conclusions infallible.

*Covenant Theology* and *Dispensation Theology* are good examples of inductive systems of theology. Neither system can ever be proven, so they will just continue arguing between themselves as well as with everyone else. The theological distinctives of most denominations fall into this same category – inductive systems of theology. Many parts of these systems of theology may be validly *deduced*, but the problem is that some of these parts are validly deduced from propositions which were *not* validly deduced, but were arrived at *inductively*. Hence these systems of theology are actually houses built upon the sand of incomplete inductive reasoning. They are not founded upon the solid rock of Scripture, but upon the shifting sands of imaginative speculations and extrapolations from selected and rearranged Scripture. We can compare this to the scientist who seemingly observes a shift in peppered moth populations – micro-evolution, and then he extrapolates these observations into the theory of macro-evolution where every living organism develops from a one-celled accident in some primordial soup. The Covenantal and Dispensational systems have been extrapolated from theological peppered moths.

This may be contrasted with deductive theological reasoning, which simply takes the propositions of Scripture in various combinations – “precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little” (Isaiah 28:10) – in order to deduce truth from truth. If our propositions are taken directly from inerrant and infallible Scripture, and our reasoning from these propositions is valid in form, then all of our conclusions are necessarily true. We will be building upon rock. This is the method which Jesus and the Apostles used, while they rejected speculation and vain philosophy – which is the inductive method (Colossians 2:8).

Inductive systems of theology become straight-jackets for the Scripture. They twist Scripture until it conforms to the system. There are many texts of Scripture which may be interpreted more than one way. We may call these *reference texts* because we may *refer* to them, not as proof, but only as explaining and supporting evidence for our views, and then only if they happen to be interpreted in accord with our views – though they may be interpreted otherwise by others. A *proof text* is a text which, as regards the particular question at hand, can be interpreted only one way. In inductive systems, *reference texts* are forced to become *proof texts* – they are allowed to be interpreted only in a way which agrees with “the system.”

There are many individual doctrines of theology which have been arrived at deductively from Scripture – such as the doctrine of the two natures of Christ, the doctrine of the trinity, and the doctrines of sovereign grace. But whole theological systems, such as Covenantalism or Dispensationalism, are characteristically a hodge podge of both inductive and deductive reasoning. We end up arguing about what are the legitimate proof texts.

“The analogy of faith” is a phrase borrowed from Romans 12:6. “Analogy” is the translation of the Greek word, *ἀναλογία*, which means “that which is reasoned with itself.” The truth is consistent with itself, and Scripture is the truth; therefore the Scripture must be “reasoned with itself” in order to bring out the truth by the rule of consistency. In other words, the only infallible interpreter of any one text of Scripture is another text (or other texts) of Scripture. Many texts of Scripture are worded in such a way as to seem rather obscure to our understanding. We could understand them in more than one way. But other texts of Scripture may speak on the

same subject quite clearly. We can understand them in only one way. All truth, by its nature, must be thoroughly consistent with itself. Therefore we must interpret the more obscure passages of Scripture in a way which will not contradict the clear passages of Scripture. This is the legitimate use of what is called “the analogy of the faith.”

However, “the analogy of faith” is often abused in order to support an inductive system. Because the inductive system is presumed to be the pattern of Scripture, it is therefore presumed to completely agree with the “analogy of faith.” All texts of Scripture are then forced to agree with a particular interpretation of certain texts of Scripture in order to fill out a presumed pattern. All of Scripture is forced to logically conform to the pattern. In this way, “the analogy of faith” is turned on its head. Of course, this is theological arrogance, and unfortunately we are all guilty of it from time to time. May the Lord grant us the humility to recognize it, to confess it, and to repent of it.

There is one simple way to disprove any inductive system – the counter-example. A counter-example is any indisputable truth which cannot be reconciled with the inductive system. Of course, counter-examples cannot be tolerated by diehard enthusiasts of a system. If we show an evolutionist what appears to be the footprints of a man in the midst of dinosaur tracks, or the fleshly (not petrified) remains of a dinosaur, then he is forced to contrive an explanation which is somehow consistent with his own system. If we show him a living dinosaur, then he must do something to discredit, redefine, or destroy the evidence. A few thinking individuals may be shaken by the evidence, but the committed and diehard enthusiasts of a theory are rarely perplexed. The same is true of theological systems. The theological system of the Sadducees regarded only the five books of Moses as authoritative. The Sadducees observed that there was no direct reference to the resurrection in the five books of Moses. They therefore rejected the doctrine of the resurrection. So Jesus offered a counter-example from the second book of Moses. Jesus proved the resurrection from the tense of a verb in Exodus 3:6. (“I Myself am [not “was”] the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Matthew 22:31-32.) Yet we do not read that any of the Sadducees became disciples of Jesus that day. Nevertheless, on the basis of logic, the inductive theory of the Sadducees against the resurrection was thoroughly disproved by one clear counter-example. The Apostle Paul – by simply pointing to the singular number of a noun – proved that a man gained the privileges of grace due to his relationship to Jesus by faith apart from any genealogical relationship. (“He does not say, ‘And to the seeds,’ as upon many; but rather, as upon One, ‘And to thy Seed,’ Who is Christ. ... Now if thou belong to Christ, consequently thou art the seed of Abraham and thou art heirs according to the promise.” Galatians 3:16, 29.) The Bereans were commended as more noble than the Thessalonians because they labored to deduce everything from Scripture (Acts 17:10-12).

