

The Sabbath or Sunday

By Rev. Peter C. Yorke, D.D.

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THE WEEK.

The grouping of days into weeks is a practice we meet very early in human history. The moon, as well as the sun, has been used as a measure of time. Indeed, as the changes in the appearance of the moon are so striking, the moon was employed much earlier than the sun for computing dates. Every child can observe the first quarter of the moon, the half moon, the three-quarters moon, the full moon. Her phases return so often that they are forced on human observation. Hence, the ancient nations marked their time by the revolution of the moon.

The period in which the moon completes her course is, roughly speaking, twenty-eight days. This space of time is called a month. Now, as the moon has four quarters, it was but natural that the primitive peoples should use the quarter of a month as a measure of time. The quarter of a month is seven days. Thus, the week of seven days is founded in the very nature of things.

We find this division very early in the Scripture. In the second chapter of the Book of Genesis we read, "God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it." In the records of the Assyrians, a kindred people of the Hebrews, we discover that the first twenty-eight days of each month were divided into weeks of seven days each. Thus, as far back as we can go in human history we meet the week as a division of time.

THE JEWISH SABBATH.

Among the Jews, the week was built into the system of their religion. In the Ten Commandments we read, "Remember that you keep holy the Sabbath day. Six days shall you labour, and do all your works; but on the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord, your God; you shall do no work on it, you nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your man servant, nor your maid servant, nor your beast, nor the stranger that is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that in them are, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the seventh day and hallowed it."

Sabbath is a Hebrew word meaning "rest," and all through the Old Testament, we find the obligation of resting from servile works as the mark of the Sabbath day. The obligation of divine worship on the seventh day of the week is not found in the Old Testament. The Sabbath was hallowed by rest, not by prayer. Later in Jewish history, the Sabbath became a day of prayer; but this result followed as a consequence of the rest from work. The people then had time to listen to the prophets, and to frequent the meeting places or synagogues. But, as far as the commands of God go, the Sabbath is intended primarily as a day of rest.

THE LORD'S DAY.

When we come to consider the Christian Church, we find that its practice marks a complete break with the Old Testament. In the first place, the seventh day of the week, the Sabbath, is no longer

observed. The seventh day of the week is Saturday, and it has been reduced to the same level as Friday or Thursday. One day in the week, it is true, is kept holy, but it is the first day, not the seventh. Sunday has supplanted Saturday. The Lord's day, as it is called, has taken the place of the Sabbath.

Secondly, Sunday is primarily a day of prayer, not a day of rest. Servile work is forbidden on that day, but it is forbidden in order to allow the Christian leisure to attend divine service. In the Old Testament divine service followed as a consequence of the leisure granted by the Sabbath. In the new dispensation, rest from work follows as a consequence of the necessity of attending church on the Lord's day.

THE PURITAN SABBATH.

There is, therefore, a clear distinction between the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Sunday. The early Protestants recognised this distinction. In England, the first attempt to confound the two was made by Dr. Nicholas Bownde, of Norton, in Suffolk. The Westminster Confession of 1647 was the first creed which held that the Jewish method of observing the Sabbath was binding on Christians. Everyone knows how this opinion was carried by the Puritans to America. In New England, the prescriptions laid down by Moses became part of the law of the land.

But while the Puritans thus restored the Jewish method of observing the Sabbath, they did not restore the Sabbath itself. They still continued to keep the first day of the week instead of the seventh. In England, the principle was pushed to its logical conclusion by the Seventh Day Baptists. They were organised in America in 1671, at Newport, Rhode Island, but they have not spread. At present, they number about 10,000 communicants. The Seventh Day Adventists are an outcome of the Adventist movement. This was begun in 1831, by one William Miller, who predicted the end of the world, first for 1843, and then for 1844. When this date passed, the Adventists split into various bodies, one of which, organised in New Hampshire in 1844, declared that it was necessary to observe Saturday instead of Sunday, and that other Protestants were merely doing the will of Rome by keeping the first day of the week. Besides the Adventists and Seventh Day Baptists, the "Church of God" follows the same rule. This sect is a branch of the Seventh Day Adventists, which originated about 1864. It differs from the parent sect on such questions as health reform, abstaining from swine's flesh, and the like.

INCONSISTENCY OF PROTESTANT PRACTICE.

Thorough-going Protestants, who believe that the Bible, and the Bible alone, is their religion, can offer no logical reason for observing the first day of the week. They observe it because their fathers, who went out of the Catholic Church, observed it: and the custom has been handed down to them. But they are no more illogical than the Adventists themselves, who cling to this portion of the law of Moses, and reject the rest. The Adventists appeal to the Bible against the Sunday; but the Bible itself they have received from Rome, just as other Protestants have received the Sunday from Rome.

WHY DO WE KEEP SUNDAY?

