

## **Colossians 2:14-17, The Law that was Nailed For Something it Couldn't Do**

Many Christians, including Seventh-day Adventists, believe that the law was nailed to the cross of Calvary when Jesus was crucified, according to **Colossians 2:14-17**. But a question should be raised at this point; which law is Paul identifying? There is a difference of opinion as to which law Paul is referring to. Which law was nailed to the cross? Let's look to Scripture to help identify which one.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that this law refers to the ritual, ceremonial, law that is found in Scripture, not the Ten Commandment, or moral law, found in the Bible. By making a simple comparison we can put this view to the test of Biblical correctness.

An inspection of **Colossians 2:14-17** brings out some identifying characteristics of which law Paul is addressing, it is:

- ❖ a set of regulations which is against us (standing opposed to us)
- ❖ a law triumphed over at the cross
- ❖ a law involving eating, drinking and religious festivals (New Moon and Sabbath celebrations)
- ❖ a law which is a shadow of things to come.

A thorough review of the Ten Commandments, found in **Exodus 20:1-17** and **Deuteronomy 5:6-21**, will not reveal any common denominator with the law described in **Colossians 2:14-17** except for the Sabbath reference (**verses 8-11**). In regards to the moral law (Ten Commandments/Decalogue) there is no mention of food, drink or religious festivals involving new moon celebrations. In what way is the decalogue a shadow of things to come, the reality of which is found in Jesus Christ (**verse 17**)? It is generally considered sensible to make a complete match of all the incriminating evidence (identification characteristics) before convicting a person. Perhaps we should do the same for the law referred to in this passage.

Another law is cited in Scripture, which does fit the identifying characteristics. **Hebrews 10:1-22** refers to a law that is a shadow of things to come, the same wording that Paul uses in Colossians, and it mentions sacrifices that are repeated yearly. Repeated sacrifices are not part of the Ten Commandments. Sacrifices of sheep, bulls and goats could not actually atone for the sins of the people, but they were a graphic reminder that an innocent Messiah would be sacrificed for their sins. They were a very graphic reminder to the people of the horror of sin and its tragic consequences.

As Jesus approached John the Baptist for baptism, he (John) proclaimed “Behold, the Lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world”, **John 1:29**. As the attention of the people was drawn to Jesus, their minds must have immediately been drawn to their sacrificial system, whose purpose was to point forward by faith to the true Sacrifice, Jesus Christ.

**Hebrews 10:16** says that in the new covenant God would write His law in the hearts of His people, and on their minds, see also **Jeremiah 31:33**. There would be no consistency or logic for God to abolish, set aside, this law only to re-invoke it to write it on our hearts and minds. This only makes sense if God is referring to a different law in **Colossians 2:14-17**.

There is another law in Scripture that had annual reminders, such as discussed in Hebrews. It is found in **Leviticus 23:2-41** (**chapters 1-7** also discuss ceremonial/sacrificial law). An investigation of these passages will yield the common denominators for an accurate identification of the law spoken of in Colossians.

- ❖ Food: bread without yeast must be eaten for seven days.
- ❖ Drink: a drink offering of a quarter hin of wine.
- ❖ Sacrifices: male goats and lambs yearly as a sacrificial offering.
- ❖ Religious Festivals: “the appointed feasts (plural), the sacred assemblies”.
- ❖ Sabbaths: appointed times called Sabbaths or Sabbaths of rest. Yet these Sabbaths are not the same as the seventh day Sabbath instituted by God at Creation, figured on a weekly or seven day, cycle. Notice **verse 7 and 8**: a first day was considered a holy day (Sabbath) while six days later (on the seventh day) it was to also be considered a holy day, thus two days of rest (Sabbath) within a span of seven days. These festival or ritual Sabbaths were also referred to as ordinances (law).

The ceremonial laws in the Old Testament required annual religious festivals. This ceremonial law, not the Ten Commandment law, also required sacrifices and offerings. This law even had new moon celebrations, as recorded in **Numbers 28:14-15**.

These two laws, Decalogue and ceremonial/ritual, were even recorded differently and kept in different places. Where were the ceremonial laws recorded and kept? **Deuteronomy 31:26-27** gives us the answer. They were written in a book of law (by Moses) and placed beside (on the outside) the ark of the covenant where it would be a “witness against you”. Even this word usage is the same as Colossians.

Where was the Decalogue, or Ten Commandment law recorded and kept? **Deuteronomy** again gives us part of the answer in **Chapter 4, verse 13**. This law was written on two stone tablets, by God’s own finger (**Exodus 31:18; 34:1; Deuteronomy 5:22; 9:10**). **Deuteronomy 10:2** and **Hebrews 9:3-5** state this law was kept inside the ark of the covenant.

The Bible presents two laws; the ceremonial/ritual law contains ceremonial feast sabbaths, while the moral law calls people to remember God’s seventh day Sabbath. While both mention the sabbaths and Sabbath, respectively, the similarities end at that point. The Sabbath of the Decalogue (the seventh day Sabbath, what we today call Saturday) is based solely on a weekly cycle established at creation. It is a memorial of both creation and redemption. I believe the Bible’s evidence leads to only one conclusion as to which of these two laws match the identification criteria of **Colossians 2:14-17**: the ceremonial or ritual law.

The ceremonial law pointed forward to the ultimate sacrificial Lamb, Jesus as well as other aspects of His ministry which we will study further in this study of the ceremonial feasts. It was no longer needed once His sacrifice was made. What about the Decalogue? Jesus said in **Matthew 5:17-28** that He came to fulfill this law but not to destroy it. This moral law is also written on our hearts and minds as part of the new covenant – see **Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Hebrews 8:10 & 10:16**. If I traverse a road once and obey (fulfill) all the traffic requirements, I cannot use that as justification to later drive at any speed I wish, even if other drivers do and say its alright. Fulfilling the law did not abolish it.

The Decalogue (the 10 Commandments) can never save us, neither can we earn salvation through obedience. But the Decalogue leads us to sense and understand our need for a Savior. If there was no law there would be no sin (**1 John 3:4**), if there was no sin we would not need a Savior. But because we have all sinned (**Romans 3:23**) we all need Jesus (**Romans 6:23**). **Ephesians 2:8-10** clearly states that we are saved by grace, through faith, and not from works (our ability to keep the law). Contained in the Decalogue then, is the very means to protect and nurture relationships, whether with other people or with God. The law shows us how to respond, protect, and behave in those relationships.

The Ten Commandments (the Decalogue) is the law that God desires to write in our hearts and on our minds. This law, His law, is based on love which is the very foundation of God's government and His character. **1 John 4:8** says that God is love. Why should a Christian keep God's Decalogue? The Bible provides this answer in **John 14:15**, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." That is pretty simple, keep it by His grace simply because we love Him. As God stated at the very beginning of the Decalogue (Exodus 20:1), His children should keep His law because they have already experienced His deliverance. They have been set free from sin and its condemnation. Christians should be motivated to keep God's law because they have received the gift of salvation (**John 3:16**; **1 John 2:3-4**; **4:10,19**; **5:2-3**; **2 John 1:6**). Love for God should be our only motivation.

Dear friend, will God's love be your motivation to follow His complete Ten Commandment law and to follow Jesus, the Lamb of God, where ever He leads you?