

The real meaning of the Sabbath

In Exodus 20:10 it is written about the Sabbath on which work of any kind was prohibited during the seventh day of the week. The practice of observing the Sabbath (Shabbat) consists in setting aside the 7th day for rest and worship and this corresponds to the fourth commandment of the Decalogue.

The word Sabbath (Shabbat) is originally associated to *“rest”*, remembering the day during which God rested after having completed Creation in six days, according to Genesis 2:2-3.

Sabbath observance is practiced from sunset on the sixth day to sunset on the seventh day in a seven-day week and remains observed by certain religious groups, such as Seventh-day Adventists and Orthodox Jews. They believe that keeping seventh-day Sabbath is a moral responsibility equal to that of any of the Ten Commandments.

Despite this original observation on the 7th day (Saturday), most Christian denominations observe “Sabbath” in the Sunday, the first day of the week, considering it to be *“Lord’s Day”*.

However, I think the observance of this 24-hour temporal Sabbath is meaningless in the sense of *“rest”*, whether on the seventh or the first day of the week, because only Jesus Christ can give us real rest for our souls, as we read in Matthew 11:29 ... *“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”*.

This means that the rest that Jesus Christ provides is not just a 24-hour chronological period, but an effective and definitive rest for the souls of men and women who sincerely seek him.

Regarding this rest that Joshua could not give to the people of Israel, the text in Hebrews 4: 8-10 mentions this way: *“For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about **another day**. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters **God’s rest** also rests from their works, just as God did from his”*.

This text makes reference to the fact that Joshua was never able to guide the people to this type of soul rest, due to his inability to bring the people of Israel to real peace with God.

Excluding the religious aspect, the pretext for a pause in the work routine during the week is completely rational and makes perfect sense, including for the purpose of healthy balance of mind and body.

However, it is illogical and irrational to imagine that God demands the fanatical observance of the chronological Sabbath, on the pretext of fulfilling a purely religious requirement. Not everyone has the privilege of not having to work on Saturday or Sunday because of their essential business or activity.

Jesus Christ did not seem to hesitate to do activities on the Sabbath, especially if it was for the benefit of people in need of his physical or spiritual help. Because of this freedom to perform works on any day of the week, Jesus was criticized by the Pharisees when he performed his miracles on Saturdays (John 5: 16).

The Jews were very concerned about keeping the *“ceremonial Sabbath”* and so they accused Jesus of breaking the fourth commandment because Jesus did not choose special dates to do miracles and healings for the needy.

The legalist repose for the bodies from the Old Testament law was virtual and illusory, whereas the rest that Christ gives to the souls is real and true.

Jesus was accused by the Pharisees of violating the Sabbath, simply because he did not differentiate dates to perform his miracles and healings (Luke 13: 14-17). He saw no reason to stop doing good deeds on whatever day of the week because of a mere religiousness (Luke 6: 6-11).

Because of this freedom to do good at any time, Jesus was persecuted by the Jews, as John 5: 16-18 says, not only for transgressing the traditions of religious, but also for calling himself "*Lord of Sabbath* ", as we read in Matthew 12: 8.

His disciples were also accused of violating the Sabbath, because they were seen tearing off ears of corn on the seventh day (Matthew 12: 1). If that event happened today, Jesus and his disciples certainly would be called "worshippers of the devil" by the fanatic seventh-day keepers.

Paul considered the legalist Sabbath correspondent to 4th commandment of Decalogue as a mere ceremonial precept of an obsolete and innocuous Law. That is why in Colossians 2:16-18 he quoted Sabbath along with other religious feasts, emphasizing that they boiled down to ephemeral things, such as food and drink ... *Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days, which are just shadows and allegories of things to come ...*

Now, if keeping the Sabbath and other ceremonial rites are mere allegories and antitheses of bigger things that would happen, then why such practices are demanded by certain religious groups just to overwhelm people with religious legalism ordinances?

In Mark 2:27 it is written that God made the Sabbath for man, not man for the Sabbath. Here we can see a difference between the Old Testament Sabbath and the New Testament Sabbath.

The Old Testament Sabbath was not made for man, since man dedicated the Sabbath to God, as well as sacrifices and everything else that the Mosaic Law required. Those who did not obey by keeping the Sabbath were severely punished with stoning.

