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*Issues: Sabbath in the New Testament Part 3*

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“Father in Heaven, we want to be drawn near to You. We live here on a planet that is riddled with sin and difficulty, sorrow, anxiety, everything associated with destruction, and we have burdens. We are concerned about people; we are concerned about marriages, relationships and the family. We are concerned about health issues, finances, all of these things. Lord, we give you those burdens right now, and we ask for a time that we will not be consumed by them. But that we’ll be so much in Your presence through Your word that life will be forgotten for a while, and we’ll just be with You. We pray that You will take all those concerns, Lord. Take the anxiety and all those things away from us and help us just to hear Your word. We pray that You will teach us. We ask this in Jesus’ name, Amen.” Please be seated!

We continue our series today regarding issues. This is, *Issues: The Sabbath in the New Testament, Part 3*. Last week, we were unable to speak about this because of our Easter Service. So this comes as an add-on of the service two weeks ago. I am going to remind you what we’ve had thus far in the two sermons on this topic to date. We learned in the first sermon that a law of commandments had been done away by Jesus. We learned that the law of commandments was still expected to be kept by Jesus’ followers. We learned or discovered that there are at least three laws of commandments mentioned in the New Testament: Men’s Law, Moses’ Law and the Moral Law, that means the Ten Commandments. We learned that new covenant experience is to have the law written on the heart. And we also studied that the law is a law of love and relationships. Love for God and love for men.

The last time we studied together, we looked at the Colossians controversy and we revisited those passages and learned that there are forty four acknowledged and considered relevant explanations for what the controversy was there at the Colossians’ church. Nobody seems to know, so it’s confusing issue. We learned that the Sabbath is God’s Sabbath. It is not a Jewish Sabbath. We learned that the Bible gives three reasons for why the Jews were told to keep the Sabbath. They were to remember God as their Creator; they were to remember God as their Redeemer, and they were to remember God as their Sanctifier, the One who made them holy.

We learned that the New Testament teaches that the Sabbath was made for all of mankind. And we learned that the Bible story of God and his relationship with humanity is centered in the history of Abraham’s decedents. The Bible does not tell us what God was doing in China. The Bible does not tell us what God was doing in South America, North America, Africa, Australia or Europe. The Bible tells us what God was doing with a people, Abraham’s decedents. And this one people, singled out, were to be taught the lessons of God, and were in turn to teach those lessons of God to others. So, the Bible in a sense is Jewish, and is their story. Our Savior is Jewish. And Gentiles who accepted Christ were grafted into the Jewish concepts of God and many of their practices.

Consequently, the Bible does not talk at all in the New Testament in terms of the Gentiles having to keep the Sabbath. They just did it. You see back then, from what I understand, the pagans did not keep a special day. Now maybe later on they kept Sunday in honor of the sun god, but in the time of the New Testament, they were not doing that. Primarily the worship experience of a pagan was to swing by the

temple and hang out with one of the temple prostitutes to worship their gods of fertility. It was a brothel with a religious flavor to it. And they would do that whenever the urge arose to worship. And they did not have the specific days or times of days that they did that. They would just go. And so for a Gentile, who accepted a Jewish Savior as God and Lord of their life, they would naturally do what the Jews did, and they worship on the Sabbath. So it was no issue. It's not addressed in the New Testament at all as an issue because they just fell into it.

Now today, we are moving on in our study, and we are going to talk a little bit about the Old and the New Covenant. I promise you down the road, we will deal with it in more detail, but I'll use it to set up what we're going to talk about today. There is a lot of confusion regarding the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. Popular teaching says something like this, and before I quote that, I want to tell you. Old Covenant is associated with the Old Testament. New Covenant is associated with the New Testament. So the New Testament is from the birth of Jesus on. Old Covenant is from creation up until that point. The Old Covenant was centered in law. People served God and were saved by keeping the law. The New Testament or New Covenant is centered in grace. Now people are saved by grace and serve God through faith.

Let me repeat that for you; I hope it will sink in. The Old Covenant was centered in law. People served God and were saved by keeping the law. The New Covenant is centered in grace. Now people are saved by grace and serve God through faith. Now that sounds good as an explanation of the Old and New Covenant. It seems simple enough, it's straight forward. But unfortunately, it isn't quite a true picture. There are some difficulties with that understanding. Some questions are raised about God, if that is your understanding of the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. Here are a few questions. There is a question of God changing when the Bible says, "He does not change. He is the same yesterday, today and forever."

How could it be that for eighteen hundred years or for four thousand years there was one method of being saved, and then it switches at another point? It raises the question about God being responsible for establishing legalism in the Old Testament, then coming along and condemning it in the New Testament. "Come on God, make up your mind." It raises the question about God delivering the Israelites from the bondage of slavery, only in order to turn around and give them a bondage of spirituality through the law. It raises questions of God setting up a system where someone would be owed salvation by Him. They would arrive at a certain level and God would have to take them to heaven. It raises questions about God understanding humans and their capacities to serve Him. Didn't He know no one could keep the law enough to be saved?

