



SATURDAY

OR

SUNDAY:

WHICH DAY SHOULD
CHRISTIANS KEEP?

by John Carter

SATURDAY OR SUNDAY?

GOD'S LAW FOR ISRAEL

THE words of Hainan are as true today as they were in Persian times, when he said to the king concerning the Jews, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom, and their laws are diverse from all people" (Esther 3:8). The Jewish people are still scattered everywhere, still observing laws "diverse from all people". Among these are the laws of the Sabbath. At sundown on Friday the devout Jew ceases his work and until sundown on Saturday observes his Sabbath. He does this because he believes that the law of God given at Sinai and repeated in the instructions of the great law-giver, Moses, requires that the seventh day of the week shall be a day of rest. That God gave Israel this law is beyond question. The fourth commandment of the Decalogue given to Israel at Sinai reads:

"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it" (Exod 20:8-11).

At a later repetition of the commandment severe penalties were attached to its non-observance. "My sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you". Three times it is declared that a man who defiles the sabbath by doing any work thereon shall be put to death (Exod 31:12-17). When Israel entered the land Moses recapitulated the law and enjoined the keeping of the sabbath in the following terms:

"Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee. Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou. And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day" (Deut 5:12-15).

Israel failed to obey the law and were reproved by the prophets (Jer 7:21-24). Their disregard of the sabbath law is specifically included among Israel's sins for which God scattered them among the nations (Ezek 20:23,24); and for its neglect they were frequently rebuked. Isaiah pleaded for its observance:

“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: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord” (59:13).

Amos satirized their attitude to the feasts connecting their neglect of God’s appointments with deceit and fraud:

“When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit ?” (8:5).

When, however, they became subjects of the Gentile powers they turned to the laws they had before despised, and although the law was then difficult to observe, they insisted upon keeping the sabbath.

GROWTH OF TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION

After the Babylonian captivity the efforts to provide the law with an authoritative interpretation led to the growth of the Tradition of the Elders. The need for this would be felt by every devout man. He must do no work: but on the sabbath he must eat; what cooking could be done? There were always sick persons: what service could be rendered to them? Livestock, too, needed attention.

Thirty-nine classes of actions were forbidden on the sabbath; a number arrived at by calculating the works which had to be performed in making the tabernacle. Then each class had its sub-divisions. A list of occupations was drawn up in doing which it was supposed there was a violation of the idea of rest. The following examples may be given of these regulations:

“He who ploughs, however little it be, he who weeds, and he who trims trees, and he who cuts off young shoots, however little it be, is guilty.”

“These are the knots in regard of which guilt is incurred: the knot of camel-drivers and the knot of sailors; just as a man is guilty if he ties this, so is he also guilty if he unties it. Rabbi Meir said: A man is not guilty with respect to any knot that can be untied with one hand.”

Works of healing were permitted when there was grave danger to life, but where there was no danger it was forbidden. Thus to heal a longstanding infirmity was not permitted on the Sabbath. In several particulars Jesus did cures which violated these traditions, although as we shall see his challenge went deeper.

There was a further reason for building up the traditional interpretation. The Jew living in Palestine needed help to interpret the law; the Dispersion needed counsel to promote faithful adherence to the law. The Jew living outside Palestine was beset with constant temptation to forsake all practices which impeded converse with his neighbour. In particular the dietary restrictions and the sabbath regulations would press hard on a man keen in business and eager for social life. It naturally followed

that the earnest Jews, and particularly the Pharisees, insisted on the observance of these rules as a means of preserving that separateness which they regarded as being one of Israel's great privileges before God. By keeping the law the Jew preserved his witness; when they were slack in its observance they became apostate. Remembering these things we can see why the Pharisees were outraged at some of the actions of Jesus. But Jesus had a purpose in what he did and we must seek the meaning of the repeated challenge to sabbath keeping in both his words and acts. The teaching of Jesus is of paramount importance to the Christian on this subject.

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN'S DUTY?

