

THE NEW COVENANT AND THE TRANSITION FROM SABBATH TO LORD'S DAY - Putting Deeper Meaning Into Sunday Worship - Part 1

Teaching #1844 - Sunday, November 29th, 2015, 10:00 a.m.

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Romans 14:1-9 - "As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. [2] One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. [3] Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. [4] Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. [5] One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. [6] The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. [7] For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. [8] If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. [9] For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living."

What are we to make of these words? What are we to do with **verse 5** - "**One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.**"? Do these verses teach that only the weak Christian takes diligence to honor the Lord's Day? Do they teach that all days are the same - that each person can decide when and how he will set time aside for the Lord?

How important is Sunday? Is there abiding Scriptural meaning to the concept of the first day of the week as being the ***church's day of corporate worship***? Is it still the ***Lord's Day***? And if it is, ***how*** is it so?

I have four points I want us to consider together. We'll do two this Sunday and two next.

We will come back to this Romans 14 text at the ***close*** of these teachings. At this point it simply highlights the questions we're studying. Before we come to answer these questions, let's take a fairly detailed look at the Biblical teaching about the Sabbath Day and the Lord's Day, and the particular meaning and importance of each.

1) **THE FOUNDATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SABBATH WAS THE SETTING FORTH OF A VISIBLE WITNESS THAT THERE WAS ONE TRUE GOD WHO WAS THE CREATOR OF ALL THINGS**

Biblical revelation didn't enter a vacuum condition in this world. There were competing religious stories and systems of worship. Then as now there were competing truth claims. How shall the Christian truth claims proceed?

Exodus 20:8-11 - "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 to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. [11] **For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day.** Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

Exodus 31:12-13 - "And the Lord said to Moses, [13] 'You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, 'Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, **that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you.**'"

It is true that the first ***mention*** of the Sabbath is found in the feeding with manna in the journey of Israel. But these texts in Exodus ***explain*** the Sabbath in terms of ***ongoing law***. The ***reasons*** for the Sabbath are unpacked in greater detail. God creates in six days and rests on the seventh. He doesn't rest in order to worship, of course, for the obvious reason that God ***has*** no one to worship. So our rest isn't exactly like His. But, just as God said to Moses, the creation of the world by the one true God receives permanent witness through the rhythm and completion of six days plus one, the Sabbath.

If you want proof of this consider the fact that we still have ***weeks***. That shouldn't be rushed over without thought. We have ***days*** because that's how long it takes the earth to revolve once on its axis. We have months because that's how long it takes the moon to orbit the earth in all its phases. We have years because it takes a year for the earth to complete its orbit around the sun.

But **why do we have weeks?** There is nothing specific in the realm of astronomy that coincides with weeks. You can Google this and you'll find all sorts of references to the fact that the creation account in the opening chapters of Genesis as the only valid reason for the presence of weeks in our keeping of time. We think in terms of weeks because God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day.

Think about this. It means every time we say we're going to do something or go somewhere in two weeks we're pointing to the creative activity of the one true God. We are **separating** the God who created the world and all that is in it from all the false gods and idols that clutter and dominate the religions of the world. **Weeks** point to **creation** and creation points to a **Creator**.

But why this day of **pause**? Why did God **"rest"** on the seventh day? What kind of rest was this? Last summer, while on holidays, Reni and I went to a church near here one Sunday. The pastor was doing an illustrated sermon, and it was on, of all subjects, the keeping of the Sabbath.

The pastor came out dressed in keeping with his topic. He was dressed in casual cargo shorts, sandals, and a summer sports jersey. He was making the point that we all are stressed out. He took little objects out of a bag he was holding - a cell phone - a Black Berry - a shopping list - a bundle of credit cards - all the things that make our lives hectic and fast-paced. These, we were told, were the things bringing stress and bondage. To **free** us of all these, God has given us a precious gift - a day to kick back - a day to catch a fresh breath - a day to rest from our mad material pursuits. And if we **ignore** this day, we will either burn out, or at least fray around the edges.

And that was it. Rest. Relax. Take a God-ordained break. These things stress us out. And we can't live well stressed out. God gave the Sabbath to de-stress our busy lives. Sunday is for inward regrouping. It's a peaceful pause to ward off burn-out. You can't rev the engine for too long without a God-given pause. And there's certainly some truth in that. But it's tragically incomplete and, I'm going to argue, a strange kind of reverse legalism in terms of what the Bible teaches about the theology and fulfillment oriented understanding of the Old Testament Sabbath Day.

The kind of **rest** we need isn't just a **physical break**. The kind of rest we **need** is a day that **teaches** and **trains** us to **live different lives**, not merely one that gives a break to then go back to the same **kind** of life-style all over again, but with a little bit of renewed energy - **"...for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you" (Ex.31:13)**.

We should **know** this. We should know it from the Scriptures themselves. Did God rest on the seventh day because He was **tired**? Did He just plunk down under a big tree somewhere and moan, **"Boy am I bushed. If I have to create one more tree I'm going to go out of my mind!"**?

No. The text tells us God **pondered His own works** on the seventh day. In a way that would be highly egotistical for any other being in the universe, God looked at the **sheer grace and power and goodness** in His own Person. God **admired His own glory**. **That's** our Sabbath calling as well. We fill our minds with the mighty, gracious, all-powerful, Creator. We mentally separate Him from all **non-creating, non-redeeming God's**. **That's** why the world is filled with weeks that end with a seventh day. **That's** what those weeks give testimony to.

