

38. The Gospel of John—5:8-16

“The Sabbath Controversy” Pt.2

(8/5/18)

A couple of weeks ago, we began a two-part study which I’ve entitled—“*The Sabbath Controversy*”.

We have been studying John’s gospel and came to chapter 5 where Jesus healed a man who had been crippled for 38 years—on the Sabbath.

And while most people would think that was a good thing—it created a fire-storm of hatred towards Jesus on behalf of the religious leaders—

John 5:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath.

As we mentioned last time, the reason the Jewish people were so protective of the Sabbath, the reason it was so sacred to them was because—it was the sign of the covenant that God made with Moses and the children of Israel from Mount Sinai when they first came out of Egypt—that they would be His chosen people, a holy nation unto Him.

The Sabbath was the one thing that separated the Jewish people from every other nation on the face of the earth (Exodus 31:12-18).

To command that an agrarian culture take one day off each week (especially at harvest time)—was unheard of in the ancient world and made the Jewish people absolutely unique.

And so, one of the reasons the Jewish leaders hated Jesus so much and wanted to kill Him was because they believed He sought to undermine and destroy the covenant God made with them (along with their power) by violating the Sabbath and teaching others to do so (John 5:8-9).

And yet, Jesus didn't come to destroy the Law of God (the Mosaic Covenant), He came to fulfill it (Matt.5:17)—as the only One who *could* keep the Law perfectly.

But you need to understand, Jesus never violated Sabbath law (as God intended it)—He only violated their *interpretation* of Sabbath law.

When God originally gave the Sabbath law it was a very simple concept—you work your fields six days a week and on the seventh day, the Sabbath (Saturday), you were to rest.

So, the principle was an easy one to understand—take the day off so that you could physically rest and recuperate—and spend some quality time with God in the process.

And as a part of the written Law of God (Ten Commandments) the Sabbath was a relatively simple, succinct law containing 60 words in the English.

However, the rabbis took a simple concept and turned it into an unbearable burden.

As they began to interpret what God *meant* when He said they were to rest on the Sabbath—it led to 24 chapters in the Talmud being devoted to the concept of what constituted Sabbath rest (as we studied last time).

But folks, the Sabbath had become anything but a time of rest—the scribes and Pharisees had loaded it down with so many rules and regulations the people dreaded the Sabbath—instead of being the greatest *blessing* of the week, it had become the biggest *burden*.

So Jesus, during His earthly ministry, never violated or broke Sabbath Law—only their faulty man-made interpretations of what constituted Sabbath Law.

Besides, as God in human form—Jesus was the One Who gave the Sabbath to Israel in the first place, and as such He was the One Who had the authority to suspend Sabbath law or abrogate it altogether if He chose to do so.

Even as Jesus stated clearly in Mark 2:28—"the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath."

As we said last time, these first two points in our outline on the Sabbath—**I. The Sabbath Law;** **II. The Sabbath Lord** (which we studied last time) were informational—or in other words *doctrinal*.

That's what doctrine is—it's information.

However, for doctrine (the Word of God) to become living and powerful in your life—it has to be applied.

And the order is no accident—*first* comes the information and *then* the application.

Too many pastors today open the Bible, read a verse or two and make immediate application without giving any contextual information as well as explaining and interpreting the passage first.

However, without knowing and understanding *what* God is saying (context is vital), *why* He's saying it, and to *whom* He's saying it—often leads to wrong conclusions and ultimately to faulty applications which lead many astray.

As I learned in Hermeneutics class—a text without a context is a pretext

And so we spent the entire message last time carefully giving you the background as to what the Sabbath was all about, why God gave it and how He intended the Sabbath to be understood and applied by the Jewish people in the practice of their lives from week to week.

That then brings us to the application—

III. The Sabbath Lesson

As we have just seen, Jesus referred to Himself as ‘Lord of the Sabbath’—an inescapable claim of deity on the part of Jesus which we will look at in detail next time in John 5.

But here is an important lesson about the Sabbath that Jesus (and later Paul the apostle) taught, that—not only did Jesus, as the Lord of the Sabbath, *institute* the Sabbath—He Himself is the Sabbath!

