

The Sabbath in Luke 10:25-28

Copyright (c) 2007 by Frank W. Hardy, Ph.D.

The Setting

Already in Jesus' lifetime, before the cross, there was a spiritual component to the law. Consider the following exchange between Christ and a teacher of the law, found in Luke 10:25-28.

^{NIV} **Luke 10:25** ¶ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" ²⁷ He answered: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" ²⁸ "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

This exchange is normally treated as a preamble to the story of the good Samaritan, because the lawyer, having answered his own question, wanted to show that he had something more in mind. Otherwise he would look foolish. So the focus is on the story that follows. But there is valuable instruction in the preamble itself.

The Question

One frequently encounters the teaching that the law is now done away and what takes its place is the idea that we must love God and love our fellow man. This is good, but when was the law done away? One can't say it was done away during Jesus' lifetime because He Himself kept it. His Sabbath keeping didn't always please the Pharisees, but it didn't give them cause for action either. If it had, Jesus would have been stoned instead of crucified. Since no one can challenge that He was crucified, no one can challenge that the Pharisees did not execute Him for Sabbath breaking. This is something they would like to have been able to do, but they didn't. Jesus kept the Sabbath and the other commandments. In Matt 5, and on many other occasions, He taught about them. (Matt 5 contains an extended commentary on commandments 5, 6, 7, 9, 8, and 10. Numbers 8 and 9 are out of sequence in the sermon on the mount.)

So when was the law done away? Those who feel it is no longer binding argue that it was done away at the cross. But Christ's death followed His life rather than preceding it. If the law was ever done away – which I challenge – that was not the case when Jesus spoke to the teacher of the law in Luke 10. And yet the concept of the law being expressed in this passage is the same as that normally associated with the post cross view commonly held by Evangelical Christians.

What this tells me is that the above post cross view of the law has nothing to do with time. It did not come into being at the cross, but was just as valid before that even as after. Before the cross it was just as true as it is now that loving God and loving one's

fellows represent the essence of the law and constitute law keeping. Jesus says so here. "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live" (Luke 10:28).

What I draw from this fact is that summarizing the law with respect to what it implies about love was never a substitute for keeping it, but merely brought out the main principles behind the details. If it was not a substitute for keeping the law then, it is not a substitute for keeping the law now. We can't love God (the first pillar of the love summary) while putting other gods before Him or treating His name with contempt. We can't love our parents (one part of the second pillar) without respecting them, or others outside the home (another part of the second pillar) while killing or robbing them.

But of course no one would challenge any part of this. With the possible exception of graven images, no one has any objections to nine of the ten commandments, because they are so obviously beneficial to society. It is only the Sabbath that causes offense. But the Sabbath commandment, in a day and time when our children are being taught that people are a historical and biological accident of nature, that there is no God who loves or cares for them, that the fittest will come out on top, just might be the one that we need most right now.

The Challenge

I challenge the reader to try this by keeping one Sabbath just as the Bible teaches us to keep it, i.e., by setting aside an entire day for God starting at sundown Friday evening and extending to sundown Saturday evening. The Sabbath is not just a day of worship. Corporate worship services need not take very long. The Sabbath is a day of rest. It takes an entire day to keep the Sabbath right. Less than a day means not keeping it at all. So we're talking about twenty-four hours here.

What do you do during a twenty-four hour period when you can't do anything you normally would? Isn't this awfully constricting? Personally I find it liberating, because what I normally do tends to isolate me from the rest of the family. When the Sabbath begins, that's a great time for a walk with those who value your time and presence most. The next morning is a time for corporate worship together with the entire church family. This can't be any more limiting than taking an equivalent amount of time for church attendance on a Sunday. The real difference comes in the afternoon.

When my daughter was young Sabbath was a time when we didn't have to rush here or there. We could take a walk at the duck pond, or go to a nature center, or pick up leaves in autumn, or wade in a creek during the summer. On many Sabbaths the conversation in the church lobby would go something like this. We're going to such and such a place this afternoon. Want to come? And pretty soon we'd have a dozen people all enjoying a walk together. And when the sun eventually set we would all gather round and give thanks to God for the beautiful things we had seen and the time we had experienced together.

Then there's visiting. Every church has shut ins. Every community has nursing homes. My daughter learned to play the violin by coming to nursing homes with me and playing cheerful songs for old people on Sabbath afternoon. These are some of my happiest memories from the past several years. Even though my daughter is married

now I still regularly visit nursing homes to share music and enjoy the company of these older people.

In a program like this there is room for loving God and loving others. Loving God comes through in church attendance. That's the morning. Loving others comes into focus in the afternoon. That's the part about taking time for one's family, visiting those who would otherwise receive no visits, fellowship with other church members, and sharing the joy of being out of doors surrounded by the beautiful things that God created so long ago – in six calendar days, just as the Bible teaches (see Gen 1:1-2:3). It does not mean taking everyone to a football game. Nursing homes are not works, and football is not grace. The context for what I say about fellowship with others is one of continued fellowship with God. The Sabbath is a day of spiritual, not just physical, rest.

There are many things to say about the Sabbath, and not all of them would necessarily be theological. That was the one day we served desserts. Our daughter had special Sabbath toys that we let her play with only on Sabbath, and were bought especially for that purpose. We put up during the week. Then, after some of the new had worn off and they had lost their initial appeal, we would let her play with those toys during the week, but not on Sabbath. (She got a lot of new toys this way. I can still hear my wife saying, "Not another bear!") But of all the things we could say about the Sabbath perhaps the most important and practical would be, Try it. Theologically, it is a foretaste of heaven, when we will spend not just a day but all eternity with Jesus. On a personal level, it is my special time with Jesus and with others who love Him as I do. Those who treat the Sabbath as some sort of unclean thing to be avoided, just don't know what they're missing.