

THE CHRISTIAN'S SABBATH

THE WORD SABBATH is a prominent one in the Christian vocabulary. Its literal meaning is "to rest." The word first appears in the Bible in Exodus 16:23. In gathering the daily manna which the Lord provided for them, the Israelites were to gather twice as much on the sixth day that they might have a supply for the seventh, which the Lord declared was to be a Sabbath, or day of rest. Later, when the Law of God was given to Israel, keeping the seventh day of the week as a Sabbath, or time of rest, was made the fourth of the Ten Commandments. Keeping the Sabbath was to Israel a vitally important part of their service to God, so much so that the penalty of death was to be inflicted upon those who did not obey this commandment. (Exod. 35:1,2) The New Testament contains no instructions on the matter of weekly Sabbath-keeping, but it has been assumed by many that the Sabbath commandment of the Law was intended by God to carry over to the Christian church.

In his sermon on the mount, Jesus said, "Think not that I have come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill." To the condemned and dying race of mankind, fulfillment of the Law was impossible,

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for none could measure up to its perfect standard of righteousness. But Jesus, being perfect, was able to keep the Law inviolate. Being a Jew and under the Law Covenant, he kept the seventh-day Sabbath, although he had a different concept of its meaning than the religious leaders of his day.

Because Jesus healed a sick man on the Sabbath, his enemies "sought to slay him," which was their obligation to do had he actually broken the Sabbath. Jesus' answer to his enemies was, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." (John 5:17) This emphasizes that simply refraining from all activity was not the real meaning of the Sabbath, for both the Heavenly Father and Jesus work on this day. Jesus healed the sick.

In Mark 2:23,24,27,28, we have another important lesson brought to our attention by Jesus. He and his disciples walked through a corn field on the Sabbath Day, and as they went, the disciples plucked some of the corn, evidently for their own use. This was different from healing the sick on the Sabbath, and according to the strict letter of the fourth commandment it was wrong, so the Pharisees asked, "Why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful?" Jesus' reply was, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath."

The thought here evidently is that the

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commandment which required the Israelites to rest every seventh day was designed for their good, not their injury. The disciples were hungry, and it would have been a wrong understanding of the purpose of the Sabbath to suppose that the Law concerning it meant that they should refrain from satisfying their hunger. And we are glad for Jesus' assertion that he became the 'Lord of the sabbath,' for we know that his interpretation of it is correct. Whatever Jesus enjoined upon his followers concerning the Sabbath should be obeyed.

In his sermon on the mount, Jesus said, "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:19) To what commandments did Jesus refer? We can be guided only by his following remarks in which he partially quotes four of them—two from the Decalogue and two that were not. The first two were moral requirements—"Thou shalt not kill" and "Thou shalt not commit adultery."—vss, 21,27

The third commandment quoted by Jesus was the Law's expression of justice—"An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." (vs. 38) In each instance when referring to one or another of the commandments, Jesus gave a higher meaning to them than had ever been taught before. Instead of exacting 'an eye for an eye' he admonished his followers not to resist evil, "but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right

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cheek, turn to him the other also.”—vs. 39

The fourth commandment quoted by Jesus was, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour,” to which Jewish tradition had added, “and hate thine enemy.” (vs. 43) It will be seen that all four of these commandments which Jesus said should not be broken pertain to human relationships, emphasizing the high standard of moral ethics which should govern them, especially when viewed in the light of the finer, more exacting meaning which Jesus gave.

Did Jesus, in any of his teachings, command his followers to observe the seventh-day Sabbath? Besides, if it was God’s design that the fourth commandment be carried over into the Christian dispensation, then it would be obligatory for those in positions of church authority to impose the penalty stated in the Law for failure to obey it. As we have seen, that penalty was death. Is this what Jesus taught?

Jesus opened his sermon on the mount by setting forth the Beatitudes—“Blessed are the poor in spirit”; “Blessed are they that mourn”; “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness”; “Blessed are the merciful”; “Blessed are the pure in heart”; “Blessed are the peacemakers”; and “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.”—Matt. 5:1-10

If keeping the seventh day of the week as one of rest had been considered by Jesus as vital to salvation, it would have been logical for him to

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add, "Blessed are they who keep the sabbath day holy," but he did not. In his sermon on the mount Jesus touched upon many details of Christian living—domestic relationships, the taking of human life, loving our enemies, prayer, etc.—but said nothing about keeping the Sabbath. No mention is made of the Sabbath in Jesus' many parables.

