

Convent Avenue Baptist Church
Wednesday Bible Study 6/16/10
Pastor Jesse Williams

The Articles of Faith; What we believe...

Article XV. The Christian Sabbath

Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11; Isaiah 58:13-14; Matthew 12:1-14; Mark 2:23-28
John 20:1, 19; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10-11

The Christian Sabbath is a doctrinal teaching of the church that has its' roots in an Old Testament concept that was established by God Himself. Like many of the church's teachings, when we look at it through the lens of Jesus Christ, we are able to see it and interpret it more clearly for our lives as Christians in the church of today. The word *Sabbath* literally means to *cease, stop or rest* in its original Hebrew form. So, when we read about the Sabbath in the Old Testament, our first exposure to it comes in Genesis 2 where the bible records that after finishing the work of creation in six days that God rested on the seventh day and declared it holy. One day out of every seven was to be a day of rest for human beings in which we commemorated God finishing the work of creating the physical world. While the Jewish Sabbath is traditionally celebrated on Saturday, the bible does not specifically name a day of the week. Rather it highlights that one day out of seven is to be set aside for Sabbath rest. God created the Sabbath for us, and has created us to need the Sabbath.

In general, the bible teaches that humans are supposed to rest on the Sabbath, cease their labor, and only perform deeds of necessity, mercy and worship. It was a day designed to replenish the mind, body and spirit within man. Jesus himself also observed the Sabbath, being a devout Jew; however by the time Jesus began His ministry on earth, Jewish religious teachers had devised and added more than 1500 rules of conduct designed to regulate the observance of the Sabbath. Therefore, the Sabbath eventually became more of a burden than a blessing. Jesus basically ignored these man-made rules, but always kept the fourth commandment as God intended it to be observed. Jesus taught that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. As is almost always the case whenever human beings add man-made rules onto God's law it usually ends up in a mess that deviates from what God wills and desires for us. So, Jesus declared that He was also Lord of the Sabbath. That means that we must understand Jesus and His mission and ministry to have a proper and complete understanding of what the Sabbath is supposed to be. Some of Jesus' most heated disagreements with the Pharisees and other religious leaders of His day were over what could or could not be done on the Sabbath.

In the New Testament, there is a distinct shift in the language of the bible that begins on the day of Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is clearly recorded in scripture that Jesus arose on the "*first day of the week*". Therefore, as opposed to the Jewish Sabbath, which is Saturday, Jesus was crucified on Friday but arose on Sunday. Even Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to the disciples happened on *the first day of the week*. When the new early Christian church would gather for worship it was on *the first day of the week*. Later in the language and culture of the Christian church, it began to be referred to as the "*Lord's Day*".

So, we see how the Christian Sabbath has its history in the Old Testament establishment of the Jewish Sabbath as it was created by God and articulated in the Ten Commandments. But we also see how Jesus Christ has re-interpreted the meaning of the Sabbath for all of humanity

and placed it in its proper perspective and meaning. Every Lord's day, Sunday, the first day of the week is a day that incorporates all of the principles of rest and commemoration that we get from the Old Testament, and also adds the principles of blessing, celebration, service, mercy and worship that Jesus shows us in the New Testament. So as Christians, our Sabbath is traditionally celebrated every Sunday because Jesus' life, death and resurrection have redefined the meaning of the term "*Lord's Day*" for us. Jesus is Lord and Sunday, the first day of the week is His day of Resurrection! The Jewish Sabbath in the Old Testament and the Christian Sabbath of the New Testament complement each other in some remarkable ways, among them are the following:

1) Creation & Redemption

In the Old Testament, the Sabbath represented God's completion of creation. Everything in the physical world and ultimately human beings were all created by God. The Sabbath was God's day to rest, observe and contemplate all that He had created. Likewise, the Christian Sabbath on Sunday represents God redeeming all of creation from the Fall and the effects of sin in the world. The resurrection of Jesus Christ on Sunday is the ultimate symbol of God's plan of redemption for humanity and all of creation. It is in fact like God is preserving, saving or re-creating all of His creation for His glory. As God rested from His creative work on the Old Testament Sabbath, He rests from His redemptive work at Calvary on the Christian Sabbath.

2) Rest & Contemplation/Service

The Old Testament Sabbath was one that encouraged rest from physical labor. The intent was to allow the body, mind and spirit to be replenished so that man could be effective in labor for the next six days. Rest is essential for human beings! God thought that rest was so important that He declared that the Sabbath was a holy day that we should observe every seven days. In the New Testament we see how we are not simply to rest physically, but that we should be using the time to meditate on God and consider God's presence in our lives and how He wants us to work. It should be a time where we contemplate how we can live better during the next week and glorify God even more in our lives. The rest that God designed for us on the Old Testament Sabbath gives us the sacred space in our lives on the Christian Sabbath to help us think about how we can be more like Jesus Christ in our daily lives; by showing mercy, love, justice and service to our fellow man. It is a time of personal meditation and devotion.

3) Recognition & Celebration/Worship

The Old Testament Sabbath was also a special way of recognizing God and acknowledging God as the One who has authority to order our daily lives. God's declaration of the Sabbath day as holy sets a certain tone for every day of the week. Likewise, the Christian Sabbath is the day that we go to church for the purpose of worship. In the act of worship we express to God how much we love Him and what He is "worth" to us. Every Sunday is a day of celebration when we gather to experience worship in the church. We are celebrating the reality that God is our God, that Jesus is our Lord, and that the Holy Spirit gives us power to be the church that God created us to be. We do it out of obedience and because of the joy that God gives us in our relationship to Him and each other.