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THE SABBATH-DAY.*

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“And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord.”—ISAIAH lxvi. 23.

IS the Sabbath a divine institution of permanent and universal obligation? Is it of God, and did God intend it for all mankind? This is the question that lies at the root of the present-day Sabbath controversy. Many are losing a sense of the sacred quality of the day. Many are turning it from a holy day to a holiday. Corporations are turning it from a rest-day to a work-day. Many who teach that it should be set apart for a rest-day and a day for religious purposes affirm this upon grounds of expediency, and not as a matter of divine requirement. In the midst of so much diversity of opinion, the question is a pertinent and an important one, Is the setting apart of one day in seven a divine ordinance, and did God intend it to be permanent and universal? If it be, we should know it, and we should want to know it. If it be, then to speak otherwise of it, as though the Sabbath were a mere human arrangement, which men may treat as they please, is to profane it. It is to dishonor God and to trample his will under our feet. It is a sin. Let us see what Scripture teaches on this subject. Certainly what Scripture requires we are bound to accept,

* A sermon delivered before the Synod of Kentucky.



I call your attention to three separate declarations of the word of God, which ought to settle this matter. One is the account given in Genesis of the origin of the Sabbath; the second is the fourth command of the decalogue, and the third is the utterance of our Lord.

These three passages, like a threefold cord that cannot be easily broken, contain the scriptural argument.

In the first place, we may argue for the permanent and universal obligation of the Sabbath from the nature and date of its origin.

In the second chapter of Genesis the first three verses read as follows: "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them; and on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; . . . and God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it, because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made."

These words follow upon the description given in the first chapter of the six days of creation. They tell us that God's six days' work was followed by God's resting on the seventh day; and, therefore, he appointed the seventh day, or, what is the same thing, one day in seven, as a day for rest and a sanctified day.

It seems to me that our whole contention is contained in that declaration. How any one who accepts the Bible as the inspired and infallible word of God can escape it, I do not see. What does it teach? Certainly that the Sabbath is a divine ordinance; that it is not a human invention. It is God's arrangement; that is clear. God, says the record, blessed the seventh day and sanctified it. This setting apart, then, of one day in seven, was ordained by God. You must bear that in mind. You must remember that in dealing with the Sabbath you are not dealing with a mere human device. It is

not like a tariff bill or a lodge bill that men may quarrel over. It is not an enactment of the state. It is God's institution; the creation of God's will and armed with God's sanction. As, then, God made it, no man has a right to unmake it. Only God can do that. But has God done that? Can you point to a single passage in his word where he has done it? In this passage God distinctly says that one day in seven shall be set apart as a blessed and a sanctified day. Where, in all the pages of inspiration, from Genesis to Revelation, will you find any utterance of God to the contrary—that one day in seven shall not thus be set apart?

But this passage not only teaches that the Sabbath is an ordinance of God; it just as plainly teaches that God intended it to be permanent. That appears in the reason assigned. When a law has a temporary ground or reason for its enactment, its obligation will be temporary. The obligation to observe it will cease with the reason for enacting it. But where the reason of the law is permanent, the law itself will be permanent, too. Is not that sound logic? Apply it here. What was the divine reason assigned for instituting the Sabbath? Because God rested after his six days' work. Is not that reason as good to-day as it was then? Will it not be as valid in the last generation of mankind as it was in the first? Because God, having worked six days, rested the seventh. Can time change the force of that consideration? Who shall dare to say, until God bid him to, that that reason is not as good now as it ever was?

