

THE DAY CHANGE

THE SABBATH PRESERVED

By Archibald A. Hodge, D.D.

Different Christian nations and different denominations, and each denomination at different periods of its history, have entertained very various sentiments and followed very diverse customs with respect to the observation of the weekly Sabbath, as well as with respect to every other Christian ordinance and practical duty. Notwithstanding this fact, however, the whole historical Christian world, Catholic and evangelical, has always been agreed as to the truth of the following propositions:

1. The institution of the Sabbath rest upon the physical, moral and religious nature of man, as that nature exists under the conditions of his life in this world.
2. In conformity with this fact, God instituted the Sabbath at the creation of man, setting apart the seventh day for that purpose, and imposed its observance as a universal and perpetual moral obligation upon the race.
3. After the resurrection of Christ, instead of abrogating an old and introducing a new institution, God, through his inspired agents, perpetuated the increased obligations, and by changing the day from the seventh to the first day of the week enriched it with new and higher significance.

This statement of the historical faith of the whole Church contradicts the following false views of small and transient parties:

1. That the Sabbath was simply a Jewish institution, temporary in its adaptation and design, and abrogated along with all the other special laws of that preparatory economy, leaving no divinely appointed substitute in its stead.
2. That the Lord's day is a new Christian institution established by the apostles and binding upon Christians, but in nature and design, spirit and obligation, entirely different from the ancient Sabbath inaugurated at creation and reordained in the fourth commandment.
3. That the observance of the seventh day of the week is of the essence of the sabbatical institution, and that the substitution of the first day in its place, which has always prevailed in the Church, was made without divine authority.

The object of this tract is simply to state the grounds upon which the faith of the universal Church rests when, while recognizing the fourth commandment as an integral part of the supreme, universal and unalterable moral law, she affirms that the first day of the week has for this purpose, and for obvious reasons, been substituted for the seventh by the authority of the inspired apostles, and therefore of Christ himself.

1. Observe that the particular day of the week on which the Sabbath is to be kept, although fixed for revealed reasons by the will of God at the creation, never was, or could be, of the essence of the institution itself. The command to observe the Sabbath is essentially as moral and immutable as the commands to abstain from stealing, killing, or adultery. It has, like them, its ground in the universal and permanent constitution and relations of human nature. It was designed to meet the physical, moral, spiritual and social wants of men; to afford a suitable time for the public moral and religious instruction of the people and the public and private worship of God; and to afford a suitable period of rest from the wear and tear of secular labor. It is therefore of the very essence of the institution that a certain proper proportion of time, regularly

recurring and observed in common by the community of Christian people and of Christian nations, should be appointed and its observance rendered obligatory by divine authority. These essential elements are found unchanged under both dispensations.

The Sabbath, as divinely ordained in the Old Testament, is just what all men need today. It was commanded that all should cease from worldly labor and keep the time holy in devoting it to the worship of God and the good of men. The services of the temple were redoubled, and afterward the instructions and worship of the synagogue were introduced. It was granted to the people and to their servants and beasts as a privilege, and not as a burden. Deut. 5:12-15. It was always kept by the Jews, and after them by the early Christians, as a festival, and not as a fast.

In later years it was, like all other parts of God's revealed will, overlaid with pharisaical and rabbinical carnal interpretations and additions. From all these Christ purged it as he did the rest of the law. He came 'to fulfil all righteousness', and therefore he kept the Sabbath religiously and taught his disciples, while disregarding the glosses of the Pharisees, to keep it in its essential spiritual sense as ordained by God. He declared (Mark 2:27) that 'the Sabbath was made for man', the genus homo, and consequently is both binding on all men for all time and adapted to the nature and wants of all men under all historical conditions.

On the other hand, it is evident that the particular day set apart is not in the least of the essence of the institution, and that it must depend upon the positive will of God, which of course may substitute one day instead of another on suitable occasions for adequate reasons.

2. The introduction of a new dispensation, which a preparatory and particularistic nation system is to be replaced by a permanent and universal one, embracing all nations to the end time, is certainly such a suitable occasion. The moral law, expressed in the ten commandments written by the finger of God on stone, and made the foundation of his throne between the cherubim and the condition of his covenant, must remain, while the types, the special municipal laws of the Jews, and whatever is unessential in Sabbath or other permanent institutions, must be changed.

