

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LORD'S DAY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

By Frank McClelland

The keeping of the Lord's day is not an anachronism. It is as relevant to the 20th century as it was to the first. The natural laws of the world have not changed. Gravity and centrifugal force are just the same as they have always been. Why then should it be thought that God's moral laws have changed and require less obedience now than then?

The sabbath is more important than many Christians realize. The antidote to the present slack attitude is for every believer to know what the Lord has to say about His day.

The Introduction of the Sabbath

The sabbath was introduced first by *Divine Example*. God rested after His creation labours. We are to follow His example.

Then God gave His *Divine Exhortation*: **"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it."**

Exodus 20:8 - 11

It is no light matter to disobey God's holy command. Remember, it was disobedience that caused Adam and Eve to fall, and brought sin and therefore the curse of God upon the whole human race.

The Importance of the Sabbath

Consider *its priority*. The law of the sabbath existed long before the moral law was codified in Exodus 20. Its observance is seen in Exodus 16:23 before the law was given on Mount Sinai. But the law of the sabbath goes back much further, right to the end of the creation week. Hence, man's first full day on the newly created earth was a sabbath of rest.

Consider *its perpetuity*. From God's holy rest in heaven the law of the sabbath applies on earth to all people, from our first parents in Genesis, right through every age to the present day. Then right into the future in heaven itself where "There remaineth therefore a rest (lit. a sabbath day's rest) to the people of God." Hebrews 4:9

Consider *its position* within the law. It comes at the end of the four commandments dealing with man's duty to God, and at the commencement of those commands that deal with his duty to his fellow man. Also in Leviticus 23 where the important holy convocations of Israel are given, the sabbath comes before, and after, them all.

Consider *its primacy*. The Jewish convocations in Leviticus 23, the feasts of the Passover, first fruits, Pentecost, trumpets, day of atonement and tabernacles, are parts of the ceremonial law of Israel. The sabbath, by contrast is part of the MORAL law. With the coming of Christ the signposts of ceremonial law are no longer required, but the moral law is still in force today and every day.

Consider *its purpose*. The key word is "remember". The original sabbath was in remembrance of the creation. The Christian sabbath, or Lord's Day, is in remembrance of the work of redemption, or re - creation of lost sinners, by the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Interpretation of the Sabbath

The Christian does not observe the Jewish sabbath. To the question, 'Why the change from the seventh to the first day sabbath?' we respond, because the change is scriptural.

Jesus Christ referred to Himself as "Lord also of the sabbath." Mark 2:28. It is therefore His special day, the Lord's day.

Psalm 118:24 states "This is the day the Lord hath made; we will be glad and rejoice in it." That scripture is quoted six times in the New Testament making seven in all. Seven is the number of completeness or perfection. Of which day does the Psalmist speak? The answer is found in the Acts 4:11 quotation of Psalm 118.

The day 'the stone' that was rejected became 'the headstone of the corner' was the day when Jesus Christ rose from the tomb. That it was not the Jewish sabbath is clear because the Psalmist speaks of rejoicing and gladness in connection with that day.

The disciples did not 'rejoice, and be glad' on that Jewish sabbath for Jesus was dead in the tomb. They were sad in the extreme. But the next day, the first day, the resurrection day, the Lord's day, there was very great gladness and joy, for they saw that Christ had defeated death and rose victoriously.

So the Christian, on the Lord's day, remembers the glorious resurrection of Christ on the first day of the week.

For Christians in New Testament times, the Lord's day, the first day of the week, was a time for meeting, for preaching the word, and breaking bread. It was a day for giving financial support to God's work. Acts 20:7. 1 Corinthians 16:2. It was also the day when John had his wonderful vision of Christ. Revelation 1:10. We need to see Christ in, and on, the Lord's day.

The Intelligence of the Sabbath

To use the sabbath of rest is an intelligent practice. It pleases God, and is beneficial to our bodies. We must have proper rest from labour, especially with the torrid pace of life in this twentieth century. We need a day to recharge our physical, mental and spiritual batteries for another week's toil.

Some nations, with atheistical tenets, have tried to introduce a seven day work week. The attempts did not succeed because man must have proper rest otherwise his work efficiency drops dramatically.

We are told that the Lord "hallowed" the sabbath day. That is, God set it apart as a special time for worship and communion with Him. But arrogant man wants to use all his time for selfish purposes. He does so at his own peril. We must set apart the Lord's day for the Lord's worship and work.

God says "Remember the sabbath day." Proud man is inclined to forget God. Even a closed store on Sunday should remind the most ungodly that there is a God in heaven.

Advocates of open Sunday shopping have failed to understand that most people work within the framework of clearly defined home budgets. Therefore if they spend more on Sunday they will spend less on weekdays, but the total amount will no be greater. It is foolish to trade short term financial profit for long term spiritual loss.

How sad those who are controlled by the furious profit motive are willing to have others sacrifice the weightier matters of the law for their personal gain. Recognition of the Lord and His holy day produces *real* physical, mental and spiritual benefits.

The puritan Thomas Watson said, "People who cannot abide the Lord's day cannot abide the Lord."

The Implementation of the Sabbath

There should be *solemn preparation* for the Lord's day. When God gave Israel the manna in the wilderness, they were to gather it daily except on the sabbath. Double was to be collected on the sixth day, in preparation for the sabbath.

Likewise believers ought to prepare for the Lord's day. Supplies of milk, bread and gasoline should be gathered on Saturday to obviate the need to support those who desecrate the Lord's day by opening their stores on Sunday for financial gain.

Preparation of the soul for the Lord's day is important. Few would dream of attending church services without washing and dressing their bodies, yet many spend more time on external preparation than they do on their souls.

It is good to pray and read God's Word before going out on the Lord's day. A time of meditation is also profitable. Meditate on the wonders of God, His creation and His holiness. Think of the mercy of God, the love of Christ, the salvation of the soul, the blessings of fellowship and you will find His day to be a delight.

There should be *sacred observance* of the Lord's day. "In it thou shalt do no work." It is to be a day of rest and worship. The Lord does not condemn works of necessity and mercy. His disciples plucked ears of corn on the sabbath much to the disgust of the legalistic Pharisees. Doctors, nurses, firemen and police must be on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

Each believer, before God, must ask if his work on the Lord's day is an absolute necessity. In cases of doubt it is always wise to give God the benefit of any doubt. The old adage is true, "If in doubt - DON'T!"

"The Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it." There is a divine blessing upon the people who are obedient to His heavenly command. God always blesses obedience and curses disobedience. Deuteronomy 1:26 - 28.

God gave a sure promise with regard to the Jewish sabbath, and it applies equally to the Lord's day. Individuals, churches and nations that remember the Lord, and His holy day, will be blessed by the Lord.

"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 thou shalt 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.

The Lord's day causes people to stop in the midst of their weekly labour, and focus their attention on the God who made them, and Who is willing to redeem them. It is a serious sin when people forget the good and gracious God who gives them each breath and heartbeat, and gave His only begotten Son to be their Saviour.

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