

The Day of Rest

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The editor of the *Shorthand Temperance News* (Belfast) has sent us a kindly letter, of which the following is a copy, with the exception of the omission of a personal explanation at the close: —

Allow me to offer a humble suggestion to obviate the difficulty experienced on such a momentous, vital, and burning question as the observance of the Lord's Day. It might facilitate the clearer exposition of God's written word on the subject, if I were to quote some passages: "and rested the seventh day." Exodus 20.11. Leviticus 19.30; 26.2 show that it was more than a rest the Sabbath was made for; to reverence God's sanctuary; to show in deed and truth that God was the Lord, the ruler and maker of the universe. We ought therefore to know that "some" regular rest was observed heretofore. Under the new dispensation manners and customs have completely changed. The Jews kept, we know, the "seventh" day, and yet after all, were they found on the right side—honoring their Lord and Master, who redeemed them from sin and wickedness, and the power and snare of the Evil One? Facing that indisputable fact in this nineteenth century, can we not lay higher claim on the first day of the week as being the Christian Sabbath, free from the contaminating influences of such displeasing recollections in the history of the world, and raise our Ebenezer to Him who washed us in His own blood, and made us whiter than snow, on this very day of the week which Christians have since observed as the day appointed wherein to worship, praise, and magnify God, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords? Is there one single argument to the contrary whereby we can change a custom that has stood the test for centuries?

Until I find a church or sect, established on more high and deep-rooted principles of practical religion, I shall continue in my assertion (although I do not say that anybody is wrong) that we are keeping the day appointed, according to the teachings of the Scriptures, as *one whole day out of the seven*, and it is only right we should give the first fruits of our labors unto the Lord, when we give the first day of the week upon which we enter in laboring for the bread that perishes.

Yours sincerely,
Robert M'Master,
Editor "The Shorthand Temperance News."
Belfast, August 18, 1893.

We are always glad to receive communications upon any subject treated of in Present Truth. Our only desire is for the truth, and so we welcome anything that has truth for its object, and pray for grace rightly to receive all criticism; and believing that others are as desirous for truth as we are, we take it that they will be pleased if we reason with them out of the Scriptures. Let it be understood always that man is to live “by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God”; and that as His word contains everything necessary to make a man “wise unto salvation,” and to make him “perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3.15-17) everything that has not express warrant of His word, is sin. To do that which God has not commanded is sin, the same as not to do that which He has commanded.

Our friend well says that the matter of the day of rest is a “momentous, vital, and burning question;” but, fortunately, there is no difficulty connected with it, provided one is determined to abide by the word of God. It is so very clear that a child can understand it as well as a philosopher. Let us read some of the things that it says.

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, 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

Following the record of the six days of creation, come these words: “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it He had rested from all his work which God created and made.” Genesis 2.1-3

There we have the whole story. “The seventh day is the Sabbath.” It is made the Sabbath by the Lord’s resting on it. After He had rested on it, He blessed it; that provided the blessing, which the Sabbath brings to man. And He sanctified the seventh day. In Exodus 19.23 we read: “And Moses said unto the Lord, The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for thou charged us, saying, Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it.” Also we read in Joshua 20.7 that “they appointed Kedesh in Galilee,” and certain other cities to be the cities of refuge. The Revised Version has “set apart” in the place of “appointed,” and the margin of both versions gives “sanctified” as an equivalent. If therefore when we read that God “sanctified” the seventh day as the Sabbath, we know that He appointed it, or set it apart, to be kept wholly by man.

The Sabbath Day is Definite

Although this matter has recently been set forth in these pages, it may be well to recur to it again. Our friend says, referring to the common practice of Sunday observance: “I shall continue in my assertion (although I do not say that anybody is wrong) that we are keeping the day appointed, according to the teachings of the Scriptures, as *one whole*

day out of the seven.” But he has overlooked the fact that the Scriptures nowhere say anything about “one whole day out of the seven.” It says, “*the seventh day.*” It is true that the seventh day is “one whole day out of the seven,” but it must be remembered that there are six whole days out of the seven, that are not the seventh day. The Bible has not left any room for doubt as to which particular whole day out of the seven, shall be observed. It says, “the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God”; and the seventh day is not the first day.

