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THE TWO DOCTRINES OF THE BIBLE ON
SABBATH-KEEPING.

I. THE OLD TESTAMENT.

THE SEVENTH DAY SANCTIFIED.—Near the opening of the second chapter of the book of Genesis we find this passage:—

“God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.”

The comment made by Jesus upon this statement of the Hebrew historian (mentioned on page 4 of this tract) is very significant and instructive. All that needs to be said here upon the passage above quoted from Genesis is, that *it does not direct any human being to do, or not to do, any thing whatever*. It alleges something to have been done by God, but gives no command to men.

FIRST COMMAND TO MEN TO OBSERVE A SABBATH.—The original institution of a Sabbath *to be observed by human beings* (the first mention of it in the Bible) is in the twenty-third verse of the sixteenth chapter of Exodus. Speaking to the Hebrews “on the sixth day” (verse 22d), Moses said to them, “*To-morrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the Lord.*”

On the morrow, the seventh day, Moses said (speaking of the manna which they had previously gathered): “*Eat that to-day; for to-day is a Sabbath unto the Lord; to-day ye shall not find it in the field. Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, in it there shall be none.*” But the people, having evidently known nothing of Sabbath observance before, did not put perfect confidence in this statement; and the narrative proceeds: “*And it came to pass that there went out some of the people on the seventh day for to gather, and they found none. And the Lord said unto Moses, How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws? See, for that the Lord hath given you the Sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day. So the people rested on the seventh day.*”

Now my point is, that the observance of the Sabbath was here expressly fixed for a definite day. On that day travel and one kind of labor were expressly forbidden. The Hebrews were not to gather manna, and were not to go out of their place on a certain fixed day,

the seventh. And the record proceeds to state that they *did* rest on that day.

Now, when, four chapters after (about one month after: compare Ex. xvi. 1-29, and Ex. xix. 1, xx. 8), the solemn command is given to these same people, — “Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy,” — is it not in the highest degree probable that the Sabbath here spoken of is the same that they had been observing for the month past? And does not this probability become certainty when it is immediately added, “Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work, *but the seventh day is the Sabbath*”?

The day is here proved to be not merely a seventh part of time, to be chosen by each according to his pleasure, but a particular day of the week, which the Hebrews were already getting accustomed to observe. This day they still observe; and the name of this day is Saturday, alike by their usage and ours. There is no more doubt that the seventh day of the Fourth-Commandment-Sabbath is Saturday than that the “first day of the week,” spoken of in the New Testament, is Sunday.

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT. — Having thus shown the connection of the Fourth Commandment of the Hebrew Decalogue with the first command in the Bible to any man to observe a Sabbath (recorded Exodus, sixteenth chapter, and occurring chronologically only a month earlier), I proceed to give the whole of that Fourth Commandment. It is as follows: —

“Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath-day, and hallowed it.” — Ex. xx. 8-11.

This command has a wider scope than the one recorded in the sixteenth chapter. That one (addressed to the Hebrews, and to them only, since no other nation depended on manna for food) forbade them to gather manna, and also to leave their appointed places, on Saturday, the seventh day of the week. This one, addressed to the same people, required them to remember that same Saturday-Sabbath, and to observe it by not doing “any work.”

THE SABBATH APPOINTED AND INTENDED ONLY FOR THE HEBREWS. — We have seen that the first command in the Bible directing any man to keep a Sabbath was given to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and reaffirmed at the giving of the law at Mount Sinai. In accordance with this, the lawgivers and prophets of the Hebrews continually repeated the injunction to them to con-

tinue this observance, and to regard it as a sacred duty, no less than circumcision, the observance of the new moons, and the offering of sacrifices; and, moreover, in many of these commands the limitation of them to the Hebrews is distinctly expressed, declaring sabbatical observance to have been given to them *as a mark of distinction between them and other nations*. Here is some of the evidence:—

“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily, my Sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a SIGN BETWEEN ME AND YOU *throughout your generations*.”—Ex. xxxi. 12, 13.

“Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign *between me and the children of Israel for ever*.”—Ex. xxxi. 16, 17.