3. The amazing fact of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus on the first day of the week constitutes evidently adequate reason for appointing that instead of the seventh day to be the Christian Sabbath. The Old Testament is introduced with an account of the genesis of the heaven and earth, and the old dispensation first grounds itself upon the relation of God as Creator of the universe and of man. The New Testament is introduced with an account of the genesis of Jesus Christ, and reveals the incarnate Creator as our champion, victorious over sin and death. The recognition of God as Creator is common to every theistic system; the recognition of the resurrection of the incarnate God is peculiar to Christianity. The recognition of God as Creator is involved and conserved in the recognition of the resurrection of Christ, while the latter article of faith carries with it also the entire body of Christian faith and hope and life. The fact of the resurrection consummates the process of redemption as far as it is objective to the Church. It is the reason of our faith, the ground of our hope, the pledge of our personal salvation and of the ultimate triumph of our Lord as the Savior of the world. It is the keystone of historical Christianity, and consequently of all living theism in the civilized world.

The essential qualification of an apostle was that he was an eyewitness of the resurrection. Their doctrine was summed up as a preaching of 'Jesus and the resurrection'. Acts 1:22; 4:2; 17:18; 23:6; 24:21.

4. During his life Jesus had affirmed that he was 'Lord also of the Sabbath day'. Mark 2:28. After his resurrection he signaled the first day of the week, and not the seventh, by his revelation. On the day he rose he appeared to his disciples on five different occasions, and withdrawing himself during the interval reappeared on the following 'first day of the week', his disciples being assembled and Thomas with them: 'Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.' John 20:19. The day of Pentecost falling that year on the 'first day of the week', the disciples were again found assembled by mutual understanding: 'And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began

to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance' (Acts 2:1-4); and the promised gift of the Holy Ghost descended upon them. The Lord after many years appeared unto John in Patmos and granted him the great closing Revelation on the 'Lord's day:' 'I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet' (Rev 1:10); which all the early Christians understood to signify the weekly festival dedicated to the resurrection of the Lord.

The record is also full of evidence that the members of all the apostolic churches were in the habit of assembling in their respective places at regular times for the purpose of common worship. 1 Cor. 11:17, 20; 14:23-26; Heb. 10:25. That these assemblies were held on the 'first day of the week' is certain from the action of Paul at Troas: 'And we sailed away from Philippi after days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days. And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight' (Acts 20:6-12). So also his orders to the churches of Corinth and Galatia: 'Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.' 1 Cor. 16:1, 2. The change was then certainly made, as we can trace by an unbroken and consistent chain of testimonies from the time of the apostles to the present. The motives for the change assigned by the early Christian Fathers are known to have operated upon the apostles, and are perfectly congruous with all that is recorded of their characters, lives and doctrines. The change, therefore, had the sanction of the apostles, and consequently the authority of the 'Lord of the Sabbath' himself.

5. From the time of John, who first gave the institution its best and most sacred title, 'Lord's day', there is an unbroken and unexceptional chain of testimonies that the 'first day of the week' was observed as the Christian's day of worship and rest. For a long time the word Sabbath continued to be applied exclusively to the seventh day. From habit, and in conformity to the natural sentiments of the Jewish converts, the early Christians long continued to observe both days. They kept every seventh day except the Sabbath before Easter, when the Lord lay in the grave, as they did every first day, as a festival. Afterward for a time the Roman Church, in opposition to Judaism, kept it as a fast. They held public religious services upon it. But the day was no longer considered sacred; labor was never suspended nor legally interdicted. On the other hand, any tendency to return to its ancient observance as a strictly holy day, as in any sense sacred, as the first day of the week was maintained to be, was discountenanced as an abandoning the freedom of the gospel and a returning to the ceremonial of the Jews. Ignatius, Epistle to the Magnesians, ch. 9, and Council of Laodicea, can. 29, 49 and 101, AD 361. See Bingham's Christian Antiquities, vol. ii, b. 20, ch. 3.

The early Christians called their own day, for which they asserted pre-eminence and exclusive obligation, 'the Lord's day,' 'the first day of the week,' 'the eighth day' and in their communication with the heathen they came to call it, as we have done, in correspondence with ancient secular usage, ἡ τοῦ Ἡλίου ἡμέρα, 'dies solis' 'Sunday.' A comparison of the passages in which these designations are used by the early Christians makes it absolutely certain that they signify the same day, since they are all defined as applying to the day after the Jewish Sabbath, or to the day on which Christ rose from the dead.

Ignatius, an immediate friend of the apostles, martyred at Rome not more than fifteen years after the death of John, in his Epistle to the Magnesians, ch. 9, says, 'Those who have come to the possession of new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath (seventh day), but living in the observance of the Lord's day, on which also our life has sprung up again, by him and by his death.' He calls the Lord's day 'the queen and chief of all the days' (of the week).

