

TOPIC VII.

ARE BELIEVERS IN CHRIST REQUIRED TO KEEP THE SABBATH DAY UNDER THE NEW COVENANT?

Some denominations insist that it is necessary to keep the Biblical Sabbath Day as a day of rest and worship. Is this a commandment we ought to keep?

But first, let's note that the Biblical Sabbath Day is the seventh day of the week. In the Biblical sense, this day falls on Saturday, not Sunday and in fact, since the Biblical calendar is based on a lunar system and not a solar system, the Sabbath begins on Friday evening at sunset until Saturday evening at sunset.

In Exodus 20:8-11, the commandment is established.

8: "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9: "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10: but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. 11: "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy."

Certain holy days and feast days are also referred to as "sabbath days" in which no work was to be done. These are noted in Leviticus 23:26-44 for one example. The groups that hold to the belief that the sabbath day must be kept do not keep the other specified "sabbaths." This reveals the confusion about what this all involves and means and what they are supposed to do about it.

There are many references to God's displeasure toward those who fail to keep the sabbath day and the "sabbaths."

Ezekiel 20:21 "But the children rebelled against Me; they did not walk in My statutes, nor were they careful to observe My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live; they profaned My sabbaths. So I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the wilderness."

Exodus 31:15, "For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death."

So the fear of breaking the Sabbath is a heavy motivation for those groups who literally keep it each week.

Well, how is this resolved for those under the New Covenant? Once again, we will see that the writer of Hebrews particularly focuses on this matter in chapter 3 and 4 of his epistle. Paul addresses this as well. Here are comments from him,

"Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-- things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ." Colossians 2:16-17

"Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God." Romans 14:4-6

Paul's argument is that one must be careful not to cause a stumbling block for those he terms as the "weaker brothers." None of these matters are the real issue, but some have not grown to understand the total application of the New Covenant and that is something that we who do need to be aware of in dealing with those who don't - who are in the majority.

In Hebrews, we find that the "Sabbath day" is an earthly picture of a spiritual reality. As is said in Colossians 2:17, all the earthly regulations and commemorations are just a "shadow" of the reality which is heavenly or spiritual.

Hebrews 8:1-7, 13, notes,

1: "Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, 2: a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. 3: For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and

sacrifices; so it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer. 4: Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; 5: who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, 'SEE,' He says, 'THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN.' 6: But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. 7: For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second."

13: "When He said, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear."

Then, Hebrews 10:1 states,

"For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near."

Next, we will see that the Sabbath itself is fulfilled spiritually for those who are in Christ, under the New Covenant and that it is constant, sustained reality all the time forever. Believers have entered the divine rest, the eternal Sabbath and thus it is kept by them through the completed and finished work of Christ who fulfilled the entire law, sat down in the "rest" now the work is done and therefore it applies to those in Him who sit in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6). It is Hebrews, chapter 4 that presents more of this truth.

4:1-3, 1: Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. 2: For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. 3: For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world."¹

¹ Psalm 95:7-11; Numbers 14:23-30. (Verse 30 of this passage is interesting as one wonders if Jesus' comment in Luke 18:16-17 might be an illusion to this, "But Jesus called for them, saying, 'Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all.'")

4:8-10, 8: "For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that."² 9: So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. 10: For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His."

The promised land of Canaan, where the descendants of Abraham actually owned the land, was to be the place of rest for the people from slavery and bondage. It corresponded to the Sabbath Day of creation and the Garden of Eden in Genesis. But because of the faithlessness of the people, God made it clear they would not enter the rest He had prepared for them. Psalm 95 calls it "His rest." This suggests that there is more than just a physical rest in an earthly territory, and that there is a spiritual/relational idea here from what the author of Hebrews writes.

It is Christ however, having fulfilled all righteousness gives the spiritual and eternal rest to those who do believe and thus the Sabbath rest is accomplished for all who are in Him. He is our Sabbath. In other words, those who are in Christ have also "sat down at God's right hand" because there are no more works necessary to complete under the Law as by faith alone the Sabbath is fulfilled for all who believe.

In 3:18-19, the analogy is presented, 18: "And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? 19: So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief."

But in 4:3 we read, "For we who have believed enter that rest..." and in 4:10, " For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His."

The importance of this is that by faith, we enter HIS REST not our own. The Sabbath Day for our temporal rest is simply a shadow of the real rest that is accomplished in Christ. When we are seated in heavenly places in Christ by our faith, as Jesus' works are done so are ours. The eternal rest by faith takes precedence of the temporal rest of works. The purpose of the 7th day of creation is then fulfilled.

²Joshua 1:13-15

Conclusion. We have learned that in Christ we are the heirs and beneficiaries of God and fellow heirs with Christ because we are His family and His children. That fact alone should convince us that the keeping of a temporal, physical day does not relate to an eternal spiritual reality in which the entire law is fulfilled and the intent of God for us who have believed is complete.

The Sabbath Day is simply an earthly, temporal portrait (or shadow) of the spiritual reality God wants us to all enjoy. Once we enter the spiritual reality by faith, there is no more necessity to remain in the shadow.