It may be well to set forth, briefly, what are the facts about the change from Saturday to Sunday. Why is it that we keep the first day of the week, instead of the seventh?

In the beginning, we must bear in mind that there is no reason in the nature of things why we should keep the first instead of the second, or the seventh instead of the sixth. If we wish to worship God,

there is nothing in human reason to tell us that the worship should be paid on one day more than another.

It is, indeed, in accordance with reason that we should worship God. In order to worship God we should devote some time to the acts of worship. But there is no natural reason why we should give a whole day, rather than parts of several days; why we should give Saturday rather than Sunday or Monday.

THE SABBATH A CEREMONIAL LAW.

Therefore, if God set apart the seventh day for rest, He did so by a special, particular law. His ordinance was on the same plane as the laws regulating circumcision, sacrifice, the vestments of Aaron, the distinction between clean and unclean meats, and the like. There is no necessity in nature why these things should be chosen in preference to others. God might have adopted other rites, other vestments, other classifications, if He so chose. But of His own free will, and for the good of His people, He chose those set down in His law, and, as they were His choice, His people adopted them.

CHRIST AND THE SABBATH.

When Christ came upon earth, the Jewish ceremonial system was in full vigour. The religion of the chosen people centred round the great temple in Jerusalem, where the sacrifices were offered according to the minute directions left by Moses. The Sabbath day was observed with exceeding strictness. Our Lord Himself was made subject to the law. He was circumcised, presented in the Temple and at the stated times went up to Jerusalem to adore.

Christ, however, came to fulfil the ancient law. It was to pass away. His one sacrifice was to abolish all other sacrifices. His priesthood, the priesthood of Melchisedech, was to supplant the priesthood of Aaron. Baptism took the place of circumcision, and the Law of Liberty cast out the Law of Fear.

As it was with those observances, so it was with the Sabbath. Christ enunciated two great principles concerning the day of rest, which explain the subsequent action of His Church. "The Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath," is the first. The second is. "The Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath." These two principles mean that the Sabbath law must give way, first, before the natural needs of mankind, and, secondly, before the supreme authority of Him Who called Himself the Son of Man. The Sabbath was under His dominion to set up or to pull down, to keep or to break, to preserve unaltered or to change.

THE CHURCH AND THE SABBATH.

But it is in the books which follow the Gospels that we find the relationship of the Christian religion to the old dispensation fully set forth. From the beginning, there was a party in the Church which wished to enforce the Jewish law on the converts from Paganism. The Jewish faction tried to impose all the Mosaic regulations, such as the distinction of meats, circumcision, Sabbath keeping, and the like, on the new Christians. The Apostles met in Jerusalem, to consider the question, and they decided that it would be unwise to force on the Church a burden that the Jews themselves could not bear. The Epistles of St. Paul bear witness to the fierceness of the struggle, and to the zeal with which he vindicated the liberty of the Christian faith. The old ceremonial law was entirely abolished. With the old ceremonial law, the Sabbath went too.

ST. PAUL AND THE SABBATH.

It is not necessary to quote particular texts to show that the abolition of the Law of Moses is the burden of St. Paul's teaching. The Seventh Day Adventists themselves admit this, because they do not practise circumcision, offer sacrifice, or observe the distinction between clean and unclean meats. Hence it is only necessary to show from the Bible that the Jewish Sabbath was treated precisely the same as circumcision and the other ordinances.

- AGAINST THE OBSERVANCE OF DAYS.

The Epistle to the Galatians is one grand plea for the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. St. Paul had made converts among the Galatians, but certain Jewish teachers had come in, telling them that it was necessary to obey the law of Moses. To these teachers the Galatians gave ear, and St. Paul writes to them, "I wonder that you all are so soon removed unto another Gospel from him that called you into the grace of Christ." Then he goes into particulars, and specifies the charges he has against them. "But now after that you all have known God, or rather are known by God, how turn you all again to the weak and needy elements which you all desire to serve again? You all observe days and months, and times and years. I am afraid of you, lest, perhaps, I have laboured in vain among you." (Galatians 1:6 and 4:9-11.)

St. Paul's complaint against the Galatians was that they observed the law of Moses which had been abolished. In specifying the objectionable features he mentions the Mosaic regulations concerning "days and months, and times and years." In other words, he declares that the calendar of the old law was abolished, and the principal feature in the ancient calendar was the Sabbath, which, therefore, is abolished, too.

- FOR THE OBSERVANCE OF DAYS.

