

Christ and His Law

Christ and the Sabbath

Lesson #5 for May 3, 2014

Scriptures: Genesis 2:1-3; Hebrews 1:1-3; Acts 13:14; Mark 2:23-25; John 5:1-9; Isaiah 65:17.

1. In this lesson we will discuss how Christ kept the Sabbath and the things He did to directly challenge Jewish misinterpretations about the Sabbath.
2. Why do so many Christian churches observe Sunday instead of Saturday as their day of worship? Many languages including French and Spanish clearly identify Saturday as the Sabbath. A careful study of Scripture will make it clear that the Sabbath was given to us at creation, reinforced at the time of the exodus, and promoted by the prophets of the Old Testament. It was clearly observed by Jesus throughout His life and observed by the apostles after His death.
3. It was hundreds of years later at the time when the Christian church became the official church of the Roman Empire that Sunday became the official day of worship. Isaiah 65 and 66 are clearly talking about the new earth. Isaiah 66:23 tells us that in the earth made new, we will again worship on the Sabbath. What possible reason could there be for saying that in the years between the apostles and the second coming, we should worship on Sunday instead?
4. Read Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15. By comparing these two passages, many of our Christian friends suggest that the Sabbath was intended only for the Jews. Were Adam and Eve Jews? They were given the Sabbath back in the Garden of Eden. From reading Exodus 20:8-11, shouldn't it be clear that God originally gave the Sabbath to commemorate creation? In Deuteronomy 5:12-15, He associated the Sabbath also with the escape from Egypt; and thus, in a metaphorical sense, He associated it with salvation and restoration.
5. In all of Scripture, there are no passages suggesting that we should worship on Sunday. By contrast, the Sabbath was "blessed" and "made holy" as a time for us to celebrate both our creation and our redemption. Why do Sabbathkeepers get a special blessing? Or, do they?
6. Christians who believe in the Bible believe that Jesus is the Creator of the entire universe. (Hebrews 1:1-3; Colossians 1:13-20; John 1:1-14) Seventh-day Adventists also believe that at the third coming—as spelled out in Revelation 21 and 22—He will make all things new including a new heaven and a new earth. If we do not believe that Jesus was the Creator of the first heaven and the first earth, what evidence could we have that He has the ability to re-create it? He has given us the Sabbath as a full day, 24-hours, to celebrate these two monumental events in this earth's history. By celebrating the Sabbath, we are affirming that creation occurred in seven 24-hour days.
7. We should not forget that when He came to this earth and was crucified on Passover Friday, Jesus rested over the Sabbath to add further meaning to it. Thus, God has connected the Sabbath with each of the most important events in human history.
8. Colossians 1:16-17 suggests that Jesus also created the "invisible" things. Would that not include the seventh-day Sabbath? If Jesus really intended for us to worship on Sunday instead of Saturday, He could have told us so very, very easily by just announcing it during His ministry. He never did.
9. When Genesis tells us that God rested on the Sabbath, does that suggest that He was sleeping? Not at all! The Hebrew word used for *rest* implies "cessation," "stopping," or "pausing." God took time out from His constant activity to celebrate what He had accomplished. Isn't that clear enough evidence that we should take a break from our daily activities and celebrate with Him on the Sabbath?
10. According to Jewish teachings, any village that was large enough to have 10 Jewish males (Such a grouping was known as a *minyan*.) needed to build a synagogue where they could worship together.
11. What do we know about the habits of the early Christians relative to the Sabbath? Read Acts

13:14,42,44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4; and Hebrews 4:9. Paul and Luke wrote most of the New Testament. Thus, the history we have of early church activities in the book of Acts which was written by Luke describes primarily Paul's activities when they were together. Many years after the crucifixion of Christ and God's appointment of the Christian church as His primary agency to reach out to the world in A.D. 34, Paul as one of the apostles was faithfully keeping the Sabbath just as Jesus had done during His time on earth. (Luke 4:16)

12. Read Mark 2:27-28 and Isaiah 58:13-14. What is implied by these two passages? The Sabbath is supposed to be a delightful time of fellowship with family, Christian friends, and especially God. It was never supposed to be a burden or a yoke. Of course, in all these activities, the Sabbath was to be kept holy.
13. When the Jewish religious leaders read the fourth commandment, they decided that there was a problem. In His preexistent state, Jesus had not spelled out in detail what work was included as being forbidden on the Sabbath. So, they developed a list of 39 types of work that were forbidden. Those 39 types of work later expanded to include 613 specific Sabbath commands. Look specifically at the 39 types of work which were forbidden.

The main classes of work are 40, save 1. sowing, plowing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, cleansing crops, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking, sheering wool, washing, or beating, or dyeing the wool, spinning, weaving, making two loops, weaving two threads, separating two threads, tying a knot, loosening a knot, sewing two stitches, tearing in order to sew two stitches, hunting a gazelle, slaughtering, or flaying, or salting it or curing it's skin, scraping it or cutting it up, writing two letters, erasing in order to write two letters, building, pulling down, putting out a fire, lighting a fire, striking with a hammer, or taking out ought from one domain into another. These are the main classes of work, forty save one.—*Mishnah*, Oxford University Press.

In the footnote it says, "These thirty-nine acts of work are treated in various degrees of detail in chapters eleven and following."

14. Read Mark 2:23-28. Which types of work were the disciples doing that they were forbidden to do on the Sabbath? They were reaping, threshing, winnowing, and cleansing crops. But, a careful study of the original rules spelled out in the writings of Moses made it very clear that what they were doing was permitted. (See Deuteronomy 23:25 and Exodus 34:21.)
15. The Sabbath was not to be made an object of worship. Instead, it is an opportunity for worship. So, what things can you do? What do you do on the Sabbath that you cannot easily do on other days of the week? The Sabbath should provide us an opportunity for going to Sabbath school and church, an opportunity to celebrate with family and friends, to do missionary work, to take extra time to study the Bible and pray either alone or with friends, to visit the sick, etc.
16. When God rested on that very first Sabbath, Adam and Eve were guests at the service! It was their second day. What kind of celebrations do you think took place in the Garden of Eden on that day? But, when sin entered our world, God's creation was corrupted. The perfect human bodies that God had created became subject to sickness, deterioration, and finally, death. We often suggest that death is a natural part of life. That may be true in our sin-polluted world; but, it was never the original plan of God.
17. Read Mark 3:1-6; Luke 13:10-17; and John 5:1-9; 9:1-14. In each of these cases, Jesus did specific things on the Sabbath. And in each case, He also came into conflict with the Jewish leaders—in particular, the scribes and Pharisees. Were there any things that Jesus did in performing those miracles that were against any of the original rules about the Sabbath? Jesus was doing good; He was healing. He was releasing people from their burdens; but unfortunately, He was also intentionally breaking Jewish ceremonial rules which had no place in God's plan. Jewish law permitted the dealing with medical emergencies on the Sabbath. But, none of those healings performed by Jesus was in any way an emergency. Some of them had been lifelong!
18. Jesus intentionally performed those miracles to raise questions about who had authority to say

what should be done on the Sabbath. Jesus knew where those Sabbath restrictions had come from. He was breaking their Sabbath rules on purpose.

But the plans which these rabbis were working so zealously to fulfill originated in another council than that of the Sanhedrin. After Satan had failed to overcome Christ in the wilderness, he combined his forces to oppose Him in His ministry, and if possible to thwart His work. What he could not accomplish by direct, personal effort, he determined to effect by strategy. No sooner had he withdrawn from the conflict in the wilderness than in council with his confederate angels he matured his plans for still further blinding the minds of the Jewish people, that [206] they might not recognize their Redeemer. **He planned to work through his human agencies in the religious world, by imbuing them with his own enmity against the champion of truth. He would lead them to reject Christ and to make His life as bitter as possible, hoping to discourage Him in His mission.** And the leaders in Israel became instruments of Satan in warring against the Saviour. (DA 205.2) [Bold is supplied.]

19. In light of this fact, Jesus had a specific purpose in mind.

He had come to free the Sabbath from those burdensome requirements that had made it a curse instead of a blessing. (DA 206.1)

For this reason He had chosen the Sabbath upon which to perform the act of healing at Bethesda. He could have healed the sick man as well on any other day of the week; or He might simply have cured him, without bidding him bear away his bed. But this would not have given Him the opportunity He desired. A wise purpose underlay every act of Christ's life on earth. Everything He did was important in itself and in its teaching. Among the afflicted ones at the pool He selected the worst case upon whom to exercise His healing power, and bade the man carry his bed through the city in order to publish the great work that had been wrought upon him. This would raise the question of what it was lawful to do on the Sabbath, and would open the way for Him to denounce the restrictions of the Jews in regard to the Lord's day, and to declare their traditions void. (DA 206.2)

20. In our day, is it easy to distinguish between God's rules and man's additions?

21. In the healing of the man at the Pool of Bethzatha/Bethesda, Jesus was accomplishing something else as well. There was no valid reason whatsoever for the man to be there at the Pool of Bethzatha/Bethesda. Certainly, our intelligent, wise, and fair God would not send an angel down from time to time to stir the waters of that pool so that there could be some kind of race to get in first! That was nothing more than a pagan tradition. John 5:4 which tells about the angel stirring the waters is not in the oldest manuscripts. It was added later to explain why many people with diseases were at the pool.

22. If we worship on the Sabbath to recognize God's creative and re-creative abilities, we are also recognizing His power to make us new. The work of the Holy Spirit on the human mind and heart is a creative work. All God asks is that we give Him an opportunity to do that work. What choices are we making on a day-by-day basis that gives the Holy Spirit that opportunity?

23. Review John 9 again. What Jewish rules did Jesus break by spitting on the ground, mixing mud or clay, placing it on the man's eyes, and sending him to the Pool of Siloam to be healed? It was against their rules to mix clay on the Sabbath. It was also against their rules to place a medication above the shoulders on the Sabbath. It was believed anciently that spittle had some healing properties. Of course, we know that Jesus had healed blind men on a number of other occasions without any "medicinal aids." So, why did He prepare that spittle/clay mixture on this occasion? It was specifically to challenge their man-made rules.

The preparation of the clay doubtless came within the restrictions of rabbinical laws with regard to the Sabbath. Kneading was specifically forbidden (see *Mishnah* Shabbath 7.2, Soncino ed. of the *Talmud*, p. 349). For example, men

were permitted to pour water on bran in preparation as feed for animals, but they were not permitted to “mix it” (*Mishnah Shabbath* 24.3, Soncino ed. of the *Talmud*, p. 794)—Nichol, F. D. (Ed.). (1980). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Vol. 5, p. 998). Review and Herald Publishing Association.

24. Thus, it was permitted to feed one’s animals but not to heal a human being on Sabbath!
25. As we know from Luke 4:16, Jesus was accustomed to attending the synagogue at Nazareth on the Sabbath. *Desire of Ages* 74.2 suggests that He had often been asked to read the Scriptures there. But, on one particular Sabbath during His ministry when He went to Nazareth, He was asked to read the passage for that Sabbath. He read from Isaiah 61:1-2. But, He did two very unusual things on that occasion. First, He left off the final phrase of Isaiah 61:2, “When the Lord will save His people and defeat their enemies.” That was their favorite part of the passage.
26. But, Jesus did more than that. Read Luke 4:16-21. He went on to say: “This passage of Scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read.” (Luke 4:21, *GNB*) By that statement, Jesus declared Himself the Messiah. This so angered His friends at Nazareth that they wanted to kill Him. They were especially offended by the idea which Jesus stated that God would bless people outside of the Israelite nation—as witnessed by the stories of the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian—instead of blessing the Jews exclusively. (Luke 4:25-27)
27. Try to place yourself in that synagogue on that Sabbath. Suppose you were living in Nazareth, and Someone living nearby stood up and declared Himself to be the Messiah. How would you respond?
28. So, what was the purpose of Jesus in each of those Sabbath conflicts?

Jesus’ insistence on healing on the Sabbath is best understood when we see the Sabbath not as the prized possession of the Jews but as God’s signature statement. In effect, Jesus is delivering on the original commitment invested in the seventh day at Creation.—Tonstad, Sigve, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2009), p. 183.

29. Jesus was laying down certain absolutely essential truths regarding His self-identity, His mission, and His theology. He followed up His teachings with clear actions. When such an important issue was at stake, He was not afraid even to face the Sanhedrin.
30. Read John 5:17. At the end of His defense regarding the healing of the paralytic at the pool, Jesus said: “My Father is always working, and I too must work.” (*GNB*) Unfortunately, we do not have Jesus’s original words in Aramaic. But, the Greek expression makes it very clear that Jesus was placing Himself on a level equal with the Father! No wonder we have the response that we find in John 5:18.

This saying made the Jewish authorities all the more determined to kill him; not only had he broken the Sabbath law, but he had said that God was his own Father and in this way had made himself equal with God. (*GNB*)

31. So, what difference do all these things make in our keeping of the Sabbath? Why do we go to church on Saturday? Do we learn things that are important at Sabbath school? What specific steps can we take to make the Sabbath as meaningful as possible for all with whom we associate, including our own families? We know that there are certain cultural norms about what is acceptable and what is not acceptable to do on Sabbath even in our day. Do we need to question some of those norms? If Jesus was here today, how would He observe the Sabbath? Should we be trying more carefully to follow His example?

© 2014, Kenneth Hart, MD, MA, MPH. Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution is encouraged. It is our goal to see them spread as widely and freely as possible. If you would like to use them for your class or even make copies of portions of them, feel free to do so. We always enjoy hearing about how you might be using the materials, and we might even want to share good ideas with others. So, let us know. Info@theox.org

Last Modified: March 2, 2014

C:\Users\Gordon\Documents\ZZZ-KHart Docs\2014-Q2-SS-Christ&Law\2014-SS-Christ&Law-5\SS-5-Christ&Law-2014_05_03-Fin+.wpd