

THE LETTER THAT CHANGED THE WORLD - The Biblical Theology of Romans - Part fifty-five
Sunday, March 1st, 2020 - 5:30 p.m. - Teaching #2195
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DID PAUL TEACH THAT STRONG CHRISTIANS DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT GOING TO CHURCH ON SUNDAY?

Romans 14:5-9 - "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?

We will come back to this text at the **close** of this teaching. At this point it simply points to 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**

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.'"

This is where the whole subject starts. 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. The **Encyclopedia Britannica** cites 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 that 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? A few summers ago Reni and I went to a church near here on a Sunday night. 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. Take a break. 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 in terms of what the Bible teaches about either the Sabbath Day or the Lord's 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"**(Exodus 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 His own **sheer grace and power and goodness** in His own Person. **That's** what we do. We fill our minds with the mighty, gracious, all-powerful, above all non-creating gods, Creator. **That's** why the world is filled with weeks. **That's** what they 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**. These Old Testament passages all **fit** together when they're all **taken** together. 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 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**

Progressive revelation starts to unpack Sabbath details beyond the bare creation account. We need to stay with God's revelation:

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. [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 **no work for themselves** instructions. But **why** were they given? What were they to **do** while they **didn't** work? Were they to contemplate their navels? Count clouds? Shop and spend their money? Take the boat out?

No. They were to cease work so they could give their **full** attention to something else. They were to study and ponder and celebrate God's **delivering work on their behalf**. This is the **reason** given for the break from their regular routine. Learning 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**. 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.

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 - waters 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 had done nothing to **earn** her deliverance. She **needed** the Sabbath to remain **thoughtful**. She **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 God, to be sure. But she would remain **unsanctified** in her life-style.

3) ALL THAT THE OLD TESTAMENT SABBATH MODEL BEGAN FINDS ITS COMPLETION IN CHRIST JESUS, THE LORD OF THE SABBATH

There are several pivotal passages, first from the gospels:

Matthew 12:1-8 - "At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. [2] But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." [3] He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: [4] how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? [5] Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? [6] I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. [7] And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. [8] For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."

Jesus battled with the religious leaders over the Sabbath more than any other single issue. They didn't understand His unique relation to the Sabbath. That it all pointed to Him. He healed on the Sabbath. He and his disciples picked corn to eat lunch on the Sabbath. He did good on the Sabbath. In all these issues they accused Him of breaking the Mosaic law.

And here's the important point. He **was**. Never once did Jesus **deny** He was breaking the Old Testament Sabbath laws. None of that is the real issue. The real issue is pressed home by Jesus in the blazing words of **verse 8** - "**The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath!**"

That's the new issue. **That's** what these Jewish leaders didn't get. Jesus takes the Sabbath and in bold, sweeping, divine, and absolutely majestic words says, "**I own the Sabbath. The Sabbath is mine. It has my stamp all over it. I make its rules and I decree its terms!**" The Sabbath is forever **Christ-centered**, not **Moses-centered**, and not **Israel-centered**, and not **temple-centered**. No one understands the Sabbath properly until he understands it finds its completion and focus in Jesus Christ. He, and He alone can say, "**I am LORD of the Sabbath!**"

Very quickly, there's another very important passage in John's gospel:

John 5:8-17 - "Jesus said to him (the lame man by the pool of Bethesda), "Get up, take up your bed, and walk." [9] And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath. [10] So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed." [11] But he answered them, "The man who healed me, that man said to me, 'Take up your bed, and walk.' " [12] They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk?'" [13] Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there

was a crowd in the place. [14] Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you." [15] The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. [16] And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. [17] But Jesus answered them, 'My Father is working until now, and I am working.'"

Again we see the conflict over the Sabbath issue. The key phrase to note is the one that seems to make little sense - "But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I am working"'(17).

What does Jesus mean? I think He means the Father didn't just sit idle after the six days of creation. He rested from the *initial creation* on the seventh day. But creation has gone amuck. God got up from His Sabbath rest and began a new work. Not the work of *creation* but the work of *redemption*. And Jesus says His works of healing, restoration, and forgiveness are the *expression* of God's work right now.