And then, too, not only the permanency, but also the universality, of the Sabbath obligation appears in these words. Of what time do these words in Genesis speak? Is it not the time immediately following upon the creation? Hear them again: "Thus the heavens and the

earth were finished, and all the host of them; and on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; . . . and God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made." Is it not plain that the time referred to here is the time that followed directly upon completing the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them? Is not that the natural sense? Anti-Sabbatarians try to get away from that sense, but is not that the plain meaning? After the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them were finished, then it was that God rested on the seventh day and blessed and sanctified it. If that be so, the Sabbath is coeval with the creation. It was instituted at the beginning. It did not first appear in later ages. God established it at the outset. It was, therefore, given to all mankind; intended for the whole human family. If the Sabbath had first appeared among the Hebrews, in God's legislation for them, it might have been supposed to be intended only for the Jews. But here we see that it appears at the beginning of human history, with the very commencement of mankind; therefore it must have been intended for mankind. Even Dr. Paley admits that. He says that if the divine command was actually delivered at the creation, it was addressed, no doubt, to the whole human species alike, and continues, unless repealed by some subsequent revelation, binding upon all who come to the knowledge of it. That is exactly the fact, and yet that admission comes from one of the strongest of the anti-Sabbatarians. It is an admission that contains the whole argument.

The fact is that, as I read these words in Genesis, I cannot but feel that in them God intends to tell us that the principle of the Sabbath, viz., that of one day in

seven for cessation from labor and for rest, is wrought into our nature and implanted in the constitution and laws of the universe. Men are so made, and animals too, that they need to have that interval to recuperate their wasted energies. So physiologists tell us. So experience demonstrates. The daily nocturnal rest is not sufficient. The human system is like a seven-day clock. That is the law of our being. That is the way our nature has been created and things around us have been fixed. That being the case, I take these words in Genesis as God's announcement of that fact. They may be paraphrased after some such fashion as this. It is as if God had said to mankind, just as they were starting out on their world-wide career: "I have just got through the work of creation; you are now about to commence your course. There are some things you must at once understand. One is, that in creating your nature and things around you, I have fixed it that one day in seven must be set apart as a rest day. I have also constituted it to be a blessed day and a sanctified day. It is so woven into the constitution of your being. It is the law of your nature. Be sure to keep it in mind and observe it. For if you do not, the economy of your well-being will be disturbed. Your body will suffer; your mind, your heart, every part of your nature, will suffer. It is absolutely necessary, if you want to rise to your best and noblest development." That is the way I would read these words in Genesis. When read that way, it is apparent that the Sabbath was intended to be permanent and universal; for if it be a law implanted in our nature, then that law can never be abrogated until our nature has been re-created.

These statements may be confirmed and illustrated by the case of marriage. In the same chapter of Genesis

we read: "God said, It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a help meet for him. . . . And they shall be one flesh." That is the law of marriage, one man and one woman, man's helpmeet, and both together a unity. That law is woven into our nature. It is not an arbitrary enactment in such a sense that any other arrangement would answer just as well. We are made and constituted that way. When, then, God said, It is not good for man to be alone, he needs a woman for helpmeet, and the two shall be one flesh, he was not enacting a law, he was simply enunciating the law of our nature, telling us how we were made, what must be the order of our life in the sexual relation for our best development. Exactly the same is true of the Sabbath. The fact is, that marriage and the Sabbath are twin institutions. They are both coeval with creation. They both stand at the commencement of the world's history. They both indicate the order and constitution of our nature. They are not like paper laws, not like the enactments on our statute-books, but they are set in our very being, like as gravitation is set in the orbs of the sky. They are written all over our bodies and our minds. They are the lines in which our nature is appointed to act—just as there are certain lines in which the rose bush matures into the flower, or the fig tree or the orange into the luscious fruit. They are so wrought into our being that marriage lies at the root of our earthly welfare, and the Sabbath at the root of our spiritual and eternal welfare. This is so true, that if marriage, which the enemies of mankind want to destroy, and the Sabbath, which the enemies of God want to destroy, were got rid of, all order would be upset and the world be turned into a pandemonium. So true is this, that always wherever the law of marriage and the law of Sabbath

have been most faithfully observed the nations have been most mighty and prosperous. You see, then, that in the nature of the case, the Sabbath was designed to be a permanent and universal institution. If, like marriage, it is fixed in man's nature, and woven into the constitution and order of things, even God himself could not do away with it without making our nature all over again.

