

ONE

IN

SEVEN

THE PRINCIPLE

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THE PROMISE

MALCOLM MACINNES

Isaiah 58:13-14.

"If you turn away your foot from the sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shall honour him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words: Then shall you delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father: for the mouth of the LORD has spoken it."

This part of God's holy word deals, not with the sins of the nations, but with the sins of those who claim to be the people of God. They went to worship, and went through their religious devotions. There was a great deal of religious activity, but behind that smokescreen there was sin. One of the sins of this present generation is with respect to the Lord's Day. I prefer, in these New Testament times, to use this name rather than the Sabbath, especially in a society where there are many people of the Jewish religion. As Christians we understand that our "Sabbath" is the first day of the week, whereas, for those of the Jewish religion the "Sabbath" falls on the seventh day, which is Saturday. So, when we as Christians talk now about the Sabbath, we are talking about the Lord's Day. One of the advantages of using this name is that it reminds us of the Lord. Of course, the name is used in the New Testament, Revelation 1:7, so it is a Biblical name which was understood and used by the early Christians.

It is a sad commentary on the present religious climate that even in some evangelical circles the practice of keeping the Lord's Day is often

shunned. If you profess your interest in keeping one day, the Lord's Day, as a Christian Sabbath or rest day to the Lord you are considered by the vast majority to be a legalist, or someone who is out of touch with the real needs of the Christian church in this generation. You will be thought of as one who has not been liberated from the Judaism of the Old Testament. So, what we are confronted with in this issue is the opposition of the world to having a set time for God, and the indifference of much of the professing Christian church. Within the Christian community the situation is nothing short of alarming, and it gives a lever to the ungodly to trample the Lord's Day under foot. Thousands of fans will pay their way into watching sport on a "Sunday", and some of these players on the field will profess to be Christians. The teams, in all probability, have a 'Chaplain' who has prayed with them before they went onto the field! Church leaders, in many instances, show themselves to be 'blind leaders of the blind'. They will be called one day to account to God for their stewardship. Yet, out of this cloud of religious darkness, a voice can be heard calling for help. There is recognition among church people that they need and want something. The widely-read magazine, "Christianity Today", did a survey in which they asked their readers to list what they thought to be the most important thing of real value for a Christian. Sunday, or the Lord's Day, was listed as 'important' or 'very important'. That was the response from the average members who make up the church today. The response from the church hierarchy would most likely be different. What we are, therefore, considering is something over which there is division even in the ecclesiastical world. We will try to discover whether or not there is divine authority for the observance of one day in seven as a religious day devoted to divine worship. If

there is no divine authority for such an observance, we had better forget the issue, because then we cannot make it a matter of belief and religious conscience. On the other hand, if it can be shown from the Bible to be a divine ordinance, our faith is strengthened and we realize that we have a great work to do. Those who love the Lord's Day, and who are set for its defence, may seem to be fighting a losing battle. However, if they have Biblical authority for their contention, the battle is not theirs but God's, and He will vindicate His truth.

The Principle.

Is there a principle that lays out for us "one day in seven" as special for the Lord? As we look at **society** today, we conclude that there is not such a principle, but rather that there may be a principle which requires one day for sport. As we look at most church leaders and religious organizations, we can come to the conclusion that there should be one day in seven for the family. Seldom do we hear that there should be one day in seven specially for the Lord. If there is no principle for such a day, there need be no practice of observing it, and certainly, there can be no binding obligation to observe it.

On the other hand, if there is such a principle, we must seek carefully to hold to it and to practice it in our lives. If we look again at verses 13 and 14 in Isaiah 58 we see that obviously God has a principle in mind. It is precisely because there is such a principle that God hastens to speak in practical ways about our observing it. God in heaven, the Almighty One, in whom we live, move, and have our being, sees us, and He says that we are to devote this one day in seven to certain activity. God speaks in such detail about our doing 'our pleasure', and 'speaking our own words'. Sometimes people say that God speaks in generalities, but that cannot be said about this passage. God comes to the details. He talks about what we are doing; about what direction we are going for our pleasure; even about what words are coming

out of our mouths expressing our thoughts. In effect, He is saying, "What are your thoughts on my day? Are you thinking of Me?"