What is the duty of the Gentile Christian with regard to keeping the sabbath? Generally in Christendom the Jewish sabbath is not observed, and since the days of Constantine the first day of the week, Sunday, has been generally followed as a day of worship when ordinary occupations were suspended. There have indeed been times when a puritanical spirit has so moved some groups that very repressive measures have been taken against doing very simple acts on a Sunday. We, however, live in a day when the observance of Sunday as a day of worship has fallen into some disuse. On the other hand, there are one or two religious communities who insist that the keeping of Saturday as a day of rest and of worship is essential for a faithful Christian. One community, which claims a million adherents throughout the world, and which places considerable emphasis upon the teaching of the second advent of Jesus, requires the observance of the sabbath as a Christian duty. The question, then, whether the sabbath should be kept today by the follower of Jesus is not one remote from present-day life. It is an active issue in the lives of many people. We must, therefore, examine the teaching of the New Testament to find out what Jesus and the apostles had to say on the matter.

THE TEACHING OF JESUS

Jesus performed many miracles, but the gospels appear to attach a particular importance to those which he did on the sabbath day. Attention is drawn to the fact that the day of the miracle was the sabbath, and also that this use of the sabbath led to much controversy and bitterness. So strong was the resentment at his violation, as they thought, of the sabbath that immediately after the first sabbath miracle the Pharisees took counsel against Jesus seeking how they might destroy him. Yet Jesus repeated the offence many times. In this persistent choice of the sabbath as the day on which to perform a miracle we have something that calls for enquiry. We must also ask, whether Jesus merely opposed the narrow traditionalism which made the day a burden, or whether his act struck at something deeper. Was he, in fact, by his action annulling the law of sabbath observance? If such was his intention then the fact is of vital importance and the reason for it must be sought.

Before looking briefly at the five occasions of sabbath healing, we must first notice the context in Mark's gospel. Mark and Matthew both record the plucking of corn by the disciples in connection with the healing of the man with a withered hand. But Mark in addition associates with it an answer on fasting and the parables of the patched cloth and the new wine (Mark 2:16-28). Jesus put aside the idea of fasting as inappropriate, so long as he was with his disciples—the presence of a bridegroom was an occasion for joy. They would fast after his departure, but it would be because he

was away, and not as a religious exercise. He enforced his setting aside of fasting as a duty by the story of the patched cloth. As it was impossible to repair an old garment by a new piece, so he could not attach his teaching to the practices of Judaism. He therefore was instructing chosen men to preach his doctrines, for new wine could not be put in old bottles and the teachers of the Jewish way of life could not be expected to proclaim his word. His teaching was incompatible with Judaism, and so could not repair it; it was like new wine which needed new teachers to set it forth. This leads on to the cornfield incident, which with the healing incident form a connected group.

THE CORNFIELD DISCUSSION

The account of the healing occupies Matt 12:10-13, but it was the climax of the discussion which had immediately preceded it. On the sabbath Jesus and his disciples went through a cornfield. The law of Moses permitted men to pluck and eat ears of corn under such circumstances (Deut 23:26); but the tradition of the elders had forbidden it on the sabbath, since plucking the corn and rubbing it in the hands to remove the husk was regarded as reaping and winnowing, acts which were forbidden on a sabbath. The Pharisees drew the attention of Jesus to the action of his disciples; they were doing that which it was not lawful to do on the sabbath day. In answer Jesus cited two precedents from the divine record. David had eaten the Shewbread, and those with him had shared; yet the law reserved the Shewbread for the priests alone. Even the priests themselves on every sabbath performed the temple services, working on the sabbath, and yet were blameless. They found no fault with David, and they would quickly have justified the action of the priests. Here, then, were two illustrations where some higher consideration took precedence over the sabbath law. David was the Lord's anointed and his companions shared in his priority over the Shewbread law: and the priests' activities showed that the temple ordinances had precedence over the sabbath restrictions. How did these considerations bear upon his exoneration of his disciples from blame? Must it not be that both Shewbread and sabbath were part of a ritual system that was typical only and which must give place to the realities they foreshadowed? The temple was God's dwelling place in their midst, but only as an instrument designed for the worship of God. It was needful there should be regulations to fit it for such a purpose, but what mattered more was that the worshippers should be fit abodes of God. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus had spoken of his body as the temple of the living God. He was the real counterpart of the temple. Jesus points to this fact in his answer in which he draws the lesson he would have them learn from the two exceptions he had cited: "But I say unto you that in this place is one greater than the temple". His position and work therefore superseded the sabbath. Let us trace out his thought more fully.

