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CHASING SHADOWS

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In recent times the issue of feast keeping has become a much debated one in Seventh-day Adventist circles. It seems that there are a significant number of sincere Christians who are presently examining this question and that a high percentage of them are concluding that the feasts of Israel ought still to be literally observed by Christians today. The Worldwide Church of God, founded by Herbert W. Armstrong, advocated the keeping of these feast-days for decades, but it was not until fairly recent times that this belief began to take hold on people within the ranks of Adventism. No less a person than Adventist scholar Samuele Bacchiocchi concluded that the feasts ought to be kept and gave strength and impetus to the feast days movement by writing a couple of books in support of feast keeping.

I myself have received letters and literature and have also had talks with people who seem to feel that the necessity of keeping the feasts is so clearly taught by the Bible that every reasonable person ought to be able to see it. I must say, however, that my own study of the subject has not persuaded me that God requires His people to observe the feast days today.

Hundreds of Christian groups exist today with hundreds of conflicting beliefs, yet all claiming to base their beliefs on the same Bible. It is therefore extremely important that as we study the word of God we seek most earnestly for the guidance of God through His Holy Spirit. This is the MOST important element in any attempt to study God's word, for it is certain that unless we have this guidance, the feebleness and perversity of the human mind will lead us into strange paths. It is also vital that we not only read the words of the Bible, but understand the underlying principles and purposes of God. "The letter killeth but the spirit giveth life."

MUST WE, OR MAY WE?

The question which we need to discuss, is not whether or not, these holy days, are full of instruction for us. That is not the question. The question is not whether we should study these cycles, and these times. That is not the question. The question is not whether or not we may choose to observe some of these days as a personal choice. The question is whether we all are obligated, required by God, to observe these times, and festivals today. That is the question.

It is very important that we understand the difference between whether we **MUST** or we **MAY** observe these feast days. To say that I may do a certain thing makes it optional. A matter of personal choice. I can take it or leave it alone if I prefer. No one may charge me with guilt if I choose not to do that thing. Since it is not a requirement, I am not compelled to do it. On the other hand, when I must do something I have no choice. The decision is not mine to make. It is, do or be damned. It is, conform or be charged with guilt. Which of these categories do the feast days fit into? **Must** we or **may** we observe these feasts?

Let us remember that for Israel under the Old Covenant, observance of these rituals and ceremonies was not an optional thing. It was woven into the very fabric of their lives. Observance was mandatory with the penalties of disobedience being very real. For them, observance of these ceremonies was rule. It was law. To disobey was to commit a serious transgression.

A CRITICAL PRINCIPLE OF INTERPRETATION

Before looking at details let us examine a broad principle of interpretation which the Bible clearly teaches. It is this: the Hebrew economy was basically a system of types, shadows and examples. It was essentially a lesson book whose lessons were symbols rather than reality. Since the time of Christ, God no longer is dealing with symbols and

types. The death of Christ represented a gigantic transition point in God's dealing with humanity. The acted lesson book of the Hebrew economy had fulfilled its purpose and from this point henceforth God (and therefore His people) was dealing with reality. No longer with forms and shadows. (Hebrews 8:4, 5)

As examples of this principle please look at the following.

- (a) Under the Old Covenant God's people had been a single nation of people bound by geographical boundaries, common blood, physical kinship and identified by the outward mark of circumcision. Now God's people were from every nation, kindred, tongue and people, not bound by Abraham's blood line but by the Spirit of Christ (Romans 2:28,29; 1 Corinthians 12:13). Circumcised not in the flesh but in the heart. In other words, the Hebrew economy dealt with carnal things, while the New Covenant deals with spiritual things.
- (b) Under the Old Covenant, Palestine, a physical geographical location had been considered to be the "holy land." A place upon which God placed special favour. Now Christians recognize (or ought to) that our inheritance is in heaven. "Jerusalem which is above is the mother of us all." (Galatians 4:26). We are "Come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem ..." (Hebrews 12: 22)
- (c) The Hebrew economy required the offering of carnal sacrifices which, being only symbols could never really deal with the problems of humanity. (Hebrews 10: 1-4). The sacrifices of the New Covenant are real and are effective in reaching the problems of mankind at the deepest level and literally have the power to solve these problems. (1 Peter 2:5; Heb. 13:16)

We could add numerous other examples. However, these three should serve to illustrate the point I am trying to make. Many Christians, failing to understand this principle or, only half accepting it have tried to mingle the Old and the New Covenants. The result has been a hodge podge of beliefs which show glaring inconsistencies. This has resulted in the belief that (1) the Jews are still God's special chosen people (2) Jerusalem is still a holy location specially protected by God above other locations. Consequently, many prophecies of the Old Testament

relating to the last days are interpreted literally, being applied to literal Jews, literal Palestine, a literal temple etc. In actual fact however, these prophecies ought to be applied in the light of the spiritual application which has been established since the time of the New Covenant.