Our second argument is based upon the fourth commandment. The presence of this command among those delivered on the top of Sinai, when properly understood, is proof of the universal and permanent obligation of the Sabbath.

What was the first thing God did after the creation was finished, and before the human race had started upon its historical career? It was to announce the law of the Sabbath. What was the first thing God did when he took a people from out the world which had wickedly departed from him, and before he started them on their national career? It was to revive and reinforce the law of the Sabbath. Does that look as if God intended the institution of the Sabbath to pass out of existence?

It is sometimes said that because the fourth commandment was addressed to the Jews, it was designed only for the Jews. But why is not that said of the first, or the second, or the third, or any of the others? Why should that be said only of the fourth? Why fasten objection on that one alone, and not make the same assertion as to the other nine?

There are three things that ought to correct such a notion. One is the word "Remember." "Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy." Did it ever occur to you that that is a very remarkable word to put at the beginning of a law? No other law in the decalogue be-

gins with such a word. No other law in the Bible begins with such a word. I do not know that any law on our statute-books begins with such a word. Why, then, does the fourth commandment begin with that word? Because God having established the Sabbath in the beginning, and the world having forgotten it, God is charging the people whom he had taken out of the world to be his peculiar people to remember it. His people must not do with the old Sabbath ordinance, which had come down from the beginning, what the world had done with it—forget it; they must remember it. It is as if God had said: “I am now giving you a code of laws lying at the foundation of all individual and national prosperity. They are laws that are set in the nature of things. No nation can attain to real and lasting greatness without them. In selecting you to be my peculiar people, I announce them to you. The other nations, who will have nothing to do with me, I leave to themselves. They have got to learn, by rough experience, that in departing from my statutes they have deserted the way of happiness and power. The ten commandments are the way. There is, there can be, no other way. Among them is the law of the Sabbath. Be sure to remember that. The other nations have forgotten it, and so must suffer the consequence. Do not be like them. Remember it. Not only your greatest power and prosperity, but even your existence, is interwoven with its remembrance.” I take that to be the meaning of that remarkable word. A proper understanding, then, of that word shows how false is the idea that the Sabbath was intended only for the Jews.

A second thing is, because it is not found among the ceremonial regulations of the Hebrew commonwealth. Had it been put there, the opinion that it was intended

only for the Jews might have had some force. When those ceremonial rules passed away, it would have passed away, too. But, instead of being among the ceremonial regulations, it is in the decalogue, and one of its principal precepts. It belongs to the ten commandments, which the ceremonial arrangement did not. It is one of the longest of the ten commandments, one of the most conspicuous of them, one of the most strongly emphasized of them. Like the other nine, it was spoken by the mouth of Jehovah, amid the awful solemnities of Sinai. Like the other nine, it was engraven on stone, as a symbol of perpetuity. Like the other nine, it was laid in the ark of the covenant. It occupies so important a place in the series as to come before the commands against filial disobedience, against theft, murder, adultery, covetousness, and the like. Is it possible that God could have associated it so closely with the other nine, confessedly intended to be permanent and universal, and have given it such a conspicuous and prominent place amongst them, if he had not intended it to be permanent and universal too? Is he a God of confusion? Is he not a God of order?

The third thing is, because the fourth commandment is the keystone of the arch. Take that away, and all the others will soon fall to the ground. How long would men remember the first command, to have no other gods before Jehovah; or the second, not to worship idol images; or the third, not to profane the holy name, if one day in seven were not set apart for them to learn of God and to worship him? Even as it is, how ignorant and careless men become in relation to their duties towards God! Or how long would it be before men would cease to honor and obey their parents, and fall into crime, if this day were abolished? Take away the fourth com-

mand, and you will break down all the others. Do you doubt this? See, then, the atheism, the vice, the crime, the lack of filial honor, the weakening of family ties, the robberies, the murders, the rapes, multiplying on every side of us at the very time men are being taught that the Sabbath is no longer of divine obligation. In the history of our country there has never been the amount of criminality of every sort that exists now; in the history of our country there has never been a time when the Sabbath has been so neglected and ignored. Do you not see how the two things go together? This is according to the observation of the great men who sit on the watch-towers of the world. Blackstone says: "A corruption of morals usually follows a profanation of the Sabbath."