It raises questions about having to change the plan because God learned and discovered it wouldn't work. We will have a study on the Old Covenant and on the New Covenant, but in essence, let me share this with you. The Old Covenant was not centered in law. The Old Covenant was centered in relationship with God. God initiated the Old Covenant; God was the Savior in the Old Covenant. The response of the human heart in the Old Covenant was to obey what God told them to do. That is Old Covenant. We will study that and we will see how it relates to the New Covenant. In essence, in reality, there is only one

way to be saved. There has only been one way to be saved, but the people in the Old Covenant looked forward to Jesus' coming. We in the New Covenant see He's been here, and we now live with Christ as our Savior instead of living in the shadow of things that pointed towards Him. But it's always been the same way to be saved.

Now, the New Testament and the Sabbath; please turn to Mark chapter 2 verses 27 and 28. Jesus and His disciples had been walking through a grain field. It's the Sabbath. And while they are walking through a grain field, they pluck grain and they rub it in their hands, and they eat it. And the Pharisees considered that unlawful to do, so Jesus is confronted about it. And it's in the context of that conversation Jesus says this in verse 27: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath." Now Jesus is saying this: that the Sabbath was made for mankind, man was not made for the Sabbath. The Sabbath is not something to be served. The Sabbath was made in a way to serve man, to be a blessing to man.

And then He goes on to say that He as the Son of Man, the representative of the human race, and He is the son of God, the representative of the Godhead on earth, He knows how to keep that day. He knows what to do on that day. And we'll have an interesting study when we talk about Sabbath observance because Jesus was countercultural in His Sabbath observance. The Sabbath, Jesus teaches us, was meant to be a blessing for mankind. Yet, it became a symbol of legalism. They had over 600 laws just associated with the Sabbath: how to walk on the Sabbath, or how far you could walk; what you could eat, what you could carry, how you could prepare your food on, and on, and on, 600 laws just regarding Sabbath observance. Now, it was a symbol of legalism in the days of Jesus. Unfortunately, it's still a symbol of legalism today.

For some reason, keeping the other nine commandments does not bother Christians, but the Sabbath, smells like and feels like and tastes like legalism to many, many Christians. You will not find any Christian churches that are against these nine commandments. "No other gods before Me, no graven images and idols, don't take God's name in vain, honor your father and your mother, do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not covet," they will all say, "That's absolutely right, that's how we should live our lives as Christians." If you say, "Now keep the Sabbath," they'll say, "It's legalism, that is legalism." Now, one of the reasons given, they would say that all of the other commandments are quoted in the New Testament, but the Sabbath is not. So the Sabbath was for the Jews, ended with Jesus, it's no longer anything to worry about – if it were that important it would have been quoted in the New Testament.

So I decided to challenge that thesis. I took a Bible concordance. Now a Bible concordance has the words that are used in the Bible. And you look up a word, and it will tell you all the places it's used. So I took the words of the Ten Commandments to see if they are quoted in the New Testament. "No other God's before me," the first commandment is not quoted anywhere in the New Testament. "Having no graven images" is not quoted anywhere in the New Testament. "Not taking God's name in vain" is not quoted anywhere in the New Testament. They are simply not quoted anywhere in the New Testament. Now, "...honor your father and mother" and those five or six, excuse me, are. So the Sabbath is not quoted,

and these other three aren't quoted, yet the Sabbath is set apart and we are told it is legalism to be involved in it.

Now, I've pondered this. I tried to figure it out. I tried to understand why it's so difficult for people to understand the blessing of the Sabbath. And I realized that perhaps, even for us, the Sabbath is not a blessing but it is legalism. And I think it is driven by fear of what will happen in the last days. In the Book of Revelation, God's people are identified as keeping God's commandments – implying that the followers of the antichrist are not keeping God's commandments. And so you have commandments. And everybody seems to agree on nine, but you've got that other one, so maybe that is the issue in the last days. And if that's an issue, if that's part of the law, then we bite our nails wondering, will we be faithful to God? And consequently what happens is a problem ensues that that concept is ratcheted up to such a high level that it takes precedence over Jesus being our Savior.

And so, we do teach the Sabbath because of law. We do teach the Sabbath because of commandments instead of teaching it because of blessing. That is something in the human heart that rebels against having to do something. And so when we talk to our Christian brothers and sisters who do not keep the Sabbath, and we say, they have to keep the Sabbath, they rebel! It doesn't feel right. And I'm fascinated that none of us are having to deal with any of the other commandments in a day in and day out and weekly process like we do the Sabbath. Our lives are ordered around it. And yet, how many times do people sit around and discuss lying? Oh, they do every now and then when you get into Corrie Tan Boom discussions, "Would you hide Jews in your house during WWII?" "Would you lie to the German officers who came to your door?" You know, we do a little ethical debating like that, but the Sabbath seems to be all consuming.