When we think of the principle of one day in seven specifically for the Lord, we immediately think of the Fourth Commandment. On the surface of things, this brings us to think of the Israelites. From there we can more easily entertain the idea that the 'sabbath' institution was intended for that nation, and that we as non-Jews are free from any such legislation. We must, therefore, ask about the period before the Ten Commandments were given. The obvious starting point is in the account of Creation, where, in Genesis chapter two, we read that God sanctified the seventh day. What does it mean when it says that "God sanctified" the day? When something is sanctified; it is put apart for a holy use. Further on in the Bible, but before we come to the time of the Ten Commandments, we have another incident which shows this principle of one special day in seven. Exodus, chapter 20, gives the account of the giving of the Ten Commandments, in the fourth of which there is the 'sabbath day' law. Earlier in the history of the Israelites, in chapter 16, we see that God provided them with manna, and that on the sixth day they were to gather twice as much. Why? The reason was that the seventh was to be a holy day to the Lord, and they were to be as free as possible from purely secular activity. On other days, as directed by God, they were to gather a certain amount, enough for that day. Their lives were to be lived by faith, and that meant that they were to trust God for the next day's provision. Some of them gathered beyond the stipulated amount, but they discovered that it would not keep fresh until the following day. Would not the same thing happen, if they gathered twice as much on the sixth day? Would it not go bad, as had happened with the surplus on other days? One expects that it would, apart from one all-important fact. The fact is this, that God had given instructions for the sixth and the seventh days. According to His instructions,

they gathered sufficient on the sixth day for two days, and the divine record tells us that it did not go bad or rot. Why was there a difference? God had an interest in the sabbath day, and He was showing them that He wanted them to recognize one day in seven as a special day. All this happened before the Fourth Commandment was given, and it answers the objections of those who say that the Fourth Commandment is only part of the legal system given at Mt. Sinai.

There are two references of importance regarding the Ten Commandments, and it will be helpful for us to look at these. The **first** is in Exodus, Chapter 20:8. There we are told, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy", and the passage continues to tell us why the Sabbath day is of special significance. God rested on the seventh day, wherefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. The significant matter is Creation. The sabbath day is set in the context of Creation as a Creation ordinance. The **second** reference is found in Deuteronomy, chapter 5:12. In this passage the emphasis on the importance of the Sabbath day lies in the deliverance of the people from the land of Egypt. "Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the LORD your God has commanded you".

In verse 15 the Lord makes this statement, "remember you were a servant in the land of Egypt and the LORD your God brought you out of thence by a mighty hand and a stretched out arm, therefore, the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath". Here the sabbath is set in the context of redemption. A people who have been redeemed are obligated to keep the sabbath unto the Lord who redeemed them. The redemption from Egypt was a type of the redemption that has been provided for us in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our Passover, and as a redeemed people, we are to keep one day in seven special unto the Lord. Surely, as Christians, we can say that we love the Lord Jesus, and we will be thankful for the opportunity to spend time away from the

merely secular affairs of life, to concentrate our minds on the precious things of His kingdom. We are often told, especially by those who are opposed to the principle of observing one day in seven for the Lord, that it was an Old Testament arrangement and that we, in the New Testament period, are not under this obligation. We will look at the New Testament and see if this is the case. There we see that the Lord Jesus did not do away with the Sabbath. He removed the '*man made rules*' about the Sabbath. In Matthew chapter 12, which is an extraordinary chapter on this subject, we have an outline of the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ on the matter. There you will see that Jesus allows religious work on the Sabbath. It has often been said that the Lord's Day is the only day in which preachers do their work. That, of course, is a gross misunderstanding, not only of the work of the ministry, but also of the nature of the Sabbath. In Matthew 12:5 Jesus tells us that **religious work** can be done on the Sabbath day. **Work of necessity** may also be done on the Sabbath. He said to them "Have you not read what David did, when he was hungry, and they which were with him: how he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them that were with him, but only for the priests?" **Works of mercy** may be done, according to Matthew 12:11. "What man shall there be among you that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it and lift it out?" You see, the Jews had tied up the Sabbath with so many rules of their own that they had lost sight of the divine intention of the day. It is a day to be set apart for God; it is a day in which religious activities are to be engaged in; it is a day in which works of necessity and mercy are allowed.

One of the very significant statements in the Bible about the principle of 'one day in seven for the Lord' is to be found in the Book of the Revelation, chapter 1:10. There John says that he was in the Spirit on the **Lord's Day**.

That name indicates that this was a special day. The very pious statement is sometimes made that every day is the Lord's Day. However, strictly speaking, that is not a correct statement to make, and it may be used to cover a resentment to the principle of one day specifically set apart for God. Why call it the Lord's Day if every day is the Lord's Day? We should live for the Lord every day, but that is not the same as saying that every day is the Lord's Day. In the Old Testament period people should have lived for God every day. At no period should we think that we can live to please ourselves. God, however, made the arrangement that men should set apart one day in seven for Him. That did not free them from the obligation to live for Him on the other days. It only added to them the blessing that God intended by the Sabbath day arrangement. Man was to work, so that by the sweat of his brow he would have food, and God was giving him this one day in seven during which he can, with clear conscience, leave aside his work, and he can draw near to God his Creator to worship Him and to be refreshed by His presence. We should also learn from the passage in Revelation 1:10 to call the day by its Biblical name "**The Lord's Day**". Perhaps one of the reasons for which the Devil and the world do not use this name is that the name makes a divine claim. It states that the day is the Lord's.

