**The Sabbath And Forgiveness Of Sin**

**By Martin Storey**

While the Sabbath was given at creation, the term “Sabbath” is not used until God told Israel to keep it after they had left Egypt. As they were slaves in Egypt, they would have had no chance for any day off work. The Sabbath was a day of freedom for them, and to keep it was no doubt a great relief and blessing. However, it also had significant meaning over and above the physical benefit of having a rest, for its introduced as the holy Sabbath of the Lord. (Exo 16:23) A few chapters later, God spoke the Ten Commandments to Israel, in which he showed a clear link between forgiveness of sin in the third Commandment, and keeping the Sabbath in the fourth:

• You shall not take (bear) the name of the Lord your God in vain. For the Lord will not hold him guiltless that takes (bears) His name in vain.

• Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. You shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it. (Exo 20:7-11)

First of all, we are told to not bear God’s name in vain, that is call yourself a follower of God but not do as he says. If we bear his name in a worthy manner then we will have our sins forgiven, for we will be counted guiltless. This command is not talking about ‘blasphemy’, which means to speak ill of God, and to denigrate him. The issue of blasphemy by swearing or cursing, is specifically dealt with by Moses some time after the Ten Commandments were given. (Lev 24:10-16) The Hebrew word (*nâsâh*) used here for “take” means to lift up, in the way we bear or carry something. In all the 653 times *nâsâh* is used in scripture it never means “to use as blasphemy”.

Next, we are told to remember to keep holy his Sabbath day, for it is God’s holy day. I have heard preachers say that only God can make something holy, yet God makes it our job to *keep* this day holy. By doing so we bear his name and proclaim that we are a worshiper of the creator who first made this day holy. How we keep it holy is by not doing any work, nor allowing anyone else to do any work for us.

If we claim to be his people, but undertake work on his holy Sabbath Day, or employ people, we will be bearing God’s holy name in vain. If we actually bear God’s name in vain, by working on the Sabbath, then the consequences of doing so are not insignificant: … *the Lord will not hold him guiltless that bears His name in vain.*

Does this mean that forgiveness of your sin is directly linked to your keeping the Sabbath holy? It’s difficult to read it any other way. However, perhaps we could look at it differently and say “In order to be forgiven you must take a holiday!” Could be a catchy bumper sticker: *Relax and be forgiven*!

God’s day of rest is to tell us we are not slaves, but sons and friends. If you work on the Sabbath, then you are acting like a slave, but not a slave of God, for even slaves have a rest on God’s Sabbath. We are slaves of sin if we profane the Sabbath: *Jesus answered them, Truly, truly, I say to you, Whoever practices sin is the slave of sin. And the slave does not abide in the house forever, but the Son abides forever. Therefore if the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.* (John 8:34-36) Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, and he has made you free to keep his holy Sabbath day. (Matt 12:1-5) Do you accept his freedom from sin? If so, then take the first step in having a rest from sin, by keeping his day of rest, and at the same time you will be reflecting God’s freedom from sin that is offered to the entire world.

It's our choice if we obey or not. If we love God, and delight in his ways, then we will want to have a rest and develop our relationship with him on his day of rest: *If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath,* (don’t do any work) *from doing your pleasure on my Holy Day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the Holy Day of the Lord, honourable, and shall honour Him* (by resting as he commanded), *not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the Lord.* (Isaiah 58:13-14) God is not forcing you to delight in him, or his ways. But if you do, he shall delight in you and give you the desires of your heart, including forgiveness of sin.

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