

Sabbath School Lesson #5 – Christ as the Lord of the Sabbath – 25 Apr - 1 May 2015

Christ “said unto them, The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27-28). This week’s Lesson turns to Christ as the Lord of the Sabbath: how He observed it, and how that observance He reproduces in His followers. The Pharisees had laid down rigid rules as to how the Sabbath should be kept. Their man-made rules of keeping a Sabbath of their own making, not the Sabbath of the Lord, was everything and man was nothing. It was far better in their eyes to let a man die than to do anything for his relief on the Sabbath day. Thus they made the Sabbath a burden, whereas Christ gave the Sabbath day to man for a blessing.

Christ’s statement that the Sabbath was made for man does not at all convey the idea that it is a plaything for man; that man can do as he pleases with it; but it does show that it is designed for man’s welfare. When Christ gave it to man in Eden, as well as when He spoke the fourth commandment at Sinai, it was a blessing for mankind. Christ’s statement did not in the least remove any of the sanctions that had been placed around it by the Lord, for Christ came not to destroy the law (Matthew 5:17). There cannot be any circumstances in which it is not the duty of man to keep the Sabbath; yet in no case will the true keeping of it work injury to man. It is in keeping the Sabbath that the greatest blessings come to man.

To keep the Sabbath of the Lord is to keep the rest of the Lord. It is to rest with the Lord. The Sabbath was given to man in Eden, before sin and curse were known. Man was given work to do, but it was not wearisome. After sin, work became wearisome; “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread” (Genesis 3:19), man was told. Work is not a part of the curse, but weariness from work is. If man had not fallen, he would have had work to do throughout eternity, but he would never have known anything of weariness. Yet he would have had the Sabbath of the Lord, and would have kept it. The Sabbath therefore is not designed for merely physical rest. It was given to man when it was not designed that he should ever become physically tired. Yes, in our fallen condition we may derive physical rest from not working on the seventh day, but the object of the Sabbath is something far higher than that.

Still further, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). To be clear on this rendering, God is not one of many spirits, but He is Spirit. “There is none else besides Him” (Deuteronomy 4:35); every other being derives its existence from Him. But while God is Spirit, He is a real being. Spiritual does not mean immaterial. God is a spiritual being; yet He is a personal being, for man was made in His image. Better still, God is Spirit; yet Christ is “the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person” (Hebrews 1:3). It being clear that God is a spiritual being, we consider the nature of His rest (Hebrews 4:4). It must of necessity have been spiritual rest. And that is the nature of the rest that we are to enjoy in the Sabbath day. A few verses should help:

To us fallen beings, the Spirit of the LORD gives us rest from sin. You are saved from sin “by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). You purify your “souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren” (1 Peter 1:22). You keep the Sabbath because you are not “carnally minded” but “spiritually minded” because you are “not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you” (Romans 8:6-8). Christ said, “The words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit and they are life” (John 6:63). “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you” (John 15:3). It is the word of Christ, which we well know created, that cleanses us from sin. That word creates us a new so that we may keep the Sabbath in spirit and in truth. True Sabbath keeping is justification by faith, for it is the absolute rest that comes from perfect faith in the power of Christ to create you a new and “to keep you from falling” into sin (Jude 1:24).

Perfect Sabbath rest is only by the Spirit of Christ in us (Galatians 4:6). Only those who are spiritual can truly keep the Sabbath of the Lord. So long as Adam was led by the Spirit, he enjoyed perfect rest, both of body and soul; but as soon as he sinned, he lost the rest. But although the curse upon the earth causes weariness of body, the Sabbath still remains from Eden, the pledge and seal of spiritual rest. The abstaining from all secular work and our own pleasure on the seventh day – from everything by which we could personally profit – is simply in recognition of the Lord as our Creator and upholder of all things – the one by

whose power we live. Sabbath keeping involves rest from our own work on the seventh day, but he who does no more than this does not keep the Sabbath of the Lord. As the Sabbath was the seal of a perfect creation, so it is the seal of a perfect new creation in Christ Jesus.