“And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched-out arm: *Therefore*, the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath-day.”—Deut. v. 15.

“I gave them my Sabbaths to be a sign *between me and them*.”—Ezek. xx. 12.

Thus it appears by the Old Testament Scriptures that the Sabbath was not only an important part, but a peculiar and distinctive part, of the Jewish system. Nobody supposes that the Philistines, the Amalekites, the Moabites and Ammonites, the Hittites and Hivites, were required to observe the Sabbath. This observance was devised expressly as a mark of distinction between Jews and Gentiles. But the term Gentiles includes all who are not Jews; and thus Christians, *unless Sabbatism is commanded in the Christian Scriptures*, have no more to do with that observance than the Philistines or the Assyrians had. It was never intended for any but Jews; of course it was never intended for *us*, unless the distinctive law of the Christians commands it. Our next business, then, is to examine the *Christian Scriptures* and to inquire what says

II. THE NEW TESTAMENT.

NEITHER JESUS NOR ANY APOSTLE ENJOINS SABBATH-KEEPING.—Not a single writer in the New Testament commands or recommends the observance either of Saturday or of any other day as a Sabbath. We find there no requisition for the observance of any day as peculiar and sacred, or as to be specially devoted to rest or to worship. The Christian law being silent on this subject, the times of rest and worship are left free to be decided by human beings for themselves. Those who wish to set aside a particular day for religious observance have an undoubted right to do so; but they are not authorized to proclaim that *God* requires this observance.

NEITHER JESUS NOR ANY APOSTLE FORBIDS SABBATH-BREAKING.—There is need of making this statement in this form, since so many

persons who call and think themselves followers of Jesus cry out against what they call Sabbath-breaking. But, in fact, it necessarily follows from the statement next before this — the fact that neither Jesus, nor any apostle, nor any New Testament writer enjoins Sabbath-keeping — that *in the Christian system there is no such thing as Sabbath-breaking*. Where no Sabbath is commanded there is no Sabbath to be violated; of course, then, to Christians, there is no such thing as Sabbath-breaking. If an Episcopal minister should stigmatize dissenters as Lent-breakers, or Christmas-breakers, he would be no more absurd than those who, claiming to be Christians, cry out against Sabbath-breaking. The Christian system, judged by the New Testament, gives no injunction respecting either Lent, or Christmas, or a weekly Sabbath. The rules of particular churches bind only the members of those churches, and bind even those only while they choose to remain members. But if all the churches in the world should unite for the purpose, they could not manufacture a new Christian duty.

THE ANTI-SABBATICAL POSITION OF JESUS. — The ground taken by Jesus upon this subject was such, that he was popularly known to the devout Jews as a Sabbath-breaker. This man, they said, “cannot be of God, because he keepeth not the Sabbath-day.” He accepted an invitation to a feast on that day; and the record sets forth in no fewer than eight cases that his miracles were performed on the Sabbath; as if he purposely used that opportunity to show his perfect independence of their sabbatical system. He justified his disciples in travelling and laboring on that day. And in the controversy which he had with the Pharisees on that occasion, while they were maintaining the binding force of their Fourth Commandment upon his disciples, and he was denying it, he unhesitatingly made the claim that he was “Lord of the Sabbath;” a phrase which, *in that connection*, could have no other meaning than that he was Lord of it to reject it; that he and his disciples were authorized to disregard their Sabbath, were freed from the obligation of their fourth commandment, and might decide (as he said in another place) “even of themselves,” what they should do, or not do, on the seventh day of the week. He also commanded, in one case, the bearing of a burden on that day, in direct opposition, not only to the fourth commandment, but to the express and emphatic injunctions of Nehemiah and Jeremiah. And when accused in regard to this last act, he not only defended himself, but denied the statement (which they seem to have quoted to him from Genesis as authoritative) about God having “rested” after the work of creation. Jesus said plainly, “My father worketh hitherto.” He never needed rest and never did rest.

