

Know Your Bible

17. THE SABBATH CHRIST MADE

ONE of the most significant and arresting of all Bible revelations is this: Everything that God ever said or did which has to do with man and his world, He said and did through His Son, Jesus Christ. This striking truth is clearly stated in 1 Corinthians 8:6: "To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him." This inspired assertion is pregnant with meaning; and it is worded so clearly and pointedly as to leave no ground for difference of opinion. All things are of God the Father; that is, they all have their genesis in Him and come from Him. Again, all things are by Jesus Christ; that is, all things are uttered by Him-executed, or carried into effect, by Christ. The American Revised Version makes this thought even more telling, by saying that all things are through Christ. In short, the Father is the source, or fountain, of all things; and the Son is the dynamic agent through whom all the words of the Father are uttered and all the deeds of the Father are carried into effect.

In His personal teaching, Christ states the same wondrous truth in these words: "No man has seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." John 1:18. Here, in simple, lucid phrase, Jesus expresses a momentous truth; namely, that no man has ever seen the person of God the Father, but that God the Son has declared the Father. The term "declared" is in the Greek original an exceptionally comprehensive word. It means not only uttered in language, but manifested, revealed, set forth, in character, in thought, in purpose, and -let me emphasize-in works.

An extraordinary significance attaches to the fact that Christ, as seen in John 1:1, is named the Word; and in Revelation 19:13, He "is called The Word of God." This can have no other meaning than that the mind or thought of the eternal Father has ever been uttered through the eternal Son; that is, Christ is the Spokesman, or the Word, of God.

We have express testimony to the effect that "the Spirit of Christ" spoke through the prophets who wrote the Old Testament Scriptures. 1 Peter 1: 10, 11. To be sure, it was Christ, in His ministry on earth, who uttered the transcendent truths of the four Gospels. It was Christ, in the upper room, who assured the disciples that after His ascension He would send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who would reveal to them the things that are Christ's. The Spirit would not testify of Himself, but of Christ. He would lead them "into all truth" - into all the truth of Christ. Unquestionably, then, the Holy Spirit, when inspiring the writers of the New Testament books, from Acts to the Revelation, moved those writers to incite the words, the truths, of Christ. "He [the Spirit] shall testify of Me," said Jesus. Thus we are led to conclude, with the certainty of a demonstration, that all Scripture came by Jesus Christ. We recall that John said: "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." How natural and fitting it is, therefore, that the Divine Spirit should repeatedly name Jesus as the Word of God! We have the further statement of Christ that "no man knows . . . the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him." Matthew 11: 27. Again we see that Christ is the one and only revelation of the Father.

In the first eleven verses of 1 Corinthians 10, Paul, referring to the experiences of the Israelites in their long travels from Egypt to the Promised Land, tells us that it was Christ who went with them, that it was Christ who constituted the spiritual Rock of which they all drank during their journeying, and whom they tempted or grieved in the wilderness. Verses 4, 9.

If now we turn to the first two verses of Exodus 20, the preamble to the Ten Commandments, we shall see that the One who spoke those commandments-God's law-from Mount Sinai, in the hearing of the people, was "the Lord thy God," who brought the Israelites out of Egypt, and who went with them as their supreme leader and teacher to the Land of Promise. Hence it was undeniably God the Son who spoke the divine law in awful majesty from the flaming, quaking Sinai. Yes, it was Jesus who was the Father's Word, His Spokesman, in the promulgation of His law, as well as in the communication to man of all other Scripture. Jesus spoke the Ten Commandments as the embodied expression not only of His Father's will and authority, but also of His own. In other words, the commandments of the Father are the commandments of Jesus-Christ's law in precisely the same sense as they are the Father's law. Surely, then, the fourth commandment, which is the Sabbath commandment, is one of Christ's commandments just as it is one of the Father's. Nothing can be more certain than that the Sabbath of the Father is the Sabbath of Christ; and the Sabbath of Christ must be the Christian Sabbath, for whatever is of Christ is Christian.

But we must give thought to the fact that the Sabbath of the fourth commandment-the only weekly Sabbath-is the seventh day of the weekly cycle. That the seventh day of the week commonly called Saturday, is the only weekly Sabbath known to the Holy Scriptures, is a firm, unshakable truth. The Sabbath that Christ revealed anew from Sinai is the Sabbath of the whole Bible, the Sabbath of the New

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Testament as it is of the Old. It is therefore the New Testament Sabbath, the Christian Sabbath; as we shall see, it is the Lord's day from the creation of the heavens and the earth.

Men erect monuments to commemorate important events: a great discovery, a great invention, an important war or battle, or the conclusion of a peace. Men instinctively feel that such an event calls for the erection of a suitable memorial to immortalize the occasion, and to stand as a enduring testimony to coming generations of the importance attached to the achievement by those who had a part in it or who recognized its significance.

