

The Sabbath Problem.

SERMON PREACHED BY REV. J. H. JENNER IN THE NORTH BAPTIST CHURCH, HALIFAX, ON SUNDAY, NOV. 8.
GAL. 4: 21-28.

The Christian church has with considerable uniformity honored the Lord Jesus by observing the day upon which he rose from the dead, in public worship and spiritual service. The question is, do we do right to do so? Are we justified in discarding the day which ancient Israel was commanded to keep holy and observing another day? The question, of course, is a larger one than this; viz., are Christians under the authority of the covenant which God made with Israel on Sinai? Or are they made free from it by the new covenant of grace? Paul was the champion of Christian liberty. When this question came up in the first Gentile Christian church, he insisted that the Gentile Christians should not be required to submit to the requirements of the Mosaic law. There was, however, a following of Jews jealous of the law of Moses who sought to compel obedience to his law. When this question came before the church at Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 15, Peter spoke of the law as a yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear; and James, speaking on behalf of the church, declared that there should be no other burden laid upon them than these necessary things, "That ye abstain from meats offered unto idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication; from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well." If there was no reason to instruct the Gentile church on the duty of observing the Sabbath day according to the law of Moses this was the opportunity for that instruction; but it was not given. It would appear that this Jewish party had made its way into Galatia and into the church at Colosse; and that this letter of the apostle Paul was written especially to correct the errors into which some of the Christians had been led by these teachers "who called themselves apostles, but did lie." The effect of their teaching was, of course, to bring the church or some of the Christians into the bondage of the law again, from which they had escaped through grace.

It will be noticed that my text is taken from an allegory in which the apostle essays to teach that Christians are not under the authority of the first covenant made with Moses on Mt. Sinai; or in the language of the apostle himself, "We are not the children of the bondwoman, but of the free." In discussing the allegory and the conclusion of Paul, we shall do so under two heads: The Bondwoman and her children; the Freewoman and her children. Who is the Bondwoman, and who are her children? And who is the Freewoman, and why are Christians called her children? In attempting to answer these questions, we notice first the historical reference to the household of Abraham. The story is well known—how the two women, Hagar the servant, and Sarah, the wife of Abraham, became the mothers of two children, the one born in bondage like his mother, the other born in freedom, because the child of free parents. Beside that, there is this interesting addition to the story which gives points to the allegory, that Isaac, the child of Sarah, was given by promise to the parents in their old age. Now Paul sees in this story an illustration of the truth he had been teaching. He says: "These women are two covenants, the one from Mt. Sinai which beareth children unto bondage, which is Hagar." It will be seen thus that the "bondwoman in Paul's thought" is not so much Hagar, the servant, in the home of Abraham, as it is the covenant made on Mt. Sinai with the Israelites. The bondwoman is the Sinaitic covenant.

Now notice the third step of the apostle's illustration: this bondwoman still lives and still bears children unto bondage. "This Hagar is Mt. Sinai in Azabiah and answereth to Jerusalem, which now is, and is in bondage with her children." The thought common to Jewish people was that those under the instructions of a teacher or in obedience to a covenant, were the children of that teacher or of that covenant. See Acts 3: 25: "Ye are the children of the prophets and of the covenants, which God made with our fathers." We are ready, then, to answer the two questions suggested at first—the bondwoman is the covenant made on Mt. Sinai, and her children are those who yield to her authority. Before we approach the second question regarding the freewoman, there are two things we want to settle in our minds regarding the bondwoman, i. e. the covenant of Sinai. What was that covenant? And what was the sign of it? For as we shall see, whenever God made a covenant with his people he gave them a sign of that covenant.