The Sabbath was never given just to give a chance to chill and rest so we could return to our mad pursuit of self in the new week. It was given to **change the way we think altogether**. If there is anything the Bible makes clear about the Old Testament Sabbath it is this.

For obvious reasons, there are verses we quote far less often, but which make crystal clear the Sabbath was never given for our own sheer leisure or pleasure. The prophet Isaiah thunders against Sabbath abuse:

Isaiah 58:13-14 - **"If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; [14] then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."**

The Sabbath was given, not primarily to **recharge**, but to **sanctify**. And those are not the same thing. The Sabbath isn't for our **"own ways,"** or our **"own pleasure" (13)**.

Remember, these Old Testament passages all *fit* together when they're all *taken* together. Here's what we've seen so far. In the words given to *Moses*, God wants to *sanctify* the people on His holy day. In the Word of the Lord through *Isaiah*, God wants them all to learn to *"take delight in the Lord"* rather than their *"own pleasures"* on His holy day.

But we're still not done. In fact, in terms of understanding the purpose of the Old Testament Sabbath, we haven't yet come to the most important part. There is a second dominant theme coming out of the Old Testament Sabbath that is even *more* central to us as Christians and to the establishment of the Lord's Day in the New Testament:

2) **AFTER ESTABLISHING THE PROPORTIONS OF ONE DAY IN SEVEN TO KNOW OUR CREATOR GOD AND BECOME SANCTIFIED AND TRANSFORMED BY HIM, THE CENTRAL THEME OF THE OLD TESTAMENT SABBATH IS FURTHER SHARPENED**

This is the nature of *progressive revelation* as we have it in the Scriptures. God takes us by the hand and leads us deeper once we've grasped *earlier* revelations of His will and way. Earlier truths become *preparatory* for more complete understanding.

This is what I meant with I said that well-intentioned pastor's comments that summer Sunday were a kind of *reverse legalism*. By that I mean it was a legalism that doesn't *feel* like legalism because his words didn't have that legalistic *command/prohibition* ring to them. But it *was* legalism nonetheless because he was taking that bare *rest* instruction and separating it from its *fulfillment* teaching in the New Testament - and even the rest of the Old Testament.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 - "Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. [13] Six days you shall labor and do all your work, [14] but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you....(and now the crucial words that explain the link between the Old Testament Sabbath and the New Testament Lord's Day)....[15] **You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.**"

We've already considered the *"not pursuing their own pleasure"* instructions. But *why* were they given? What were they to *do* while they *"didn't pursue their own ways"*? Where were their minds to go? What kind of *transformation* was taking root in their minds over weeks and weeks of *"remembering the Sabbath"*?

We're not left to guess. The Sabbath was for *remembering* - **Deuteronomy 5:15** - "**You shall remember....that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.**"

We're told they were to cease other activities so they could give their *full* attention to something else. If they didn't stop everything else they wouldn't *remember* what they needed to remember. They would be *distracted*. Transformation would be impossible if their full attention wasn't given - one day in seven - completely to something else - something different. The Sabbath was for this *shifted studying* - this *remembering*.

Remember what? And why couldn't they remember it properly while they worked at other important things? They were to study and ponder and rehearse and celebrate God's *delivering work on their behalf*. They were to remember they were delivered by *God's* work rather than their *own* work. Hence they were to cease from their *own* labor. This is the *reason* given for the break from their regular routine. It had and has nothing whatsoever to do with merely taking a break - like not going to work on Saturday.

No. This day was God-designed to teach us learning about and knowing God takes *time*. You can't do it in just a few minutes each day. And you can't do it adequately while you're immersed in other activities. It takes *undistracted* concentration over *time*. You can't do it properly in an hour, or two hours. God sets aside one *day* in every *seven*. ***That's what it takes to remember.*** That's the *mental leverage* required to retrain and reorient my fallen, proud, self-reliant heart.

Right from the creation of the world onward we are forced with the lesson that we aren't as naturally spiritually inclined as we think. It's not easy for us to savor and relish divine grace.

So, after establishing the week's *proportions* by the Sabbath, God states clearly the *purpose*. Israel ponders deeply her *deliverance from Egypt*. She ponders how her Creator used creation itself - water turning to blood, frogs, the first-born smitten, seas parting to form a dry pathway for escape, the cloud and pillar of fire to guide.

Israel was smaller and weaker. She could easily forget this. She forgot it even *with* the Sabbath observance. She was delivered by God's work, not hers. That's the reason for turning from her own efforts on the Sabbath. She had done nothing to *earn* her deliverance. She *needed* the Sabbath to remember this. Then and now we are all inclined to think we are delivered by our own *religious effort and piety*. Israel needed - and we need - a forever, continuous reminder of *deliverance by grace*.

Grace is easier to *sing* about than to *mind*. It is incredibly hard to remain *thoughtful* about grace. Israel *needed* the Sabbath to remain *thankful*. Without this turning of attention to her *delivering God* she would become like the nations all around her. She would have a *belief* in some God, to be sure. But she would remain *unsanctified in her thinking about her delivering God*. And even when she *did* rest she would consider that rest a rest *earned* by all the work she had accomplished - like saving up for retirement. Just like that pastor was telling us in that summer Sunday service. Redemption was never mentioned.

Next Sunday we'll focus on the Biblical meaning of the shift to Lord's Day from Sabbath. Spend your Lord's Day feeding your whole being with grasping, learning more deeply, savoring the *atoning work of Jesus Christ*.

And do it with *other* redeemed sinners so you can fully marvel the vastness of such a redemption that even people like those around you can stand in grace as well!