His Final Command

Shortly before Jesus left his disciples and returned to the heavenly courts, he said to them, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."—Matt. 28:19,20

Here again we find no mention of the seventh-day Sabbath. Nor can we assume that it is included in the statement, "Whatsoever I have commanded you," for Jesus had never given any such command to his disciples. Honesty in handling the Word of God compels us to acknowledge that so far as the personal and direct commands of Jesus are concerned, they do not include seventh-day Sabbath-keeping.

Beginning with Pentecost, the apostles wrote and spoke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Peter's first sermon, preached on the Day of Pentecost, made no reference to the

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Sabbath. (Acts 2) A little later, Peter preached another sermon, but again he made no reference to Sabbath-keeping.—Acts 3

Throughout the Book of Acts, we find many outstanding testimonies to the Truth by the apostles and others—some to the Jews as a people; some to their rulers; some to civil rulers of the day; and some to Gentiles—but in none of these is there any mention whatsoever of seventh-day Sabbath-keeping. The martyr Stephen said nothing about it. When Paul witnessed before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa to the Jews in Jerusalem, and to the Greeks from Mars' Hill, he said nothing about it.

Necessary Things

One of the difficult issues which confronted the Early Church was how to deal with Gentile converts to Christ who were seeking fellowship among Christians of Jewish birth. This issue became so serious that a conference of the apostles was called in Jerusalem at which the subject was discussed and conclusions reached. (Acts 15:1-10) Here is the full statement of the apostolic edict which was sent out from that conference:

“It seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye

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keep yourselves, ye shall do well.”—Acts 15:28,29

Shall we charge the apostles with neglecting to mention one of the vitally ‘necessary’ things when delivering this message to Gentile converts? Surely not! Yet, this was certainly the logical place to mention the Sabbath if they did consider it to be an essential part of Divine Law which Gentile Christians should observe. Let us ponder well the significance of this omission as we consider our own relationship to God.

In Acts 20:27, the Apostle Paul is reported as saying that he had “not shunned to declare . . . all the counsel of God.” In view of this, it is interesting to note that in all of Paul’s epistles and sermons he omits to mention the necessity of keeping the seventh-day Sabbath. From this it is impossible to escape the conclusion that seventh-day Sabbath-keeping is not a part of the counsel of God for Christians.

Dead to the Law

In the Book of Romans, Paul does touch upon the Law of which the Sabbath commandment was a part, not to impose that Law upon Christians, but to emphasize that faith in, and obedience to, the Gospel make one free from it. He wrote:

“Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who

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is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. . . . But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead [or, having died to that] wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter. What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.”—Rom. 7:4,6,7

Some claim that the Law to which Christians are dead is merely the ceremonial Law, not the Ten Commandments. But Paul differs from this, for in his statement that Christians are dead to the Law he quotes one of the Ten Commandments—“Thou shalt not covet.” There is no doubt, therefore, as to what law Paul is referring.

Again, some take the extreme position that if the Law of the Ten Commandments is not binding upon Christians then we are free to commit adultery, to covet, to lie, and to murder. This is shallow reasoning. It is morally wrong to do all these things. They are gross sins. They are an injury to self and to others. Jesus and the apostles taught that these things were wrong and enjoined against them. But they did not command that the seventh-day Sabbath should be kept. This is not a moral issue, and the fact that Jesus and the apostles failed to command its observance, but did speak out against the sins forbidden by the commandments, simply

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emphasizes the fact that they did not consider the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath a necessity for Christians.

Judge Not

In Romans 14:5,6, Paul wrote, "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks."

Two points should be observed in this argument. One is that Paul does not condemn those who esteem every day alike. The other is that he places the observance of one day above another in the same category of importance as eating or not eating meat. Regardless of the reason some of the converted Jews in Rome had for esteeming one day above another, certainly those who believed that every day was alike did not consider seventh-day Sabbath-keeping a necessity. And it is obvious that the Apostle Paul did not think so either, else he would have sounded a timely warning to non-Sabbath-keepers.