Something He alluded to when He said, “*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matt.11:28)*

Jesus is the Sabbath rest for the people of God under the New Covenant, and that’s because under the New Covenant we are no longer under Old Testament Law including Sabbath Law.

And yet, there are many Christians today who are ‘Sabbatarians’.

In other words, they believe that Christians are still under the Moral Law (Ten Commandments) and therefore we are commanded to keep the Sabbath (which they claim for Christians is Sunday not Saturday).

This idea has been around for a long time in certain church circles (Reformed and Calvinist) but is gaining momentum in more recent movements like the Hebrew Roots Movement.

I know of one Reformed pastor who believes that Christians are still under Sabbath Law and feels guilty for going to restaurants on Sunday after church because he's making the waiters and cooks sin by working on the "Sabbath".

What about this—is it true that Christians are still under Sabbath law?

As we've already pointed out, in the Torah, God gave the Sabbath to Israel as a law and a sign—

Exodus 31:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations *as a perpetual covenant*.

The Sabbath was the sign of the Mosaic Covenant (Old Covenant) and as such—was only intended for Israel and was never given to mankind as a universal law.

Nowhere in the New Testament is the Church ever commanded to keep the Sabbath—on the contrary we read—

Colossians 2:16-17 (NKJV)

¹⁶ So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths,
¹⁷ which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

A shadow contains no substance but is cast by something or someone *of* substance.

The O.T. feasts, sacrifices and Sabbaths all pointed *to* Jesus (the substance)—He said, "*The volume of the Book it is written of Me.*" (Ps.40:7)

And now that Jesus has come, we no longer live in the shadows of the O.T. law—as Christians we now live in Christ who is the fulfillment of these things.

And that's why we are accepted by God (to have fellowship with Him now and heaven someday)—not because of who *we* are and what *we* do, but because of Who Jesus is and what He did.

Something Paul stated clearly in Ephesians 1:6 when he said that “*He has made us accepted in the Beloved One [Jesus Christ].*”

And that is the *only* reason we can approach God and be accepted by Him as His children—*because we are in Christ.*

You see, as Jesus fulfilled the Law perfectly, and we are in Him (‘hidden with Christ in God’ - Col. 3:3)—we have also fulfilled the Law perfectly by virtue of being in Jesus thru the new birth.

And as such we are not obligated under law to observe the Sabbath (Saturday or Sunday) each week—

One well known pastor has it right when he said—

“Because the Lord of the Sabbath had come, the shadow of His Sabbath rest was no longer needed or valid. The New Testament does not require Sabbath observance, but rather allows freedom as to whether or not any day is honored above others (Rom. 14:5-6a)...From the days of the early church (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2), Christians have set aside Sunday, the first day of the week, as a special day of worship, fellowship, and giving offerings, because that is the day our Lord was raised from the dead. But the Lord’s Day is not the “Christian Sabbath,” as it was considered to be for many centuries and still is in some groups today”.

You see, there were those in Paul’s day who were trying to put Gentile Christians under the Mosaic Law and condemning them for not keeping the Jewish feasts, dietary laws and special holy days—i.e. the Sabbaths.

But Paul the apostle made it clear that N.T. believers are not under the Law of Moses—

Galatians 3:24-25 (NKJV)

²⁴ Therefore the law was our tutor *to bring us* to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor [*the Mosaic Law*].

Romans 10:4 (NKJV)

For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Once the law has brought us to Jesus for *His* righteousness—it is no longer needed, it has served its purpose and therefore is to be jettisoned (like the two solid rocket boosters of the Space Shuttle that propel it into orbit—Explain).

Now understand, I'm not saying God's moral law is to be jettisoned in the sense that it no longer needs to be followed in the practice of our daily lives as Christians and that we can now live lawless lives because we are saved by grace.

It's true that the Law (think of the Ten Commandments) was never intended to make us *righteous*, only to show us our guilt (again, to bring us to Jesus for His righteousness and salvation)—

Romans 3:19-20 (NLT2)

¹⁹ Obviously, the law applies to those to whom it was given, for its purpose is to keep people from having excuses, and to show that the entire world is guilty before God. ²⁰ For no one can ever be made right with God [*get to heaven*] by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are.

