
The 4th Law of Life - part 1 of 2

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Ex. 20:8–11).

The Origin of “Difficulties in Scripture Interpretation”

This commandment, like every other, is exceedingly broad, and we can never exhaust it. Yet, with all its breadth and depth, it is simple and easy to understand. Nevertheless, it is very much misunderstood, and many professed Christians seem to find great difficulty in it. Because of the general perversion of this commandment, it is necessary to clear the ground of some misapprehensions, before we come to the consideration of the real teaching of it. **The difficulties connected with this commandment**, like those with any part of the Bible, **are entirely in the minds of men, and not in the commandment itself. Perverted minds pervert the word.** Whoever comes to the study of the Bible, totally free from prejudice or selfish motives, with a sincere desire that he may learn the will of God in order to do it, will never find any difficulty in it; for “If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine” (John 7:17).

All the difficulties of “interpretation” lie in this: People come to the Bible with more or less fixed opinions of what is right. They take it for granted that the common ideas and practices that they have received by tradition from their fathers must be right. But they find things in the Bible that do not sanction their course, and since their minds are not open to change, they feel it necessary to make the Bible harmonize with their practice. Bible study is very difficult under such conditions.

Which Day?

Although the commandment states the case in the plainest language, there is a great deal of questioning as to which day is the Sabbath. Nothing could be more simple and direct than this: “the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God,” but the majority of professed Christians observe the first day, calling it the Sabbath, and hence arises one of the difficulties to which we have just referred. It is true that many observers of Sunday have not found any difficulty over it, because they suppose that it is the seventh day spoken of in the commandment. Their attention has never been called to the matter, or else they would see the fallacy of their supposition; for if you ask them why they observe Sunday, they will say that it is in honor of Christ’s resurrection, which they know

took place on the first day of the week. "The Sabbath" is the day before the first day of the week. (See Luke 23:56; 24:1) Hence it is the seventh day of the week.

It is very plain, therefore, that the fourth commandment, as given by the Lord from Mount Sinai, requires the observance of the seventh day of the week, and that the observance of the first day of the week by professed Christians is not authorized by it. There is no revised edition of the commandment, for God's Word is forever settled in heaven, and Christ said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matt. 5:17, 18).

But some say, "It all depends on where you begin to count; if you begin to count with the second day, you make Sunday the seventh; or if you should begin with Wednesday, you would make the third day the seventh." The error of this statement should be apparent to every one. If a man has seven sons, you cannot make the first-born the seventh by any process of counting. Call them what you please, the first-born is still the first son, and the last one born is the seventh. Calling black white does not make it white. Calling the first day the seventh does not make it the Sabbath; it still remains the first day, and one of "the six working days." The same principle applies to the seventh day; no matter what men call it, or where they begin their count of days, it still remains the seventh day, which "is the Sabbath of the Lord your God."

At the very time the law was spoken from Mount Sinai, when God said, "Remember the Sabbath day," He was making it plain that the Sabbath is a definite day, and that it was not left to man to choose which day it should be, nor how it should be kept. The giving of the manna emphasized the sacredness of the day, and showed its definiteness. For forty years manna fell six days in the week; on the seventh day none fell, but the lack was made up by a double portion being given on the sixth day. While ordinarily the manna that fell one day could not be kept till the next day without spoiling, the extra portion given on the sixth day was sweet and good for use on the seventh. Nobody could change the day.

Do We Know the Original Seventh Day?

But some tell us that the reckoning of days has been lost, and since we cannot know which is the original seventh day, one day is as likely to be right as another. Such objectors forget that the Word of God "lives and abides forever." The commandment speaks to us as directly as it did to the Israelites gathered about Mount Sinai. It is not four thousand years old, but is new every day. We have no more ground for saying that we cannot tell which is the Sabbath day according to the commandment, than the

Israelites had when they heard it spoken. God does not command impossibilities, and the fact that He still speaks to us in His commandment, requiring the observance of the seventh day, is evidence enough that it can be kept. But to take away every shade of doubt, and to show positively that the original Sabbath cannot possibly have been lost, we will briefly trace its history.

In the beginning God rested on the seventh day, and sanctified it (Gen. 2:3); and this is given in the commandment as the reason why we should observe it. God makes no mistakes, and never gets confused in His reckoning, so we may know that the Israelites in the desert had the identical seventh day upon which God rested. During all their history they were in direct communication with God by means of prophets, and the fact that they never lost their reckoning of the days is shown from the frequent reproofs God sent them for their violation of the Sabbath. Finally they were carried into captivity because of their transgression of the commandment; but God would not have punished them for disobedience if it had been impossible for them to know the truth. After their return to captivity they were very scrupulous in their observance of the Sabbath, at least outwardly. Then Christ came, God's Representative, and the Giver of the law. If the Jews had lost a reckoning, He would have set them right. But He recognized the day they were observing as the Sabbath day, and reproved them only because they made it a yoke of bondage, instead of the blessing that God designed it to be.

