

Which Is the "Lord's Day"?

ONE day in seven is "the Lord's day." Upon this day the apostle John, in lonely exile on the Isle of Patmos, had those remarkable visions recorded in the book of Revelation. (Revelation 1:10.) But precisely what day was this?

Almost every day of the week is held in high esteem by one or other of the various religious faiths; and according to his religion, so will a man contend for the divine dignity of the day which he esteems. The Bible, however, leaves us in no doubt as to the true "Lord's day." In the one and only statement which clearly designates this day, Jesus said: "The Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath." Mark 2:28. The Sabbath, then, is "the Lord's day."

Jesus did not say: "The Son of man is Lord of the first day of the week," as a great many sincere people seem to assume. Nor did He declare the sixth day to be "the Lord's day," as Muslims prefer to believe. The day regarded by our divine Master as His special day is the Sabbath. The Lord's testimony through Isaiah leaves no doubt whatever. "If you refrain from doing your own business upon The Sabbath, on My sacred day, and hold the Sabbath a delight, and the Eternal God's sacred day an honor, not following your own wonted round, not doing business, and not talking idly, then you shall have delight in the Eternal God's favor." Isaiah 58:13,14 (Moffatt).

To discover the identity of the Bible Sabbath we turn to the fourth commandment which states: "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shall thou labor, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shall not do any work." Exodus 20:8-10. Our answer is

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now complete. "The Lord's day," according to Jesus, is the Sabbath; the Sabbath, according to God's eternal law, is "the seventh day" of the week; and the seventh day of the week is what we now know as Saturday.

The reason why we should remember to keep holy the seventh day is given thus by God: "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." Exodus 20:11. Thus, among its many benevolent purposes, the Sabbath, or Lord's day, is designed as a weekly reminder of the creation of this world—a reminder, be it noted, of the omnipotent power of our Lord and Savior Himself, for "the world was made by Him." John 1:10.

Modern evolution would obliterate from men's minds the truth of the great creation story. It would banish God from His universe, and forever rob Him of the credit for having performed so marvelous a creative act. Well might the evolutionist be asked: "Who is this that darkened counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou Me. Where was thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou has understanding. Knows thou it, because thou was then born? Or because the number of thy days is great?" Job 38:21,22. Such searching questions serve to emphasize how finite and limited is even the most intellectual among us. Yet the subversive modern theories are destined to be taught with increasing emphasis as time progresses. (2 Peter 3:3-5.)

No wonder God's final ultimatum, at its very outset, gives due emphasis to the fact that He is the Creator. (Revelation 14:7.) And no wonder that the remnant church will uplift the true Sabbath of God as the weekly memorial of His creation. This is doubly needful in view of the spurious Sabbath instituted by "the beast," and which constitutes the unique "mark" of his assumed authority.

Is the Sabbath Necessary?

GOD'S law was given to show us how to live nobly, peaceably, and joyfully. Each one of its precepts is essential for the perfection of the whole. Omit any one, and the law becomes deficient. Omit the Sabbath commandment, and we are robbed of one of the most effective means of bringing the blessing and spiritual nourishment we so much need today.

Quite apart from any blessing it involves, however, the Sabbath is necessary because God has hallowed it, ordained it, and commanded that it be remembered. When God commands, He recognizes no human right to decide whether or not that command is essential or irrelevant.

Of course, He forces no one to obey; but inasmuch as He alone is the source of life and blessing, He reminds us that disobedience must sever us from that source. Failure to obey any of God's commands, provided a person is conscious of that failure, can only lead to spiritual bankruptcy and death. The wise man records for us the somber assurance that "he that turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." Proverbs 28:9. And those who "set at naught "God's counsel, who "cast away the law of the Lord of hosts," or who despise "the word of the Holy One of Israel," are duly warned in such passages as Proverbs 1:24-32 and Isaiah 5:24. "But who so hearkens unto Me," says the Lord, "shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil." Proverbs 1:33. It is very evident then, that the Sabbath is essential for our mental and spiritual happiness.

The Sabbath commandment is the only one of the ten which provides us with the time we need for prayer and meditation, for Bible study and public worship. As Jesus said: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." Mark 2:27. It was made not for any exclusive group, such as is erroneously assumed by those who call it "Jewish," but for all mankind—just as were the other nine of the Ten Commandments. For all men are in need of the benefits it provides. The Sabbath was ordained as a means of spiritual refreshing after the secular toil of the previous six working days.

If there were no Sabbath, every day would be a working day, and our minds would soon be fully absorbed with secular things. For this reason, the Sabbath commandment of all the ten is pre-eminently suited to maintain and strengthen that close relationship with God which makes possible the work of sanctification in our lives. Hence the Lord says: "I gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them." Ezekiel 20:12.

