

Sabbath School Lesson #6 – Resting in Christ – 30 April-6 May 2016

Christ invites us to His rest: “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). After “God ended His work which He had made,” “He rested on the seventh day” (Genesis 2:2), that is, He had Sabbath.

The word Sabbath means *rest*. It is a Hebrew word transferred into the English language. When the Hebrews used the word “Sabbath,” it conveyed the same idea to them that the word “rest” does to us. Hence, the fourth commandment says: “Remember the [rest] day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the [rest] of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the *rest* day, and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:8-11).

It is the Lord’s rest, and we must not mistakenly judge the Lord’s rest from what men are accustomed to call rest. God is not a man. We should rather learn from God’s rest what rest really is. God’s rest is not mere physical rest from weariness. This we know from two facts. First, “God is Spirit” (John 4:24); not the KJV render of “a spirit,” as though He were one of many; but He is Spirit, as it is rendered in the ESV. Second, “the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary” (Isaiah 40:28). The Lord therefore did not rest because He was tired, and His rest is not physical, but spiritual, since He is Spirit. “They that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

God rested, not because He was weary, but because His work was finished. When work is finished, and is well done, nothing but rest remains. In six days God finished His work, and as He surveyed it, He pronounced it “very good.” There was no flaw in it. It was without fault before Him. Hence, since God’s work was done and well done at the close of the sixth day, “He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made” (Genesis 2:2).

He had no sad reflections, no regrets. His rest was not marred, as what man calls rest so often is, by any such thought as, ‘To-morrow I must go at that work again;’ nor, ‘I wish that I had done this portion a little differently;’ nor, ‘If I could do that over again, I could make an improvement;’ nor, ‘That last day’s work is so bad that I cannot bear to look at it; I was so tired when I got to it that I could not half do it.’ Nothing of the kind! Every portion of the work, even man, was as perfect as it was possible for it to be, and God took pure delight in contemplating the work from which He was resting because it was complete and perfect.

This is the rest which He offers to us. It is not something that He imposes on us, but which He in everlasting love and kindness gives to us. Rest is not a task that is laid on one. It is not a burden. They who look upon the Sabbath as a burden, have no idea of what the Sabbath of the Lord is. It is rest, perfect, unalloyed rest. Jesus Christ is the One by whom the worlds were made, “for in Him were all things created, in the heavens, and upon the earth” (Colossians 1:16), therefore He is the one who offers us this rest. To every soul He clearly cries, “Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). The rest is found in Him, because in Him the works of God are completed. In Him is the new creation, and “therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature” (2 Corinthians 5:17). On the cross Jesus cried, “It is finished” (John 19:30), thus showing that in His cross we find that perfect rest that comes alone from the finished work of the Lord.

This rest is gained by faith. “We which believe do enter into rest” (Hebrews 4:3). How so? – Because by faith we have the finished, perfect work of the Lord as our own. “This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent” (John 6:29). Believing Him means receiving Him; and since in Him the works of God are complete, it follows that by believing on Him we find the rest. The rest that Jesus gives is rest from sin. The heavy laden whom He calls to Him are those who are burdened with the weight of their sins. All men are thus burdened, “for all have sinned” (Romans 3:23). Our best works are utterly worthless. Christ will have a people who are “zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14-15), but the good works must be those which God Himself has wrought for us in Christ. Only His work is enduring. “His work is honourable and glorious; and His righteousness endureth for ever” (Psalms 111:3). Therefore, “by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of

yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast; for we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before prepared, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8-10). It is "not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He poured out upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Titus 3:5-6). O that we may pray for wisdom to grasp this truth!

It is by the works of God, therefore, that we are saved, and not by our own. Good works there are in abundance, and they are for us too, but through no work of our own; solely through the perfect work of God in Jesus Christ. If the works were our own, then the rest would be our own; but God gives us His rest, not ours, because only His works can yield perfect rest. "He hath made His wonderful works to be remembered" (Psalms 111:4), or, literally, "He hath made a memorial for His wondrous works." That memorial is the seventh day, the day on which He rested from all His works. That day He has blessed and sanctified, made holy. Its holiness has never departed from it, for "whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever" (Ecclesiastes 3:14). No matter what man does, nor regards the day, it remains holy.

"There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God" (Hebrews 4:9); and the seventh day, which God for ever declares to be His rest, is that by which He makes known to us the perfection of His rest, because it calls us to contemplate a finished and perfect new creation. It reveals to us the everlasting God, the unwearied, almighty Creator, who has wrought and laid up great goodness for them that trust in Him before the sons of men (Psalms 31:19). It reminds us that we are "complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power" (Colossians 2:10). Although we have sinned, and brought the curse upon God's perfect creation, the cross of Christ that bears the curse, restores and perpetuates the perfect work of God, so that through it we may stand without fault before the throne of God, just as when man was first made. "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

How about others even Seventh-day Adventists who treat the Sabbath as Jewish? There is such a thing as 'the Jewish Sabbath,' but it is a far different thing from "the Sabbath of the Lord." Many people imagine that if one observes the seventh day he is keeping the Jewish Sabbath; but that does not at all follow. No one keeps the Jewish Sabbath if he keeps the Sabbath "according to the commandment." There is the same difference between the Jewish Sabbath and the Sabbath of the Lord, that there is between a man and God. Let us explain.

"The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord" (Exodus 20:10); but we have seen that the Lord's rest is spiritual rest, which the seventh day commemorates. A man may cease from physical toil on the seventh day of the week, and not keep the Sabbath of the Lord (this is sadly so even among us). If a man stops work on Friday evening at sunset, and abstains from all labour until the next day at sunset, merely as a form of worship, and in order that he may be physically better able to go at his work again, or with the thought that he is thereby discharging a duty, and gaining the favour of God, that is not keeping the Sabbath of the Lord. To keep the Sabbath of the Lord is to delight in the Lord. Those who do not delight themselves in the Lord, do not keep His Sabbath, no matter when they abstain from labour.

It is absolutely impossible for one who is not a Christian to keep the Lord's Sabbath; for, as we have seen, God's rest comes only from His perfect work, which is found only in Christ. "We which believe do enter into rest." Therefore no Jew, so-called, as distinguished from a believer in Christ, keeps the Sabbath of the Lord, even though he apparently rests on the seventh day of the week. His rest is his own rest, and not the rest of the Lord; do you see the difference? The Jewish Sabbath falls on the same day of the week as the Sabbath of the Lord, but it is not by any means the same thing. It represents only the man himself, and his own work. Instead of being the sign of justification by faith in the work of the Lord, it is the sign of self-righteousness, as indicated by the question which the Jews asked of Jesus: "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" (John 6:28). They counted their own works equal to God's works. Their obedience was not the obedience of faith, but only of form. From such a Sabbath may the Lord deliver us. It is from it that we are delivered in the Sabbath of the Lord, for we are saved from our own works, and given the perfect works of the Lord. "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord" (Exodus 20:10), but let us beware of making it a mere caricature of rest. Let us take it for what it really is: the rest of the Lord.