

The Sabbath - What does it really mean?

by Stella Paterson

Over the past several months we have been uncovering the ineffectiveness of the present-day "gospel" message. We have looked at the source of sin [death], which is the knowledge of good and evil, and the fact that it is only through *relying upon Christ for salvation* [belief/faith] that we can have life. The issue is death and life - the reason Jesus died. It is not about the things we have done; as dreadful as those deeds may be. It is about receiving the Life of Jesus and making us the Righteousness of God in Him. His Spirit in us will mortify the deeds of our flesh - both good and evil. Mere forgiveness will never change us and we, as hard as we try, can never change our deeds to make us righteous. That kind of "righteousness" would be "self-righteousness" - the dead works that "self" produces. "Self" must die if the fruit of Righteousness is to manifest.

So, you may ask, what has this to do with the Sabbath? Let's take a look.

There are many people today who preach about and adhere to the belief that it is necessary to keep a sabbath day. There is much debate over when the Sabbath begins and when it ends, and whether the "Sabbath day" is Saturday or Sunday. Although many Christians say that Sunday is the "Lord's day," it is anything but His. It is a day of turmoil; rushing to "church"; listening to someone else speak of Him, and "worshiping" within in a particular time frame dictated by a ritualistic schedule. At the end of the day, it is not only the preacher who is exhausted. And they call it a "day of rest." The word "rest" is taken from the Bible but its true meaning has escaped many.

The question is, Have we entered into His rest, the sabbath He planned for all even before He gave to Moses the Ten Commandments? There is a link at the end of this article to the study of "sabbath" and "rest." In it you will learn what "sabbath" is and is not.

Origin of the Sabbath

The word "sabbath" first appears in the Old Testament, in Exodus 16, where the Lord speaks to Israel about resting on the seventh day. The next occurrence of the word is in Exodus 20, where it is included in the Ten Commandments with this: "*Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy* [Hebrew: 'clean (ceremonially or morally)]."

As we know, the Law was given to lead Israel to Christ. It was the "tutor" ["schoolmaster" in the KJV] to prepare them for the coming of their Messiah who would fulfil the Law by His death and resurrection. Along with the shedding of blood to atone for sin, the keeping of the sabbath was paramount in the tutoring of Israel. The record of Sabbath-keeping in the Old Testament; the expounding

on it in the book of Hebrews, and even references to it in the Gospels are for our understanding today. But we must come to grasp its importance to us, for both now and the future.

Is it necessary to keep the Sabbath? No; not in the sense as was required of the Jews under the Law. It was another one of those "shadows" of a coming day when they would have opportunity to enter the Sabbath rest of the Lord. The writer of Hebrews recorded these words in Hebrews 4:10-11: "*For he that is entered into his rest hath himself also rested from his works, as God did from his. Let us therefore give diligence to enter into that rest, that no man fall after the same example of **disobedience** [Greek #543: 'disbelief (obstinate and rebellious)']*." The Greek word which means "*obstinate and rebellious disbelief*" is the word "*apeitheia*," from which we get the English word "apathy."

This "*disobedience*," or "unbelief" as the KJV translates it, is non-caring, apathetic, willful ignoring of the truth that Jesus died that we might have Life through *entrusting our spiritual wellbeing* to Him. This, I believe, is what Paul meant when he used the words "*received not the love of the truth*". (2 Thessalonians 2:10) Read that passage and think about the seriousness of what the Apostle was really saying.

For one who is yet in simple unbelief, not having heard the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection, God's mercy will be upon them. They will be given the opportunity to come to Christ. An example of this can be seen in 1 Timothy 1:13, in Paul's words: "*Though I was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: howbeit I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief*. [Greek #570]" And we know how Jesus got Paul's attention on the road to Damascus. But for those who have heard but do not respond, having been brought to the Light by the Holy Spirit, they are subject to the wrath of God. This is what Jesus was speaking of in John 3:36. He said "*He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him*." The words "*believeth not*" are translated from the Greek word "*apeitheo*" [#544] which has the same root word as "*apeitheia*" [#543]. To "believe not" means, literally, "*to disbelieve (wilfully and perversely)*."

We must never fall into the delusion that once we have "said the sinner's prayer" we are ready to meet Jesus. That word "believe" (or "faith") is so much more than mental assent.

Sabbath and faith - the connection

The book of Hebrews, that great letter on faith, tells us of the "rest" that God wants for His people. The book was written to the Hebrews to show them the futility of keeping the Law in their own strength and to tell them of the absolute importance of faith in God and in Jesus Christ, their Messiah, and His finished work on the Cross.

We are headed into a time when we need to be securely in the place of protection we could call "the Lord's sabbath." This "time" is the tribulation period which will be the *"time of trial which will come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."* (Revelation 3:10) Jesus' next words tell us to "hold fast" and if we overcome we will be counted in that number that makes up the New Jerusalem, the Bride of Christ.

In the earlier part of Revelation 3:10, Jesus said that He would *"keep you from the time of trial which will come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."* The word "keep" comes from the Greek word which means *"to guard (from loss or injury, properly by keeping the eye upon."* There are some who say this is proof of the church being "raptured" but that is not the case. When we have firmly committed our spiritual wellbeing to Christ, never to look back, He will "keep" us during the time of trial [tribulation] that will try, and sift, and prove those that dwell upon the earth. The keeping power of God will protect us from deception - not save us from physical harm. It is the final purification of His Bride who is made up of those still alive during this time.

It was not just empty words that our Lord spoke, when He said *"Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"* (Luke 18:8b) Nor was it empty words in Hebrews 11:6, when the writer told us, *"But without faith it is impossible to please [Greek: 'gratify entirely'] him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is [God], and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek [Greek: 'crave'] him."*

Now look at these words, spoken by the Apostle Peter: *"receiving **the end of your faith**, even the salvation of your souls."* The "ultimate purpose" of our faith is the salvation of our souls. Read the whole passage from 1 Peter 1:3-9: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our **Lord Jesus Christ**, who according to his abundant mercy has **regenerated us**, giving us expectation of Life by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are **kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation** ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein you greatly rejoice, though **now for a season**, if need be, you are in heaviness **through various adversities**: that the **trial of your faith**, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of **Jesus Christ**: whom having not seen, you love; **in whom, though now you see him not, yet believing**, you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the **ultimate purpose of your faith**, even the salvation of your souls."* (Some words were amplified by me, using Greek meanings. Emphases are also mine.)

I will close with this one verse which is the only one that uses the Greek the word "sabbatismos": *"There remaineth therefore a sabbath rest for the people of God."* (Hebrews 4:9) I will leave it up to you to check out the definition in this study.