

## ABOUT THE BOOK.....

Who of us knows the principle, practice and secret of rest? The author of this book thinks all too few. Our day is one of unceasing busyness, constant frenetic action, accelerated living, and consequent high stress, daily tensions and increasing hypertension. What then, is the answer?

Curiously enough the writer believes it is the most ancient remedy of all which can quieten us, bring us to a place of ease, increasing our enjoyment of life, and bringing the renewal of natural energies which belong to true humanity.

He also believes we have creative abilities which have become covered over, or even frozen by our life-fears. The old remedy is not only the Gospel of forgiveness, and genuine freedom from life's guilts, but the discovery of that rest which used to be called 'the Sabbath'. He believes that a weekly period of genuine rest is indispensable to the energies needed for our bodies, our minds, and that of us which we call 'spiritual'.

This then is a book to be read, not only by people of faith, but also by others. Here in our 'now-time', without the aid of Eastern religions, esoteric gimmicks, and dependence upon chemical tranquillizers or transcendental meditation, we can find what we need, for 'a tranquil mind gives life to the flesh, but passion rots the bones.'

# Sabbath Rest or Human Turmoil?

Studies on the nature, use,  
and place of the Sabbath.



new creation  
publications

Geoffrey Bingham

SABBATH REST OR

HUMAN

TURMOIL?

by

GEOFFREY C. BINGHAM

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## FOREWORD

The Sabbath question is one which deeply troubles many thoughtful Christians. On the one hand there are those who hold strongly to the seventh day as the true day of the Sabbath, and others who say the Sabbath as such is abrogated in favour of a newer, better day, the Lord's Day. Yet others' hold that the Lord's Day is really the true Sabbath and must be kept in a Sabbatarian manner. There are also those who say that the day does not matter very much provided the Sabbath principle is kept.

Doubtless no treatment of the Sabbath is going to be satisfactory to all. Nor does the writer of this treatment feel he has done justice to any one of these positions, although he doubts that any position stated above is the correct one. It may be an over-emphasis on one or the other which has caused any reasonable position to be rejected.

The purpose of this small book is to outline as far as possible the Biblical teaching on the subject. That is to come to the principle of the Sabbath so that we may see whether it is needful for today, practicable, and helpful. No ordinance of God is ever given in a harsh legislative manner. All God's laws are for the good of people in His universe and for creation itself.

This book may provide the material from which the reader can make up his own mind. The writer certainly believes that the Sabbath principle is for today, although he does not agree with all in regard to the modes which ought to be observed. He also believes that the truth of the Lord's Day has been given to lighten up the Sabbath with new and enriching insights.

Who can say how much of the formation of the people of Israel was assisted by the notion and practice-

of the Sabbath? Doubtless it made a great impact upon them. A people who can draw aside from the routine business of life to meditate, rest and worship, must achieve some kind of character greatness, and this none should deny to those of Israel.

It may well be that with a renewal of living Sabbath-keeping we too, as a nation, may find refreshment, and grow towards greatness.

*Geoffrey Bingham, Coromandel, 1981.*

*Note: Those who do not wish to pursue this subject in detail nor develop the background to its ultimate conclusions should commence reading on page 60.*

*It may well be that having concluded the book they will return to read the preliminary pages.*

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE QUESTION OF THE SABBATH

#### GENERAL QUESTIONS

How relaxed, generally speaking, are human beings today? The question is, of course, very general. Have human beings, over all, a history of relaxation or tension? Do they find it easy to relax, and evade tension? Is tension something which is to be avoided, or does it have a place in human experience?

What we are doing by asking these questions is leading up to the Biblical injunction to keep the Sabbath. We do not doubt that Israel was told to keep the seventh day as a day of rest. Similar injunctions were there for Israelites to give the land a rest each seventh year, whilst the Jubilee Year—the fiftieth was a whole year of rest, and also of liberation. Slaves, debtors and captives were given a remission in that year.

Given in that Jews had the principle of a Sabbath day, is this a principle of all mankind? Does God demand it of all human beings? Again, looking at the modern scene, is a weekly day of rest essential, and even indispensable to the well-being of the human race? Should Christians keep a Sabbath, and if so should they do it on the first or seventh day of the week?

These, and similar questions help us to focus on our subject. Doubtless there will be varying answers given to these questions, because of varying views, both sacred and secular. Let us then seek to see what the Jewish and Christian Scriptures say about the subject.