Such memorials are generally made of the most enduring material obtainable. Some of them have stood for thousands of years and are still serving their original purpose.

There are other kinds of memorials that serve the same purpose as those of granite or marble. Practically all nations have days dedicated to the celebration of some great national event or achievement. July 4 is such a day in the United States, as is July 1 in Canada, July 14 in France, and May 24 in England. Each of these days is a memorial occasion, calling upon the nation to remember the events that led to the setting apart of the day and giving every citizen an opportunity to rededicate himself to the principles for which the nation stands.

Even as men erect memorials, so also does God. To commemorate the great sacrifice on Calvary, Jesus instituted the beautiful and significant ordinance of the Lord's Supper. "As often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you do show the Lord's death till He come." "This do in remembrance of Me." 1 Corinthians 11:26, 24. From the time when Christ was here on earth, the church has celebrated the ordinances of the Lord's house, and God's people will so celebrate it "till He come."

Another significant ordinance which God has instituted is the Sabbath as a memorial of creation. The fourth commandment of the Decalogue 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.

The seventh day is a day blessed of God. It is the Lord's Sabbath. It is the day on which He rested. It is the day He hallowed, and, furthermore, it is the day He commanded us to keep. In it we are not to do any work. We are to rest and keep it holy. This is to be done because God rested and set apart the seventh day as a day of rest. Hence we are to "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." The Sabbath calls to mind the fact of creation and is the memorial of it.

God set apart the seventh day as a sacred time of rest and as the memorial of creation. And how needful such a reminder is! Men easily forget God. Scientific theories make light of the fact of creation; evolution has displaced God; science, falsely so called, has substituted slow evolution and gradual development for the divine fiat of God; and, with the fact of creation disputed, it is not to be considered strange that men forget the memorial God instituted by which His wonderful works would be remembered. It is not without cause that the Sabbath commandment begins with the word "remember." God knew that the time would come when men would forget both God and His day of rest and turn to theories that destroy belief in God as the Creator.

As Christians we believe the inspired record of creation given in Genesis. We were not present when God created the world; hence we do not consider ourselves capable of disputing the word of One who was there and who tells us how it was done. We accept His word; for the One who speaks is our Lord and Savior. We have learned to trust Him. Should we doubt His word in Genesis, we would have no good grounds for believing Him or His message in the other books of the Bible. If He should begin with an untruth, our basis of confidence in Him would be destroyed.

The Sabbath and the existence of the week as a measure of time demands explanation. There is no reason in nature for the existence of a period of time seven days long. Astronomy finds no reason for it, as it does for the day or the year. It is not explained by science, nature, or astronomy. It is a purely arbitrary time division. How did it originate?

The week finds its only satisfactory explanation in the fact of creation. Its widespread use argues a common origin. The Genesis story furnishes the only acceptable reason for its existence. There is, in fact, no other. Ignore creation, and the seven-day week becomes an insoluble problem.

The seven-day week is dependent on the Sabbath for its existence. Remove the Sabbath and every day is alike, and the week ceases to be.

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Viewed in this light, the origin of the week becomes understandable, God takes His rightful place as Creator, and the Sabbath becomes the great memorial of the mighty power of God, in creation and in redemption.

It is well known that the word "Sabbath" is the Hebrew equivalent for our English word "rest." Accordingly, when Christ declares the seventh day to be the Sabbath of the Lord, He declares it to be the rest or rest day of the Lord. It was because the Creator, Christ Jesus, rested on the seventh day, after six days' work, that the day became His rest day, His Sabbath day. Since the seventh day of the Week is Christ's rest day, Christ's Sabbath day, it follows inevitably that the seventh day is the Christian Sabbath; that is, the Sabbath of Christ. And it is the only Christian Sabbath that the Bible knows.

As "Sabbath" means rest, evidently "the Sabbath of the Lord" must mean the rest of the Lord. Obviously, too, the Lord's rest, or the rest which comes from God, must be essentially spiritual rest - rest of soul - the peace and quiet of God in the heart. But, according to the uniform teaching of the Scriptures, only the presence of Christ can give spiritual or inner rest. Our minds revert to the Master's gracious invitation: "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me: . . . and you shall find rest unto your souls." Matthew 11:28, 29.

We have already learned that it was Christ who led and cared for the children of Israel through the wilderness from Egypt to the Land of Promise. Hence it was Christ who spoke the following words of assurance to Moses near the beginning of the forty years' journeying in the wilderness: "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." Exodus 33:14. There is no room here for doubt. Clearly and forcibly these Bible citations teach that spiritual rest-the peace of God-is conditioned upon the presence of God in Christ. Christ says, "Come unto Me" if you would have "rest unto your souls." He tells Moses, "I will give thee rest," as the necessary result of His "presence" going with Moses. It is as certain then as a mathematical axiom that, since the Sabbath of the Lord is the rest of the Lord, Christ the Lord is identified with that day and is

present in that day in a deeper and more vital sense than is true of any other day. Yes, it is the presence of Christ in the Sabbath day and in the hearts of His people that makes that day to them a spiritual, a heavenly, rest day.

