

SABBATH OBLIGATIONS AND PRIVILEGES.

– MATTHEW 12:1-14. – APRIL 8. –

Golden Text: – "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." – Exodus 20:8

FEW seem to get the proper thought respecting the Sabbath. Some consider themselves as Jews under the Mosaic Law: others go to an opposite extreme, and, declaring that we are not under the Law but under grace, repudiate the Sabbath entirely. What we believe to be the correct view is the intermediate one between these two extremes, as we shall endeavor to set forth.

God adopted the Jewish nation – all the children of Abraham, through Jacob – as his special possession in the world. With them he made the Law Covenant through Moses at Sinai – to them he sent his messengers, the prophets, and, finally, his Son. With them and with no other nation it was his agreement that by the keeping of the Law they would abide in his favor and have divine blessing upon flocks and herds, land and people, instead of sickness, pain, drouth and dearth. To no other nation was the Law of Sinai given, with no other nation was that Covenant made – as it is written, "You only have I known [recognized] of all the families of the earth." – Amos 3:2.

When the Jews rejected Jesus, and when Jesus made an end of the Law Covenant on the cross, it did not imply that that Law was then extended to the other nations of the world as some seem to imagine: quite to the contrary. Nor did the Law Covenant extend to the Church – the followers of Christ selected from the Jewish nation and other nations – for we read, "Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believeth." (Rom. 10:4.) Whoever sees this point clearly has the foundation for

correct views respecting the Sabbath and every other feature of the Law; those who cannot see this will remain in confusion.

"KINGDOMS OF THIS WORLD"

Accordingly it is not for us to *demand* of the nations of Europe and America that they shall enforce the Jewish Sabbath or any other Sabbath. True, the civilized world is called "Christendom" – Christ's Kingdom; but this is a misnomer. The kingdoms of earth are still under the dominion of the "god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4); they are kingdoms of this world and not kingdoms of God. True, God is aware of their existence and permits them for a time, but he has never attempted authority over them nor made himself responsible for the imperfect governments which they represent – they are not his kingdoms. When the God of heaven shall set up his Kingdom in the hands of the glorified Messiah, Head and body, during the Millennial age, its conditions and arrangements will be greatly in contrast with those of the kingdoms of this world. God, therefore, is not commanding the nations of the world to observe the Sabbath day, etc., etc.; whatever they do in this line is of their own volition, without command, for they are not under the Mosaic Law, and no other law has been given them.

Christian believers, followers of Jesus since he made an end of the Law Covenant, nailing it to the cross (Col. 2:14), are not under the Law Covenant but, as the Apostle declares, "We are not under the Law but under grace." (Rom. 6:14.) Our relationship to God is of the same character as that which prevailed before Sinai's Law Covenant was effected at the hands of Moses over Israel – after the same order as that enjoyed by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – grace under the terms of the Abrahamic Covenant: we are the real seed of promise. (Gal. 3:29.) Did Abraham, Isaac and Jacob prosper without a law? Yes! Much more can Spiritual Israel prosper under the same conditions, because we now have

much advantage everyway through our special relationship by faith to the great Redeemer, and to the exceeding great and precious promises which centre in him, and which apply to all those adopted by him as members of his body – members of his Bride class. [R3753 : page 105]

"WHOM THE SON MAKES FREE"

Some are inclined to feel alarmed at the very thought of being free from a law covenant based upon obedience to a law. Such should be comforted with the thought that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were approved to the Lord without the Law. Their faith in God constituted an obligation to do the divine will to the extent of their knowledge and ability: and the same is true of us, for the Scriptures assure us that, as children of God and adopted into his family, made partakers of his Spirit, our rule of action must henceforth be love, and that to us love is the fulfilling of the law. That is to say, if we receive the spirit of adoption into God's family it implies that we possess the spirit of love, because God is love; and this love for God as it develops signifies love for all that are in accord with him, and a love like his in respect to all of his creation – a sympathetic love. Such a love permits us to be and to do in harmony with the divine will to the extent of our ability; and the Lord, who is dealing [R3753 : page 106] with us according to our intentions and endeavors, and who is covering our unwilling weaknesses and imperfections, counts this service of the heart and intention as a perfect keeping of the divine law. Thus the Apostle says: "The righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us who walk not *after* the flesh but *after* the Spirit." (Rom. 8:4.) However short we may come of the full spirit of the divine law, we are counted as fulfillers of it so long as our daily walk is in that direction to the extent of our ability.