The author of the Epistle of St. Barnabas, writing a little before, or at latest not long after, the death of the apostle John, says, ch. 15, 'We celebrate the eighth day with joy, on which, too, Jesus rose from the dead.'

Justin Martyr (AD 140), Apol. 1:67, says, 'On the day called Sunday is an assembly of all who live either in cities or in the rural districts, and the memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read, . . . because it is the first day on which God dispelled the darkness and the original state of things and formed the world, and because Jesus Christ our Savior rose from the dead upon it' (Dial. c. Tryph). 'Therefore it remains the chief and first of days.' The testimony continues uniform and unbroken; e.g., see Dionysius,

bishop of Corinth, quoted by Eusebius; Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons (AD 177); Clement of Alexandria (AD 192).

Tertullian, writing at the close of the second century, says (De Orat., c. 23) that on the Lord's day Christians, in honor of the resurrection of the Lord, . . . must avoid everything that would cause anxiety, and 'defer all worldly business, lest they should give place to the devil.'

Athanasius (296-373) says explicitly that 'the Lord transferred the sacred observance (from the Sabbath) to the Lord's Day'. Horn. De Semente op., tom. 1, p. 1060.

The author of the sermons de Tempore (Aug. Hom. 251, De Temp., t. 10, p. 307) says: 'The apostles transferred the observance of the Sabbath to the Lord's day and therefore from the evening of the Sabbath to the evening of the Lord's day men ought to abstain from all country-work and secular business, and only attend divine service.'

In AD 321, four years before the Council of Nice, Constantine, the first Christian emperor, published his famous edict ordaining that 'all judges, with the civic population, together with the workshops of artisans, should rest upon the venerable day of the sun,' although allowing, in concession to the as yet imperfectly Christianized rural population, agricultural work to be done. Civil and ecclesiastical laws providing for the sanctification of the Lord's day became more and more strict as the European communities became more thoroughly Christian. Secular business, unless when necessary, and all public games and shows, were forbidden by civil enactments.

The highest Christian officers and the most famous Christian teachers and ecclesiastical councils unite in commanding all Christian people to attend public worship and to abstain from all worldly employments and amusements on the Lord's day. In cities, evening as well as morning services were held. Bingham's Christ, Antiquities, vol., 2, b. 20, ch. 2.

6. With this view the testimony of all the great Reformers and all historical branches of the modern Christian Church agree.

The catechism of the Council of Trent (pt. 3, ch. 4, ques. 7 and 14) affirms that the 'Jewish Sabbath was changed into the Lord's day by the apostles.'

But the papists arrogate to their Church the possession in perpetuity of all the normal authority possessed by the inspired apostles. Hence they claim that as the early Church had legitimately altered even a commandment of the decalogue, the extant Church has unlimited power of imposing obligations upon Christians, and even of altering divine laws. To oppose this fertile source of superstition, the Reformers were led to speak unadvisedly of the termination of the Sabbath enforced by the fourth commandment by divine limitation.

With reference to these unguarded statements of the Reformers, which are often quoted by the opponents of the Sabbath, it is sufficient for the present purpose to say: (1) The Reformers, however great and excellent, were but fallible men, and their private opinions have no binding authority upon the Church. (2) The wonder is that under their circumstances they attained as clear views of the meaning of God's word as they did, and that they made so few mistakes. (3) The sense of their several statements on this and on all other points is of course to be sought in due consideration of the Romish errors, theoretical and practical, which they were antagonizing. (4) Their negative statements must be interpreted within the limits of their positive statements, referred to in the next paragraph. (5) The history of Sabbath observance in continental Europe and its effects upon spiritual religion, continental Christians themselves being judges, refutes the soundness of their views, in so far as these differed in any degree from those of the founders of Protestant churches in England and Scotland.

On the other hand, it is demonstrable that their essential principles and practice with regard to Sabbath observance is identical with that of modern evangelical churches.

(1.) Luther, Calvin, and other Reformers taught that the Sabbath was ordained for the whole human race at the creation.