And if Christ made the seventh day the Sabbath by resting on that day, surely it was He who blessed the day, and thus made it His blessed rest day. It is well to remind ourselves in this connection that Christ has never removed from the seventh day that distinctive primal blessing which He placed upon it when "He rested on the seventh day from all His work." Genesis 2:2. The day is still, and forever will be, Christ's blessed rest day.

Of course, it was Christ who "sanctified" His rest day-His Sabbath day -and, in so doing, set it apart for man's sacred or spiritual use. The Old Testament use of the term "sanctify" implies to set apart or devote to a sacred or religious use. It was Christ, too, who "hallowed" the Sabbath day, or made it holy. Naturally, then, it is He who commands us "to keep it holy." Thus, whoever is willing to derive his faith from the teachings of Holy Writ must conclude that the seventh day is forever the blessed, consecrated, holy rest day of Christ the Lord. In brief, it forever remains "the Sabbath of the Lord thy God."

We are now prepared to appreciate the categorical claim our Lord makes for Himself when He states: "Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath." Mark 2:28. Have we not seen that it was Christ who, by resting on the seventh day, made that day His Sabbath day? Was it not He who blessed and sanctified and hallowed the Sabbath day? Yes, that is what the Scriptures teach. We cannot then escape the conclusion that Christ is the Author, the Maker, of the Sabbath. In Mark 2:27 we are told that "the Sabbath was made." Speaking of Jesus, the Holy Spirit says: "All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made." John 1:3. Hence there is no avoiding the conclusion that Christ made the Sabbath. It is then just as evident that He is "Lord even of the Sabbath day." That is, He, being the founder of the Sabbath, is its Lord, its Master.

In Revelation 1:10 is brought to view a day called the Lord's day. John the inspired writer of that book, asserts that he "was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." He made no attempt to identify the day. It was not necessary, for in John's time there was no question as to what day was the Lord's day. Every Christian knew that it was the day of which Christ is Lord-the Sabbath, which Christ Himself says is the seventh day, the day on which He originally rested from His works. It is, therefore inconceivable that any candid person could doubt that it was on the Sabbath, the Sabbath of the fourth commandment, the seventh day of the week, that John "was in the Spirit."

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Suppose we now revert for a moment to the Sabbath commandment, and remind ourselves that the commandment contains the clear-cut statement: "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God." Can anyone possibly fail to see that the day of "the Lord thy God" must be the Lord's day? Again, in Isaiah 58:13, the Lord explicitly calls the Sabbath "My holy day." Here the Lord Himself unequivocally affirms that the Bible Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, is His holy day. In the name of all reason and of the inexorable logic of the Lord's own words, does it not follow that that day is the Lord's day?

Let us ask in candor: Does God ever refer to any other day than the seventh day of the week as "My holy day," or as "the Sabbath of the Lord thy God"? Absolutely never. Is it thinkable, then, that John did not mean the Sabbath day by the phrase "Lord's day"? Surely not.

Frequently those who observe Sunday as a sacred day refer to the Bible Sabbath as the Jewish Sabbath. Yet not once in the Sacred Scriptures is the Sabbath thus designated. On the contrary, as we have repeatedly seen, God calls that day "My holy day," "the holy of the Lord, honorable." No, no! The inspired writers never speak of the Sabbath of the Decalogue as the holy day of the Jews, or the holy of the Jews, but always as the Lord's holy day, "the holy of the Lord, honorable." Accordingly, we are not surprised that Christ, the Creator, and therefore the Author and Lord of the Sabbath, declares that He makes no exception, no qualification. Hence no sensible man would think of denying that He means all men, universal man. Yes, the Sabbath, the sign of God's creative and recreative power in Christ Jesus, was made not only for the Jew, but also for the Greek, the Latin, the Teuton, the Mongolian—in short, for man. The fact that God in Christ is the Creator, and therefore the Re-creator, or Redeemer, is eternally true; and it follows inexorably that the sign of that fact, the Sabbath (Ezekiel 20:12, 20), is eternal. See Isaiah 66:22, 23.

As long as it remains true that the Son of God is our Creator and Redeemer (Re-creator), so long will the Sabbath of the Lord continue to be one of God's transcendent gifts to man. Knowing the Sabbath to be the sign, the pledge, the monument, of the creative and redeeming power of the Lord Jesus, shall we not forever "call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable"?