Shall we repeat the substance of an illustration given in a previous number? Here are seven coins lying in a row on the table. The first six are pennies, but the seventh is a sovereign. The man who owns the coins tells my friend and me that we may have that seventh coin. Will my friend tell me that the man has kindly given us one-seventh of the coins? and will he choose the first? Indeed, he would not; for while the first coin is truly one-seventh of the entire number, it is not *the seventh*; and in a question of a sovereign against a penny, it is worthwhile to be exact. But can anybody say that in choosing the sovereign we selfishly strained a point? Certainly not; but when the sovereign was the last of the seven coins, and we were told to take *the seventh*, there was nothing else for us to do.

The case is the same with the Sabbath. There are seven days in the week. God has rested upon the seventh day, and has blessed and sanctified it. He calls it His Sabbath, and tells us to keep it holy. Can we obey Him by selecting some other day, and say that it makes no difference, provided we keep one whole day out of the seven? Let the reader who has decided in the case of the pennies and the sovereign, answer for himself.

The circumstances at the time that the law was spoken from Sinai show clearly that the command refers to a certain, definite day. The fourth commandment did not introduce a new thing. The Sabbath was well known before the commandment was spoken. More than a month before, God had given the Israelites a test in regard to the Sabbath. See Exodus 16. They were in need of food, and He gave them manna. It fell six days in the week; each morning they were to gather enough for that day’s use, but were not to try to keep any until the next day; if they did, it spoiled. On the Sabbath none fell, but on the sixth day twice as much fell as usual, and on that day they were to gather enough for use on the Sabbath. Although the manna would not keep overnight at any other time, it was fresh and good Sabbath morning, after having been kept over the sixth day night.

This was going on when the law was given, so that when God said “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy,” nobody could have the slightest doubt as to what day it was. And the Jews never had any doubt about it. They often broke it, but they knew when it came. There is nothing in this world more clearly defined than the Sabbath day. It is the seventh day, — the day immediately preceding the first day of the week.

Sabbath in the New Dispensation

This is a subject, which the theologians have succeeded in enveloping in almost complete obscurity. It is almost impossible for people to read the Bible except through the fog of theological terms that they have heard from childhood, and consequently it is no wonder that they get perplexed. Here is where a child has the advantage of a man. Not knowing anything about theological terms and definitions, the child takes the Bible just as it reads, and finds no difficulty provided he does not have somebody at his elbow to suggest difficulties that do not exist.

In our friend's letter we read, "Under the new dispensation, manners and customs have completely changed." Let us investigate this. We read, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God." 2 Corinthians 5.17. What is it that is changed in the "new dispensation?" It is the man. What is the change? —Simply this, that whereas before all things were of self, now all things are of God. But the Sabbath is of God, for the commandment says, "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God." Therefore the Sabbath is one of the things that pertain to the "Christian dispensation." We shall see a little later on, that Sabbath keeping is not found in the "old dispensation." Only the man who is in Christ, keeps the Sabbath.

Again we read: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." Ephesians 2.10. God makes a man a new creature in Christ, making old things—the old man, the body of sin—pass away, so that the new man may walk in the ways that God has prepared. One of these good ways is the Sabbath of the Lord, for in the new creation, "all things are of God."

It is a common idea that the "new dispensation" began at the resurrection of Christ, or at Pentecost. Then it is supposed that the new order of things was introduced, and old things passed away. But if that were so, what about Jesus Christ? His earthly ministry was all before the resurrection, closing with the crucifixion. Is His life to be left out of the "new dispensation?" If this is what theology gives us, we will choose the "old dispensation" with Christ, rather than the "new dispensation" without Him.

