

## "REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY."

– MAR. 6. – MATT. 12:1-13. –

"The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath day."

THOSE who have little of the truth are sometimes great sticklers for formalities. This was true of the Jews at the first advent. Feast days, fast days, sabbaths and tithings were very carefully attended to by them but the weightier matters of the Law, respecting justice and love to God and man, were sadly neglected. This is our Lord's testimony. So to-day there are people who give strict attention to church attendance and to various religious formalities, who wholly overlook the real spirit and intention of the Scriptural commands. Their attention to the formalities seems to satisfy them that they are good, as good as need be, and thus hinders them from making a thorough reformation of life, and seeking to bring all its affairs into harmony with the divine law, love to God and for our fellows.

The Jews of our Lord's day laid great stress upon Sabbath keeping, which fact, according to some people of our day, should have been ample evidence of their holiness and full harmony with the entire Law, – but such was not the estimation of our Lord. They even undertook to chide our Lord and his disciples respecting neglect of the Sabbath, altho they generally admitted the blamelessness of their characters. On one of these occasions in which reproof was administered by the Pharisees, our Lord took up the subject and explained it, showing that they had wholly misapprehended the divine intention respecting the Sabbath. It was not intended to be a burden but a blessing; it was not given for God's sake, but for man's sake. He called them to witness that his disciples were doing no harm, that they were merely satisfying their hunger, lawfully. He then proves the correctness of his position, from authorities they would be willing to accept. They recognized David as a holy man approved of God, and he pointed out to them how that David under *stress of hunger*, had

eaten bread that otherwise would have been unlawful to eat. Then he laid down the general principles, that altho labor was prohibited under the Law, it was in order to bring rest, comfort, refreshment and blessing, and not to bring hunger, inconvenience and distress upon either man or beast. [R2268 : page 62] He cited them to the fact that certain work was done on the Sabbath by the priests, and under divine *direction*, and that this proved that labor done sacrificially for the assistance of others, as well as for their own necessities, could be no violation of the fourth commandment. After declaring himself fully qualified to decide the Sabbath question, he tells them that, watching out for the letter of the Law, they were neglecting its spirit, and should learn that the Lord desires mercy, sympathy, pity, love, more than he desires sacrifice, and consequently that any deeds of mercy, sympathy, pity, love, done on the Sabbath day, are more pleasing in God's sight, than were those sacrifices which were performed on the Sabbath as well as on other days, in the typical temple. With this proper view before their minds, they would not have condemned his disciples, whom he, the Master of the Sabbath, did not condemn.

The blindness of the Pharisees respecting the proper interpretation of the Law of the Sabbath, is shown by the fact, that even after our Lord had given them this explanation, they evidently still supposed that while it would be right for a priest in the temple to labor in the offering of a sacrifice, it would be contrary to the same law for someone to heal the sick and relieve distress. Our Lord, however, soon discovered to them the error if not the hypocrisy of their own hearts. He well knew that in their love of gain, they would help a sheep or an ass out of a pit on the Sabbath day because it represented value, and its remaining in the pit over the Sabbath might mean its death, and hence a financial loss. Thus he showed them that they well knew how to interpret the Law correctly, liberally, when it touched their purse, but that they were so lacking in mercy, sympathy, love, that they failed to properly interpret it as respects acts of mercy, where financial loss or gain were not involved.