In other words then, the Old Testament was a period, which came to a definite end with the arrival of the Messiah. (Luke 16:16) During that period of the Old Covenant, the Jews participated in a powerful learning exercise. Every year they took part in rituals and ceremonies which represented the main events of the plan of Salvation. It was a good teaching tool, but it was not the reality.

The Bible tells us that we (God's people) were at that time only children (spiritually). Therefore we were under tutors and governors, in bondage under the elements of the world. (Galatians 4:2, 3). This was a stop-gap. Its purpose was to prepare the people of God for adulthood when the fullness of the time was come and we would move from symbols to actually experiencing the real events to which the symbols pointed.

When we were children, we played with toys, with dolls and model cars. Now we are adults should we do the same? As a child in school, my teacher made me write dozens of essays. I had to do it. I had no choice. Yet these essays had no value in themselves, they were simply the means by which I was prepared for the reality of now writing articles such as this one! There comes a time when we must move from childhood to adulthood, from form to reality. In the history of God's people that transition period came at Calvary. From this point henceforth we no longer are acting out the symbols of the events of Salvation, we have moved beyond these and are participants in the reality.

Does this mean that everything which the ancient Hebrews did in their worship was ineffective and useless? Not really. Many of God's people in the Old Testament looked beyond the form and ceremony and recognized the deeper implications of these rituals. They recognized the realities which these forms illustrated and by faith laid hold on the blessings (Hebrews 11:4). These ceremonies, therefore, were a constant reminder and a promise to those who possessed spiritual discernment, of larger blessings in the future on which they could even then, lay hold by faith.

LAWFUL OR EXPEDIENT?

At least two times the apostle Paul stated that “all things are lawful.” (1 Corinthians 6:12; 1 Corinthians 10:23) “all things are lawful, but all things are not expedient.” (1 Corinthians 6:12) What did he mean by this statement? Consider carefully what he was saying here. His meaning was that as far as a New Testament Christian was concerned the rituals, regulations and ceremonies of the Old Testament system of law or legalism did not apply. For the Christian, “*all things are lawful*”. The law no longer dictates my behavior, no longer determines my activities from day to day. Notice, however, what he says next: “But all things are not expedient.” The word “expedient” means, “necessary” or “helpful.” The point Paul was making is that there may still be some things which the law commands or prohibits which we may still observe, but not anymore because the law says so. Not because the law continues to be our governor or schoolmaster. We have been delivered from the law (Romans 7:6) “*All things are now lawful*”. Our reason for doing these things now is not anymore because the law says so. That kind of obedience is for children under a schoolmaster. Our reason now, as liberated intelligent adults is the question of whether the thing is “expedient.” Whether it is helpful or necessary. No one may say to me, “you must, because the law says so”. The law is no longer my schoolmaster. I no longer need to listen to its commands.

Paul himself did something at one time which is a good illustration of this principle. In Galatians 5:2 he said that if anybody was circumcised, Christ was of no effect to that person. But it was Paul who took Timothy, and circumcised him! (Acts 16:3). Paul took Timothy and circumcised him, and then told the Galatians, “if you are circumcised, Christ is of no effect to you.” Was this a double standard? Was Paul a hypocrite? Not at all. He was simply operating on the principle, “*all things are lawful, but all things are not expedient*”. In other words, if you were to circumcise your child because you believed the law required it, because you believed that God required it, then it showed that your faith was warped. You didn’t understand salvation. However, if you did it as a matter of convenience, for health reasons, or as in the case of Timothy, so that there would be no prejudice among the Jews, then it was alright. The issue was not what he did. The issue was the reason for his doing it.

SONS OR SERVANTS?

Galatians chapter 4:1-11 is a critical passage in the study of this issue of the feast days. Verses 1-5 say:

“Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; {2} But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. {3} Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: {4} But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, {5} To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” (Galatians 4:1-5)

When Paul says “we were children”, who is he referring to? Clearly, he is speaking of the people of God. These are the first five verses of chapter four, but if we look at the last verse of the previous chapter, we will see that this chapter is simply a continuation of what Paul was explaining in chapter three. In the last verse of chapter three he says,

“And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:29)

Then immediately he goes on to say in the first verse of chapter four,

“Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all;” (Galatians 4:1)

He is speaking about God’s people. We are heirs of the kingdom, but there was a time when we, God’s people, were children in our religious experience. During the time of the Old Testament God dealt with His people as children. Because of the limitations of their understanding, they were kept “in bondage under the elements of the world.” What were these “elements” which kept God’s people in bondage? Paul explains in verses 9 and 10. He asks, “how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements to which you desire again to be in bondage?” Then he explains what he means by saying,

“you observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you lest I have labored for you in vain.” (v. 10, 11)

It is clear then that the observance of days, months, seasons and years were a part of the “weak and beggarly elements” which kept God’s people “under bondage” under the Old Covenant when we were still children.

