

Know Your Bible

51. IS THE SABBATH VITAL?

IN reviewing the subject of the Sabbath, I design not to follow any previous writer, but simply, plainly, and briefly to convince sinners of sin, let their profession be what it may. This I hope and pray may be done without giving offense to those who love the truth more than error; for God has many servants on earth who would gladly exchange error for truth and many who do exchange their former traditions for the precious and everlasting truths of God as contained in His word. "This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments." 1 John 5:3.

Now, the New Testament statements concerning the law and the prophets were written within the space of some sixty-five years after the resurrection. It is easy for us to understand how these apostles understood and practiced with regard to the Sabbath, and they are the "foundation" next after Christ Himself. Therefore, if there was any such institution known and frequently spoken of in the church as "Sabbath," in those different ages of the church, we can easily know what was then meant by it. Some say, if we keep the seventh day of the week, we shall keep a "Jewish Sabbath." Well, we have no Savior to trust in but Jesus Christ, who was, according to the flesh, a Jew; no other apostles and prophets but Jewish; no other than Jewish Scriptures; and, indeed, Jesus said Himself that "salvation is of the Jews." John 4:22.

What did the writers of the New Testament mean by the words "Sabbath" and "Sabbath day"? What did Matthew mean when he used the word in his Gospel? He certainly did not mean the first day of the week, but he meant the day before the first day of the week. Matthew 28:1. He meant what all other Jewish writers ever meant; namely, "the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God." But neither Matthew nor any of the apostles ever told us a word about the Sabbath's being changed from the seventh to the first day of the week. Now, if the Scriptures cannot be broken, but everywhere mean one and the same thing; viz., "the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord," then, if ministers contradict this, and say the seventh day is not the Sabbath of the Lord, but the first day of the week is the Sabbath, will they not in this bear witness clearly and positively against themselves, unless they bring forward the chapter and verse where God commanded the Sabbath to be changed?

What did Mark mean by the word "Sabbath"? He meant, also, that the Sabbath was the day before the first day of the week. Mark 16:1, 2. Surely, if the Sabbath had been changed at the resurrection of Christ, Mark would have known it when he wrote his Gospel.

What did Luke mean, who wrote three decades after the resurrection of Christ? He also meant that the Sabbath was the day before the first day of the week; for he says that the women who prepared the ointment "rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment." Luke 23:56 Thus Luke understood the words "Sabbath day," in the sixth decade of the Christian Era, to mean the day immediately preceding the first day of the week.

How did John understand this subject in the seventh decade of the Christian church? He not only speaks of the Sabbath day as the others did, but he shows plainly that the first day of the week was considered a business day by the disciples after the resurrection. John 20:1; Luke 24:13.

But what did the writer of the Acts of the Apostles mean by the words "Sabbath" and "Sabbath day," thirty years after the Christian church was fully commenced? In writing, he often mentions the Sabbath, and once mentions the first day of the week as meaning quite another thing in plain distinction from the Sabbath. Acts 13:14, 42, 44; 20:7. The practice of the Jews was then, as it is now, to meet in the synagogue on the seventh day. And again: "The next Sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God." He does not say this was the Jewish Sabbath, but the Sabbath day; this was the seventh day; and the first day of the week was not then known as a Sabbath by this writer, because he says the next Sabbath day most of the Jews and Gentiles came together again. I say there would not have been any "next Sabbath" in the week until the next seventh day. Acts 16:13. "On the Sabbath we went out of the city by a riverside, where prayer was wont to be made." He does not say on the Jewish Sabbath, nor on one of the Sabbaths, as though there were two Sabbaths then, but on the Sabbath, that is, the seventh day, as understood by all Jewish writers of this day. Again see Acts 17:2, where Paul, as his manner was, went in among the Jews, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures.

Thus have I proved that the apostles of Christ understood that one day in the week should be called the Sabbath day; and, further, I have proved that this day was the day before the first day of the week, which is the seventh day and one cannot deny it, nor by the Scriptures disprove it; consequently, if the apostles of our Lord always called the seventh day the Sabbath day, many years after the church was fully commenced, then it must be the Sabbath day now. Every one of the Lord's ministers who calls any

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other day the Sabbath besides the one so called by the writers of the New Testament, gives it a title which is nowhere found in the Scriptures; for when they say the Sabbath day, they mean something different from what the New Testament means. It is already proved that the apostles called the seventh day of the week the Sabbath, and the Sabbath day, for many years after the church was fully commenced.

Now we are to show what sin is, and we are not left to guess at it, or to suppose it; but we have a given rule to know with certainty what constitutes sin. "By the law is the knowledge of sin." By what law was the knowledge of sin in Paul's day, years after the resurrection of Christ? ANSWER: The very same law that was given when it was said: "You shall not covet." The law, then, by which sin is known, is the Ten Commandments; and one cannot deny it! This law says: "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 20:10, 11.

