

Questions About the Sabbath, Part 2

Questions About the Nature and Perpetuity of the Sabbath

by John Bunyan

QUESTION IV

Whether the seventh day Sabbath did not fall, as such, with the rest of the Jewish rites and ceremonies? Or whether that day, as a Sabbath, was afterwards by the apostles imposed upon the churches of the Gentiles?

I would now also, before I show the grounds of my proposing this question, premise what is necessary thereunto; to wit, That time and day were both fixed upon by law, for the solemn performance of divine worship among the Jews; and that time and day is also by law fixed, for the solemnizing of divine worship to God in the churches of the Gentiles. But that the seventh day Sabbath, as such, is that time, that day, that still I question.

Now before I show the grounds of my questioning of it, I shall enquire into the nature of that ministration in the bowels of which this seventh day Sabbath is placed. And,

First, I say, as to that, the nature of that law is moral, but the ministration and circumstances thereto belonging, I do mean the giving of it by such hands, at such a place and time, in such a mode, as when it was given to Israel in the wilderness.

The matter therefore, to wit, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength:' and 'thy neighbor as thyself,' is everlasting, (Mk.12:29-31) and is not from Sinai, nor from the two tables of stone, but in nature; for this law commenced and took being and place that day in which man was created. Yea, it was concreate with him, and without it he cannot be a rational creature, as he was in the day in which God created him. But for the ministration of it from Sinai, with the circumstances belonging to that ministration, they are not moral nor everlasting, but shadowish and figurative only.

That ministration cannot be moral for three reasons. 1. It commenced not when morality commenced, but two thousand years after. 2. It was not universal as the law, as moral, is; it was given only to the church of the Jews in those tables. 3. Its end is past as such a ministration, though the same law as to the morality thereof abides. Where are the tables of stone and this law as therein contained? We only, as to that, have the notice of such a ministration and a rehearsal of the law, with that mode of giving of it, in the testament of God.

But to come to particulars.

1. The very preface to that ministration carries in it a type of our deliverance from the bondage of sin, the devil and hell. Pharaoh and Egypt, and Israel's bondage there, being a type of these.
2. The very stones in which this law was engraven, were a figure of the tables of the heart. The first two were a figure of the heart carnal, by which the law was broken: the last two, of the heart spiritual, in which the new law, the law of grace is written and preserved. Ex.34:1,2. 2Co.3:3.
3. The very mount on which this ministration was given, was typical of Mount Zion. See Heb.12 where they are compared. ver.18-22.

4. Yea, the very church to whom that ministration was given, was a figure of the church of the gospel that is on Mount Zion. See the same scripture, and compare it with Acts 7:38. Rev.14:1-5.

5. That ministration was given in the hand and by the disposition of angels, to prefigure how the new law or ministration of the Spirit was to be given afterwards to the churches under the New Testament by the hands of the angel of God's everlasting covenant of grace, who is his only begotten Son. Is.63:9. Mal.3:1*. Acts 3:22,23.

6. It was given to Israel also in the hand of Moses, as mediator, to show or typify out, that the law of grace was in after times to come to the church of Christ by the hand and mediation of Jesus our Lord. Gal.3:19. De.5:5. Heb.8:6. 1Tim.2:5. Heb.9:15; 12:24.

7. As to this ministration, it was to continue but 'till the seed should come;' and then must, as such, give place to a better ministration. Gal.3:19. 'A better covenant, established upon better promises.' Heb.8:6.

From all this therefore I conclude, that there is a difference to be put between the morality of the law and the ministration of it upon Sinai. The law, as to its morality, was before; but as to this ministration, it was not till the church was with Moses, and he with the angels on Mount Sinai in the wilderness.

Now in the law, as moral, we conclude a time propounded, but no seventh day Sabbath enjoined. but in that law, as thus ministered, which ministration is already out of doors; we find a seventh day; that seventh day on which God rested, on which God rested from all his works, enjoined. What is it then? Why the whole ministration as written and engraven in stones being removed, the seventh day Sabbath must also be removed; for that the time, not yet the day, was as to our holy Sabbath, or rest, moral; but imposed with that whole ministration, as such, upon the church, until the time of reformation: which time being come, this ministration, as I said, as such, ceases; and the whole law, as to the morality of it, is delivered into the hand of Christ, who imposes it now also; but not as a law of works, nor as that ministration written and engraven in stones, but as a rule of life to those that have believed in him. 1Cor.9:21.

So then, that law is still moral, and still supposes, since it teaches that there is a God, that time must be set apart for his church to worship him in, according to that will of his that he had revealed in his word. But though by that law time is required; yet by that, as moral, the time never was prefixed.

The time then of old was appointed by such a ministration of that law as we have been now discoursing of; and when that ministration ceases, that time did also vanish with it. And now by our new law-giver, the Son of God, he being 'lord also of the Sabbath day,' we have a time prefixed, as the law of nature requires, a new day, by him who is the lord of it; I say, appointed, wherein we may worship, not in the oldness of that letter written and engraven in stones, but according to, and most agreeing with, his new and holy testament. And this I confirm further by those reasons that now shall follow.