The temple itself was a part of the instruction that the Law imparted to Israel: it was part of "the shadow of good things to come". While God's dwelling for the time being, it yet could not be final. In the emphatic words of Stephen, citing Isaiah in his support: "The Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?" (Acts 7:48,49). The same prophet has also this word: "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isa 57:15). The letter to the Hebrews traces out the typical

significance of the tabernacle and declares Jesus to be “the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched”. Preeminently, Jesus was one in whom the Father revealed Himself; and therefore John can say, “The Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us”. The figure is extended to all believers in a number of passages of which Eph 2 and 1 Peter 2 are examples, from which we learn that the true dwelling-place of God is in the hearts of men and women of faith and Godlike disposition. With these ideas in mind we can understand the words of Jesus as explained by John. When he cleansed the temple and was challenged concerning his authority, he said, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days”. They thought he referred to the temple which he had just cleansed, but John adds: “He spake of the temple of his body”. Jesus, then, was the temple of God—one in whom the Father dwelt and in whom He revealed Himself.

This illustrates the language of Jesus in his answer to the Pharisees in which he draws out the significance of the priests’ exemption from the Sabbath code by reason of an overruling duty. The lesson he would have them learn concerned his higher standing even than the temple. “I say unto you that in this place there is one greater than the temple.” As the temple service sanctioned the supercession of the sabbath law for those engaged in its duties, so he, greater than the temple, in fact the very reality the temple foreshadowed, had a higher authority than the temple. His position and work, therefore, superseded the sabbath day. His comments on the sabbath therefore point the same lesson as the parables which Mark groups with the cornfield incident and the sabbath healing. A new dispensation was dawning and the old had run its course. The Law had “waxed old and was ready to vanish away” (Heb 8:13).

Jesus, in fact, asserted this by adding: “But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless. For this Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day”. The prophet’s words cited by Jesus were meant to point to the greater importance of mercy compared with sacrifice. God had indeed commanded the latter, but only that they might learn His ways and how He wished them to live. Sacrifice was typical; mercy was fundamental. So also the sabbath was only a means of teaching a lesson—a lesson which found its full meaning in Jesus himself. Hence he was Lord of the Sabbath.

Since the phrase Son of Man was a Messianic title he is also affirming that it is as Messiah he is the Lord of the sabbath. In other words, when he discharges his office as the Messiah at his second advent, when he comes to be Israel’s king and the world’s ruler, he will then inaugurate that rest for the world which the sabbath was designed to represent. In this we have the teaching of Jesus concerning the sabbath: it was but a type—he is the real sabbath, both in himself and in the blessings he brings now and in the future. Well might he speak of those “that were with” David as sharers in his precedence: for the companions of Jesus share in him and his gifts. If this interpretation is correct we shall have the key by which we can unlock the meaning of the miracles he did on the sabbaths.

HEALING

1. *Withered Hand*

The claims of Jesus must have sounded shocking in the ears of the Pharisees. It is not

surprising that they posed a test without delay. Jesus went to the synagogue, a usual action, and one which they anticipated by placing in a conspicuous place a man with a withered hand. They put a direct question: Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? Since the man was not in a critical condition, by their tradition it was wrong. The behaviour of Jesus suggested he would answer that it was lawful and they could then accuse him of being a lawbreaker. He avoided the snare by a counter-question: “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? How much better is a man than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath day”.

Like all the sayings of Jesus this was pregnant with meaning. It is a parable the meaning of which must be sought on a higher plane. Man is like a sheep¹: “all we like sheep have gone astray”. All are in a pit² and as helpless in our sin and death-stricken state as a sheep is in a pit. Apart from a shepherd to seek and save us we are lost. Here, then, is a picture of his own work: and part of this picture is the fact that it was on a sabbath—because Jesus will bring healing and blessing on the world’s sabbath when in the prophet’s words he comes as the “Sun of righteousness with healing in his beams”.

