

B.A.S.I.C.

Brothers And Sisters In Christ

The SDA Church (Pt.2 The Sabbath)

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This month we are going to continue our series looking into the claims of the Seventh Day Adventist church.

In the last issue we acknowledged that there may indeed be true Christians among the SDA church, however the Bible is very explicit in its teaching that we do not want to fellowship together or work together with any who teach false doctrine. It is important therefore to examine the teachings of the SDA church and consider whether their teachings do indeed deny Scripture. To begin with we will look at that claim for which the SDA is perhaps most famous, and one that Southwind particularly leveled against us in his letter, the Sabbath.

Sabbath

Concerning the Sabbath the SDA church teaches as follows: *"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."*¹

Although they are correct that God rested on the seventh day (Genesis 2:2-3) there is no command from God that men also should rest on the seventh day in connection with creation. The command given to the Israelites to set aside the seventh day as a special day of worship, does not come until 1,500 years after the creation. It is true that in Exodus 20:11 when the Lord does establish the Sabbath on the seventh day the reason he gives for that particular day is because it was the day he rested after creation. However the fact remains that contrary to the first sentence of the SDA quoted above the Sabbath,

as a day of rest for men, was not instituted as a command on the seventh day of creation. It was in fact instituted 1,500 years later at the time of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt. We will discuss this more later. However what is important is that no command is given, and without a command from God we cannot make the Sabbath binding on the basis of the creation account.

More importantly as the SDA church rightly acknowledges Jesus is the "Lord of the Sabbath." It was the Lord who established the Sabbath on the seventh day at the time of the Exodus. It was Jesus, who is Lord, who tells us through his Apostles that worship on the seventh day is no longer necessary. Matt 12:5-8; Mark 2:27-28;

Let no one judge you

¹⁶ Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. (Col 2:16-17 ESV)

The SDA church attempts to get around this passage from Colossians by saying that the "Sabbath" mentioned here is a reference to special Sabbaths, in other words the Jewish festivals. But we can see clearly from the text that Paul has already mentioned the festivals. The word Sabbath coming later is not a reference to festivals but to something different namely the normal weekly Saturday worship of the Jews. There is nothing in the text that indicates any special meaning for the word Sabbath. Furthermore Paul explains himself quite clearly telling us that all these things including worship on the Sabbath are merely a shadow. Christ is the real substance. Christ is the true Sabbath. Our Sabbath rest

is not found on one particular day of the week, but continually every day as we live in Christ who is our rest.

Christ is our rest

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Mat 11:28 ESV)

It is certainly not a coincidence that Jesus says "I will give you rest." If you continue reading in Matthew after this quote you will find the story of the Pharisees confronting the disciples and Jesus because the disciples were picking grain on the Sabbath. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus is specifically making reference to the Sabbath and teaching us that we now find our rest in Him.

The writer of Hebrews confirms the same thing in Hebrews 4:3-9. Study carefully this section of Scripture. Here the writer of Hebrews makes it clear that the seventh day Sabbath of the Jews was not the true Sabbath, but only a temporary sign of the true Sabbath. In verse 3 he says, "**For we who have believed enter that rest.**" Therefore he makes it clear that the true Sabbath is found by faith in Christ and not in the observance of one particular day. This is what Jesus himself tells us in our previous passage Matthew 11:28. If we receive rest through faith in Christ Jesus, and enter into the true Sabbath by faith in Christ Jesus, then we have indeed partaken in the true Sabbath every day of our lives through faith in Christ Jesus. If we live every day of our lives in the true Sabbath through faith in Christ Jesus how can anyone condemn us because we do not physically go to a church building on Saturday?

One day or many

⁵ One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶

The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. (Rom 14:5-6 ESV)

While this passage from Paul does not specifically mention the Sabbath, it does speak about the subject. We may take the "one day" Paul mentions as a reference to either Sunday or Saturday. It does not matter which one Paul is referencing. His point re-

mains. If one person wishes to worship on one particular day there is nothing wrong with that. If someone else worships every day then that is okay too. Paul's point here is that the day is not important, Christ is what is important.