Please note that we are not rejecting inductive reasoning as useless. Without inductive reasoning, we would be in very sorrowful shape. Induction can be very useful. If the barometric pressure is falling, we may take an umbrella along because it may rain. That’s an induction of probability. A theological induction – speculation – may lead someone to examine the Scriptures to see whether the speculation can actually be deductively demonstrated from Scripture, or whether there may be a counter-example to disprove the speculation. If we can deduce it, or else disprove it, then we have advancement in our understanding of the Scriptures. If we can neither deduce it nor disprove it, then we must be humble enough to admit it is only a speculation, and be careful not to build upon a speculation. Today we have whole systems of theology humbly deduced from proud speculations, and the adherents of these systems have become so entrenched within their logical systems that they are unable and/or unwilling to examine the speculative foundations upon which their systems are built. Some of these systems have become so refined over the years that their presuppositions are well hidden within the system. The adherents of these systems are well trained in those interpretations of certain texts which are absolutely necessary to uphold their system. All of this makes it very difficult to break out of the system. Hence denominations: I am of Paul. I am of Apollos. I am of Luther. I am of Calvin. I am of Presbyterian. I am of Baptist. I am of Covenant. I am of Dispensation. Are ye not carnal and behaving like men? (Compare 1 Corinthians 1:12-13; 3:1-4.) If we would only submit to the mind of Christ! Instead, we proudly attempt to instruct God as to what He says (1

Corinthians 2:16). In all of this, we are not claiming to have perfect understanding ourselves. We hope and pray that we will have the humility to be corrected by the Scripture, or by clear deductive reasoning from the Scripture, or by refutation through a counter-example from Scripture, or by a deduction from a counter-example.

Now we have explained what we believe is a correct and correcting theological method. We do not believe we should continually reformulate our speculations according to the inductive scientific method in order to refine our hypotheses. (“Reformed and always reforming,” but never able – because of our inductive method – to come to the knowledge of the truth, 2 Timothy 3:7.) Rather, we should test and prove everything and throw out those things which are not built squarely upon the foundation of the Word of God (1 Thessalonians 5:21). To do so may leave us with missing portions in our theology for a while – perhaps for a long while. But the result will be that our foundation will be sure, and we will be building with gold, silver, and precious stones which will withstand the fire; not with wood, hay, and stubble which will be burnt in the trial (compare 1 Corinthians 3:12-15).

We must continually examine the presuppositions upon which we are building. We must trace everything back to its source. Is it deduced from Scripture, or is it induced into Scripture? Some may be quite surprised when they discover what things they only presuppose without actual proof. Many don’t want to know.

## Some Basic Facts Regarding the Sabbath

The following are some basic observations regarding the Sabbath.

1. After six days of creating, God rested from the work of creating (Genesis 2:2-3). His rest from the work of creating has continued without any interruption from the seventh day through every single day until this day, and that rest will continue throughout eternity. In other words, God does not observe every seventh day as a repetitive rest from the work of creation. Instead, He observes every single day without exception as a continuous rest from the work of creation. Nevertheless, during the first six days of creation, throughout the seventh day of rest, and for every day thereafter throughout eternity, God continues to work the works of providence (sustaining and directing all things) and to work the works of grace (in the elect angels, and in those chosen in Christ before they were created in Adam) (John 5:16-17).

2. God revealed a repetitive seventh-day Sabbath as a special sign between Himself and the circumcised nation Israel (Exodus 16:22-30; Nehemiah 9:14; Exodus 31:12-17; Ezekiel 20:12, 20). This marked Israel as a new creation (Isaiah 51:13-16). He also gave Israel festival-Sabbaths, a seventh-year Sabbath, and a fifty-year-jubilee-Sabbath. But above all, the Promised Land was itself a rest or “Sabbath” for the people of God (Psalm 95:11; Hebrews 3:11, 18; 4:3, 5).

