

# **THE LORD'S DAY — 'SPECIAL' OR SABBATH?**

**A look at modern teaching which denies  
that the Lord's Day is the Sabbath in its  
Christian form.**

**By J. P. Thackway**

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## FOREWORD

The Sabbath is the oldest sacred institution in the world. Enjoined on man at Creation, it was assigned a prominent place in that perfect summary of moral duty, the Decalogue, and it is therefore a universal and perpetual obligation. Men are to keep one day in seven holy to the Lord by resting from normal activities of business and amusement, and by devoting themselves to the public and private worship of God. Our Lord Jesus Christ neither abolished the Sabbath nor relaxed its precepts. On the contrary, he affirmed the abiding validity of the entire Moral Law and taught that the Sabbath was an institution over which he would still rule. It is true that, in demonstration of his authority, he set apart 'the Lord's Day', transferring the Sabbath from the Jewish seventh day to the first day of the week, but this merely ensured the continuance of the Sabbath as a specifically Christian ordinance.

This is the biblical position, expressed in our most excellent Confessions, and now restated and defended by my good friend, John Thackway. His booklet is admirably conceived and executed; and he has rendered an invaluable service by producing this thorough yet highly readable work which evidences sound judgment in all biblical and theological aspects of the subject, and which also provides a probing and devastating critique of the view steadily but *tragically* gaining ground in some Reformed churches that the Fourth Commandment and the Christian Lord's Day are not identical. The author believes that this new emphasis — popularized by Professor D. A. Carson and others — represents a serious departure from

biblical orthodoxy and that it can only contribute to further spiritual decline. In a clear and forthright manner, he argues that there *is* a New Testament Sabbath and that strict observance of it is the duty of every Christian. The result is a first-rate work, faithful to the Scriptures, in the best Reformed tradition, and thoroughly convincing.

The booklet's relevance at this present time cannot be underestimated. John Willison of Dundee once wrote: 'I despair ever of seeing Christianity and reformation considerably advanced in the world, till once the Lord's Day come to be highly esteemed, and strictly observed: for still it is to be seen, wherever religion flourisheth in the power of it, there it is that most conscience is made in the observance of the Sabbath.'

I am more than happy to commend John Thackway's study. It highlights a vital truth which I have not seen elsewhere so clearly presented, and I believe Christians everywhere will be greatly benefited by a careful reading of it.

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Minister of Emmanuel Church,  
Salisbury



## INTRODUCTION

In a popular Christian paperback the author (a Minister) writes about the conscience. To illustrate his point he gives this word of testimony: 'The voice of conscience is familiar to us. Soon after settling in England, my conscience was pricked by prevailing Christian ethics. Having come from America through Germany, I was used to reading the Sunday newspapers, eating in restaurants on Sunday and also watching television on the Lord's Day. Soon I realised that these practices outraged my Christian friends and wounded their consciences, and thus I quit them.'

This author's view of the Lord's Day is revealing. He sees it as something which belongs to the realm of 'Christian ethics', and English Christian ethics at that. His abandonment of certain indulgences on that day was solely to avoid giving offence to weaker brethren. What lies behind his approach, of course, is the belief that Scripture nowhere legislates about Lord's Day observance. It is a matter for individuals to make up their own minds about, while being sensitive to the scruples of others. It belongs to the category of Paul's teaching in Romans 14, especially verses 5 and 6.

Traditionally, as our author-friend found, British Christians have held Sunday observance to be a Scriptural privilege and duty. Rooted in the Old Testament, the Lord's Day has been loved and sanctified as the Sabbath in full-flower for gospel times. In recent years, however, alternative views have been gaining acceptance in this country. Through the influence of publications from the USA



the assumption that the Lord's Day is the Christian Sabbath has been challenged and rejected. A magazine responsible for this is *Searching Together* (formerly Baptist Reformation Review). Its editor, Jon Zens, and his contributors teach that the Ten Commandments, as such, are not the rule of life for New Covenant believers. And the Fourth Commandment in no way at all, since it is nowhere reiterated in the New Testament. According to this view, the Lord's Day is not a day of mandatory rest but simply a convenient worship day for the church. No obligation is attached to the first day of the week beyond the exhortation of Heb. 10:25 'Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together'.

In 1982 *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* was published. This hefty paperback of 444 pages is the work of six contributors under the editorship of D. A. Carson of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Illinois. It is not a symposium so much as 'a unified, co-operative effort' (page 11). The thesis of this book is broadly that of Zens but is more academic. It is a logical, persuasive case sustained by impressive scholarship. Though not an easy book to read, and sales in this country have not been much above a thousand, many have been influenced by its message. The Lord's Day Observance Society is referred to several times rather dismissively.\* After reading the book one could be

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society in general. Wilfully misusing this day results in physical, spiritual and eternal loss. 'Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed' (1 Sam. 2:30).

This five-fold position is attacked at every point by non-sabbatarian teaching. In what follows I have isolated their five main counter-arguments. It is not possible in this brief compass to consider more, but these are the crucial ones upon which their negative position is built. Let us look at them and examine afresh the declaration of God's Word on this important subject. Before doing so, let both writer and reader bow before the Spirit of God and ask Him to guide us into all Truth. Ultimately, this is not a matter of theological investigation or of having our thinking stimulated. Rather it is our need of prayerful dependence upon divine aid, that we might all be 'taught of God'.