In turn, New Testament Sabbath was made for man to enjoy the soul rest that Christ offers (Matthew 11: 28-29). God the Father does not demand any sacrifice or penance, for Christ has already offered in a single sacrifice on the cross all that was necessary to provide full reconciliation and peace with God.

The things that happened in the Old Testament serve us as antitheses, that is, as inverse metaphors, so that we are not based on what is shadow, but on what is reality (Colossians 2:17, Hebrews 8: 5, 9: 24) .

Regarding this change to a new nature, Paul mentioned in 2 Corinthians 5:17 ... *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature: old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

As he said that "*everything has become new*", we can extrapolate that circumcision in the foreskin of the men of the old Law was replaced by circumcision of the heart; the chronological rest on the Sabbath of the old Law was replaced by the rest of the soul in Christ; the commandments of the old Law that were written on tablets of stone were replaced by commandments written on tablets of flesh in the hearts; and so on.

The Old Testament Law and its ethical-moral principles were an antithesis, that is, a counterpoint to everything that came to be taught in the New Testament.

Thus, Jesus not only brought with him a new "*interpretation*" of the Old Testament law, but also transmitted his own principles and commandments, which were often essentially opposed to the *Torah* commandments.

All those who consider the Old Testament law (Torah) valid until today, should strictly keep the Sabbath (24 hours at the seventh day of the week), as it is one of the ten commandments of the Decalogue, under pain of suffering the punishments prescribed in Numbers 15:32-36, in which a man was stoned because he was found gathering wood on a Sabbath day.

The Sabbath of rest for the souls Jesus promised in Matthew 11:28-29 is only for those who consider the chronological Sabbath, as well as physical circumcision and also the animal sacrifices of Old Testament law, only metaphors and shadows of very realities that were revealed in the New Testament.

If the things that happened in the Old Testament were to be applied only in its literal sense, the Bible would be nothing more than a Religious Handbook, which could be adopted by any legalistic or ritualistic religion. This involves sacrifices, circumcision, food rules, and of course, the Sabbath as well.

That is why in the text of Hebrews 3: 13-4: 10, the author made it clear that the literal Old Testament Sabbath was replaced by TODAY, which applies to the first, second, third ... or seventh day of the week.

Therefore, the rest that the Old Testament Law Sabbath (Torah) did not provide for anyone, because it is merely a religious practice, has been replaced by a rest for the souls under any circumstances and on any occasion by Jesus Christ (Matthew 11: 28-29).

In Galatians 4: 3-10, the submission to the legalistic Sabbath is considered "*slavery*", in which those who are not adults, are under the "elemental spiritual forces of the world". But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, to set free those under the tyrannical law. This is the conclusion of that text: Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God, how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days (Sabbaths, New Moon ...) and months and seasons and years!

This means that the Sabbath of weekly physical rest (flesh) is for those who have no spiritual maturity and are still under the yoke of servitude, in a religiosity that is only apparent and outward.

On the Old Testament temporal Sabbath, there was simply the mechanical obedience of men and animals throughout their generations, with the disobedient being summarily exterminated by stoning.

To this day, Jews in Israel cease trading and working on the night of the sixth day, however, they do this only because of a tradition custom, without any awareness of the true meaning of the Sabbath.

The fact is that that Old Testament ceremonial Sabbath generated only fanatics, ready to stone anyone who transgressed the literal observance of the seventh day, and even Jesus was accused of violating the Sabbath (Luke 13: 14-17; Luke 6: 6-11).

The Jewish women who followed Jesus (Mary Magdalene, Mary and others) were attached to the obsolete Old Testament law and therefore rested on the Sabbath after Jesus' death. However, Jesus' glorious resurrection did not happen on the seventh day, but the next day (Luke 24: 1).

This means that the Old Testament Sabbath is related to Jesus' death, denoting failure, frustration and worthlessness, as it would be without the glorious resurrection.

When Paul and Barnabas started the process of "*evangelizing*" the Jews, they sought to meet their compatriots on the seventh day, as the Jews met in the temples on Saturdays. However, when Paul and Barnabas realized the hardness of the Jews' hearts, they turned to the crowds in general (Gentiles), so they stopped looking for Jews exclusively on Saturdays (Acts 13:46).