In Luke’s record we are informed of another counter-question Jesus put forward. He asked, “Is it lawful on the sabbath day to do good or to do evil? to save life or to destroy it?” It posed a fatal contrast, for they were plotting his death—a sad commentary on their view of the sabbath: to him the sabbath pointed to healing and salvation.

Matthew’s gospel links the sabbath dispute with a saying of Jesus which should be noticed. Jesus spoke of the great intimacy between himself, the Son, and the Father, an association which, however, was open for men to share if the Son and his message were accepted. In gracious words he invited men, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (11:28-30). Did his hearers observe that he had repeated in his own name the invitation of God through Jeremiah, when he said: “Ye shall find rest for your souls”? (6:16). In these promises of rest we have the essential feature of the sabbath; “God did *rest*” on the seventh day. But man’s work has been marred by sin and his life is one of sorrow and toil, burdened by guilt of sin and fear of death. The Jew toiled to obtain favour with God by works of law and multiplied rules of tithing and fasting, various washings and ritual observances. Such was a vain labour, a burden, Peter said, which they were not able to bear.

Salvation is of God’s grace in Christ, by the forgiveness of sins; and when a man has faith in Christ he “ceases from his own works” and accepts God’s grace. The basic difficulties of life are solved in Jesus and there is a sabbath rest for the spiritual man. In all these ways Jesus is the real sabbath—the reality foreshadowed by the sabbath enactment. The life of the believer is thus one continual sabbath now, leading on to the life which will never end when Christ, the Messiah, raises him up at the last day—an idiomatic phrase denoting the millennial day of Israel’s Messiah, promised by the

¹ Isa 53:6; Psalms 23; Ezekiel 34.

² Psalms 40:2; 35:7; 88:3,4.

prophets.

2. *An Afflicted Woman*
Luke 13:11-17.

On this occasion Jesus cured a woman who had suffered for 18 years. The synagogue ruler, not daring to rebuke Jesus, berated the people for seeking Jesus to be healed on a sabbath. Again, Jesus used as an illustration the need for attending to cattle on a sabbath: so should this woman be loosed of Satan on the sabbath. Jesus defined the issue as between himself and Satan, here used as a symbol for sin and its effects³. He imposes a restraint on sin in overcoming sickness which in general is one of the effects of sin. But this again forms a prophecy of the millennial reign of Jesus when sin will be restrained through the wise and powerful rule of Jesus. In the Lord's own Revelation the figure of Satan with this meaning reappears (Rev 20:2,3).

3. *A Man with Dropsy*
Luke 14:1-6.

This incident presents parallels with that recorded in Matt 12, although the circumstances are different. Jesus repeats his parable of an ox or an ass fallen into a pit and its recovery on the sabbath day. By these repetitions Jesus pressed home his lesson.

4. *A Man Infirm 38 Years*
John 5:1-22.

The fourth gospel has two miracles pointedly mentioned as being performed on the sabbath.

An infirm man was healed; and Jesus said to him, "Thou art made whole, sin no more", thus connecting sin and the evil in the flesh. The miracle foreshadowed that wholeness which Jesus as millennial ruler will give to his people, whose sins will have been forgiven. Jesus described the miracle as a continuation of his Father's work on His sabbath (Gen 2:2,3). God has carried on His redemptive work and Jesus joined in that work. His adversaries saw that by his teaching, besides claiming divine Sonship, he broke, or more literally, annulled the sabbath. They determined that Jesus must die. But were his claims true? If Jesus is the one to bring God's rest for mankind, he could annul that which foreshadowed it.

5. *Man Born Blind*
John 9.

A blind man was healed by Jesus, who mixed clay and spittle and anointed the eyes of the blind man, and then sent him to wash in Siloam. The discussion which followed showed the meaning of the miracle. Men are spiritually blind and Jesus can either make it permanent or remove it. The whole episode is full of significance: in pointing out that Siloam means sent and also that Jesus was sent, John links in some way Jesus and Siloam, and turns the student back to Isa 8:6, where the prophet uses the same

³ See the pamphlet, *The Evil One*, by R. Roberts. 15

stream as a figure of the Messiah.

