

Know Your Bible

NO less a personage than Jesus Christ Himself gave forth the announcement that “the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath.” Mark 2:27, 28. Not only was the Sabbath “made for man,” but it was made by this very Personage who announces Himself as “Lord also of the Sabbath;” for we have the assurance from John concerning the Christ, “All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made.” John 1:3. Then since the Sabbath “was made,” and since “without Him [that is, Christ] was not anything made that was made,” it therefore follows that Jesus Himself was the Maker of the Sabbath, and for that very reason He has the right to the distinction of being “Lord also of the Sabbath.”

Now since the Author of the Sabbath declares that it was not made primarily for Him, but “for man,” we must find in the Sabbath peculiar virtues that are worthy of its creation as a blessing to mankind. Our God gives us the very best that the infinite mind can produce. He gives us the highest forms of blessings, and no substitute could possibly equal that which God has made for man in such a definite manner.

The Sabbath has a peculiar and specific setting. It commemorates creation, teaching man that he has a divine origin, a heavenly Father, and that he is not brought into existence by some chance or evolutionary process. The Sabbath commandment reads:

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it you shall not do any work, you, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: 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 Sabbath day, and hallowed it.” Exodus 20:8-11.

What the Sabbath Teaches Man

The opening word of the commandment is “remember;” and we are carried back to the creation of the heavens and the earth by the power of God, and informed that because of His acts of creation and His own resting on the seventh day, “the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.” God designed that through the Sabbath the soul should get an experimental touch of creation’s power.

As the believer enters into the Spirit on the Lord’s day, as he contemplates the multiplied millions of the starry host shining in the firmament overhead, and as he views the great work of creation all about him on the earth, his soul is inspired by the vastness of the power displayed in God’s creative handiwork; and new confidence takes possession of him as he reflects upon that wonderful promise of the Master:

“All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.... And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” Matthew 28:18-20.

The Message of a New Creation

The “everlasting gospel” to be given to the world in connection with the proclamation of the judgment hour, calls humanity to “worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.” Revelation 14:6, 7. The Author of the Bible claims the distinction of being the Creator. Through His prophet it was declared:

“The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens. He has made the earth by His power, He has established the world by His wisdom, and has stretched out the heavens by His discretion.” Jeremiah 10:11, 12.

Jehovah has made all that is in the heavens and in the earth, by His power and by His wisdom. The gods that have no creative power “shall perish from the earth!” But sin entered God’s perfect creation; for though knowing God, men “glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.” Romans 1:21. Yet, regardless of man’s degradation, “God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16. Through Heaven’s love, expressed in the gift of Jesus, fallen, sinful, degraded man may be brought back to the high and glorious estate from which he fell.

Regeneration Is in Fact a Re-creation

But this restoring of the soul of lost man requires a new birth, a new creation. Said Jesus to the Jewish ruler who came to Him by night: “Except a man be born again (or as in the margin, “from above”), he can not see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus marveled at this saying of the Master; and the Lord

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repeated to him: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter in to the kingdom of God!" John 3:15.

This new birth is described by Paul as "a new creation." 2 Corinthians 5:17, R. V., margin. A "newness of life" is imparted to the individual. Romans 6:4. Paul says in the Ephesian letter: "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them." Ephesians 2:10.

Since conversion, or the new birth, is a new creation, how appropriately does the Sabbath, the sign of God's creative power, fit into the plan of the gospel! There is deep significance in the words: "The Lord spoke unto Moses, saying, Speak you also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily My Sabbaths you shall keep: for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations; that you may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you." Exodus 31:12, 13.

Our God designs that we shall know Him as our sanctifier. He desires that we shall have no doubts which will overthrow the evidence He gives us; and so He comes into our sinful lives with creative power.

And God's Sabbath, which was given to man in his sinless state in the Garden of Eden as a memorial of the original creation, thus becomes a double memorial to the redeemed sinner; for it is ever "a sign" to him of the sanctifying power of his divine Father.

Then we have before us the facts that the Sabbath was made by no less a personage than the Christ Himself; that the Sabbath was set apart as a sacred memorial of God's creative power; the Sabbath commandment in the clearest and most specific language tells us what day shall be observed as God's memorial of creation; the judgment hour proclamation of eternal good tidings calls us to the worship of the great Creator of the heavens and the earth, thus showing that God care fully cherishes His memorial of creative power; and then we have as a climax for sinful humanity the Sabbath as a memorial not alone of the creation of the world in six days, but also of the creation of the new heart and of the new spirit that are given to man at conversion.

We Are Urged to "Remember"

A day that is thus firmly embedded in the work and the plan of the Creator and Redeemer of men must be regarded as God commands with peculiar sacredness.

When Moses approached the burning bush, and when Joshua was met by the "Captain of the Lord's host" before the walls of Jericho, they were bidden to take off their shoes, for the ground whereon they were standing was holy. They were entering upon unusual experiences in communing with their God. In like manner, he who catches the true spirit of Sabbath keeping as the Bible presents it enters upon an unusual experience of blessing and power. He most reverently seeks to "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."

So particular is our God in respect to the observance of His sacred day, that He has not left to the imperfect timepieces of men the marking of the hour when the day begins. Six times over in the record of creation, are we told that the day begins with the evening. And through Moses, we are explicitly instructed: "From even unto even, shall you celebrate your Sabbath." Leviticus 23:32. That there might be no mistake upon this point, Mark informs us that "even" is at the time "when the sun did set." Mark 1:32.

Thus, God's great timepiece, the sun, with undeviating accuracy marks the beginning and the close of the day. On the sixth day, as the sun sinks in the west, the sacred moments of the Sabbath of Jehovah begin. Every moment of the day is sacred. No part of it should be touched by secular work. Throughout the week we are, in the terms of the commandment, to remember the Sabbath to keep it holy. Definite plans should be laid so that no common work of any character shall be permitted to invade the sacred boundaries of holy time.