Our Lord, as a Jew, was bound under the Jewish Covenant so long as he lived; because he did not in any sense of the word make an end of the Law Covenant until his death – *there* he became "the end of the Law [Covenant] for righteousness [justification], to every one that believeth." Consequently, during his ministry it would have been unlawful, sinful, for our Lord to have violated any of the terms of the Law Covenant. We are therefore to understand from the discourse here presented to us that the Jews, while neglecting the weightier matters and the real interest of the Law Covenant, had fallen into certain habits of thought and certain customs which were perversions of the Law and wholly inconsistent with its real sentiment. Phariseeism had become formalism in many respects. It is claimed that according to their definition of Sabbath-breaking the disciples had threshed the wheat when they rubbed it in their hands. So also it was claimed, and so argued with apparent seriousness, that if any one walked upon the grass with nailed shoes, upon the Sabbath day, that would be a violation of the Law, because that would produce a kind of threshing, since one might trample out some of the seeds. With equal seriousness it was claimed that to catch a flea upon one's person would be a kind of hunting and thus a violation of the Sabbath. It is even said to have been debated whether or not a fresh egg should be eaten on the first day of the week since it implied work on the part of the hen on the seventh day; and quite probably if clocks had been invented at that time they would all have been stopped over the Sabbath. Our Lord shows by his criticism that this was merely hypocrisy and self-delusion on the part of the Pharisees, who found it easier to make a show of righteousness in such trifling things than to consider **[R2269 : page 62]** and seek to obey the weighty matters of the Law – justice and mercy. Our Lord showed them that God, as he had foretold, had more pleasure in mercy than in sacrifice and that if they had his spirit in respect to the matter, they would not be hypocritically condemning their fellow creatures who were really doing no wrong, nor yet justifying and priding themselves in their superstition and hypocrisy.

This was a prelude to what followed, and prepared the way. For coming into the synagogue the same day, our Lord found a poor cripple who needed help, and while the Pharisees were looking on, waiting for a chance to condemn him for violating the Sabbath according to their false assertions respecting it, he took the opportunity to administer a rebuke before performing a cure, realizing, no doubt, that the effect upon his hearers would thereby be more favorable.

He knew what to teach them – he knew their tender spots of selfishness; and that however much they might delude themselves and others in theorizing respecting observance of the Sabbath, when it would come down to a matter of loss or gain they would be well able to rid themselves of their superstition and act accordingly, hence he put the question whether or not they would deliver a sheep or an ass on the Sabbath day, if it should fall into a pit. He and they well knew what they would do, what was the custom, and hence, without waiting for an answer, but taking it for granted, he proceeds to show that the poor cripple before him was much better than the sheep or the ass, and that he had been trapped into sin and sickness by the Adversary, and that if it were right to deliver the sheep or the ass, much more would it be right on the Sabbath day to help a fellow creature in distress.

Having thus answered their difficulties in advance and reproved their wrong spirit, our Lord proceeded to heal the cripple and thus to manifest beforehand, [R2269 : page 63] the glorious power and blessings that will come more abundantly with the establishment of his Kingdom – during the Millennium.

### **JEWISH VS. CHRISTIAN SABBATH.**

Every human obligation is based upon some divine law. Looking to the Jewish Sabbath, we find that it was the seventh day of the week, and was made obligatory through a divine command – being one of the ten commandments given to Israel at Mt. Sinai, consequently it was not optional with them how they should keep it, but was obligatory upon the terms explicitly stated. To violate it, the Fourth

Commandment of the Decalogue, was to violate one point of the Law; and to violate one point of the Law was to violate the entire Law; because the offer of eternal life to the Jew was based upon his absolute obedience to this Law – not his obedience to a majority of its precepts, but his obedience to all its precepts, without a solitary exception. As we have heretofore seen, however, and as our Lord and the apostle expressly declare, no Israelite did keep or could keep inviolately all the items of their Law, and consequently, according to their covenant, not one of them was ever justified to eternal life. In view of this, the particularity of the Pharisees, that even a good deed should not be performed on that day, is as amusing and as foolish as their claim that they were holy, thoroughly acceptable to God, because of their over-particularity in the outward formal and typical features of the Law, while they neglected the spirit of the whole Law – supreme love to God and love of their neighbors as themselves.

The Christian has come into relationship to God, not under the terms of the Law Covenant made with the Jew, but under the terms of the New Covenant, sealed and ratified with the precious blood of Christ; he therefore has nothing whatever to do with the terms and conditions of the Jewish Covenant which bore only upon Israel after the flesh. The fact that by the deeds of the Law Covenant, no flesh was justified in God's sight (Rom. 3:20) leads us to rejoice that we have a "better" covenant with God through Christ, – sealed by a greater sin-offering and accompanied by "better promises." Ours, the New Covenant, is very much higher than the Law Covenant, just as its Mediator, Christ, is much higher than was the mediator of the Law Covenant, Moses; as also spiritual Israel is much higher every way than was fleshly Israel. The basis of our covenant is not the Ten Commandments, written in stone, delivered at Sinai, but a much higher statement of that divine law – the spirit of that law, the meaning, the intent, the grand completeness of the divine law, of which the Ten Commandments was but an incomplete statement brought down to the measurable comprehension of that people. Our New commandment, our new law, as expressed by our Master, Jesus, is not composed of a

number of threats, Thou shalt not! Thou shalt not! but is composed of one commandment, *Thou shalt love* – the Lord thy God and thy fellow creatures.