3. There remains a sabbatical to the people of God (Hebrews 4:9). The context of Hebrews indicates that the sabbatical which remains is not related to time – weekly or otherwise; but to a land – heavenly. The Christian’s rest is in the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 11:28-29).

## The Inductive Theory of a Perpetual Weekly Sabbath

The theory of a perpetual Saturday Sabbath is built upon the following premise: *“The Ten Commandments are pure moral law for all mankind for all time.”* If that premise is true, then it follows deductively and conclusively that all men are perpetually obligated to keep the *Saturday* Sabbath from sunset on the sixth day of the week (Friday night) to sunset on the seventh day of the week (Saturday night). The more popular *Sunday* Sabbath position is a variation on the *Saturday* Sabbath theory. Briefly, the *Sunday* Sabbatarian believes that the moral obligation to observe one day in seven remains. However, with the change of dispensation from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, it is necessary that there be a change in the day. Since in the New Testament Scriptures Jesus rose on the first day of the week, and since the Christians regularly met on the first day of the week, it is therefore necessary to conclude that the day of the Sabbath has been changed from the seventh day of

the week to the first day of the week.

This premise – that the Ten Commandments constitute pure moral law – is nowhere *expressly* stated or *deductively* concluded from Scripture. If it were, then all genuine argument over this issue would have ceased long ago. We could list a number of texts which have been interpreted so as to agree with this premise, particularly Matthew 5:17-18. An exegesis and exposition of Matthew 5:17-18 would have to be lengthy and quite involved in order just to defuse and remove the many theological trip-wires and minefields different parties have erected around it. (Many theological systems have a lot riding on their peculiar interpretation of this one text.) Although we do not shrink from the task of tackling Matthew 5:17-18 (and we do so elsewhere), we will here take an easier course. If it can be proven deductively that the Sabbath day commandment is not pure moral law, then this would provide us with that one counter-example which is necessary to prove that the Ten Commandments – of which the Sabbath day commandment is a part – cannot be pure moral law. The Ten Commandments may contain moral law – indeed we believe they are about 97% moral law, but they also contain several elements which are not moral law, and the Sabbath day commandment is one of those elements.

In order to remove any ambiguity, this is how we are using the expression *moral law*: By *moral law* we mean an absolute righteous standard which admits of no exceptions. A non-moral law (including ceremonial law and civil law) is an arbitrary rule which may be imposed for various reasons at various times upon various persons. Where there is a conflict, ceremonial law must always yield to moral law. “You shall do no murder” is a moral law. “You shall drive on the right side of the road” is a non-moral law, but which is ordinarily a necessary law in order to prevent killing others or ourselves on the road in America. In England, “You shall drive on the left side of the road” works equally well. But sometimes there is a conflict, and when there is, unless we break the non-moral law and move to the opposite side of the road, we are going to break the moral law and kill someone.

## Jesus’ Syllogistic Logic of the Sabbath

When the Pharisees confronted Jesus with His violation of the Sabbath, Jesus responded with a simple syllogism from Scripture in order to disprove their theory that the Sabbath day commandment was pure moral law.

- **Matthew 12:1** At that period of time, Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath {day}, but His disciples hungered {for food}, so they began to pluck ears of grain and to eat. 12:2 Now when the Pharisees had seen {this}, they said to Him, “Behold, †your disciples are doing what is not lawful to be doing on a Sabbath {day}.” 12:3 So He said to them, “Did †you never read what David did, when he himself hungered {for food}, along with those who were with him? 12:4 How he entered into the house of God, and he ate the loaves of the presentation, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor yet {was it lawful} for those who were with him {to eat}, except {that it was lawful} only for those who were priests? 12:5 Or did †you never read in the Law that on Sabbath {days} the priests in the temple-compound desecrate the Sabbath {day}, and they are without guilt? 12:6 Yet I say to †you, that One greater than the temple-compound is here. 12:7 So if †you had known what {this} means, ‘I choose mercy and not sacrifice,’ {then} †you would not have condemned those who are guiltless.” [Mark 2:27 adds here: And He said to them, “The Sabbath {day} came into existence for the sake of man, not man for the sake of the Sabbath {day}.”] 12:8 For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath {day}.