Sabbath observance does not end with resting on Sabbath day as the sign of resting in the Lord. Observing the Sabbath of the Lord means constant rest in Him. It is not merely on that day that we are not to speak vain words, but every day. At no time have we any right to speak vanity. We are to be so intimate with the Lord, and so closely conformed to His life, that our religion will not consist in mere observing of certain ceremonies at certain times, but in a continual godly life. True Sabbath keeping means godliness all the week. "Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD" (Isaiah 58:14). The blessing of rest, which the Sabbath brings, will extend throughout the week, and the soul will revel in the delightfulness of it.

The Pharisees accused Christ of breaking the Sabbath because He healed on Sabbath. They failed to see that the healing of bodily infirmities on the Sabbath day was an exhibition of the working of the Word that creates, and that upholds all things. The Word that creates also cleanses from sin, since His works "are verity and judgment, and are done in truth and uprightness" (Psalm 111:7). The Word that gives life gives perfect life; the Word that heals diseases also forgives iniquities (see Matthew 9:1-8); and so the healing of disease on the Sabbath day should, more than on any other day, reveal the loving kindness of our Creator.

God works constantly, but by His Word – the Word by which He healed the sick. Such work pertains to the Sabbath day. But this work is not predicated on personal gain to God; it is gratuitous on His part. It is done at great sacrifice in that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16) even to heal and save lost mankind. Thus we are guarded against deceiving ourselves with the thought that certain work which we very much desire to see accomplished, in which we shall derive personal gain, directly (such as salary) or indirectly (such as job security), is a work of necessity. If any secular work can by any possibility benefit us – if we can possibly derive from it any personal gain – it is not a work of necessity. If you worked in a conventional hospital on Sabbath because the security of your job requires so, claim to be healing on Sabbath, it is not a work of mercy, but of selfishness, even though it is lawful in itself if performed on some secular day. But any work that has in it no possible element of selfishness, and from which we cannot in the remotest manner, or to the least degree, derive any personal gain, but which is wholly for the benefit of others, is lawful on the Sabbath day. In doing such work, cheerfully, we show ourselves to be children of God who bears the burdens of mankind because He cares for them, and loves them.

Moreover, even if a Sabbath-keeper were to work in a conventional hospital on Sabbath without deriving any personal gain, but engaged in dispensing drugs that "enfeebles the system, making it more susceptible to disease" (5T 311.1), he would not keep the Sabbath of the Lord. "It is the Lord's purpose that His method of healing without drugs shall be brought into prominence in every large city through our medical institutions" (9T 168.4). Christ healed by miracles, but "God's servants today could not work by means of miracles, because spurious works of healing, claiming to be divine, will be wrought" (LDE 169.2); He "has commissioned us to carry forward the medical missionary work that He began; in this work, men and women suffering from diseases are to be treated without drugs" (CH 393.1).

Keeping the Lord's Sabbath involves adopting the Lord's health laws. The apostle Paul tells about men "having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:2), and there are very many who have got into that sad condition. Many will feel condemned by the truth that "excessive indulgence in eating and drinking is sin" (CH 50.3) and that "tea and coffee drinking is a sin" (CD 425.3), but have no notion of leaving off their evil ways. So long as conscience makes one uncomfortable over sins committed, there is hope of repentance and salvation; but what if you are offered a drug that could relieve you of all compunctions of conscience, while still "fulfilling the desires of the flesh" (Ephesians 2:3)? Many Sabbath-keepers take that approach; they neglect the Lord's health laws, they sin by defiling the body temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:17; 6:19), they suffer pain, then they take drugs to deaden that pain, so that they can continue in sin with impunity. Many did so in ignorance that "God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30). For Christ the Lord of the Sabbath to reproduce His observance in us, we must not defile His body temple.