First, Because we find not from the resurrection of Christ to the end of the Bible, anything written by which is imposed that seventh day Sabbath upon the churches. Time, as I said, the law as moral requires; but that time we find no longer imposed. And in all duties pertaining to God and his true worship in his churches, we must be guided by his laws and testaments. By his old laws, when his old worship was in force; and by his new laws, when his new worship is in force. And he hath verily now said, 'Behold, I make all things new.' Rev.21:5.

Second, I find, as I have showed, that this seventh day Sabbath is confined, not to the law of nature as such, but to that ministration of it which was given on Sinai: which ministration as it is come to an end as such, so it is rejected by Paul as a ministration no ways capable of abiding in the church now, since the ministration of the Spirit also hath taken its place. 2Cor.3. Wherefore instead of propounding it to the churches with arguments tending to its reception, he seeks by degrading it of its old lustre and glory, to wean the churches from any *likement thereof:

1. By calling of it the ministration of death, of the letter, and of condemnation, a term most frightful but no ways alluring to the godly.
2. By calling it a ministration that now has no glory, by reason of the exceeding glory of that ministration under which by the Holy Spirit the New Testament churches are. And these are weaning considerations. 2Cor.3.
3. By telling of them it is a ministration that tends to blind the mind and to veil the heart as to the knowledge of their Christ: so that they cannot, while under that, behold his beauteous face, but as their heart shall turn from it to him. 2Cor.3.
4. And that they might not be left in the dark, but perfectly know what ministration it is that he means, he saith expressly, it is that 'written and engraven in stones.' See again 2Cor.3. And in that ministration it is that this seventh day Sabbath is found.

But shall we think that the apostle speaks any thing of all here said, to wean saints off from the law of nature, as such! No verily, that he retains in the church, as being managed there by Christ: but THIS ministration is dangerous now, because it cannot be maintained in the church, but in a way of contempt to the ministration of the Spirit, and is derogatory to the glory of that.

Now these, as I said, are weaning considerations. No man, I do think, that knows himself, or the glory of a gospel ministration, can, if he understands what Paul says here, desire that such a ministration should be retained in the churches.

Third, This seventh day Sabbath has lost its ceremonies (those unto which before you are cited by the texts) which was with it imposed upon the old church for her due performance of worship to God thereon. How then can this Sabbath now be kept? Kept, I say, according to law. For if the church on which it was first imposed, was not to keep it, yea, could not keep it legally without the practicing of those ceremonies: and if these ceremonies are long ago dead and gone, how will those that pretend to a belief of a continuation of the sanction thereof, keep it, I say, according as it is written?

If they say, they retain the day, but change their manner of observation thereof; I ask, who has commanded them so to do? This is one of the laws of this Sabbath. 'Thou shalt take fine flour, and bake twelve cakes thereof: two tenth deals shall be in one cake. And thou shalt set them in two rows, six on a row, upon the pure table before the Lord. And thou shalt put pure frankincense upon each row, that it may be on the bread for a memorial, even an offering made by fire unto the Lord. Every Sabbath he shall set it in order before the Lord continually, being taken from the children of Israel by an everlasting covenant. Lev.24:5-8. You may see also other places, as Num.28:9,10. Ne.13:22. and Ez.46:4.

Now if these be the laws of the Sabbath, this seventh day Sabbath; and if God did never command that this Sabbath should by his church be sanctified without them: and, as was said

before, if these ceremonies have been long since dead and buried, how must this Sabbath be kept?

Let men take heed, lest while they plead for law, and pretend themselves to be the only doers of God's will, they be not found the biggest transgressors thereof. And why can they not as well keep the other Sabbaths? As the Sabbaths of months, of years, and the jubilee? For this, as I have showed, is no moral precept, it is only a branch of the ministration of death and condemnation.

Fourth, The seventh day Sabbath, as such, was a sign and shadow of things to come; and a sign cannot be the thing signified and substance too. Wherefore when the thing signified or substance is come the sign or thing shadowing ceaseth. And, I say, the seventh day Sabbath being so, as a seventh day Sabbath it ceaseth also. See again Ex.31:13,14. Ez.20:12,21. Col.2:14.

Nor do I find that our Protestant writers, notwithstanding their reverence of the Sabbath, do conclude otherwise; but that though time as to worshipping God, must needs be contained in the bowels of the moral law, as moral; yet they for good reasons forbear to affix the seventh day as that time there too.

They do it, I say, for good reasons; reasons drawn from the scripture; or rather, for that the scripture draws them so to conclude: yet they cast not away the morality of a Sabbath of rest to the church. It is to be granted them, that time for God's worship abides for ever, but the seventh day vanishes as a shadow and sign; because such indeed it was, as the scripture above cited declares as to the sanction thereof as a Sabbath.

The law of nature then calls for time; but the God of nature assigns it, and has given power to his Son to continue SUCH time as himself shall by his eternal wisdom judge most meet for the churches of the Gentiles to solemnize worship to God by him in. Hence he is said to be 'Lord even of the Sabbath day.' Mat.12:8.