If we turn to the prophecy of Jeremiah 31: 31, we read: "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand, to bring them out of the land of Egypt, which covenant they brake, though I was an husband unto them." Notice several things: This covenant was made with Israel, made on Mt. Sinai, made when God brought Israel out of Egypt, of which covenant Moses was the mediator. This is sufficient to identify it with that of which Paul speaks in the allegory in his letter to the Galatians. Now let us turn to two passages of Scripture, Exodus 34: 27-28: "And the Lord said unto Moses, write thou these words, for after the tenor of these words have I made a covenant with thee

and with Israel . . . And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, even the ten commandments." And Deuteronomy 4: 12-13: "And the Lord spake unto you out of the midst of the fire . . . and he declared unto you his covenant which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone." The Sinaitic covenant, or bondwoman is then embodied in the ten commandments.

Now what is the sign of this covenant? For God always gave a sign of his covenant. When he made a covenant with Noah, as recorded in the 9th chapter of Genesis, he gave people the rainbow for a sign: "It shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth." When God made his covenant with Abraham, he gave him the ordinance of circumcision for a sign or token, saying "Ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt Me and you." What, then, was the sign of the covenant made with Moses? Was there any? Let us read Exodus 31: 16: "Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generation, for a perpetual covenant; it is a sign between me and the children of Israel forever." Years afterward Ezekiel recalled the fact to his people that the Sabbath was given them for a sign.

We are prepared now, I think, for this conclusion, if, as the writer to the Hebrews says, 8th chapter, God has made the first covenant old and ready to pass away, then the sign of that covenant, which, as we have seen, is the Sabbath or seventh day, should pass away with it. Why should we continue to observe the sign when the substance is gone? Or rather, following the thought of Paul, should we continue to submit ourselves to the bondwoman when she is not our mother and has no authority over us? Just as circumcision, which was the sign of the covenant made with Abraham, passed away, so passed away the Sabbath which also was but a sign of a covenant that has been superseded.

Let us now inquire who is the freewoman? And why are Christians called her children? Let us see first that the apostle does not complete the comparison in the allegory that he starts to make. He says: "These women are two covenants, the one from Mt. Sinai which beareth children unto bondage," and then he is turned aside to follow out that side of the comparison. He does not tell us who the other woman is, but in verse 26 he adds, "Jerusalem, which is above, is our mother." The freewoman is unquestionably the new covenant which is brought to us in the gospel. Remember that the words "New Testament" might well read "New Covenant," for Christ is again declared to be the mediator of "a new covenant" or "a better covenant" than was that given to Moses. And the children of this freewoman are those who are begotten through the word, children of grace. The apostle Peter says, "Ye were begotten not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth."

Does anyone say that the time of the new covenant is not yet? That we must still continue to wait for it. I call attention to two passages of Scripture that seem to me conclusive. Hebrews 12: beginning to read at the 18th verse, there the comparison is made between the two covenants, that given on Mt. Sinai and that coming through Jesus Christ. "For ye are not come unto a mount that might be touched and that burned with fire, and unto blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words, which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more; for they could not endure that which was commanded, and if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned or thrust through with a dart; and so terrible was the sight that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake. But ye are come unto Mt. Zion and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."

The other thing to which I call attention under this head, is the cup which speaks of the blood of the new covenant. Laying his sacred hand upon the cup, that hand which was so soon to be nailed to the cross, he said, "This is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you." As often as we drink of the cup we do ratify anew that covenant with our Lord. The covenant is now in force, and we are not children of the old, but the new; not of "the bondwoman," but of the "freed."

Imagine the man who had been made free from slavery by the kindness of his master, afterward returning and saying, "I love my master now; I want to serve him to the very best of my ability; and for fear that I should fail in anything, I desire to return and place myself again in the old bondage. Absurd, you say. And so it would be; but for those who, having been made free from the bondage of the law by grace, would voluntarily return to the authority of the bondwoman is doing this very absurd thing.