Love is the fulfilling, not only of the Jewish code, but a fulfilling also of the entire Law of God, as it relates to himself and to all his creatures. In this new commandment, the basis of the New Covenant, there is no reference whatever to a Sabbath day. Nevertheless, as the Ten Commandments to Israel and their Covenant and their mediator, *foreshadowed* this higher law of Love and our New Covenant and our Great Mediator, so we find that the Sabbath feature of the Jewish Law has an antitype on a higher plane in the Christian's experience, – a better Sabbath. In the type it was a physical rest to the natural, typical Israelite; in the antitype it is a mental rest, a heart rest to the antitypical Israelite. As the Jewish Sabbath day typified the rest of heart, the joy and peace which Christians may possess through faith in Christ – in realizing their sins forgiven, their iniquities pardoned and themselves reconciled to God through the death of his Son – so also the Law of the New Covenant, Love, commands all who are in Christ Jesus to *rest* in full faith in the great work finished for us, by our Mediator, at Calvary. As the Apostle declares, "Being justified by faith we have peace [rest] with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Thus we enjoy the rest or Sabbath of our New Covenant. Thus the new Mediator has provided for the spiritual Israel a very much better rest than that which was provided by the typical mediator for the typical Israel. As seven is a type of perfection, of completeness, so the seventh day rest was a type of the complete or *perfect rest which we have* in Christ, which Israel after the flesh never did and never could enjoy.

The Sabbath or rest under the New Covenant is not merely for a day – alas, how weary we would be if we could only rest in the sufficiency of Christ, one day in seven! But we may rest continually in Christ, "every day and every hour" – trusting not to our own sufficiency, but to his. Thus we rest from works of self-justification, from all efforts to justify ourselves before God. Accepting the

justification freely offered to us through the precious blood, and resting in it continually, we give our little all of loving service on the Lord's side, and in opposition to sin; not to secure rest and justification, but as thank-offerings that we have already received this blessing through divine grace. Thus, as the Apostle declares, "We rest from our works as God did from his." God gave over the matter of the world's redemption into the hands of Christ, [R2269 : page 64] and we read that "the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." Likewise we have committed all our affairs into his hands, and are resting in him – keeping a continual Sabbath all the days of the week and all the weeks of the year.

As respects physical rest, however, we are under no commands respecting this so far as the Lord and his Word are concerned, except that our Law of Love requires that we shall glorify God in our bodies and our spirits which are his, and hence that we shall observe such rules and regulations in our physical systems in relation to our food and clothing and rest as would best qualify us and enable us to perform the divine service. While we would be glad that all people might recognize this matter from this standpoint of the New Covenant, yet we know that none can view it and observe it from this standpoint, except those who have entered into the New Covenant relationship with God, and these we know are comparatively few of the world's population – altho our hope is that in God's due time, the Millennial age, all mankind shall be brought to the knowledge and appreciation of this New Covenant, and may then, if they will, enjoy all of its provisions including this rest of faith, the antitypical Sabbath – which can be enjoyed only by God's faithful people.

Meantime, however, the world of mankind, amongst whom we live, have through various misconceptions, both of the Law Covenant and the New Covenant, set apart one day of the week as a Sabbath or rest day, and as Christians who enjoy the real Sabbath of rest and peace in Christ, we are glad to avail ourselves of the regulations of the world to abstain from worldly labor and to devote ourselves to spiritual

works, spiritual feasting and spiritual upbuilding of character in righteousness on that day. But while recognizing and observing it carefully, because it is the law of the land, and while pleased to have this special opportunity for Christian fellowship and spiritual cooperation, we deny in toto that it is of divine obligation. And while we should observe whatever day might be appointed by the "powers that be," we are especially glad that they have by common consent adopted the day, which we prefer to all others because it commemorates the resurrection of our Lord and Master, and hence the beginning of our *rest of faith* in him.

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