The Practice

The principle of one day in seven is laid out for us by the Lord; it was upheld by the Lord Jesus; and it is illustrated for us by John in the Book of the Revelation. How does it work out in our lives? In the Scripture passage, Isaiah 58:13-14, God begins with a condition. He say "If...". There are certain things which we must attend to. Then God lays down two main points in this condition. **Firstly**, we must refrain from certain things. If we do these things, we must stop doing them.

Secondly, there are certain things that we must do. If we do not do them, then we must start doing them. Specific activity is called for. This is where the principle of the Lord's Day touches us the most, and where, therefore, we put up the most resistance to it. This is not history about the Israelites hundreds of years ago. This is the present reality of our lives. The Lord is talking to us about what we are doing with the time He is giving us. What about the things we must stop doing? God says in v.13 "if you turn away your foot from the sabbath...". On the surface this may sound as if you must neglect it, turn away from it. That is not what it means. Rather, they were trampling the sabbath underfoot in much the same way as is being done today by the vast majority of people. The sabbath is holy ground, and we must not trample on it. In this passage of Scripture God is telling the people that they must not do this. You should remember that this chapter is addressed, not to the heathen nations, but to the people who professed to be the people of God. They were mixing their religion with their own pleasure. They were making the rules themselves, as if God had not spoken. There was a conflict between their creed and their conduct, as they professed to draw near to God in worship and then followed their own will, not His. The inconsistency is highlighted by the use of the pronouns when God says "**your** pleasure" on "**my** holy day". This is the complaint that God had against them. They had their religious practices in which they professed that God was their God, but the chapter tells us also about how they treated one another. The emphasis in all their life was "your own ways, your own pleasure and your own words". Does that describe the focus in your life? May God touch us with His power in our lives so that we will become God-centred in all of our living. God claims the day as His. Therefore, our attention is to be on His ways, His pleasure, and His words. As the heavens are higher than the earth, God's ways are higher than our ways, so

we are introduced to the supernatural. We need to recognize that there are human limitations and human visions. The Word of God confronts us with the divine, and it calls us to obedience to our Creator and Lord. His rule for us is that we are **not** to be "finding our own pleasure". At a time when 'positive thinking' is considered paramount, this will sound negative in the extreme. There is a misconception as to what 'liberty' is. Self-expression is the fashion of the age, and that accounts for the chaos, confusion, and corruption which are all so prevalent. God knows us better, and He sees what is in our hearts. He sees that our pleasure lies in the direction of what is mundane and material. The spiritual aspect of man's being seeks satisfaction in some way other than in God. Hence the interest in man-centred religion and the occult. God calls us from that activity to concentrate our attention on matters of a higher order. It does not mean that the Lord's Day will be a gloomy and dull day. Often, those who oppose the observance of the Lord's Day, say that playing fields, stores, and cinemas should all be open so that we can have something to do on the Lord's Day. **God** gives us something to do on His day. He calls us to worship, to prayer and times of meditation in private, in the family, and in public. If we are to have proper views about the Lord's Day, we need to recognize that it is not merely what we think is right for that day. The Lord Jesus Christ said "I do always those things that please Him". If you would be a disciple worthy of His name, remember His example. This part of Scripture in Isaiah talks about the words we speak. It is natural to us to freely speak about the subjects that interest us and about the things on our minds. That practice may be perfectly in order on other days, but God says to us that there is a time when it is not appropriate that we speak about anything and everything. He gives us something to think about, and He wants us to concentrate on that on His day. The matter can best be illustrated if we think of the

teaching of the Lord Jesus in the parable of the sower. When the seed is sown some falls by the wayside and the birds come to pick it up. There is no harvest from what was sown. How often that happens on the Lord's Day. The word of God is preached and people may be brought to seriousness of mind as the message is proclaimed. Soon after, however, these impressions are erased as the conversation turns on almost everything except what was preached! The message is gone and the solemnity of spirit is lost. There are certain things which we ought not to spend our time on during the Lord's Day. That is not being legalistic. Rather, let us understand that we have a great blessing from God because we can devote the day to pursuing communion with Him. During the other days of the week you must engage diligently in your work. You will meet with problems and situations which will drain your spirit. In the divine arrangement of a weekly sabbath we have God's method for refreshing us so that our vision for life will be clear and our strength be renewed. On that holy day you have the great privilege of being able to lay aside other concerns, not carelessly, but with a clear conscience as you commit them to God. You may concentrate your attention exclusively on Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord. That is not legalism, is it? No, what I am advocating is that we use the privilege that God is giving to us. It is His day, for us to use as He knows is best for us. One of the ways in which we have lost sight of the day as the Lord's Day is in the use of the name. An earlier reference is made to this name "**The Lord's Day**" in Revelation 1:10. It is common practice to call the day "Sunday" and to debate that point may seem to reduce the argument to mere semantics. However, it is rather significant, is it not, that the human arrangement for special days, such as Mother's Day, Father's Day, falls on the Lord's Day? Mothers and fathers are very important in God's plan for the human family, but why not have a special day to focus our attention on them on a

