



THE  
CHALLENGE  
OF THE  
LORD'S  
DAY

J. NEVILLE KNOX

## THE CHALLENGE OF THE LORD'S DAY

THE CHALLENGE OF THE LORD'S DAY is ever before every man. Man is confronted every week either with a problem or a privilege. As each seventh day comes round, that first day of the week, whether man likes it or not, he is faced with the challenge of the day. It was the Lord Jesus Himself Who said, and I believe this is of paramount significance, that 'The Sabbath was made for man', in other words, it was not man who made the Sabbath for himself or even for God, but it was God Who made it for man. I often emphasise this when I am talking to young people about the Fifth Commandment — 'Honour thy father and thy mother'. It is not the parents who say to the children that they should be honoured, it is God Who says it. I believe it is vitally important we should see that this provision for man is one of God's good gifts to us. It is His creation and therefore it is good, for God saw everything that He had made and 'behold', we read in His Word, 'it was very good'. Thus, the day of rest was given to man from the time when he was created. Man began his life on earth by keeping and enjoying the Sabbath Day. There was never a time when man was not blessed with this priceless possession of the weekly Sabbath. In His work of creation, we read in Genesis 2 that God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, and it is important that we see that this gift was first of all given to man, not as a law, but by grace, and it was given before the fall so that it was meant for all men.

### BY GRACE

God's grace, by which we were given the Sabbath, is that same grace by which we are saved, and just as we ignore the gift of salvation at our peril, so I believe we ignore all God's gifts of grace including His Sabbath to our great cost and loss. The simple principle involved is

that for the rest and refreshment of his body and for the sanctification and good of his soul, man must set aside one day in seven as 'Holy to the Lord'. This means not just refraining from work. It is a positive aspect. In itself, of course, it is important for man's bodily and mental health that he should have this one day in seven for rest. Medical information and statistics prove this. In the early days of World War II when there was a tremendous emphasis on production, not only were six days a week worked, but seven days a week. However, it was not long before it was found that instead of production increasing, it was found to fall, and there had to be a reversion to the one day in seven free from work. The same applied during the time of the French Revolution. When the revolutionaries wanted to get rid of all things Christian they thought (and probably rightly) that one of the ways in which they could do it was to get rid of this seventh day, but they soon had to come back to it. This, I believe, is something inherent in man because God created him this way.

## BY COMMAND

Not only was the Sabbath Day instituted by grace but also it became one of the great commandments of God. It is important that we see this in connection with its continued universal application binding on all men. On one occasion I was preaching in an Anglican Church in the North of England which had the Ten Commandments set out on either side of the east window. The church was badly in need of redecoration, and after the service the church warden said that when the church was redecorated they were having the Commandments painted out as they were out of date. Out of date! The great moral law of God? The Government has no right, and no one would disagree with this, to attempt to legalise murder or theft, nor would they think of

doing so. No Government would act as if there were no distinction between right and wrong, as if God had not spoken and this, I believe, applies equally to the Fourth Commandment as to each of the others. The Fourth Commandment is part of the great Moral Law of God. Sometimes people talk to me about breaking God's Law. There is no such thing. You cannot break God's Law and if you try it breaks you. No one can break any of the natural laws of God. You cannot break the laws of combustion or gravity, and exactly the same applies if we attempt to break His Moral Law. It is significant that God prefixes this particular commandment with the word 'Remember'. It is the only one of the Ten Commandments which is prefixed in this way. This recalls the original institution of the Sabbath and underlines the importance of it. Time and again God in His Word calls us to 'remember the law'. We should, in other words, keep the Lord's Day holy because God in His revealed Word has commanded us to do so. This aspect is very much connected with man's view of the Word of God — the Bible.

## BY THE WORD

I believe the great challenge of our times, including the challenge of the Lord's Day, is in our attitude to the Bible. We read in 2 Timothy 3:16 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God' and that to me means *all* Scripture and not, as some of the new translations put it, 'all inspired Scripture' for all Scripture is inspired. We have never lived in such times of apostacy and this is shown by the whole general tenure of many of our present day pulpit utterances. It always reminds me of the story of the clergyman in the modernistic line who was visiting one of the older members of his congregation who was sick. She asked him to read a portion of the Scriptures to her; when he picked up the Bible it almost fell to pieces for many pages and parts of pages were missing

throughout the whole book. When the clergyman enquired why the Bible was like this, the old parishioner replied, 'Well Mr So-and-So it is this way; I have sat under your ministry for many years now and every time you have said you did not believe this or that, I cut it out and that is all that is left.' I am always struck by the force of the last three verses of the fifth chapter of John's Gospel where Jesus says, 'Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?' Many of our theologians today do not believe that Moses wrote at all, never mind that he wrote about Christ, but if we want to argue we must argue with Him, for He said it. I believe that any attack on God's Word is ultimately an attack on Christ Himself. It was President Abraham Lincoln who said 'I believe as much of the Bible as I can by reason, and the rest by faith', and that is where, by the Grace of God I stand, and that is why I am a great believer in both learning and teaching texts. 'Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against Thee.' Psalm 119, 11. 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.' There was a time when we, as a nation, were known as a people of the book and that book the Bible.

