

THE LORD'S DAY

A

MEDICAL

POINT OF

VIEW

Professor V. Wright, MD, FRCP

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Professor V. Wright, MD, FRCP

'Hurry, Worry, Bury' has been the epitaph suggested for many people in this century. The increasing number of patients taking tranquilizers; the rising incidents of stress diseases; the frequency of attempted suicide; reflect sadly on our modern society and demand an answer. I have no doubt that a proper regard for the Lord's Day would help to improve these problems. Speaking as a physician there are good reasons physically, mentally and spiritually why we should set aside the first day of the week as a special day unto the Lord. The ancient promise of the Holy Scripture still holds true:

"If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words:

Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it." ISAIAH 58:13, 14

Physically

There are natural, in-built laws which govern human behaviour. An obvious example is that you cannot continue to work without sleep indefinitely. After a certain number of hours you fall asleep whatever you are doing. In a torture situation where people are forcibly kept awake, there comes a break point when they crack up catastrophically. There are many examples of 24-hour cycles in the body (called circadian rhythms), showing the natural functioning of the body on a daily basis. Your temperature varies by two degrees; many chemicals in the blood stream alter in their concentration; and your ability to concentrate fluctuates in a cyclical manner. You can test the last by keeping awake all night – around 6 a.m. you begin to 'wake up', even though you have not been asleep! Similarly, there are weekly cycles. It is significant that the natural split of the year is in lunar months (4 X 7 days) rather than calendar months. From time to time societies have tried to extend the working week to eight days or ten days. Each attempt has failed. The natural variation is six days' work, one day rest. The body cries out physically one day in seven for rest and change. At the University of Leeds we have measured for several months in a working man the 17-oxogenic steroids in his urine. These chemicals are breakdown products of the hormones from the adrenal gland. High volumes occur with stress and activity. There was a weekly rhythm of these chemicals in the urine. The lowest levels were on a Sunday. It is not clear whether this was an inherent

rhythm, or whether it was a reflection of decreased stress and activity. Whichever it was, it demonstrates the beneficial effect of a weekly day of rest. A seven day work week causes extra burden on the employees with their families. Workers will be subject to even more unsocial hours and physical pressures.

Mentally

Said the poet:

What is this life if full of care?

We have no time to stand and stare?

He appreciated that to get the best out of life we needed time to relax mentally. We need time to unwind from the tensions of the week, whether these are produced by the frustrations of a repetitious job, or by the demands of an administrative position. Doctors have to treat many illnesses which are categorized as 'stress diseases'. These include peptic ulcer, muscular rheumatism, migraine, hypertension (raised blood pressure), and coronary heart disease. Stress is not the only factor. Very often there is a constitutional predisposition, shown by a family history of the same condition. Nevertheless, as the sufferers are only too well aware, stress plays an important part in precipitating attacks. Animal experiments by Professor Hans Selye, a pathologist of Montreal, have provided confirming evidence, suggesting that these stresses affecting the mind produce many hormones from the adrenal glands, and

these in turn harm the body. God's provision of a day of rest helps to combat the harmful effects of a week of stress. The verse of Sir Matthew Hale, a former Lord Chief Justice, remains even more true today than when first written:

*A Sabbath well spent brings a week of content
And health for the toils of tomorrow;
But a Sabbath profaned, whate'er may be
gained,
Is a certain forerunner of sorrow.*

As a university teacher I warn my students against over-studying before exams and in particular advise them not to revise on Sundays. The most striking and sad case we had was a student who worked throughout Sunday, and took amphetamines to keep himself awake as he *remorsefully* revised through the night. He sat down to the exam on Monday and spent three hours covering sheet after sheet of paper with nothing but his name. The brain is an amazing computer which God has programmed to need one day's rest in seven. That is not a rash analogy. There is suggestive evidence that most dreams are the 'computer' ditching rubbish. Your own experience will tell you that often the solution to a problem comes when you have laid it on one side and you are relaxing – then comes the answer to your consciousness. The mind has been working, uncluttered by the additional data and signals you are trying to feed it. That is why Archimedes leapt out of his bath shouting "Eureka!" It was

whilst relaxing in the warmth of the water that his great principle came to mind. Intense, single-minded, unremitting concentration is not the best stimulus for creative thinking. We need that *one-in-seven* time to set our mind on other things.