The Scripture tells us that "we are saved by His life." Romans 5.10. He is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." Hebrews 13.8. Therefore His life that saves us is identical with the life that He lived on earth for thirty-three years. He Himself said, "I have kept My Father's commandments." John 15.10. Jesus recognized the seventh-day Sabbath, and kept it, claiming for Himself the honor of being its Lord. Therefore Sabbath-keeping "according to the commandment" is part of His life, by which we are to be saved.

After Jesus had died upon the cross, His body was taken down, and laid in a sepulcher, for "that day was the preparation, and the Sabbath drew on. And the women also, which came with Him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulcher, and how His body was laid. And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment. Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulcher, bringing

the spices which they had prepared.” Luke 23.54-56; 24.1. Here we learn that the Sabbath came between the preparation day and the first day of the week.

In Mark we learn the same thing, only he specifies a little more closely, saying that it was “when the Sabbath was passed,” that they came to the sepulcher very early in the morning of the first day of the week.” Mark 16.1, 2

But Matthew is still more explicit. He writes: “In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn for the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher.” Matthew 28.1

This shows that the first day of the week immediately followed the Sabbath; but the Sabbath was all *past* before the first day of the week began. Although they came “very early in the morning the first day of the week,” there was no Sabbath there. They could not have found it if they had been looking for it; but they were not looking for it, because they had kept it the day before, “according to the commandment.”

This was after the resurrection of Christ. It will not do to say that the disciples had not yet learned of the change in the day, for be it remembered that these Gospels were written years after the event, and if there was ever to be any change in the Sabbath the disciples would have known it by that time; but they do not give a hint of any such change. Moreover the Holy Spirit inspires the language. Therefore we find that many years after the resurrection, the Holy Spirit inspired the statement that the day immediately preceding the first day of the week, is the Sabbath “according to the commandment.” And this is written for all time; therefore the seventh day of the week is still the Sabbath according to the commandment. And the commandment is the same now as when it was given, for “it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.” Luke 16.17. Therefore the seventh day of the week is the Sabbath of the “new dispensation.”

The “Two Dispensations”

Christ is the “Lamb that hath been slain from the foundation of the world.” Revelation 13.8, R.V. We are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot; who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world.” 1 Peter 2.19, 20

Ever since the foundation of the world, men have had “redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins.” Colossians 1.14. It is through “faith in His blood,” that righteousness is declared. Romans 3.21, 25. Now “by faith Abel offered unto God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous.” Hebrews 11.4. So we see that “the blood of His cross” was available for righteousness and peace as soon as there was sin in the world. He is the propitiation “for the sins of the whole world,” not merely for a certain age of the world.

But as surely as Christ was slain from the foundation of the world, He was raised from the dead from the foundation of the world; for He saves men by His life. Therefore the “Christian dispensation” began for man as soon, at least, as the fall. There are indeed,

two dispensations, a dispensation of sin and death, and a dispensation of righteousness and life, but these two dispensations have run parallel from the fall. God deals with men as individuals, and not as nations, nor according to the century in which they live. No matter what the period of the world's history, a man can at any time pass from the old dispensation into the new. It is when men know Christ after the Spirit, that "old things are passed away," and "all things are become new;" but Moses "endured, as seeing Him who is invisible" (Hebrews 11.27), and therefore Moses was in the new dispensation.

In 2 Corinthians 3.5-18 we have this matter of the two dispensations clearly set forth. We will quote it from Dr. Young's Literal Translation, putting in brackets some of the renderings of the Revised Version; so that the reader, having the common version before him, can have the benefit of three renderings: —

"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God, who also made us sufficient to be ministrants of a new covenant, not of letter but of Spirit, for the letter doth kill, and the Spirit doth make alive. And if the ministration of the death, in letters engraved in stones, came in glory, so that the sons of Israel were not able to look steadfastly to the face of Moses, because of the glory of His face, which was being made useless was passing away, how shall the ministration of the Spirit not be more in glory? for if the ministration of the condemnation is glory, much more doth the ministration of the righteousness abound in glory; for also even that which hath been glorious, hath not been glorious in this respect, because of the superior glory; for if that which is being made useless is through glory, much more that which is remaining is in glory. Having then such hope, we use much freedom of speech, and are not as Moses, who was putting a veil upon his own face, for the sons of Israel not steadfastly to look to the end of that which is being made useless was passing away; but their minds were hardened, for unto this day the same veil at the reading of the old covenant doth remain unwithdrawn, — which in Christ is being made useless which veil is done away in Christ, —but till to-day, when Moses is read, a veil upon their heart doth lie, and whenever they may turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away. And the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty; and we all with unveiled face, the glory of the Lord beholding in a mirror, to the same image are being transformed, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

