The Meaning Of Sabbath

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Introduction

The word “sabbath” is a Hebrew verb that means “to rest from labour” or refers to the day for rest from the day-to-day labour of life. The earliest account of the sabbath is found in the book of Genesis (2:2). It was made for man so that he could rest and refresh his body and soul; it was mentioned when man was innocent in the Garden of Eden[1]. This essay’s concern is to elaborate on the meaning of the sabbath in the teaching of Christ, see its relevance in our present-day lives, and provide an overview of its historical background from the Old Testament.

Discussion

In the book of Exodus, God says “remember the sabbath and keep it holy”; the other six days of the week are for labor, and this day is for rest. It is among the Ten Commandments, with the words coming directly from God. Furthermore, according to the Old Testament, the penalty is death if you defile this commandment[5]. According to the Old Testament, it was meant to be respected and followed and considered most important among the Ten Commandments. Why does God want us to follow the sabbath? I referred earlier to the first mention of the Sabbath. We find its account in Genesis right after God completed the creation of six days. On the seventh day, God ceased to work and blessed the seventh day as holy, did nothing on the sabbath day and felt happy to see his creation. In order to understand the significance of the sabbath, we need to see it in a broader social perspective. The concept of sabbath is about turning aside from the petty routine of daily life and offering ourselves for the highest spiritual pursuits; spiritual enrichment and rest are the core features of the idea and practice of sabbath.[3]. In the following discussion, we will discus the radical transformation it went through leading to Christ’s teaching of the Sabbath.

The first reference to the sabbath is in the gospel of Luke when Jesus Christ entered the synagogue to teach on the day of the sabbath5. Luke says that it was among his customs to go to the synagogue on the day of the Sabbath. We have already seen the Old Testament view on the sabbath. Hence, the Pharisees turned red at this violation, and consequently, they turned against Jesus. Therefore, a conflict started between the rigid regulations of the Pharisees and Christ’s insistence on the flexibility of the commandments of God. For Christ, the day of the sabbath is made for man, not man for the sabbath.[5]. There are almost 39 principles and classes of prohibition, such as grinding, winnowing, threshing, ploughing, and so on. Jesus’ teaching on the sabbath also indicates his position as God,

that he possesses the power to change the law. For some people, the deliberate use of his violation of the day of the sabbath indicated that it was no longer mandatory. Others argue that Christ was observing the sabbath in private but deliberately breaking it for the sake of giving importance to other commandments of equal importance. Jesus performed miracles on the day of the sabbath that provoked anger among the Pharisees because the miracles did not bother them. What really angered them was the blasphemous nature of his argument when he justified his actions by saying that God did the same on the day of the Sabbath. Hence, he works on the day of the sabbath because "[his] father is working till now".[5].

In order to understand this inherent conflict, we need to reconsider Christ's agenda regarding the true nature and significance of the sabbath.[2]. For instance, by violating the day of the sabbath, Christ is following God; now, the question arises: what kind of violation was done by God? He rested from the labor of creation, and his rest was physical. God had finished making the world, but this does not refer to inactivity in salvation, help, and curing the diseased, as God works endlessly and effortlessly. Therefore, Jesus was able to spot an inherent flaw in the intellectual authorities of the time by bringing out the true purpose of the Sabbath and its significance in our lives. Because the six days of the week are devoted to endless physical labour, the seventh day must be devoted to the people in need of redemption and cures for their diseases. By working like God and following God's actions, we can prove ourselves to be the children of God and participate in the divine feast.[1]. By doing this, Christ provided the practical grounds for the words of God and revealed the original purpose of the divine word, which was misconstrued by the Pharisees through rigid religious regulations. For Pharisees, the synagogue was a place of "devotion to the law" rather than a convent where one celebrates one's relation with God. Jesus Christ came to revive that lost connection between man and God; hence, the first step was to reject the religious conventionalities and set culture in order to pave the path of love and compassion.

Conclusion

Jesus' teaching on the sabbath reveals some of the core features of religious teaching; for Christ, the rules and regulations are made for the benefit of human beings, not to trouble them. Furthermore, he also emphasizes the practical purposes of religion, which are timeless; even today, we are able to draw lessons from his teaching regarding the sabbath. By acknowledging the true sensibility of the sabbath, we can improve our lives through love and compassion towards other human beings as well as God.

End Notes

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