## DENIAL 1

### THE SABBATH IS NOT A CREATION ORDINANCE

That is, its mention in Gen.2:2,3 does not give us a mandate to observe it ever afterwards. The word 'Sabbath' is not even used there. We find no direct command to keep this seventh day, and no evidence that Adam and others ever did. The Sabbath day was not inaugurated until Sinai in Ex.20:8-11.

One writer in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* (from now on FSLD) concedes that if God *did* institute the Sabbath immediately following creation, we would have a strong argument: 'If the hypothesis of the

left with the impression that those honouring and defending the Lord's Day for Sabbath reasons are rather simplistic and naive, never really having got to grips with the teaching of Scripture on the subject.

The purpose of the booklet now in the reader's hands is to supply some answers to the main tenets of this non-sabbatarianism. We believe that serious appeal to Scripture can be made on behalf of the historic position, which for the purpose of clarification is set out as follows:

The Sabbath was ordained by God the day after completing His six days creation. He Himself rested the seventh day, and set it apart as a perpetual ordinance for His glory and man's good. It is a 'creation ordinance'.

The Sabbath was promulgated from Mt Sinai as the Fourth of the 10 Commandments. The primeval ordinance was recalled and we are to remember to keep its hours holy. Being part of the unique moral law, it remains in force for the gospel age, though not in the same form.

The Sabbath has been transferred to the first day of the week by Christ the 'Lord of the Sabbath'. He rose from the dead on that day and gave the Sabbath a new significance. This Christian Sabbath is called the Lord's Day.

The Lord's Day is to be observed as a day of rest and worship, and carries the obligation of moral law. It is binding upon all men but is of special significance to the Christian.

The benefits and blessings of keeping the Lord's Day are incalculable for God's people and for



Sabbath as a creation ordinance could be established, then . . . the appeal could still be made to the permanence of the mandate for one day of rest as inherrant to humanity made in the image of God' (page 346).

We believe the permanence and obligation of the Sabbath *does* rest on this foundation.

1. Although the word 'Sabbath' is not used in Gen.2:2,3 (simply 'the seventh day') yet the root from which the word comes is used: 'He *rested* on the seventh day,' literally 'He Sabbath<sup>ed</sup> on the seventh day'. And this verb clearly means Sabbath rest when it is used later in Ex.16:29,30 'the Lord hath given you the *Sabbath* . . . the people *rested* on the seventh day'.

Furthermore, there are instances where 'the seventh day' is used as a synonym (a word meaning the same) for the Sabbath (e.g., Ex.16:26; 20:10; 35:2).

The Lord Himself, however, interprets the seventh day as the Sabbath when, in giving the Fourth Commandment, He uses the very words of Genesis 2 and says that was what He meant: 'the Lord . . . *rested the seventh day*: wherefore the Lord blessed *the Sabbath day* and hallowed it' (Ex.20:11).

It is quite legitimate, therefore, in Gen.2:2,3 to understand the seventh day as being equivalent to the Sabbath day. The absence of the actual term does not provide grounds for denying that this is where the Sabbath began.

2. It is true that no command to observe the Sabbath is given at this stage, nor a specific example of man doing so. Yet Gen.2:2,3 must be taken seriously. Here God does something to the seventh day: He 'blesses' and 'sanctifies' it. We read in 1:22



that creatures were blessed and given their function; and man and woman too, 1:28. Now the next to be blessed is the Sabbath, 2:2,3. Surely this is more than God merely expressing approval of it — rather He is giving *it* a function too: to serve as a pattern for man to follow. 'Sanctified' would confirm this, for what is sanctified is separated and set apart from common to sacred use. We know that Adam worked in the garden of Eden (2:15): are we to believe that he worked every single day? Would he have not, like his Maker, worked for six days and have rested on the seventh? It would seem strange for God to deliberately bless and sanctify a day, and for it to have no application to the first working man. And because Adam is the father of the human race, this Sabbath-precedent is set for us all.

3. The absence of a direct command about the proto-Sabbath is no real problem. The same could be said of other primitive institutions. The ordinance of labour, for instance, is found here only in the form of God placing Adam in the garden to work (Gen.2:15). But later it is given the force of a command (Ex.20:9). The offering of sacrifices, too, is like this. We find Cain and Abel doing it (Gen.4:3,4) and yet we read of no prior command from God. Direct command is not the only way we discern the will of God from Scripture.

4. Attention is often drawn to the word 'Remember . . .' in the Fourth Commandment: 'Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy' (Ex.20:8). This assumes a knowledge of the Sabbath for, as R. L. Dabney observes, 'It is not accurate to call on people to remember what they have never heard

before'. Now, there are only two sources for this prior knowledge of the Sabbath. One, quite recently in Ex.16:23, where Moses explains why twice as much manna was gathered on the 6th day: 'This is that which the Lord hath said, Tomorrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath.' And the other is its first mention in Gen.2:2,3. What, then, does 'Remember . . .' mean if it does not refer to one or both of these? But God Himself locates the 'Remember . . .' squarely in Gen.2:2,3 as He concludes the Fourth Commandment: 'For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, etc.' (Ex.20:11). We have therefore the highest possible authority for believing that the Sabbath began life at creation.