The reference here is to the circumstances attending the giving and receiving of the law, from Sinai. Read Exodus 34.29-35, and you will see that when Moses came down from the mount, where he had been talking with God, his face shone. Although he did not know that his face shone, the children of Israel could not look upon its dazzling brightness. So while he talked with them, he put a veil upon his face, but he took it off when he went into the presence of the Lord. While the people could not look upon the reflected glory of God, in the face of Moses, he could go with unveiled face into the presence of God Himself. And there were others who did the same, for we read: —

“Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and they saw the God of Israel; and there was under His feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in His clearness. And upon the nobles of Israel He laid not His hand; and they saw God, and did eat and drink.” Exodus 24.9, 11

Let us now summarize the above points:

1. Life comes from the Spirit alone. But “we know that the law is spiritual.” Romans 7.14. He, who has the Spirit, has the righteousness of the law (Romans 8.4); it is only when the Spirit is rejected, that the law works wrath, for without the Spirit the law is transgressed.

2. The glory of God is the righteousness of God. “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” Romans 3.23. Therefore to be partakers of the glory of God is to be freed from sin. But freedom from sin is true obedience to the law. It is the Spirit that changes men from glory to glory, into the perfect image of God. So again we see that it is the Spirit that gives the perfect righteousness of the law of God, which is simply His life.

3. That Spirit was given to men from the beginning. It was striving with men before the flood, to bring them into the way of righteousness. Genesis 6.3. The Spirit was with the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai: “Thou gave also Thy good Spirit to instruct them, and withheld not Thy manna from their mouth, and gave them water for their thirst.” Nehemiah 9.20

4. The law merely upon tables of stone or written in a book can work only wrath and death. The reason is that in such a case it is only the statement of righteousness, and a mere statement of what his duty is can save no man. The law on stones, or in a book, simply tells us what to do, but gives us no power to do it. Therefore the giving of the mere written words of the law to any people is simply ministering death to them. The thunder, lightning and earthquake at the giving of the law - and the fact that no one could touch the mount without dying - showed that men cannot approach the law to get righteousness from it of themselves. He who takes the law as a simple statement of duty that he of himself must perform will find only death in it.

5. But there was the ministration of righteousness at Sinai, as well as the ministration of death. The whole thing was designed for righteousness, and all would have received the righteousness of the law, through Christ, if all had believed as Moses did. “The law entered that the offence might abound; but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; that as sin had reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 5.20, 21. Then no matter how much the law showed men to be sinners, and that the wages of sin is death, there was grace abounding to cleanse from all sin, by the life of Christ.

6. This is shown also by the fact that Moses went into the immediate presence of the glory of the Lord with unveiled face, although the people could not look upon the

reflected glory in his face. And why could they not? Because their minds were blinded. That veil over the face of Moses stood for the veil of unbelief over their hearts. When a man shall turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away, even as it was from the face of Moses, who, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, was changed into the same image from glory to glory.

That glory was the glory of the Gospel, for, continuing the narrative, we read: “But if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel [or, the glory of the Gospel] of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.” 2 Corinthians 4.3, 4. The minds of the people were blinded, and so the light could not shine in; but the light was there, ready to shine in, for the mind of Moses was not blinded, and the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ shone in his face, transforming him. The law and the Gospel were united at Sinai, as everywhere else. The glory of Calvary was shining at Sinai, as clearly as it shines now. Those who received it by faith had righteousness and life; those whose unbelief refused to see it, remained in sin and death. That, which is a savor of life to some, is a savor of death to others.

