

Questions about the Sabbath? 1 of 3 – 29-01-2022

Hi all,

I get asked questions about the Sabbath quite often. It is a major issue for everyone from 7th Day Adventists to 'Messianic' Christians, to those with Roman Catholic backgrounds and many others. So let's examine scripture, history, what Jesus said, and what is taught in the New Testament letters, and apply all that to our lives.

The first thing to understand is the word 'sabbath' means 'to rest' or 'to cease from doing something, to quit'. It is from creation when on the 7th day God 'quit' (not rested as we use the term), or God ceased from His work.

Because there are so many religious attachments associated with the word Sabbath, I will mostly use 'rest', or 'quit' which is what the word means.

The Sabbath command: Exodus 20:8-11

"Remember the rest day by keeping it holy. You work 6 days, but on the 7th you will rest unto the Lord your God. You will not do any work on that day, and neither will your sons or daughters, foreigners in the land, or even your animals. For in 6 days the Lord made the heavens and earth, the sea and all that is in them, and He quit on the 7th day. Therefore He set aside the rest day and made it holy."

The day of rest was a family day, as seen in Leviticus 23:3 where the day of rest was called in the King James Version, 'a holy convocation'. The gathering of the family for a day together was holy. There is no command to make that day a day of worship. It is merely the weekly day off for the family to fellowship together, and is to be considered holy as we emulate our God who quit working on the 7th.

Rabbit trail...

We see that the day of rest was first and foremost a day for the family to spend together, and God called it holy. This carries over to the New Testament celebration of the gathering of the family of God. In Acts 2:42 we are told they kept their gatherings rather simple: "And they were in the apostles teaching, fellowship, food and prayer."

Fellowship in New Testament realities, is holy, for it is fellowship first with one's blood family, and second with family linked by Jesus' blood. That gatherings themselves are a rest, a sabbath gathering of family. The gathering of the household of God is restful, a celebration of the family and of our Lord whose example we are following.

In the auditorium thinking 'fellowship' is treated as an afterthought, not as being equal with teaching, food, and prayer. In the auditorium thinking 'fellowship' has been relegated to something you do with coffee or tea after a main event: "After the meeting today we'll have a time of fellowship with refreshments in the fellowship hall."

In kingdom culture hospitality and the fellowship associated with it, are part of the fiber of the kingdom. We are also called into the fellowship of the Lord Jesus. (1 Corinthians 1:9). 'Koinonia' is tossed around like it is a program or something to achieve, when in fact it's just part of who we are - we seek out blood relatives. Food, fellowship, prayer, teaching and sharing - it's what family does.

In NT thinking fellowship with family is holy and can be traced directly back to the command to keep a day of rest with family, from Exodus 20:8-11 and Leviticus 23:3 for examples. In both places God calls the family day of rest a 'holy gathering'. Let us elevate our gathering together to the same level of value as the Lord does.

Back to the main point...where did worship on Saturday begin?

There is nothing in the Old Testament saying God commanded the rest day to be a day of worship. It is a family day, that is all. That weekly gathering of the family was and is considered holy. It requires discipline to keep. No work on that day, the whole family spends it together doing something other than work.

God only commanded Israel to come to temple 3x a year, as seen in Deuteronomy 16:16 and Exodus 23:17: "Three times a year will all your males appear before the Lord your God in the place He will choose; Unleavened bread, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. And they will not come empty handed."

I've stated the history many times, but briefly: Around the time of the Maccabee's, in the 200-160BC time frame, a holiness movement arose in Israel to educate the Jewish people. They were being heavily influenced by Greek culture which brought things like sporting events, theater, arts, literature and such into Jewish society.

But because Jewish people only went to temple in Jerusalem 3x a year and they were spread through the land, they were ignorant of God's Word and ways. A group calling themselves the 'separated ones' arose to solve the problem. They would start 'gatherings' on each rest day comprised of 10 males and families (a boy 13 and older was counted as a man) and make copies of scripture. These separated ones traveled to these 'gatherings' and when not able to, the families took turns reading scripture and sharing - as we see Jesus doing in Nazareth in Luke 4:17-20.