Imagine a beggar who comes to my door, clad in garments which were both ragged and vile, begging me to give him some clothes. Taking pity upon him I give him

a suit of clothes on the condition that he shall go wash himself thoroughly, and afterward bury those old garments out of sight. He consents, takes the garments I give him, and goes. A few days later I see him, and he seems like a new man; he is clean and neatly dressed in the new clothes. But I imagine my horror when a little later I behold the same man with the clothes I had given him, and over the same old garments that I had insisted he should bury forever out of sight. In answer to my chiding he has only the reply that he was afraid, that the clothes I had given him were not quite sufficient, and he had dug up the old ones and put them on also. When one having been clothed in the garments of Christ's righteousness, the beautiful wedding garment, shall place over that the old, ragged and foul garments worn under the law, he is doing the same absurd thing as the beggar.

In closing, just a word of exhortation, "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

(1) The "yoke of bondage" is the law of the first covenant.

(2) We make ourselves children of the bondwoman by submitting to that yoke. Those who obey the bondwoman are her children. This is not merely a question of which day of the week we shall observe; it is rather the question of which covenant we are under. It is a question of bondage or liberty.

(3) The sign of the first covenant, the bondwoman's authority, is the observance of the seventh day. But Christians are not under her authority. They are free, made free by Christ. They are not without law, but are "under law to Christ." Perhaps there never was a time when this truth should be taught than now, because many have been led into bondage by the successors of the Jewish party in the churches of to day.

Spreading Literature.

III.

Some years ago I wrote several articles for the newspapers on "light-house literature" showing how much good the sending of books and papers to our Light Stations would do, and how much they were needed. Thousands of bundles have been sent out during the past seven years to many of the 200 Light Stations in Nova-Scotia whereby intelligence, education and enjoyment were carried to many outlying homes and settlements scattered along our extensive coast. Not only the Light-keepers but all near-by families have the reading of the papers, etc. Gentle reader you can easily picture the joy carried to a distant home by the arrival of paper or magazine. You cannot realize all the delight of the family, especially of the child to whom it came addressed, unless you have been there to see. Some of my friends have the names of certain distant families to whom they send literature. This affords especial enjoyment for invalids and persons who cannot get away from their own doorsteps. There is some pleasure in gazing at a pile of papers or magazines on our shelf; but it is a sign of selfishness. It is vastly better to send the old papers out on duty in the advance line to vanquish ignorance and loneliness. Our library shelves contain volumes, some duplicates, some read and some growing old and superseded by new editions, that ought to go into other homes.

Now, I pause right here and feel guilty. This is right. The best practical sermons they say always contain some paragraphs applicable to the preacher or his friends. Still it is probable if a person wanted a few of my books for winter reading and to loan his needy neighbors, it would give quite a wrench to my selfishness to part with them and I am not a book miser either. I am quite resolved, however, just now to give away all my books except those I want to retain. What a fine resolve for the mid-night hour of a rainy evening.

What are we to do? Why, each do his or her share as the weeks roll by. Do not wait for a committee of the Church or Young people to come and drag the literature out of your grasp, but enjoy yourself the delight of giving it away.

Still as many comparatively good people are only moved to give or do when especially visited and talked with, it is desirable for every church by itself or its B. Y. P. U., to have a bright committee on "Literature" whose ambition is to get every family to subscribe for our MESSENGER AND VISITOR, and where not so successful to arrange for the loan or gift from "Subscribers" to the needy or careless. Wouldn't it be delightful some evening in the prayer meeting for the chairman of the committee on "Literature" to announce that there were only ten families of the church MESSENGER AND VISITOR-LESS, and the committee had a plan for a "Social" or something whereby to raise the \$15 necessary to make them subscribers, and some pink-headed deacon should arise and say he was opposed to "Socials" and move that we pass around the plate just now and get the money. Everybody votes "Aye;" collection is taken amounting to \$16, thereby paying the pastor's subscription also. Mr. Editor, I trust you will have a number of new subscribers just this way; or even by means of the "Social." If one church will do this and you will publish the good news, others will be sure to follow.

Is such effort worth while? The old soldiers used to say