

The Three Sabbaths

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This article, first published as a small pamphlet in 1898, is very relevant today. In it an important distinction is made between various sabbaths, in order to distinguish what the real nature of true spiritual Sabbath-keeping is all about.

Some have tended to view the seventh-day Sabbath as a day of legalism and bondage. This is, of course, not the Lord's Sabbath.

Others who think they are keeping the Lord's Sabbath because they go to church on Saturday are actually keeping the Jewish sabbath. These need to test their sabbath-keeping by the spiritual application of the Law.

Those who think that Sunday has replaced the seventh-day Sabbath need to reconsider their stand, as this is not the Lord's sabbath either, and does not stand for justification by faith, which is the true rest that only the Lord can give.

One can in truth speak of sabbaths in the plural only as one can speak of many gods:

1 Corinthians 8

⁵ There is no god but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or on earth; as there are gods many and lords many;

⁶ Yet to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we through Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through Him.

So, though there be various sabbaths, so-called, there is but one true Sabbath, the Sabbath of the Lord.

1. The Lord's Sabbath

The word Sabbath means rest. It is a Hebrew word transferred into the English language. When the Hebrews used the word "Sabbath," it conveyed the same idea to them that the word "rest" does to us. The fourth commandment therefore really says to us:

Exodus 20

⁸ Remember the rest day, to keep it holy.

⁹ Six days shall you labor, and do all your work;

¹⁰ But the seventh day is the rest of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates;

¹¹ For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the rest day, and hallowed it.

We must not make the mistake of judging of the Lord's rest from what men are accustomed to call rest. God is not a man. We should rather learn from God's rest what rest really is. God's rest is not mere physical rest from weariness. This we know from two facts:

“God is Spirit.” (*John* 4:24). Not “a spirit,” as though He were one of many; but He is Spirit, as it is rendered in the margin of the Revision.

Isaiah 40

²⁸ The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not, neither is weary.

The Lord therefore did not rest because He was tired, and His rest is not physical, but spiritual, since He is Spirit.

John 4

²⁴ They that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth.

God rested, not because He was weary, but because His work was finished. When work is finished, and is well done, nothing but rest remains. In six days God finished His work, and as He surveyed it, He pronounced it “very good” (*Genesis* 1:31). There was no flaw in it. It was without fault before Him.

Therefore since God's work was done and well done at the close of the sixth day,

Genesis 2

² He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made.

He had no sad reflections, no regrets. His rest was not marred, as what man calls rest so often is, by any such thought as,

“To-morrow I must go at that work again;”

nor,

“I wish that I had done this portion a little differently;”

nor,

“If I could do that over again, I could make an improvement;”

nor,

“That last day’s work is so bad that I cannot bear to look at it; I was so tired when I got to it that I couldn’t half do it.”

Nothing of the kind. Every portion of the work, even man, was as perfect as it was possible for it to be, and God took pure delight in contemplating the work from which He was resting because it was complete and perfect.

This is the rest which He offers to us. It is not something that He imposes on us, but which He in everlasting love and kindness gives to us. Rest is not a task that is laid on one. It is not a burden. They who look upon the Sabbath as a burden, have no idea of what the Sabbath of the Lord is. It is rest: perfect, unalloyed rest.

Jesus Christ is the One by whom the worlds were made,

Colossians 1

¹⁶ ...for in Him were all things created, in the heavens, and upon the earth,

Therefore He is the one who offers us this rest. To every soul He cries,

Matthew 11

²⁸ Come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

The rest is found in Him, because in Him the works of God are completed. In Him is the new creation, and if any man be in Him, he is a new creature. On the cross Jesus cried,

John 19

³⁰ It is finished.

Thus showing that in His cross we find that perfect rest that comes alone from the finished work of the Lord. This rest is gained by faith.

Hebrews 4

³ We which believe do enter into rest.

How so? Because by faith we have the finished, perfect work of the Lord as our own.

John 6

²⁹ This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He has sent.