Is it a command or is it a blessing? Now I can demonstrate from the New Testament and I've been told to do it, but I won't do it today. But I can demonstrate from the New Testament that Jesus kept the Sabbath, His followers kept the Sabbath. Jesus expected His followers to still be keeping it 39 years after He died, when He tells them to "...pray that you won't have to flee in the winter or on the Sabbath" when Jerusalem was being surrounded by the Roman army. The Gentiles kept the Sabbath in the Book of Acts. The references to the first day in the New Testament do not indicate a change from Sabbath to Sunday. God's people in the Book of Revelation will keep the Sabbath. It's all crystal clear. I can teach that, but if I do, so what? So what? There are other questions, and I have written in my notes, greater questions, and that's what we are going to deal with today. And here they are.

"Do grace and faith do away with the need to obey?" Or, "Do grace and faith give a desire to obey?" Let's go to John, chapter 8. John chapter 8, we'll be reading verse 31. We find Jesus in mid conversation with a group of people. "Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'if you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.' They answered Him, 'we are Abraham's descendants and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, 'You will be made free?'" Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin, and a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed!"

Free from what? Free from the bondage of sin. Free from slavery to sin; free from vice and habits, and wicked things that enslave a human being. Now, does a person consider obeying God, who has freed him from all these things, does he consider obeying God a blessing or a burden? I can tell you, myself. When I accepted Jesus Christ I was an alcoholic. And when He came into my heart, the first thing that came into my mind, "I no longer have to drink alcohol or take drugs. I found what I'm looking for." And I'll tell you, I was tempted. I've told sermons about it. But I did not want to get enslaved again by alcohol. I'll tell you, it has not been a burden. It has been a blessing to walk with God, and to stay away from the enslavement and bondage of sin.

John 8 verse 1, story: "Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Now early in the morning He came again to the temple, and all the people came to Him. And He sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had sat her in the midst, they said to Him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses and the law commanded us that such should be stoned, but what do You say?' This they said testing Him that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote in the sand, wrote in the ground with His finger as though He did not hear." Later Jesus would say, 'If anyone among you is without sin, let him cast the first stone.' Well the people leave. And you go to verse 10: "When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, 'woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'no one Lord.' Jesus said to her, 'neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.'"

Literarily, it says "Go, and from now on stop sinning." I ask you, does that person consider it legalism to do what God said to do, or do they say, "That's a blessing to me?" It is a blessing! Now look at Romans chapter 6 verse 10. Speaking of Jesus, "For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all, but the life that He lives, He lives to God." Now that is a description of Jesus. But maybe in one verse that might be the most beautiful description of the Gospel as well. "For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all..." When we accept Christ, we died to sin. And the life that we live, we now live to God. Is that a burden, or is that a blessing? Is it legalism or is it love in action? Well we continue reading, verse 12: "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey it in its lust. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin. But present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead and your members as instruments to righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you. You are not under law but under grace!"

"What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey; whether of sin to death or of obedience to righteousness." Life that is lived for God! Jesus weighed in on this topic in John chapter 14 verse 15. Jesus is speaking to His followers at the Last Supper. He put it this way. He said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." Other versions of the Bible say, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." Conversely, the Lord could say: "If you are keeping My commandments, but you don't love Me, don't do it. Don't bother! Nothing comes of it. But if you love Me and you want to know what pleases Me, keep My commandments." God's desire for humanity is

that the relationship with Him will result in us loving Him, and loving righteousness. He desires to free us from the bondage of sin, to freely give us something we could never achieve on our own -- salvation and salvation in Christ! The gift of eternal life is through grace. It is accepted by faith! That faith develops into love for God. And love for Him is demonstrated in wanting to serve Him, that's how it works.

The Sabbath is a gift to mankind. It is given as a blessing. Unfortunately, we don't teach it as a blessing. We teach it as law. And we wonder why our kids hate the Sabbath. We wonder why our teenagers just are watching the clock for Saturday evening. We wonder why tension builds in the home on Friday afternoon. We teach it as law. We don't teach it as blessing. We teach it as, "You've got to do it or you will be damned." And then, the greatest amount of time and energy spent in discussing the Sabbath is spent on what we can and what we cannot do. It's not about blessing; it's not about relationship. It's not about, "Man, you get to take a break from the normal things of life. Take a break from all that and recoup physically, emotionally, spiritually, and in your relationships." We don't teach the Sabbath as a blessing. We teach it as law and wonder why it feels like legalism, and we wonder why we look like legalists.