5. Attempt is sometimes made to undercut the force of 'Remember . . .' by claiming that it does not mean to recall something known about, but rather to keep something in mind *from now on*. If 'Remember . . .' has this forward-looking meaning then here is evidence that the Sabbath began, not at creation, but at Sinai after all. It is true that 'remember' is used like this in the Old Testament (e.g., Ex.13:3). However, there are plenty of places where it quite obviously means to call to mind something previously known about (e.g., Ex.32:13). The context must decide which way the particular 'remember' is used. But since the context of the Fourth Commandment is a backward look at Gen.2:2,3 the matter is settled. We must opt for 'Remember . . .' in the sense of calling to mind the Sabbath known about since creation.

6. Non-sabbatarian writers tend to see Gen.2:2,3 as teaching, not a literal day with implications for



Sabbath observance, but as a sign and promise of God's future salvation rest for His people (e.g., FSLD page 29). In other words, the seventh day here is virtually a 'type' of gospel blessing to come. There are, however, serious difficulties with this view. This would bring in a gospel type before the Fall in Genesis 3. That would be strange, because in a sinless Paradise, promise of salvation is not relevant. There are, strictly speaking, no other such types in Genesis 1 and 2. Also, it is usually held that Gen.3:15 is the first gospel promise. Yet if the seventh day rest of Gen.2:2,3 is made that instead, then this would make the *result* of salvation (rest) come before the *Achiever* of it (Christ) — the wrong way round. Spiritualising the original seventh day means you can deny creation ordinance to the Sabbath, but it doesn't seem to work.

7. Our Lord's words in Mk.2:27 confirm the Sabbath as a creation ordinance. Due weight should be given to the word 'made': 'The Sabbath was *made* for man.' The Greek word here is a form of 'ginomai', which elsewhere is used when creation is meant (e.g., Heb.11:3, Jas.3:9). If the Sabbath arose originally out of God's creative work, then Jesus' use of 'made' makes proper sense. This is further seen in the other half of the parallelism: ' . . . and not man (made) for the Sabbath.' No one would deny that Jesus here alludes to man originating from creation. Why, then, should this be denied to the Sabbath? Inherent in this verse is Jesus saying that as surely as man was made in the beginning, so the Sabbath was made for him. The divine origin and permanence of the Sabbath is taught in the same breath as the divine origin and permanence of man.



There is, therefore, no reason to deny that the Sabbath can be traced back to creation, and is, as Prof. John Murray says, one of 'the commandments or mandates given to man in the state of integrity. These creation ordinances, as we may call them, are the procreation of offspring, the replenishing of the earth, subduing of the same, dominion over the creature, labour, *the weekly Sabbath*, and marriage' (Principles of Conduct, page 27).

## DENIAL 2

THE SABBATH DAY, BEING PART OF OLD TESTAMENT LEGISLATION, HAS BEEN ABOLISHED BY CHRIST AND THE GOSPEL

Non-sabbatarians maintain that God intended the Sabbath to be literally observed only by the Jews, just like other Old Testament laws. Christians are not under the Old Covenant and are, as New Covenant believers, free from its yoke. Any appeal to the Fourth Commandment to prove Sabbath obligation is therefore legalism.

This argument fails to take seriously the fact that not *all* Old Testament law has been abolished in Christ. Careful reading of Old Testament Scripture yields the conclusion that its laws intentionally fall into different categories: some temporary and some permanent. It is tremendously important to appreciate such distinctions for, as John Newton once wrote, 'Ignorance of the nature and design of the law is at the bottom of most of our religious mistakes'.

A three-fold distinction is found within Old Testament law:

## **Moral Law**

Those commands which prescribe the rule and standard of man's moral behaviour. They are founded upon the nature and character of God Himself: 'the moral perfection of God coming to expression for the regulation of life and conduct' (Prof. Murray). These are comprehended in the 10 Commandments, of which the Sabbath is the 4th. These commandments are, by their very nature, permanent. As R. L. Dabney put it: 'Moral laws are founded upon the unchangeable nature of God Himself, and will never be changed because God cannot change.'

## **Ceremonial Law**

Laws relating to the mode of Israel's worship for the duration of the Old Testament dispensation. These include instructions and commands about the tabernacle/temple, priests, sacrifices, clean and unclean beasts, and many other rites and ceremonies. These were only designed to be in force until their fulfilment arrived in Christ.

## **Judicial Law**

Has to do with Israel as a nation under God, a theocracy. These laws were for the government of life especially in the land of Canaan. These, too, belong exclusively to Israel for as long as she was to be His peculiar people.

Such categorising of the law is often criticised as artificial and only done to try to prove that the Sabbath is in force today. It is true the words 'moral', 'ceremonial' and 'judicial' are not found in Scripture.



But in the study of doctrine it is permissible, and often necessary, to use technical words to accurately express biblical concepts. 'Incarnation' and 'Trinity' are further examples of this, and no one usually quibbles about these except Jehovah's Witnesses! The distinction between Universal Church and Local Church is another example.

So our position is that the moral law alone was designed to be perpetual. And since the Sabbath commandment is part of that moral law, it, too, is permanent. As permanent as the one about taking God's Name in vain, honouring parents, not killing, committing adultery or stealing.

It follows then, that if we can prove that there *is* an enduring moral law, standing unique amongst all the time-bound laws of Moses, then the abiding nature of the Sabbath day is proved also. The evidence for this is overwhelming.

1. The Lord God makes such a distinction: 'And he declared unto you . . . ten commandments; (moral law) and he wrote them upon two tables of stone. And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, (ceremonial/judicial law) that ye might do them in the land whither ye go over to possess it' (Deut.4:13,14).