The word 'separated one' is the word Pharisee, and the word 'gathering' is synagogue. That is how rest day (Sabbath) day worship began - as a holiness movement in the 100's BC, roughly 200 years before Jesus's ministry. Thus when Pentecost happened, these new believers merely continued meeting in homes as they had, only now they recognized the apostles as their authority, not the Pharisees. This caused great persecution and 'synagogue splits'. The persecution against those splitting the synagogues was so severe, Acts 8:1-2 tells us every disciple except the apostles moved out of Jerusalem to the surrounding areas of Judea and Samaria.

So we can set aside....

...the error that God commands worship on the rest day, for He does not, and never did. All He said was to take the day to rest following His pattern of creation when He quit working. We are to do the same. It's that simple. The intellectually honest person will adjust what they believe to fit God's Word, the rest will say 'Don't confuse me with facts, my mind is already made up', lol. There is nothing wrong with worshipping any day or night as long as we don't say God ordained that day for the saints to gather.

Others hold onto Saturday worship because they love it - that's no problem - as long as they don't teach the error that God commands Saturday worship.

And we will pick it up there next week, showing how Paul dealt with people who insisted one day or another was the day to worship on. Until then, blessings,

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Questions about the Sabbath 2 of 3 – 05-02-2022

Hi all,

We left last week with the statement that worshipping on Saturday is fine unless someone insists that is the only right way. Paul ran into this issue with the Romans and addressed it in chapter 14:

"Why are you judging another man's (Man's) servant?...One man considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them needs to be convinced within their own mind. Whoever one day as special does so unto the Lord...and whoever doesn't does so unto the Lord. 14:4-8

Paul also told the Colossians in 2:16-17: "Therefore let know one judge you in food and drink or holy days, or the new moon or sabbaths, for these are shadows of what is to come..."

Food and drink are a type of the time we will have with the Lord, a great marriage celebration feast. The new moon is a reference to the rapture of the church that Paul taught in I Corinthians 15 and in his letters to the Thessalonians. The Feast of Trumpets which was given by God and includes the catching away of believers in Messiah, is the only festival that starts at the new moon phase. The new moon is when there is no moon, said to be hidden from view and is the opposite of the full moon.

Believers in Judaism use the moon as their type, while the sun is a type of the Lord - so the resurrection blast happens at the new moon, showing believers will be hidden in Christ at a future fulfillment of the Feast of Trumpets.

Sabbath days are a shadow of the earth at rest, we ourselves at rest in Him, never again to face the struggles found in this earth-body and world ravaged by the devil.

Jesus our Sabbath - Jesus our rest

In Hebrews 4 the author addresses the issue of the Jewish day of rest, the sabbath. He sets the tone saying in v3: "We who have believed have entered into rest."

This is the same point Paul made in II Corinthians 5:17-19, that we have been recreated in our spirit man because God the Father reconciled the world to Jesus, charging their sins to Him. Therefore we as new creations in Christ, are a rest and peace with the Father God - we've been reconciled.

The author of Hebrews says 'we who have believed have entered into rest', meaning being in Christ is rest. The Father is at peace with us.

Hebrews 4:7 continues talking about this rest time in Christ. His point is the weekly sabbath is a type of rest in Christ. Every week when Israel took their day off to rest as a family, it was a divine appointment and picture of a time when the family of God would rest in God as a family. These 'holy gatherings' were seen as rehearsals before the True would come.

So the author of Hebrews continues in v7: "God (Father) set this certain day and called it 'Today', saying as He spoke through David later: 'Today if you hear His voice don't harden your hearts.'"

That line is a partial quote of Psalm 95:7-8 which every Jewish person reading it would have known, but it is often missed by us. The full quote of those 2 verses says this: "He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the flock in His care. Today if you hear His voice don't harden your heart as in the days in the wilderness at Meribah (quarreling) or as at Massah (testing) in the wilderness."

This is why Hebrews 4:8-9 continues: "If Joshua had given them rest God would not have spoken about a later day of sabbath (rest) to come. Therefore there is a Sabbath-rest for the people of God. For anyone who enters into His rest must also cease (rest) from their own works, as God did."

"Anyone who enters into His rest must cease from their own works."