Once again, when I'm *in Christ* (salvation) I'm righteous because of *His* righteousness—

Philippians 3:9 (NKJV)

⁹ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

However, when it comes to daily Christian living, God's Word teaches that, once we give our hearts to Jesus and are saved—the Holy Spirit moves inside of us and writes His laws on our hearts.

And the result is that, as new creations in Christ, we now obey the commandments of God from the heart out of love—the Law of Moses (with its punishments) no longer applies to us—

1 Timothy 1:8-9 (NKJV)

⁸ But we know that the law *is* good if one uses it lawfully, ⁹ knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for *the* lawless and insubordinate, for *the* ungodly and for sinners...(Comment)

The Old Covenant with its written laws on external tablets of stone never affected the heart—in that regard all those laws could do was compel the Jews to obey out of the fear of consequences.

But obedience based on fear was an inferior motivation than obedience based on love—and that’s why God promised that the Old Covenant would someday be replaced with a better covenant—

Hebrews 8:7-13 (NLT2)

⁷ If the first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no need for a second covenant to replace it. ⁸ But when God found fault with the people, he said: “The day is coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. ⁹ This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and led them out of the land of Egypt. They did not remain faithful to my covenant, so I turned my back on them, says the LORD. ¹⁰ But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel on that day, says the LORD: I will put my laws in their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people...¹³ When God speaks of a “new” covenant, it means he has made the first one obsolete. It is now out of date and will soon disappear.
[Which happened when Jesus died on the cross and ratified the New Covenant with His own blood]

So once again—as Christians we are now *in* Christ and as such we are partakers of everything Jesus accomplished.

He fulfilled the law (Matt.5:17) and since we are in Him—we have fulfilled the Law as well.

You say, “*including the Sabbath?*”—Yes, including the Sabbath!

This is because, as we've already mentioned,—the New Testament says that *Jesus* is our “Sabbath rest” (read Hebrews 4).

Which means, as Christians, we are not violating the Sabbath by not setting aside one day of the week to rest and worship God—for us, every day is a Sabbath which we keep by simply being in Christ!

Every day is a day of worship and rest from our works to get us into heaven—Jesus did all the work (He said, “It is finished”) and now we rest in Him and His completed work on our behalf.

If there is a ‘secret’ for living the Christian life with power and victory this is it!

Although, it's not a secret (the N.T. clearly teaches it)—but it is a powerful Sabbath *lesson* for living a ‘transformed life’.

The power to live the Christian life doesn't come from a principle but from a Person—Jesus Christ!

He won the victory on Calvary's cross, He vanquished principalities and powers (the devil and his demons) thru His death and resurrection.

And since we, as Christians, are in Him—all the victory and power we need to live the Christian life comes thru Him.

We don't need more power (we already have all we need by being in Christ)—we just need to rest in Jesus (our Sabbath) and let Him live His life thru us by the power of His Holy Spirit—as Paul the apostle said in Galatians 2:20:

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

In other words, to be all that God commands us to be in His Word we simply rest in Jesus' completed work and victory and trust Him to live His life thru us by faith—as Paul said, "*The life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God...*"

It is faith that releases the power of God into our lives to be saved and to live for Him—not hard work and self-effort in the strength of our flesh.

We don't need to try harder, we need to abide longer (rest in Him) —Jesus is our Sabbath!

One author had this to say on the subject—

"Every Christian ought to read Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret, by Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, because it illustrates this principle of inner power in the life of a great missionary to China. For many years, Hudson Taylor worked hard and felt that he was trusting Christ to meet his needs, but somehow he had no joy or liberty in his ministry. Then a letter from a friend opened his eyes to the adequacy of Christ. 'It is not by trusting my own faithfulness, but by looking away to the Faithful One!' he said. This was a turning point in his life. Moment by moment, he drew on the power of Christ for every responsibility of the day, and Christ's power carried him through."

Awhile back, I re-read the Christian classic, "*The Saving Life of Christ*" by Major Ian Thomas.