2. The radical difference between the moral law and the ceremonial/judicial law is abundantly demonstrated in the way the Lord gave them in the beginning:

(1) The promulgation of the moral law was attended with awful and terrifying majesty upon Mt Sinai: thunders, lightnings, thick cloud,



tempest, smoke, earthquake, darkness (Ex.19:16ff). The other laws (ceremonial/judicial) were given quietly and privately to Moses afterwards on the mount (Ex.20:22ff).

(2) The moral law was declared by the audible voice of God Himself in the hearing of Israel: 'And God spake all these words, saying . . . ' (Ex.20:1). But God spoke the other, temporary, laws to Moses to be passed on to Israel by him (Ex.20:22).

(3) The moral law was afterwards written by the finger of God (Ex.31:18). The other laws were taken down with the writing instrument of Moses.

(4) The moral law was written by God upon tablets of stone, a symbol of permanence: 'These words the Lord spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice: and he added no more. *And he wrote them in two tables of stone*, and delivered them unto me' (Deut.5:22 cf 10:4). The other laws were given to Moses, who wrote them upon ordinary writing material.

(5) The moral law was placed inside the Ark of the Covenant (Deut.10:4-5). The other laws were placed beside the Ark on the outside (Deut.31:24-26).

(6) The 10 Commandments are called 'testimony' (Ex.31:18). The word is used 32 times in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers (but not Deuteronomy) and in every case refers to the 10 Commandments or moral law written on tablets of stone. In no instance is the word used of the ceremonial/judicial law. The moral law is a testimony indeed: to the unchanging holiness of God, and to the

unchanging standard of behaviour He requires of His creatures.

3. As we have seen, the Fourth Commandment is grounded upon creation (Ex.20:11): an event that predates the Jewish nation with its temporary laws, and that long survives it too. Therefore the Sabbath is exalted above these laws. No ceremonial or judicial law is ever grounded upon something as fundamental and perpetual as creation.

4. Those who differ from us concede that the first half of the Fourth Commandment is of permanent obligation: 'six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work . . .' No one can make out a case for the temporariness and Jewishness of work — it dates from the beginning (Gen.2:15). If this is so, why not also the provision of Sabbath *rest* from work, which also dates from the beginning (Gen.2:2,3)?

5. Violation of the Sabbath has some interesting company in later Old Testament history. It is found alongside transgression of the moral law and no distinction is made. So plain is this, that Bishop Ryle can write: 'I turn to the writings of the Old Testament prophets. I find them repeatedly speaking of the breach of the Sabbath side by side with the most heinous transgression of the moral law (Ezek.20:13,16,24; 22:8,26). I find them speaking of it as one of the great sins which brought judgment on Israel and carried the Jews into captivity (Neh.13:18; Jer.17:19-27). It seems clear to me that the Sabbath, in their judgment, is something far higher than the washings and cleansings of the ceremonial law. I am utterly unable to believe, when I read their language, that the Fourth Commandment was one of the things one day to pass away' (Knots Untied, page 301).



6. It is often argued that although 9 of the commandments reappear in the New Testament (albeit on a different basis) and are therefore in a sense abiding, the Fourth Commandment alone does not, and therefore must be ceremonial/judicial. This point will be covered later, but suffice to say here that the view is untenable. No such distinction within the decalogue is made: in fact if anything the Fourth Commandment is singled out for greater emphasis. It is the longest of the 10, is enforced both positively and negatively, is rooted in the primeval event of creation, and has more reasons and arguments for being observed than any of the others. We shall see later on that there is a sense in which the Fourth Commandment *does* reappear in the New Testament. But its surprising form seems to have blinded many to its presence there.

7. Repeated emphasis is placed upon the fact that God gave 10 Commandments (Ex.34:28, Deut.4:13; 10:4). There appears to be significance in the number 10. The tithe was one-tenth of possessions (Gen.28:22, etc.); 10 is a final figure (Gen.31:7 'and changed my wages ten times'; cf Num.14:22; Job.19:3); 10 plagues fell upon Egypt (Ex.9:14 'all my plagues'); and 10 was often a number in the articles and dimensions of the tabernacle (e.g., Ex.26:1,16). The significance seems to be that of completeness. If the Lord gave 10 Commandments it is highly unlikely that one of them is fundamentally different from the others, i.e., the Fourth Commandment merely Jewish and temporary. That would destroy the unity and perfection of these 'ten words'.

In spite of all this evidence, non-sabbatarian

writers maintain that the distinction between moral and ceremonial/judicial law is 'apt . . . but not self-evident' and is 'foreign to the spirit of the Pentateuch' (FSLD pages 68,173). This rather obvious distinction, however, and its corollary of the continuing obligation of the Sabbath commandment, cannot be summarily dismissed in this way.

## DENIAL 3

THE DAY FOR THE SABBATH HAS NOT BEEN TRANSFERRED FROM THE 7th TO THE 1st DAY OF THE WEEK BY CHRIST'S RESURRECTION. THE LORD'S DAY IS NOT THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH.

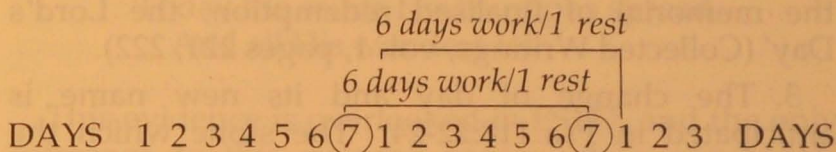
It is alleged that we have no biblical evidence for insisting that the Saturday Sabbath of the Old Testament became the Sunday Sabbath of the New Testament. Jon Zens writes of the 'gigantic inferencial leap (that) is taken to connect Sabbath with Sunday'. According to this view, the New Testament is silent about any such transfer, the Sabbath-Sunday connection being a man-made product of later church history (FSLD pages 136,390).