Quite apart from our spiritual needs are those of our mind and body. We need one rest day in seven for the preservation of mental and physical health. Genuine Sabbath-keepers always find that Sabbath observance, far from hampering their chances of success in their daily work, is a wonderful

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stimulus. It provides the needed rest and relaxation for them to return with renewed zest and drive to the secular tasks.

Some years ago, a certain Dr. Farre testified before a committee of the House of Commons that men working six days each week will enjoy better health and longer life "other things being equal-than those working seven days a week. He further claimed that such men would actually do more work and do it more efficiently. An association of physicians voted unanimously in support of Dr. Farre's contention.

Nervous diseases such as neurasthenia abound today. In fact, of all diseases, they are characteristic of this modern age. And they are on the increase. Never in all history have nerve forces been so squandered by over-work, fear, anxiety, and other destructive emotions. Such conditions were unknown in earlier ages. Now the Sabbath is admirably suited to restore health and tranquillity to jaded nerves, and vigor to tired bodies. Sabbath observance prevents us from overworking, and thus from squandering the life forces which are to be conserved and used for God's glory. Sabbath worship will likewise more than neutralize and dissipate such destructive emotions as fear and anxiety. It will keep us mentally sane, physically sound, and spiritually keen.

"The Sabbath," wrote Dr. Blakie, "is God's special present to the working man; and one of its chief objects is to prolong life, and preserve efficient his working tone. In the vital system, it acts like a compensation-pond: it replenishes the spirits, the elasticity, and vigor, which the last six days have drained away, and supplies the force which is to fill the six days succeeding; and, in the economy of existence, it answers the same purpose as, in the economy of income, is answered by a savings bank."

In view of the times, it is surely true to say that never in all history was the Sabbath more necessary than it is today. It is a golden link which binds men to God.

"A world without a Sabbath," claimed H. W. Beecher "would be like a man without a smile, like a summer without flowers, and like a homestead without a garden. It is the joyous day of the whole week."

In considering the need for obeying the Sabbath commandment, James' statement should be borne in mind: "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." James 2:10. D. L. Moody's comment on this is interesting: "The Ten Commandments are not ten different laws; they are one law. If I am being held up in the air by a chain of ten links, and I break one of them, down I come, just as surely as if I break the whole ten." - *Weighed and Wanting*, page 119.

If the Sabbath was necessary in the Garden of Eden before sin came (Genesis 2:2, 3), and if the Sabbath is necessary hereafter when all the saints shall gather for worship before God's glorious throne (Isaiah 66:23), then the Sabbath is essential today for us who are struggling against evil in this vale of sin. Besides, when we really love the Lord Jesus, having come to a realization of all He has done for us, we will revel in this weekly opportunity of having full and unhindered communion with Him and fellowship with other Christians. We will be among those who "call the Sabbath a delight." Isaiah 58:13.

Has the Sabbath Been Changed?

SINCE its institution at the very beginning, the Sabbath has come to man with unfailing regularity. And thus will it continue for all eternity. The law of which the Sabbath is a central part is frequently described in the Bible as eternal. David said: "All Thy commandments are righteousness; "and commenting on this righteousness, he adds: "Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Thy law is the truth." Psalm 119:172, 142.

It is held by some that Jesus came to abolish the law, or at least, to change it. The prophet's testimony, however, suggests otherwise: "The Lord ... will magnify the law, and make it honorable," says Isaiah. (Isaiah 42:21.) There is a vast difference between magnifying a thing and abolishing or even modifying it. Jesus' own testimony was: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you. Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." Matthew 5:17,18.

By His preaching and practice Jesus always maintained and recognized the benevolent claims of the holy Sabbath. Far from changing the day, or abolishing it altogether, Jesus strove to show men how to keep it and to derive from it the fullness of God's blessing. In His day, the Sabbath had become an intolerable burden and a day of misery for most of the people, due to the fantastic rabbinical teachings. Before the Babylonian captivity the Jews were notably lax in the matter of Sabbath observance; but after the return they swung from an extreme of slackness to an extreme of mortifying rigidity. The Jewish

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doctors strove to make the Sabbath a barrier between the world at large and God's chosen people. Sabbath prohibitions multiplied, and each irksome-and often senseless-rule gave rise to new subtleties. So crushing a load of legal rubbish was heaped upon the Sabbath commandment that its benevolent purpose was well-nigh forgotten. For instance, let a man be caught spending the moments of the Sabbath chasing some troublesome household pest, and he was at once condemned as a Sabbath breaker. He was, as the rabbis saw it, engaged in the secular pursuit of hunting. Or let any one do so innocent a thing as pluck a few ears of corn when out for a Sabbath walk, and he was considered guilty of defiling the sacred hours by harvesting. (Matthew 12:1, 2.)

It was to dispel such legal rubbish and magnify the real Sabbath that Jesus preached and acted as He did. His great concern in the many conflicts He had with the Jewish teachers was to transform that cold and deadly rabbinical Sabbath to the life-giving season of joy and fellowship God intended His holy day to be.