Now, until this law is altered or abrogated (and Christ says He came not "to destroy the law") by the same power that enacted it, a willful transgression of it is a willful sin, let your profession be what it may; "for sin is the transgression of the law." He that offends in one point, offends in one of these commandments, is guilty of all, that is, he is a transgressor of the law, a sinner in the sight of God. But a regenerated soul, a truehearted Christian, says with Paul: "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." Romans 7:22. "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." Verse 12. Any person who is not willing to keep the commandments of God, when plainly understood, has still a carnal mind, which "is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Romans 8:7.

Will you say this is judging too hard? or, "This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" I wish to judge no man; but the word that the Lord has spoken, the same shall judge you in the last day. John 12:48. "As many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law . . . in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel." Romans 2:12-16. Then those who shall hold the truth in unrighteousness, those who pretend to keep the law differently from what God appointed it, those who, in fact, lay aside the commandments of God (the fourth or any other command) and teach for doctrine the commandments of men (the observance of the first day instead of the seventh), such, the word says, are vain worshipers. Mark 7:7.

But you say: It makes no difference which day is kept or called the Sabbath day, provided we keep one seventh part of the time! This is not correct, because God never said so. God is not to be mocked in this way. He has been very good and kind to make the Sabbath for man, to appoint the day, and the particular time of the day when the Sabbath is to commence and when it is to end; it is the seventh day in order from the creation—the seventh day in the creation; and he said, "From even unto even, shall you celebrate your Sabbaths." (Leviticus 23:32); as the evening and the morning were reckoned for the day. God did not leave this subject undecided, so that His people would appoint different days, and then everyone call his own the Sabbath day. But God blessed and sanctified the seventh day, and proved that particular day to be designated by Him, in the face and eyes of about six hundred thousand witnesses, by a miracle directly from heaven, in withholding the manna on that day, and in giving the food for that day on the day before; and it cannot be denied or disproved.

Again, you ask: How shall we know which is the seventh day? I answer: Do you wish to know? Then ask the Jews; for God has committed the lively oracles to them, and then scattered them among the nations. Do you know when the first day of the week comes? Well, the Sabbath is always the day before the first day of the week. Matthew 28:1. But you may say: Do not the majority of honest hearted Christians keep the first day of the week? and have they not for centuries done common labor on the seventh day, and observed the first in obedience to the fourth command, and still been honest in their motives, and living Christians? I answer: What is that to us, so long as the true light of the Sabbath did not come to their minds?

Now, we certainly know what sin is, not by what popular writers say not by the popular traditions of our fathers—not altogether by our feelings—but by the law of God is this knowledge; "for sin is the transgression of the law;" and all who have the law of God have an infallible and everlasting rule to know what sin is. Are you a willful transgressor of the law of God? Then by the law is the knowledge that you are a willful sinner before God. But if you are an ignorant transgressor of the law of God, then by the law is the knowledge that you are an ignorant sinner before God. To say nothing of presumptuous sin, I say: If you have ignorantly sinned, then repent and reform, and God will heal you. Leviticus 4:2, 13.

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By the law of God, then, is the clear knowledge of sin. I speak to you, Protestants, who keep the Sunday, a day formerly dedicated to the worship of the sun by the pagans, and afterward brought into the church by Constantine and Roman Catholics, and called the Christian Sabbath, a name never known for the first day of the week by any of the writers of the New Testament. I speak to you, Protestants, and ask you if you have any given rule to know what sin is. Have you any certain rule to know whether Roman Catholics sin or not, in bowing down to images? They say they do not sin!

You say you know they do sin. But how do you know it is sin to bow down to images, when they say it is not sin? ANSWER: By the law, you say, you know this is sin, and you know it by no other rule; for you "had not known sin, but by the law." Well, by the same rule, I know what sin is. You say it is not sin to work and do common labor on the seventh day. But we know, not by your assertion, but by the law, whether you sin or not. You say you know by the law that it is sin to bow down to images. I say (by your own rule): I know by the law that it is sin to do common labor on the seventh day; and one cannot deny it. And, if you know it is the duty of Roman Catholics to repent of their sins for transgressing the second command, then I know it is also your duty to repent of your sins for transgressing the fourth command.

He who said, "You shall not kill," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bow down thyself to them [images], nor serve them," also said, "The seventh day is the Sabbath."

Can you not see the weakness of the argument; viz., that one-seventh part of time was meant in the law, without regard to any particular day? In this you make the commandments of God of no effect through your tradition. Yes, you make void the part of the command which says, "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God." We read, not that the Lord blessed the seventh part of time or the Sabbath institution, as you say, but the seventh day in particular. Why do you wish to take out and make void this part of the fourth command, when Christ has said: "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in nowise pass from the law"? Matthew 5:18. It was as necessary that the particular day should be designated as it was that there should be a Sabbath made for man. It would not have been according to divine wisdom to say, "You shall keep one seventh part of time, or one day in seven," because this would have left mankind in as much confusion as your theory could make them! One might have kept one day, another the next, until seven Sabbaths were kept in one family.