The point is, these “*weak and beggarly elements*” (v. 9) “*of the world*” (v. 3) were simply tutors and governors. They were intended to teach graphic lessons to a people who were spiritually immature, but their usefulness was only for a very definite and limited period. They were only functional until “*the time appointed by the Father*” (v. 2) That appointed time arrived when “*God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law*” (v. 4, 5) That we might no more be servants, but sons.

Some of those who advocate the keeping of the feasts have suggested that Paul was here referring to Pagan holidays and festive seasons and they have concluded that these Galatians (former pagans) were returning to the practices of their former religion in observing pagan seasons, days and times. I must strongly disagree with this conclusion. What is the issue in the book of Galatians? It is too plain to be missed. The problem was that these Galatians who had become children of God on the simple basis of faith in Christ were being persuaded by Christian Jews that faith in Christ was not enough to assure them salvation. They had been persuaded that they also needed to observe Jewish rites and ceremonies such as circumcision (Galatians 5:1-4) and the observance of days, months, times and years (the feasts). This was the issue. Read the following verses and you will see this very clearly Galatians 2:14; 3:5; 4:21; 5:1-4; 6:12,13.

The apostle Paul opposed this trend very strongly. As far as he was concerned, these people had lost their way. In coming to the conclusion that these ceremonies were necessary for Christians, these brethren showed that they did not understand the gospel. The point is, these Galatians had once understood that salvation was through a relationship with God. How was it that they had gone back to trying to please God through the observance of days, weeks etc.? The problem lay not so much in the fact that the Galatians were observing these days, but rather in the fact that they were observing them with the feeling that

they were necessary for salvation. That they contributed to their salvation. Because of this attitude the observance of these days had become harmful and even a threat to their salvation. Paul's statement was "*I am afraid of you lest I have bestowed labour upon you in vain.*"

WHAT ABOUT THE TEN COMMANDMENTS?

With this kind of focus and this understanding of the Old Testament can we justify the observance of the Ten Commandments and in particular the observance of the Sabbath? Let us see if we can strike the balance here. Strenuous efforts have been made by persons both within and outside of Adventism to place the Ten Commandments on the same footing as all the other laws of the Old Testament. The thinking is that if it can be demonstrated that the Sabbath stands upon exactly the same foundation as the other holy days observed by the Jews, then those other holy days will either stand or fall with the Sabbath. In the case of Sunday worshipers, their motive is to demonstrate that the holy days are abolished and therefore, if the Sabbath, stands on the same basis, it must also be abolished. In the case of those who advocate the keeping of the feasts, their motive is to establish that the keeping of the feasts remains necessary as long as the keeping of the Sabbath remains necessary.

However, it cannot be done. Even today, the hand-written copy of the Ten Commandments, engraved on stone with the finger of God remains in its original state hidden away somewhere, undecayed, unchanged. Where is the original copy of the other laws written with Moses' hand? Long since decayed, rotted away gone forever. An apt illustration of the difference between the Ten Commandments and the other laws. The point is, we must come to see the difference between mere ceremony and genuine morality.

What is Morality? According to Webster's New World Dictionary it "*implies conformity with the generally accepted standards of goodness or rightness in conduct or character.*" It is "*based on the principle of right conduct rather than legality.*"

You see, morality has to do with what is intrinsically right: the basic fundamentals of right and wrong, not deriving its rightness from its link with some consequential effect, but right in itself. Morality appeals to man's conscience. Nevertheless, it is vital that we recognize that God is the source of morality. He is the Author of the ultimate definitions of right. In the Old Covenant, God's definition of morality is found in the Ten Commandments. It is true that many of the other laws and statutes that God gave to Israel were applications and subsections of the Ten Commandments but while some of these statutes expressed right from wrong, they did not, of themselves, embody the concept of morality as the Ten Commandments did.

From the beginning of the history of mankind one thing has remained constant in God's dealings with men. While His method of communication has varied, His way of teaching has varied, His revelations of Himself has been in different ways, yet God's definition of sinful behaviour has never changed. He has always required that His people should refrain from committing sin and has always made sure that they have had a clear understanding of what was wrong. It was not only in the time when John wrote, but in all ages that sin was "*the transgression of the law*". (1 John 3:4).

Under the Old Covenant man sinned by breaking one of the 10 Commandments. When he broke those laws, the sacrificial system provided a way for him to be forgiven and restored to God's favour. There were also civil laws to govern the nation as well as health laws to ensure the well-being of the people. There were typical ceremonies which illustrated the plan of salvation. But the real issue was the 10 Commandments. It is true that the root of sin goes far deeper than simply how man behaves in obeying ten rules; it is true that a proper understanding of sin goes much further than simply the superficial understanding of those commandments. But the committing of sin always involved direct or indirect transgression of these laws, and all the types were simply illustrations of how God would deal with the problem of man breaking those laws.