There is no word, no hint, in all Christ's teachings that this day of rest would ever be changed or abandoned. The very opposite is true. Looking forward with prophetic foresight to the impending destruction of Jerusalem by the armies of Titus, and the escape of His followers from the doomed city, He warned them: "But pray You that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day." Matthew 24:20. Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70. Thus it was Christ's expectation that His followers would be enjoying the benefits of the Sabbath long after He had ascended into heaven. (AD 31.)

Likewise the apostles give no hint of any change of the Sabbath. Rather, it was their practice to preach and worship on that day. (Acts 13:44; 18:4; etc.) Paul knew of no such change. Toward the close of his ministry, as a prisoner in Rome, he testified before the Jewish elders of that city: "Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans." Acts 28:17. How unthinkable and untrue such a testimony would be, if Paul, together with the other apostolic teachers, had observed and recommended the first day of the week as the Lord's day instead of the seventh-day Sabbath. Realizing with what zeal the Jews hung to their Sabbath, it is easy for us to imagine how vehement would have been the uproar had Paul desecrated, disregarded, or preached against, that holy day. But in all things his preaching and practice harmonized with the "customs of our fathers."

The change of the day, therefore, has taken place since Bible days for such reasons as that of popularizing Christianity among Sunday-keeping pagans, and of dispelling the popular opinion held by the Gentiles that Christianity was merely another Jewish sect.

Of course, however men may seek to modify the law makes no difference whatever to that moral standard recorded in heaven, and by which we will be judged. All ten of those righteous precepts will "stand fast forever and ever."

The question is sometimes asked: "Can we be sure that the Sabbath of today is the identical day ordained at the beginning? Is it not very likely that the sequence of days has been interfered with during the passage of time?" Fortunately we can be sure of our answer. The weekly Sabbath, and the weekly cycle, have never been lost. God's people had a reminder from God Himself when He provided manna in the wilderness. Abundant supplies fell on six days of each week; but on the seventh day there was none. (Exodus 16:27) This provision continued for forty years. When Jesus came, He recognized the sanctity of the day which the Jews observed as the Sabbath. Thus by His preaching and practice He set His seal on the fact that the identical Sabbath day was still preserved. And since the time of Christ, the week has continued with regular and recorded sequence until today. Even the calendar changes of 1582 and 1752 when, in the process of changing from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar, several dates were dropped, the actual sequence of days was undisturbed. Instead of Thursday, October 4th, 1582, being followed by Friday, October 5th, it was followed by Friday, October 15th. The weekly cycle thus remained and the true Sabbath was preserved.

How wonderful a place this old world would surely be if everybody ceased from all but the essential duties on the Sabbath. God would speedily be restored to His rightful place. Wars would forthwith become unthinkable. We would have a veritable heaven on earth.

This weekly day of rest and spiritual refreshing was given to man at the very beginning of human history, before man fell. (Genesis 2:2, 3.) It was as if the Lord anticipated the rise of teachings and theories that would deny His wonderful creative acts; and He therefore ordained His weekly rest day as the great reminder that He is, indeed, the One who made all things by the word of His power.

It is as true today as ever it was that: "Blessed is the man that keeps the Sabbath from polluting it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil." Isaiah 56:2. Such a man is blessed because his sense of God's

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presence and power is deepened week by week. His mind and spirit recover from the disturbing and worrying influence of the humdrum routine of workaday life. Taking time to think upon loftier things enables him to put everything in its right perspective. Not least is the physical blessing which brings new life and refreshing to tired muscles and jaded nerves.

As true today as ever it was is the ancient assurance of God's favor to those who fulfil the particular condition. Millions are proving it so. Says God through the inspired prophet: "If you refrain from doing your own business upon the Sabbath, on My sacred day, and hold the Sabbath a delight, and the Eternal God's sacred day an honor, not following your Own wonted round, not doing business, not talking idly, then you shall have delight in the Eternal God's favor." Isaiah 58:13, 14 (Moffatt).

How wonderful to have the special favor of God! Such would assure not merely success in secular undertakings, but success in our preparation for the life to come. Sad indeed, is the modern tendency not only to rob God of the credit for creating all things, but to forget and sometimes even to deny-Him entirely.

Hence, as the prophet described, is the clarion call to be sounded in the last days by the remnant church: "Fear God, and give glory to Him; and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." Revelation 14:7. What is this but a call to Sabbath observance. A call to remember God, not alone as Savior and Redeemer, but as the omnipotent Creator? Special emphasis to this merciful call is needed in a world where false theories are receiving such widespread acceptance.

No one need fear to respond to the great God. There is no single instance on record that He has ever broken the following promise: "Them that honor Me I will honor." 1 Samuel 2:30. Wonderful it surely is, especially in such a world of unrest as we find ourselves today, to know that God has a special interest in our personal welfare; and to know that all His resources, infinite in power and limitless in quantity, are at our disposal.