The Sabbath is a gift to mankind. It is given as a blessing. It is given in the context of relationship with God. It is given as an opportunity for you to be closer to God. It is given as, well, let me explain it again just to remind you of couple of weeks ago, they never had days off prior to the Sabbath – prior to at least Israel being told about the Sabbath. Everybody worked, sunup, sundown, seven days a week. The Sabbath was given as a blessing. I want to ask you a question. Listen carefully. The Sabbath is a gift from God to mankind. It is given as a blessing. Here is the question: Is it a command? The answer is, yes it is. Is it a burden? No! Not for those who love the Lord. But for those of us who don't love the Lord, the Sabbath is a burden. It's a day to keep. It's something I can't do. It's a list of rules that I have to abide by. The Sabbath is a command my friends. That's clear in the Scriptures, but it is not a burden.

Now I want every man here to listen, every man that's married especially. If you are not married you can listen, but don't respond. And I want every man here to respond. The answer is "yes" or "no," and it shouldn't take long to think. "Are we commanded to love our wives?" (A few "yes" are heard from the audience) That wasn't very enthusiastic. (...laughter from the audience) I'm going to give you another shot at it guys. Here is your chance to redeem yourself in front of your spouse. "Are we commanded to love our wives?" (Men from the audience: "Yes.") Thank you! Now fellows, I'm going to ask you another question. Don't flinch, don't twitch an eyebrow, look straight forward. Get in a coma if you have to. Here is the next question. First one, "Are we commanded to love our wives," you all said "Yes." Here is the second question, "Is it a burden?" (A few men from the audience said, "No.") (...laughter) How many of you have ever read about lying? (...more laughter) I appreciate you saying "no."

You know, if you are a husband who has not treated a wife well, and you are working hard to win her heart back, and she demonstrates to you some affection again, like when you were courting, you would never say, "Loving her is a command." You would say, "Loving her is a blessing; is a blessing." All of God's commands, my friends, are soaked in blessing. God only asked us to do what is good for us, what is a blessing to us. He only asked us to do things that He'll empower us to do, so we can live a good,

wholesome and wonderful, healthy life. Are we commanded to honor our parents, not commit adultery, not murder, not steal, not bear false witness, and not covet? The answer is "Yes." Are they a burden? "No." It's the way we want to live. I don't think the generation coming up behind us is going to embrace the Sabbath if we presented it as law. I don't think our friends and neighbors in the community are going to embrace the Sabbath if we presented as law. It is a law. But if presented that way, it creates legalism. The Sabbath my friends, is a blessing from God.

You know, I don't know how you keep the Sabbath? I'm going to have a Bible study about it, and I'm going to show you what the Bible says. And you are going to be shocked about how little the Bible actually says. And we are all going to agree that we are all going to have a different opinion on how to keep the Sabbath. It's designed that way. The Sabbath, my friends, is such a personal experience with God that there aren't two people in this auditorium that agree on how it's to be kept. It's a personal experience with God. But the blessing that God offers us is tremendous. And if I truly enter into the Sabbath seeking God's blessing, and I receive His blessing, and I'm strengthened physically. Emotionally, I get to turn that stupid news channel off and forget what our dumb congress is doing.

For twenty four hours I don't have to listen to the debate and you know the vitriol spirit and the hatred. "They did this, and they did that, and this one is doing this, and that one is doing that, and calamity here and calamity there!" I can turn that stuff off. I don't have to read the paper that day. I don't have to read the *Newsweek* magazine or *Time* or any of that. And for awhile I can live life with hope. I can live life with joy. I can live life forgetting how hard it is to live life. I can spend time with my wife, my children, grandchildren; I can relax, take a hot bath and put suds in it and say, "I'm keeping the Sabbath." (audience laughing) I can read books I don't have a chance to read other times. I can cultivate the relationships that I don't have time to during a busy, hectic week. I can come to church and listen to this beautiful music and these children stories and be encouraged by the Word of God. All these things are blessings! That, I believe, is what God wants us to be emphasizing.

It is a blessing to be saved by Jesus. It is a blessing to be falling in love with Jesus. And it is a blessing to receive the Sabbath from Him as a gift for my well being. But without Jesus, it's legalism through and through. So today, the real question is: "Do grace and faith do away with the need to obey or do grace and faith give a desire to obey?" "Jesus saves me; I want to walk with Him." The answer is, "Absolutely, because that's where the blessing is, in walking with God." Do you want to be saved? Do you want to obey? I just ask you to stand right now. "Father in Heaven, thank you for a Savior; thank You that You love us so much You are saving us through Jesus. Now may we, in a relationship with You, do what pleases You and receive Your blessings. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen."