Lesson 15 - Entering God's Rest



The universal sin problem has inflicted mankind with guilt and shame, causing much distress and restlessness. It is for this reason Christ gave this invitation to the discouraged Jews of His day: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). This invitation is offered today to everyone through the gospel message.

Since the Fall that divine rest which Christ offers to sinful humanity has been linked with the Sabbath rest (see Exodus 31:13-16; Deuteronomy 5:15). That is why every feast day of the Old Testament that pointed to the coming Messiah and His work of redemption was designated as a day of sabbath rest. The Sabbath was also included in the Ten Commandments as part of the covenant God made with Israel.

Unfortunately, many Christians limit this Sabbath commandment to only the Old Covenant. However, Scripture does not support such a view. Since the Sabbath has a redemptive significance it is vitally linked with the New Covenant. As we saw in our study of the two covenants, the difference between the Old and the New Covenants is that the former offered salvation on the basis of man's obedience to the law, while the latter offered it based on God's promise to redeem mankind through the obedience of Christ.

The New Covenant does not do away with the law, as some teach, but writes it in our hearts (see Hebrews 8:7-10). In this study we will examine what the Bible teaches regarding the Sabbath rest as part of the New Covenant of salvation by grace alone in the redemption that is ours in Christ.

1. According to the moral law to whom does the Sabbath belong? Exodus 20:10

All through the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, we find the Sabbath belongs to God and not man, not even to the Jews. Yes, it was made for man but it does not belong to him. That is why Israel was instructed by God: “Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep…” (Exodus 31:13).

2. According to the prophet Isaiah, whose holy day is the Sabbath? Isaiah 58:13

3. In whom are we delighting when we keep the Sabbath holy? Isaiah 58:14

Keeping the Sabbath holy neither saves anyone nor contributes toward one’s salvation. This is the mistake Israel made. But it is a sign that we have entered God's rest and are delighting in the salvation He gives us in Christ.

4. Why did God rest on the seventh day of creation and sanctify it? Genesis 1:31; 2:1-3

There are two reasons why God rested on the seventh day of creation. The first was because “everything that He had made… was very good,” that is, perfect. (Genesis 1:31). The second was because “the heavens and the earth…were finished” (Genesis 2:1). The Sabbath was therefore initially set aside (sanctified) as a memorial of God’s perfect and finished work of creation.

5. For whom did Jesus say the Sabbath was made? Mark 2:27

Please note, Jesus did not say that the Sabbath was made for the Jews but rather “for man,” that is, mankind. It was at creation that the Sabbath was set aside (sanctified) for man. It was given a universal application from the day mankind was created in Adam.

6. On which day of the week were Adam and Eve created? Genesis 1:27, 31

Adam and Eve were created at the end of the sixth day. This means that God's Sabbath was really their first whole day. Therefore, while the Sabbath is God's seventh day it is mankind’s

first day. Consequently, when we look at the Sabbath from God's point of view, He worked for six days and rested on the seventh. But when we consider the Sabbath from man's point of view, we begin by resting on God's Sabbath and then work the other six days. This order becomes significant when we consider the Sabbath in the light of redemption.

7. What did God give mankind after He created us in Adam? Genesis 1:28

God created man to have dominion over all of creation even though our first parents did not contribute to it. The Sabbath was therefore to be a covenant sign that man was always to be Goddependent. When we live independently of God, we are breaking the Sabbath covenant.

Who needs God, anyway?

8. How was Adam to make a living after he sinned? Genesis 3:19

When Adam and Eve sinned they turned their backs on God and became self-dependent. That is why after the Fall God said that they would eat bread by the sweat of their brow. At the Fall the Sabbath covenant was broken, since our first parents were no longer God-dependent.

9. According to the apostle John, who actually created our world? John 1:3

Jesus is the Word by whom God created all things. He was the spokesman for the Godhead at creation. That is why He could claim to be the Lord of the Sabbath (see Mark 2:28).

10. What was the Word made in order to save fallen mankind? John 1:14

At the Incarnation Jesus, the one who created this world, became one of us in order to be the Savior of mankind. By His perfect life and sacrificial death He redeemed the human race and restored the Sabbath rest.

11. Why did God command the Jews of the Exodus to keep His Sabbath? Deuteronomy 5:15

According to 1 Corinthians 10:1-11, the Exodus is a type of salvation from our bondage to sin. By commanding the Jews of the Exodus to keep His Sabbath, God gave the Sabbath a redemptive significance. This is how we must consider the Sabbath under the New Covenant.

12. Why did many of the Jews delivered from Egypt not enter Canaan? Hebrews 3:19

Unbelief is deliberately turning one's back on God. Sad to say, in spite of all the miraculous evidence God gave the Jews of the Exodus, the majority of the Jews who left Egypt turned their backs on God in unbelief. Their history is recorded as a warning to us (see 1 Corinthians 10:11).

13. With what is God's rest linked in the book of Hebrews? Hebrews 4:1, 2

Entering God's rest is linked with believing the gospel. This is because Jesus, who is Lord of the Sabbath, is also the source of our redemption. As Adam and Eve entered God's rest at creation, so also we must by faith enter the gospel rest obtained for us in Christ's perfect redemption.

14. To what is this gospel rest compared? Hebrews 4:4

Just as Jesus created a perfect and finished world by the end of the sixth day and rested on the seventh, likewise, He finished our redemption on the sixth day (Friday) and rested in the tomb on the Sabbath (Saturday). Thus, the Sabbath rest was restored through the gospel and given a redemptive significance.

15. According to the Book of Hebrews, what still remains for God's people? Hebrews 4:9

The Greek word "rest" in this text is "Sabbatismos," a keeping of the Sabbath. The epistle to the Hebrews was written to first century Jews. Therefore, the phrase "the people of God" refers to the Jewish nation. Although these Jews were keeping the seventhday Sabbath, in God's eyes this was meaningless as long as they rejected Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath.

16. What should we cease from when we enter God's rest? Hebrews 4:10

When we by faith enter God's rest and depend entirely on Christ's perfect and finished redemption for our salvation, we will cease trying to add our own works of the law toward that salvation (see Galatians 5:4). The keeping of the Sabbath as a day of rest is to remind us that righteousness is by faith alone.

17. What did Jesus cry out on the cross just before He died? John 19:30

When the crucified Jesus cried out "It is finished", He was proclaiming to the world that His saving mission had at last been completed. This took place at the end of the sixth day (Friday). The next day, the Sabbath, He rested in the tomb from all His work, just as He did at the end of creation week.

18. What day of the week will be kept in the earth made new? Isaiah 66:22, 23

The Sabbath was given to man before the Fall. It was a sign that man would be God-dependent. The Sabbath still testifies to the fact that God is our Creator. However, since the Fall, the Sabbath has a redemptive significance (see Question 11).

In the new earth, man will always be God-dependent. Entering God's rest means entering into what God has done for us.

19. Why did God command the Jews of the Exodus to keep His Sabbath? Exodus 31:13

After the Fall, the Sabbath was given a redemptive significance. It was made a covenant sign that God would step into our shoes in the person of Christ and make us holy and blameless in Him (see Ephesians 1:4). Therefore, all who enter God's rest, of which the Sabbath is a sign (not as a means of salvation but as their confession of faith in Christ), are guaranteed the salvation which Christ has obtained for everyone at the cross (see Hebrews 10:14).

My Response to Lesson 15

• The seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday) belongs to God. It represents His rest from a perfect and complete work of creation, redemption, and soon to be realized restoration. Is it your desire to keep God's Sabbath as a confession of faith that you have entered His rest?

Response: _____

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