### THE MATTER OR QUESTION OF THE SABBATH

The books of Genesis, Exodus and Deuteronomy refer often to the matter of the Sabbath. The two statements of the Ten Commandments as set out in Exodus 20, and Deuteronomy 5, make it clear that Israel is to keep the Sabbath. These two accounts link up with the creation of the universe. We must of course examine them, but before doing so we ought to have a rough idea of the nature of the first five books of the Bible.

Scholars differ on the dates of writing, and the authorship of these books. Some see them as compiled and edited from former writings available to the author or authors of the books. Some claim they were generally speaking available to the liberated tribes, 'partly during their wanderings in the desert, before reaching Canaan, and partly after their arrival. It is difficult to resolve the matter, but what is very clear is that the books were written for the nation of Israel, and were primarily intended for them to read from their vantage point in history.

For this reason we must understand that they worked back from their contemporary position in history. The liberation of their tribes from Egypt would make much sense in the light of the covenant of God with Moses. It would make even more sense in the light of the covenant God had made with the patriarchs (reading back), Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham. Hence the Abrahamic covenant and history would be wholly relevant to them. In fact covenant would be a powerful principle in their understanding.

Given this in, covenant would make sense only in the light of the fact that God was One, and God was Creator. For example the judgement of the Flood would only make sense in the light of the truth of creation, and the mandate which God had given man in regard to his place and purpose under the sun. We mean that man was created to have leadership in the universe, and stewardship over it. The fact that man

had rebelled and had brought violence to bear upon this world justified the judgement of the unforgettable flood. However that Flood had been followed by a universal covenant, pronounced to Noah. God would not judge in this way again. The fact of covenant opened the way for the universal covenant with man through Abraham.

When the Israelite read back past the Flood, past the violence of man, he came to the Fall. The Fall would only be comprehensible in the light of creation. Creation then was vividly alive to the Hebrew. He would gain much of his understanding of God from that event. The writer (or writers) of Genesis would leave him with the impression that the doctrine and matter of creation was cardinal for knowing God. For that matter it was cardinal for knowing man, and the very creation itself.

### CREATION AND LAWS

Some unthinking readers believe that law as such came only in the generation of Moses. This is not so. Genesis 26:5 says, '...Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes and my laws.' Nothing could be plainer: Abraham knew and obeyed the laws of God generations before Moses was born. The law as given to Moses was an articulated and inscripturated law. It related primarily to Israel as a covenant nation. Whatever the value of its ritual, moral, sanitation and hygiene laws may prove to be, then and now, does not really matter. The Mosaic laws were primarily for Israel.

It would be natural for the Hebrews to trace the origins of their laws in the truth of creation, especially as set out in their own writings. Were these laws 'natural', i.e. related to the modes and purposes of creation? Perhaps a better question is, 'Were their laws functional, correlating to the elements existing within creation?' If so that would give them validity.

In fact the ten commandments are, every one of

them, rooted in creation. Some are shown to be explicitly linked with creation. Others are implicitly related. However the *functional nature of creation* has first to be understood. Genesis 1:31 (cf. I Tim 4:4, Eccles 3:11) says that when God had created all things He saw that it was 'very good'. This means it was functionally good, because 'He has created everything for its own purpose' (cf. Prov 16:4, Eccles 3:1-9). The basic laws or principles of the universe would, therefore, be functional.

The Ten Commandments are divided into two tables, love to God, and love to neighbour. The fact that God has created us obligates us to worship and serve Him, and place Him before all other persons and creatures. The fact that He is love means that love is the primary principle upon which the universe is established. Therefore to love God and the creation (including other persons) is to live functionally, and so, creationally. We can say that honouring one's parents is functional as well as moral. Likewise adultery is harmful because it goes against the natural (i.e. functional) order of creation. Stealing, lying, murdering and coveting are also set against the true principles of living. In that sense they are 'unnatural'.

Specifically certain matters are linked with creation. Procreation and marriage are of the true creational order. This is seen by a study of Genesis 2:18ff, and supported by our Lord's insistence that there is a creational order which had not been remitted. This is seen in Matthew 19:1-9. The ordinance of labour can also be deduced from Genesis 1: 28-31, 2: 15, 3:17 and other related passages. However it is the ordinance of the Sabbath with which we are particularly concerned.

