

9. The Sabbath in History

AS WE continue our study of the Sabbath question, we shall first consult an eyewitness, who had travelled over the greater part of Christendom: Socrates, the Greek historian, who was born about 380 A. D. M'Clintock and Strong's Cyclopaedia says of him: "He is generally considered the most exact and judicious of the three continuators of the history of Eusebius, being less fond in his style and more careful in his statements than Sozomen, and less credulous than Theodoret. 'His impartiality is so strikingly displayed,' says Waddington, 'as to make his orthodoxy questionable to Baronius, the celebrated Roman Catholic historian; but Valesius, in his life, has shown that there is no reason for such suspicion.'" *Vol. IX, art. "Socrates" p. 854.*

Socrates says of the year 391 A. D.:

"For although almost all Churches, throughout the world celebrate the sacred mysteries [the Lord's Supper on the Sabbath of every week, yet the Christians of Alexandria and at Rome, on account of some ancient tradition, refuse to do this. The Egyptians in the neighbourhood of Alexandria, and the inhabitants of Thebais, hold their religious meetings on the Sabbath, but do not participate of the mysteries in the manner usual among Christians in general: for in the evening . . . they partake of the mysteries. "*Ecclesiastical History," Book 5, chap. 22, page 289. London: G. Bell and Sons, 1892.*

The footnote which accompanies the foregoing quotation explains the use of the word "Sabbath..." It says:

"That is, upon the Saturday. It should be observed, that Sunday is never called 'the Sabbath' by the ancient Fathers and historians. . . . The Latins kept the Sabbath as a fast, the Greeks as a feast; and the 64th of the Apostolical Canons forbids any of the clergy to fast on the Sabbath (Saturday) under pain of being deposed, and likewise a layman under the penalty of excommunication." - *Id., p. 289.*

This shows that all the churches throughout the world kept Saturday as the Sabbath in 391, but that some did not have the Lord's Supper till in the evening. There had sprung up a hot controversy in regard to fasting on the Sabbath. Who was it that urged this Sabbath fasting against the will of the churches in general? Pope Sylvester (314-335) was the first to order the churches to fast on Saturday, and Pope Innocent (402-417) made it a binding law in the churches that obeyed him.

Dr. Peter Heylyn says:

"Innocentius did ordaine the Saturday or Sabbath to be alwayes fasted. . . . It was by him intended for a binding law. [Most of the churches refused, however, to obey him.] And in this difference it stood a long time together, till in the end the *Roman Church* obtained the cause, and *Saturday* became a *fast*, almost through all the parts of the *Westerne* world. I say the *Westerne* world, and of that alone: The *Easterne* Churches being so farre from altering their ancient custome, that in the sixth Councill of *Constantinople, Anno 692*, they did admonish those of *Rome* to forbear fasting on that day, upon pain of censures. Which I have noted here, in its proper place, that we might know the better how the matter stood betweene the *Lord's Day*, and the *Sabbath*; how hard a thing it was for one to get the mastery of the other." - "*History of the Sabbath," part 2, chap. 2, pp. 44, 45. London: 1636. (The original spelling is retained.)*

This shows how the popes tried to get rid of the Sabbath. They knew that the churches generally would not give it up willingly, and as yet the popes did not have the power to force them to do it. But if the Sabbath was made a day of fasting, the children would soon tire of it, and after a few generations the majority would gladly give up the gloomy fast day. This effort continued from about A. D. 391 to 692, and even then it was hard for the Sunday to get the mastery over the Sabbath, says Dr. Heylyn. Here we can readily see that it was not changed at the time of the apostles.

Rev. Joseph Bingham, M. A, says:

"The ancient Christians were very careful in the observation of Saturday, or the seventh day, which was the ancient Jewish Sabbath. Some observed it as a fast, others as a festival; but all unanimously agreed in keeping it as a more solemn day of religious worship and adoration. In the Eastern church it was ever observed as a festival, one only Sabbath excepted, which was called the Great Sabbath, between Good Friday and Easterday. . . . From hence it is plain, that all the Oriental churches, and the greatest part of the world, observed the Sabbath as a festival. . . . Athanasius likewise tells us, that they held religious assemblies on the Sabbath, not because they were infected with Judaism, but to worship Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, Epiphanius says the same." - *"Antiquities of the Christian Church," Vol. II, Book XX, chap. 3, See. 1, pp. 1137, 1138. London: 1852.*