(2.) That it was in its essential features designed to be of universal and perpetual obligation. Luther's Works tom. 5, p.22; Calvin, Gen. 2:3 and Ex. 20:8; and sermon on Deut. 5: —

‘God, therefore, first rested, then blessed this rest, that in all ages it might be sacred among men. In other words, he consecrated every seventh day to rest that his own example might be a perpetual rule. The design of the institution must be always kept in memory, for God did not command men simply to keep holiday every seventh day, as if he delighted in their indolence, but rather that they, being released from all other business, might the more readily apply their minds to the Creator of the world, . . . Spiritual rest is the mortification of the flesh, so that the sons of God should no longer live unto themselves or indulge their own inclination. So far as the Sabbath was a figure of this rest, I say, it was but for a season; but inasmuch as it was commanded to men from the beginning that they might employ themselves in the worship of God, it is right that it should continue to the end of the world.’ (Com. On Gen. 2:3)

(3.) They observed, and insisted upon the duty of all Christians observing, the Lord's day by abstaining from all worldly business and amusements, and devoting the time to the worship of God and the edification of one another.

Calvin's sermon on 24 Deut. 5: ‘When our shop windows are shut on the Lord's day, when we travel not after the common order and fashion of men, this is to the end that we should have more liberty and leisure to attend on that which God commandeth.’

Calvin's sermon on Deut. 5: ‘If we employ the Lord's day to make good cheer, to sport ourselves, to go to the games and pastime, shall God in this be honored? Is it not a mockery? Is not this an unhallowing of his name?’

The opinion of John Knox is given in the first Book of Discipline: ‘The Sabbath must be kept strictly,’ etc. See also homily ‘Of the place and time of Prayer,’ Book of Homilies of the Church of England.

(4.) They referred the ground upon which the obligation to keep the Sabbath rests to the original ordinances of God at the creation and on Mount Sinai: ‘But if the reason for which the Lord appointed a Sabbath to the Jews is equally applicable to us, no man can assert that it is a matter with which we have nothing to do. Our most provident and indulgent Parent has been pleased to provide for our wants not less than for the wants of the Jews.’ ‘It was, however, not without reason that the early Christians substituted what we call the Lord's day for the Sabbath.’ Calvin, Institutes bk. 2, ch. 8, §§32, and 34.

Beza, the disciple and successor of Calvin, says in Comment. on Rev. 1:10: ‘The seventh day, having stood from the creation of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was exchanged by the apostles, doubtless at the dictation of the Holy Spirit, for that which was the first day of the new world.’

7. The change of the day by the apostolic Church has thus been proved by historical testimony, to which much might be added if space permitted, but against which no counter-evidence exists. This, as well as the passages above cited, proves that the change was effected by the authority of the apostles, and hence by the authority of Christ. With the apostles preaching ‘Jesus and the resurrection,’ and observing and appointing the first day of the week for religious services, God bore ‘witness both with signs and wonders and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost.’ Heb. 2:4. Ever since the great Pentecostal Lord's day this day has been observed by God's true people and blessed by the Holy Ghost. It has been recognized and graciously used as an essential and pre-eminent means of building up the kingdom of Christ and effecting the salvation of his seed. And this divine acknowledgement has been in every age and nation in direct proportion to the faithful consecration of the day to its spiritual purpose. It is not possible that either a superstitions will-worship or an ignorant misconception should have been crowned with uniform and discriminating seals of divine approbation through eighteen hundred years.

If any should claim that while we have indeed proved a Christian Lord's day, instituted by the apostles and graciously owned by God, nevertheless we have not proved that the Sabbath of the fourth commandment remains in force under a change of day, we answer:

1. The fourth commandment is an inseparable constituent of the Decalogue, which was the foundation of God's throne and the basis of his covenant with his Church. This law is wholly moral (except the mere element of the particular day in the fourth commandment), and instead of being abrogated was broadened and enforced with new emphasis by Christ. Matt. 5:17. And by an instinct, as universal as true, it has been incorporated into the confessions, catechisms and liturgies of every historical Church in Christendom.
2. The true permanent interpretation of the Sabbath law is to be found, not in the glosses of Pharisees and Rabbis, but in the example and doctrine of Christ, who restored the true rule and use of the original institution for the instruction of the Church in all time. All the Reformers agree that the Lord's day is of perpetual use and obligation in the sense of Christ's version of the Sabbath.
3. The reasons for the original Sabbath had their ground in the universal nature and condition of man. They are identical with the reasons for the apostolic institution of the Lord's day. The function of the latter in the Christian Church is identical with that of the former in the Jewish Church. The great Author and Dispenser of the schemes of providence and grace, during both dispensations is the same unchangeable God. The two dispensations form but two parts of one harmonious system. It appears evident, therefore, that an institution having unchanged purposes and relations, enacted at creation, re-enacted with added sacredness on Sinai, and re-enacted with added associations and obligations by the apostles, must be the same institution, in spite of the mere change of day.