But literal and spiritual blindness will all pass away when the visions of the prophets are fulfilled in the reign of Jesus: "Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened"; and men will hear a voice saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it" (Isa 35:5; 30:21).

THE TRUE REST

To sum up: the sabbath miracles were evidently designed to establish the claim of Jesus that he was Lord of the Sabbath because he will be Lord when that time comes which the Sabbath foreshadowed. Matthew, in fact, as we have seen, places the first sabbath miracle in connection with the invitation of Jesus that men should come unto him and find rest. Rest is the essential feature of the sabbath: and the reality is rest from the toil of sin and its attendant sorrows. The millennial age is the sabbath of God, when all men will find in the knowledge and service of God rest from sin, cleansing of conscience, and life in harmony with God. In that time the blind will see, the deaf hear, the lame walk: Jesus returned will reign for God, strong, wise, sympathetic, firm for right, stern towards wrong (Isa 35).

This conclusion is in keeping with the lesson drawn in the letter to the Hebrews. It is pointed out that the inheritance under Joshua was not the goal of God's purpose, for God in the Psalms still invites men to enter "His rest"—an invitation without meaning if the rest were already existing. Paul calls the "rest" of God's kingdom "a keeping of a sabbath", which remains for the people of God; God's kingdom to come will be the true sabbath (Heb 4).

Such an interpretation was current among the Jewish teachers. Psalm 92 is "a song for the Sabbath day", and introduces a series of Psalms which foretell God's coming kingdom on earth. In these Psalms occur the words which Paul cites in Hebrews which we have just quoted. The rabbis interpreted this group of Psalms as prophetic of Messiah's reign which would be indeed a true sabbath day.

If then Jesus showed that the sabbath was only a type, he classed it with all the other ritual of the Law which Paul says was a shadow of good things to come. That ritual was prophetic of him—the shadow had given place to the substance. This was the attitude taken by the apostles, who while allowing for Jewish Christians in Palestine still to observe the current customs, expressly resisted any attempt to impose the practices of the Law of Moses upon Gentile Christians. Together with circumcision and sacrificial offerings, the sabbath ceased to be binding upon Christians.

TEACHING OF THE APOSTLES

One of the earliest difficulties in apostolic times arose from an effort by Jewish believers to make their law binding upon Gentiles. A council was held at Jerusalem when a decision was reached and four restrictions imposed to make possible social association between Jew and Gentile. But sabbath-keeping was not enjoined, surely a significant omission. Judaizers dogged Paul's footsteps and agitated the churches Paul founded. As a consequence we have frequent references in his letters to the fact that the Law of Moses is not binding upon the Christian. These must now be briefly noticed.

Writing to the Corinthians, Paul contrasts the Old and New Covenants and his descriptions of the Old Covenant are pertinent to our investigation (2 Cor 3). He calls it the “letter” “which killeth”, “a ministration of death written and engraven on stones”, “a ministration of condemnation” which was “done away”. Now a part of this covenant was the sabbath law. This is evident by its inclusion in the Ten Commandments which were engraven on stone, but it is specifically declared that the ten commandments were fundamental to the covenant, e.g. “God declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments: and he wrote them upon two tables of stone” (Deut 4:13). This is in keeping with the history which says, “He wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments” (Exod 34:28). When the covenant was “done away” the ten commandments were done away as a code: it is not the basis of the new covenant.

Here we might emphasize the significant silence in the New Testament. If the sabbath law had been binding we might have expected it to be included in the decrees formulated at the council at Jerusalem as a basis of co-operation between Jewish and Gentile Christians. *But there is no reference to the necessity of observing a sabbath.* Again, while in some form or other the principles of the other nine commandments are taught in the epistles as moral rules for believers to observe, *there is no repetition of the sabbath law.*

WARNINGS

There are, however, repeated references to the fact that the law was not a basis for justification before God. “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth” (Rom 10:4). The facts concerning the grace of God in Christ for men’s salvation rule out “law” as a condition of acceptability. The law was only “a shadow”, and the shadow has given place to the reality (Heb 10). Paul therefore exhorted the Colossians: “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, *or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come*; but the body is of Christ... Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?” (Col 2:16,17,20).