The Sabbath ordinance is set out clearly in Genesis 2: 1-3, as follows: 'Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His

work which He had done.' So God blessed the seventh' day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all His work which He had done in creation.' We see that in Exodus 20:11 and Deuteronomy 5: 12-15 the reason for keeping the Sabbath is given as (a) The fact of God creating in six days and resting the seventh, and (b) The fact that God liberated Israel from Egypt, and so commanded them to keep the Sabbath. The reason given in Deuteronomy for keeping the Sabbath, i.e. liberation from bondage, is not the reason for the Sabbath, for this is shown to be related to God's action in creation. Liberation is not the reason for the Sabbath ordinance, but the reason for *keeping* the Sabbath ordinance. In other words the Sabbath is a universal matter, enjoined by God for all, and related to the way in which God created, and the reason for keeping it is its own innate nature and necessity.

The *further reason* for keeping it is gratitude to God for national liberation from Egyptian bondage.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE SABBATH ROOTED IN CREATION

#### CREATION AND THE SABBATH

Let us now look at the essential rootage the Sabbath has in the fact and matter of creation. It was recorded that God made the heavens and the earth, and all things in six days. He rested the seventh day. The days, whatever their duration may be, correspond in principle to the days we know as week days. The seventh day follows the work done. God rests. Obviously He does not rest because He is exhausted. He rests from what He has done, i.e. the work of creating. It is clear that He goes on working. Jesus says (John 5:17), 'My Father has always been working'. Sustaining the universe, upholding and providing for it, is obviously work, but it is not creating work. At the end of six days this ceased. In another sense of course we can say that creation goes on continually, but not a new creative work. If we call sustaining and perpetuating that which He has created creation, then of course He goes on creating. However the rest is designed to show that He has finished one work, and will not again apply Himself to that.

The seventh day is not said to be finished and done with. God does not set out on another series of six. However His action and resting are the paradigm for our cycle of activity and rest. It may well be that the time of man's history is the seventh day. God, in resting from creation is now occupied in another work, i.e. providence and redemption. Current time may well be God's sabbath. John 5: 17, i.e. 'My Father is

always working,' shows us that the Sabbath is not a time of passivity. In fact note that the commandment which demands a sabbath rest is also the very commandment which demands that we work, i.e. for six days. What is more we must do all that we have to do in those six days, so that we can enjoy the seventh.

#### THE SABBATH IS REST, BLESSING AND HOLINESS

In Genesis 2:1-3 we are told that God rested the seventh day and for this reason did two things in regard to it, (a) He blessed it, and (b) He hallowed it. What do these things mean? In Genesis 1:28 following the creation of man, i.e. male and female, God blessed them, i.e. He sealed the fact that male-female union and being was a good thing, i.e. a functional thing. Also His blessing brings joy, serenity, and vocation to marriage. Without the blessing man cannot accomplish the purpose of male-female union which is to be 'fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over it.' All this is connected with God's blessing.

Likewise in Genesis 2:3 (cf. Exod 20: 11), God hallows the day. This means that so far as God is concerned, the Sabbath is a special day, different from the complex of the other six days. Doubtless each one of those six days is also holy in that each day is 'the day that the Lord has made', and work is just as holy as rest from it. It is intended to teach us the completeness of what God has done in six days. It is intended to teach us to effect completeness within the working time, and turn to this other day for other purposes.

When then we are to keep it holy, we must not think of it as just a religious day. It is only in later Judaism that it becomes a day of worship, as such. Primarily it is for rest, or for action different from that which man has done in the previous six days. We must keep it holy by using it only for what God has

allotted it.

What we ought to recognise is that the Sabbath was not given to man because he had sinned, but *before* he had sinned. God had blessed it; it was to *be a blessing* for man. God had hallowed it: it was to be a holy time for man. Holiness and blessing go together. They are inseparable. The Fall did not alter man's functional need for such rest. Far from being a frustrating and restricting law, it was a liberating and recreative principle.

### THE UNIVERSAL NATURE OF THE SABBATH

The command to keep the Sabbath, whilst specified for Israel, does not originate in Israel. Nor is it confined to Israel. It was always a principle rooted in creation. God is the exemplar of times of work and the time of rest. This functional principle is what we all need to observe. It may or may not be true that many, if not most peoples of the world exercise some kind of Sabbath. What matters is that man recognise the essential nature of the Sabbath as well as recognise its usefulness. He ought to be interested in modes of keeping this day only for their functional value. Man is always in danger of legalism, and a rigorous spirit. The Sabbath is to free him, rather than inhibit him. All human beings may well be in need of the practice of this principle.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE PRINCIPLE OF OBEDIENCE

#### OBEDIENCE ITS OWN MOTIVATION

We will see that the principle Of the Sabbath is rooted in creation. Because of this it is (creationally) functional. Hence it is useful, beneficial, and needful. To keep the Sabbath is to experience those elements of usefulness and satisfaction which commend the principle to us. The joy and peace in being in harmony with God and His creation are such as to motivate us to further obedience. We discover the principle that obedience is deeply satisfying and deeply beneficial. *We do ourselves a good turn when we are obedient!*

