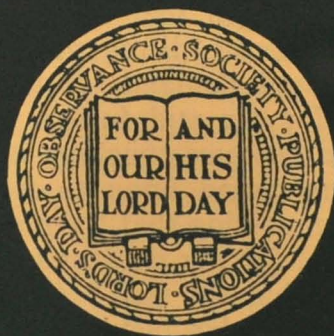


THE SABBATH
and
THE GOSPEL



by John Wilmot, D.D.

THE SABBATH AND THE GOSPEL

A SERMON PREACHED
BY
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*"The Sabbath was made for man, and not
man for the sabbath: therefore the Son of
Man is Lord also of the sabbath."*—
Mark 2:27-28.

It will be acknowledged that throughout Christendom there is today a general disregard of Sunday as the Christian Sabbath, and demands from one quarter and another are made for the still further loosening of laws and restrictions and customs touching its due observance. Civil authorities are called upon to face the issue, and often, instead of recognizing that "the powers that be are ordained of God . . . for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of them that do well" (Rom. 13; 1 Pet. 2), they pander to the popular taste, and find a wished-for escape from solemn duty in the democratic vote. They cast off on the people, who "love to have it so", the sins that are their own, and the fact that "there is no authority but of God" to Whom account must be given, does not appear to weigh with them.

The text we have chosen to introduce this consideration of a supremely important and current question is used or

rather misused to give support to the license that since "the sabbath was made for man" he may determine how to employ it according to his likes and dislikes, and that "Jesus Christ said so" is used as an additional buttress. But is it so? That the Christian Sabbath or Lord's Day is the most blessed of all days has received the witness of God-fearing people of all nations which the gospel has reached, and where disciples have been made and churches established. On the other hand, that it is a most serious matter to disparage and misuse the sacred appointment is evident from a consideration of the history of the Israel nation as written in the scriptures, and, indeed, of other people besides. It is folly to ignore the admonition of history and example.

Authority

What, then, is *the AUTHORITY for SABBATH OBSERVANCE*? The answer is, the Bible and not civil law or tradition. The Bible, it used to be said, is the religion of Protestants. The testimony of Christian rulers to the effect that the Bible is the secret of a nation's greatness, and the Bible is the most valuable thing that this world affords, are not to be forgotten, much less despised. Britain and Canada and the United States and other lands may yet bitterly prove the truth of such words; they may yet learn that the slippery slope down from religious duty may land them in national decline under the displeasure of God. It is to be recognized that simultaneous with the rise of modernism and the rejection of the authority of the Bible in matters of faith and practice, there has come the breaking loose from Sabbath observance as a divine institution. This fact in itself is deeply significant: it indicates that there attaches to the Sabbath the character, not of privilege only, but of *obligation*. But whereas among Christian people the usefulness and blessedness of the Day of Rest is acknowledged, not all are prepared to concede that the "commandment" still obtains. But He Who declared, "the Son of Man is Lord also of the sabbath" has also remonstrated, "Why call ye Me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?"

Even if it be contended that the original command cannot be observed *as then*, it must be admitted that the *principle* remains. The validity of biblical principles governs all doctrine and life.

Whence, then, this Day of Rest? It is as ancient as the world's creation. It was established in the history of Israel. It received the confirmation of the Lord Jesus Christ. It has accompanied the world-wide reception of the Christian gospel. It has become embodied in the tradition and practice of the Christian churches. It has been given place in the legislation of Christian governments. Let those who despise the sabbath as such and yet demand at least their "one day's rest in seven", remember that they owe everything for this provision to the Bible, to the Gospel, to the Churches, to God. And there are over a hundred mentions of it in the scriptures.

Institution

Its ORIGINAL INSTITUTION and CHARACTER call for some attention (Gen. 2:1-3). The Creator pronounced His six day's work "very good", blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it (set it apart); because that in it He had rested from all His work which God had created and made. *He* rested. Sin had not then wrought its ruination. Man had had no part in the good work. The sabbath, however, was made for him, and there can be no doubt that Adam shared with his Maker in the observance of the Day of Rest. How long this blessed state continued, we do not know. Man, made in the image of God and in communion with Him in a manner we cannot explain, shared with God in the pleasure of those weekly sabbath days, for God had given it to him to have dominion over all His works. What then was this "Rest"? It could not have been rest from weariness or from the toil of the week which tires. It was only *after* the entrance of sin that the judgment was pronounced, "in sorrow shalt thou bring forth". At the beginning work did not necessitate rest. Again it is written, "Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the

Lord, *the Creator* of the ends of the earth, fainteth not neither is weary?" (Isa. 40:28). The rest was not from weariedness by working, it was the rest of satisfaction with work well-done. God reviewed His work, and it could have been said, "All Thy works praise Thee, Thou most high". Taking delight in the Creator's plan and purpose, as observed in the works of His hand, would seem to have been the engagement on those original sabbath days. "Man was not made for the sabbath", as though slavishly and ritualistically he must observe the day under penalty for neglect. But "the sabbath was made for man", for his spiritual blessing and eternal good in admiring the works of God and worshipping the high and lofty One Who inhabiteth eternity.

Legislation

The Sabbath was later INCORPORATED IN LEGISLATION: The Law received by Moses and communicated to Israel contained this provision. But even before the giving of the decalogue on Mount Sinai the people were instructed to "Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy". They were to *remember* it; it was not a new commandment. When they collected the heaven-sent manna day by day, two days' supply were given on the sixth day that there should be the proper observance of the sabbath on the seventh (Ex. 16:22-30). Moreover the Law was not for Israel alone, but through Israel for the whole world. "Now we know that what things the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world become subject to the judgment of God" (Rom. 3.19). Israel, blessed and privileged above all nations was so favoured that she should be the crucial test for all. Her failure proves the world in default. Notice then the serious consequences of their sabbath desecration. Moses had forewarned them of threatened exile upon the disobedience, "Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies' land . . . because they despised My judgments and abhorred My statutes" (Lev. 26 : 34). And centuries later when the judgment fell

the prophet confirmed it, "to fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths, for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil three score years and ten" (2 Chron. 36:21). They had been forewarned, but the time came after long forbearance, that they having "mocked the messengers of God and despised His words, and misused His prophets, the wrath of the Lord arose against His people till there was no remedy", and He gave them over to captivity (2 Chron. 36:16). Let it be remembered that the nation of Israel was designedly a typical nation and these happenings are "written for our learning". Will Britain learn? Will the Commonwealth learn? Was it not Voltaire the French infidel who said that to destroy the British nation you must first destroy the English sabbath?

A sabbath well-spent brings a week of content,
And strength for the toil of the morrow;
But a sabbath profaned, whate'er may be gained,
Is a certain forerunner of sorrow.

The even balance of God's Word, judgment tempered with mercy, is seen everywhere in the holy book. Listen to these words, so inviting, so appealing; "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 (transacting thine own business); then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord, and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth" (righteousness exalteth a nation) (Isa. 58:13, 14).

Evangelical Purpose

We must further remark that the Sabbath had *an EVANGELICAL INTENTION*: Included in the Mosaic Law it is placed in the Moral Code of that Law. It is the fourth commandment. Others, for instance, are: "Honour thy father and mother; thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not bear false witness; thou shalt not covet". The Sabbath

Commandment is introduced with the word: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain". We recognize that these commandments are still valid, and we find them also in the New Testament. On what ground then is the sabbath law to be excluded? Evidently it is one of God's moral requirements. The Law is one, and "he that offendeth in one point is guilty of all" (James 2:10). Being, as a commandment, placed in the moral section and not in the ceremonial part of the law, we are surely to understand that sabbath observance is to continue when the ritual of ceremonialism, intendedly typical of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ and all realized in His fulfilment thereof, is abolished, as it is written: "He taketh away the first that He may establish the second (Heb. 10:9).

It is clear that although the original rest of God was broken by the despoilation of His works through sin, the *character* of that rest is perpetuated. And we find that the reason given for its observance is not now alone as a memorial of Creation, but to commemorate the gracious intervention of God in *Redemption*. And redemption in its biblical exposition means a *New Creation*. Therefore Moses said: "Remember that thou wast a slave in Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and outstretched arm: *therefore*, the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day" (Deut. 5:15). The Lord Jesus said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work". God will not, therefore, allow His rest of satisfaction and delight in a work of creation well-done, though outraged and destroyed by sin, to be forever destroyed. He will again be glorified. He will regain by redemption a lost paradise. And it is to be noticed that although the seventh day after Creation was the original sabbath day, the blessing He pronounced was not upon the seventh day as such but upon the *sabbath* day.

"The Son of Man is Lord also of the sabbath". He mentioned not the "day"! Being Lord of the sabbath, may not He, Who in the beginning originated it, may not He Who communicated its law through Moses, if He so

determine, change the day? We believe it is to be concluded from the New Testament that He has so done. And we believe the legislation in the Old Testament provided for and anticipated this change. Within the law of Israel were included the annual festivals of Jehovah: the Calendar of Redemption. There were six of them to be observed "everything upon his day". They are introduced by the weekly sabbath injunction and proclaimed as the gospel (Lev. 23; compare Ps. 89:15). The *Passover* was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God: "Even Christ our passover Lamb is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7). The *Firstfruits*, three days later was fulfilled in the resurrection of Christ: "Christ the firstfruits" (1 Cor. 15:23). They were to count fifty days from this feast to *Pentecost*, and we gather from the New Testament that the time was precisely this "when the day of Pentecost was fully come" and the Spirit was bestowed on the waiting Church (Acts 2). The *Trumpets* speak of the gospel proclamation: "the trumpet of the gospel sounds with an inviting voice", and "if the trumpet give an uncertain sound who shall prepare himself for the battle?" (1 Cor. 14:8). *Atonement*, with its most solemn requirement that in its observance they should "afflict their souls" finds its meaning in the penitence and faith which are unto salvation, as in the hymn, "The atonement of Thy blood *apply*", and "There is a fountain". *Tabernacles*, the feast which recalled the wilderness journeyings, the provision of the water from the rock, specially memorialized, which Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10) our Lord Himself recognized as fulfilled in Himself and His gospel when "in the last day, that great day of the feast He stood and cried, saying, "If any man thirst, let Him come unto Me and drink". And "this spake He of the Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive" upon His being glorified (John 7). The joy of salvation on pilgrimage towards the promised land was thus expressed in the words which the people chanted, "With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation" (Isa. 12).

All of these feasts, therefore, pointed forward to and received their spiritual realization in the Lord Jesus

Christ as He is expounded to us in the Gospel. It is specially to be marked in this connection that, whereas the seventh day was the most outstanding day in Israel's calendar, and the breach of its observance brought severe judgment, the day most conspicuous in these anticipative gospel festivals is named as "the morrow after the sabbath", that is, not the seventh but *the first day*. The eighth day of the feast was the first day of the week. The Resurrection day, the Pentecostal day, the great day of the Tabernacles were all the first day of the week. The work of the Son of God, the Spirit of God, the Church of God, are all related to the first day of the week.

At the beginning on the sixth day Adam was created. Later, on the sixth day Jesus, the last Adam, was crucified. On the sixth day, the original creation, "the heavens and the earth were finished", and on the sixth day, Jesus on the cross cried, "It is finished" and the new creation was assured, for He had in prayer a few days earlier said, "I have finished the work Thou gavest Me to do: I have glorified Thee on the earth". It is in the new creation, therefore, arising from His *redemptive* work; the work of Him "by Whom all things were made" at the beginning: His *redemptive* work; that God will find satisfaction again and forever. A new day to commemorate this was thus provided. On the seventh day at the beginning "God rested from all His works", and this continued to be the ordinance in a ruined world with sin unremoved. Therefore, on this seventh day the Lord Jesus lay resting in the tomb of death. But having put away sin by the death of His cross, "He rose again *the third day* according to the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15)—"the third day" fell on the first day of the week, the day after the Jews' Sabbath. Which scriptures? All of them in their united, consistent and cumulative testimony to the one Redeemer. On the first day of the week, the work of creation began: "God said, Let there be *light*": And on the first day, the Redeemer in resurrection "brought life and immortality *to light* through the gospel". The two are parallel in this word: "For God Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of

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