Fifth, I find by reading God's word, that Paul by authority apostolical, takes away the sanctions of all the Jews' festivals and Sabbaths.

This is manifest, for that he leaves the observation or non-observation of them, as things indifferent, to the mind and discretion of the believers. 'One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.' Rev.14:5.

By this last clause of the verse, 'Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind,' he doth plainly declare, that such days are now stripped of their sanction.* For none of God's laws, while they retain their sanction, are left to the will and mind of the believers, as to whether they will observe them or not. Men, I say, are not left to their liberty in such a case; for when a stamp of divine authority is upon a law, and abides, so long we are bound, not to our mind, but to that law: but when a thing, once sacred, has lost its sanction, then it falls, as to faith and conscience, among other common or indifferent things. And so the seventh day sabbath did. Again,

Sixth, Thus Paul writes to the church of Colossae. 'Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.' Col. 2:16,17. Here also, as he serves other holy days, he serves the Sabbath. He gives a liberty to believers to refuse the observation of it, and commands that no man should judge against them for their so doing. And as you read, the reason

of his so doing is, because the body, the substance is come. Christ saith, he is the body, or that which these things were a shadow or figure of. 'The body is of Christ.'

Nor hath the apostle, since he saith 'or of the Sabbath' one would think, left any hole, out at which men's inventions could get: but man has sought out many; and, so, many he will use.

But again, That the apostle by this word 'Sabbath' intends the seventh day Sabbath, is clear; for that it is by Moses himself counted for a sign, as we have showed: and for that none of the other Sabbaths were a more clear shadow of the Lord Jesus Christ than this. For that, and that alone, is called 'the rest of God:' in it God rested from all his works. Hence he calls it by way of eminency, 'MY Sabbath, and MY holy day.' Is.56:4; 58:13.

Yet could that rest be nothing else but typical; for God, never since the world began, really rested, but in his Son. 'This is he,' saith God, 'in whom I am well pleased.' This Sabbath then, was God's rest typically, and was given to Israel as a sign of his grace towards them in Christ. Wherefore when Christ was risen, it ceased and was no longer of obligation to bind the conscience to the observation thereof. [Or of the Sabbath.] He distinctly singles out this seventh day, as that which was a most noble shadow, a most exact shadow. And then puts that with the other together; saying, they are a shadow of things to come; and that Christ has answered them all. 'The body is of Christ.'

Seventh, No man will, I think, deny but that Heb.4:4 intends the seventh day Sabbath, on which God rested from all his works; for the text doth plainly say so: yet may the observing reader easily perceive that both it, and the rest of Canaan also, made mention of ver.5 were typical, as to a day made mention of vers.7 and 8 which day he calls another. He would not afterwards have made mention of another day. If Joshua had given them rest, he would not. Now if they had not that rest in Joshua's days, be sure they had it not by Moses; for he was still before.

All the rests therefore that Moses gave them and that Joshua gave them too were but typical of another day in which God would give them rest. Heb.4:9,10. And whether the day to come was Christ or Heaven, it makes no matter: it is enough that they before did fail, as always shadows do, and that therefore mention by David is, and that afterward, made of another day. 'There remains therefore a rest to the people of God.' A rest to come, of which the seventh day in which God rested, and the land of Canaan, was a type; which rest begins in Christ now, and shall be consummated in glory.

And in that he saith 'There remains a rest,' referring to that of David, what is it, if it signifies not, that the other rests remain not? There remains therefore a rest, a rest prefigured by the seventh day, and by the rest of Canaan, though they are fled and gone.

'There remains a rest;' a rest which stands not now in signs and shadows, in the seventh day, or Canaan, but in the Son of God, and his kingdom, to whom and to which the weary are invited to come for rest. Is.28:12. Mat.11:20. Heb.4:11.

Yet this casts not out the Christians holiday or Sabbath: for that was not ordained to be a type or shadow of things to come, but to sanctify the name of their God in, and to perform that worship to him which was also in a shadow signified by the ceremonies of the law, as the epistle to the Hebrews doth plentifully declare.

And I say again, the seventh day Sabbath cannot be it, for the reasons showed before.

Eighth, Especially if you add to all this, that nothing of the ministration of death written and engraven in stones is brought by Jesus, or by his apostles, into the kingdom of Christ, as a part of his instituted worship. Hence it is said of that ministration in the bowels of which this seventh day Sabbath is found, that it has now NO glory; that its glory is done away, in or by Christ, and so is laid aside, the ministration of the Spirit that excels in glory, being come in the room thereof.

I will read the text to you. 'But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: (It was given at first with this provision, that it should not always retain its glory, that sanction, as a ministration.) How shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious! For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excels. For if that which was done away was glorious, much more that which remains is glorious.' 2COR.3:7-11.

What can be more plain? The text says expressly, that this ministration doth NOT remain; yea, and insinuates, that in its first institution upon Sinai it was thus ordained; and if by the coming in of the ministration of the spirit, this ordination is now executed; that is, if by it, and the apostle saith it, it is done away by a ministration that remains: then where is that seventh day Sabbath?

This is Part 2 of 2