

GENESIS 2:1-3 (A DAY OF REST)

This was found in a church bulletin: “Tonight’s sermon: ‘What is hell?’ Come early and listen to our choir practice.”

I’m not really sure if that’s what I want to do on my day of rest...

Speaking of our day of rest, let me read you a passage from Matthew. I wonder if any of you see the same fuzzy logic in these verses that I do – “Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” He said to them, “If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus. Matthew 12:9-14

So... we can’t heal on the Sabbath, but we can plot to kill someone on the Sabbath? Yeah, that makes sense... Unfortunately, this thinking fits most of us in one context or another. We all tend to get judgmental about this issue or that. And when it comes to denominational mindsets, the judgments get even wilder. At the top of the list is one of the most misunderstood and most argued concepts in Christianity – that of the Sabbath.

Four prevalent and many lesser views exist concerning the Sabbath – The seventh day Sabbath; the Puritan Sabbath; the Lutheran Sabbath; and the Fulfilled Sabbath. Only one is correct and therefore only one can be termed “biblical” for the Christian.

The problem with this is that the exact same verses used to defend a position are often applied by proponents of an opposing view to establish their doctrine. So resolving this dilemma isn’t something either easy or which will be agreed on by others. It’s simply not going to happen.

Having said that, I will tell you which view is the correct one and why. Just because people don't agree doesn't mean the issue can't be resolved.

Introduction: God created in six days and as we'll see in the upcoming verses, He rested on the seventh day. This set a pattern for the people of Israel to observe a Sabbath day as well, but the seventh day Sabbath wasn't only based on creation, it was also based on redemption, a point we'll define as we look into our own weekday life cycle and how we should handle it biblically.

As we look at these things, please know for certain that this isn't a minor issue for a number of reasons. What God ordains and why is naturally of immense significance and so we need to properly regard His word and His decisions.

Text Verse: 'It is a people who go astray in their hearts,
And they do not know My ways.'
So I swore in My wrath,
'They shall not enter My rest.'" Psalm 95:10-11

May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. God's Work

¹ Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished.

² And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.

³ Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

What's the reason you're here today? I can think of a few possible answers. Maybe you're here because you love the beach and also want to enjoy some fellowship with other Christians. Or you might possibly want to learn something about the Bible you'd never thought of. Some of you might say, I know I'm supposed to go to church on Sunday and this is the least

oppressive place to do it. Maybe you feel guilty because you know you're supposed to take a day off and spend it in some religious context.

Whatever the reason, because you're here you're not working. If nothing else, this is certain. That means this is your time off from work. In America, we generally get two days a week off and if someone demands a certain day for religious reasons, then they usually get that day if at all possible.

A lot of the rest of the world doesn't get two days off, but pretty much everywhere I've been, people get at least one day a week off from their job. Whether they use that day to relax or to work a second job is totally up to them, but most cultures and groups follow the one in seven pattern. It's as if it's built into us.

Is how we're spending our day off in line with the Bible and if so, how do we know? Seventh Day Adventists believe that the Saturday Sabbath that was given to the nation of Israel is binding even to this day. Here's what their statement of faith from the Adventist website says –

“The seventh day (Saturday) is an extra-special part of the relationship. The Bible, from Genesis through Revelation, describes the seventh day as the one day God has set aside for focused fellowship with His people.”

“The beneficent Creator, after the six days of Creation, rested on the seventh day and instituted the Sabbath for all people as a memorial of Creation. The fourth commandment of God's unchangeable law requires the observance of this seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest, worship, and ministry in harmony with the teaching and practice of Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a day of delightful communion with God and one another. It is a symbol of our redemption in Christ, a sign of our sanctification, a token of our allegiance, and a foretaste of our eternal future in God's kingdom. The Sabbath is God's perpetual sign of His eternal covenant between Him and His people. Joyful observance of this holy time from evening to evening, sunset to sunset, is a celebration of God's creative and redemptive acts.”

Is this correct? If so, then everyone here – who assumedly works from time to time on a Saturday, is going to hell. That’s what they teach and that’s what they believe. First, their statement which said “The Bible, from Genesis through Revelation, describes the seventh day as the one day God has set aside for focused fellowship with His people” is completely false. How someone could say this with a straight face is beyond belief.

They also said, “The fourth commandment of God's **unchangeable** law requires the observance of this seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest, worship, and ministry in harmony with the teaching and practice of Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath.”

This mindset comes from a confused theology about the work of Jesus Christ. It also comes from a misunderstanding about how God works.

Calling the seventh-day Sabbath one of God’s **unchangeable** laws relegates God to the law, not the law to God. Some things are a part of His very nature, such as moral issues. These would be unchangeable because they reflect His character. The Sabbath, in Jesus own words is not a part of His character –

And He said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.” Mark 2:27, 28

As you can see, God created the Sabbath for man; it is not a part of His nature and is therefore changeable. Anything done by God for man is something that is not, by necessity, eternal in nature. Before God created, time didn’t exist and therefore a seventh-day Sabbath didn’t exist. Once we understand this, then we can properly evaluate the purpose of the Sabbath and how it pertains to us in the context in which God purposes it.