In dealing with this burning question of the observance of the Mosaic law in the infant Church, St. Paul was compelled, as in the case of the Galatians, to defend the non-Jewish converts from the indiscreet severity of the Jewish converts. But he was also compelled to defend the Jewish converts from the over-zealous radicalism of the non-Jewish converts. If some of the Jewish Christians wished to force the observance of the law of Moses on the Gentile Christians, some of the Gentile Christians, in turn, wished to hinder the Jewish Christians from following their ancestral rites. The Apostle took the common sense stand that the transition should be gradual. The Jewish party, being accustomed to the law of Moses, should be permitted to observe its restrictions. The Gentile party, not being accustomed to the law, should not be forced to keep its provisions. Both sides should live in mutual peace and tolerance. This is the argument of the fourteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans.

"Now take unto you him that is weak in faith not in disputes about thoughts. For one believes that he may eat all things; but he that is weak let him eat herbs. Let not him that eats despise him that eats not; and he that eats not, let him not judge him that eats. For God has taken him to Him. Who are you that judges another man's servant? To his own lord he stands or falls. And he shall stand, for God is able to make him stand. For one judges between day and day; and another judges every day; let every man abound in his own sense. He that regards the day regards it unto the Lord. And he that eats, eats unto the Lord," etc.

Here the question of observing days is put on the same level as the prohibition against eating unclean meats. The latter was abolished; therefore, the keeping of the Sabbath and other holy days was abolished, too. The Jews who wished to keep the Sabbath should not be disturbed. The Gentiles who kept every day in the same manner should be left in peace.

3: THE SABBATH ABOLISHED.

In the Epistle which St. Paul wrote to the Colossians he preaches the same doctrine, but more clearly. It was sent as a warning against those who would deceive them by loftiness of words, "Beware lest any man cheat you by philosophy and vain deceit; according to the traditions of men, according to the elements of the world." Then he puts them on their guard against those who would enforce the Mosaic law upon them, and he says:

"Let no man, therefore, judge you in meat or in drink, or in the matter of a feast, or of a new moon, or of a Sabbath day." (Colossians 2:16.)

By this warning, he informed the Colossians that just as the distinction between clean and unclean meats had been abolished, so the Sabbath had been abolished too. They were to permit no man to judge them - that is, to compel them to keep the provisions of the law of Moses in regard to meat or drink or feasts, such as the Passover, or New Moons, or the Sabbath day.

THE SABBATH AND THE COMMANDMENTS.

It is, therefore, seen by the clearest evidence that in the Christian Church, the Sabbath went the way of the rest of the Mosaic Law. But it may be asked, how could an express command of God be abrogated? The Ten Commandments tell us to keep holy the Sabbath day, and the Ten Commandments are still binding upon us.

But we must remember that the Ten Commandments form only a small part of the Law of God as set forth in the Books of the Old Testament known as Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Besides the Ten Commandments, there are hundreds of regulations dealing with religion, telling how sacrifice should be offered, how God should be worshipped, how the people should live. All those laws are set forth with the same sanction as the Ten Commandments, and by the same God. If God, therefore, wished in the fulness of time to abolish those ceremonial prescriptions, and, if He did abolish them, there is no valid reason why He could not abolish the ceremonial part of the Ten Commandments.

THE UNALTERABLE PART OF THE COMMANDMENTS.

In the Ten Commandments we find two elements. The first is the eternal law of right and wrong, which can never be changed. Thus, it is always right to worship God and honour Him. God Himself cannot make that wrong. Therefore, the first three Commandments which inculcate: (1) The Unity of God; (2) respect for God's Name; and (3) the necessity of offering worship to Him, can never be abrogated. In the same way, respect for parents, the prohibition of murder, adultery, theft, false witness are founded in the nature of things, and God cannot change them. Hence those Commandments, too, must always last.

THE CHANGEABLE ELEMENT.

But the second element is different. It consists of the means by which God enforced the eternal truths, the particular practices, by which He impressed His law on the minds of the Jews. For instance, the prime doctrine in His revelation was the oneness of the Divinity. There is only one God. The Jews were living in the midst of a people who believed in many gods, and worshipped idols. The countries round about were filled with the representations of false gods — gods in the shapes of beasts and birds and fish and men. The sight of such idols formed a great temptation to the Jews to desert the God of their fathers. Therefore, in order to enforce the Commandment to

worship only one God, we have the ordinance, “You shall not make unto yourself a graven thing, nor the likeness of any thing that is in the heavens above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters that are under the earth: You shall not adore them, nor serve them.”

This prohibition was absolute, and was so understood by the Jews. Under Divine direction, they made a few images, such as those over the ark, or the bronze serpent, but otherwise no image was found in Israel. When, however, the danger of idolatry passed away, this specific provision disappeared with the rest of the ceremonial law, and today men have no hesitation in making graven things and images.

Again, reason tells us that God made the heaven, and the earth and all things that in them are. God impressed this idea on the Jews, but they were continually forgetting it. The neighbouring people related how their various gods had made heaven and earth, and the Jews were naturally inclined to run after false gods.