Suppose a parent should command his child to do a certain piece of labor on a certain day, and that the child should, without any just cause, neglect to perform the labor on the day specified, and should perform it on the next day. Would this show any respect for the authority of the parent? or would the parent approve such conduct in his child? You will say No. Or, if a governor should command all the military to do duty two days in the year, and leave each one to select his own days, there would be as much wisdom in this as in the seventh part of time for the Sabbath of the Lord. God is not the author of confusion, but of order, while the theory of one-seventh part of time, or one whole day in seven, instead of the seventh day, impeaches the divine wisdom, and makes God the author of confusion. Thus the theory, not the law of God, leads to a narchy and confusion, and to the observance of no Sabbath; and it cannot be denied. What reasonable objection have you to the law of God? What fault can you find with it as it stands? Have you wisdom enough to change it for the better? "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." Psalm 19:7. Yes, it is so perfect that it has already converted the souls of many, even from the doctrines and commandments of men, to keep the Sabbath of the Lord, and I trust it will convert many more; because "the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. . . . More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." Verses 8-10. "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good."

"For I [Paul] delight in the law of God after the inward man." Romans 7:12, 22. The Westminster divines found contradicting the writer of the Acts of the Apostles! These divines say: "From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, God appointed the seventh day of the week to be the weekly Sabbath, and the first day of the week ever since, to continue to the end of the world, which is the Christian Sabbath."

1. Luke (the writer of the Acts of the Apostles) says (Acts 13:14): Paul and his company went into a synagogue of the Jews on the Sabbath day. Luke says this was on the Sabbath day then, at least ten years after the resurrection.

2. Luke says (Acts 13:42-44) that "when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words [of the gospel] might be preached to them the next Sabbath. . . . And the next Sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God." This, Luke says, was on the

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Sabbath day at that time, years after the resurrection. But the divines say that it was not on the Sabbath at that time, that Sunday had become the Sabbath.

3. Luke says (Acts 16:13): "On the Sabbath we went out of the city by a riverside, where prayer was wont to be made." This, Luke says, was actually on the Sabbath day at that time; but the divines contradict him, saying this was not the Sabbath at that time, but on Saturday; for the seventh day was not then the Sabbath, neither had been since the resurrection of Christ!

Reader, if you will take Scriptures and search them as above requested, then you will find the following valuable treasures of knowledge, among the many therein contained:

1. You will find Christ Himself saying, "The Sabbath was made for man," and that it was made when the first seven days were made, before man had sinned. The Sabbath was thus made not for the Jews in particular, but as a gift of God to man; i.e., to mankind universally, of all nations and of all ages of the world.

2. You will find that before the law was given at Mount Sinai, this was a law and a commandment (Exodus 16); that it was also written by the finger of God, with the "lively oracles," which God committed to the Jews to give to us.

3. You can find that the resurrection of our Savior has nothing to do with changing the Sabbath, any more than His birth, His death, or His ascension.

4. You can find that the common reasoning of men, that Christ frequently met with His disciples on the first day of the week after His resurrection more than on other days, are false and without foundation.

5. You can find that Luke had not forgotten the distinction between "the first day of the week" and "the Sabbath day" (Acts 20:7), in his recording the meeting of the disciples to break bread on that day; and that this is the only time the first day of the week is mentioned in all the Acts of the Apostles; and it is the only notice of Paul's preaching on that particular day, or rather, evening, and that on a particular occasion, namely, in order to be "ready to depart on the morrow," that this is one instance of the first day's being mentioned proves that it was not the Sabbath, and that the many meetings of the Jews and Gentiles, believers and unbelievers, where Paul preached "every Sabbath," certainly did not occur on the first day of the week.

6. You may find that Paul, in giving orders to some of the churches to lay by themselves in store something according as God had prospered them, on the first day of the week for the poor saints at Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:2), does not prove that to be the Sabbath day, but that it was not the Sabbath day, nor suitable to a Sabbath day's work; but rather as an offering to the Lord of the first ripe fruits of their increase; to be the first business attended to in the week, to reckon up their earnings and incomes, and devote a part of the same, and lay it by itself, so that it would be ready when Paul came.

7. You can find that as there is no law of God against doing common labor on the first day of the week, therefore it is no sin or transgression of any law other than the laws and commandments of men.

8. You can find that the Savior said to His disciples: "If you love Me, keep My commandments." Again: "He that has My commandments, and keeps them, he it is that loves Me: and he that loves Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him."

Now, reader, if you neglect or refuse to obey this fourth command of the Decalogue, are you not left without excuse? You can plead nothing in extenuation of your neglect. "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." Ecclesiastes 12:14.