

THE DAY -

By The Right Rev.
Bishop Frank Houghton

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“THE DAY BELONGING”

“MY HOLY DAY” — Is. 58, 13

“THE LORD’S DAY” — Rev. 1, 10

The Sabbath, as our Lord Himself says, “was made for man”. It is God’s good gift to mankind but nonetheless God calls it “*My* Holy Day”. The day of rest which we observe as Christians is also God’s good gift to us, but at the same time it is particularly the *Lord’s* Day and not ours to spend as we please. My purpose is not to say anything new on this important subject but rather like the Apostle Peter “to arouse your sincere mind by way of reminder”. These reminders are all the more needed, not only because of the persistent and determined attempts from outside to undermine the very foundations of this Holy Day, but also because within the Christian Church, and by men who call themselves Evangelicals, doubts are being cast upon the validity of arguments which we have adduced over and over again in our efforts to protect the Day. For instance, in a Church weekly newspaper there

appeared an article entitled “The Lord’s Day or Christian Sabbath” which stated that the Christian Sabbath is a contradiction in terms. But, as the writer reminds us, the word “sabbath” is derived from the Hebrew verb “to rest” and thus “Christian sabbath” means simply “Christian rest-day”, and is a perfectly fair description of Sunday or the Lord’s Day! Even if we accept the argument that the Jewish Law concerning the Sabbath is abrogated—and I am not prepared to accept it except in the sense that the ceremonial law was abrogated and our Lord set aside some of the restrictions that attached to the Sabbath in His day—but even if we do accept the fact that the Law is from one point of view abrogated, are we to admit the obvious corollary that God has ordained no rest-day for us Christians? Our Lord Himself looked back to the Creation when He said, “The Sabbath was made for *man*”—not for the Jew only, but for all mankind, for, of course, we are all in the line of descent from the first parents of our race. “God blessed the seventh Day and sanctified it”.

The argument from silence is a dangerous one. For instance, it is used to suggest that the institution of a Sabbath was something

virtually new, because there is no actual mention of any of the patriarchs observing it, nothing until Exodus 16 when the manna was given. But we have no right to conclude that a Sabbath rest had never been enjoyed until that time. In Exodus 16: 28, 29, God says to Moses: "How long refuse ye to keep My Commandments and My laws? See for that the Lord hath *given* you the Sabbath, therefore, He giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days". This, then, was a *gift* of God and a *law* of God even before the promulgation of the Ten Commandments. It is God's gift to man from the time when man was created and from the beginning it was God's law that it should be observed.

HOW IS IT TO BE OBSERVED?

Again, the writer of the article to which we refer appears to stress the fact that the Sabbath is to be a day of *rest* almost to the exclusion of any other significance attaching to it. Yet, again from the beginning we have the categorical statement that God *blessed* this day and *sanctified* it, set it apart as *holy*. Thus there was not merely the negative obligation to do no work on that day, but the positive obligation to

keep it as a holy day, set apart for God. For the Christian, in one sense sacredness attaches to every day; we do not suggest that we have six days in which to please ourselves and one day in which to remember God! But nonetheless this day was *given* to man, not merely because his physical frame *requires* the rest from work—and this is a fact about which the medical profession, including non-Christians, would be unanimous—but also as a day free from worldly cares, in order that we may have time for fellowship with God. The brief minutes which every Christian *must* snatch from every day for prayer and reading of the Word are not enough. The Sabbath meant not only cessation from work but a longer opportunity for worship, for spiritual refreshment and recreation which, owing to the inexorable demands of our weekday tasks, is denied to us on other days.

"This", says God, "is *My* day, My holy day". As a lover might say to his beloved, "I am going to keep such and such a day absolutely free for you", so we should make a covenant with our Beloved and pledge ourselves as far as may be possible to keep the Lord's Day free for the Lord.

It is true, as the writer of this article reminds us, that in the words of Isaiah 58: 13 ("If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day . . ."), the phrase "doing thy pleasure" may mean "doing your own business". There may, therefore, be no specific reference, in the sense of physical recreations, to Sunday sports, etc. But, whatever translation we accept, it certainly means that we do not go our own way or occupy ourselves with our own concerns. It is *God's Day*, "My holy Day", and therefore a day to be occupied especially with *His* concerns. What are His concerns? "Hallowed be Thy Name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done as in Heaven so in earth". Worship, the spread of the Gospel in our own locality and throughout the world — these are surely the primary occupations for the people of God on His Holy Day, and in this they should find "delight" and, although the earlier part of the chapter may not refer specifically to the keeping of the Sabbath, its exhortations may very appropriately be applied to God's Day. "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed

go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?" (Is. 58: 6,7). Here is what used to be called "works of mercy". These surely are particularly suitable for God's Holy Day and especially for men and women who are very busy all through the rest of the week and have little time to care for the needy and perhaps those in difficulty around them.

While England is still a nominally Christian country, we are surely right in seeking to safeguard the sanctity of this day by every means in our power and therefore to support the work of the Lord's Day Observance Society. I cannot remember a time when I had not heard of the L.D.O.S., I cannot remember a time when, in the Church I attended as a small boy, we did not have sermons for the Lord's Day Observance Society and I can assure you that in our home the Lord's Day was the day to which we looked forward, it was a delight even then. It is good to support the work of this Society which maintains its testimony in spite of open or covert

attacks and even sneers. You know our statesmen would be better occupied in regarding this whole day as a holy day than even in meeting together for the discussion of world affairs, however important those affairs may be; they would come with freshness to them on the other days of the week if they would observe this day, the whole of it, as a holy day.

DIVINE IMPRIMATUR

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day". I believe that just as God the Creator gave the Sabbath to man setting His own gracious imprimatur upon it and calling it "My Holy Day", so our Lord Jesus Christ marked the first day of the week in equally signal fashion by His glorious Resurrection, and by the giving of the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost.

"On thee, at the creation,
The light first had its birth;
On thee, for our salvation,
Christ rose from depths of earth;
On thee, our Lord victorious
The Spirit sent from heaven:
And thus on thee most glorious
A triple light was given".
"A triple light" was shed on this day

because it was to be the perpetual memorial of God's act of Creation, His even greater new Creation when on this day our Lord and Saviour rose in triumph from the dead and the quickening of the Christian Church when on this Day the Holy Spirit was given.

"I was in the Spirit on the *Lord's Day*". It is noteworthy that this adjective, which means "belonging to the Lord", is used only in two connections. First of all, in 1 Corinthians 11, 20, for "The *Lord's Supper*", the Supper that particularly belongs to the Lord, and then in Revelation 1, 10, of the Day particularly belonging to the Lord; "The *Lord's Day*".

Now it is true, of course, that our Lord left us free from the Law in the sense that our salvation is by grace through faith and not by obedience to the Law; it is true that the ceremonial law was abolished although never the moral law. It is true, too, that our Lord gave to His Church no rules of organisation, no ecclesiastical system as such. Thus while those of us who are members of the Church of England regard that denomination as the most Scriptural, other denominations have an equal right to attempt to show from Scripture that the rules and orders of their organisation are

from their point of view more Scriptural. So, whilst our Lord left us no clearly defined rules of organisation, He did leave us with two institutions of the Gospel, the first *the Lord's Supper*, the feast of our redemption, superseding for us Christians the Passover feast, and, second, *the Lord's Day* which I believe we have a perfect right to call the Christian Sabbath, our day of rest and gladness, our day of joy and light, as truly a "delight", I trust, as ever the Jewish Sabbath could be to a pious Jew. On one day in seven we rest as God rested after the Creation, and on the Lord's Day we not only rest from ordinary, daily work but we rejoice in the spiritual rest which is already ours—rest from ourselves and our own works—because on this Day God *acted* raising His Son from the death whereby we have been redeemed, and sending His Spirit to enable us to proclaim His salvation to the ends of the earth, and to live so as to please God.

FRANK HOUGHTON, *Bishop.*

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Published by
THE LORD'S DAY OBSERVANCE SOCIETY,
55, FLEET STREET,
LONDON, E.C.4.
