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# The Saviour and His Sabbath

Part I / Gerhard F. Hasel

WE MUST not separate the theme of the Saviour and His Sabbath from the relationship of those whom He saved and their Sabbath, because the Saviour and the saved are inextricably related to each other. The Saviour could never be Saviour without those whom He saved. The saved could never be saved without the Saviour and the plan He designed, part of which is the Sabbath.

During the time when Christ Jesus walked in this world; when His divinity was clothed with humanity; when He took upon Himself human nature with its infirmities, weaknesses, and liabilities; when He was assailed with temptations as we are assailed with temptations; when He was as dependent upon the power of God to overcome Satan as we are dependent upon this power to overcome the tricky wiles of the prince of darkness, our Saviour set forth this theme in a most remarkable way.

"The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27).

Mark wrote the shortest of the Gospels. Nevertheless he often gives us material and details not found in the other Gospels. If it were not for Mark's writings, this word of Jesus would not have been preserved for us. Whereas Matthew and Luke give us the same story, only Mark contains the actual words Jesus spoke in response to the accusation of the Pharisees that the disciples of Jesus were guilty of an unlawful act on the Sabbath.

It was on a beautiful spring Sabbath that Jesus walked through the grain fields with His disciples. Being hungry, the disciples plucked some of the ears of grain. It was considered unlawful, in the view of the scribes, to perform this kind of harvest labor on the Sabbath day. Luke mentions that the dis-

ciples even rubbed the ears of grain in their hands in order to separate the grain from the husk! Thus they were additionally guilty of threshing, which is another unlawful act on the Sabbath. So, in the opinion of the rabbis, they were committing a double Sabbath offense, since among the thirty-nine primary or major types of labor prohibited on the Sabbath, rabbinic tradition numbers 3 and 5 prohibited "reaping" and "threshing."

Imagine how eyebrows were raised, how looks of surprise and consternation were exchanged between the Pharisees who had followed Jesus and His disciples when they noted that the Rabbi Jesus failed to reprimand His disciples for their unlawful acts on the Sabbath day. It was too much for them. They could not stand such outright desecration of the Sabbath any longer. Complaining to Jesus they said, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" Jesus replied by citing the example of David and his men when they satisfied their hunger (see Mark 2:25, 26). If it was right for David to satisfy his hunger by eating of the bread that had been set apart for holy use, then it was right for the disciples to supply their need by plucking ears of grain upon the holy time of the Sabbath.

"The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath."

The Sabbath, Jesus asserts, was instituted to serve man's welfare: man was not created to be a Sabbath slave. In these words Jesus thundered forth a "shocking but golden sentence."

"The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath."

In Jesus' time the following Jewish aphorism seems to have been in existence.

"The Sabbath is delivered unto you, you are not delivered unto the Sabbath." (From Rabbi Simeon ben Menasya [A.D. 180], to be traced back to Mattathias, father of the Maccabees [1 Mac. 27: 39-41].)

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But this rabbinic principle would only indicate that things might be done on the Sabbath that otherwise would be forbidden where life was at stake. Judaism, with its principle of putting a fence around the law in order to assure its faithful observance, produced a multitude of subregulations that were meticulous and casuistical. The most widely known is the so-called Sabbath day's journey of two thousand cubits, or two-thirds mile, distance. It was forbidden to even light a candle on the Sabbath. A Gentile needed to be called for this task or for lighting a fire. An egg laid on the Sabbath needed to be sold to a Gentile. And, to the chagrin of the ladies, looking in a mirror fixed on the wall was counted as an act of Sabbathbreaking.

The total number of Sabbath prohibitions, according to Rabbi Johanan, reached 1,521 derivative laws (Moore, II, 28). Sabbath observance had lost its meaning. It degenerated into casuistic legalism. Legalism takes the life force out of religion.

An Adventist, relating an experience he had on an Ingathering call, tells of meeting a certain businessman. He introduced the fact that he was Ingathering and mentioned the name Seventh-day Adventist. As he did so, the businessman told him he was traveling one day in the country and ran out of gas. It was raining but fortunately his car stopped near a gas station so that he was able to stop the car actually in front of a pump. He was delighted by his luck. But as no attendant came he blew his horn. When there was no reaction to this, he decided to put on his raincoat and go to the front door of the house next to the gas station. He rang the bell and soon a man appeared. Having learned that the man was the proprietor of the gas station, the businessman told him that he just ran out of gas. The proprietor explained that he was an Adventist and did not do business on Saturday, which was his Sabbath, the day of rest.

The businessman's urgent pleadings that he give him just a minimum of gas to get him to another station were to no avail. He was told to go somewhere else and was forced to go by foot in the rain.

Legalism is loveless; legalism is Christless; legalism is deadening.



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Against all of this, though well-intended, Jesus thundered His liberating cry,

"The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath."

By word and action Jesus demonstrated that it is right and lawful to do good on the Sabbath. When Jesus turned upon the Pharisees with the question whether it was lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, he confronted Judaism with the question of right and wrong Sabbathkeeping. In His Sabbath miracles, which were so offensive to the rabbis but which brought healing and well-being to the suffering, Jesus condemned legalism. He swept away the senseless casuistic restrictions of the Jews. The Saviour honored His Sabbath and restored its meaning for salvation.

*To be continued*

*Jesus condemned legalism. He swept away the senseless casuistic restrictions of the Jews.*