There was a telling article printed in the *Chicago Tribune*; *not written as a Christian observation*, but yet shrewdly. Here follows some of it:

One weekend recently I looked out the window and discovered that Sunday had disappeared. Nobody had swiped it exactly, but something had gone out of the noble day. Suddenly, I realized what it was: Sunday had turned into Tuesday. Out on the street, people had a midweek glint in their eyes, that meant business. They were walking briskly in and out of stores. The scene was as busy as your average workaday Tuesday, throwing the whole week out of whack. Now Sunday is just another day, and it appears to have lost its real purpose.

Back in the old days, Sunday had character. It was prim, but underneath it had a certain toughness, some confidence and sense of security. It was the most sturdy and unflappable of days, one people could count on. You did not market; you did not go to the office for a few hours; you didn't even hunt for antiques.

Spiritually

To live as if man is just a body and a mind is to be guilty of unutterable folly. It leads to futility and frustration. It has driven many of the most 'successful' to suicide. It flies in the face of overwhelming evidence. Man has a spiritual dimension to his nature. Indeed he is distinct from the animal creation in being made "in the image of God." For his spiritual well-being he needs one day in seven to concentrate on this vital aspect of his character. It has been keenly observed that, "We can too easily forget that *healing* and *holy* come from the same root." Since God made us *in toto* (i.e. entirely) then He certainly knows what is best for us as individuals and as a society. No one quibbles with the prohibition on stealing, lying, coveting, murder – nor even in their honest moments with the command, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," despite our permissive society, with its epidemic of disease raging and broken homes. Why should we argue with the command that we are to keep holy the sabbath day? A man told me it was needlessly restrictive. It is no more needless than the law which forbids you to drive in the wrong direction of a divided highway; or to mainline with heroin for pleasurable purposes. Restrictions are necessary for our welfare and the benefit of others. True freedom is not the liberty to do what you like, but the ability to be what you were meant to be and the power to do what you ought. Physically, mentally and spiritually there are bounds within which we must live if we are to fulfill our destiny. Within that fence we have an almost endless variety of possibilities for

freedom. That is why it is said of the Lord Jesus Christ: His service is perfect freedom.

A man said to me, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (St. Mark 2:27) and he added thereto: "Surely that means man can do what he likes on a Sunday."

May I illustrate the problem and solution in this way. I am driving along a clear road early one morning. As I approach a *Keep Right* sign and markings on the street, a child darts out on to the pavement. The only way I can avoid the child is to veer left on to the other lane. I do so unhesitatingly, because the markings were made for motorists and not motorists for the markings. Yet as a general rule I still keep to the signs and markings. Jesus Himself delineated the two clear areas of exception for the day (*That He was made and sanctified*): works of necessity and works of mercy. Therefore I will go into hospital to see a patient of mine who has developed a medical problem on Sunday, but I will not accept invitations to teach general practitioners taking postgraduate courses on the Lord's day.

"But I thought we lived under grace, not under the Law," another responded. It is true that our salvation is entirely of grace. I may 'keep' the sabbath meticulously, but it will not save me. I trust entirely on the redeeming work of Christ upon the cross for my salvation, not pleading a single good deed to merit favour with God. Justification is by faith alone.

But that does not mean I ignore the Law. Apart from being my "schoolmaster" to lead me to Christ, it provides

the guide rails for my Christian living. Indeed, the teaching of Jesus sharpens the law; it doesn't dispense with it. Adultery is in a look, not just an act. Murder comes down to the harbouring of hatred in the heart. Nevertheless, the *motive* for keeping the law is different. May I illustrate again. I drove to a friend who lived in a stately home. I restricted my speed within the limits (especially when I saw a police car in my rear view mirror!) As I turned into the drive of the large property, no speed limit applied, since I was off the public road. Nevertheless I kept well below the otherwise low limit of the city street, because I knew my friend appreciated those who drove slowly through the grounds. Love was an even more powerful influence in keeping me below the limit than the law. In other words, love fills the loopholes of the law, as ROMANS 13:10 advocates. God has made it perfectly clear what He desires as far as the sabbath day is concerned. Out of love for Him I wish to obey. I find, as it happens, that this is to my best advantage also. God is no man's debtor.

Conclusion

From a medical point of view, one day set apart for rest and worship is best for man physically, mentally and spiritually. The Creator God who made man in His own image certainly had man's welfare at heart when from the beginning of creation He instituted the weekly sabbath. The fourth commandment underlined its importance. We ignore the Christian Sabbath at our peril. We keep it to our inestimable benefit.

*You are invited to
write for a Catalogue
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