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Things Which Abide

Paul wrote two letters to the church at Corinth, but in neither of these is there any mention of Sabbath-keeping. In the 13th chapter of I Corinthians he emphasizes the fundamental importance of love as a governing principle. Gifts of the Spirit were to vanish away; also the limited knowledge enjoyed in this life. But three things were to abide, Paul wrote—faith, hope, and love, the greatest being love. If the seventh-day Sabbath were to be an abiding ordinance in the church, why did the apostle fail to mention it? Why did he not say that the Sabbath was to abide as well as faith, hope, and love?

The Law That Was on Stones

In II Corinthians 3:3-7, Paul presents another important lesson in which he explains that it was the Law “written and engraven in stones” which is “done away.” It was the Law of the Ten Commandments that was written on tables of stone, not the ceremonial Law. Thus we see that while Paul does not here specifically mention the Sabbath commandment, he does declare that the entire Decalogue is “done away,” and that during this present age God is writing his law on “fleshy tables of the heart.”

In Paul's letter to the church of Galatia he expresses concern over those who observe “days, and months, and times, and years.” (Gal. 4:10,11) Criticizing this group, Paul wrote, “O

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foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?"—Gal. 3:1

In Galatians 3:16-19, Paul refers to God's covenant with Abraham, and explains that the Law, which was added "four hundred and thirty years after," could not make void that original covenant. "It was added," he explains, "because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made." If the Law was 'added till the seed should come,' why is it necessary, now that the seed has come, to continue under the Law?

Some will argue that the seventh-day Sabbath had always been observed. But this was a part of the Law which Paul states was added. This shows that it did not exist prior to Sinai. It is merely an assumption that the seventh-day Sabbath was observed prior to this. There is not a single text of scripture which so states. If it had been the custom of Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others of the patriarchs to observe the seventh-day Sabbath, why is there no reference to it in the historical records of their lives?

The Law of Commandments

In Ephesians 2:15, Paul tells us that Christ has abolished the "law of commandments." The

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King James Version adds the word “contained” in translating the remainder of the text, making it read, “contained in ordinances.” This has been seized upon to prove that it was merely the ordinances of the Law that were abolished. Certainly the ordinances of the Law were abolished. An ordinance is simply an act of religious worship, such as baptism. Thus the Sabbath commandment is in reality an ordinance. It was not a commandment regulating moral conduct.

In Colossians 2:16 we read, “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect to an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath [‘days’ added by translators].” From this it is obvious that Paul did not consider the keeping of the Sabbath essential to salvation. True, there were other sabbaths observed by Israel in addition to the seventh-day Sabbath. There were the yearly ‘holydays,’ and also the ‘new moon,’ or monthly holy days. Since Paul mentions these separately, his reference to the sabbath is therefore definitely to the seventh-day Sabbath.

God's Rest

In Paul's letter to Timothy he wrote, “We know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully.” To this he adds, “Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners.” (1 Tim. 1:8-10) Here is an important

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consideration. Christians who have devoted themselves entirely to the service of the Lord, and who are endeavoring to set their affections on things above, should be living above the necessity of the “law of commandments.”—Eph. 2:15

In Hebrews 4:1-11, Paul presents a very important and revealing lesson with respect to Christian sabbath-keeping. In the 10th verse he sums up the matter for us, saying, “He that is entered into his [the Creator’s] rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.” Here is another important point, for the claim is made that the seventh-day Sabbath is and always will be binding upon the Lord’s people, because this day was made sacred by the fact that on it God rested from his work of Creation. God’s sabbath is sacred, and here the apostle explains how it can be kept sacred by Christians. It is not by resting on the seventh day of each week, but rather by continuing to exercise faith in the finished work of Christ.

We are told that the Sabbath was given to Israel for a “sign.” (Exod. 20:8-11; 23:12; 31:12-17) It was, or should have been, a sign, or token, of God’s ability to care for all their needs. When they rested on the seventh day they refrained from that which helped to provide their living. This in turn, became a picture of a far more important rest for Christians.

For centuries the devout Israelites struggled to obtain life under the terms of the Law. (Lev.

