

What Is The Christian's Sabbath Rest?

BY A. E. STUERNAGEL.

The term "Sabbath" is of frequent occurrence in the Word of God being employed more than 160 times by the writers of the Sacred Scriptures. But it remained for Paul the great writer of church truth to give an exposition of the Sabbath as it applies to Christians. See Heb. 4. But in order to rightly understand the progressive development of this important subject it is necessary to trace it thru the different dispensations. Accordingly we will consider first,

THE REST OF GOD.

There are ardent advocates who assume to find in Gen. 2: 2-3 a specific, universal and perpetual command to keep the seventh day. But even a casual reader will notice that God does not issue any command in this Scripture. Instead, there is the simple statement that God rested on that day, Nothing is said about man resting. In fact there is not a reference to man resting on any day until 2500 years later when the command was given to Israel. But the day was characterized by God's rest, and no thoughtful person will limit that rest to a mere cessation of labor. The rest of God consisted in His joy and satisfaction in a perfect, harmonious creation. It was this that characterized the birthday of a new world. But the rest of God was of short duration. No sooner had the disturbing element of sin entered into the world than God began the great work of redeeming the lost race, and re-

covering the forfeited rest. When Jesus appeared on earth He became the agent in removing sin and conquering its agent, and thus restoring to man the primeval rest of God. Accordingly Jesus could say, "My Father worketh even until now, and I work." (Jno. 5: 17). Secondly, we read that God "sanctified" or hallowed the seventh day. The ultimate purpose of God with reference to this day was not revealed at that time. He had in mind purposes and plans which are requiring centuries and millenniums to fully reveal. God had other purposes than a mere 24 hour period of rest. For the Sabbath was a type, as we shall see, of the Canaan rest, the rest of the believer in the finished work of Christ, the rest of Israel in the Millennium, and the complete and final rest of the eternal ages. Lastly, God pronounced blessing upon that day. This also cannot be limited to a seventh day rest, but must embrace the boundless grace which flows through the Spirit from the heart of Christ our glorious rest-giver.

THE SABBATH AND THE LAW.

The first command to observe a day was given to national Israel after the Exodus. It was closely connected with their redemption. Then it was given to Israel at Mt. Sinai as one of the ten commandments where it is appointed as a memorial of the creation. But in Deut. 5:15 it is connected with Israel's redemption from Egyptian bondage. It thus received a two-fold signification. It looked backward as a memorial of God's creation rest, and forward to the redemption rest in Christ. The Jewish Sabbath demanded absolute rest. In this it was a type of the believers perfect rest in Christ. That it is not applicable to our time will be clear from the fact that it was enforced under penalty of death. See Ex. 31:

14-15. As an illustration of the carrying out of this penalty we read of one being stoned to death for gathering sticks on the Sabbath (Num. 15: 32--36).—Now no law is in force unless a penalty is attached. Those who insist that the Old Testament Sabbath is still in force should be ready also to demand the penalty. The details of the observance of the seventh day as required of Israel were only applicable to them and not to all nations for all time. For instance, they were to remain in their places of abode (Ex. 16: 19). Yet Sabbatarians of our day attend religious services, visit hospitals, and engage in all kinds of missionary activity. Then, too, they were not to kindle a fire on the Sabbath. This could easily be enforced in a warm climate like Palestine, but what would our great northern population do where the thermometer runs down to 40 below zero? Sabbatarians try to follow the example of the Israelites by observing the day from sunset to sunset. This also was easily done by Israel near the equator where the days were of equal length thruout the year. But what will those do who live near the poles where for months each year the sun never sets? All this only confirms the fact that the Sabbath was not given to all nations living everywhere on a round globe, but to Israel alone, and that for a limited period. See Ex. 31: 12; Neh. 9: 14. It is unreasonable and unscriptural to ask Gentiles or Christians to keep the Jewish Sabbath. Christians are called out from all nations, are formed into the body of Christ, and are brought under the authority of a new standard of teaching which does not call for seventh day keeping.

CHRIST AND THE SABBATH.

Did Christ keep the seventh day Sabbath? He certainly did. Should we therefore follow

His example and become seventh-day keepers? By no means. Christ was "born under the law, that He might redeem them that were under the law." (Gal. 4: 4-5). He not only paid the penalty of a broken law but took us out from under its dominion and brought us under the authority of Himself. Christ lived and ministered during the overlapping of two dispensations -- the law and the Gospel. The latter began with the preaching of John and the former ended with the death of Christ on the cross. On the one hand Christ lived the life of a faithful Israelite interpreting Old Testament law, and meeting all its requirements perfectly. In fact He was the only Israelite that ever did this. It was necessary that He should do this in order to qualify Him to remove the curse of Israel's broken law. See Gal. 3: 10, 13. On the other hand Christ was the personal demonstration of the Gospel message. As such He taught by precept and example the principles of the new Gospel age. But Christ never once commanded the keeping of the seventh day. The reason is not far to seek. He Himself was the anti-type of the Old Testament Sabbath. Coming from Heaven He endured our trials and temptations, drank the bitter cup of sorrow, suffered the agonies of dark Calvary, bore the penalty of sin, broke the power of Satan, and cried in the final act of triumph, "It is finished!" What was finished? Redemption, full and free for spirit, soul and body, for time and eternity. With the tokens of His redemptive work He returned to Heaven and is seated at the right hand of God. His victory is complete. The primeval rest of God is restored. Every element of rest and blessing related to the Old Testament Sabbath is swallowed up in the infinitely fuller, sublimer and

more tranquil and refreshing rest which the believer finds in Christ.