This is why Jesus said in Mark 2:27 and 28: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath."

Jesus here made the case that HE is the Sabbath-rest long predicted with each day off every Jewish person took through the centuries. HE is the Sabbath-rest who was made for man because that Sabbath day off was made for man - and so was He. With each bull and goat and sheep and bird offered as a blood sacrifice it spoke to a time where a final sacrifice would be made to bring a rest between God and human kind once and for all. Jesus is that rest. Jesus brought that Sabbath-rest.

But to enter into His rest, you have to cease from your own works. You have to accept the grace. And once accepted, you can't go back to working formulas to find peace with God the Father. Once you have Jesus, as Paul stated in Romans 8:32, you have all things.

This is why Paul in his letters to the Corinthians and Colossians and as we see in Hebrews, the teaching that Jesus is our Sabbath-rest, which makes every effort on our part to make peace with the Father obsolete. Jesus is all we need. Once we have Him, it is proof we have ceased from our own works (efforts) to get to God.

Faith feels like peace

Back in the day when I was first learning about faith and grace, I would face a problem and then try to stir up faith, try to work up faith. I would speak or declare 'words of faith' thinking that is what faith was. I would be scared or worried about a bill to be paid for which I had no money, and speak out positive things about provision - and I thought that was being 'in faith'.

But a curious thing happened. I noticed when I just stopped all my efforts and worked through my fear and turned it over to the Father, a peace came into my spirit that my mind picked up on. And then the answer came. There was a direct correlation between ceasing from my own works, receiving peace, and then receiving the answer. In the same way the reverse was true. When I worked hard to speak and declare while I was worried and doing it truth be told, out of fear the need wouldn't be met, then it never happened, or took lots of work on my part to make it happen.

Faith feels like peace, is a lesson I learned through the school of hard knocks, trial and error. And yet it was written here in Hebrews 4 all along: He that is entered into His peace has ceased from his own works."

This is why Hebrews 4:11 says: "Let us make every effort therefore to enter into that rest (peace) lest we end up in unbelief."

Faith feels like peace - work to enter into the rest of peace by ceasing from your own efforts of worry, fear, or religious formula designed to 'do something' to help your situation and/or move God. Just let it go. Let Jesus be your rest. Work to get into His rest.

And we'll pick it up there next week, until then, blessings,
John Fenn

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Questions about the Sabbath, 3 of 3 – 12 februari 2022

Hi all,

I've been sharing how Jesus is our Sabbath-rest, and anything we do in the natural like taking a day off, is a type of the rest in Christ we have.

Another example of types would be clothing - when the Lord God made the first clothes for Adam and Eve, they were a type of something to come. Genesis 3:21 says the Lord God made the first clothes, specifically stating made of skins of animals. The animals were the first blood sacrifice which covered the nakedness of man, as a temporary picture of the Lord God's final sacrifice on the cross.

Therefore every time we put on clothes we are reminding ourselves of the covering God provided, first and last, to cover our nakedness. Is it any wonder man has twisted the original intent of clothing to make it both worshipped and often something design NOT to hide a person's nakedness fully?

As it relates to our topic, when we take a day off we are rehearsing the true meaning of rest, which came when God sent His Son to make peace, reconciling us to Himself, that we may be at total Sabbath-rest in Him. Just being.

Faith is not the issue. Faith is of the spirit and Spirit,

So faith cannot be touched by the devil. Consider that you believe in and know Jesus. Satan can't touch that. The demonic attacks our soul, our thoughts and emotions but can't touch our spirit. So faith isn't the issue, working to enter into His rest by ceasing our own efforts is the issue. The effort is to enter into rest, to enter into peace. That is the battle.