In the book Thomas makes this statement—

"There are many wonderful Christians—you would love to meet them. They talk all the language of salvation and they mean every word they say. They are not hypocrites! They are tired, many of them—desperately tired! God knows how tired they are, but they are not hypocrites. They are overwhelmed inwardly with a sense of defeat and frustration and futility and barrenness... Story after story could be told of men and women who go on and on and on—yet deep down in their hearts they are tired, almost beyond endurance! Again and again they have gotten down by their bedside and cried out to God, with tears in their eyes: "God, You know how barren I am. You know how empty I am. You know how stale I am. You know it!"—and yet they do not know the answer. I wonder are you like that?"

Major Ian Thomas knew what he was talking about because he himself, at one time, was one of these kinds Christians—(relate the Major's testimony from "*They Found the Secret*")

In a chapter from his book, *“The Saving Life of Christ”* Major Ian Thomas continues the thought I quoted from earlier—

“The carnal Christian is the one who has received the Holy Spirit and all the fullness of Christ, yet ignores His presence and struggles to live the Christian life as though Christ were not there. He is the one who constantly begs and pleads for all that God has already given him but which he will not take. He is the one who will not step out by faith upon the glorious fact that Christ is his life and therefore his victory! The Christian life is an exchanged life. *“I am crucified with Christ—nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me.”* (Gal.2:20a)”

The Major ends this particular chapter with these words—

“Are you still in the wilderness? Then repudiate your unbelief! Start right now trusting the Lord Jesus for that for which His blood was shed—that He might live His resurrection life in and through you, even while you are still on earth in the body, and thank Him that He is your victory, that He is your strength, that He is your future, that He is all that you can ever need at any time, in any circumstances, for *“in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and you are complete in Him.”* (Col.2:9-10a)”

The Christian life is a supernatural life—it’s an exchanged life not a New Year’s resolution, turn over a new leaf kind of life! (Explain)

And either you are living it in the power of the Holy Spirit or you are living it in the power of your own human strength.

“How do I know which one I am operating in?” → How tired are you?

Are you exhausted, discouraged, defeated and ready to give up, if so you very probably are living your Christian life in your own strength and not in the power of the Holy Spirit—in other words, you are not resting in Jesus!

Not that a Christian who is serving the Lord in the Spirit never gets tired—but it’s a ‘good’ tired, not a tired that makes you frustrated, discouraged, depressed and wanting to give up.

Once again let me state before we end that the Sabbath was never given to mankind as a universal law it was only given to Israel under the Mosaic Covenant—and therefore no longer applies to those who are under the New Covenant in Christ.

But just because the Sabbath no longer applies to the people of God as a law doesn't mean it shouldn't be observed as a principle.

One pastor has this to say about the wisdom of observing the Sabbath as a practical principle rather than a punitive law—

“At the time the Law was given, no culture had ever taken a day off of work. In agrarian societies, this would have been unthinkable. But here in the very beginning of time, we see the institution of the Sabbath. (Genesis 2:2-3)

“*But I don't need a Sabbath because I'm not tired,*” you might be thinking. Gang, God wasn't saying, “*Whew, am I beat! This creating stuff is really draining.*” No, He was saying to you and me, “*I'm your Father, and here's a key to navigate life successfully: Shut it down one day in seven.*”

“*But I can get ahead if I just do a little bit of work on the seventh day.*”

As an observer, as a Bible teacher, as a pastor, I tell you with surety that if you don't take a Sabbath day, it will catch up with you either mentally, emotionally, physically, or spiritually... I'm convinced many people have physical problems they wouldn't have if they took one day in seven and said, “*I'm going to rest and relax, be refreshed and renewed.*” I'm convinced many people are seeing psychiatrists and taking pills because, failing to take a Sabbath, they're just mentally fried. I'm convinced many people have collapsed spiritually because the weekend finds them revving up their ski boats rather than finding renewal and refreshment in the Lord. Be renewed, gang. I'm not saying what you should or shouldn't do on the Sabbath day because that's where the Pharisees erred. Instead, I would just remind you that because God rested on the seventh day, we get to as well. The principle He modeled on the seventh day of creation continues to be a healthy one for us.”