Shortly after Christ's ascension the Jews were dispersed, and ever since they have been found in every part of the world. But they have remained faithful to the tradition of Sabbath keeping, and no matter how widely separated, they all still observe one and the same day. It is absolutely impossible that all should have lost the reckoning of days, and all made exactly the same mistake at the same time, so that nobody ever detected it. **It is plain, therefore, that all that is required in order that one may know that he has the identical seventh day on which God rested, and in regular succession from the creation, is the ability to count to seven.**

The Essence of the Commandment

Whoever reads the Bible with care will notice that there is never any suggestion of the possibility of doubt as to which day is the Sabbath. The whole burden of the Scripture is as to its nature, and the manner of its observance. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." **We are not required to make it holy**; God himself did that in the beginning, to which the commandment refers us. When the heavens and the earth were finished, God "ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made" (Gen. 2:2, 3). To sanctify is to make holy. The same word is used in the commandment as in

Gen. 2:3. **The idea prevails quite generally that men can keep any day holy, that they can make any day holy on which they choose to rest. This is a grave error.** Only He who can create can make holy. For any man to claim that he can make a day holy, is to put himself in the place of God, claiming equal power with the Creator. When God says, "Hallow My Sabbaths," He does not ask us to do what He has already done, but to recognize what He has done and conform to it.

It is not for the benefit of the Sabbath itself that we are required to keep it holy. "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Those who observe Sunday often bewail the little regard that is paid to it by the mass of people, saying, "We have no Sabbath;" and so they ask for laws to protect it. In these efforts to enforce Sunday observance by law, they disclaim any wish to make people religious by law, but say that they merely want protection for the day, as though people could injure a day by anything that they do on it. He who knows the true Sabbath day will never have any such thoughts about it. **And our keeping it does not add any sacredness to the day, and our violating it does not make any difference in its sanctity. The Sabbath is not a fragile thing that must be kept in a case, lest it be broken to pieces by rough usage. It does not need to be protected: it itself is a protection for those who keep it.** "His truth shall be your shield and buckler" (Ps. 91:4). It is never true that we have no Sabbath. If every man on earth violated the Sabbath, it would still remain the same holy day. You cannot abolish the Sabbath day, any more than you can abolish God.

Recall the text quoted in our study of the first commandment: Joshua 24:19: "You cannot serve the Lord, for He is a holy God." "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). The law is spiritual (Rom. 7:14), and only those who are spiritual can keep it. John was keeping the Sabbath according to the commandment when he was "in the Spirit of the Lord's day." No one can serve God unless he is holy. We are to "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." Does that shut anybody off from serving Him? No; this is the blessing of the Sabbath day: "I gave them My Sabbaths to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them" (Ezek. 20:12). **God gives us the Sabbath, to make us know and remember that He has the power to make us holy, so that we can serve Him acceptably. God sanctifies man by His creative power, in order that they may keep the whole law. To keep the Sabbath holy, therefore, is the sum of all commandment keeping.**

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The 4th Law of Life - part 2 of 2

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A New Creation

The Sabbath was instituted at the close of creation. It is the memorial of God’s creative power. “The works of the Lord are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them. His work is honorable and glorious, and His righteousness endures forever. He has made His wonderful works to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and full of compassion” (Ps. 111:2–4). This last statement would be better rendered, “He has made a memorial for His wonderful works.” In the “song for the Sabbath day,” the Psalmist says, “I will triumph in the works of Your hands.” God alone works righteousness. “The Lord is righteous in all His ways, gracious in all His works” (Ps. 145:17). “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

The Gospel is “the power of God to salvation,” and His everlasting power is seen in all the things that He has made. Therefore the power of the Gospel is to create, to make new. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God” (2 Cor. 5:17, 18). In Christ “we have redemption” because “by Him all things created” (Col. 1:14, 16). **He is Redeemer because He is Creator, and redemption is creation.** It is a complete and perfect work. Christ’s last words on the cross were, “It is finished!” **The cross of Christ brings those who accept it into the condition in which man was at the close of the sixth day of creation, when God saw everything that He had made, “and behold it was very good.” Therefore, since the Sabbath is the mark or seal of a perfect new creation, it is the seal of the Gospel, the sign of the cross, the pledge of the complete redemption of all things.**

