

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

THE SABBATH AND THE LORD'S DAY.

BY THE REV. S HARVEY GEM, M.A.

HEBREW scholars tell us that the word Sabbath is properly *Shabbath*, meaning rest, the word day being understood. It is first mentioned as the seventh day in the well-known passage of Genesis (ii. 3), where it is said that God "rested on that day from all His work which He had made," and "blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it." The inclusion of the seventh day among the moral commandments, the only ceremonial one placed among the ten in Exodus xx, bears witness to its moral and spiritual purpose. In Exodus xvi it is alluded to in connection with the manna (v. 23), "To-morrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the Lord," and in Exodus xxiii. 12 we read, "Six days shalt thou do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest, that thine ox and thine ass may rest and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger may be refreshed." We have not space to follow the many passages of the Old Testament that refer to the rest and holiness of the Sabbath Day, but one more quotation must not be omitted, for it shows with the utmost clearness that the seventh day was no mere formal requirement, but carried with it a high spiritual purpose. I take the translation of Sir George Adam Smith, *Isaiah*: vol. ii. p. 421. "If thou turn from the Sabbath thy foot, from doing thine own business on my holy day; and callest the Sabbath a delight, holy of Jehovah, honourable, and dost honour it so as not to do thine own ways, or find thine own business, or keep making talk, then thou shalt find thy delight in Jehovah, and He shall cause thee to ride on the high places of the land, and make thee to feed upon the portion of Jacob thy father, yea, the mouth of Jehovah hath spoken." "And," adds Adam Smith, "the Sabbath did not fall with the Temple and the Altar; the Sabbath was independent of all locality; the Sabbath was possible even in exile. It was the one solemn, public, and frequently regular form in which the nation could turn to God, glorify and enjoy Him."

It is evident that the rest from weekday labour was meant to be no mere idleness, but the means of raising the heart to God by devout thoughts and practices, as is shown in Psalm xcii—"A Psalm or Song for the Sabbath Day." This was sung in the services

of the second Temple, and suggests a noble conception of the day of the soul's rest, as a day of joyous thanksgiving and devout meditation on the works of God.¹ For the Sabbath would be specially valued when the leaders of the restored people were reviving the ancient worship of Israel. Nor should we deny that their leaders were making a real effort to promote holiness, by keeping the prescribed sabbaths and festivals not only in the letter, but also in the spirit. Yet we know only too well how after a while the true earnestness is apt to evaporate from the outward form, and this had occurred in our Lord's time, when the Pharisees objected to His healing sufferers on the seventh day. It is only fair, however, to the Jews to point out that revivals as to the higher meaning of their Sabbaths have occurred since.

A most interesting article will be found in vol. x of Dr. Hastings' *Dictionary of Religion and Ethics*, by Dr. Abrahams, Reader in Rabbinic Literature in the University of Cambridge. He quotes several of the prayers now in use relating to the sanctifying of the soul. One of these is as follows :

“ Our God, and God of our Fathers, accept our rest : sanctify us by Thy commandments, and grant our portion in Thy Law : satisfy us with Thy goodness, and gladden us with Thy salvation ; purify our hearts to serve Thee in truth ; and in Thy love and favour, O Lord our God, let us inherit Thy holy Sabbath, and may Israel, who hallow Thy Name, rest thereon. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who hallowest the Sabbath.”

The Christian Sunday can retain the blessings while it escapes the literalness of the ancient Sabbath. Our Lord appeared after His Resurrection upon the first day of the week. John xx. 19. It soon became marked by religious services. In Acts xx we read that Paul was seven days at Troas, before the principal meeting of the Christian Society, and “ 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.” And we read further, that after the accident to Eutyches, Paul went up to them again, to “ break the bread.” The first day of the week also became marked by each laying by what he could afford for St. Paul's collections. 1 Corinthians xvi. 1, 2. Thus, the Lord's Day is mentioned as an accepted observance in Rev. i. 10. “ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day.” And in that very early document, called the “ Teaching of the twelve Apostles,”

¹ See Kirkpatrick. *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*.

intended to embody their principles, we read, " Now on the Lord's Day of the Lord, when ye are assembled together, break bread, and give thanks, after confessing your transgressions, in order that your sacrifice may be pure." So we read in the Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians, " Those who were brought up to the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him." In the second century Justin Martyr describes the observance of the day :—

" On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the Prophets are read, as long as time permits, and then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs and exhorts to the imitation of these good things."

