

Some Phases of the Sabbath Question

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Is it not, according to the New Testament Scriptures, a fact that our Lord was in the tomb all the Jewish Sabbath? He had fulfilled every jot and tittle of the law, and by this He closed the old dispensation; and by rising on the first day of the week introduces a new dispensation, namely a reign of grace, and not law. “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” *Romans 10:4*.

THIS question contains several common misapprehensions, which need to be considered in detail. We first note the reference to...

The Jewish Sabbath

This is a term found not once in the entire Bible. The seventh day of the week, nowadays commonly called Saturday, which the Jews kept, and to some extent still keep, is declared to be...

Exodus 20

¹⁰ ...the Sabbath of the Lord your God.

In the days when the Easter controversy was raging, the Emperor Constantine, who was a famous theological tinker, said:

“Let us have nothing in common with the contemptible Jewish rabble,”

—and so the festival was transferred from the time of the Passover, which might be any day of the week, to Sunday. From that time, and even before, there has everywhere been a bitter prejudice against the Jews, which has extended to everything that they have had to do with—except money. So the Sabbath of the Lord came to be called in contempt “the Jewish Sabbath,” the enemies of the truth well knowing that a contemptuous epithet will have more effect against a man or an institution than will a statement of fact.

If Christians would strictly confine themselves to Bible terms for Bible things, and would call the seventh day by its right name, “the Sabbath of the Lord,” or “the Lord’s day,” it would not be as easy for them to pass it by. Many who never give a second thought to what they have called “the Jewish Sabbath,” would feel very serious over trampling upon the Lord’s “holy day.”¹

The fact, however, that the Sabbath was kept by the Jews before any of the so called “Christian nations” were in existence, is nothing against it. Jesus himself said,

John 4

²² Salvation is of the Jews.

Jesus was a Jew, brought up after the manner of the Jews. The news of His birth was first made known to Jewish shepherds, and it was Jewish fishermen whom He first sent out to preach. The whole Bible, with the exception of two books of the New Testament (if it be a fact that Luke was a Greek), and possibly one of the Old, was written by Jews. Shall we call it “the Jewish Gospel,” “Jewish salvation,” “the Jewish Bible,” etc., and reject the whole thing?

Jesus Fulfilled the Law

The statement is that Jesus...

¹ *Isaiah* 58:13.

...had fulfilled every jot and tittle of the law.

Good. We believe it, because:

1 Peter 2

²² [He] did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth.

He said,

Psalm 40

⁸ I delight to do your will, O my God, Yea, your law is within my heart.

The common conclusion is that therefore we have nothing to do with the law. Let us see what that means:

- Jesus did a certain thing; therefore we must not do that thing.
- Jesus was baptized to “fulfill all righteousness”²; therefore we must not be baptized,

–and must be on our guard against doing any righteousness. The argument, in short, is,

“Avoid following the example of Jesus, as you would the pestilence.”

We wish everybody to see just what is involved in the argument that because Jesus kept the Sabbath and fulfilled every jot of the law, therefore we need not. All that it means is that we must not do as Jesus did. It may seem “absurd” to keep the Sabbath that Jesus kept; but this argument against it is a good deal worse than absurd.

He left us an example, that we...

1 Peter 2

²¹ ...should follow His steps.

² *Matthew 3:15.*

1 John 2

⁶ He that says He abides in Him ought himself also so to walk even as He walked.

Christ fulfilled the law,

Romans 8

⁴ That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

What propriety is there in people calling themselves Christians, and repudiating the ways of Christ?

Luke 6

⁴⁶ Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

A New Dispensation

The statement is that Christ by rising on the first day of the week...

...introduces a new dispensation—namely, a reign of grace.

We call attention, in passing, to the fact that our correspondent makes this statement as confidently as though it were a Scripture truth, as he no doubt thinks it is, without stopping to hunt for or quote the authority for it. It ought to be understood that in a matter of this kind, every statement that is made should have the fullest warrant of Scripture, and that warrant should be given; for a man's assertions count for nothing.

But now as to the matter of "dispensations." It would be well here, also, if people would confine themselves to Scripture terms. If they did, no such words as "old dispensation," or "new dispensation" would ever be seen or heard. The Greek word where we have "dispensation" occurs but seven times in the Bible, three of these being *Luke 16:2-4*, where it is rendered, as it should always be, "stewardship." The Apostle Paul says,

1 Corinthians 9

¹⁷ A dispensation of the Gospel is committed unto me.

The words “of the Gospel” are added by the translators, so that we have the exact rendering in the *Revision*,

“I have a stewardship entrusted to me.”