According to Paul's words here we do not insist on any particular day. Some among us do indeed worship on Saturday, as for example our churches in Nepal, and some worship on Sunday. If the SDA wishes to worship on Saturday then that is fine, as long as they do not try to make demands that we also worship on Saturday. In this regard Paul makes it clear that we are free, to choose one day like Saturday or Sunday or any other, or to choose every day.

What about the 3rd (or 4th) Commandment?

The problem that some have is that they look at the list of the ten commandments and think why do we keep all the other nine commandments but not the 3rd (or some would call it the 4th)? But what they miss is what we have seen above. The Sabbath is not gone. We do not teach that it should be ignored. We do not teach that we should ignore the Sabbath. But rather we see that the Bible teaches that the seventh day of the week is not the true Sabbath. It is merely a shell or as Paul calls it a shadow. The true rest is Christ himself. Thus we keep the Sabbath by resting in Christ. We do not keep it by resting on the seventh day of the week, or even by resting on first day of the week. Sunday is not a replacement of the Old Testament Sabbath. Jesus is the Sabbath. In the Old Testament Saturday was merely a temporary place holder until Christ came.

A Second look at Genesis 2:2

With all this in mind we can return to where we started Genesis 2:2.

² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. (Gen 2:2-3 ESV)

What does it mean that God blessed the seventh day? When we talk about a blessing from God we

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are talking about a gift. First we might ask to whom is He giving a gift? **“And he said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.’” (Mar 2:27 ESV)** “The Sabbath was made for man.” In other words when God blessed the Sabbath He was giving a gift to men.

What is the gift that God is giving when He blesses the seventh day? Was it simply a day of rest from work? In part we can see that yes part of the blessing was a day of rest after six days of work. However, since the fall into sin the seventh day like all of God’s physical gifts to men was corrupted, Romans 8:20. There is then no true rest for men on this sinful earth. We can find rest alone in Christ our Savior as we saw above.

Furthermore Scripture is clear that physical rest is not the real blessing of the seventh day. For Scripture continues, “God blessed the seventh day and **made it holy** . . .” What does it mean that he made it holy? Sometimes we use the term sanctify. These two words “sanctify” and “make holy” mean the same thing. It means to set something apart as dedicated to God. In the wilderness we see how the Lord instructed that the Temple was holy, sanctified, set apart for himself. Indeed the ark was set apart to the point where no man could touch it and live.

But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1Co 6:11 ESV)

In the New Testament we are sanctified, by which Paul means that we are once again united to God. We are set apart as those who belong to God. So also the seventh day was set apart as that which belongs to God. But not for God’s sake, as if He needs a day of rest, or a day of His own. “The Earth is the Lord’s and all the fullness thereof” (Psalm 24:1). This includes all the days, not just one. Rather as we have seen it was sanctified for the sake of man. As Jesus said, “the Sabbath was made for man.” The seventh day of the week at the time of creation was made the Lord’s day for the sake of man. The original purpose of the seventh day was to be a day in which God came to man and gave Himself in fellowship with man. When Adam and Eve fell in sin, this was no longer possible and the Sabbath was broken. The seventh day remained as a reminder of that fellowship even though it could no longer fulfill that purpose until Christ came to restore what

had been lost. A second time God gave himself to man, but this time not on a particular day but in the person of Jesus Christ. Thus once again we conclude that Christ is our Sabbath and not one particular day of the week.

¹⁸ But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. ¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹ whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. (Act 3:18-21 ESV)

1. (2013). *28 Fundamental Beliefs*. Available from: <http://www.adventist.org/fileadmin/adventist.org/files/articles/official-statements/28Beliefs-English.pdf>. [Accessed: 7/3/2014].

*What is the gift
that God is giving
when He blesses
the seventh day?*