At the Coronation when the Bible is handed to our Sovereign these sublime words are said, 'Your Majesty, this is the most valuable thing that this world affords'. Now, this is either humbug and hypocrisy or it is true. Note, it is, 'This is the most valuable thing' not one of the most valuable things, but the most valuable thing that this world affords. The saying of those words goes back almost to the date of the Sunday Observance Act, 1625, and yet nobody has suggested that at a Coronation the Bible should not be given or that these words should not be used. There was a time, too, when we were known as the people of the Day and that Day the Lord's Day.

## BY THE SAVIOUR

The Lord's Day is the day to remember Him Who loved us and gave Himself for us, and He rose on that first day of the week, the Lord's Own Day. It is as if He had said, 'This keep in remembrance of Me'. Never have there been so many attacks against the keeping of the Day holy with, I believe, less and less reason for them. Never has there been so much time for leisure and yet there is a clamour for more, it does not matter at whose expense in time or energy. Our land is becoming a veritable 'Vanity Fair'. It is, I am certain, the Christian's duty wholeheartedly to support the laws of the land which are based on God's Word, including the Fourth Commandment. It is, of course, true that men will never truly keep the Lord's Day aright until they truly love the Lord of the Day, and our first aim and endeavour must ever be to lead men and women and young people to the Lord. Those of us who love the Lord and therefore everything that is His, including His Word and His Day, must resist the temptation to give up what appears (but, I believe only on the surface), the unequal struggle, and to ever remember that He Who is with us is more than they who are against us. Our duty and our responsibility is to warn and to fight, and when we do, it is wonderful how God honours our often weak, faltering efforts. That was my experience when for twenty-six years I was Town Clerk and Chief Executive of Harrogate, even at times with the help of the media. I recall a number of occasions where my advice was taken by the Council in favour of Sunday Observance.

## BY EXAMPLE

We must ever pass from theory into practise and above all be positive in our example in the keeping of the Lord's Day by our regular attendance at worship and in our instruction of the young. I was, for some forty years, a Sunday School teacher and for many of those years a Superintendent of a large Senior Sunday School, during

which there were tremendous opportunities of bringing before young people in their most impressionable years, the Lord's claim to their lives, to His service and the keeping of His law. What are we like in our homes and with our own children? How much do we keep the Lord's Day for the Lord? None of our own children ever found it necessary to do homework on a Sunday, nor have we needed to do the odd jobs which many people seem to do because they say they never have time to do them during the rest of the week. I love John's declaration in Revelation, chapter 1, 'I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day', the Day our Lord marked by His Resurrection and His special meetings with His disciples there-after, and by the sending of the Holy Spirit on that first Day of Pentecost, the Christian Sunday or Sabbath. In a special way 'this is the Day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it'.

Every morning in our home for the last thirty years or more, we have always found time, as a family, to sit around the breakfast table reading God's Word and sharing family prayers finishing with, 'This is the Day the Lord hath made, let us rejoice and be glad in it'. This sets the whole tone for our day, and that is whether the snow is six inches deep or it is blowing a gale or it is washday or Monday morning, or whatever it is. It makes a tremendous difference to life. The people who are always complaining, always moaning and groaning about the weather or their health, even sometimes Christians, should remember that 'This is the day which the Lord hath made, let us rejoice and be glad in it'. In its specific application, of course, it refers to the Lord's Own Day. We are glad to remember it and the Lord Who gave it to us. We are to keep it by our worship of Him in His House. We are to treasure it as a priceless heritage, and we are to defend it. It was an atheist who said, 'If you would destroy Christianity you must first kill Sunday'. An American judge about one hundred years ago said, 'Where there is no Christian Sabbath there is no Christian morality'. That was not a

theologian who said it, it was a lawyer: 'WHERE THERE IS NO CHRISTIAN SABBATH THERE IS NO CHRISTIAN MORALITY'. Could it be that in these days when we are witnessing the so-called 'new morality' the reason for it is in the desecration of the Lord's Day. We are to pass on the Lord's Day as an inheritance to those who follow after, and one day we shall be held accountable for the way in which we have discharged this responsibility. One shudders to think if the present trend of desecration continues, what will be the position in another generation.

To whom much has been given, of him shall much be expected. I am always challenged by that thirty-third chapter of Ezekiel where God says, 'If the watchman see the enemy coming and warn not the people so that they perish, their blood will I require at the watchman's hand. O son of man, I have set thee a watchman.'

'Remember to keep it holy,  
The Lord's own Day,  
Remember to keep it holy,  
His Word obey;  
There's plenty of time on weekdays  
For work and play,  
So break not the Lord's Commandment  
In any way.'

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