Jesus’ disciples were harvesting on the Sabbath Day (12:1). The Law permitted gathering some of a neighbor’s grain (Deuteronomy 23:25). The Pharisees correctly noted that this was a violation of the Sabbath day commandment (12:2, compare Exodus 16:27-28; Nehemiah 13:15). Jesus confirmed their accusation when He compared what His disciples were doing to a time when David “hungered for food, along with those who were with him,” and “he entered into the house of God, and he ate the loaves of the presentation, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor yet was it lawful for those who were with him to eat, except that it was lawful only for those who were priests.” (12:3-4). The moral principle of mercy required that the intense hunger of David and those with him must be satisfied. This mercy of satisfying intense hunger took precedence over the ceremonial law of the temple regarding the eating of the loaves of presentation.

Furthermore, “on the Sabbath days the priests in the temple-compound desecrate the Sabbath day” as they were fulfilling ceremonial law, “and they are without guilt.” (12:5, compare Leviticus 16:30-31; 2 Kings 11:9; 2 Chronicles 23:8). Hence the service of the ceremonial law within the temple clearly took precedence over the keeping of the Sabbath day. Observe the simple reasoning:

**MAJOR PREMISE:**

*(In the case of David)*

*The mercy of satisfying intense hunger took precedence over the ceremonial law.*

**MINOR PREMISE:**

*(In the case of the priests)*

*Ceremonial law took precedence over the Sabbath.*

**CONCLUSION:**

*(In the case of Jesus’ disciples)*

*Therefore the mercy of satisfying intense hunger took precedence over the Sabbath.*

A is greater than B; B is greater than C; therefore A is greater than C. Jesus proved by clear deductive reasoning that though His disciples violated the law of the Sabbath day, they were nevertheless as blameless as David and the priests who also violated the law of the Sabbath day.

Lest the Pharisees missed the point of Jesus’ deductive syllogism, Jesus spelled it out for them. He said that they did not understand what the expression “*I choose mercy and not sacrifice,*” meant (12:7). Mercy is a moral principle. Sacrifice is ceremonial law. Hence the moral principle of mercy in feeding those intensely hungry takes precedence over the ceremonial law of the Sabbath. Jesus said that if they had understood the principle that moral principle took precedence over ceremonial law, then they would not have condemned the guiltless. What did they condemn the guiltless for? For breaking the Sabbath! Hence the Sabbath is ceremonial law.

**MAJOR PREMISE:**

*There is guilt for following ceremonial law over moral principle.*

**MINOR PREMISE:**

*The Pharisees had this guilt for following the Sabbath over the moral principle of mercy.*

**CONCLUSION:**

*Therefore the Sabbath is ceremonial law.*

In another place Jesus pointed to the fact that the Jews themselves circumcised on the Sabbath Day, thereby acknowledging that the ceremonial law of circumcision took precedence over the Sabbath.

- **John 7:23** If a man receives circumcision on a Sabbath {day}, in order that the Law of Moses should not be broken, {then} are ‡you bitterly enraged against Me personally because I made a man entirely sound on a Sabbath {day}?

The law of circumcision must be obeyed over the law of the Sabbath “in order that the Law of Moses should not be broken.” There are only four possibilities:

1. Both circumcision and the Sabbath are moral laws.
  2. Circumcision is a ceremonial law and the Sabbath is a moral law
  3. Circumcision is a moral law and the Sabbath is a ceremonial law.
  4. Both circumcision and the Sabbath are ceremonial laws.
- If both circumcision and the Sabbath are moral laws, then we have a moral law contradicting a moral law, which is, of course, impossible. Both the law of circumcision and the law of the Sabbath carried death penalties (Genesis 17:14; Exodus 31:14; Numbers 15:30-36), but that is no proof that they were moral

law. If they both were moral law, then we would have the moral absurdity of imposing the death penalty for disobeying the law of the Sabbath in order to obey the law of circumcision, or for disobeying the law of circumcision in order to obey the law of the Sabbath.

- If circumcision is a ceremonial law and the Sabbath is a moral law, then we have a ceremonial law taking precedence over a moral law, which is impossible for reasons similar to those stated above.
- If circumcision is a moral law and the Sabbath is a ceremonial law, then we have no conflict. But nobody asserts that circumcision is a moral law. A moral law cannot be removed, changed, or replaced.
- If both circumcision and the Sabbath are ceremonial laws, then we have no real conflict.

The whole argument of Matthew 12:1-8 and John 7:23 can be reduced to one simple logical deduction:

**MAJOR PREMISE:**

*Ceremonial law **can never** take precedence over moral law.*

**MINOR PREMISE:**

*Ceremonial law **did** take precedence over the Sabbath.*

**CONCLUSION:**

*Therefore the Sabbath **can never** be moral law.*

Mark's account of this incident adds one detail. Jesus said, "The Sabbath {day} came into existence for the sake of man, not man for the sake of the Sabbath {day}." (Mark 2:27)

Man is accountable to his Creator for what was given him in his creation. The moral law of God for all of mankind for all of time is whatever man is morally committed to do by virtue of the nature of his creation and by virtue of his relationship to his Creator. Man was made to bear the image of God in all that man does. If he bears the image of God as God has designed and commanded, man will be in full conformity to the moral law of God for all of mankind for all of time. In other words, man was made for the moral law. But Jesus said that man was **not** made for the Sabbath day. Therefore, the Sabbath day **cannot** be moral law.