What we need to do is to start first by reviewing the Sabbath law as given to Israel, the covenant people of God.

In Exodus, we read the fourth commandment –

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the LORD your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates. For *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

Exodus 20:8-11

The fourth commandment is repeated in Deuteronomy, but the reason for the Sabbath is actually different there –

... And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. Deuteronomy 5:12-15

If you notice the difference, the first reason given in Exodus at the time the people were brought to Mount Sinai was based on the creation account – “For *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day.”

The second reason given in Deuteronomy is based on the consummation of redemption and the promise of entering His rest – “And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm;....

Everything in the Old Testament is a picture of something greater coming in the Person of Jesus. He is the true Redeemer and He has provided the complete rest which could only come about with His **fulfilling** the Law given to the Israelites.

The Law was given to Israel alone. Until the coming of Christ, the Sabbath was a sign, like circumcision, of the covenant law received at Mount Sinai and agreed upon by the people of Israel.

Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: ‘Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it *is* a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that *you* may know that I *am* the LORD who sanctifies you. Exodus 31:13

This is mentioned three times in Scripture and is very specific. It was to be a sign between God and the Israelites as a part of the covenant law. So the question arises, “Are we as Christians under the Law of Moses or not?” The answer to this question is the defining mark as to whether we must adhere to its precepts or not.

Unfortunately and again, there are many interpretations from an “absolute yes” to a, “well, partially” to a “not at all.” The “absolute yes” people are the most confused of all because they stand on Sabbath and dietary laws, but they ignore the laws which tell them they have to go to Jerusalem three times a year, perform sacrifices, not wear clothes with two types of materials ... among 613 other laws, many of which are impossible to fulfill in today’s world.

The “well, partially” people attempt to make a distinction between the “ceremonial laws” and the “moral laws” found in the Law of Moses. In other words, the “ceremonial laws” are all the little things they don’t want to do, like wearing clothes of only one type of material, and the “moral laws” are the Big Ten that they’re afraid will crush them if they don’t follow them perfectly.

Unfortunately, these “well, partially/moral law” folks generally pick and choose some of the “ceremonial laws” as taboo too – like eating pork. This is confused thinking based on poor biblical interpretation.

The only sound option concerning the Law of Moses – meaning the entire law, including the Ten Commandments which are a part of that law, is that the law is not applicable to Christians today. There is no distinction made between ceremonial laws and moral laws in the Law of Moses. The reason the law isn’t applicable is because it’s what the Bible teaches. Three times in the book of Hebrews this is stated explicitly and it is implied numerous times –

Hebrews 7:18 and Hebrews 10:9 say the law is “set aside” by the work of Christ and the establishment of the New Covenant. In Hebrews 8:13 it is said to be “obsolete.”

When it says this, it’s referring to the entire body of law and no distinction is made between what is ceremonial and what is moral. What we couldn’t do in living out the law, Jesus did on our behalf.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. Matthew 5:17

II. He Sat Down

So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!” And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. John 19:30

Jesus finished the work His Father sent Him to do and with His last breath, he acknowledged this for an anxious world, lost in sin. After that, He gave up His spirit, having paid the penalty you and I owe and fulfilling the law that you and I could never meet.

When Jesus died the work was done
Perfect obedience performed by God’s own Son

The law complete, fulfilled by the Lord
And a new covenant was given in His blood

In His deeds we find our rest
By faith in them, the only test

Who can bring a charge against God’s elect
When it is Jesus who saves us by His grace
In the saved no sin can the devil detect
Nothing can move us from our place
Resting then in His work alone
On Sunday through Saturday, each day at peace
The glories of **His work** be known
So that from **our work**, we do cease

What is it we do when we finish a given task? In the case of Jesus, He sat down.

In the temple, there were all kinds of furniture. There was an altar to burn sacrifices, there was a laver for washing, there was a table with bread that needed to be changed out at regular intervals, there was a lamp which needed to be filled with oil, and there was an incense altar that needed fresh incense. There were all kinds of things that needed to be done morning and evening, day in and day out, all year long. The priest's work was never finished and so there was no chair in the temple.

When a priest reached retirement age, there was someone to replace him and the cycle continued on without any interruption. What happened in the temple was similar to that of an auto assembly line. Day in and day out cars are made and people work their lives putting out new cars.

No matter how many cars they make, there will always be a need for more. Old cars wear out, cars get in accidents, new people turn 16, and the cycle goes on. In the same way, new people were born in sin, sinners kept on sinning, the law kept on being broken, and so the work of the priests never ended.