Remember

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” When shall we remember it? Many seem to think that the commandment merely requires them to remember it on Friday, so as to be able to get their work out of the way, and be ready to sit down and rest at the setting of the sun. This is well, but it is infinitely below what the commandment says. The word

is absolute and unlimited. We are to remember it all the time, everyday in the week. We are always to remember the sanctifying power which it reveals, in order that we may continually worship God "in the beauty of holiness," "lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting." Knowing that only those who are holy can truly worship a holy God and keep a holy day, we must remember the Sabbath, which makes known God the sanctifier, and then when the Sabbath day comes to us, we shall be ready for it. It comes bringing a blessing; for God "blessed the seventh day." It is frequently said, with a view to avoiding the force of the commandment, that we may have a blessing at any time. Some say, "I keep every day holy." Now we not only may, but should, experience the blessing of God every day. But **a blessing upon us, is not the same as a blessing upon the day.** As we have already seen, we cannot keep any day holy except the one which God has made holy. Our motion or condition has no effect upon it; but the day is given to us to effect us. Do not forget that "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." No man's holiness can impart holiness to any day; but the Sabbath was given that we might partake of the holiness of God, and be kept holy every day. While God blesses us every day, there is a special blessing on the seventh day, even the blessing of the Sabbath, and this blessing assures to us all the blessings that we may have on any other day.

The Blessing of Eden

The Sabbath is a fragment of Eden that comes down to us untouched by the curse. It is the bridge by which men may pass from Eden lost to Eden restored, freed from the intervening curse. It is the rest to which Christ calls all who labor and are heavy laden. By it we become sharers of His burden, which is light, for He lays upon us only a "weight of glory." So the Sabbath, when kept in the Spirit, brings to us the glory of that new creation when "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy," and is the pledge of the time when all the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. Although Eden has been taken from the earth, that it might not suffer the effects of the curse, the reality of it is left us in the Sabbath, that we may come back to the beginning, and find in the beginning the end, even "the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:9). **The reason why now, at this time, we have the Sabbath made clear as never before in this world's history, is because Eden is about to be restored, and we must be made ready for the change. When Christ comes, He appears not as a stranger, but as one with whom we are well acquainted, and He will conduct us to Eden, not a strange country, but a familiar home.** To this end God has given us the Sabbath, the essential part of Eden. There is to be a change now day by day, through the sanctifying power that the Sabbath makes us know and remember, so that at last when we get to Eden we shall not have to get used to our surroundings. Before the last day comes, we shall have drunk of the river of Eden, and

eaten of the hidden manna. "They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures," or, literally, "the river of Your Eden" (Ps. 36:8).

Rest is Not a Burden

Sometimes when we talk about Sabbath-keeping, people will say, as though they were telling something new, "Oh, but keeping the Sabbath will not save us; we are saved by faith, not by works." Exactly; and that is what the Sabbath teaches us. **We keep the Sabbath, not in order to be saved, but because we are saved. Sabbath-keeping is rest in God, the assurance of His finished work.** "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent" (John 6:29). By believing, we receive the perfect works which God Himself has prepared for us to walk in. These works were finished from the foundation of the world. Therefore whoever receives them must find perfect rest, because when the work is done and well done, rest must necessarily follow. "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God" (Heb. 4:9). Note, it is the people of God who have the rest. "We who have believed do enter that rest" (v. 3), and they which do not believe, cannot rest. **There can be no perfect Sabbath-keeping without perfect faith in God, which means perfect righteousness, because we are justified by faith. So the Sabbath means pre-eminently justification by faith.** Although there are many believers in Christ who observe Sunday, thinking it to be the Sabbath, it is nevertheless a fact that **Sunday-keeping stands as a sign of attempted justification by works.** It is the attempt of man to do the work which only God can do, namely, sanctify a day; for God never sanctified any day except the seventh day, so that all the sanctity Sunday has is what man has put upon it. He who can sanctify one thing can sanctify anything, because he must have the sanctifying power in himself. **So the idea that man can make any day holy, involves the idea that he can make himself holy, that is, justify himself by his own works; its principle is that man has holiness in himself. Sunday-keeping is therefore the sign of the man of sin who "exalts himself against God."**

The Sabbath is rest; that is the meaning of the word. **The word "Sabbath" is the untranslated Hebrew word for "rest."** It would be well if it had been translated into our language, instead of transferred. The word "Sabbath" conveys to the Hebrew mind exactly what the English word "rest" does to ours. So we may read: "Remember the Rest day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Rest of the Lord your God." How can anybody call this a burden? Rest is not a burden; to cease from labor is not wearisome; **rest, absolute, perfect rest, the rest that cannot be disturbed by anything on earth, is the sum of all blessings.** He who knows the Sabbath indeed can never count it a burden to keep it. Such an one will never say: "I could not make a living if I should keep the Sabbath," because the Sabbath

reveals God, in whom "we live, and move, and have our being." It reveals Him who delivers from the power of darkness, and the curse and burdens and perplexities of this present evil world, and translates us into the kingdom of His dear Son, making known to us the power and the joy of the world to come. Then remember it, and keep it, that you may know the sweetness of rest in the bosom of the Father, and delight yourself in the Lord.

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