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18:5; Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:12) They failed, not because the Law was imperfect, but because it was beyond the ability of any member of the fallen race to keep. But with the coming of Christ there was opened "a new and living way"—not a new way of works under the Law, but a way of faith which enables a consecrated believer to cease depending upon works to obtain life, and to accept instead the provision of life made for him by God through Christ.—Heb. 10:20; Rom 3:30; 5:1,2

It is thus that the Christian enters into rest with God, ceasing from his own works, as God did from his. When God finished his original work of Creation he ceased his efforts on behalf of the human race; not in the sense that he no longer cared for his human creatures, but because he entrusted their ultimate destiny in the hands of another, even Christ Jesus, the Redeemer and Savior.

The perfect pair whom God created and placed in Eden transgressed his law and came under condemnation to death. His justice demanded that they die, but his love provided an escape from death, that way being through his beloved Son. Jehovah knew that his Son would willingly come to earth, be made flesh, and suffer death in order to meet the demands of justice against the fallen race. His faith in the outcome of this loving plan of redemption through Christ enabled him to "rest." And if we can also have full confidence in the Redeemer,

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and in his finished work for us, we can also rest from our "works, as God did from his."—Heb. 4:3,10

This is Paul's explanation of God's rest, and of how we share in it. How much grander it is than to think of God actually being inactive for twenty-four hours, as though he had become weary! This could not be, for the Prophet Isaiah wrote, "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?" (Isa. 40:28) Besides, there is much evidence in the Scriptures that the creative days of Genesis were not twenty-four hour days, but long epochs of time. On this point, we refer the reader to our booklet entitled "Creation."

Difficulties present themselves when we try to think of God's sabbath as being limited to a twenty-four hour period each week. The scriptural day begins at sundown and continues until sundown the next evening. The seventh day of the week is made holy, it is claimed, by the fact that it is on this day that God rests. So if we rest on this day, we are resting with God.

But what are we to do with the fact that the sun sets at various times, depending in which part of the globe one lives? There are eight hours' difference between the time the sun sets in Western Europe and in California. There are also hours of difference between sundown in the North and sundown in the South. In the

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Arctic and Antarctic Circles there are six months of day and six months of night. To keep a seventh-day Sabbath in these regions would mean resting for a whole year at a time every seventh year. Would God be conducting his rest on this basis? Or, if we should establish the length of day by our watches, would this be in harmony with the Bible?

Besides, how can we be absolutely certain that Saturday is now the seventh day of the week that was established at Sinai, or at Creation. Even if it were so in America, it would not be so after crossing the international date line. We raise these questions merely to emphasize how flimsy a thread secures our hope of salvation if it depends upon resting one day each week, and on the selfsame hours during which God is supposed to be resting. Each Christian must decide for himself how important this thread is. We think it is better to base our hope on the solid rock of Christ Jesus and rest by faith in him.

The "Mark" of the "Beast"

In Revelation 13:16 reference is made to a "mark" which is placed on the right hand, or the forehead, of those who worship a certain "beast," or the "image" of the 'beast.' This mark of the beast is also referred to in Revelation 15:2; 16:2; and 20:4. Revelation 7:2-4 makes reference to the "seal of the living God." The mark of the beast has been interpreted to mean

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the observance of the first day of the week as the Christian sabbath, and the “seal of the living God” has been taken to symbolize adherence to the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath.

Actually, the word sabbath is not used in the Book of Revelation at all, nor is seventh-day Sabbath-keeping even remotely referred to. There is not the slightest suggestion anywhere in the Bible that first-day sabbath-keeping is the mark of the beast. This is an arbitrary interpretation which is based on nothing more substantial than theological imagination.

In Revelation 22:14 we read, “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.” The ‘city’ here mentioned is described in detail in chapter 21, and is identified as “the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” (Rev. 21:2,9,10) The twelve foundations of the city are said to be the “twelve apostles of the Lamb.” (vs. 14) The twelve gates carry the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, those referred to in chapter 7 as having the “seal of the living God.”

The setting of chapters 21 and 22 is of this city being complete, and of the nations of the world walking in the light of it, and the kings of the earth bringing their glory into it. The bride, the Lamb’s wife—one of the biblical titles given to the church of Christ—is shown in chapter 22:17 as inviting whosoever will to partake of “the water of life freely.” The evidence is clear,

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therefore, that those referred to in verse 14 as having the right to the tree of life by keeping the commandments, are not Jesus' followers of this age, but the world of mankind during the millennium.