The law was a schoolmaster (tutor-slave): “But before faith came we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith, but after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (Gal 3:23-25). He therefore was anxious when the Galatians were turning to legal enactments under the influence of Jewish teachers: “But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days and months, and times and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain” (Gal 4:9:11). The agitation for observance of the law persisted for a time, and it is evident that while Paul’s teaching permitted Jews to continue to observe the customs of the law he refused to allow it to be made obligatory on Gentiles. Its observance was a matter of indifference and not a duty. “One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind, He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the

Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks” (Rom 14:5,6). To these references we might add as supporting “evidence” the repeated warnings in the epistles against any Judaizing tendency. The following passages illustrate this teaching: Phil 3:2,3,6-9; Col 2:13-17; 1 Tim 1:6-7; 2 Tim 2:14,18; Titus 1:10-14.

FIRST-DAY MEETINGS

While any command to observe the sabbath is absent from the New Testament, there is evidence that Christians met on the first day of the week to observe the Lord’s supper. Since the sabbath ended at sundown it is probable that in many cases such meetings would be held in the evening after the sabbath was ended. Many Christians were slaves who would not be at liberty during the day. But the fact that the meetings were held on the first day suggests that the apostles avoided using the sabbath on the one hand and on the other *positively chose the first day as the day on which the Lord rose from the dead*. As in the old creation on the first day of the week God had said Let light be, so on the first day the Light of the world had come from the tomb, the conqueror of the darkness of death, and had become the Lord of Life. A reference by Luke is almost casual but the more valuable therefore as showing that the practice had become general to meet on the first day. “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 20:7). In the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul repeats the instruction he had given them concerning the observance of the Lord’s supper (1 Cor 11:20-29). He does not mention the day of meeting, but it is evident that there was a regular time and arrangement from his words, “When ye come together therefore into one place” (see verse 20). In the same epistle, however, he has a reference to the day of meeting. “Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store” (16:2), which shows it was the practice to meet on the first day.

We must notice, however, that the observance of the first day was not in the nature of the transfer of a sabbath from the seventh day to a first day. There are no instructions in the epistles that there should be abstinence from work, and avoidance of the usual duties of life. Such would in fact not have been practical among the large body of slaves in the early churches. But God did not command it then, and no divine command has since been given that either the seventh or the first day should be kept as the Jews were commanded to keep the sabbath.

WISE USE OF SUNDAY

Since the use of Sunday as a day of Christian worship arose from the fact that on that day Jesus rose from the dead, it came to be known as “the Lord’s day”. The evidence for this usage probably goes back to the first century, certainly to the early years of the second century. At the first, the day began at sundown on the Saturday and lasted until the same time on the Sunday: but later the modern starting point of midnight came into use. With the spread of Christianity other influences operated to modify the form of its observance, among them possibly the veneration of Sunday in the cult of Mithraism. In the days of Constantine an edict required that “All judges, city people and craftsmen shall rest on the venerable day of the Sun”. Perhaps a change of

emphasis is discernible in the terms of the edict.

What should a Bible Christian do today? The release from ordinary work on one day is beyond question a blessing physically and rightly used, mentally, and spiritually. The general recognition of Sunday as a non-working day, enables believers to meet together for the observance of the Lord's supper and for other meetings, and so utilized adds spiritual blessings to the other benefits. But this observance is of grace and not of the bondage of law. To this issue might be applied Paul's words, "Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled with the yoke of bondage... For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another" (Gal 5:1,13).

In such a use of liberty for service to God, and one to another in love, the believer uses the Sunday rest as a day for those objects that will help him in his life Godward. The break from routine is good in every way; and the opportunity for worship should be gratefully accepted that God may be remembered. If Israel's sabbath was designed to make a people thoroughly furnished for life, we may be sure that the Sunday rest provides a means of spiritual growth no earnest believer in God and His purpose will neglect. The prevailing secularization of Sunday can only be deplored by any who seek a complete life in the fullest sense; such will accept Sunday's rest as a gift of God.

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