Prideaux says: "It is not to be doubted that, if the Sabbath were dropped from amongst us, the generality of the people, whatever else might be done to obviate it, would, in a few years, relapse into as bad a state of barbarism as was ever in practice among the worst of our Danish or Saxon ancestors."

Does that seem too strong? Then you know but little about the history of criminology, and of communities and nations. Let the Sabbath be devoutly observed, and the other commands will be observed too. Let the Sabbath be habitually profaned, the other commands will be disobeyed too. Break down that one command, and all the others will soon follow. Suppose the Sabbath were observed all over our State; among our mountains, in our valleys, and in every part of the State; do you imagine that we should have the lawlessness and disorder that now darken and blacken the civilization of this commonwealth? Therefore it is that God put it in the middle of the decalogue; and its presence there ought to convince every right-minded person what the

significance is that God attaches to it, and what his purpose was in framing it.

But we may go further, and, in the last place, argue for the universal and perpetual obligation of the Sabbath from the direct utterances of our Lord. Strange that persons who will have nothing to do with the Old Testament suppose that in giving that up the Sabbath goes with it. Hear what our Lord says: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath." Could there be a clearer recognition of the Sabbath than that, or a stronger authentication of it? Do you not see that in these words our Lord is doing just what was done at the creation and upon the organization of the Hebrew commonwealth? At the creation, as the human race was starting out on its historical career, God ordained the Sabbath. At the organization of the Hebrew commonwealth, when God is starting his peculiar people out on their national career, he re-ordains the Sabbath. At the inception of Christ's kingdom, when our Lord is starting it out on its world-wide mission, he takes up the Sabbath again, and makes it one of his institutions. He does not annul it. He does not ignore it. What he does is to remove the errors and corruptions grown around it, and exhibit it in its true nature. He claims it as his institution, invests it with his authority, and constitutes it a vital part of his kingdom. Mark his words: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath." What do these words mean? I think the key to them is found in that little word "also." The idea is this, that the Son of man was made Lord of the Sabbath because the Sabbath was made for man. Let us expand this statement. You will observe that we

have a syllogism here, with the major premise omitted. The full syllogism might be expressed as follows: The Son of man is Lord of everything intended for man and for man's good; but the Sabbath was intended for man and man's good; therefore the Son of man is made Lord also of the Sabbath.

Now, with that syllogism before your eyes, you can arrive at our Lord's exact meaning in these words. He is talking to the Pharisees. He is telling them that they have perverted the real meaning of the Sabbath. You have supposed he would say to them that God originally gave that day to you as a peculiarly Jewish institution. As such, you have supposed that it should be observed in a peculiarly Jewish way. But you are mistaken. It is not a peculiarly Jewish institution at all. God originally made it for man—for all men; not for you alone, but for man universally, and made it for man's good. "But you have perverted it from this purpose; you have made it a Jewish day; you have made it a hard day; you have turned it into a day that, instead of doing good, brings harm and evil. Well, now, as everything that pertains to man and man's welfare has been put into my hands, so I have been given charge of the Sabbath; and I have been given charge of it that I might recover it from your perversion of it, and see to it that its original purpose of being made a blessing to mankind is carried out."

That, I understand to be the meaning of these words, a meaning so plain that I wonder anybody could have missed it. Do you not see, then, that in these words there is no intention on the part of our Lord to weaken, by a hair's breadth, the obligation of the Sabbath; that, on the contrary, his purpose is to confirm and strengthen it; nay, more than that, to liberate it from its Jewish

limitations and restore it to its original universality? Do not his words plainly teach that, instead of its being less true under the gospel that the Sabbath is an institution of universal and permanent obligation, it is more true now than ever before? And is not this exactly what the ancient prophet predicted in our text, when, in speaking of Christian times, he said that "From one Sabbath to another shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD"?