This work of redemption - this making of a *new creation* - found its victory in Christ's death and Resurrection. There was a *rest* - a *Sabbath* - at the end of the *first* creation. And there was also a *rest* at the completion of *redemption* - the *second* work of our Creator God:

Ephesians 1:19-23 - "...that you might know.... what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might [20] that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, [21] far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. [22] And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, [23] which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."

Hebrews 10:12 - "But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God...."

Christ's Resurrection and ascension mark the *completion* of the second work of God - the work of *redemption*. Christ "*sits down.*" *This was pictured under the reminder of Israel's deliverance in the Old Testament.* But that was just a shadow - just a symbol of the *ultimate* deliverance and the *ultimate* Sabbath. We don't *work to save ourselves*. We rest in the *finished* work of Jesus Christ. We join in the *ultimate* Sabbath rest, celebrating our deliverance by our mighty Redeeming God.

Every time this parking lot fills up on the Lord's Day we give testimony to the *delivering work of God in Christ Jesus*. When we walk from our car into this sanctuary, while others are sleeping or shopping or fishing or golfing or visiting, we *proclaim the reality of Christ's uniqueness in a world full of religions*. Church, this is *His* day because *He* did the work and sat down - just as our Creator sat down at the completion of the work of creation.

4) EACH LORD'S DAY REMINDS US OF THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD TO KEEP ALL OF HIS PROMISES TO HIS REDEEMED CHILDREN

Hebrews 4:9-11 - "So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, [10] for whoever has *entered God's rest* has also rested from his works as God did from his. [11] Let us therefore *strive to enter that rest*, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience."

The *new creation* is fully purchased, but not fully *delivered*. This fascinating text says we *rest* and we *strive* at the same time. But the *Lord's Day*, the *fulfilled Sabbath*, is full of promise. Just as the Old Testament deliverance from Egypt Sabbath looked with anticipation to the deliverance Christ would provide in the fulfillment of the New, so the *Resurrection of our Lord* anticipates the *final consummation* of Christ's Lord's Day victory.

Every Sunday you come into church you walk through a world of tsunamis, earthquakes, cancer, starvation, abortion, perversion, and immorality. Who among us has not, in the quiet of his or her own soul, screamed out, "*Where are you God? What are you doing?*"

Every Sunday you come into this church you have to wrestle all over again with your own incompleteness in Christ Jesus. You and I all long for the day when we see Him face to face in *perfect likeness*. We long for the day when we fail Jesus no more. We long for that ultimate, permanent, complete, eternal Sabbath.

And every Lord's Day we walk in the fulfillment of a promise God made through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We

walk in the fulfillment of a million butchered lambs and rams. We walk in the fulfillment of temples filled with smoke and incense but unchanged hearts, longing for the coming of a Redeemer. And each Sunday service, no matter how dull or ordinary, whispers into the listening ear, **“See. I keep all my promises. My plan isn’t done yet. But the day you’re celebrating testifies to the completion of the purchase of it all.”**

So, what about our opening question and text? Do just weak Christians think the Lord’s Day is special? Does the Apostle John call Sunday the Lord’s Day because He was weak in faith? Is that what Paul was teaching in Romans 14?

I doubt it very much. The whole context of Romans 14 deals with the foods, diets, and days and seasons (plural) in which the ceremonial regulations of the Jewish system functioned. We know from the rest of the writings of Paul that he taught in the churches on the Lord’s Day (**Acts 20:7**) and gave instruction for worship on the Lord’s Day (**1 Corinthians 16:1-2**).

But those converting to Christianity from Judaism, as well as a host of other religions, came with their own history and baggage. Like the dietary regulations we studied last week, Paul didn’t want them squabbling over these issues. They didn’t make or break the Christian faith. Neither the many special days, nor the foods to be eaten or abstained from on those days, was the key issue, but a heart for God and the glorifying of Jesus Christ.

In the meantime, remember the bright promise of every Lord’s Day. You can’t see all the way into it yet, but **“there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.”** *Sabbath is never a synonym for day off in the Biblical usage.* The same One who completed creation and rested, who completed redemption, the seal of the new creation and sat down at the right hand of the Father, will usher in the full inheritance - that glorious day when there will be nothing but one complete, long and bright eternal Sabbath.