

How to Keep from Breaking the Sabbath

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The church has discussed through the ages which day is the Sabbath and how to keep it holy. For a Christian, is Saturday really the Sabbath, or is it Sunday? What constitutes work on the Sabbath also invites definition. However, maybe this kind of analysis misses the point. Look at the argument from the book of Hebrews, where the writer says that Joshua did not give the people rest, meaning that Christ, as the Joshua of the New Covenant, must give us rest. The writer warns against failing to enter into this rest.

The implications of the Old Testament Joshua's inability to give the people rest does not mean that he failed in his assigned mission. God meant that Joshua lead Israel in battle, conquer a land, govern according to the Law of Moses, and that the people experience prosperity and peace with a specific land and theocratic constitution. Even today, God may assign a Gospel people a land and just and merciful laws, all with a view to their prosperity, peace, and opportunity. None of these, however, brings rest to the soul; for land, laws, and prosperity do not wash away sin or give the rest of the Holy Spirit or guarantee an understanding of Christ in us.

The rest indicated by the writer of Hebrews is a rest in the Spirit whereby we do not look to human work, the work of man's hands, for the source of rest, but we look to the Spirit of rest. The argument is simple: God finished His work of creating the world, according to

Genesis, and He ceased from that work, because He completed it. All that remained was to enjoy it. In the same way, God completed the work of His new creation when Christ rose from the dead, after his death and burial. Nothing remained to do except that we enter into that rest from our own works of trying to be righteous.

In both instances—the physical creation in Genesis and the work of salvation for mankind—God was the sole worker, with the view that man simply enjoy God’s work and worship Him only. We did not take part in creating the physical world, and we do not take part in creating the spiritual world of salvation—the work necessitated by man’s fall. To see this means that we ask ourselves, “What are we doing?” If God is the only legitimate worker, why are we working? Also, if He worked, but finished His work, why are we not ceasing from our works? The reason for not ceasing brings us to the meaning of sin: sin means trying to do what only God can do and what God has already done.

Most Christians know better than to work for their entrance into heaven. They know that the blood of Christ alone forgives sin and that justification by faith means that we receive Christ’s righteousness as a free gift simply by faith. Yet the deception often carries over that we must try to be like Christ. The book of Galatians challenges the reader on this point, for it makes plain that we begin in the Spirit, continue in the Spirit, and finish in the Spirit. Never do human works enter in as the way to live. The only works of value are those of the Spirit in us as we walk by faith. This is too easy. What—we don’t work? Already, some are rushing to the book of James to underscore that faith without works is dead. Yes, but do you also know that works without faith,

meaning works not produced by the Spirit, are no more than dead, human works, no matter how good they look. Worse than that, they have bewitching as their source and are set on fire from hell.

The context of Hebrews tells us that the recipients of the letter experienced pressure to return to works as a way into heaven and as the way to live. Works means a return to law and the self's efforts to keep the law. This means a retreat from Christ because if we can keep the law, then Christ died for no reason.

A retreat from Christ means a return to what the self thinks it can do to improve itself and work for God. Faith is then not needed, for human toil becomes the measure of good. This is not rest. We even sense this when we work under such deception. So the writer chides us to stop working. This sounds dangerous; what will we do? We fear the emptiness of nothing and the prospect that we might stop working only to find that we're a number of assignments behind and should have kept at our task.

The writer of Hebrews is not cold-hearted; he says that Christ sympathizes with our weaknesses when we are faced with temptation, since He too was tempted. He means us to live from rest in what He has done and is doing by the Spirit in us and not by what we are tempted to do when we do not think that things are going the way they should. Jesus Himself looked worse and more incongruous to His world than we realize. His approach to life—union with His Father—whereby He waited upon His Father and only did the works His Father did in Him—threw the world into a mad rage. So Jesus perfectly understands our discomfort and suffering when we do not conform to

the militant expectations of works according to law.

That is why the writer mentions the exhortation to enter into Christ's priesthood, the priesthood of Melchizedek, which is not based on law-keeping, but on the New Covenant, whereby we recognize by faith that God has written the law upon our hearts. God promised the day of this New Covenant through Jeremiah, and through Christ, has brought this about for those in whom Christ lives. This means that like Moses, we experience the glory of God face to face. Moses enjoyed this kind of fellowship up on the mountain, while those under law fearfully only saw the quaking and consuming fire. Yet Moses experienced glory and light. Clearly, the Lord did not deal with Moses the way that He dealt with His people still consigned under the Law. So Moses is our picture of the new man in glory.

This all has great meaning for the Sabbath, for the Sabbath rest in Hebrews is the rest of ceasing to live as if we can do any work of our own. Rest means that Christ does all the work. That's the death of us, but the rebirth of us as well. When I got too tired to try anymore, I knew that life, to continue, would require continual miracle. I was ready for someone else to live my life. Oddly, when I came to that, I popped back into view as a self I had never seen or known before. Life had formerly meant trying to be like a self that I pictured in my mind as the self I thought that I should be. But this picture was a lie and satanic in origin. Trying to be like this presupposed-self also took enormous work and led to exhaustion. Satan is behind all this, authoring the lie and producing the dead works.

When Christ does all the work, we discover our real selves, the

new creation. We suffer and labor in faith, but we do not work works that we try to produce ourselves (really, satanic in origin). We experience death; but this death is not works. Also, it leads to a continual stream of resurrection in us. The new self is the miracle-self. The new self does not try to create either physically or spiritually but waits on the Lord to see how He will create in us. We do nothing but believe. Failure now can only mean a reversion to Romans 7 trying, and soon, that tedium of works comes back. When God does the living, we experience outer discomfort, but underneath we know our rest.

The Sabbath therefore, is all the time. Oddly, many go to church and still do their own works, so although they observe a certain day and set it aside to worship, they, unknown to themselves, still break the Sabbath because they still see themselves as working to be like Christ. Those who do not work in this way, but live from Christ Himself by faith, enjoy the Sabbath rest seven days a week.