Believing Him means receiving Him; and since in Him the works of God are complete, it follows that by believing on Him we find the rest. The rest that Jesus gives is rest from sin. The heavy laden whom He calls to Him are those who are burdened with the weight of their sins. All men are thus burdened,

Romans 3

²³ ...for all have sinned.

Our best works are utterly worthless. Christ will have a people who are...

Titus 2

¹⁴ ...zealous of good works.

But the good works must be those which God himself has

wrought for us in Christ. Only His work is enduring.

Psalm 111

³ His work is honorable and glorious; and His righteousness endures for ever.

Therefore,

Ephesians 2

⁸ By grace are you saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God;

⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast;

¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before prepared, that we should walk in them.

It is...

Titus 3

⁵ ...not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost,

⁶ Which He poured out upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

It is by the works of God, therefore, that we are saved, and not by our own. Good works there are in abundance, and they are for us too, but through no work of our own; solely through the perfect work of God in Jesus Christ. If the works were our own, then the rest would be our own; but God gives us His rest, not ours, because only His works can yield perfect rest.

Psalm 111

⁴ He has made His wonderful works to be remembered,

Or, literally,

“He has made a memorial for His wondrous works.”

That memorial is the seventh day, the day on which He rested from all His works. That day He has blessed and sancti-

fied, made holy. Its holiness has never departed from it, for...

Ecclesiastes 3

¹⁴ ...whatsoever God does, it shall be for ever.

No matter what man does, nor how man regards the day, its holiness remains.

Hebrews 4

⁹ There remains therefore a rest to the people of God.

And the seventh day, which God for ever declares to be His rest, is that by which He makes known to us the perfection of His rest, because it calls us to contemplate a finished and perfect new creation. It reveals to us the everlasting God, the unwearied, almighty Creator:

Psalms 31

¹⁹ Oh how great is your goodness, which You have laid up for them that fear You; which You have wrought for them that trust in You before the sons of men!

It reminds us that we are...

Colossians 2

¹⁰ ...complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power.

It tells us that, although we have sinned, and brought the curse upon God's perfect creation, the cross of Christ, which bears the curse, restores and perpetuates the perfect work of God, so that through it we may stand without fault before the throne of God, just as when man was first made.

2 Corinthians 9

¹⁵ Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.

2. The Jewish Sabbath

There is such a thing as "the Jewish Sabbath," or the Sabbath of the Jews, but it is a far different thing from the Sabbath of the Lord. Many people imagine that if one observes

the seventh day he is keeping the Jewish Sabbath; but that does not at all follow. No one keeps the Jewish Sabbath if he keeps the Sabbath...

Luke 23

⁵⁶ ...according to the commandment.

There is the same difference between the Jewish Sabbath and the Sabbath of the Lord, that there is between a man and God. Let us explain.

Exodus 20

¹⁰ The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord;

But we have seen that the Lord's rest is spiritual rest, which the seventh day commemorates. A man may cease from physical toil on the seventh day of the week, and not keep the Sabbath of the Lord. If a man stops work on Friday evening at sunset, and abstains from all labor until the next day at sunset, merely as a form of worship, and in order that he may be physically better able to go at his work again, or with the thought that he is thereby discharging a duty, and gaining the favor of God, that is not keeping the Sabbath of the Lord.

To keep the Sabbath of the Lord is to delight in the Lord. Those who do not delight themselves in the Lord, do not keep His Sabbath, no matter when they abstain from labor. It is absolutely impossible for one who is not a Christian to keep the Lord's Sabbath; for, as we have seen, God's rest comes only from His perfect work, which is found only in Christ.

Hebrews 4

³ We which believe do enter into rest.

Therefore no Jew, so-called, as distinguished from a believer in Christ, keeps the Sabbath of the Lord, even though he apparently rests on the seventh day of the week. His rest is his own rest, and not the rest of the Lord. Do you see the difference?