In order to impress the truth that there is only one God, who made heaven and earth, upon their minds, the Sabbath was instituted: “You shall do no work upon it, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your man servant, nor your maid servant, nor your beast, nor the stranger that is within your gates, for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that in them are, and rested on the seventh day; therefore, the Lord blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it.”

When the doctrine of creation was fully impressed on men’s minds, the Sabbath, too, was abolished by the Lord of the Sabbath. Like circumcision, which was the sign of God’s covenant with His chosen people, the Sabbath, which was the memorial of His creation, went into desuetude. Circumcision and Sabbath and the other elements of the law were the shadows of the good things to come. When Christ appeared, they passed away. The reality took their place. Therefore, Christians are no longer bound to observe them, according to the Apostle’s words:

“Let no man judge you in meat or in drink, or in the matter of a feast or a new moon or of a Sabbath day, which things are a shadow of things to come, but the body is Christ’s.” (Colossians 2:16.)

This, then, is the attitude of the Christian Church toward the Sabbath. It has passed away, and forever.

THE CHRISTIAN’S REST.

Once in the New Testament is there reference made to a Sabbath keeping by the people of God. That reference is found in the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The Christians are exhorted to enter into the rest of God, and the Apostle argues that that rest was not given to the Jews when Joshua (Josue) led them into the Land of Promise.

“For if Joshua had given them rest, he would never have afterwards spoken of another day. There remains, therefore, a day of rest (a Sabbath keeping) for the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, the same also has rested from his works, as God did from His.”

Here the reference is plainly to the Christians’ rest in heaven. The people of God shall enter into the eternal rest of which the Sabbath was a prophecy. Hence, there is no earthly Sabbath for the Christian people. It has passed with the other shadows now that the true light has come.

THE SABBATH OR SUNDAY.

The greatest event in Christian history is the Resurrection of Our Lord. This stupendous miracle was the proof of His Divine mission and the pledge of the final victory over sin and death. The Resurrection took place on the first day of the week, and every Sunday, therefore, the Christians met in their assemblies to celebrate it.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, we find that such assemblies were the rule among the Christians. In chapter 10, verse 25, the faithful are exhorted not to neglect the assembly: "Not forsaking our assembly, as some are accustomed." In Acts 20:6-7, we read the day on which the assemblies were held: "But we fled to Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came to them (the disciples) and to Troas in five days, where we abode seven days. And on the first day of the week, when we were assembled to break bread, Paul discoursed with them, being to depart on the morrow," etc. The name which was given to that day is set down in the Revelations of St. John, chapter 1, verse 10: "I was in the spirit on the Lord's day."

This is about all we find in the New Testament about the Sabbath and Sunday. It is clear from it that the Sabbath has been abolished, but it is not clear from it that another day has been substituted in its place. No one can prove from the Bible alone that Sunday should be observed more than Monday. If the Bible proves anything at all, it proves that no day should be kept.

WHERE DO WE GET OUR RELIGION?

But God never intended that we should depend on the Bible alone for the knowledge of our religion. At the very time the Sunday was coming into use, no Bible existed. For nearly fifteen centuries, Bibles had to be copied by hand, and it was absolutely impossible for everyone to have a Bible. Moreover, the divisions and quarrels among Protestants show that they cannot agree as to what the Bible means. God did not leave His people without proper guidance. He established a Church which was to teach all nations, and to that Church He gave power to make laws concerning Divine worship: "All power is given unto Me in heaven and on earth; therefore, go all of you and teach all nations, baptising them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and behold I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world." (Matthew 28:18-20.)

In accordance with this commission, we find the Church teaching the people to observe the first day of the week as the commemoration of the Resurrection. In the first, second, and third centuries we have the testimonies of the Christian writers that Sunday was kept as a day of prayer in the assemblies. The Eucharist was celebrated, and the whole day was devoted to the worship of God.

SUNDAY LEGISLATION.

In the fourth century, the persecutions came to an end, and Christians were given freedom of worship. In order to protect that freedom of worship, Constantine prohibited law, business and mechanical arts in towns, and Christian soldiers were exempted from work. If Christians were bound by their religion to give up the whole day to prayer, it would certainly be unfair to compel them to work on that day. This was the spirit which animated the first Sunday legislation. It was a measure of religious liberty absolutely necessary at the time.

THE OBSERVANCE OF SUNDAY.

In the beginning, Sunday used to be reckoned from evening to evening. It was not until about the eleventh or twelfth century that the present custom came into vogue of measuring it from midnight to midnight. The faithful were bound to assist at all the public prayers of the day, including Mass

and what is known as Matins and Vespers (Morning Prayers and Evening Prayers). Practically the whole day was given up to prayer. This was the chief difference between the Sabbath and Sunday. The Sabbath was a day of rest; Sunday was a day of prayer. The Christian law to abstain from servile work arose as a protection to the right to worship.