No other commandments can be compared to these 10 Commandments. Jesus expressed God's law in the two great pillars—love to God and love to man—but we can clearly see that these two great commands embrace all of the 10 Commandments. The first four commandments define the practical application of love to God with the

last six outlining the practical application of love to man. Granted that these 10 Commandments express love in a negative way. “Thou shalt not,” rather than “Thou shalt.” Nevertheless, when the underlying principles of the 10 Commandments are understood and applied, “*The law of the Lord is perfect*”. (Psalms 19:7)

While it is true that the governing force in a Christian’s life is the Holy Spirit and not the written law (Ten Commandments), yet it is also true that the Holy Spirit leads every Christian to walk in harmony with the Ten Commandments. The Spirit of God writes the great law of God upon the heart and mind of every believer so that we may perfectly observe that law, (Hebrews 8:10) because, though we are no longer **under** the law (that is, no longer motivated, governed, controlled by law, but by a new mind), yet it is still true as it always has been in every age that “*sin is the transgression of the law*”. (1 John 3:4). It is wrong to transgress any of the 10 commandments.

WHAT ABOUT THE SABBATH?

As we stated before, attempts have been made to place these feast days on the same footing as the Seventh-day Sabbath. However, there is a major difference between the Sabbath and all the other holy days and seasons which were observed by the children of Israel. What was the difference? All the feasts and holy days of Israel were types or shadows. They were symbols which pointed backwards to some significant action of God in the past, and, more importantly, which pointed forward to significant future events in the plan of salvation. These feasts, therefore were not **REAL** events in themselves. Rather they were teaching tools which helped the Israelites to remember and focus on real events in the past or in the future. Was this true of the Seventh-day Sabbath? A little careful thought will show us that the Seventh-day Sabbath was different and was established upon entirely different principles. Let us examine the foundation of the Sabbath for a moment.

Genesis 2:2-3 gives us the description of the Sabbath’s origin and explains the reason for its observance. It says,

“And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.” (Genesis 2:2-3)

Let us notice two things that God did to the Sabbath. First of all, He **blessed** it; that is, He imparted some special virtue to the day. God’s blessing is not just the speaking of words. When God blesses something a change takes place in that thing. From the moment the blessing is imparted that thing becomes different from others in a marked way which is discernible. For example, if God blessed a field it would bear more abundantly than other fields. If God blessed a barren woman’s womb she would bear children. Therefore when God blessed the Sabbath day, He made it possible for people to gain something on that day which was not available on other days.

Secondly, God **sanctified** the Sabbath. This means that He set it aside for a holy purpose. He ensured by this means that the day was not to be used for any secular purpose but was to be wholly set aside for undisturbed fellowship with God.

Let us take careful note of the time when God did all this. It was on the Seventh day of the first week, immediately following creation. At this time there was no sin, no need yet for a plan of salvation, no types, and no shadows. Whatever was happening then, at that time was no symbol, but reality. What God instituted then, in that garden was his **PERFECT** plan for sinless men. Man enjoyed perfect spiritual rest in that garden. They did not need a symbol or a type pointing forward to some future rest. The point is, that the Sabbath is not primarily a type or a shadow. The original and the ultimate reason for the observance of the Sabbath is that the Sabbath has value in itself. The blessing is in the Sabbath itself, imparted to the day itself, rather than in the fact that the day is a reminder of some other event. Granted, the Sabbath served as a reminder of creation. Granted, the Sabbath has, since the introduction of sin, been used as a symbol of a future rest experience. However, the ultimate and chief reason for Sabbath observance, is the fact that God Himself first rested on that day and then set it aside for that same purpose of rest, before there was any sin in the world.

Just consider for a moment. What does the Bible mean when it says that “God rested on the Seventh day?” How did God rest? What happened to God on that day? Did he sit down for a while and revive His muscles? Was it simply that He did absolutely no work on that day? In Exodus 31:17 there is an intriguing statement. Here we are told that on the Seventh day God rested “**AND WAS REFRESHED!!**” Clearly, this rest was not simply a ceasing from work. This was an experience which did something for God.

We know that God could not have needed **physical** rest. This, therefore must have been a spiritual rest. An experience which God enjoyed on that first Seventh day which brought happiness and delight to the heart of God. What was this experience? This experience was obviously found in the fellowship that He enjoyed with Adam and Eve. This was the first time in the history of the universe that God had ever enjoyed fellowship with men. As Adam and Eve rejoiced in God’s creation, as they discovered the beauties and wonders of their new home, as they named the animals, God’s heart was refreshed. He felt the joy that a parent feels when he takes his children to the zoo or to the ocean for the first time. For Adam and Eve it was a wonderful day, but it was also a happy day for God. The Bible says that He rested and was refreshed. “*Therefore (for this reason) He blessed the Seventh day and sanctified it.*” (Genesis 2:3) God’s reason in blessing the Sabbath, was the experience He had enjoyed on that day. In other words, God decided that He would place a special blessing upon the Seventh day and sanctify or set it apart for a holy purpose forever. What was that holy purpose? It was that man and God could repeatedly enjoy the same fellowship which they had enjoyed on that first Sabbath day. More than two thousand years later when God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses on mount Sinai, He declared that the same blessing was still on the Sabbath day and that therefore the Jews were to keep it holy. (Exodus 20:8-11)