From this standpoint we see that God is no longer dealing with Israel, nor has he adopted the other nations as his. Rather he

is forming a new nation, gathering its citizens out of every nation, kindred, people and tongue. This new nation is the Church, of whom the Apostle says, "Ye are a Royal Priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people." (1 Pet. 2:9.) Presently this nation will be completed, and be ushered into glory, honor and immortality, to rule and bless and uplift all the families of the earth. God's dealings, instructions, tests, etc., are upon this new nation – yea, as we have seen, he has placed no law upon us except the law of love – for God and for our neighbor. Before our adoption into this holy nation we accepted its law of love, and recognized selfishness as part of the works of darkness; and in the school of Christ we have been learning more and more the full meaning of the word love in its application to God and to our fellowmen. These lessons still continue, but must reach a certain completion or fruition before we can be accounted worthy of transference to the heavenly and eternal state as members of this Kingdom.

OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE LORD

Have we then no relationship to the Law given to natural Israel, as expressed in the ten commandments, etc.? No, we are free from the Law – thank God! Nevertheless, we may derive a great blessing through an examination of that Law from which we are free, because we recognize that it was just and holy and good – that it was not set aside because the Law was imperfect, but because man was imperfect and unable to keep that Law and to gain life thereunder. Looking, then, at that perfect Law, we should seek to get, not merely its outward form and letter, but especially its inner meaning, its spirit, to determine just what it did signify. Then, having ascertained its significance, we as New Creatures – while not depending upon it for our life, but recognizing that the precious blood of the Lamb of God has compensated for all of our unwilling weaknesses and deficiencies and imperfections – we should strive, nevertheless, to conform

our lives to all the blessed thoughts we can gather respecting the spirit of the Law.

We should do this, not thereby to merit salvation, but that having obtained the salvation, the forgiveness of sins, and having gone further and been begotten of the holy Spirit to a new life, a new nature, we no longer seek to justify ourselves by the Law, because justified by the blood of Christ. We now seek as New Creatures to please our heavenly Father, and rejoice to find anything in the Law given to natural Israel that would furnish us clearer conceptions of the divine will, that for love to God we might do with our might everything in our power.

Accordingly, as we look at the Decalogue we say, "Yes, those laws are perfect," and the more closely we examine them the more do we grasp the depth of their signification. As, for instance, in the first and second of these commandments we see prohibited not merely the making of images and the worshipping of the same, but equally prohibited the having of any object of worship aside from God – wife or children or mammon or self, etc. Applying this to the fourth commandment respecting the Sabbath, Spiritual Israelites will realize that they are not under bondage to a day, but will nevertheless desire to know what was the Spirit or intent or object of this command, and to be in harmony, in accord, with all its spirit. The Israelites, as today's lesson shows, got merely the outward form of these three commandments, but wholly missed its real purport; and similarly, many Christians today merely take the Jewish view of the command and entirely overlook its real import.

"WE WHO BELIEVE DO ENTER INTO REST" – A SABBATH

The Apostle refers to the real meaning of this Sabbath rest of faith into which we Spiritual Israelites enter so soon as we accept the Lord Jesus as our Redeemer, the expiator of our guilt

– our Life-Giver. As soon as we begin to believe we begin to enter into this rest, and thenceforth, if we are faithful to the Lord and abide in his love, our Sabbath never ends – "We which believe do enter into rest." – Heb. 4:3.

Our lesson of faith should continue throughout all the days of the week, and thus Spiritual Israel keeps Sabbath every day – resting in the finished work of Christ, resting from our own works, from all endeavor to justify ourselves through the Law. Was not our Lord's ministry a perpetual Sabbath? and may not all of the Lord's people today so rest in the Lord by faith, and so continually seek to work the works of him that hath sent us as his ambassadors to the world, that every day with us should be a Sabbath day? Thus all the labor of life is sanctified to us. Whether we eat or drink, scrub or dig, write or talk, sleep or wake, we are to do all to the glory of God – to do all as unto him, and in all of our doings to maintain the Sabbath rest in our hearts – rest in divine love and care, which applies to us through our relationship to Christ Jesus our Lord.

PROPRIETY OF SUNDAY OBSERVANCE

The question comes, then, Should the Lord's people who see the true rest and who are enjoying it – should they observe the Sabbaths or Sundays appointed by the civil laws of Christendom? We answer, Yes! for three reasons:

(1) It is the divine command that we should obey all the ordinances of human law that do not conflict with our conscience as Christians; and clearly nothing in the human law on this subject could violate our conscience.

