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## SABBATH-KEEPING.

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Exodus xx., 8 : "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy."

I propose this morning to offer a few practical thoughts on the proper observance of the Sabbath by the Christian.

And my first remark is that the Sabbath is for us a divine institution or it is not. If it is not, then any kind of Sabbath observance is uncalled for. It is a merely human device and is of no more consequence than Easter or Christmas, which are human institutions, and, therefore, of very questionable advantage. If the Sabbath was meant for Jews and not for the Church of all ages, then the less we keep Sabbath the better. Keeping it would be as out of place as keeping the Feast of Tabernacles. Keeping it would only lead us back into the twilight of types. The Sabbath must be a divine institution, not only for the old Jews but for us, if we are to keep it at all. We cannot bind it on the church or the world, if it be but a human expediency.

Now, if it be a divine institution for us, then we must go to the Divine Word for instruction as to its meaning and as to the proper mode of observing it. The alternative is either no Sabbath at all or the Sabbath as God makes it for us. We cannot strike an average between these alternatives and, taking God's Sabbath, shape it as we will. To divide it, and say we will use the first half as God's Sabbath and the last half as our own playtime, which is the theory largely on the continent of Europe, is illogical and absurd. God certainly did not set apart a half day. If there is any Sabbath, it is a whole day and not a half day. If play is the appropriate exercise of the Sabbath then it should be play all day and not play only for the last half. If something else than play is the appropriate exercise of the Sabbath, then it should be this something else than play all day and not only for the

first half. The day is evidently to be of the same sort all through. There is not a hint in Scripture of two great principles in the day, one for the fore part and the other for the after part.

With these preliminary thoughts let us now first answer the question, "Does the Sabbath belong to the Christian Church?" and then, on finding an answer in the affirmative, see how God would have us spend the day.

The common declaration of superficial opponents of the Sabbath is that it is a local Jewish affair. They class it with the sacrifices and the annual feasts, all of which were done away in Christ. But these objectors fail to see the difference between the ordinance of the Sabbath and the special details of its Jewish observance. The two things are wholly apart from one another. The Sabbath came to the Jews from the ages before, and at Sinai special forms of its observance were given to Israel in its typical capacity. These forms have all expired with the ritual, but the Sabbath remains, as it was before the Jews existed. And this fundamental law of the Sabbath is imbedded in the Decalogue, which was wholly separated from the ritual or civil law by being written by the finger of God on tables of stone and placed by itself in the Ark in the Holy of Holies. The Sabbath, as such, is both a divine institution and a divine institution for all. The Jews observed it before they reached Sinai, and other nations also preserved its maintenance. The week was not a natural division of time. New moon and full moon could naturally mark epochs but the quarters of the moon are no more natural than the thirds or fifths of the moon. The week's observance is itself a testimony to the divine origin of the Sabbath. The French felt this when they did away with the week and made a decade of days as the division of time in order to be rid of the Sabbath. The story of Jacob and Laban shows us that three centuries before the law was given at Sinai the week's division of time was known and used in Syria. The Babylonian records show the same a thousand years earlier. The fact that the Babylonians counted the week from the first of each month does not alter the testimony that they recognized the week, and their laws expressly ordered rest from labor on the Sabbath or seventh day. The reason for the seventh day after six being established is given in the Decalogue as found in the periods of creation, and hence the Sabbath dates not from Sinai, but from the beginning of man's occupancy of the earth. That it is not binding upon the Christian Church would be of a piece with a declaration that none of the laws of God, which had special details of punishment given them at Sinai, are binding on us to-day—such as against murder and stealing. But again, objection is made that laws against murder and stealing are in consonance with our inner consciousness of right and wrong, but Sabbath-keeping has no inner witness at all. It is an extra law, an outside statute, and finds no natural response in the human mind or heart. The answer to this is that God has seen fit

to make an outside statute for all mankind, just as before man fell, He made an outside statute that man should not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Why should not God give law to man independent of the inner consciousness, as well as such laws as find their echo in the conscience? Nay, is not one grand external statute like this of the Sabbath a constant witness for God through all generations, a reminder to every one that we are not under the government of conscience merely, but under the government of God above and beyond conscience?

I trust I have shown that the Sabbath is no Jewish institution, but an institution of God for the race, and is as binding in the Christian dispensation as before. That there has been a change from the seventh to the first day of the week is true, but that change does not alter the fact that the seventh day, after six others, is our Sabbath. As the Church left its narrow precincts in Palestine, where exactly the same hour could be kept as Sabbath, and extended over the world where that is impossible, the exact hours became of no value. The principle of the seventh day after six other days was all that could be maintained, for any particular seventh day in New York would be the first day in Japan. There was also necessity for a change in the Eastern countries, because the Jewish way of keeping the Sabbath had become both human and burdensome, and if the same day was maintained in the Christian Church it would be hampered with all the follies that the scribes and Pharisees had piled upon it. A change of the day was thus necessary to free the Sabbath from its abuses, and not only so, but also to free it from those Jewish methods of keeping it which were according to the old Mosaic law, but which belonged to the ritual church and were to be done away in Christ. Our Sunday is thus rightly called "the Christian Sabbath," and we must go back to the Decalogue to see how it is to be observed.

