

Bible Studies for Adventists



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May 16–22, 2009

Commentary on “Rest”

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Day 1: Sabbath Afternoon, May 16, 2009

Introduction

The text cited is Mark 2:27, 28:

“Then He said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.’”

The main idea of this study is that the Sabbath is more relevant today for our hurried, hectic lives, than ever before. The above verses are given to emphasize (so we can emulate) Christ’s Sabbath-keeping behavior in the New Testament. The Lord has reiterated to us the need for a Sabbath day because we need the physical and mental rest, all the while using this time to come into God’s presence and focus on Him.

Problems

These verses are in context of unacceptable Sabbath activities by the disciples that the Pharisees were questioning. In context of the New Covenant, ushered in by Jesus, this statement is pointing out how Jesus is superior to arbitrary Sabbath-keeping and that the Old Covenant laws given to the Israelites were now fulfilled and point entirely to Christ. It’s emphasizing that Jesus controls the Sabbath and isn’t controlled by it—He is superior (Heb. 7:18, 22-28). This is not underscoring appropriate Sabbath behavior or reminding us of the importance of the Sabbath day in the New Testament.

We show “resting in Him”, not by physically resting on a calendar day, but by trusting/having faith in His completed work, therefore giving up (resting) relying on my own works to gain merit or earn salvation. Physical and mental rest can be taken care of by a secular vacation. This is referring to a spiritual rest—giving our efforts over to Him.

Summary

1. “Lord of the Sabbath” refers to Jesus being “in charge of” and “superior to” the Old Covenant Sabbath day instead of being subjected to/emphasizing Sabbath activity.
2. Resting on a specific calendar day is an external action, and it can’t give us the internal peace associated with complete reliance on Jesus’ finished work (Matt. 11:28-30).
3. He’s done it all; completed the work. “It is finished!” (John 19:30) We can rest in Him, not for Him.

Day 2: Sunday, May 17, 2009

Introduction

Marriage and the Sabbath are two institutions that date all the way back from creation and, therefore, have been under much attack from the evil one. God knew what mankind needed so He gave us a special day, and those who have respected this “divinely instituted rhythm” have been blessed by it. It is an intrinsic part of the divine program for human happiness. The study mentions Gen. 2:2, 3, asking why God rested on the seventh day after the creation of the world. A reference is made to Ezek. 20:12, asking, “With what term does the prophet Ezekiel refer to the Sabbath? What do you think that means?”

Problems

This section is referred to as “God’s gift to busy people”. I need to say up front that Christ is God’s gift to busy people (Matt. 11:28-30). Gen. 2:2, 3 talk about God resting on the seventh day and making it holy. He didn’t rest because He was physically tired, like we need to, but to enjoy fellowship and communion between Creator and created life. In the text there is no “and there was evening and there was morning, a seventh day” like for each of the previous six days, indicating that it was to be a continuing and ongoing intimate relationship--it was interrupted by the introduction of sin. The command to keep Sabbath with specific rules and regulations didn’t come until God gave the 10 Commandments (and other Old Covenant laws) to Moses and the Israelites on Mt. Sinai as recorded in Ex. 20. It was a specific set of laws to be a covenant between two specific parties—God and the Israelites—as demonstrated by the wording of these laws (Ex. 20:2, Deut. 5:1-6).

Ezekiel 20:12 is specifically talking about how “my Sabbaths are a sign between me and them (God and Israelites), so they (Israelites) will know that I (God) am the Lord who sets them (Israelites) apart as holy.” This isn’t a reinforcement for church/New Testament Christian Sabbath-keeping, but a reminder and a sign of the Old Covenant between God and the Israelites. It’s a non-issue for the church. We’re called to a higher standard of behavior (Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 3:24-26; Gal. 5:14).

The lesson then goes into a long E. G. White quote (from *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 47, 48), which is irrelevant because it’s extra-biblical and reinforces S.D.A. theology, not the Bible. If one is to understand the Bible correctly and consistently, then it needs to be studied alone, without the confusion of Ellen G. White’s “enlightenment”. They contradict, not complement, each other (Heb. 1:1, 2; Matt. 11:13; 1 Tim. 4:1-5; Rom. 14:1-7).