What then? Just this, that as the law at Sinai was “in the hands of a Mediator,” even the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only Mediator, it was to teach all men that the law just as spoken there, is what Christ, through the medium of His life, puts into the hearts of believers. Christ dwells in the believing heart, and ministers the law as life, for His life is the law. And so in the “new dispensation,” the Sabbath—the seventh day—is kept by men. And it is only in the new covenant or dispensation that the Sabbath of the Lord can be kept; for the righteousness of the law is fulfilled only in those in whom Christ dwells. The old dispensation is self, but the new dispensation is Christ.

The Object of the Sabbath

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, 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

“And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it He had rested from all his work which God created and made.” Genesis 2.3

“And hallow My Sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that ye may know that I am the Lord your God.” Ezekiel 20.20. “Moreover also I gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them.” Verse 12

All this is spoken of the seventh day of the week, and of no other; for “the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God.” Therefore the seventh-day Sabbath—the only Sabbath—was given that men might know God and His sanctifying power. God is

known through His works (Romans 1.20) and it is through His creative power that men are freed from sin. See Psalm 51.10; Ephesians 2.20. So the Sabbath, as the memorial of creation, is the means through which a perfect, saving knowledge of God is obtained. But God is known only through Christ, for all the works of God are wrought in Him.

Now the question is, Since God sanctified the seventh day for this purpose, is it possible that the same object can be gained by another day, upon which He never blessed or sanctified? Certainly not; to say that it can, is to impugn the wisdom of God in sanctifying the definite seventh day in the beginning.

We have already seen that the Sabbath pertains to what is called the "Christian Dispensation." There is more evidence still. Who created all things? It was Christ, through whose blood we have redemption. See John 1.1-3; Colossians 1.13-17. It is He also "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." 1 Corinthians 1.30. He, then, is the sanctifying power of God, for He is the power of God. Now the Sabbath was given that we might know God who sanctifies us. Therefore the Sabbath was given for the purpose of revealing Christ to us as a Saviour of sinners.

The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Romans 1.16. The power of God is known by the things that are made. Verse 20. The Sabbath is for the purpose of directing our thoughts to the things that God has made, so that through them we may know His power to save; for redemption is creation.

In the resurrection of Christ the power of God is shown. Paul's prayer was that we might know the "exceeding greatness of His power to us ward who believe, according to the working of His power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead." Ephesians 1.19, 20. But God's power is one, and ever the same, and it is seen in the things that He has made. Therefore it was creative power that raised Christ from the dead. We are sanctified through living faith in the death and resurrection of Christ, which, as we have seen, were accomplished from the foundation of the world. But the Sabbath makes known the sanctifying power of God; therefore the Sabbath is the reminder of the power of the resurrection as well as of the power of creation.

"What is the chaff to the wheat?" Men cannot sanctify a Sabbath. They can make nothing holy. The customs of the people are vain. Custom decides nothing. True, the Sunday has been nominally observed more or less for fifteen hundred years, but that proves nothing. God's name has been blasphemed, and the sun and the other objects have been worshipped instead of Him for nearly four times as many years; but that does not make blasphemy and idolatry right.

It is true also that the Jews rejected Christ, but that was not because they kept the Sabbath. On the contrary, it was because they did not keep it although they professed to. They rejected Jesus because they did not know Him; but if they had kept the Sabbath and the Spirit, and not in the outward form merely, they would have known Him as the sanctifying power of God.

It is not how men have regarded the Sabbath, but who gave it, that determines its sacredness. God gave the Sabbath day, and the blessing and sanctification, which He placed on it, can never be removed by any action of men. But the observance of Sunday—"the venerable day of the sun"—was "the wild solar holiday of all Pagan times," and as such was adopted by that power which exalting itself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, and thought itself able to change times and laws. Shall we continue to observe it, and thus recognize the authority of the Papacy? Or should we walk in the "old paths," and by keeping the rest day of the Lord, find the rest from sin, which He alone can give?