Why does he say to work to enter into rest right before he tells us of the sword of the Spirit in v12-13? The answer is because entering into His rest involves a real person, not a set of rituals or formulas to move God or position ourselves for better standing with Him. Here he is writing about real peace found in Jesus, and the Word of God he writes about is not chapter and verse, but the Person of the Word, the Lord Jesus:

"For the Word of God is living and alive and shaper than any two-edge sword. Piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and judging the thoughts and intentions of the heart. There is nothing hidden, all things are open and naked before the eyes with whom we have to do. Seeing that we have such a high priest who has passed into the heavens, Jesus Christ the righteous....let us come boldly to the throne (of the Father) to receive mercy and grace." (12-16 in part)

Hebrews 4 presents the totality of our Sabbath-rest in Christ. He is the fulfillment of the 7th day Sabbath. He is the fulfillment of the type of the family gathered for their day off. He is the fulfillment of every sacrifice made in days of old to bring peace and reconciliation between the Father and the worshipper.

When we cast our cares on the Lord, when we give up all ritual and formula realizing we cannot influence the Father to any greater degree because He already gave us His only Son, we rest. We are at peace. We live as if in a river of life flowing in life in Him, knowing He has provided all things for our life and godliness, and all He wants is us to walk with Him in that rest, in that peace...

What about the sabbath command being a forever command?

One final question is often brought up by those who want to ignore the work of Jesus on the cross to bring us the True Sabbath rest, and that is that God commanded Israel the Sabbath would be a perpetual command. This is especially strong among Messianic Christians and 7th day Adventists. One passage used is Exodus 31:13 & 16:

"...my sabbaths you will keep; for it is a sign between me and you throughout all your generations..."
"...to observe the sabbath throughout their generations; it is a perpetual covenant."

I could bring up the first rule of Bible interpretation is to understand who was being spoken to which would be therefore to whom the command applies. In this case God is talking to Israel in about 1400BC, not to gentile nations nor to New Testament people. But even with that said the passage still applies to us through Jesus.

It is in that statement of the sabbath being a perpetual covenant where we find Jesus. For Jesus is the sabbath and keeping Him is perpetual. Forever. Entering into His rest is forever. This statement in Exodus is a statement of a forever Sabbath found in Christ Jesus, the Lord and Master of the Sabbath. It is perpetual covenant.

This should bring peace to all who struggle, wondering if 10,000 years from now they may lead a rebellion in heaven and lose their salvation - they fail to recognize one our full spirit and soul and body are made of heavenly material, and the devil is dealt with, we will forever be one with the Lord. There is no possibility of rebellion for it just isn't in us any longer. Jesus is our perpetual covenant of rest.

How do we enter into that rest?

In Philippians 4:6-7 gives us understanding for how to enter into that sabbath-rest.

"Be anxious (worried, fearful) for nothing. But in every thing by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God (Father). And the peace of God (Father) which is beyond all understanding, will keep (hem in) your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

For years I found myself as worried and afraid after I prayed as I did before I started praying. Then one day I realized I needed to take scripture as a command, not as reading material or a suggestion.

Step one: Be anxious for nothing.

I took that as a command. I started not praying until and unless I had first dealt with the fear and worry. One issue that turned my life in this direction had to do with a situation at work with the church where I was the Bible school Director. The auditorium church is political by nature because it patterns the federal government of Israel set up by Jethro on Exodus 18 with 'captains' over 1,000's, 100's, 50's, and 10's. It can't help being political with all the territories guarded and climbing over one another to be noticed that goes with political structures.

Just such a situation where I was being attacked verbally by someone on staff had me worried and afraid. But I was determined to 'be anxious for nothing' before I ever made my request to the Father. I struggled for 2 or 3 weeks going over and over it in my mind. The worst case scenario of losing my job over false accusations born of greed for my position and budgeted departmental money played over and over in my mind. How would I provide for my family? What would we do? What about the kid's tuition at the Christian school? And so much more.

About 2 or 3 weeks later each issue, one by one, had been met by 'the Lord hasn't brought us this far to let us down', and the realization He had always taken care of us. One by one each fear was dealt with in that way. Finally free from fear, I made my request to the Father, and suddenly peace came upon me. Flowing in my spirit and up to my soul, I was bubbling over with peace and joy....and the problem was dealt with without me having to do anything.

The work is to get into His rest, and that is done by ceasing our own works. I had to cease and desist worry and fear. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. He IS that rest. No formula, just conversational relationship, and dealing with life and our own heart as needed so that we may grow in Him. Rest.

New subject next week, until then, blessings,
John Fenn

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