

# Colossians 2:16: Is it the weekly Sabbath?

AUGUST 23, 2010

tags: [Colossians 2:16](#), [Sabbath](#)

by emmilglenn

I was attending the **ECYC** conference this past weekend, and I attended a seminar by Dr. Ron du Preez, current Director of Communications for the **Michigan Conference**. The seminar was something along the lines of the “Principles of Becoming A Peculiar People”, or how Adventists have developed a unique, and thorough understanding of Scriptures. He goes on to use **Luke 24:27**, as a principle verse in how we should study the Scriptures, and list 7 important steps when studying the Bible, as not to err in forming doctrines and beliefs.

One of the steps involved properly exegeting passages by looking at the context, as well as literary structures used by the writers. He used Colossians 2:16 as an example of where a lot of Christians **go wrong when interpreting the verse**, and the remainder of this post will be focused on the interpretation of that verse, as I learned it that day.

*<sup>16</sup> So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, (NKJV)*

This is a very controversial verse, so much so that Dr. du Preez has written an entire book on that verse, and is currently writing a dissertation towards another doctorate on this very verse. He mentioned 400 pages worth of writing just to expound this passage. He gave us a brief synopsis of his research, and I'll do my best to summarize it here.

Firstly, if you look at the passage that many Christians say Paul was referring to the weekly Sabbath, it may appear so:

*regarding a festival [Annual] or a new moon [monthly] or sabbaths [weekly],*

They may be correct on that surface level view, but if you dig deeper, as Dr. du Preez

emphasizes when studying God's Word, you'll find a whole new truth. There are so many ways to skin this cat, in terms of proving that this verse isn't talking about the weekly, seventh-day Sabbath, but the one method I learned this weekend was by looking at the literary structure of the chapter.

Dr. du Preez mentioned that Jewish writers often wrote in a **Chiastic** Structure, meaning that the verses are written in parallel points that follow a pattern. For example, a pattern can be A B B A, or ABCDDCBA, ABAB etc. If one looks at Colossians 2:16, one may think it is an ABC pattern,

*regarding a festival [A] or a new moon [B] or sabbaths [C],*

but upon closer inspection, Colossians 2 follows an alternating ABAB parallel pattern, and I'll prove it using TWO methods:

*regarding a festival (annual)[A] or a new moon (monthly)[B] or sabbaths (annual) [A],*

Method 1, is the simplest and easiest way, just look at the rest of the chapter and how Paul writes: For example, look at verse 21 where Paul makes a list:

<sup>21</sup> *“Do not touch [A], do not taste [B], do not handle [A],”*

Both touching and handling are parallels, which involve using your hands, or coming in contact with something. Dr. du Preez gave the above example, but I took the liberty to look for more:

<sup>11</sup> *In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands [A], by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh[B], by the circumcision of Christ[A],*

<sup>12</sup> *buried with Him in baptism, [A] in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead[B].* <sup>13</sup> *And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh[A], He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses,[B]*

<sup>14</sup> *having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us,*

*[A]which was contrary to us [B]. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross [A].*

<sup>15</sup> *Having disarmed principalities and powers, [A] He made a public spectacle of them [B], triumphing over them in it. [A]*

The pattern in the chapter more closely resembles an ABA parallel, than an ABC type pattern.

Method 2 involves a greater understanding of the original greek language, and Hebrew customs, which most Christians, including myself are greatly lacking in. So it was quite refreshing to learn the following, that both “festivals” and “sabbaths” refer to **annual** celebrations. Dr. du Preez went on to prove it.

The word for ‘festivals’ is a very specific word, which denotes the **“Pilgrimage” festivals**, (**Pesach** (Passover), **Shavuot** (Pentecost), and **Succoth** (Tabernacles)) in which males made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate. For example, Jesus had to wait till he was of age to attend the yearly Passover celebrations (Luke 2:42).

New Moons were monthly Sabbaths, which are straight forward. The confusion is over the “sabbath” celebrations. Many say they are weekly, but in the context of Colossians, it is clearly other **annual sabbaths**, in which everyone was to celebrate, Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) Rosh Hashanah (Feast of Trumpets/New Year).

Therefore, sabbaths refers to more annual celebrations, further proving the ABA parallel. There is no way that Paul was talking about a weekly Sabbath, as the rest of his letters have no hint that the Sabbath was done away with.

The literary context of the passage, as well as the remainder of Paul’s writings, just does not allow “sabbaths” in Colossians 2:16 to be viewed as the weekly seventh-day Sabbath.