Ceremonial law was made for man to assist him in his duties and to teach him. But Jesus said the Sabbath day was made for man. Therefore, the Sabbath day can only be ceremonial law.

Matthew (12:8), Mark (2:28) and Luke (6:5) record the words, "the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath day." In other words, the Sabbath is not above or beyond the authority of the Lord. It is true that the Lord is Lord over all things, including all laws, moral or ceremonial. However, Jesus is not here pointing to His lordship over moral law. How do we conclude this? Moral law is a reflection of the unchangeable nature of God in the created nature of man. The Lord cannot change moral law without first changing the nature of man, or else changing the nature of God. The Lord cannot, for example, change the moral law prohibiting murder without changing the nature of man and/or changing the nature of God Himself. Jesus, Who in Person is God, cannot change God's own nature. And Jesus is not talking about changing man's nature. Therefore, Jesus cannot be talking about his lordship over moral law. Then what is Jesus talking about His lordship over? The Son of Man is greater than the temple (12:6), that is, He is Lord over the ceremonial law which rules the temple. The Lord is therefore greater than the Sabbath – that is, He is Lord even of the Sabbath. The Lord of the Sabbath could and did suspend the Sabbath in the temple. Therefore the Sabbath is ceremonial law, not moral law.

## Some Logical Implications

By means of seven independent logical arguments, Jesus proved that the Sabbath law was ceremonial, not moral. On the one hand, if the Sabbath is moral law, then Jesus' whole argument utterly falls to the ground and the Pharisees have forever exposed Jesus as a fraud. On the other hand, if the Sabbath is ceremonial law, then Jesus has forever exposed the Pharisees as a fraud – and, through this example, He has exposed as a fraud everyone else who attempts to raise ceremonial law to the level of moral law.

Raising the Sabbath to the level of moral law had, in fact, the reverse effect of lowering mercy to the level of non-moral law. Jesus was determined, throughout His ministry, to expose this legalistic hypocrisy of the Pharisees, and to put the moral and the non-moral laws in their proper places. He did not oppose the Sabbath law. He opposed only its abuse. The Jews had no problem understanding Jesus' reasoning. Their only problem was with accepting it. Notice their response!

• **Matthew 12:9** Then when {He} had moved on from there, He came into their synagogue. 12:10 Now behold, there was a man having a withered hand. So they asked Him, saying (in order that they might accuse Him), "Would it be lawful to heal on Sabbath {days}?" 12:11 But He said to them, "What man would there be from among ~~you~~ you who would have one sheep, and when this one should fall into a pit on {one of} the Sabbath {days}, {then} he would in no way take hold of it and raise it up? 12:12 Then how much more is a man better than a sheep! For this reason it is lawful to make well on Sabbath {days}." 12:13 Then He said to the man, "Stretch out ~~your~~ your hand!" So he stretched {it} out, and it was restored as sound as the other. 12:14 Then when the Pharisees had left, they took up a council against Him, {as to} how they might destroy Him.

The Sabbath issue, more than any other issue, was what tested the Pharisical spirit. They could not tolerate the clear, concise, and conclusive reasoning of Jesus. But neither could they defeat it. If the Sabbath was not moral law, then this one fact would serve as the logical counter-example which would pull down their entire system of theology like a row of dominoes falling one block at a time. There are those who declare in our own day that the Sabbath is moral law. They stand essentially in the very same shoes as the Pharisees, and their entire system of theology may be pulled down with the very same counter-example. When they cannot logically argue against this truth, some turn to slandering the messengers of this truth with the label of "antinomian" – which means "what is against the law" – and they command their followers not to listen to such reasoning. Discern the spirits. Is this not a spirit akin to the Pharisees? We do not mean to be accusing any particular individual. The spirit of the Pharisees arises in every camp where men are involved, and sometimes good men get entangled in a spirit which they do not understand. Our purpose is simply to call attention to the need for soul-searching self-examination of the spirit which often motivates our actions.

## Wisdom in the Practical Application of the Sabbath

To say that the Sabbath day commandment is not pure moral law is not the same thing as to say that there is no moral law in the Sabbath day commandment. It is only to say that the literal observance of the commandment included some ceremonial elements. The primary ceremonial element of the Sabbath day commandment was the day itself. How do we know that? Because the New Testament specifically says so.