The Primitive Christians

Bishop Jeremy Taylor says:

"The primitive Christians did keep the Sabbath of the Jews; . . . therefore the Christians, for a long time together, did keep their conventions upon the Sabbath, in which some portions of the law were read: and this continued till the time of the Laodicean council; which also took care that the reading of the Gospels should be mingled with their reading of the law." - *"The Whole Works" of Jeremy Taylor, Vol. IX, p. 416 (R. Heber's Edition, Vol. XII, P. 416). London: 1822.*

The edict here mentioned is "Canon XVI, " which reads:

"*Canon XVI.* - The Gospels are to be read on the Sabbath Day, with the other Scriptures." - *"Index Canonum," - John Fulton, D. D., LL. D., p. 255. New York: 1883.*

Dr. T. H. Morer (a Church of England divine) says:

"The primitive Christians had a great veneration for the Sabbath, and spent the day in devotion and sermons. And it is not to be doubted but they derived this practice from the apostles themselves, as appears by several Scriptures to that purpose." - *"Dialogues on the Lord's Day," p. 189. London: 1701.*

Dr. Theodore Zahn (Lutheran Professor in Theology at the University of Erlangen) says:

"The Apostles could not have conceded to any other than one man the right to 'change the customs Moses had given:' the Son of Man, who had called Himself Lord also of the Sabbath day; but of Him they knew that He had neither transgressed nor abolished the Jewish Sabbath, but truly sanctified it. And they knew also, how He had threatened any of His disciples who might dare to abolish even one of the least of the commands of Moses.

"But this has no one dared to do with the Sabbath commandment during the time of the Apostles. Certainly not within the territory of the Jewish Christendom; for they continued to keep the actual Sabbath. . . . Nor could any one have thought of such a thing within the Gentile Christian domain as far as Paul's influence reached." - *"Sondagens Historie" (History of Sunday), pp. 83, 84. Christiania: P. T. Mallings, 1879.*

The Example And Command Of Jesus

Dr. Zahn further says in regard to the early Christians:

"They observed the Sabbath in the most conscientious manner: otherwise, they would have been stoned. Instead of this, we learn from the book of the Acts that at times they were highly respected even by that part of their own nation that remained in unbelief. . . . That the observance of Sunday commenced among them would be a supposition which would have no seeming ground for it, and all probability against it. . . . The Sabbath was a strong tie which united them with the life of the whole people, and in keeping the Sabbath holy, they followed not only the example, but also the command of Jesus. *"Geschichte des Sonntags," pp. 13, 14.*

Bishop Grimelund of Norway (Lutheran) says:

"The early Christians were of Jewish descent, and the first Christian church in Jerusalem was a Jewish-Christian church. It conformed, as could be expected, to the Jewish law and Sabbath-custom; it had no express instruction from the Lord to do otherwise." - *"Sondagens Historie," p. 13. Christiania, Norway: Den norske Lutherstiftelses Forlag, 1886.*

After citing the fact that Christ arose on the first day, he continues:

"But, one could reason, that for all this it does not follow that one should give up and forsake the 'Sabbath' which God Himself has commanded, . . . nor that we should transfer this to another day of the week, even if that is such a memorable day. To do this would require an equally definite command from God, whereby the former command is abolished, but where can we find such a command? It is true, such a command is not to be found." - *Id., p. 18.*

Dr. John C. L. Gieseler says:

"While the Jewish Christians of Palestine retained the entire Mosaic law, and consequently the Jewish festivals, the Gentile Christians observed also the Sabbath and the passover (1 Corinthians 5: 6-8), with reference to the last scenes of Jesus' life, but without Jewish superstition." - *"A Compendium of Ecclesiastical History," Vol. I, chap. 2, see. 30, p. 92. Edinburgh: 1846.*

A little later we shall trace Christ's true followers from the days of the apostles to our own time, and show how they retained the Bible Sabbath with the other parts of the apostolic faith. But we will here break off this narrative, and trace step by step how Sunday-keeping came into the popular church, and the influences which worked together to accomplish the change from the seventh to the first day of the week.