PAUL'S TEACHING AGAINST SABBATISM. — Paul, born and educated a Jew, and taught from his youth to consider Sabbath observance a duty, would of course have continued to teach and practise it under the new religion if such observance had formed a part of the new religion. It is a highly significant fact, considering his antecedents, that no word of injunction to keep either *the* Sabbath or *a* Sabbath ever dropped from his lips after he became a Christian. But we are not left to this negative evidence. He plainly teaches, in strong, varied, and multiplied forms of expression, that Christian proselytes from Judaism are *delivered* from the sabbatical obligation, as from all other distinctively Jewish obligations. Observance of days, to the Jew who became a Christian, was utterly abolished; and to Jew and Gentile alike, as soon as they received the doctrine taught by Christ, Paul proclaimed their entire freedom from all sabbatical ordinances. Hear him: —

“And you, being dead in your sins, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; **BLOTTING OUT THE HANDWRITING OF ORDINANCES** that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; **LET NO MAN THEREFORE JUDGE YOU** in meat or in drink, **OR IN RESPECT OF A HOLY DAY, OR OF THE SABBATH-DAYS**; which are **A SHADOW** of things to come; but the **BODY** is of Christ.” — Col. ii. 13-17.

There were at that time many Judaizing Christians, persons disposed to incorporate the old faith with the new, instead of turning decisively to the latter as preferable. To such Paul speaks of their disposition to Sabbatize as a suspicious circumstance, — as showing a remainder of subjection to the obsolete ordinances (“beggarly elements,” he calls them, Gal. iv. 9) of the Jewish system. To such he says: “Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain.” — Gal. iv. 10, 11. Still he claims for every man — under the Christian system — the right to make special and peculiar use of that day, or any other, if he shall think it desirable: “One man esteemeth one day above another; another esteemeth *every day alike*: let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.” — Rom. xiv. 5. This passage is eminently noteworthy, for two reasons: first, it expressly allows to Christians the observance or non-observance of a Sabbath, according to the preference of each person; next, the fact of such allowance proves that Christianity, as a system, does not require, nor include, Sabbath-observance.

“**THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK.**” — “The first day of the week” is several times mentioned in the New Testament; and the use of this phrase is so insisted on by sabbatarians, that one would naturally expect to find, in connection with it, some authority for the pretence

that the Sabbath has been "changed" from the seventh day of the week to the first. It is on the assumption of some authority connected with this phrase that the man who, going to church on Sunday morning, and meeting you setting out for a walk, accuses you of Sabbath-breaking. Let us look at the record, and see what ground he has for this charge.

We will clear the way for this examination by noticing that the first day of the week is never in the New Testament called the Sabbath. There, as in the Old Testament, wherever the word Sabbath occurs, it means the Saturday-Sabbath of the Hebrew Decalogue. The fact that "Sabbath" in the New Testament means quite a different day from "the first day of the week" is clearly shown in Matt. xxviii. 1, which says, "In the *end* of the Sabbath, *as it began to dawn towards the first day of the week*, came Mary Magdalene," &c.

The cases in the New Testament where this phrase, "the first day of the week," is mentioned in connection with an assembly of people, a coming together of numbers (whether for food, worship, preaching, or any thing else), are just two; two, and no more. They are the following:—

"Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus," &c. — John xx. 19.

"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." — Acts xx. 7.

Here are two historical facts: 1. The disciples of Jesus met together as quietly and secretly as possible on a Sunday evening in Jerusalem, two days after their dispersion in consequence of the crucifixion of their master. 2. A considerable time after this, the Christians in Troas, in Asia Minor, came together on a Sunday evening to break bread, and to hear an exhortation from Paul, who was going away the next morning.

From just these two little facts, the mention in the Christian records of Sunday evening as the time when two meetings were held, the following unauthorized assumptions are made:—

That all Christians, everywhere, are to hold meetings every Sunday.

That they are not merely to copy these scattered instances of what the early disciples did, by meeting on Sunday evening, but to devote the whole of every Sunday to rest and worship.

That these things are *God's command*, instead of merely somebody's inference from insufficient premises!

And that God intended, by the mention that these two scattered meetings took place on Sunday evening, to have it understood that a

Sunday-Sabbath was thenceforth to be binding upon Christians, in place of the obsolete Saturday-Sabbath of the Jews?

Is it not absurd, to attempt to manufacture a Christian Sabbath out of these two evenings of "the first day of the week"?

But they do it because there is nothing else in the New Testament to make a Sabbath of.

Let it further be noted that, even on the unproved supposition that these two evening meetings were held for worship, there is not the slightest reason to doubt that the disciples went to them after spending the daylight hours in their ordinary bread-earning occupation. The pretence of a sabbatical day preceding these evening assemblages is destitute alike of evidence and probability.

OUR STATE SUNDAY LAWS FOUNDED IN ERROR.—It is certain that the Sunday laws in our various States had their origin in an erroneous impression (derived from the teaching of certain religious sects), that a sabbatical observance of Sunday is one of the injunctions of Christianity; and this error continues to be taught by various organs of sectarian propagandism, — the pulpit, the periodical religious press, and the various tract societies. If these powerful instrumentalities attempted only to persuade men that it is *desirable* to use Sunday as a Sabbath, no one would object to their doing so. Their right is unquestionable to hold that belief, and to express it; but when they go further (as they systematically do), and say that *God* commands such observance, that *Christianity* includes it, and that the *Bible* requires it, they teach false doctrine, libel the Creator, misrepresent the system taught by Jesus and Paul, seek to graft a new duty upon the Christianity which Jesus and Paul taught, and make a claim utterly without foundation in regard to the teachings of both Old and New Testaments. It is time that popular intelligence, and a just estimate of Christian liberty, should put a stop to this presumption.

THE RIGHT USES OF SUNDAY.—Christianity does not set apart any day for religion; but it does something much better: it requires that we apply religious principle to the labor and rest and recreation of *every* day. The New Testament leaves the uses of Sunday just as much to the choice of mankind, and the choice of each individual, as those of Monday. Therefore, he who demands of another special acts or special omissions as the Christian duty of Sunday, or who rebukes another for acts or omissions on that day which would be right on any other day, usurps a power altogether unauthorized, and sets up a claim of lordship over God's heritage. The man who accuses you of Sabbath-breaking shows himself either utterly ignorant of Christianity, or disposed to exercise an unauthorized interference with your Christian liberty.

Let it be noted, however, that in claiming, as to the uses of Sunday, all the liberty that Christianity and the New Testament give us, we do not propose either to make an ill use of that day, or to abandon a single one of the advantages belonging to the prevailing custom of holding it separate from the *ordinary* course of labor and business. So far as the customary observances of Sunday are good, accordant with reason, suited to promote the welfare of the community, let them be continued on those grounds. Let us keep such of the Sunday customs as are salutary, *because* they are salutary; and of this sort are rest, recreation, the social meeting of relatives and friends, and public assemblage for religious instruction.

In this way all classes can have benefit from the common freedom, each obtaining the particular solace he desires, undisturbed by the fact that others are differently employed. Those who want ceremonies of worship can assemble for that purpose in the churches; those who want religious instruction can meet for *that* purpose; those who want simply rest, or social enjoyment, can stay at home; those who want quiet recreation abroad, can go there. Why should not each pursue the course which he finds salutary, without seeking to constrain the will of others? The people who wish to spend Sunday in a sabbatical way are perfectly free to do so; nobody tries to prevent them; nobody proposes to shut up their churches. Why should they bolt the door of the Public Library in the face of the people, its owner? Why should they try to stop the Sunday cars, the people's only means of locomotion? Why should they insist on the maintenance of a Sunday Law unwarranted by the Bible, and at variance with the Constitution? a relic of the superstition of an unenlightened age.

A FALSE PRETENCE EXPOSED. — The pretence that the disuse of sabbatarian observance indicates disregard for religion, or neglect of religion, or the absence of religion, though very commonly made by certain classes in the community, is a gross imposture. The industrious propagandism practised by these classes has, indeed, caused a wide diffusion of false ideas and unsound inferences in the community. One baleful result of their labors is to make many people feel guilty while doing innocent things; another is to produce a comfortable sense of self-approval in people who are doing useless things.

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