

Should Christians Keep The Sabbath?

Introduction

1. There could not be a clearer answer on the question of the Sabbath as a religious requirement than that given by the apostle Paul, yet many today continue to keep the Sabbath as a religious observance (Colossians 2:16-17)?
 - a. Though Bible versions differ on their translation of the Greek, there can be no question as to the conclusion that the keeping of the Sabbath is no longer a religious requirement.
 - b. “Obviously, ‘judge’ in a negative sense, i.e. to condemn, to take one to task, sit in judgment upon one” (MDC).
2. Sabbath day keepers, however, will dispute this conclusion and interpretation of Paul’s statement; here are some quotes from a few prominent Bible scholars:
 - a. “But the use of the term in the plural number, and the connection, show that he had his eye on the great number of days which were observed by the Hebrews as festivals, as a part of their ceremonial and typical law, and not to the moral law, or the Ten Commandments. No part of the moral law - no one of the Ten Commandments could be spoken of as “a shadow of good things to come.” These commandments are, from the nature of moral law, of perpetual and universal obligation” (Barnes).
 - b. “SABBATHS, (not ‘the Sabbaths’) of the Day of Atonement and feast of tabernacles have come to an end with the Jewish services to which they belonged. The weekly sabbath rests on a more permanent foundation, having been instituted in Paradise to commemorate the completion of creation in six days” (JFB).
 - c. “There is no intimation here that the Sabbath was done away, or that its moral use was superseded, by the introduction of Christianity. I have shown elsewhere that, Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, is a command of perpetual obligation, and can never be superseded but by the final termination of time” (Clarke).
3. Three assumptions can be drawn from these quotes: (a) that the Sabbath was instituted at Creation, (b) that it was a universal obligation and, (c) that it is a perpetual obligation. Are these true?

I. Israel’s Introduction to the Sabbath (Exodus 16)

- A. Those that advocate keeping the Sabbath often turn to the creation account as proof of its institution as a universal obligation (Genesis 2:3). However, it is not until the account of Israel’s time in the wilderness that we first read of it being observed (vs.2-6, 13, 22-30).
 1. This first observance of the Sabbath day as a holy day involves Israel being introduced to the concept rather their familiarity with the practice, in spite of being descendants of Abraham (Genesis 18:19).
 2. The prophet Nehemiah recounts not just the time of the Sabbath’s institution but also the fact it previously it had been unknown and hitherto not practiced (Nehemiah 9:14).

II. The Holy Day of the Sabbath Becomes Part of Mosaic Law (Exodus 20:8-10)

- A. Following its trial run, the Sabbath as holy day was incorporated into Law that was given on Mount Sinai forming the basis of a covenant God made with Israel and no other nation (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:2-3, 12; Psalm 147:19-20).
 1. The fact that Sabbath keeping as a religious obligation is described as a sign between God and Israel is further proof that it was never a “universal obligation” (Exodus 31:12-18; Ezekiel 20:10-12).
 2. The Gentile nations were never upbraided for their violation of God’s covenant with Israel and certainly not for breaking the Sabbath (Psalm 14:2-2; Rom.3:19-20).
 3. Therefore, there can be no doubt that the Mosaic Law, including keeping the Sabbath, was the sole responsibility of physical Israel; not a “universal obligation” (Romans 2:17-21; 3:1-2).

III. The Abolition of the Law of Moses, including the Sabbath (1 Corinthians 9:20)

- A. The fact that God intended to abolish the Law of Moses and would make a new and different covenant was prophesied during the time of the Old Covenant and fulfilled at Christ’s death on the cross (Jeremiah 31:31-34 cp. Hebrews 8:6-13).
 1. The inspired writers of the New Testament describe the abolition of the Mosaic Law as a total dismantling of its parts (Ephesians 2:15-16; Colossians 2:14).
 2. The believing Jews, let alone Gentile Christians, were, as a result, free from “all things” contained in the Mosaic Law (Acts 13:38-39).
 3. Freedom from the Mosaic Law extends to the Ten Commandments as they originally existed in the Law of Moses (Romans 7:6-7 cp. Ephesians 3-5; Colossians 3:5).

Conclusion

1. We have shown that (a) the weekly observance of the Sabbath was not instituted at creation, but in the giving of the Law of Moses (b), as such, it was not a universal obligation and (c) that it was never intended as a perpetual obligation.
2. So what does Genesis 2:3 mean if it does not mean that the Sabbath as a religious observance was not instituted on the day rested from His creative activities?
 - a. “Which shows, that this refers not to the same time when God blessed and hallowed the seventh day, which was done in the times of Moses, but to what had been long before, and was then given as a reason enforcing it; for it is not here said, as in the preceding verse, ‘he rested’, but ‘had rested’, even from the foundation of the world, when his works were finished” (Gill).
 - b. “The fact is, Moses wrote the Genesis account *after* the sabbath law was in place. When he recorded the narrative regarding God’s rest on the seventh day, therefore, he simply included the later information regarding its sanctification for the Hebrew nation. This reflects a common figure of speech known as prolepsis, i.e., the combining of two events due to their thematic relationship, though separated by time” (Wayne Jackson).