Every Saturday, the people would rest in acknowledgment of God's creation and His redemption, but they never really entered God's rest as we'll see a bit later when we look at the 95th Psalm. The work went on and the need for something greater still lay ahead.

Suppose cars never broke down and everyone that had a car was happy with it. And suppose there were no more 16 year olds coming along in need of new cars. Eventually there would be a day when no more cars would be needed. The workers would probably have a big party and then they'd go home ... and sit down.

This is what happened with the Law of Moses. It was designed with the purpose of ending if it could be fulfilled. But until it was, it kept steaming along from day to day. Enter Jesus Christ – “Do not think that I have come

to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”

The Law and the Prophets are as binding today as they were at the time of Jesus. Not a letter or a brushstroke will fall from the Law and all people are bound under that law. If so, then why am I arguing that we are free from the Law? Because this is what Paul argued! If you're in Christ, then the law is set aside.

Jesus fulfilled the law which couldn't otherwise be fulfilled. The last sin was atoned for; the last car on the assembly line was finished. The law was made obsolete for those who follow Jesus. When He finished His work, He did something no other priest could do while in the temple. He sat down. As it says in Hebrews –

...looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2

Jesus Christ is at the right hand of the throne of God – there in the Most Holy place sitting down, His work complete. And He promises the same for any person who, by faith in Him, acknowledges Him as Lord. By doing so, they overcome the work of the devil, and they also overcome the Law of Moses, and they are granted peace with God. Jesus gives us the wonderful words of release in the book of Revelation –

To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. Revelation 3:21

What does all this have to do with the Sabbath? As a part of the Old Testament Law, it is obsolete in Christ. The only laws which carry over from the Old Testament to the New are those which are restated in the New Testament...a covenant which was initiated on the night of Jesus' Crucifixion.

Therefore, anything recorded in the gospels prior to that moment is a part of Jesus fulfilling the law on our behalf. Only that which is restated as

binding after the cross is a part of the New Covenant... and the Sabbath isn't. No we can't murder, the New Covenant says so. Yes we can eat pork, the New Covenant says so. No we can't steal, the New Covenant says so. Our doctrine for life in Christ comes from His New Covenant in His own blood.

The Sabbath is a part of the Old Covenant, not the new. It was based on God's work of creation and God's work of redemption, both of which are answered in Jesus. He is the Redeemer and in Him we are a new creation. Both actions are directed to the cross.

Look at the law this way. Israel was working six days and resting on the seventh. This can be equated with the anticipation of Rest which still lay ahead. Biblical Christians following the pattern set in the New Testament, worship on the first day of the week and then work after that. Israel was working in order to Rest, we Rest in order to work.

This can be equated with the fulfillment of Rest which we look back on. In other words, the Cross of Calvary is the central focus of the faith – be it looking forward by Israel or looking back by the Church.

Jesus Christ sat down on His Father's throne and He promises that anyone who overcomes will have the right to sit with Him. Guess what, that is anyone who has called on Jesus Christ as Lord –

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:4-7

When Jesus finished His work, He sat down. When we trust in Jesus we are seated with Him.

Praise be to God! He sat down.

III. We Who Believe

In the book of Hebrews, the author goes into great detail concerning the work of Jesus and the superiority of His covenant over that of Moses. He then quotes the 95th Psalm to make a point about God's Sabbath Rest.

"Today, if you will hear His voice,
Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,
In the day of trial in the wilderness,
Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me,
And saw My works forty years.
Therefore I was angry with that generation,
And said, 'They always go astray in their heart,
And they have not known My ways.'
So I swore in My wrath,
'They shall not enter My rest.'"

In what takes considerate thought, the author of Hebrews quotes King David from hundreds of years earlier saying "Today."

He then spends all of the rest of chapter 3 explaining who the disobedient were and how they failed to enter God's rest. Then starting with chapter 4, he says this –

"Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it." Hebrews 4:1, 2

If King David said "Today" when he wrote the 95th Psalm, then he was speaking from his point in time on and he was saying that the word had to be mixed with faith, but Paul explains elsewhere that "...if those who are of the law *are* heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect," In other words, it is faith and faith alone in what God promises that brings His people into a state of rest, not the law. And so the author of Hebrews tells us in verse 4:3 – "For we who have believed do enter that rest..."

Go back to King David. If he is saying “Today” at his time, then the promise of rest was still an open issue. It could not have been consummated at the crossing of the Jordan or at any time up to when King David was alive. It was the present at David’s time and present at the time of the New Testament as well.

This is what God asks of us – to receive the works of His Son by faith and to acknowledge that He is Lord and that by His unmerited favor we stand justified in everything that the law could never justify us in – including the Sabbath Day observance.

In fact, if we go back and attempt to meet that then we are remixing in the law which is already fulfilled. In our next point, we’ll see the error in that type of thinking.