(2) Surely if others can afford to rest from their labor one day in seven the Lord's people can afford to do so as well, and indeed to better advantage than the world, because through our

better knowledge of God and his Word we can make wiser and better use of the time thus taken from worldly affairs.

(3) Spiritual Israelites are greatly advantaged by the fact that the world, nominal Christendom, has made a mistake in the matter, and is under the impression that the Jewish law obligates the keeping of one day in seven as a religious [R3753 : page 107] rest day. Thus all things work together for good to them that love God – even the world's mistakes and ignorance.

Not only should Spiritual Israelites rejoice to have the privilege of one day in seven for a special rest from physical labor and for special engagement in spiritual works, pleasures and refreshments, but additionally they should realize that the world is watching them, and that their influence for good would be greatly interfered with by their violation of this civil law, which the world supposes to be backed by divine command. Our advice, therefore, to all true Spiritual Israelites is that they be as strict or more strict in their observance of Sunday as a Sabbath of rest than are their neighbors – that all works except those of necessity or mercy be avoided, that this precious day be considered a boon from the Lord, a great privilege and opportunity for growth in grace and knowledge and love. Let our homes be the most quiet of all in civilized lands on the appointed day of rest, let no sounds of labor or of worldly pleasure be heard in our habitations, but let our joys of hope and love and faith abound, and let our happy hearts manifest themselves in cheerful words and tones and looks, that thus our moderation as well as our joy in the Lord may be manifest to all with whom we have to do, that they may take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus and learned of him. (Acts 4:13.) To those of our neighbors and friends with whom we are very intimate we might explain that from our standpoint every day is a Sabbath day of rest in faith – that though upon some days it is necessary we should labor also for the meat that perisheth,

our hearts are resting still in the great Lord of the Sabbath and his finished work.

This would not signify that we of today should attempt an observance of the outward forms of the Jewish Law, according to all that is proper and required of the Jew. For instance, no doubt it would be a violation of the fourth commandment to operate a street-car line; and if the Jewish Law were in force upon us it would be absolutely wrong and sinful for any of us to ride in a street-car, much less to operate the same. But since we are not under the Law but under grace, and since Sunday riding is not prohibited by the civil law nor regarded as evil by our **[R3754 : page 107]** fellows, there is no reason why in this and in similar matters we may not enjoy reasonably and with profit the conveniences of transportation on the Sabbath.

THE PHARISAICAL SABBATH

Our lesson applies to a time when the Jewish Law was still in force, and shows us that even then the right, the true, the proper interpretation of the fourth commandment was much more in accord with our observation of it than with the extreme observances accorded today by the Jewish teachers. The difference between then and now would be that the Jews under the Law were forbidden to do work of an earthly kind on the Sabbath, while we are not forbidden, except as earthly laws may limit without a commandment, and that we may delight to abstain from temporal labors that we may the more fully enjoy our spiritual privileges.

Our lesson pictures to us Jesus and his disciples in a public pathway across a wheat-field (in old English called a corn-field). The wheat was ripe or nearly so, and the disciples, feeling hungry, had plucked a few of the heads and rubbed them in their hands to remove the chaff for the eating of the wheat. The Pharisees, appreciating the shell rather than the meat of the divine Law, were

very particular for outward observances of it, while entirely overlooking and neglecting its real sentiment or spirit. Here they thought they saw an opportunity for showing off their religious devotion by calling attention to the disciples of Jesus as being law-breakers, and to Jesus himself as being little better, in that he as their teacher had not reproved them. We see frequently this same spirit in our day: Some today would be scrupulously careful not to ride in a street-car on the Sabbath who would think nothing of allowing their minds to rove not only after the worldly things but worse, to dwell upon evil subjects, or perhaps meditate how they could take advantage of their neighbor the day following. This is hypocrisy, one of the worst sins from the divine standpoint.