It should be absolutely clear then that the Seventh-day Sabbath is not primarily a type or a shadow, but is an institution which has always had value in itself, and which is a part of God’s perfect plan for sinless man. It is impossible therefore to place the feasts such as the Passover, Pentecost, Atonement, Tabernacles etc. on the same footing as the Sabbath. These were all commemorative and typical. They were reminders of some real event already happened or still to hap-

pen in the future. This was their only purpose. There was no particular blessing placed on these days. Their main purpose was that they were lesson books used to educate and prepare children in a school for the responsibilities of adulthood. These lessons were not simply studied from books or taught by word of mouth, but in keeping with God's forceful method of teaching in the Old Testament, these lessons were acted out in the Hebrew economy year after year.

The question is, when did the people of God move from childhood to adulthood? When did they move from form to reality? From mere lessons to actual life? Some people say that we are still in that childhood period, that we are still acting out the realities of our faith. However, this is not in keeping with the revelations of God's word.

You see, the Bible does not present God's plans and purposes as a hodgepodge mingling of two systems which overlap each other. No, God had a definite plan in the Old Testament to move His people and His purposes in the world towards a certain point. That great turning point arrived with the incarnation, life and death of God's Son. This was the graduation point for God's people when we no longer act out the symbols, but as adults, experience the real events in the plan of Salvation. (Galatians 4:3-7)

LET EACH BE FULLY PERSUADED

In Romans 14, the apostle Paul again addresses the issue of the observance of holy days. He says in verses 4-6,

"Who art thou, that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth, yea he shall be holden up, for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth one day above another, another esteemeth every day alike, let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord, and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it." (Romans 14:4-6)

Paul says that if a man wants to keep the day holy, it is up to him. Who are you to judge him? If a man wants to not keep the day, who are you to judge him? Could you take that same attitude with regards to the ten commandments? Could you say, "if a man wants to steal, who are you to judge him?" No not at all. The law judges such a person; the sense of right and wrong judges such a person. You have a right to say to such a person, "you are condemned if you continue to do this thing."

But as far as feast-keeping is concerned, we are talking about something that is optional; and it is clear to me as I read the scriptures, that some of the apostles did at times observe the feast days. Paul, on occasion did observe the feast days, and a lot of people say, "well, why?" If they were not necessary, why did Paul observe these feast days?

Let us consider something: These festivals had more than one meaning to Jews. They were not only of religious significance, but they were also national holidays. Even today, many Jews, still observe the feast days not entirely as religious festivals. The American independence day is the fourth of July. When was the Jewish independence day? It was the fourteenth of Nisan, the day of the Passover celebration.

In verse one of this chapter Paul makes an important point. He says that Christians are to receive, or accept those who are weak in the faith. Let us understand what he is saying. He was not speaking of physical weakness, but of weakness **in the faith**. In other words he was speaking of people who had a poor understanding of the principles of the gospel. People who did not understand properly the means by which we are saved. This weakness manifested itself in two ways. First, there were those who believed in eating only herbs (in connection with salvation), and secondly, there were those who esteemed one day above another.

Paul's counsel was that we should not judge one another in these things. The one who observed the day should not judge the one who did not and vice versa. This might seem like strange counsel in light of the fact that Paul's rebuke of the Galatians was so severe because of their observance of days and times. However, we must take into account the fact that Paul was addressing different groups of people in the epistles to the Romans and the Galatians. In the book of Galatians he was writing to gentile Christians who had never previously been

accustomed to practicing the rites and ceremonies of Judaism. But the book of Romans was apparently written chiefly to Jewish Christians living in Rome for whom these rituals had always been a way of life. (See Romans 2:17-29; 4:1; 7:1)

As we study the life and teachings of the apostle Paul, it becomes obvious that Paul always had a problem with the believing Jews who continued to insist that it was necessary to keep the rites and ceremonies of the law. Many of these judaizing Christians followed Paul around from place to place and tried to convince Paul's gentile converts that it was necessary to keep the laws of Moses. (Acts 15:1). As far as the gentile believers were concerned, Paul was adamant. These ceremonies and rites of the mosaic law were absolutely unnecessary; and observance of them was an indication that believers had lost their way. However, with the Jews, Paul took a different attitude. Many of the Jews (even some of the apostles) found it difficult to grasp the totality of the change which had taken place with the introduction of the New Covenant. They tried to combine the new with the old, and found it difficult to divorce themselves from their former way of life and religion. Paul adopted a more tolerant approach with the Jews, recognizing how difficult it was for them to totally abandon the concepts which had been ingrained into their thinking and into the very fabric of their lives from earliest childhood.

Those Jewish Christians, never lost their Jewish identity, and Paul sometimes found himself in the midst of a conflict between what his conscience told him was required, and what his Jewish brethren required of him. We find an example of this in Acts 21:17-26. It relates an incident which happened on the final visit of Paul to Jerusalem. In verse 17 it says;

“and when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly, and the day following, Paul went in with us unto James, and all the elders were present.”

