

C. Wayne Kilpatrick

REMEMBER THE SABBATH

Exodus 20:8-11

One Main Thing

When we misunderstand the difference between the Sabbath and the first day of the week, we misunderstand the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Introduction

This collection of law transitions from the personal rights of God to the Sabbath, God's day of rest. The first three commandments are purely moral, while the fourth commandment is partly moral and partly positive. The idea that man's time should be divided between labor and time for the worship of God is moral. The division of the week following God's example in the creation is positive. The first three commandments are universally binding to man in relationship to his respecting God. The fourth is based on six days of work and the seventh

as a day of rest. It was a perpetual obligation to Israel to remember the seventh day and its significance.

To hallow the Sabbath is to set it apart from any other day as a sacred day of rest. For “Six days thou shalt labor, and do all thy work” (Exod 20:9). Then you shall “Remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy” (Exod 20:8). The seventh day is for rest from work. The number seven has acquired a typical sacredness from its application to the Sabbath. It is the rest for God after six days of creation. Rest and dedication to God are the properties here assigned to the Sabbath. A reason is given for the observance of the fourth commandment. It refers to the original division of time into six days of work and a seventh day to rest (Gen 2:3). God not only rested from six days of creative labor, but blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it (Exod 20:11).

This commandment raises a critical question for the New Testament church: how does Christians respond to the Sabbath day? Should we hallow it today? Are we wrong for not worshipping on Saturday, the Old Testament Jewish Sabbath Day? If the Sabbath is still bound upon the New Testament church, then we must observe it—not on Sunday but the seventh day (Saturday).

Going Deeper

Those who advocate the Sabbath as the correct day of worship to God claim that the Ten Commandments are everlasting and that they were binding before Moses

received them at Sinai. Nehemiah, however, contradicts that very idea when he said, “You came down on mount Sinai, and spoke with them from Heaven, and gave them right judgments and true laws, good statutes and commandments. You made known to them your holy Sabbath, and commanded them commandments, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses Your servant” (Neh 9:13–14). Moses also confirms that the Ten Commandments were given at Sinai when he said, “The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers; but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day” (Deut 5:2–3). Moses follows this proclamation by immediately repeating the Ten Commandments as embodying the covenant that was made with them and not their fathers before them. The reason for giving the Sabbath is stated in Exodus 31:12–14. It was given as a sign to Israel between the nation and God. It was not a sign for the generations before Sinai, nor for the time after the inauguration of the new covenant by the blood of Jesus. Take careful note of these New Testament passages:

For he is our peace, he, making us both one, and he has broken down the middle wall of partition between us, having abolished in his flesh the enmity (the Law of commandments contained in ordinances) so that in himself He might make the two into one new man, making peace between them. (Eph 2:14–15)

Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that

was against us, which was contrary to us, and has taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross. Having stripped rulers and authorities, he made a show of them publicly, triumphing over them in it. Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or in respect of a feast, or of the new moon, or of the sabbaths. For these are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ. (Col 2:14–17)

But now he has obtained a more excellent ministry, by so much he is also the mediator of a better covenant, which was built upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been without fault, then no place would have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he said to them, 'Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, and I will make an end on the house of Israel and on the house of Judah; a new covenant shall be, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day I took hold of their hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt.' In that he says, a new covenant, he has made the first one old. Now that which decays and becomes old is ready to vanish away. (Heb 8:6–13)

There is no truth more plainly taught in the Scriptures than the fact that the Sinai Law was insufficient, and that it was replaced by a new and better law—the Law of Christ; a new and better covenant (Heb 8:6; 12:24).

Application

Under the new covenant, which is for Jews and Gentiles, we have new rules and practices. The Law of Moses was for the nation of the Jews only. Under the new covenant, we follow the rules and practices that were given for the new Israel—the church that was bought with the blood of Christ. The early church was worshipping the Lord on the first day of the week, not the seventh (Sabbath). The church broke bread (the Lord’s supper) on the “first day of the week” (Acts 20:7). The Corinthian church was coming together on the “first day of the week” for something special; therefore, they were to give on the first day of the week (1 Cor 16:2). John refers to the special day as the “Lord’s day” (Rev 1:10). We have three references from the New Testament that the Christian’s day of worship was the first day of the week or “the Lord’s Day” as it was called by inspired men.

We follow the early church’s example and worship on the day of the week when our Lord was raised, not the day that God set as a sign to the ancient nation of Israel. The first day of the week is the day God confirmed as our day of worship when he brought forth his Son from the sealed tomb as our risen Savior, Priest, and King. The church was established on the first day of the week in accordance to Leviticus 23:15–16: “And you shall count to you from the next day after the sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete. To the next day after the seventh sabbath you shall number fifty days. And

you shall offer a new food offering to Jehovah." The fiftieth day (Pentecost) was the first day of the week. The most important events in the New Testament were connected to the first day of the week.

Discussion

1. Why was the Sabbath sacred to the Jews?
2. Why is the Sabbath not a sacred day to New Testament Christians?
3. Why is the first day of the week the special day of remembrance and worship for Christians?
4. Is Sunday to be treated with the Sabbath restrictions and regulations?