It is really amusing how the Jews, while neglecting the real essence and spirit of the Law toward God and man, exaggerated that Law as respects the trifling and unessential matters. For instance, the ruling of the Rabbis was that catching a flea on one's person was hunting, and therefore prohibited on the Sabbath; that rubbing the grain in both hands and blowing away the chaff constituted winnowing and threshing, and violated the rest of the Sabbath. Our Lord did not accept the reproof, but, on the contrary, pointed out that his disciples not only had his approval in their course but that they were fully justified by the course of others whom the Pharisees recognized. Our Lord's illustration of what constituted necessity and mercy was drawn from the Bible narrative of David's eating the shew-bread, lawful only for the priests to eat, because of the necessities of his position, his hunger. Also the labor performed every Sabbath in the Jewish Temple, in connection with the worship there, by the priests and Levites. Our Lord held logically that these approved matters showed the proper principle governing the Sabbath. He did not claim that reaping, threshing and winnowing on the Sabbath day would be justifiable; his argument was that no such interpretation should be put upon the Law as would make the satisfying of

hunger, as the apostles did, a crime, a violation of the Sabbath commandment.

"LORD ALSO OF THE SABBATH"

But after convincing them from the Scriptures that their position was untenable, our Lord asserted to them his authority as an interpreter of the Law, saying, "I say unto you, One greater than the Temple is here." If it was right for the Levites to perform the Temple services on the Sabbath, Jesus was greater than the Temple in that he was the Son of God, the mouthpiece of God, and his disciples might therefore rest secure in anything done in his service and with his approval. What a personality our Lord must have possessed that he could make such a statement before his enemies without its being challenged! We are convinced that he not only spake as never man spake, but that his appearance must have been superior to that of members of the fallen race.

Mark his statement again (v. 8) – "The Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath day." As the Lord of the Sabbath, **[R3754 : page 108]** as the great Teacher, he had not indeed the right to abolish this feature of the Law except by fulfilling it, "nailing it to the cross"; but as the Lord of the Sabbath he was the proper Teacher to set forth its real significance to the Jew. Our Lord called the attention of his critics to the testimony of God through the prophet, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice." (Hosea 6:6.) Our Lord declares that if they had given heed to this direction their thoughts would have been more merciful, more in line with the divine sentiment, and this would have hindered them from condemning the disciples, who the Lord declared were entirely guiltless of any violation of the Sabbath day commandment.

Similarly we may say today that the great lack of many critics and fault-finders is their lack of mercy, lack of love. Love is the fulfilling of the Law, and whoever has most of it will come nearest to the standard. The possession of love is always indicated

by mercy – toward our friends, toward our brethren, toward the world, toward our enemies. Proceeding to the Synagogue the same question was raised – the predominance of Love above any law was manifested. A man there had a withered hand, and the Pharisees, seeking to prove Jesus and to catch him, inquired whether or not it would be right to heal on the Sabbath day. They fain would condemn him on some score; his defense of his disciples was complete – would he now commit himself to a matter of healing on the Sabbath?

Our Lord's answer was along the lines of the prophecy he had just quoted, namely, that mercy was higher in God's estimation than sacrifice, and he proceeded to show mercy to the afflicted man. First, however, he showed them from their own course in life that they were inconsistent: that if they owned but one sheep and it fell into a pit on the Sabbath day it would be rescued – not for love of the sheep but for fear of the loss of its value. Our Lord inquired, "How much then is a man of more value than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day." This question, as to the superior value of a man over a beast, is one that the world seems to find difficult to answer, but one which should be quickly answered by the Lord's people of spiritual Israel. The Lord set the value of a man when by the grace of God he gave himself a ransom for man. Those who receive of his Spirit should more and more count it a privilege to do anything they can for the relief of their fellow man in matters temporal or spiritual.

The Pharisees were answered at every point, and, less popular in Galilee than in Judea anyway, they felt that their influence before the people had been lessened by their conflict with the Lord, the great Teacher. So when Jesus had healed the withered hand by word they went out of the synagogue angry, to take counsel against him how they might destroy him. They were rabid sectarians, fully convinced of their own importance. They

felt that anything that discredited them must be injurious to the Lord and to his cause, that they were the orthodox body, and that they would be fully justified in murdering anyone whose words and conduct so overmatched them as to hinder their influence from spreading more and more over all the people of Israel. A similar spirit prevails today, we aver, amongst many who are outwardly very zealous for religion. They are so deficient in mercy, love, so bound by the sectarian systems with which they are identified, that they would be willing to persecute as thoroughly as opportunity would permit any of the members of the Master's body whose presentations of the Truth today would seem to diminish their honor and standing before the world. Let us, dear friends, remember the Master's word, and understanding and appreciating our relationship to the Lord, let us be obedient to the very spirit of it.