After this, the administration of the Holy Communion is described, and the passage concludes as follows :—

" Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world, and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead."

In A.D. 321, the Emperor Constantine by an edict formally recognized the sacredness of the day, and enjoined that the " civic population, together with the workshops of artisans, should rest on the venerable day of the Sun," allowing only harvest and vintage work to be done, lest the fruits of the season might perish.

Ought we to be willing to dishonour a weekly solemnity, inherited from so many ages? Should it not still be a day of worship, of stillness, of reading, of quiet reunions of family affection? Can we be right to encourage Sunday travelling, the opening of picture galleries and cinemas? On these points, let me quote the opinion, not of a sabbatarian, but of a Broad Churchman, the Rev. F. W. Robertson. He remarks.¹

" We are at issue with the popular defence of public recreations on the Sabbath Day. The abolition of Judaism is not necessarily the establishment of Christianity: to do away with the Sabbath Day in order to substitute a nobler, truer, more continuous Sabbath, even the Sabbath of all time given up to God, is well. But to do away with the special Rights of God to the Sabbath, in order merely to substitute the Rights of Pleasure or the Rights of Mammon, or even the Rights of profligacy and drunkenness, that, methinks, is not Paul's Christian Liberty. It is taken for granted that architecture, sculpture, and the wonders of Nature and Art which places of recreation

¹ *Sermons* of Rev. F. W. Robertson. 2nd. Series, p. 190.

will contain, have a direct or indirect tendency to lead to true devotion ; only in a very limited degree is there truth in this at all. . . . Let us be clear upon this point. Æsthetics are not Religion. It is one thing to civilize and polish, it is another thing to Christianize. The worship of the Beautiful is not the worship of Holiness ; nay, I know not whether the one may not have a tendency to disincline from the other.

“ At least, such was the history of ancient Greece. Greece was the home of the Arts, the sacred ground on which the worship of the Beautiful was carried to its perfection. Let those who have read the history of her decline and fall tell us how, when Greece's last and greatest man was warning in vain against the foe at her gates and demanding a manlier and more heroic disposition to sacrifice, that most polished and humanized people, sunk in trade, and sunk in pleasure, were squandering enormous sums upon their buildings and their æsthetics, their processions and their people's palaces, till the flood came, and the liberties of Greece were trampled down for ever beneath the foot of the Macedonian Conqueror.”

We are in great danger at the present time of the introduction of the foreign Sunday. Abroad it has long been the custom to devote most of the day to amusement, at any rate after early service in church. But for us, who have inherited the tradition of a spiritual Sunday, such a collapse would be wrong. Such laxity is becoming widely prevalent, and among those who have leisure in the week it is without excuse. Though the Jewish Sabbath has passed away for us, and we are not in bondage to the letter, we are all the more bound to rise to a higher level and not to fall to a lower one. Ought we to ask in a grudging spirit, “ What may I do, what must I not do on the Lord's Day ? How little time given to spiritual things will satisfy God ? ” He has so loved us that He has given us “ His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life ” (St. John iii. 16). And is the weekly celebration of His Resurrection to be spent with very little thought of Him ? That we may rise more fully to the spirit of devoutness there can be no more helpful ideal for our Sundays than that suggested by the wonderful Vision of the Revelation : “ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day ” (Rev. i. 10). “ This Lord's Day I must endeavour to rise into a spiritual atmosphere. I must pray that the Holy Ghost may raise me up into some unity with the Grace and Joy of Christ.” “ Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty, they shall behold the land of far stretching distances ” (Isaiah xxxiii. 17). This is the promise of the life to come, but some vision of it may even now be given, to lift us above the low level of our earthly state.