Let us take a closer look at Scripture and see whether this Sabbath transference theology is man-made or divinely-revealed.

1. The words of the Fourth Commandment at Ex.20:10 give us a hint of the ultimate change: 'the seventh day'. It does not say 'seventh day of the week' — forever fixing the Sabbath on Saturday — but simply an expression which means after six days work is to come the seventh day rest. The Sabbath commandment is therefore in terms of proportion. Put like this, 'the seventh day' is movable. So the first



day of the week can be as much after six days as the seventh day is, as this diagram shows:



The Sabbath of old then, can give way to the first day of the week because the necessary rhythm of 6 days work/1 day rest is still there. Therefore the conclusion of A. W. Pink is justified: 'The Lord so worded the Fourth Commandment as to suit *both* the Jewish and Christian dispensations, and thereby intimated its perpetuity' (The Ten Commandments, page 30).

2. In Deut.5:12-15 Israel is reminded of the Fourth Commandment. It is a virtual repetition of that given from Sinai but there are important variations. One is that this time the Sabbath is not grounded upon creation but redemption: 'And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence . . . therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day' (v.15). So the Sabbath has redemptive significance. This paves the way for its connection with Christ's finished work and its change of day in the New Testament. As John Murray finely says: 'Inescapable, therefore, is the conclusion that the resurrection in its redemptive character yields its sanction to the sacredness of the first day of the week, just as deliverance from Egypt's bondage accorded its sanction to the sabbath institution of the old covenant. This is the rationale for regarding the Lord's Day as the Christian Sabbath . . . The

principle enunciated in Deuteronomy 5:15 receives its verification and application in the new covenant in the memorial of finalised redemption, the Lord's Day' (Collected Writings, vol. 1, pages 221, 222).

3. The change of day and its new name is anticipated in Psa.118:22-24, 'The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it'. These verses refer to Christ's death and resurrection. We know this because our Lord applied them to Himself like this, Matt.21:42; Mk.12:10,11; Lk.20:17. And so did the apostles, Acts 4:10,11; 1 Pet.2:7. The fulfilment came about like this. Christ was 'refused by the builders' when they crucified Him. But He was made 'head stone of the corner' when He rose from the dead. Now, according to verse 24 the day when our Lord rose and became 'head stone of the corner' is important: it is a day which *He makes*. This, of course, is the first day of the week which by His resurrection He made, and the *Lord's Day* (Rev.1:10) answers to this. The church began to 'rejoice' on that day (see Jn.20:20) and has done so ever since. The epoch-making day of Psa.118 is a forecast of the Sabbath in its gospel form. Christ, as Lord of the Sabbath, has exactly fulfilled this prophecy. He has made a new day for the Sabbath and invested it with new meaning. Isaac Watts catches this truth beautifully:

This is the day the Lord hath made,  
He calls the hours His own;  
Let heaven rejoice, let earth be glad,  
And praise surround the throne.



Today He rose and left the dead,  
And Satan's empire fell:  
Today the saints His triumphs spread,  
And all His wonders tell.

This evidence is overlooked in FSLD, and the only reference to this passage occurs when one writer suggests it means every day is the Lord's Day: 'So that in fact it can be said of each day, "This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Psa.118:24).' (FSLD page 405). As one old writer on this subject put it: 'Strange! that a Prophet could behold the day of the Lord so clearly, and yet *Christians* be so long in the dark about it!' (The Divine Institution of the Christian Sabbath, Gospel Magazine, 1797).

4. It is often alleged that our Lord in His ministry gave no hint of the coming change of day for the Sabbath. Fair enough; and doubtless there were good reasons for that. But it can equally be said that He gave no hint of the eventual *abolition* of it either, as non-sabbatarians maintain. In fact, everything Jesus ever said on the subject was perfectly consistent with its continuance, though on a different day. He had not come to destroy the law (Matt.5:17). He often denounced the rabbinic overlay of man-made traditions which perverted the Sabbath's original purpose (e.g., Mk.2:23-3:5; Lk.13:14-17). He even spoke, in Matt.24:20, of the Sabbath as it would be to Christians in AD 70. If He envisaged its abolition, why mention it as still existing that far into the future? Unless He meant the continuing Sabbath, by then in its Christian form. But our Lord's silence on

the change of day was shattered by His resurrection . . .

5. All four gospels record that Jesus rose from the dead on 'the first day of the week'. From then on an inescapable importance gathers around Sunday. The gospels record occasions when the risen Lord appears to His own on this day: to Mary Magdalene (Mk.16:9; Jn.20:11-17); to the women (Matt.28:9,10); to Peter (Lk.24:34); to the pair on the Emmaus road (Lk.24); to the eleven in the upper room ('the same day at evening' Jn.20:19-23). And these love-visits were on the first Sunday, when He rose from the dead. It is not without significance that we read of no more such visits until a week has elapsed and the second Sunday has arrived: 'And after eight days again His disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus . . .' (Jn.20:26).<sup>\*</sup> Why the deliberate policy of appearing on Sunday, and even waiting until the second one before appearing again? Is He not deliberately intimating the new day for holy rest and worship? It is as if He is giving us here the New Testament counterpart of Gen.2:2,3: a new Sabbath day to mark a new and greater finished work. As Bishop Wilson expresses it: 'The old day was buried with Christ — the new arose with Him. He had in the old creation rested (as being the Author, one with the Father, of that six days work) on the seventh day and sanctified it. But now, as the

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<sup>\*</sup>True, Jesus appeared to His disciples at other times (e.g., Jn.21), but no mention is made of the day. And this visit is clearly differentiated from the previous ones by the introductory 'After these things . . .' (Jn.21:1). The same applies to the other appearances mentioned in 1 Cor.15:6-8.



author of the new work of creation, being detained in the prison of the grave on the seventh day, He takes another day to rest in, the following or first day of the week, which thus becomes the Lord's Day. Everything essential in the command goes on as it did; the non-essential point of the precise time is changed, or rather delayed a single day, to wait for its rising Master, and assume a new dignity, and be a memorial of the manifestation of a new and greater creation' (The Lord's Day, pages 115, 116. See the new LDOS reprint of this excellent book).

6. The risen, ascended Lord has given further prominence to Sunday by choosing this day to shed forth the Spirit upon the church. The day of Pentecost fell upon the first day of the week. And this was no accident. If Lev.23:15,16 is consulted we find that the people were to count the fifty days from 'the morrow after the Sabbath', i.e., from the first day of the week. God right back then timed this great event to fall on this day. So, 'when the day of Pentecost was fully come' the church was assembled together 'with one accord in one place' (Acts 2:1). Thus the gift of the Spirit distinguishes the first day of the week. It is not surprising, therefore, to find in Rev.1:10 that John was 'in the Spirit on the Lord's Day'.

7. The apostles were unique men, called by Christ and commanded to teach Christians 'all things whatsoever I have commanded you' (Matt.28:20). For over a month the Lord gave them a final briefing for this before He ascended, Acts 1:3 'being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God'. They would be 'guided into all truth' (Jn.16:13) when the Spirit came. They would be

the infallible spokesmen and penmen of Christ Himself for establishing the doctrine and practice of the Christian church. Thus Paul can claim: 'the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord' (1 Cor.14:37).<sup>\*</sup> And this applies even to their example: 'Timotheus . . . who shall bring you into remembrance of *my ways* which be in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church' (1 Cor.4:17). Therefore, if we lack a specific command on any matter but have apostolic example or precedent, it is as binding upon us as if it *were* a command. Obviously we are not talking about everything the apostles ever did as men, but when the context makes clear they are settling the order and worship of the church, that is what we are mandated to follow. In the New Testament there are a number of important places where the apostles saw the first day of the week as the follow-on from the Christian Sabbath.

(1) In Acts 20:6,7 Luke gives the distinct impression that he is recording an established practice: 'upon the first day of the week, *when* the disciples came together to break bread' (literally 'having been assembled'; the Greek word for 'assembled' is equivalent to 'synagogue', implying a weekly religious gathering). Notice that this

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<sup>\*</sup>'If any will presume to say that men properly endued with the Spirit for the work of His commission, did notwithstanding do such a great thing as to appoint the Lord's Day for Christian worship, without the conduct of the Spirit, they may by the same way of proceeding, pretend it to be as uncertain of every particular book and chapter in the New Testament, whether or not they wrote it by the Spirit.' The Divine Appointment of the Lord's Day, Richard Baxter.



Christian assembly was not summoned by Paul — it was already meeting on that Sunday. And Paul deliberately waited for this opportunity to preach: 'we abode seven days. And upon the first day of the week . . .' Doubtless he had taught privately in the week, but his formal and public ministry was reserved for the day when he knew the whole company of believers would be gathered (see also Acts 21:4). Is not this apostolic sanction for the 7th day Sabbath emerging in its 1st day form?

(2) Another instance of this occurs in 1 Cor.16:1,2 where Paul gives directions for the orderly collection of relief for needy saints at Jerusalem. He knows what day will be sanctified for worship, and so he writes: 'Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him.' This was not simply what he wanted at Corinth; it was no local, one-off command. He says this is something ordained more widely: 'as I have given order to the churches of Galatia,\* even so do ye'. The same apostolic directive had gone to them, indicating that they too met on the first day of the week for the exercise of their religion. We get the impression that the practice of setting apart Sunday was established and well known in the early Christian church.

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\*This 'order' regarding the first day of the week in 1 Cor.16 should be kept in mind as we interpret Gal.4:9,10 'Ye observe days . . . I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain'. Evidently Paul was not afraid to direct their observing of the Lord's Day. This complaint, together with references to 'days' in Roms.14:5,6; Col.2:16,17, are not an embarrassment to us. Paul probably had in mind the Jewish ceremonial holy days called 'sabbaths' in e.g., Lev.16:31; 23:24,39.

(3) Some decades later (around AD 95) the last surviving apostle is exiled on the lonely isle of Patmos. It is through his pen that the new name is given to the new day for the Sabbath. Under divine inspiration he designates it 'the Lord's Day' (Rev.1:10). This title has considerable significance in view of the use of a similar expression used elsewhere in the New Testament. In the words of William Ames (1576-1633) 'It is called the Lord's Day for the same reason that the holy supper of the Eucharist is called the Lord's Supper, 1 Cor.11:20. It was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ and it is to be referred to one and the same Lord in its end and use.' If this does not refer to the first day of the week it is difficult to know *what* it refers to, as John uses the name without explanation. He takes it for granted that his readers, seven Christian assemblies dotted over western Asia Minor, will know what he means. Since they, by now, will at least be familiar with the religious significance of the first day of the week, this is the only thing 'The Lord's Day' can be. If John was referring to something other than this, he would surely have explained himself.\* To conclude, then: just as God claims the seventh day as 'the Sabbath of the Lord thy God', so our risen Master claims the week's first day as 'the Lord's Day' — the Christian Sabbath.

It is not, therefore, such a gigantic leap from Sabbath to Lord's Day as some would have us

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\*On the mistaken idea that 'The Lord's Day' means 'the day of the Lord' (the second coming and end time) see 'A Sabbath Remains' by H. J. W. Legerton, pages 3-5 LDOS.



believe. The connecting link is forged by Scripture itself. 'What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.'

## DENIAL 4

THERE IS NO SCRIPTURAL OBLIGATION TO OBSERVE SUNDAY AS A DAY OF REST, ALTHOUGH CHRISTIANS SHOULD MEET ON THAT DAY FOR WORSHIP.

Nowhere in the New Testament is the first day of the week spoken of as a day of cessation from work, only as a day for worship. There is no warrant for applying the physical rest of the Old Testament Sabbath to the spiritual worship of the New Testament Lord's Day. In short, the Lord's Day does not have the force of moral law for anybody.

We have now come to the heart of this debate: the exact status of the Lord's Day. Whether it has the Fourth Commandment behind it, or whether it is a different entity altogether, belonging exclusively to gospel times. Whether it is still Sabbath or just 'special'. The answer we give to this question has momentous repercussions for Christian obedience, the church and our nation.

1. We concede the point that the New Testament does not depict the Lord's Day as cessation from secular activity. Physical rest is not the emphasis of the first day of the week. There are, however, reasons for this:

(1) The Jewish-Roman world of the early church was not a society which made possible a sabbatic Lord's Day. The first day of the week was an

ordinary working day for both Jews and Romans. Most Christians were slaves and working folk who just could not sanctify the day as they would wish. The Lord's Day pattern emerges amidst this culture and is historically conditioned by it. S. M. Houghton, in an article on this subject written in 1983, puts the matter helpfully: 'The Christian conscience is not subject to intolerable burdens. There were dangers enough in the situation on other counts. Countless early martyrdoms testify to that; blood was shed in fearful abundance in the early Christian centuries. And the Lord, in gentleness to His own, as it were says on this issue, "I will put upon you none other burden". And so it has remained.' That is why Paul's Sunday meeting at Troas was in the evening and through the night (Acts 20:7,11) — they did the best they could in the circumstances. This situation did not continue, however, and common grace has permeated many societies so that Sunday now *can* be a Sabbath for many of God's people. May this ever be continued to us in Great Britain! And where Sunday *cannot* be a Sabbath, believers have the New Testament situation for their comfort and guidance.

(2) The rest emphasised by the Lord's Day is not so much the Christian's rest as *Christ's* rest — commemorating as it does His resurrection and finished work (cf Isa.11:10; Heb.10:12). This does not mean there is to be no physical rest for us: it simply means this is not the prominent feature of the first day of the week.

(3) There is no need for the New Testament to spell out the Sabbath ingredient of the Lord's Day



because that is already there from the Old Testament. If Sunday does not abolish and replace the Sabbath, then nothing more need be said on the matter of rest. This would explain the New Testament silence on this particular aspect. To quote S. M. Houghton again: 'The New Testament does not legislate upon the subject of the Lord's Day as does the Old Testament upon the seventh-day Sabbath. There is a carrying on from one Testament to the other of certain principles, and the Four Gospels certainly show us the true spirit of the day in contrast with the strait-jacket attitude of Scribes and Pharisees, but fresh legislation there is none. Yet the Holy Spirit in His gracious operations quickens mind and conscience in regard to the matter, reveals the mind of the Lord, 'shows thee, O man, what is good', renders tender the believer's inmost convictions, and shows him how, in the context of time and opportunity, the first day of the week, the day of resurrection, may be kept and used to the divine glory and to his own and others' good.'

2. From the ground covered so far, it is plain that this denial of Sabbath status to the Lord's Day drives a wedge between Old and New Testaments and rends the beautiful unity of Holy Scripture. That Old Testament Sabbath and New Testament Lord's Day are different in some respects we do not deny. But the difference is in terms of added significance rather than it being a different species altogether. The day on which the Sabbath falls is new, the emphasis is new (worship, and rejoicing in Christ), the name is new (The Lord's Day). But the essential Sabbath

account for if the Lord's Day is *not* the Christian Sabbath. Also, more generally, divine visitations of the Spirit in revival have always led people to love the Lord's Day and to more conscientiously sanctify it. Church history confirms this. Can anyone cite a genuine revival of religion where freedom from observation of the Lord's Day was a feature? It is as if 'the Spirit of Truth' has borne witness to the Christian Sabbath in the annals of the Christian church.

5. We read concerning God's laws: 'in the keeping of them there is great reward' (Psa.19:11). God honours those who honour Him. This has been conspicuously true of those who have made their stand for God over the sanctification of the Lord's Day. Are we to say that Eric Liddle need not have refused to run on Sunday after all? What are we to make of the way the Lord blessed him for his faithfulness to Sabbath-principle? There are multitudes of less well-known believers who would testify to the price they have had to pay for putting God first on His day, and yet to the munificent way God has recompensed them. All this is needless scrupulosity and mere coincidence if Sunday does not bind us with Sabbath authority. But to simply explain away all this phenomena is to deny the uniform experience of the people of God.

## DENIAL 5

IT IS ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE CYCLE OF ONE DAY'S REST AFTER SIX DAYS' WORK IS BENEFICIAL, BUT THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT SCRIPTURE MAKES IT OBLIGATORY FOR US TODAY.



principle: founded at creation, legislated at Sinai, and commended by the prophets remains unchanged.

3. The desire to emasculate the Lord's Day of divine obligation is curious. Especially when the mandate to observe the Lord's *supper* is accepted readily enough ('This do in remembrance of me'). If there is obligation to commemorate the Lord's *death*, why not also the Lord's *resurrection*? 'Because, while Jesus commands us to observe the Lord's supper, He nowhere commands us to keep His day', someone may say. We reply that He *has* said so in the Old Testament already, and has given us the sanction of His apostles to confirm it. Without such gracious constraint our sinful hearts would neglect those very things which are appointed for His glory and to be a means of grace to us. Believers show their love to God by keeping His Commandments (Jn.14:15), which for us 'are not grievous' (1 Jn.5:3). Divine wisdom has ordained that Christian duties and privileges have the force of 'law to Christ' (1 Cor.9:21). This is not legalism, but simply membership of what one modern writer calls 'God's Righteous Kingdom'. So much so that saints are called 'they that keep the Commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus' (Rev.14:12).

4. Robert Murray M'Cheyne, the last century Scottish Minister, says in one of his published sermons that during a certain season of revival there was profound conviction of sin. And, he notes with interest, the particular sin the Holy Spirit fastened upon the consciences of the awakened was that of Sabbath-breaking. This way the Lord sovereignly chose to bring sinners to repentance is hard to

a timeless Scriptural obligation behind what is so necessary for us.\*

3. But it is in the *spiritual* benefits of setting apart a whole day for God that the divine obligation can be most clearly seen. We all experience the frustration of being able to snatch only certain times in the week for personal devotion and public worship. These limited seasons are squeezed between the responsibility of our earthly callings. The cares of the world legitimately occupy us again and the spiritual good recedes all too quickly. Can we believe that the Lord's Day is meant to be no different? Are we *really* permitted to gather for worship, and then indulge in recreation and secular activities on this day? If so, then how is the Lord's Day even 'special' — leave alone Sabbath? No. Surely this is the day when, by divine edict, we do not *have* to do these other things; and when we *can* give ourselves with a good conscience to the things that matter most. No one, who has used the Lord's Day rightly and discovered its blessings, would want to do any different. The Lord's Day is exclusively for the things of the day's Lord. And this is only what the Giver of the day has always said:

'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

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\*See further The Lord's Day: A Medical Point of View, Prof. Verna Wright, LDOS.



1. This seems to close the eyes to an important piece of evidence. If the Sabbath *was* 'made for man' as Jesus says — founded at creation and fundamental to life — then the benefits of observing it are only what we would expect, and they lead us to one conclusion: it is the mandatory provision of a kind God. On page 403 of FSLD the writers partly concede this: 'It cannot be denied that societies that have adopted the arrangement of making Sunday a day of rest for their members have benefited from this in a variety of ways.' So far so good. But why not go the rest of the way and ask questions like: *Why* does Sabbath-keeping result in such blessing if it was only temporary? Was God only interested in the physical and mental well-being of Israelites? Is He not just as concerned for Christians? And nations generally? Interestingly, FSLD goes on to say: ' . . . although the literal Sabbath day of rest has been abrogated and has not been transferred to Sunday, we should share this concern for regular periods of rest both for ourselves and for others in our society.' We would reply that God, having shown *His* concern once and for all in the Fourth Commandment, we can do no better than simply keep that Commandment in the spirit of the New Testament!

2. The six day work — one day rest principle is a stubborn one which will not go away. The French and Russian Revolutionaries tried to abolish it, so did the Government of Sri Lanka in the 1960s. But they all had to bring it back. Other work-rest cycles have been tried: one day in ten or eight proved too long, one day in six too short; one day in seven is just right. In the face of this it seems ludicrous to deny that there is

nor finding thine own pleasure, nor  
speaking thine own words: then thou shalt  
delight thyself in the Lord . . .'

Isa.58:13,14.

Aversion to the Sabbath can so easily spring, not from genuine biblical and intellectual problems, but from our own sinful hearts. We read that 'the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be' (Roms.8:7). Although the regenerate have a new heart and a new spirit, *by nature* they remain the same people they ever were. The old enmity to the authority of God can so easily rear its ugly head. Let us tremble, lest our opposition to the Sabbath-Lord's Day is, after all, the fruit of an unsanctified use of the Bible and an unmortified spirit of rebellion.

The promise of the New Covenant entails God writing His law upon our hearts (Jer.31:33) and causing us to delight in doing His will (Psa.40:8). This booklet has been written in the conviction that wherever these two graces flourish, there will be spiritual understanding and love of the Lord's Day, with all its duties and privileges. May the Lord open our eyes to 'all the counsel of God' on this precious subject and enable us to gladly embrace His revealed will. Let us observe and defend the Sabbath in its Christian form, and ever say with the clear-sighted psalmist: 'This is the day which the Lord hath made; we *will* rejoice and be glad in it.'



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