• **Colossians 2:16** Therefore do not let anyone judge ~~you~~ you with respect to eating or with respect to drinking, or in the category of feast, or new moon, or Sabbath {days}, 2:17 which things {of the handwritten law} are a shadow of the things which are coming; but the substance is of Christ. [Alternate translation of the last line: "which things are a shadow of the things which are coming, even {a shadow of} the body of Christ"].

Colossians 2:16 systematically lists all of the periodic days which the Jews honored (compare Leviticus 23:1-17; 1 Chronicles 23:31; 2 Chronicles 2:4; 8:13; 31:3; Nehemiah 10:33; Isaiah 1:13-14; 66:23; Ezekiel 45:17; 46:1-15):

- (1) Annual feasts. (Festival Sabbaths were part of the three annual feasts.)
- (2) Monthly feasts of the new moon. (Lunar Sabbaths were part of the monthly feasts.)
- (3) Weekly Sabbaths.

This text is saying that Christians had liberty to observe or not to observe dietary restrictions regarding foods and beverages, and they had liberty to honor or not to honor calendar events according to the three periodic divisions of days – annual, monthly and weekly. No one could judge them for observing or for not observing days. How

should we apply this rule? The New Testament specifically tells us this also.

• **Romans 14:1** Now be receiving † {into fellowship} with yourselves the one who is weak in the {collected deposit of} faith - not {however} for the purpose of judicial disputations. 14:2 The one {person} believes {it is lawful} to eat all things; the other {person} who is weak {in faith} continues eating {only} vegetables. 14:3 {As to} the one who eats {all things}: let him not treat with contempt the other who does not eat {all things}; and {as to} the other who does not eat {all things}: let him not condemn the one who does eat {all things} - for God has received him {into fellowship} with Himself. 14:4 †You - the other one who condemns a household servant of another person - who are †you? To his own master he stands or he falls; indeed, he shall be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. 14:5 The one person values {one} day more than {another} day; the other person values every day {alike}: Let each {of them} be fully assured by his own mind. 14:6 {As to} the one who observes the day: {it is} for the Lord {that} he observes {the day}; and {as to} the other who does not observe the day: {it is} for the Lord {that} he does not observe {the day}. Also, {as to} the one who eats {all things}: {it is} for the Lord {that} he eats {all things}, for he gives thanks to God {for what he eats}; and {as to} the other who does not eat {all things}: {it is} for the Lord {that} he does not eat {all things}: and he {likewise} gives thanks to God {for what he eats}.

Paul is talking about honoring special days – any days: annual, monthly, and weekly days. “The one who is weak in the faith” would be a Hebrew whose conscience had been instructed regarding the observance of these special days – the most important of these observances being the weekly Sabbath, which carried the penalty of death for those who did not observe the weekly Sabbath. Paul is saying that the Hebrew believers are free to continue to observe these days on their own. They shouldn’t be belittled for doing so. But neither should the Hebrew believers criticize the Gentile believers for their liberty in Christ. The Gentiles were never under a Sabbath day commandment. The Jews taught that the Gentiles were only under the seven laws of Noah, which included *no* Sabbath day commandment. Only when a Gentile was circumcised would he be brought under the Sabbath day commandment, which was the sign of the covenant with Israel. Jethro was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was the Gentile priest of God at Midian and the father-in-law of Moses who counseled Moses on how to govern Israel. The Hebrew believers could not compel the Gentile believers to be circumcised in order to bring them under the Sabbath day commandment (Acts 15). Yet the Gentile believers must allow the weak Hebrew believers time to be built up and strengthened in the collected deposit of the faith as it was being delivered through Christ’s apostles. Eventually the weak Hebrew believers must recognize that all believers – Hebrew or Greek – had the same liberty in Christ. Hebrew *non*-believers would still be under the Mosaic code, including the Sabbath day commandment, until 70 A.D. when the end of Israel as a covenant nation forever removed their special relationship to God.

The ceremonial observance of a certain day has been removed from the Sabbath day commandment, but whatever moral element there was in the Sabbath day commandment can never be removed, and therefore it must remain. What is that moral element in the Sabbath day commandment? The New Testament is not silent on the Christian’s use of time. The Sabbath day commandment is paralleled in the following New Covenant commands:

- **Ephesians 5:15** ... be carefully observing † how accurately †you are walking, not as unwise persons but rather as wise persons, 5:16 earnestly redeeming for yourselves [/buying back /making best use of] the opportune portion of time, because the days are full of worthless toil.
- **Colossians 4:5** Be walking † with wisdom toward those who are outside {of the circle of faith}, earnestly redeeming for yourselves [/buying back /making best use of] the opportune portion of time.