Summary

1. While God “rested” on the seventh day and made it holy, Sabbath-keeping didn’t appear until Ex. 20, when the 10 Commandments and the Old Covenant laws were given specifically to the Israelites. (Righteousness was imputed to Abraham much earlier due to belief, not the law. Rom. 4:13, Gen. 15:6)
2. Sabbath-keeping was given as a sign of the covenant between God and the Israelites specifically, not New Covenant Christians.
3. Only Christ can give us true spiritual rest, not a day. We rest in Him (Heb. 4:9, 10).

Day 3: Monday, May 18, 2009

Introduction

The Sabbath is “holy”, set aside for a specific use. Who makes it holy, man or God? What does keeping the Sabbath holy look like? How does keeping it holy impact us? It’s a sign that we are separate and different, and of our loyalty to our Creator. The reality of the Sabbath should be a reminder to us, when facing temptations during the week, to be a holy people set apart from the world. Adventists object strongly to the change of Saturday to Sunday without a biblical mandate—it’s an affront to God.

Problems

This lesson assumes that while God made the Sabbath holy, we’re somehow able to satisfactorily “keep” the Sabbath holy to God’s standards. When God gave strict Sabbath-keeping laws to the Israelites, the penalty for not keeping them to the “letter-of-the-law” was severe—even death. It’s at this point we need to clarify whether we’re still under Old Covenant laws or not. If we are, then we still need to be under the whole law, as God didn’t mandate a discontinuation of some of the laws and not others.

We, then, are not at liberty to arbitrarily and subjectively “keep” the Sabbath however we want (depending on what part of the country we live in or which Seventh-day Adventist church we attend). If we try to keep the Sabbath (which basically translates into attending church on the “right” day) as we see proper and convenient to us, how can we expect it to be “holy” and

pleasing to God's perfect standards? If you marry this concept with the denominational belief of Sabbath being the ultimate test of the "true church" (Sunday laws/Mark of the Beast), isn't it vital to make sure you're doing it perfectly...why have God's standards loosened over time? Isn't it a huge "affront to God" if the Sabbath laws are truly still binding as they were for the Israelites? What about the sacrifices, other Old Covenant laws, the whole package? Why are just a few dietary laws and the Sabbath the "biggies"?

You can't have it both ways: either you're under Old Covenant law completely OR Jesus came to fulfill the law; to enter into a New Covenant with us—one directed and driven by the Holy Spirit via Jesus, instead of the external laws via Moses. You can't say, on one hand, that Jesus' sacrifice was complete, but we're still bound by Sabbath laws (and are uncertain of our salvation because we're in the middle of an Investigative Judgment). The two are incompatible, because it makes Jesus' sacrifice incomplete—that's an affront to God. Christ came down to die for all our sins as the ultimate sacrifice and a BETTER way than the old laws and sacrificial system (Gal. 3:10-12; 19-26).

Trying to have one foot in the "Old Covenant door" while trying to embrace freedom in Christ (with the other foot) doesn't work (Heb. 7:17-19, 22, 28). To "hedge our bets" by deluding ourselves that we're really keeping Sabbath is futile. If we're doing it just in case Sabbath allegiance really IS the true test of end time believers, and somehow we'll be covered and on the right side of the fence, it's really a pitiful attempt to cover ourselves, not rest in Christ's finished work. We're relying on our own works (of attempted Sabbath-keeping).

The statement made above about being "separate" and "set apart" refers to being Godly-minded vs. worldly-minded—it has nothing to do with what day one worships on or "keeps" holy. Setting apart special time for the Lord is good and necessary to build our relationship with Him. On this side of Christ, it's not a sign for us as it was for the Israelites. Being separate in this way is elitism, and it doesn't unify the body of Christ, it divides it. It's not being used as a sign of loyalty, but rather a way to cover oneself and earn God's favor.

The "reality of the Sabbath" shouldn't be what reminds us or deters us during temptations—Christ should be! What does a day have to do with it? Our love for Him and living well for His kingdom should be our motivation. It's all about the heart. This same principle applies to the charge that we've changed the holy day from Saturday to Sunday. If we had arbitrarily tried to assert that Sunday was holy, without a directive from God, that would be blasphemous (and a huge affront to God).