IV. A Day of Rest

Do you remember as we started today that I said only one of the four Sabbath options is correct? Paul couldn’t be any clearer in the book of Romans concerning the days of the week and how we handle them –

One person esteems *one* day above another; another esteems every day *alike*. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes *it* to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe *it*. Romans 14:5, 6

We’ve been instructed by Paul to be fully convinced in our own mind about the propriety of elevating one day above another – in other words, demonstrating faith in our convictions. To sit in a church that mandates a Sabbath, in any form, is not demonstrating faith. So even if you’re simply going to church out of compulsion, then you’re not demonstrating faith.

Paul, using circumcision as a benchmark for the work of Christ, says this –

And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we

through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.
Galatians 5:3-5

Circumcision was a sign of the covenant between Israel and God, just as the Sabbath was a sign. And just as every man who becomes circumcised is a debtor to the whole law, so is any man who attempts to merit God's favor in any other aspect of the law, including the Sabbath.

Circumcision is now a neutral issue ... not a neutered issue! If one wants to circumcise their children for health reasons then cut away without fear of reprisal, but if you are circumcising your children or are considering circumcision yourself because of the law, then grace is nullified and you are a debtor to the entire law.

This is exactly the same consideration as a mandatory Sabbath. If you are doing it to fulfill the law, then you are in debt to the entire body of law. You have fallen from grace, and your deeds will testify against you at the judgment.

Our day of Rest then is God's day of rest – the seventh day. Unlike the other six days in the creation account which say “evening and morning were the 2nd (or 3rd, or 4th, or whatever) day. The seventh day says nothing about evening and morning; it is an eternal day... creation is over. The author of Hebrews explains it this way –

...although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh *day* in this way: “*And God rested on the seventh day from all His works*”; and again in this *place*: “*They shall not enter My rest.*” Since therefore it remains that some *must* enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, again He designates a certain day, saying in David, “*Today,*” after such a long time, as it has been said:

*“Today, if you will hear His voice,
Do not harden your hearts.”*

This is the “Today” that was present for David and obviously still awaiting some future realization. God’s rest, which occurred on the 7th Day was open to Israel and remained open at David’s time. Hebrews goes on to complete the thought –

For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. **There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.**

Out of the four major views on the Sabbath, I only specifically addressed one of the three incorrect views. There’s really no need to address the other two because the only option which is reasonable in refuting the seventh-day Sabbath is the Fulfilled Sabbath. Because this is so, it is therefore the correct view of the Sabbath. If it is fulfilled, it is set aside.

We don’t observe a Sabbath day because we are living in our Sabbath Rest – God’s eternal seventh day. If you wish to come to Church on the Beach on Sunday, you’re welcome to come. If you wish to set aside a Monday, a Tuesday, a Wednesday, a Thursday, a Friday, or a Saturday to worship the Lord, then you may do so. If you don’t want to set aside any day, then you may do that as well.

Let each of you be convinced in your own mind, and without compulsion to follow the Lord as you rest in His work and in it alone.

One final point about the 7-day creation pattern – God worked for 6 days and then rested. This is a picture of the 7000 years of man on earth. The period known as the Millennial Kingdom is the last 1000 years before God initiates His new order. During this time, Jesus will sit on His throne in Jerusalem. When He does, Isaiah calls it His place of Rest –

They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
As the waters cover the sea.

“And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse,
Who shall stand as a banner to the people;

For the Gentiles shall seek Him,
And His resting place shall be glorious. Isaiah 11:9, 10

Those who have already received Jesus have entered that Day of Rest in advance of His glorious throne. As we live out our lives, we should acknowledge this, to His glory.

Next week we will see how the Fulfilled Sabbath is actually prefigured in Adam's time in Eden; something he had a right to and lost. As a foretaste of that today we'll note that John Sailhamer says this – "The man was 'put' into the Garden where he could 'rest' and be 'safe,' and the man was 'put' into the Garden 'in God's presence' where he could have fellowship with God..."

What should never cease to amaze us is that what we had, we gave up voluntarily – rejecting God's authority over us and determining to do it our own way. And yet, and despite this, God sent His Son to right the wrongs and to lead us back to Him through the work of the Cross of Jesus Christ.

He sat down, His work complete
Christ sat down on His heavenly seat
Jesus fulfilled the Law for Adam's seed
And sat down with the Father on His Throne
Where Adam failed, He did succeed
To the world, let His victory be known
Christ sat down His place of rest glorious
And to each He offers a place as well
The Lord prevailed for each of us
And ransomed fallen men, from the clutches of hell
Hail to the all majestic and glorious King
To Him let the redeemed of the ages sing
Spotless and pure in the finest gown
Praise to the Lord, He sat down
For all eternity, sing His renown
Hallelujah! Christ sat down