May we pass on to one or two practical considerations ? We are too apt to think we have done our religion, or at any rate that

we have had it done for us, and have paid our proper tribute to Almighty God, by our church attendance ; but as Bishop G. H. Wilkinson has remarked, " the soul must do a good deal of work for itself." Personal effort as regards the state of our souls is very necessary, and I may here quote the testimony of one who is least likely to be suspected of overstrictness. That witty clergyman, Sydney Smith, preaching his last sermon in St. Paul's Cathedral, expressed himself as follows, pointing out that self-examination is a duty which the Lord's Day brings round to every Christian man :

" Can a man be religious who assigns no time to thinking of religion ? Is godliness the only great good upon this earth which can be had for nothing ? Does the piety which fits a man for heaven grow up spontaneously in the mind of him who has no rules, no day for that piety which requires the strictest rules for its guidance, the noblest places for its exercise, and the most solemn day for its recurrence ? It is in the absence of our usual occupations, and at the season of leisure, that conscience regains her empire over us, and that man is compelled to hear the reproaches of his own heart. Every recurring Sabbath properly spent is a fresh chance of salvation. I much suspect the virtue and religiousness of that man who believes he can be a good Christian without Sabbaths and without prayer, and reach the end without submitting to the means.¹

It was a remark of Archbishop Benson that we do not find people reading the Bible in the old way as our aged relatives used to study it for a long while, sitting in the chimney corner. On Sundays at least this old custom might be revived, and some of the great devotional books of the Church, which many pious people know well, might suitably come into more general use. So might we listen in quietude to the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking in the heart, " Hold thee still in the Lord," " Be silent to the Lord," " Rest in the Lord " on His own holy day. " For there remaineth a rest to the people of God."

Much consideration needs to be given to the question how best to influence young people as regards the use of Sunday. In recent times an over-Puritanical stringency has often marred the good intentions of pious parents. Prohibitions as to Sunday have frequently had bad results with young people. The holy day should be represented in its true light, as a privilege ; a right spirit of thankfulness being aimed at. Vexatious restrictions, formerly so common, are very mischievous. But some opportunity, with children at any rate, should be sought by parents for giving instruction in religion.

¹ *Sketch of the Life and Times of Sydney Smith.* By Stuart J. Reid. Sampson & Low. 1884.

A friend of the writer of these pages who was master of a preparatory school, and was also acquainted with one of our largest public schools, was recently expressing his regret that young boys entered with so very slight a knowledge, if indeed any, of the Bible, and of the Christian religion. He attributed this misfortune to the too frequent neglect of the modern parent of religious teaching in the home. He laid stress on the gratitude that we ought to feel to our fathers and mothers in old days for the instruction that they so carefully gave us. The same complaint is the subject of a little book on *Religion in the Public Schools*, written by several headmasters and others (S.P.C.K.), who earnestly plead with parents to consider their plain duty in this respect. The friend whom I have mentioned imputed this neglect in a great degree to the lax observance of Sunday, and to the waste of the day by social entertainments and amusements.

It may be allowable to say a few words in conclusion on the subject of church services. The writer of this article cannot agree with the depreciatory remarks made by some critics of late as to the ancient prayers of our Church. We are unable to compose anything equal to them in the present day. It would, however, be well if the clergy would occasionally preach or lecture about them, explaining the words that have changed their meaning, and illustrating the petitions from Scripture quotations. I have heard that at an afternoon service in a University town an impressive course of sermons was given on the Collects, which are usually explained only in the Sunday School. All the same, permission might well be given for a short extempore prayer, before or after the sermon. More elasticity is needed in services for the working classes. Simple hymns will always be helpful, but it is a delusion to suppose that an increasing development of music is a means of saving souls. More attention needs to be given to preaching, and there is a great want of expository sermons on the Life and Work of our Lord, and on the teaching of the Holy Spirit as to His Salvation in the Epistles. Sometimes illustrations as to Conversion and Holiness might well be taken from the great characters of Church History. Our services and preaching should appeal to the *thought* of the hearers, they are in some quarters tending to become *materialistic*, we need not go back to the Middle Ages, but rather keep a forward look towards spiritual progress.

S. HARVEY GEM.