Saturday? (It might conflict with societies interest in sport!). We need not know much about society to realize that more attention is given to Easter, Christmas Day and other man-appointed days than to the Lord's Day. The Devil has a hand in it!

Another emphasis in the words of Isaiah 58:13-14 is that we are to **call the sabbath a delight**. That means that we are to count it a blessing. To call it the 'day of rest' does not mean that it is a day of inactivity. It is not a day for laziness. Laziness is not doing what God has created you to do. He has created us to do certain things on the Lord's Day, and not to do these things is laziness. The Bible tells us that we are to call the day "honorable". That means "weighty" or "significant". It means that we are to consider the day an important one. It is to be to us 'the queen of days'.

The Promise

It is wonderful that the Lord gives promises to us. He promises us in Isaiah 58:14 that if we delight ourselves in the Lord's Day, we will delight ourselves in the Lord. This means that there will be an increase in our delight. It will not be merely in an institution, but in the Supreme Being, the Lord Himself. We are to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord. Our joy can increase, and the way to greater happiness is to use God's plan for our progress. The Lord's Day has a specific place in the divine arrangement for His creatures. Doctors will tell us that we must feed and exercise our bodies properly in order to maintain good health. God tells us that we must care for our whole being, and that the way to good health spiritually is to devote His day to Him. Not only is it beneficial for each individual, it is for the good of the whole community. To come together for the worship of God has a unifying effect upon the worshipers. As they join together in prayer and praise, and as they hear the Word of God preached, their spirits are affected for good. God also promises victory, because He says, "I

will cause you to ride upon the high places of the earth". There are many things to discourage Christians in the world. There is war, violence, immorality and false religion. How can we overcome? God tells us that this is the victory that overcomes the world even our faith. As Christians, on the Lord's Day, draw near to their God and Saviour, He will clear their vision, warm their hearts, and renew their strength. He brings them into living contact with Him, and so lifts them above the bondage of temporal burdens. The world will not overcome. God's promise is not concluded yet. He says "I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father". In the Book of Genesis we read Jacob's testimony to God's goodness. Genesis 48:15 "The God which fed me all my life long unto this day". God had cared for him and had not failed. No one has to work unnecessarily on the Lord's Day 'to make ends meet'. Businesses do not have to open on the Lord's Day unnecessarily to make a profit. There is only so much money around, and there is a limit to what people can buy. God will take care of those who respect His word. "Them that honor me, I will honor".

The Lord's Day is an issue of time. Life can seem to be so busy that people often say "I must make time for this". We do not have to 'make time' for worshiping God. He has given the time to us, and we rob Him of His due if we do not use the time for the given purpose. "Quality time" is a very popular phrase. Parents who are hard-pressed to give attention to their children are counseled to spend 'quality time' with them. Presumably the idea is that deep concentrated attention for one hour is intended to compensate for the virtual total neglect during the rest of the time. It is not so with God. He gives us 'quality time' always. Time is too precious by far to be squandered, and the time which we spend specifically with Him on the Lord's Day is time well spent as it brings clarity, conviction and courage into our lives.

Pray for yourself, for your family, for your church, and for your country, that God will

bring all back to a Biblical and healthy respect for the Lord's Day. The little poem about the Sabbath may be slightly amended to read like this, without altering its message:

**The Lord's Day well spent brings a
week of content,
And strength for the toils of
tomorrow.
But the Lord's Day profaned,
whate'er may be gained,
Is a certain forerunner of sorrow.**

Rev. Malcolm MacInnes is a minister of the gospel and had a pastoral charge for thirteen years in Toronto, Ontario. At the beginning of 1990, he accepted a call to the Associated Presbyterian Church in Inverness, Scotland, where he now resides with his wife and four children.

Mr. MacInnes has faithfully served for three years on the Council of The Canadian Lord's Day Association. This article was adapted from the address delivered by him at the Association's 3rd Annual General Membership Meeting.