In verse 20 it continues:

“and when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him Thou seest brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe, and they are all zealous, for the law.”

The Jews were all zealous **for the law**. Does this mean that they were zealous for the Ten Commandments, or does it mean that they were zealous for the Old Testament ceremonies and rituals which had passed away? The next verse makes it clear which law these Christian Jews were zealous for.

“They are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying, they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.”

Notice that it was not just circumcision that these Jews were concerned about. They also were concerned that Christian Jews should follow “Moses” and “the customs”. Was Paul teaching Christians that there was no need to observe these things? It certainly was what he was teaching the gentile Christians! Now the Jewish brethren were concerned that he was also teaching it to the Jews. It becomes immediately clear that a very large portion of the early church still continued to observe many of the rituals of the Old Covenant, including circumcision. It is to be hoped that they were not doing it with the conviction that these things were necessary for salvation, but rather, because they were a part of their Jewish heritage. They had become Christians, but they still retained their Jewish identity and culture. The Jewish Christians then had an excuse for observing these holy days. Therefore Paul stated that Christians should not judge one another in regard to whether or not one observed any of these holy days. Apparently it was even O.K. for the Jewish Christians to continue to submit to circumcision.

With regards to those who were not Jews, however, it was different. These had no **cultural** reasons for observing these rituals and ceremonies and observing them was a signal that the gentiles had missed the way of salvation and had reverted to a religion which was severely limited and had ultimately been abolished. Therefore to the gentile Galatian Christians, Paul’s statement was,

“Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.”
(Galatians 4:10- 11)

“Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.” (Galatians 5:2)

The Jewish Christian leaders were anxious that their Jewish brethren should know that Paul was not encouraging Jews to give up Judaism in order to accept Christianity. They told Paul that in order to please these Jews he should take a vow, go into the temple, purify himself, and after a few days offer the sacrifice that was required. Paul complied. He was even going to have a sacrifice offered for him, at the end of the days. He complied, because he was anxious to please his Jewish brethren. It is interesting to read Ellen White’s comment on this.

The Spirit of God did not prompt this instruction; it was the fruit of cowardice. The leaders of the church in Jerusalem knew that by non-conformity to the ceremonial law, Christians would bring upon themselves the hatred of the Jews and expose themselves to persecution. The Sanhedrin was doing its utmost to hinder the progress of the gospel. Men were chosen by this body to follow up the apostles, especially Paul, and in every possible way to oppose their work. Should the believers in Christ be condemned before the Sanhedrin as breakers of the law, they would suffer swift and severe punishment as apostates from the Jewish faith.

Many of the Jews who had accepted the gospel still cherished a regard for the ceremonial law and were only too willing to make unwise concessions, hoping thus to gain the confidence of their countrymen, to remove their prejudice, and to win them to faith in Christ as the world’s Redeemer. Paul realized that so long as many of the leading members of the church at Jerusalem should continue to cherish prejudice against him, they would work constantly to counteract his influence. He felt that if by any reasonable concession he could win them to the truth he would remove a great obstacle to the success of the gospel in other places. But he was not authorized of God to concede as much as they asked.

When we think of Paul’s great desire to be in harmony with his brethren, his tenderness toward the weak in the faith, his reverence for the apostles who had been with Christ, and for James,

the brother of the Lord, and his purpose to become all things to all men so far as he could without sacrificing principle—when we think of all this, it is less surprising that he was constrained to deviate from the firm, decided course that he had hitherto followed. But instead of accomplishing the desired object, his efforts for conciliation only precipitated the crisis, hastened his predicted sufferings, and resulted in separating him from his brethren, depriving the church of one of its strongest pillars, and bringing sorrow to Christian hearts in every land. {Ellen White: Acts of Apostol p. 404- 405}

COLOSSIANS 2:16,17

There are three passages in the New Testament that speak about the observance of days more than any other. We have already examined two of them, Romans 14:5,6 and Galatians 4:1- 11. Let us now look at the final passage which is probably the most critical one for us to consider in examining this whole issue. This passage is Colossians 2:16,17. Let us see what we can understand as we take a careful look at what it says.

We will begin with verse 16:

“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:”
(Colossians 2:16)

On the surface, what this verse seems to be saying, is that nobody should judge you, about what you eat or drink, or in respect of whether you keep a holy day or not, or whether you observe the new moons, or whether you observe the Sabbath, and in fact, that is how it is generally interpreted. Let us see if this interpretation is true.