It's the Bible that tells us that the New Covenant is about Christ, not the day, and that it's superior to the Old Covenant system (Gal. 3:24-26; 5:4, Heb. 7:18, 19, 22). One can worship on ANY day (or every day!), Sunday most commonly being chosen because it's called "The Lord's Day" among New Testament believers (the day Christ rose from the dead). The main point to remember is that it's about a person, not a day.

Summary

1. Only God can make anything holy. We can't "keep" any day holy, either. We have to decide whether we're under Old Covenant law completely or not. If we are, then we need to keep them to the "letter-of-the-law" and not pick and choose which ones are convenient or mandatory. They came as a package and no mandate was ever given to do away with some of them. Either Christ fulfilled the whole "package" or He didn't. We're either under law or we're not.
2. Being "separate" isn't about being different in the day we choose to try to keep holy or go to church, but in being distinctively different in how we live our lives; our actions should model a heart that loves and hungers after Him. They should be in line with the New Covenant commands given by Jesus to love Him with all our heart, mind and soul, and to love others as we love ourselves (Rom. 13:8-10).
3. The "reality of the Sabbath" isn't what deters us from temptation, it's Christ.
4. Saturday isn't changed to Sunday as a holy day. Sunday is when the New Testament Christians met, commemorating Christ's resurrection. It isn't about a holy day; it's about our Holy God. The day is irrelevant under the New Covenant. Jesus is the fulfillment of our Sabbath Rest.

Day 4: Tuesday, May 19, 2009

Introduction

Sabbath is anchored in the Creation of the world. Every Sabbath reminds us that He is our Creator and we are His creatures. The Exodus account calls the Israelites to remember creation. The Deuteronomy account of the Sabbath law includes remembering the Israelites deliverance from slavery in Egypt. By extension, we can be reminded of how God has set humanity free, by His grace, from every kind of slavery. Sabbath is a reprieve from our form of "modern slavery", such as clocks, calendars, and a hectic work schedule. A break on the Sabbath "changes attitudes" for the rest of the week so we can "truly rest and learn delight in new ways" (Marva J. Dawn, "Keeping the Sabbath Wholly")

Problems

Once again, the commands (Deut. 5:12-15; Ex. 20:8-11) were given to the Israelites, commemorating creation and their freedom from Egyptian slavery. The Sabbath was a sign in the middle of the covenant—it was between God and the Israelites.

This whole lesson is very subjective. It talks about how the Sabbath is such a break in the middle of our hectic lives. It's true we DO need breaks from our hectic lives periodically, but what they're emphasizing isn't really any different than a secular vacation. A good vacation can help you physically with a demanding schedule, as lots of non-believers know. The rest one experiences from a mere "day off" every seven days isn't the lasting "rest" one experiences from wholly relying on Christ to do the work of salvation for us; His rest is about surrendering everything to Him, including our pitiful attempts to "keep" a day holy. When God looks at us as believers, He sees Christ and what He's done for us—that's how we're counted righteous—it's all about our belief in Him and His finished work. With this kind of rest comes real joy. Lasting joy comes only from Him, not from trying to keep one day in seven subjectively holy. If one is truly in Christ, the joy will be seen every day in our lives and behavior towards others. A holy day set aside won't change anyone's attitude; only Christ can do that.

In response to the statement that the Sabbath "helps to free us from the slavery of the clock and calendar" I'd like to mention that Adventists, practically speaking, are probably the most "clock and calendar enslaved" people I know (i.e. "Is it sundown yet?"). Most other religious denominations (aside from Jews, who reject Christ, and perhaps other Sabbatarians) aren't even concerned with the clock and calendar related to Christ and activities as Christians. The point is to integrate Christ into all of your life and not focus on the segregation of "Holy, Christ-time" and the rest of your life. This practice is legalistic and unbiblical in light of Christ and His one-time sacrifice, which is clearly superior to the Old Covenant laws.