Now let us see how God would have us spend the Holy Day. "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy." We may remark in passing that the use of the word "remember" shows that God was laying down no new law for Israel. He was only telling them to remember an old law, as old as mankind. The Sabbath was to be kept holy, to be hallowed, to be sanctified, for such are the varied renderings of the Hebrew verb "Qadash." There is a superficial interpretation which says that all this hallowing or sanctifying refers to an outward ceremony or exterior rites, and that hence to sanctify the Sabbath meant only to set it apart from other days by a distinct ceremonial. And as a proof of this interpretation, those passages are quoted (like Exodus xx., 21) where garments and other material things are sanctified or hallowed. Now, it is not denied that the word is often used of outward rite, but this is always significant of an inward holiness. The clean garments of the priesthood, anointed and sprinkled, were emblematic of a pure manhood consecrated to God. The word, therefore,

is never to be confined to the outward rite, but always looks to something beyond. The priest, for example, was consecrated, hallowed, sanctified, made holy, by a certain ceremonial (Exodus xxviii. 41), but that typical holiness only shadowed a real spiritual holiness which the priest ought to possess. It is precisely so with the Sabbath. We are to keep it holy. Well, that may imply a number of external duties, which serve externally to separate the day from other days, but the meaning of the word is not exhausted there. It means that beneath all external things there shall be a genuine spiritual use of the day as holy time. We cannot get rid of the spiritual meaning of the words "keep holy." To do so would make all religion a formalism. We have, therefore, God's command regarding the Sabbath; a command demanding the use of the whole day as holy time, time to be used in holy ways, to the special worship of God and to our growth in holiness. There is no possible escape from this plain meaning of the command.

Now, then, if the Sabbath is God's day, appointed by him to foster our holiness, to contribute to our sanctification, we see at once that the mere abstinence from our ordinary avocations does not meet the requirement. The rest from work, by the words of the command, is to be a holy rest, not a secular rest. To stop the meaning of the Sabbath with the mere idea of cessation from labor is both against the letter and the spirit of all God's commands, which seek action in the heart.

The Sabbath day is, therefore, to be kept holy in the full sense of that word. What, then, is our proper observance of the day? First, certainly, to meet in holy convocation to worship God. This was Israel's plan. It was also the plan of the Christian church from the beginning. The solidarity of the church was to be seen on that day, when all Christians, as brethren in Christ, should assemble before God. A Sabbath without attendance upon the public worship of God, where it is possible, is an absurd Sabbath. It lacks the church element which every Christian should sustain. The notion that we can just as well worship God at home is but an excuse for spiritual torpor. No earnest Christian ever entertained such a notion.

The special study of God's Word is another necessary mark of a true Sabbath. That Word is our one light in this dark world of sin. We should be ever walking in that light. And yet how lamentably ignorant of the Scriptures many Christians are! How few bend over the Word as the God-given fountain of refreshing to the soul! And yet that should be the position of every one of us. We need all the helps we can get in this study, and the teachings of the pulpit, if faithful, are among the best helps to this end. But these teachings will be of small value unless we follow them up in our retirement with careful searching of the Scripture, as did the Bereans, who received the Divine commendation for so doing. The Sabbath, as a day of leisure

from ordinary work, is the day specially adapted for this careful, private Scripture study. Its hours should be full of this spiritual research, with prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And this brings up another element of the true Sabbath.

It should be eminently a day of prayer and meditation. We should, with hearts of gratitude, rehearse to ourselves the Lord's gracious dealings and strengthen our souls by the retrospect, in which exercise prayer and praise will always have a large part. Prayer need not always have a set form either in words or attitude. We may lift up our souls to God in prayer or praise as we sit, as we read, as we walk, and so ourselves may be steeped in prayer. Now, it is very evident that a Christian, who spends the Sabbath in this way that God designed it to be spent, would no more think of sitting down to read a Sunday newspaper than he would think of going to his place of business and conducting it as on the other days. The Christian who takes a Sunday newspaper is very far from knowing what the Sabbath is and very far from prizing his religious opportunities. If indeed a Christian, his love to the Master is very weak, for the Master has said, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments."

A Christian who strolls about on the Sabbath, apparently not knowing what to do with himself, is altogether out of harmony with Divine things and God's ways, and is very like the godless world that counts the Sabbath a weary burden and would like to be free from it. The Christian who would be holy, as God is holy, will love the Sabbath as one of the most blessed means of grace, and will find its hours all too short for his happy exercise of spiritual application. He will cherish it as a precious privilege and thank God for the holy day, which does so much for his soul. My heart is pained when I see Christians, so called, whiling away the Sunday with walks and visits and the reading of secular literature and so wholly diverting the blessed day from its divine purpose. God does not want us to keep the Sabbath as slaves, whipped to a certain course of conduct, but he wants us to love the Sabbath and to use it in love and because we love Him. Ah! is not the trouble that we do not wish to become holy? We love folly so much that we would postpone the growth in holiness to the next world. O my dear hearers, if any of you are in that case, be sure that you are not deceiving yourselves in thinking that you are Christians. Be sure that you are not wearing a name that does not belong to you. If you are not seeking holiness here, how can you expect to dwell in God's holy heaven hereafter? Christ's saved ones are saints, that is, "holy ones." If holiness finds no desire in your heart, how can you be Christ's? If you are Christ's, and love and seek holiness, you will "remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy."