

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS  
CONCERNING  
SABBATH-KEEPING.

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“**D**OES not man need a day which, by its peculiar duties and its holy influences, shall be sacred to communion with his God, with himself, and with his fellow-men? — with his fellow-men in thoughts of the higher things of life?”

This is a fair question. Let us, in preparation for answering it, give a glance at what men now think, and why they think so.

It is commonly thought, even by men whose actions are at variance with their belief, that *God* requires of men the observance of Sunday as a Sabbath.

They think so because the clergy everywhere preach this doctrine, and also teach it in Sunday schools, tracts, and religious magazines and newspapers.

It is assumed or declared in these sermons, tracts, and other publications, that we know this to be God's requisition, because he has so commanded *in the Bible*.

Unfortunately for these clergymen, these declarations and assumptions are absolutely incorrect.

Not only does the Bible, as a whole, make no appointment of either Sunday or any other day for special religious observance *by all men*, but the New Testament expressly declares that Christians are not bound by the sabbatical ordinances of the Old Testament, which were made for Jews, and Jews only.

Ask your minister to show you where in the Bible an observance of Sunday is commanded.

He cannot show you, because it is nowhere commanded.

Nowhere in the Bible is it even recommended, or suggested.

Yet the clergy still continue to preach it.

The Sunday-sabbath doctrine is a part of their church-system, and they want to have it thought that their church-system is copied from the Bible. So they keep on preaching that it does come from the Bible.

You have heard of “pious frauds.” This is one of them.

Now, before entering on the question whether *man needs* a day separated from other days for religious purposes, we shall do well clearly to recognize these two truths; namely:—

1. It is certain that *the Bible* appoints neither Sunday nor any other day to be specially observed by Christians.

2. If the Bible is “God’s word,” and the perfect, complete, infallibly inspired rule of life which these clergymen pretend it to be, then it is certain that *God* has not specified any day to be particularly observed by Christians.

Now we are ready to consider, — Is it desirable for *us* to separate one day of the week from the rest *for religious observance*, or to make a point of using in that manner a day which we find already separated by custom?

Here is an axiom, or self-evident truth, bearing upon the subject.

*Just in proportion as you exalt one member of a series, you INEVITABLY proportionately depress the other members.*

If the sergeant has more authority, the privates *must* have *less* authority.

If Mary is more compassionate than God the Father, or than Jesus her son, they *must* be *less* compassionate than she.

If one day of the week is to be made more religious than the rest, the others *must* be made *less* religious.

This is an objection to separating one day from the rest *for religious observance*. We ought not to recognize a diminution of the force of religious obligation for any portion of time. We should insist on the binding force of duty to God at all times.

The key to the differences of opinion between different people on this point lies in their different estimate of what religion is. The profusion of holy days in the Hebrew and Roman Catholic faiths is due to the fact that rite and ceremony largely *constitute* their religion. In Roman Catholic countries the very name of a monk is “a religious man;” of a nun, “a religious woman.” To become a monk or a nun is called there “going into religion.” These are assumed to be the only thoroughly religious people, because their lives are spent in performing religious *ceremonies*; and those there who are not monks or nuns, and who occupy themselves *only* with the duties of daily life, are supposed to have religion only in fragments, if they have it at all.

The theory of religion here described is neither honorable to God nor useful to man, and there is not the slightest reason for accepting it. A far better definition of religion is, — *Voluntary obedience, in all the details of the business of life, to what is understood to be the will of God.* Those who do not understand God to have required, or to

desire, any rite, ceremony, or formality whatever, want no separation of a day *for worship*. If what he desires of us is daily obedience, instead of weekly ceremonies and professions, our allegiance to him will be clearly expressed in our daily lives. If that daily life is frivolous or vicious, a Sunday ceremony added to it will not help the matter. The thing needed in that case is to reform the daily life, and to apply ourselves, *every* day in the week, to the work of reforming it.

But, whether or not we need a day separated to be more religious than other days, there are several things which we do need, and which men will always continue to need, which require us to take advantage of the existing discontinuance of labor and business on Sunday.

All men — especially those whose employment is bodily labor — need a periodical cessation from ordinary business, such as is now afforded by the Sunday's rest.

Again, we need to meet together as human beings, without hurry, pre-occupation, or distraction, to obtain social and spiritual communion.

Again, all men need instruction in religion and morals, — the department of conscience and the spiritual department. Even the pure, as an apostle intimates, need to have their minds stirred up by way of remembrance; still more need the impure to be admonished, and the ignorant to be enlightened.

For all these reasons, then, it is desirable to continue the existing custom of desisting from ordinary labor on Sunday, of meeting together in a social and fraternal manner, and of making arrangements for religious instruction to be given in these meetings.

But should we not say arrangements for *worship* also, as well as for instruction?

This also is a fair question. Let us look at it.

Worship is understood to consist of prayer and praise.

Prayer — the expression of our individual desires, aspirations, feelings of every kind, to the ever-present Father — is an unspeakably precious privilege. But it seems to me that there are very few occasions when the mind of an assembly is so moved by one impulse as to enable an official, or any one person, to be appropriately their mouth-piece in prayer. The actual wishes of the congregation are nearly as various as their persons. I think therefore, not only that public prayer (so called) generally fails to be what it is assumed to be, the earnest desire *of the congregation*, but that periodical public prayer *must* be such a failure in the majority of cases, and thus is not

worship "in spirit and in truth," the only acceptable worship. For this reason I would have prayer left, as Jesus recommended it to be left, for *private use*.

As to praise,—"singing praises to God,"—I think that what God wants of us is not applause, but obedience. I don't think he values palaver, profession, wordy demonstration, periodically repeated. Music is a delightful solace and recreation for human beings, and makes a good expression of devotional feeling when he, she, or they who make it *have* such feelings to be expressed. But elaborately to make such music twice a week, *to please God*, seems to me as much a blunder as the old Jewish fashion of periodically setting hot bread and roast veal before him.

If we rest on Sunday from our ordinary bread-earning labor, seek the best religious instruction within our reach, help others with instruction as we have opportunity, and spend the rest of the time in family meetings, social intercourse with neighbors and friends, or quiet recreation at home or abroad, we shall have used the Sunday's opportunities pleasantly and profitably, and certainly we shall not have violated either the letter or the spirit of any rule of Scripture. If, however, any one chooses to spend that day in giving help—physical, mental, or spiritual—to the many who are in need all around us, he, no doubt, will have made the best use of Sunday; the best use, whether he shall have spent it in sawing wood for the sick and childless widow, or in taking the poorest of the city children out into the green fields for recreation, or in explaining the love of God to one who has been left in doubt and darkness by the preaching of some theology of the dismal sort.

Let us keep Sunday separate from the customary labors of the week, because of the manifold uses to which such separation may be instrumental. Let us, as a general rule, keep it separate, even while recognizing the fact that the Bible lays down no rule whatever upon that subject.

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*For this Tract, and another entitled*

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