

Honoring the Son (John 5:15-23)
Part 2, Sabbath Controversy
By Pastor Jeff Alexander (8/1/2021)

Introduction

1. Chapter 5 begins with a healing in Jerusalem that contrasts with the healing of the nobleman's son in Galilee that closed chapter 4. The sign displayed in Jerusalem was the healing of a paralytic at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath (vv. 9, 16). This sign was to provoke the Jews because of their hypocrisy concerning the Sabbath. This sign incited the Jews to persecute Jesus. The Jews took Moses seriously: "*The seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work*" (Exodus 20:10). In the Pharisees' opinion, Jesus disobeyed Moses by healing.
2. Jesus' response to the Jews' objection seems strange on the surface: "*Jesus answered them, 'My Father [has been and still] is working until now, and I am working'*" (v. 17). This, however, was a very good answer. The healing exhibited the creative work on which the Sabbath was instituted. The Father worked in the creation of the old world, but because of sin, He was now working a new creation. Jesus was just doing the will of His Father. His work was redemption and restoration. Healing is part of that work.

While the Godhead works on the Sabbath, humans are to *rest*: "*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath*" (Mark 2:27, 28). The end for which the Godhead works is *eternal rest* for His own.

3. Jesus's response was not to justify or explain His reason for violating the Jewish Sabbath rules. Instead, He turned the tables and informed the Jews that not only were they not in charge of enforcing Sabbath rules, but also were they not qualified to do so. Further, they were spiritually dead, not being born from above. Jesus told them, "*You do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe [obediently trust] the one whom he has sent*" (John 5:38).

I. The Lord of the Sabbath

1. Jesus alone had authority to speak and act concerning the Sabbath because He was Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28; and Luke 6:5). They, not He, were to come into judgment (v. 22; note v. 45). They, not He, were Sabbath violators.
2. Jesus alone has authority to judge disobedience with respect to the Sabbath (v. 27). Who is the *Son of Man*? (Daniel 7:13, 14). Jesus is King! He has dominion, glory, and a kingdom. All everywhere are to serve Him. His death and resurrection established His right to David's throne and kingdom.
3. Jesus expects all to obey Him. His emphasis on "*His word*" (v. 24) brings attention to what God has spoken concerning Him. We are to obey Him implicitly, and that includes Sabbath keeping. Jesus is the One who gave Moses the commandment: "*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*"
4. Jesus, then, indicted the Jews with five facts showing why they, not He, were wrong (vv. 30-47): (1) They rejected the witness of truth. (2) They gave evidence that they were not the Father's children (v. 42). (3) They received only those that came in their own name—who agreed with their agenda. (4) They sought approval from each other, not God. Loving obe-

dience to God did not drive their conduct, but they lived for the approval they got from each other. (5) They were accused and condemned by Moses, on whom they set their hope.

II. Three Questions for Christians

1. Why do Christians worship on the *first* day (Sunday) and not the *seventh* day (Saturday)?
 - a. The early church gave the Lord's Day the same duty that was given to the Sabbath Day (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2). The first day of the week is the *Christian Sabbath*.
 - b. What makes the first day *the Lord's Day*? Two uses of *the Lord's*, are found in Scripture—the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20) and the Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10). Christ owns the supper by virtue of His death, and He owns the Sabbath by virtue of His resurrection.
 - c. As the Old Covenant Sabbath pointed back to the creation and the Father's finished work, the New Covenant Sabbath points forward to the New Creation based on Christ's finished work. The Christian Sabbath is the divine pledge of the eternal state secured by Jesus' resurrection—a weekly rehearsal of our forever dwelling with Christ.
2. Many modern evangelical Protestants often show disdain for a Christian Sabbath. Why? They see Sabbath observance as legalistic and not gracious. On the contrary, Sabbath-keeping is a *love* issue (Exodus 20:6). We still have *ten* commandments, not nine. If the Sabbath was to be abrogated, why would Jesus declare His authority over it?
3. Why do most Christians tend to treat Sunday as just another day? The trouble with many is that Sabbath observance interferes too much with the self-life. Many think it is simply asking too much that one day each week be faithfully given to serious devotion to the Lord. Obedience is a critical aspect of genuine faith.

Conclusion

1. The writer of Hebrews warned of failing to enter His rest (Hebrews 3:7, 8, 10, 11). The *rest* spoken of is the rest of the eternal state: "*So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God*" (Hebrews 4:9). The weekly Sabbath-rest points to that eternal rest believers' have "now, but not yet." In the meantime, believers are urged: "*Let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it [eternal Sabbath-rest]. ... For whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his own works as God did from His*" (Hebrews 4:1, 10).
2. Failing to reach God's rest is not a failure of *doing*. It is a failure of *relating* to Christ, of knowing Him, obeying Him, walking with Him, loving Him, worshiping Him, serving Him, and growing to be like Him. The Israelites hardened their hearts in rebellion, not loving and obeying but provoking Him by straying from His will; let us not do the same (John 5:23; 14:15).