We have considered this text because it uses the word commandments. But are we arbitrarily to decide that the reference is to the seventh-day Sabbath-keeping? We do not believe that this would be a proper handling of the Word of God, especially since there is not a single text in the entire New Testament which states that keeping the seventh-day Sabbath is essential to the obtaining of everlasting life.

And what about the claim that seventh-day Sabbath-keeping is the seal of the living God? This also is based merely upon speculative imagination. There is no scriptural authority for it. In Ephesians 1:13, the Apostle Paul speaks of Christians being sealed with "the holy Spirit of promise." The sealed of God, then, are those who have received of his Holy Spirit, and are being led and blessed by it. In Revelation 7:3 the seal of God is said to be in the forehead. This evidently, is a symbol of the enlightening influence of God's Spirit, enabling the Christian to understand the plans and purposes of God.

"Marks"

Since, as we have seen, there is no scriptural authority for supposing that the mark of the

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beast is first-day sabbath-keeping, do we have any indication in the Bible as to what this symbolism might represent? We think so. We believe a clue is provided by the Apostle Paul in his reference to "the marks" of the Lord Jesus. (II Cor. 1:5; 11:23-25) In Galatians 6:17 Paul wrote, "From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."

This language is based upon the custom of slave owners in the apostle's day of branding their slaves with a particular mark to identify ownership. Paul had become a bondsman of Jesus Christ, and in this text he reminds the brethren at Galatia of this fact, and that now, being marked for the service of Christ, none should try to induce him to serve other masters. These were the marks or indications of his relationship to Christ.

The mark of the beast is evidently referred to by Jesus in Revelation as in contrast to his mark. To bear the mark of the beast, therefore, would denote a state of bondage, of enslavement to that great Antichrist system of iniquity symbolized by a beast, which, in the Book of Revelation, is in contrast with the Lamb. Paul wrote, "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey?" (Rom. 6:16) Those who obediently serve the beast are its bondsmen, and have its mark.

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Whose Law?

Some interpreters of the Bible claim that what they refer to as the ceremonial Law was given to Israel by Moses, whereas the moral Law was from God. There is, of course, a difference between ceremonial observances and moral requirements. The keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath was not a moral requirement. However, the Bible does not support the view that God is the author of one, while only Moses' authority was behind the other.

Anyone wishing to satisfy himself on this point can do so by consulting a concordance, comparing such expressions as "the Law of the Lord," "the Law of God," and "the Law of Moses." These are used interchangeably, thus proving that the laws of Moses are as much the laws of the Lord as those which are declared to be written by the 'finger of God' upon tables of stone.

To claim that the laws accredited to Moses are not the laws of the Lord is a form of higher criticism. It repudiates the fact that this faithful servant of God wrote and spoke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God. That the ceremonial features of the Law were from the Lord, as well as its moral requirements, is shown in Luke 2:22-24. Here, the ceremonial of purification following childbirth is referred to three times. Once it is called the Law of Moses, and twice the Law of the Lord.

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When God spoke to Israel out of the cloud, the people heard the Ten Commandments directly from him. The people were terrified by the voice of the Lord, and petitioned Moses to change the arrangement, which he did. Deuteronomy 5:22 declares of the Lord that “he added no more.” This does not mean that the remainder of the Law was not from the Lord. Nor did the Israelites understand it in this way, for they said to Moses, “Go thou near, and hear all that the LORD our God shall say: and speak thou unto us all that the LORD our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and do it.”—Deut. 5:27

The Great Commandment

A lawyer inquired of Jesus, “Master, which is the great commandment in the Law?” Did Jesus say that it was the commandment to remember the Sabbath Day, and explain that those who did not would have the mark of the beast? No! In answer to this question Jesus did not refer to any of the Ten Commandments. He quoted two commandments, neither of which was among the ten. He said, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”—Matt. 22:37-40; Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18

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What Jesus referred to as the great commandment was written by Moses, but of course under inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' reference to it certainly proves that he considered it to be just as much one of the Divine commandments as though, like the ten, it had been written by the 'finger of God.'

Jesus said to his disciples, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John 13:34,35) How different is this mark of distinction which distinguishes the disciples of Christ, from observing the ceremonial of seventh-day Sabbath-keeping! Had this also been necessary, surely this would have been an appropriate time to include it. Jesus did not do so.