This entire chapter is setting Christ in contrast with the other things that people do to try to obtain salvation. Its focus is: **Christ versus**

the rest. Let me just pinpoint one or two verses which make this clear. Verse 2 tells us that in Christ are hid **ALL** the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. In verses 6-9, Paul says,

“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: (7) Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. (8) Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. (9) For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” (Colossians 2:6-9)

In Jesus Christ there dwells **the fullness of the divine nature** bodily. The next verse says, *“and you are complete in Him,”* this is a critical verse. When I have found Jesus Christ, what have I found? I have found the fullness of the Godhead. I have found completeness in Christ. That is why He says in the previous verses, that as you have found Him, you are to continue to walk in Him, rooted, and built up, and established in Christ, because in Him is the fullness of the Godhead, and when you have found the fullness of the Godhead, there is nothing more required for salvation, or for victory over sin. What kind of blindness could persuade a person, that he needs something more when he already has the fullness of the Godhead? Therefore Paul says, *“don’t let anybody spoil you through philosophy, vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, because when you have found Christ, you have already found all that you need for salvation from sin’s penalty and power.”*

It is in this context that he says, *“let no man therefore judge you with regards to these things,”* the word **therefore** is important. It means, *“In the light of what I have said before.”* These other things are totally unnecessary now that you have found all you need in Christ.

Then in verse 17 Paul says something else which is also full of significance. Many of those who discuss this passage seem to miss the implications of what is said here:

“which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ.”
(Colossians 2:17)

Everybody knows the difference between a shadow, and a body. A shadow looks somewhat like the body, but it is not the real thing even though it can be helpful. If children are playing hide and seek, and one is hiding around a corner, and the light is in the right position, you'll see the shadow, and recognize the outline. And so by following the shadow, you can find the person. But now you have found the person or the body, should you continue to cling to the shadow? Does that make sense? He says, these things are shadows of things to come, but the body, the substance, the reality is Christ. You have to look at the context of the whole passage to get clearly what he is trying to say.

Because Paul mentions *Sabbaths*, there are some who conclude that the seventh day Sabbath, is also a shadow, is also one of these things, that have passed away. And there are some of those promoting the feast days who say that because of the linguistic structure of that word, it does refer to the seventh day Sabbath. Yet as we stated before, this cannot be referring to the seventh day Sabbath. At creation there was no sin. As God completed the world, after He had made Adam and Eve, creation was perfect. What was established there, was God's ideal. What was there, was no type or symbol, or shadow. There was no need for symbols or shadows, until sin came into this earth. Why would God have set up a shadow of how He was going to deal with sin, when there was no sin? Why would He have established a shadow of the plan of salvation when there was no need then, for salvation? No, the Seventh day Sabbath was not established to be a shadow, or a type. The seventh day Sabbath was from creation. It was there from the seventh day of this earth's history. The seventh day is God's rest. It was not a shadow or a type.

A type is a symbol, or a representation of a greater reality in miniature. All the types and shadows were instituted **after** man committed sin, and therefore the seventh-day Sabbath could not have been one of these Sabbaths, that were simply a shadow, of things to come. This is why it is set apart from all other Sabbaths, and this is the reason why when God immortalized His laws, by writing them on stone, He included the Seventh-day Sabbath right in the heart of those laws. God included it in what we call the moral law. He put it right in the heart of it. God put it among the other nine eternal commandments because He made it moral. It does not have to do with type, or the form of worship, it has to do with the reality of worship.

VERY FEW CEREMONIES UNDER THE NEW COVENANT

Let us consider a very important point. There is one thing which God is seeking to accomplish in His people. When we take away all the props, there is really only one single purpose. It is this: that His people may be restored to the moral image of God; that men may fully possess the character of God. Is there anything else which is really important to God as far as our development and behaviour are concerned? Think about this carefully. Every ritual, every ceremony, every symbol, every service is simply a means of directing and assisting us towards that one great goal of moral perfection. If God is able to bring His people to this place by one single means, would He require anything else of us? For what purpose? God is not interested in forms and ceremonies and rituals. What God is concerned about is character. A mind and a heart which are perfectly in harmony with His own mind. (Micah 6:6-8)

The question is, how is this perfect mind, this perfect character to be attained? If you should ask a non-Christian Jew, he probably would tell you that it is achieved by a faithful observance of all the details of the law of Moses. But, being a Christian, what would you say? Do you know the means God has provided for Christian perfection? Please look at the following verses. The way is too plainly revealed for us to miss it:

- *“...in him dwelleth all the fullness of the godhead bodily and ye are complete in him...”* (Colossians 2:9,10)
- *“Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not”* (1 John 3:6)
- *“if Christ be in you the body is dead because of sin.”* (Romans 8:10)
- *“I am the way the truth and the life...”* (John 14:6)
- *“Christ is the end of the law for righteousness ...”* (Romans 10:4)
- *“This is the work of God that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.”* (John 6:29)
- *“If any man be in Christ he is a new creature ...”* (2 Corinthians 5:17)

- *“One thing is needful and Mary hath chosen that better part...”*
(Luke 10:42)

This list of texts could go on and on. This is the overwhelming testimony of the New Testament. In order to fulfill the requirements of righteousness, in order to be like God, men need **one thing** only. Not many things, but one thing and that one thing is to be **in Christ** and to remain there. Is there anyone who will disagree with this?