Preparing for the Sabbath

Thus all through the week we should look forward to the Sabbath so that it may be guarded against any secular encroachments; but Friday, or the sixth day of the week, is especially denominated by Inspiration as "the preparation" day, "the day before the Sabbath;" the last details of preparation should be made, so that the very first moment of the Sabbath, as well as every succeeding moment of the consecrated day, shall be observed sacredly.

When the Lord rained manna from heaven for the Israelites, "it came to pass, that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one man: and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. And he said unto them, This is that which the Lord has said, Tomorrow is the rest of the holy

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Sabbath unto the Lord: bake that which you will bake today, and seethe that you will seethe; and that which remains over lay up for you to be kept until the morning.” Exodus 16:22, 23.

As these verses are studied in connection with the other portions of this sixteenth chapter of Exodus, it will be seen that God was so particular about the keeping of the Sabbath that He sent a double portion of the manna from heaven on the sixth day in order that the people might not be required to gather food on the Sabbath. Their baking and boiling were all to be done beforehand, so that, without the interruption of secular work or thoughts, one whole day each week could be given to the soul-uplifting communion with the infinite Creator. The mind was left free to contemplate the vastness of creation and the Source of all power, and thus provision was made for special drawing away from the earthly and sensual into the blessedness of eternal verity.

In prophetic vision Isaiah was bidden to look forward to a time when there would be a general desecration of God’s Sabbath day; and he was bidden also to utter the inspired promise to the people of the time: “If you turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words: then shall you delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it.” Isaiah 58:13, 14.

Anyone who turns away the “foot from the Sabbath,” and ceases from doing his “pleasure on My holy day,” comes to know that the Sabbath is truly “a delight” and “the holy of the Lord” and “honorable.”

Sabbath Reform Prophesied

Those who enter into this Sabbath reform which the prophet calls for are not found doing their “own way?” or seeking their “own pleasure” or even speaking their “own words.” The reason of all this is disclosed in the fact that they have found so great delight in Jehovah, and so rich an experience in the Sabbath keeping which He has instituted, that mere secular pursuits can not charm them away from the blessedness which a beneficent Creator has provided in His holy day.

The Lord bade His prophet declare to Eli: “Them that honor Me I will honor, and they that despise Me shall I lightly esteem!” 1 Samuel 2:30. Likewise has the divine Father given assurance of the highest honors in this time for them who will turn away their feet from desecrating the holy day He has set apart, and give themselves loyally to His service in every particular. Verse 12 of Isaiah 58 says that the Sabbath reformers are to “build the old waste places,” to “raise up the foundations of many generations;” they are to be “The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in;” and all who enter upon this work turn away from speaking wickedly, they draw out the soul to the hungry, and they satisfy the afflicted soul. In a word, Jehovah promises especially to guide them and to make them strong for their great work.

Thus do we see that the Sabbath reform and the Sabbath keeping which God calls for do not present themselves in some narrow, dogmatic, ecclesiastical ritual; but there is to shine forth through the lives of those who observe the great memorial of creation the most devoted and helpful service of their fellow men.

True Sabbath keeping is not simply a matter of prohibitions-of what we are not allowed to do. Sabbath keeping consists in doing certain things as well as in refraining from doing certain others. The fact should be continually emphasized that we are to find “the Sabbath a delight;” and one of the greatest delights of Sabbath keeping is worship. “Then shall you delight thyself in the Lord.” We are called to “worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.” As we meet for worship in the house of God on the Sabbath day, if our worship is a reality and not a mere form, we find one of the richest pleasures that comes into the human life. We look forward all through the week to this privilege and pleasure.

The Sabbath school and the various church services on the Sabbath day should be made interesting and full of life in order that we may get the most useful instruction from them. We are not to lose sight of the children, either in our Sabbath services or during the Sabbath hours that we do not spend in church. All through the week we should look forward to the Sabbath, and plan employment that the children will enjoy and that will be in harmony with God’s sacred day. Appropriate books, pictures, and other objects may be reserved for the Sabbath. The children can be taken for walks in the fields, beside the brooks, or in the woods, on the Sabbath, to view the great Creator’s handiwork. In all these ways they may be taught to look forward to the Sabbath with pleasure.

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What children may not do on the Sabbath is often impressed on them so strongly that they are made to hate religion because of the gloomy Sabbath they are required to endure. But this is not God's plan.

There are some things that must be done on the Sabbath. For instance, all needed attention must be given to the sick and the suffering, and domestic animals must have care. The Jewish church had gone to such unwarranted extremes in their attempts to observe the Sabbath strictly that Christ on numerous occasions relieved the sick in order, as it would seem, to impress the lesson of true Sabbath observance. The story of one of these experiences is told by Luke as follows: "He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and she was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him, and said unto her, Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity. And He laid His hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day. The Lord then answered him, and said, You hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?" Luke 13:10-16.

Thus does the Christ show that since the Sabbath was made for man, the comfort and relief of humanity, and also of the brute creation, on that day should receive proper attention. Yet, while the day is to be filled with activities, we must not forget that, both by the decree of the Almighty and by His special blessing, it is made holy. Therefore, on the day of preparation, as the Sabbath approaches, we should be prepared to lay aside all reading of a secular nature, such as newspapers and common magazines, as well as our common week day work, and give ourselves up to those things which are in keeping with the holy Sabbath day. Our clothing, our persons, and our homes should be clean, that we may be in readiness to enter into the joys of the day that God has sanctified.

Let us never lose sight of the fact that the mighty Christ is the One who has said, "The Sabbath was made for man," and that we should therefore study to observe the day as the Lord of glory would have us.