We are to make the best or most economical use of our time, seizing the opportunities provided for us, because the days evil – full of worthless toil. We are to use our time profitably, to edify or build one another up. But we are not to be ruled by time.

- **1 Corinthians 6:12** All things are lawful for me; notwithstanding, all things are not

{necessarily} beneficial [/useful /profitable]. All things are lawful for me; notwithstanding, I myself will not be brought under the control of anything. ... 10:23 All things are lawful for me; notwithstanding, all things are not {necessarily} beneficial [/useful /profitable]. All things are lawful for me; notwithstanding, all things do not {necessarily} edify.

We overlook this moral element of the Sabbath commandment because we look for the “carnal” and “childish” element of a specific designated time instead of looking for the mature moral principle for how we must use our time. The nation Israel was under carnal and childish “taste not, touch not, handle not” type of rules, like the laws of other nations (Colossians 2:20-22). A child must be ruled by such outward guidelines. There are things which we do not put into the hands or under the control of children because they lack self-control, and because they cannot perceive the consequences of their actions. We have our children observe certain customs in order to teach them – in a childish way – some elementary principles of the world.

- **Galatians 4:1** Now I say, for as long a time as the heir is a child [one without understanding], he differs in nothing from a slave, {although} he is {in prospect the} lord over all {properties}. 4:2 Notwithstanding, he is under guardians and trustees until the time pre-appointed by the father. 4:3 In this same manner, when we were children, even we-ourselves were enslaved under the elementary forms [/basic arrangements] of the world.

We might tell our son to mow the lawn for two hours, then rest 20 minutes. He needs to be diligent – not slothful; but he also needs to pace himself – not overwork. God told the Hebrews to work six days, then rest the seventh, in order to teach them some elementary principles. The nation Israel was subjected to a childish Sabbath day commandment because, if they were left to themselves without the discipline of the commandment, they would obliterate the principle of the restful enjoyment of their labors in gratitude to God for His providence. They, in their carnality, would not set apart time for rest and for worship.

The Sabbath day commandment taught the Hebrews – in a childish way – to redeem the time. It metered out the time for them. Underwork can be evil, but overwork can be evil also. However, Christians should not need to have their rests metered out to them.

- **Galatians 4:9** Yet now, having known God, or rather having been known by God, how are †you turning again to the feeble and insufficient elementary forms, to which †you are desiring once again to be enslaved? 4:10 †You are scrupulously observing days and months and seasons and years. 4:11 I am afraid for †you, lest perhaps I have labored for †you in to no purpose.

We have moved into the maturity of the Gospel. We no longer live as children in the “safety playpen” of territorial Israel – the protective shell of national existence. Instead, we Christians are spread out throughout every culture in the world. Now all things are lawful, but not all things are profitable, not all things edify, and we are not to be brought under the power of any (1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23). Mature adult Christians are to think for themselves and apply Christ’s law to everything. If they seek to please the Lord, if they understand the Law of Christ, and if they correctly perceive the facts and circumstances of their situation, they can make their own applications as to what they ought to do. We are free within the boundaries of the moral law and the Law of Christ. Sons of God in the age of Christian maturity are no longer under elementary principles of this world – we are not bound by childish “taste not, touch not, handle not” rules.

What about the observance of the first day of the week? We have two texts of Scripture which indicate that Christians met just after the Jewish Sabbath. By the Jewish method of reckoning time, the Jewish Sabbath stretched from sunset on the sixth day to sunset on the seventh day. By our method of reckoning time that would be sunset Friday to sunset Saturday (Acts 20:7-11; 1 Corinthians 16:2; compare 11:18). Jewish Christians would return to their daily tasks on Sunday morning (by our method of reckoning time), in accord with the Sabbath day commandment which required that they work six days. There is absolutely no evidence in the New Covenant Scriptures that Christians ever observed the first day of the week as a day of rest in any sense. The Christians repeatedly referred to the seventh day as the Sabbath. If they observed the first day of the week as a rest, then the Jews would have been in the greatest possible uproar about the Christians profaning the Sabbath

by changing the day. Instead we have the word of Paul that Christians are not bound to observe any days, though they are free to observe them. Christians are no longer bound by the ceremonial *form* of the commandment, but only by the moral *substance* of it.

The meeting of the brethren on the first day of the week is an Apostolic practice, and we are repeatedly commanded to follow the example of the Apostles (e.g., 1 Corinthians 4:16; 10:32-33; 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-9; Hebrews 6:12; 13:7). Hence the practice of meeting on the first day of the week may be considered an apostolic precedent, somewhat equivalent to a *ceremonial* law under the New Covenant. This commandment is inferior to and therefore must give way to the seven general direct commands which require that all things be done to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31), according to the apostles doctrines (1 Corinthians 11:2), for edification (1 Corinthians 14:26), decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40), in love (1 Corinthians 16:14), without murmurings and disputings (Philippians 2:14), and with thanksgiving (Colossians 3:17). Jesus Himself initiated communion on a Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday – depending on our interpretation; but not on a Saturday or a Sunday by anyone’s interpretation. Extreme circumstances may possibly dictate that meeting at a time other than the beginning of the first day of the week (Saturday sunset) would be significantly more edifying; or circumstances may dictate that meeting more often than once a week would be more edifying, or more decent and orderly, or more loving – but only for as long a time as such circumstances prevailed. Otherwise, we should default to the apostolic model.

The first day gathering of Christians is clearly linked in Scripture with the refreshing of the New Covenant which takes place in the communion of the loaf and cup. Thus the Christians gathering together took on a special significance. As the *Sabbath* was for the purpose of remembering the redemption and creation of Israel in the Exodus (Deuteronomy 5:15; Isaiah 51:13-16), so the *first day meeting* is for remembering the redemption and new creation of the people of God in Christ. As the *Sabbath* was the sign of the Old Covenant between God and Israel, so *communion* is the sign of the New Covenant between Christ and His people. Under the New Covenant, failure to observe communion at the beginning of the first day of the week (Saturday sunset) may be as much a profaning act as was the failure to observe the proscribed rest on the seventh day of the week under the Old Covenant. Those in our day who hold to the *form* of a Sabbath day commandment seem to be blinded to the *substance* of the remembrance, for they often observe communion no more frequently than monthly and often only semi-annually or annually.

## Summary & Conclusion

The problem with the Sabbatarian position is that it is built upon a theological induction from Scripture. Because the Ten Commandments are *largely* moral law, some have falsely induced that the Ten Commandments are *only* moral law. Once this theological induction has been made, the induction is used as a premise for many valid deductive arguments. Those who hold to the Sabbatarian position often feel their argument is impregnable because of its solid deductive structure. Often their attachment to their deductive system is so strong that they are incapable of examining their presuppositions. They often become so captivated by their speculative induction that no counter-example can move them to re-examine the inductive foundation upon which they are building their deductive system.

Jesus demonstrated with impeccable logic that the Sabbath was ceremonial law and not moral law. Yet the Pharisees refused to accept His deductive reasoning. Their refusal was moral in nature. If they could not destroy the argument, they would destroy the one making the argument.

The *moral* element in the Sabbath day commandment was the necessity to apportion one’s time so as best to worship and serve God. The *ceremonial* element in the Sabbath day commandment was the requirement of a twenty-four hour period of rest on the seventh day of every week from sunset to sunset. If we turn back to the childish form of the commandment and impose this childish form upon ourselves and others as moral law, then we will be denying the liberty which we have as mature sons in Christ, and we will be making ourselves slaves

under a yoke. Since we are commanded to move forward to maturity (1 Corinthians 14:20; Ephesians 4:13; Colossians 1:28; Hebrews 6:1) it is disobedience to move backward (Galatians 2:18; 4:10-11; 5:1-13). All disobedience to a command is sin.

The Jews of the first century had a weak conscience about observing days, for their culture was raised with the commandment from God to do so. But by now the time is long past for the Jew to recognize that God has judged the nation Israel, removed the childish commandments, and given a new law for mature sons in Christ. Some Christians today may in some sense have a weak conscience about observing days, but they cannot have a weak conscience in quite the same sense as the Jews of the first century. Even these modern-day “weak consciences” are free to observe days if they so choose, but they cannot be free to impose their practice upon others. All of God’s people have liberty in Christ to practice the moral commandment to “redeem the time” according to apostolic example and within the limits of the general commandments of the New Covenant. Unless these modern-day “weak consciences” are brought to maturity in Christ, they will eventually be forced by their own presuppositions to oppose Christ – probably not in word, but certainly in substance; maybe not in their lifetime, but certainly in the following generations of their followers. This is the kind of observation which should make us tremble in fear and self-examination. Are we, in some sense, guilty of a similar error; and will we, in some way, bring about a similar result? May the Lord, for His people’s sake, be pleased to defeat all of our errors in reasoning from His word. May the Lord be pleased, for His name’s sake, to bring us all to maturity in the Gospel. Amen.