Perpetual

That the Sabbath commandment was to be a "perpetual" one is interpreted to mean that it had always existed, and will forever remain binding upon mankind as a prerequisite to obtaining eternal life. (Exod. 31:16) But this is an unscriptural viewpoint. The Sabbath commandment was a part of the Law Covenant and the Bible distinctly says, "The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us [the Hebrews], even us, who are all of us here alive this day." (Deut. 5:2,3) It had not existed before.

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The Hebrew word translated 'perpetual' does not always carry the thought of being without end. It sometimes means without interruption until a designed purpose is accomplished. Paul explains that the Law was added to God's original covenant with Abraham "till" the Seed of promise should come. (Gal. 3:19) This is God's own time limit upon the Law Covenant.

Exodus 35:1,2 reveals that Israelites who failed to keep the seventh-day Sabbath were to be put to death. This also was to be a perpetual requirement. Are those today who insist on the necessity of keeping the seventh-day Sabbath also practicing this aspect of the same Law? This might be interpreted to mean that those who do not now keep the Sabbath will die the second death, and thus be deprived of future life. But this is not what the text says, and it was not thus understood by Moses and the Israelites in general.

No Historical Evidence

It is true, as claimed, that some pope or civil ruler, or possibly church council, made an arbitrary change from the seventh to the first day of the week for the Christian sabbath. Is this the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy concerning the Antichrist, that he would "think to change times and laws?" (Daniel 7:25) There is nothing in history to indicate that this was ever done. Some claim that Pope Gregory made the change; others that it was done by

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Constantine. Others insist that such a change was made by some unknown pope. The Roman Church claims that the change was made, but this proves nothing. Apparently it came about gradually through the centuries as an outgrowth of the custom in the Early Church of commemorating the resurrection of Jesus on the first day of the week.

However, we are not advocating the idea that the first day of the week is now the proper one to be observed as the Christian sabbath. What we have noted concerning the scriptural testimony, and lack of testimony, on sabbath-keeping is as true concerning the first-day sabbath as it is with respect to the seventh-day Sabbath. As we have noted, Paul considered those who esteemed every day alike to be just as faithful to the Lord as those who did not.

The original Sabbath commandment contained nothing about worshiping the Lord on the seventh day. It was simply to be a rest day, and human experience has proved the need of such rest days. The commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus on the first day of the week was more particularly an occasion for meeting together for praise and worship. Certainly it is appropriate, and to the glory of God, that his people thus assemble for worship. And why should it not be on the first day of the week? Certainly the first day of the week should serve as a reminder of the Christian's hope of life in Christ, the resurrected One.

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With Christians who are fully devoted to the Lord and his service, every day is a holy day. To them every day is to be devoted to the service and glory of God. Even their secular duties are to be performed as unto the Lord (I Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:17,23). At the same time, they welcome the opportunity of a day of cessation from these toils, that their thoughts and strength may be used more directly in the service of God.

Because the first day of the week is, in the professed Christian world, looked upon as a day of rest and worship, Christians should be glad thus to observe it. If living in a community made up preponderantly of those who rest on the seventh day, the Spirit of Christ would lead a true follower of his also to refrain from secular work on that day, and devote himself to the worship of God.

But neither on the first, nor on the seventh, day of the week should a Christian refrain from secular work in the belief that failure to do so would result in dire punishment by the Lord. Nor should either of these days be observed as a day of rest, in the belief that God had so commanded the Christian; for as we have seen, no such commands have been given to us by Jesus, nor by his apostles, who spoke for him.

We are told that Jesus would magnify the Law, and he did. (Isa. 42:21) He said that one who hated his brother without a cause was guilty of murder; that one who looks upon a woman to lust after her is guilty of adultery. So

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the New Testament has also magnified the sabbath commandment, as we have found from Paul comments in Hebrews, chapter 4. What a glorious "rest" is enjoyed through faith in the finished work of Christ!

The seventh-day, or typical, Sabbath taught faith in God's ability to provide the necessities of life. If we are now resting in the Lord it is because of our faith in the provision of life he has made for us, and a recognition of the fact that we cannot obtain eternal life through works of our own. Let us, then, continue to rest in him, and enjoy the peace of God which all understanding!