Of course we should remember our Creator, Redeemer and all Christ has done for us, but this doesn't address the mandatory observance of Sabbath by the S.D.A. church. In addition, the denominational doctrine of the Investigative Judgment inhibits joy and fosters fear as it stomps on the finished work of Christ (Heb. 9:27, 28). Both the doctrine of Sabbath adherence (end time test of loyalty and "seal" of true believers) and the Investigative Judgment keep people in fear. They fear they'll fail the test of Sabbath-keeping loyalty (it's about how they perform), and they're uncertain that their salvation is secure because unrepented sins might come up at any time—sins they've forgotten to confess. Christ's work, in these contexts, is only partial because it depends on the "work" of the believer, as well. One's salvation is tenuous, at best. (Ellen G. White, Christ's Object Lessons, p. 155) One cannot have real joy, because underlying fear is present.

Summary

1. True joy cannot be experienced by an external pseudo Sabbath-keeping. It has to be internally motivated by a changed heart for Christ (through the Holy Spirit). Limiting oneself to certain "spiritual" activities and thoughts doesn't make one spiritual.
2. While it is always a good idea to honor and commemorate what Christ has done for us, the Sabbath Covenant was given to the Israelites, not to the church. It points forward to our true rest in Jesus Christ in the New Covenant.
3. Resting physically/mentally one day in seven doesn't give us true rest or change our attitude any more than a secular vacation. Only Christ can do these things.
4. Underlying fear (because of distinct, unbiblical S.D.A. doctrines) stunt true joy and true rest—one cannot have full assurance of salvation.

Day 5: Wednesday, May 20, 2009

Introduction

What principles can we take away from Isaiah 58:12-14 about Sabbath-keeping that help us better experience the blessings God has for us if we remember the Sabbath properly? Many Adventists don't truly enjoy the Sabbath. A lot of things regarding Sabbath behavior are rooted in culture and tradition rather than biblical principles. Ellen G. White says it shouldn't be a period of "useless inactivity" but to sacred rest, to worship and to holy deeds. The Sabbath should be viewed as positive rather than associated with prohibitions and restrictions. What was Jesus' example regarding Sabbath-keeping in the New Testament? What would be the perfect Sabbath? What would be available to you then that wouldn't be throughout the rest of the week?

Problems

The title implies that it's about how it looks to the world, rather than being primarily concerned with proper Sabbath-keeping according to God's mandates. While the focus of "thinking positive" is good, the fact that discussion about "useless activity vs. worship/holy deeds" is in the context of a day misses the whole point. This should be the difference in our lifestyle as a Christian, seven days a week! It all comes down to why we're doing it. If we're internally motivated by the Holy Spirit, then the day doesn't matter; it's a way of life. If we're doing it because it's what we think God wants us to do and it's our duty, then it's a problem with the condition of our heart. God doesn't want or need our pathetic attempt, one day in seven, to "keep" Sabbath. He wants a

“seven out of seven” passion for Him manifested in all we do. This is why the focus needs to be on Christ, rather than a day. When the day becomes a bigger “god” than Christ Himself, something is wrong. In Adventist theology, Sabbath-keeping is a “deal breaker”. You can’t be a dedicated Adventist and ignore the overwhelming importance of the Sabbath, no matter how much you try to downplay it as “just a commemoration of creation and freedom from slavery”.

The passages in Mark and Luke intended to model for us how Christ “kept” the Sabbath (doing good works) are really an illustration of how He wasn’t tied down or bound by Old Covenant Jewish laws—He is Lord over them and above their jurisdiction. While He was Jewish and often was in the synagogue on the Jewish Sabbath (that’s where the people were...they were Jewish!), He purposefully broke traditional Sabbath laws, showing His superiority over them.

What would the perfect Sabbath look like? If you’re still under the Old Covenant, then you’d better be keeping the Sabbath in accordance to the Jewish laws. It’s not a subjective issue. Otherwise, you’re just deluding yourself that you’re truly keeping the Sabbath according to God’s righteous standards.

Summary

1. It’s not about how Seventh-day Adventists model “Sabbath rest” to the world. The world doesn’t care about what day they worship or “separate from the world” on—it’s about WHO we need to be modeling to the world. The Great Commission is to go out into the world and share the gospel of Christ, not to lead people to “Sabbath-keeping” (Matt. 28:18-20). Nowhere is that mentioned in the Bible.
2. Modeling “proper” Sabbath-keeping, based on Christ’s examples in the New Testament, is to illustrate disobedience to the Jewish Old Covenant laws. As mentioned before, these laws were never mandated for the Church.
3. Our focus needs to be on Christ and His finished work that brings us true rest, not what activities are appropriate for an Old Covenant holy day.

Day 6: Thursday, May 21, 2009

Introduction

People say we’re trying to work our way to heaven. Why is it that the one Commandment that’s “all about rest” (the fourth) is the one that’s turned into a way to work our way into heaven? What’s wrong with this picture? What’s the message to us here in Heb. 4:9-11? Matt. 11:28-30 calls us to rest in Him. He will give us rest and it finds one expression in His universal Sabbath day. Anyone can say that they’re resting in Christ: anyone can say that they’re saved by grace. But the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath is a visible expression of that rest, a living parable of what it means to be covered by His grace. The Sabbath stands as a symbol of our rest in the completed work of Jesus for us. Our obedience to this commandment is a way of saying, “We’re so sure of our salvation in Jesus, we’re so firm and secure in what Christ has done for us, that we can—in a special way—rest from any of our works because we know what Christ has accomplished for humanity through His death and resurrection.”

Problems

“Anyone can say that they’re saved by grace, but KEEPING the seventh-day Sabbath is a visible expression of that rest.” This is a very “works-oriented” statement. They’re talking out of both sides of their mouths. On one hand, they make it sound like they’re choosing, out of altruistic love for God, to honor the Sabbath (however subjectively that may be) and that they’re so sure of their salvation and Jesus’ finished work of salvation that it just stands as a symbol—like it’s optional. On the other hand, anyone in the denomination knows that Sabbath allegiance is the “seal” of the true believer/church in the end times (Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 605) and that Sunday worship is considered “The Mark of the Beast” (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 8, p. 117). Only people embracing the S.D.A. message will be saved.

The Investigative Judgment underscores that one can’t be certain of salvation because Jesus’ work on the cross wasn’t really finished, but entered another “phase” in 1844—the cross didn’t end it all, only helped. The bottom line is you can’t embrace S.D.A. theology and say you are only Sabbath-keeping because “we’re so sure of our salvation that we just want to do this as an outward expression”. You either embrace Adventist theology or Christ; they’re mutually exclusive and one must choose which stands as truth. Sabbath-keeping is done out of fear of losing salvation—it’s a doctrine of demons, because it stands in blatant contrast to the Gospel of Christ (Gal. 1:6-9).

Summary

1. Yes, working at “resting” is a form of “works” to earn God’s favor. It’s not done out of altruistic love for the Creator and Redeemer, but motivated by fear.
2. Both Heb. 4:9-11 and Matt. 11:28-30 call us to “rest in Him” from our works (to earn salvation), not physical work, and Sabbath day rest.
3. Strict obedience to the fourth Commandment is the opposite of being secure in Christ and of salvation. It’s primarily a form of covering oneself to be certain of salvation. Ask them to stop keeping the Sabbath—is it really optional? What about what Ellen G. White says about it?

Day 7: Friday, May 22, 2009

Introduction

This is a review of the main points highlighted throughout the week. It summarizes that the Sabbath is God's gift to humanity. The day, if approached right, and with the right attitude, can be a great source of physical and spiritual rest—a time of great joy. We need to look to our Ultimate Example of Sabbath-keeping. He referred to Himself very significantly, as “Lord of the Sabbath”.

Problems

See previous lessons for in-depth rebuttals to discussion questions, etc.

Summary

1. Christ is God's gift to humanity, not a day. The Sabbath was given to the Israelites as a sign of a specific covenant between God and the Israelites. It was never intended for Gentiles, the Church or New Covenant Christians.
2. Approaching “the day” with the “right attitude” is relying on external circumstances and actions to give us rest. This rest is temporary, at best. Only Christ can give us true Sabbath rest as we cease relying on our own works to aid in our salvation. He did it all, without our help.
3. Jesus was not the Ultimate Example of Sabbath-keeping. He deliberately broke Old Covenant laws to make the point that He was “Lord of” and the fulfillment of the true “Sabbath rest” for the Church and New Covenant believers. He was defying the old to fulfill what was made new.