In Matthew 24:20, Jesus adverted ... "*Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath*". I believe in this text, Jesus lamented the fate of the Jews who were attached to the Sabbath of the Old Testament, because at the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans Titus and Vespasian (AD 70), the Jews who kept strictly the repose on Sabbath had no chance to flee from the invaders, since the law set limits of distance to walk on the Sabbath.

The true Sabbath of the New Testament is not referred to a single day (1st or 7th), but TODAY, which comprise all days, as we can read in Hebrews 3:13 ... *But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today" so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end, as has just been said: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.*

Also in Hebrews 4: 7 we can read God again set a certain day, calling it **"Today"**. This he did when a long time later he spoke through David, as in the passage already quoted: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.

In Matthew 28:20, Jesus said that He would be EVERYDAY with all who believed, which confirms God is not the Lord of one single day, but of all days.

Therefore, the discussion about the validity of keeping a single day of the week, be it the first or the seventh, is ridiculous and has no meaning within the context of the New Testament biblical context.

What good would it do for someone to be honest, pure, fearing God and his commandments just on a single day of the week and being a devil for the remaining six days? This is the reason that the New Testament "Sabbath" is TODAY, because the *"rest for the souls"* that Jesus Christ offers is definitive and permanent (Matthew 11:29).

The 24-hour Sabbath is not related to the New Testament, but to the Old Testament law, and more precisely, to the fourth law of the Decalogue, which is considered the most important part of the Torah. As we have already seen in Hebrews 3:13 and 4: 7, New Testament Sabbath is TODAY because it is generic and covers all days of the week for those who enjoy the *"rest of souls"* in Jesus Christ (Matthew 11:29) .

In the text of Hebrews 4: 8-10 the difference between the Old Testament Sabbath and the New Testament Sabbath is clear. Joshua represents the Sabbath of the Old Testament law (Torah), which did not provide real rest for anyone, as it is merely a religious obedience that lasts 24 hours a week.

In turn, Jesus Christ represents the New Testament Sabbath, for He said in Matthew 11:29 that whoever came to Him would find rest for his soul. Therefore, the New Testament *"Sabbath"* is **TODAY**, because the *"rest for the souls"* that Jesus Christ offers is forever.

In Genesis 2: 2, we read that on the seventh day, God rested from his work that he had done in creating the world. However, in John 5:17, Jesus said that God the Father works without interruption, that is, without fatigue.

This means that God's *"rest"* was not in the sense of rest because he was tired, but in the sense of rejoicing and joy at the success of all his work. Therefore, considering the Sabbath in the sense of observing a weekly break from physical work is misinterpreting the true meaning that God wanted to give to his Sabbath.

Therefore, when God rested on the seventh day, this does not mean that He rested because He stopped working out of tiredness, even because God never gets tired, but that He rested in Christ to be fulfilling his purpose in this world. That is why the Father declared in Matthew 3:17 and Matthew 17: 5 that He delighted in the Son, whose pleasure brought him *"soul rest"*.

The creation of Genesis is imperfect, just as the first Adam was imperfect and this is explained in 1 Corinthians 15: 45-47. The perfect creation is in John 1:12 and 13, with the new creatures being born in a new birth, just as Jesus explained to Nicodemus in John 3: 1-8.

The Sabbath of the old creation is related to the 24 hours of the seventh day of the week, whereas the Sabbath of the new creation is the definitive and permanent rest that Jesus promised in Matthew 11: 28-29.

The full rejoicing of God the Father took place in the Son and was proclaimed at His baptism and on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 3:17 and 17: 5). The Father *"rested"* for rejoicing in the Son's work and this is the true Sabbath of the New Testament.

The break from physical work is at best a rest for the physical body, but the rest that Jesus promised in Matthew 11:29 is a rest for the soul. That is why many who enjoy only the weekly physical rest have troubled and afflicted souls, trying in vain to get safe through antidepressants.

Rest in the flesh does not always mean rest of the soul. Many who "*rest in the flesh*" do so out of idleness or because they are unemployed, or because they are bedridden.

To enjoy the true Sabbath of God is to rest our souls in Jesus Christ, and for this reason He said: *Come to me, you who are weary and burdened, and you will find **rest for your souls*** (Matthew 11:28-29).

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