This then is the reason why Christ gave us so few ceremonies under the New Covenant. Christians no longer observe forms and symbols, but worship in spirit and in truth. But why do we periodically observe the Lord's supper? In examining more closely, it dawned on me that this ceremony focuses on the one single essential thing which all Christians **must** work on. You and I cannot of ourselves do good works, we cannot produce the character of God. The only one who can do this in us is Christ. Our work then, our labour is to keep the bond between ourselves and Christ unbroken. Our effort must be to ensure that communion with Him remains constant. This, and this alone is the great work of Christians. Jesus promises that if we do this, we shall “bear much fruit” “work the works of God” be “new creatures” and “be complete in him.” All other ceremonies become unnecessary because in fellowship with Christ we have already achieved **all** that the other ceremonies were intended to accomplish, that is, to produce a character in us which is like God's. (Romans 8:1-4)

What we need today is not so much to participate in reminders of things and events. These do not help. The answer and the only answer is to focus on, and seek fellowship with a person. The Person, Christ. Real intimate fellowship with Him is absolutely the only answer to **ALL** the needs of mankind.

This is what the communion service speaks of, and is intended to bring forcefully and continually to our minds. The need of intimate fellowship with the Lord. The truth is that when we have this, we need nothing else. It is interesting to note also that this was, and is the purpose of the Seventh-day Sabbath. It originated as a time of close fellowship between God and man and was set aside for this purpose forever. The desire for fellowship with His people is an integral part of the character of God. This is why God placed the Sabbath in the heart of the **MORAL** law. True morality is a reflection of the character of

God, and in the Sabbath, God gave us and Himself an opportunity for intimate, undiluted fellowship at least one day out of every week.

AN ARGUMENT FOR FEAST-KEEPING?

We should like to conclude this article with just a brief response to one more of the arguments in favour of keeping the feasts. As eminent a scholar as Samuele Bacchiocchi has suggested that Ellen White advocated the keeping of the feasts. A careful examination of her life and writings, however, reveal almost a complete silence in regard to the question of feast-day observance for us today. The burden of evidence seems to rest on one statement where she says:

“Well would it be for us to have a feast of tabernacles, a joyous commemoration of the blessings of God to us as a people.” {RH, November 17, 1885 par. 14}

A close examination of this passage will reveal that Ellen White was not advocating the literal observance of the Feast of Tabernacles, but was speaking in a figurative sense. What she was really saying was that just as in the days of the Jews, they observed this feast in which they brought back to mind the blessings of God in their past history, so it would be good for God’s people today if we also would take time out to recall and keep fresh in our minds the goodness of God towards us as a people.

The simple and striking fact is that there is not a single instance recorded anywhere in Adventist history or in the writings of Ellen White where she or the early Adventist church ever literally kept any of the feasts of Israel. This would have been very difficult to understand if Ellen White had been an advocate of, or a keeper of the feast-days. To the contrary, Ellen White had this to say about the Passover:

“Christ was standing at the point of transition between two economies and their two great festivals. He, the spotless Lamb of God, was about to present Himself as a sin offering, that He would thus

bring to an end the system of types and ceremonies that for four thousand years had pointed to His death. As He ate the Passover with His disciples, He instituted in its place the service that was to be the memorial of His great sacrifice. The national festival of the Jews was to pass away forever. The service which Christ established was to be observed by His followers in all lands and through all ages.” {Desire of Ages, p. 652}

HOW SHOULD WE APPROACH THE FEASTS?

The truth, my brothers and sisters, is that we can learn many valuable lessons from these ceremonies, which God gave to the Jews. We will benefit greatly by continuing to study them.

Observing them, however, is another thing. We have noted that Paul related differently to different Christians with respect to the keeping of feasts. With the Jews, he was able to accept their background of Judaism and realize that these feasts had several different meanings for them. He realized how ingrained the feasts were in their thinking and into the very fabric of their lives from earliest childhood. However, to the Gentiles, to those not raised in Judaism, he spoke very differently. Paul said that to them, the keeping of the feasts with a sign of spiritual immaturity, an indication that their religion was still carnal and based on form and ritual. It indicated that they were still under the “elements of the world” and not fully aware of what it meant to worship God in spirit and in truth. Under the New Covenant, Jesus explains that all the law is fulfilled in one thing: you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself. (*See Mark 12:30, 31.*) The feasts, rituals, ceremonies, and other things were simply pointers to the life, work, and ministry of the Messiah. When we have found Christ, the law has fulfilled its purpose.

It should be easy then to see why the observance of the feast days is no longer necessary for Christians.

NOTES

A photograph of a cobblestone path that recedes into the distance, leading towards a bright, glowing horizon. The stones are dark and rectangular, laid in a regular pattern. The lighting is dramatic, with the path leading the eye from the foreground towards the bright light at the top of the frame.

Should Christians observe the Feast days?

Should the festivals given to Israel at Mount Sinai be observed by God's people today? Or were they intended to last only during the period of the Old Testament?