With two brief remarks your patience shall be relieved.

One is, that while Scripture teaches that the Sabbath is a divine ordinance of perpetual and universal obligation, it does not identify it with any particular day of the week. It does not command its observance on Saturday or Sunday or any other day of the week. What the ordinance exactly says is, that God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, but what day is to be regarded as the seventh day is nowhere indicated in the command. The reason is plain. It is because it is a matter of indifference which day of the week is taken, if so be that one-seventh of our time is given to that purpose. Under the old Hebrew dispensation, Saturday was the day observed, although it may be doubted whether that was the day appointed at the beginning. Since our Lord ascended, Sunday is the day that is taken. It is easy to understand why the change should have been made.

Why was Saturday preferred as the day for the Sabbath under the Jewish dispensation? Because that day was the day which commemorated the deliverance of the chosen people from Egypt (their deliverance, it is thought by scholars, being accomplished on Saturday), and it was so great an event that it was incorporated into the meaning of their Sabbath. But under the Christian dispensation we have an event to take the place of that, and

far greater than that ; that is, the resurrection of Christ, by which our eternal deliverance has been effected. His resurrection took place on Sunday, therefore Sunday is the day preferred for the Christian Sabbath. That is one reason for the change.

The other is, because the design of the Sabbath is that it should be a day of delights, of rejoicing, a festal day, not a sad day ; a day of joy, not of gloom and fasting.

Do you not know that in the early church men were forbidden to pray on their knees on the Sabbath? They were to stand erect, exulting in the accomplishment of the work of God's redeeming love. That being the design of the Sabbath, you can at once see that Saturday would not be the proper day for it, because on that day our Lord was in the grave under the power of death, and our redemption had not been accomplished ; whereas on Sunday he arose, bringing full redemption with him.

Hence it was on Sunday, the day of his resurrection, that our Lord met his disciples assembled together. Hence it was on Sunday of the week following that he met them again assembled together. Hence it was on Sunday, called Pentecost, that the Spirit descended in a miraculous and glorious manner upon the apostles. Hence it was on Sunday the disciples were wont to assemble to break bread and make charitable contributions to the suffering brethren. Hence it was that the Apostle John, in the Book of Revelation, styles this day "the Lord's day," and hence it is, too, that God has perpetually and gloriously annexed his blessing to the Christian Sabbath. Wherever throughout the Christian world Sunday has been observed as the Sabbath-day, it has been followed by all the blessings God has pronounced upon a proper observance of his day ; and it would be hard to find a more invincible proof of the

actual resurrection of our Lord than that the church from the beginning selected Sunday, the day commemorating it, for its Sabbath-day.

Our last remark has respect to the observance of the Sabbath. On this point I have said nothing, because the great need of our time is to have a sense of the sacredness of the day revived in the hearts of Christian people. It is useless to talk about the manner in which the Sabbath should be observed, unless the people are convinced of its sacred character; and if they are convinced of its sacred character it will be easy for them to understand how it should be observed. The point demanded to be emphasized at the present time is that the Sabbath is a sanctified day, set apart by God to a sacred and holy use. That is what is being lost out of the consciousness of Christian people. That is what we must labor to restore. Impress the people with the divinity of the day—that it is a divinely appointed season, and that in dishonoring it they are dishonoring a distinct ordinance of God. Make them to feel that it is not a mere institution of expediency; not a mere matter of civil or ecclesiastical decree, but a day enjoined by God himself. Unless they feel that way, the current of worldly business and pleasure will sweep it from the church. The only alternative is either a Sabbath set apart by divine authority, or no Sabbath at all. We must labor to inculcate the sacredness of the day upon the minds of our people alike, old and young. Otherwise they will do pretty much as they please on the Sabbath; will travel on the Sabbath; entertain socially on the Sabbath; read novels, and newspapers, and magazines; be careless about the requirements of the sanctuary, and let their conversation run upon business, crops, politics, fashions, and other worldly things.