The Jewish Sabbath falls on the same day of the week as the Sabbath of the Lord, but it is not by any means the same thing. It represents only the man himself, and his own work. Instead of being the sign of justification by faith in the work of the Lord, it is the sign of self-righteousness, as indicated by the question which the Jews asked of Jesus:

John 6

²⁸ What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?

They counted their own works equal to God's works. Their obedience was not the obedience of faith, but only of form. From such a Sabbath may the Lord deliver us. It is from it that we are delivered in the Sabbath of the Lord, for we are saved from our own works, and given the perfect works of the Lord.

Exodus 20

¹⁰ The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord,

But let us beware of making it a mere caricature of rest. Let us take it for what it is: the rest of the Lord.

3. The Papal Sabbath

This is something entirely different from the Sabbath of the Jews, and infinitely different from the Sabbath of the Lord.

The Sabbath of the Lord is the acceptance of God's own works, and rest in them alone, allowing Him to work both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

The Jewish Sabbath represents the vain attempt of zealous and self-confident men to do the works which God himself does, and which God alone can do.

But the Pope's Sabbath signifies the substitution of man's work for God's work, as being not only as good, but even better. It dispenses with even the form of the commandment of the Lord. Let us see how this is.

The Lord's Sabbath has been sufficiently dwelt on for the

present. We know what it is. We have seen that the Jews' Sabbath is the observing of the form of the Lord's Sabbath, without the substance which can come only by faith. It falls on the same day, but is man's Sabbath, not the Lord's.

The Papal Sabbath has nothing in common with the Sabbath of the Lord, not even in form, but utterly repudiates it. Thus, a Roman Catholic book, entitled, "A Sure Way to Find Out the True Religion," says:

The keeping holy the Sunday is a thing absolutely necessary to salvation; and yet this is nowhere put down in the Bible; on the contrary, the Bible, says, Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy (*Exodus* 20:8), which is Saturday, and not Sunday; therefore the Bible does not contain all things necessary to salvation.

This is only one out of many similar citations that might be given, but is sufficient to show that in the observance of Sunday the Catholic Church deliberately repudiates the Word of the Lord, and sets itself above it.

It has placed its Sabbath on an entirely different day from the Sabbath of the Lord,—a day which even God himself could not possibly have made His Sabbath, since on it He began His work, in order to emphasize its claim to be above God. It would teach men that they are to obey the church rather than God.

Notice that the citation speaks about the necessity of "keeping holy the Sunday." But God has not made the Sunday holy. In fact, the Bible knows nothing about such a day. It does know the first day of the week, which it calls a working day, but the Sunday, a day composed of parts of two days, was made in Rome.

The only day that God has ever spoken of as holy is the seventh day of the week. That day He himself has made holy, and all He asks of us is to keep it holy.

But since God has not made the Sunday holy, it follows that if man is to keep it holy, man himself must make it holy. All the sacredness in the world that Sunday has is that which man gives to it. The Sunday-sabbath, therefore, stands as the sign of man's pretended power to make things holy. For if man can make one thing holy, it is evident that he can make anything holy. If man can make and keep a day holy, then he can make and keep himself holy.

The Papal Sabbath is thus the sign of his claim to take the place of the Lord as the sanctifier of sinners. While the seventh day is the sign of God's power to save by His own works, the Sunday is the sign of man's assumed power to save himself by his own works, entirely apart from, and in spite of the Lord. It repudiates the Lord, in repudiating His Word.

Take notice that this is said of the Pope's Sunday, and not of all those who regard it as a holy day. There are thousands who are keeping the Pope's day, honestly supposing it to be the Sabbath of the Lord. Such of course believe in justification by faith, although they unwittingly observe the sign of justification by works. It is for the benefit of such that this article is written, that they may be wholly consistent in their profession of faith.

We are dealing with facts, regardless of how men may stand related to them; and the facts are that:

The Lord's Sabbath is justification by faith.

*The Pope's Sabbath means justification by works,
even man's own works.*

On which side will you stand?