

True Sabbath Observance

When the Jews persecuted Jesus for the good deed done to the impotent man, He justified Himself by saying, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” That was a real justification of His act, for to do that which God does is the most perfect righteousness. Moreover, the acts of Jesus were not simply copies of what the Father did; if they were, then there would be in them no lessons or help for us, for it would show no connection between Him and frail human beings. But He said, “I do nothing of Myself;” “but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works.” John 8:28; 14:10. There is no man so weak that he cannot let God work in him to will and to do of His good pleasure.

Jesus was accused of violating the Sabbath, and He did indeed break the Jewish Sabbath, but not the Sabbath of the Lord. The Jewish Sabbath consisted in formal cessation of all labour on the seventh day of the week, even though human life was lost thereby. It was simply a yoke, a burden, an act of penance by which they thought, to make themselves righteous. It had nothing in common with the Sabbath of the Lord except that it was kept on the same day of the week. The Lord’s Sabbath is absolute rest in Him and His word,—dependence on His life; and since His life is activity,—service for others,—it follows that true Sabbath-keeping may sometimes involve severe physical labour. How can one tell what works are lawful on the Sabbath day, and what are not?—No list of lawful and unlawful works can be given, but this principle will guide whatever labour is necessary for the welfare of suffering humanity, whether the disease be of body or of soul, and from which the labourer derives absolutely no profit or benefit except the consciousness of God’s presence, is proper Sabbath labour. True Sabbath keeping is rest in God,—absolute and unqualified acceptance of His word.

“My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” How does God work, and how had Jesus done the work for which He was now persecuted?—By His word. Mark this: it was not as a man works by giving orders to another. No man may flatter himself that he is keeping the Sabbath while others are labouring in his employ. Whosoever does a thing by another does it himself. It is not the way that God works, and it was not in that way that Jesus healed the impotent man. He did not speak the word which set somebody else to work, but His word itself did the work. “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.” “He spake, and it was.” Ps. 33:6, 9. This miracle of Jesus was therefore simply a manifestation of the creative power of God’s word.

In six days God created the heavens and the earth; and then He rested on the seventh day, not because to have continued the work of creation would have been a sin, but for the good reason that it was all done. The word, however, continued to work in upholding that which it had created. All the works of God since that time (so far at least as this earth is concerned) are simply to uphold or to restore, and the works which He does for us and through us are to the same effect. Keeping the Sabbath of the Lord is simply the absolute resting in God’s finished work, and allowing Him to put them into us. The absolute ceasing from all our own works on the seventh day,—from everything by which we may get gain,—is an indication of our trust in God for “life, and breath, and all things.” If one dare not trust God to keep him if he should rest on what is to all the world (and even the greater

part of the professed Christian world,) the busiest day of the week, how can he persuade himself that he is trusting for eternity?

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