THE APOSTLE AND THE SABBATH.

Did the Apostles and the early church keep the seventh day Sabbath? Verily no! It is true that the women visited the grave after the Sabbath "according to the commandment." But to them the new era had not yet opened. They were preparing to embalm a dead Christ. Paul frequently visited the synagogues but only because it afforded an opportunity to preach the Gospel. Paul had learned by special revelation that the believer is no longer under a system of law given thru Moses to Israel, but under a system of truth given by God thru Christ to the church. He shows how that we are not justified by the works of the law, "For by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." (Rom. 3:20). He further shows that to become sanctified we must become "dead to the law" and joined to Christ that we may bring forth "fruit unto God." (Rom. 7:1-5). No stronger term could possibly be used than "death" to describe the complete separation from the whole law system. That the ceremonial law is not meant here is evident from ver. 7 where "coveting" is mentioned as part of the law referred to. In the great coming day of judgment men of this age will not be judged according to the standards of Old Testament law but as Paul says "According to my Gospel." (Rom. 2:16). The great question then will be "What have I done with the dying, risen, glorified Lord?" Men are not now sent to preach law for we are "ministers of a new covenant." (2 Cor. 2:6). Man's testing under law ended abruptly at the cross when the whole world was found guilty before God. Now the Spirit's mission is to "Convict of

sin ---- because they believe not on Him.” (Jno. 16: 8-9). It is clear, then, that the believer of to-day is not under the Old Testament system of law, but under a new standard of grace. Christ laid the foundation of this new body of truth, appropriating what was applicable from the Old Testament, and committing the full development to the Apostles thru the Spirit. (Jno, 14: 26).

THE CHRISTIAN'S SABBATH.

Now in the new system of teaching adapted to the peculiar needs of the church neither Christ nor any of the Apostles gave a single command to keep the seventh day. Moreover, they uttered many warnings against the common sins such as lying, drunkenness, adultery but not one word against the non-observance of the Sabbath. This would be singularly strange if the reason were not evident. It was a type which was fulfilled in Christ. Among all the types of the Old Testament that of the Sabbath was the most important. We have already considered its typical significance in the Old Testament. We will now point you to Paul's confirmation of the same fact. In Col. 2: 16-17 Paul tells us plainly that the Sabbath was a "shadow" or type and that the "body" or substance was Christ. In other words the Christian's Sabbath is Christ. How can it be otherwise when He is the object and inspiration of the Christian's experience? Plainly, then, Christ is the believer's Sabbath rest.

Finally let us turn to Heb. 4 where we have a full exposition of the Sabbath as it is applied to the believer of this age. Doctrines having their roots in Genesis, and foreshadowings under the law often received a full doctrinal treatment by Paul while arranging the standards for the church age. Accordingly we have his exposition of circumcision, of the

Passover, and here of the Sabbath rest. The key thought is found in ver. 9. "There remaineth, therefore, a Sabbath rest for the people of God." He does not treat it as a 24 hour period of rest, but as a Christian experience. See ver. 3. And this experience is of such paramount importance as to call forth a solemn warning lest we come short of it. Paul describes the experience as the sublime and tranquil rest which God enjoyed thru His perfect creation. Man shared in this rest in his primeval days but lost it in the fall. Then God employed the seventh day rest as a type of the restored rest of God thru the redemption of Christ. Paul then shows us that this rest of God was only partially fulfilled in the Canaan rest; was still future in the days of David, and awaited fulfillment in our time. It remained for Christ to give expression to a life completely at rest in God. When His work was finished the demonstration was complete, Now it is our privilege to enter that rest thru a two-fold condition. See verses 10-11. First, we are to cease from our works. We are to abandon our own thoughts, our own plans, our own activities. This is the negative condition. Then, as a compliment to this, we are to yield implicit obedience to the whole will of God. A perfect faith in God will lead to a perfect submission to His will, and result in a complete rest in Him. If we cease from all He will work all. If we do this every day in the week we will enjoy a perpetual Sabbath. Thus God will work in us to "will and to do, for His good pleasure." (Phil. 2: 12--13). In this way we will be keeping God's Sabbath. In fact Spirit-directed and Spirit-empowered believers are the only true Sabbath keepers. Their experience does not consist in the cessation of labor one day in the week, but in

a sweet, divine, heavenly rest and refreshing which enters into all the activities of the life every day in the week. It is but a fore-taste of that perfect rest which will characterize the eternal ages.

In fact true rest is not inactivity. In Heaven the greatest activity prevails. The glorified inhabitants are represented not only as worshipping and praising God but as "serving Him day and night in His holy temple." Yet it is the place where the sweetest and most tranquil rest prevails. And how is this? The curse is fully removed from that blissful world; and its inhabitants are perfectly poised in the one object---the Christ. All their activities are directed and controlled by this one all-wise and all-powerful presence. The believer of to-day is not yet in Heaven but all the elements of Heaven may be in him. In so far as he rests in Christ as his anchorage, trusts in Him to direct all the activities of spirit, mind and body, yields himself and all his ransomed powers as a medium for Christ to work out the plan of his life, in so far will he find rest. May God lead every reader of this little message into that blessed rest.

The Sabbath must be distinguished from the Lord's Day which is commonly observed by Christians everywhere. "Why Christians keep the First Day of the Week" will be the subject of the writers next message.

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