So has every man who has received the grace of God.³ But the common idea that there are various “dispensations,” in the sense that God deals with men differently during one period of time from what He does during another period, is utterly unscriptural, and most dishonoring to God. The terms, “patriarchal dispensation,” “Levitical dispensation,” “Christian dispensation,” are absolutely destitute of meaning.

Malachi 3

⁶ I am the Lord, I change not,

—says God. Jesus Christ is...

Hebrews 13

⁸ ...the same yesterday, and today, and for ever.

With God...

James 1

¹⁷ ...is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

All the people that have ever lived on the earth shall at the last day stand together before the Judgment seat; what a spectacle it would then be, if God should divide the multitude into sections, according to the age in which they lived, and judge one by one standard and another by another, so that one man would be condemned in a course that another would be justified in pursuing! Think you that every mouth would be stopped in such a case? Would there not be many complaints of unfairness and partiality? But this matter of dispensations will appear in still clearer light as

³ 1 Peter 4:10.

we consider the statement that the “new dispensation,” supposed to have begun at the resurrection of Christ, is...

A Reign of Grace—and Not Law

If this means anything, it means that before the resurrection of Christ there was no grace for mankind; but God lived before that time, and if there were no grace it was only because He was not gracious. Who dare say it in that way? Who dare bring such a charge against God?

When people lightly use terms coined by men, without thinking of their meaning, they often say things that they would not if they gave heed to their words. It is well to have these statements analyzed. We repeat: The statement that at the resurrection of Christ “a new dispensation—namely, a reign of grace,” began, is the same as saying that before that time there was no grace—that God was not gracious. Now let us see the facts in the case.

Hundreds of years before the resurrection, the psalmist wrote:

Psalm 84

¹¹ The Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory.

And again:

Psalm 86

⁵ For You, Lord, are good and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon You.

Solomon wrote that God...

Proverbs 3

³⁴ ...gives grace unto the lowly.

Again:

Psalm 111

⁴ The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion.

Nehemiah prayed to God, saying:

Nehemiah 9

¹⁷ You are a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness.

For this he had the warrant of God himself, who revealed himself to Moses by name as:

Exodus 34

⁶ The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth,

⁷ Keeping mercy for thousands, and forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.

Take particular notice that this was at the very time of the giving of the law. So the reign of grace was in progress then. Indeed, the case is even stronger, for we read that:

Romans 5

²⁰ ...the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

²¹ That as sin had reigned unto death even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

If there were any such thing as the *beginning* of the reign of God's grace, one might from the hasty reading of this text conclude that it began at the giving of the law on Sinai. But although grace reigned there, it did not begin even there; the giving of the law simply made the already existing grace to abound.

Galatians 3

²¹ Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid.

Moreover the grace was not limited. God said by Isaiah,

Isaiah 45

²² Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else.

God preached the Gospel unto Abraham, saying,

Galatians 3

⁸ In you shall all nations be blessed.

And this Gospel which was preached to Abraham was identical with the Gospel that Paul preached; for there is but one.⁴ The “blessing of Abraham” comes on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ⁵; and that blessing was the blessing of cleansing from sin.⁶

We see, therefore, that the reign of grace is not only compatible with Sabbath-keeping, but that the proclaiming of the law of the Sabbath even made grace to abound. God was just as good and kind and merciful in the days of Moses as He is today.

A Counter Charge

Now we wish especial attention to be given to this charge which we bring against the Sunday. Everybody knows that the statement that we “are not under the law, but under grace,”⁷ and that a change from law to grace began at the resurrection of Christ, is the great argument for Sunday observance. Nobody ever seeks to uphold Sunday observance without repeating it. Without this, Sunday-keeping would have no excuse for existence, for nobody is so foolish as to believe that it dates from before Christ.

But we have already shown that the statement that grace began at the resurrection of Christ, and effected a change in the law, is the same as to say that God was not gracious before that time, and that therefore there was no salvation, which is contrary to the Bible, and a libel on God’s character.

So then, the Sunday can exist as a supposedly “Christian institution” only by directly denying the unchangeability of God’s righteousness, and the grace of Christ the eternal Son of God; in short, by denying the Gospel.

We do not by any means say that Sunday observers intend to do this; far from it; but by the use of unscriptural terms which have no meaning, and of scriptural expressions without thinking

⁴ *Galatians* 1:6-8.

⁵ *Galatians* 3:13-14.

⁶ *Romans* 4:6-9.

⁷ *Romans* 6:14.

of their meaning, they unconsciously deny the very first principles of the Gospel.

Sunday is anti-Christian, and just to the extent that it is defended is the everlasting Gospel of God's grace denied.