#### GRACE AND LOVE MOTIVATE TO GENUINE OBEDIENCE

Legal obedience is obeying law because it pays one to do so, and does not pay one not to do so: Laws are regarded by some as restrictive, confining, and damaging to true personal freedom. It may well be the opposite. If laws were only standards, and demanding ones at that, we might be excused for disliking them. However God makes no law-demand which is not a simple functional fact of life, and which does not naturally bring man to well-being, and increase his usefulness. The contrary mind of fallen man makes him perverse in the matter of law. He feels it to be a restricting of his free spirit. Whatever the wrong thinking that is attached to law-demands by sinful men, the practical fact is that most obedience issues from love and gratitude. Jesus

said, 'If you love me *you will* keep my commandments.' John says, 'We love because He first loved us'. He adds, 'His commandments are not burdensome'. It is interesting then to see *the basis* upon which God demands the obedience of Israel.

The principle is first stated in Exodus 4:22 (cf. Hosea 11: 1), 'Israel is My first-born son, and I say to you, "Let My son go that he may worship (i.e. serve) Me"' Notice that true obedience is primarily filial. Hence Paul says (Romans 9: 4), 'To Israel belonged... the sonship...'. Sons obey the Father (John 5:19f) o Obedience is a filial and a familial thing. Creation shows God as Father and man as son (Luke 3: 38, cf. Acts 17: 28).

The Fall interfered with this affectional relationship. Man has seen obedience as heavy service. The elder son in the family of the prodigal told his father, 'All my life I have served you'. This to him was a form of servitude, not a time of blessed sharing with the caring father.

Israel was told, 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage'. After this statement Israel is given the Ten Commandments. This is so both in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. It means that obedience to the law is based on the grace of deliverance. 'Let My people go that they may serve Me,' i.e. 'First liberty (or, liberation), and then obedience. ' In fact this is the principle throughout the giving of the law. Taken one step further it is this: 'God makes a covenant with Israel. He is the God of grace in this covenant. He loves Israel, gives her blessings, and expects obedience. This is the true order.'

#### **INBUILT GRACE-OBEDIENCE**

In Exodus 20:8-11 obedience is enjoined on the grace of creation, and the nature of the Sabbath itself. Creation is God's primal grace, because nothing in creation has the right to be created. Being

created is great grace to the thing or person created. Secondly the Sabbath itself is a blessing to man. We will see that it is, in fact, indispensable to him and his well-being.

In Deuteronomy 5:15 we read, 'You shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out thence with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath holy.' In other words, obedience in Sabbath-keeping is still based on grace as well as function. God delivered Israel from Egypt. Therefore it should keep the Sabbath.

Although it is not distinctly stated, there is surely the inference, 'In Egypt you had no Sabbath. You had to work. You were slaves. Your time was not your own. Now God commands you a blessing in that you have a seventh of your week in rest, and the rest itself is needful for your whole good health.'

#### **LAW- AND GRACE-OBEDIENCE**

Much more needs to be said concerning the grace of law. In the New Testament writers rightly make a distinction about being 'under law', or, 'under grace'. The conclusion could easily be drawn that to have to obey law is fearful, and to be under grace is liberty. One does not have, any longer, to obey laws. This is a false understanding.

In the NT the writers are saying that when a man is under law he is under its curse. Failure to observe the law to the last detail will bring penalty and bondage of guilt. Hence the law appears to be a burden. However, in Romans 6:7 (cf. Gal 2:16-21, Rom 3:24ff), Paul says, 'He that has died is justified from sin.' He means that Christ's death is really the death the law demands from us for our sin, but that Christ dies this death (cf. II Cor 5: 14) and we are legally pardoned or justified.

In Romans 7:6 Paul pursues the argument. He is

saying in effect, 'When we had to obey the law—or else!—then it was a burden. When, however, we are freed from the curse and penalty of the law, we are now free to obey it. We obey in the new life brought to us by the liberating Spirit' (cf. Rom 8: 1-3, II Cor 3:6, II Cor 3:17, Gal 5:1).

In the Old Testament law was not a burden, except seen in this fashion (cf. Heb 10:1-3). In fact when we read such Psalms as 1, 19 and 119—amongst many others—then we see that the law was a delight to the true Israelite. He scarcely thought of its penalty. He enjoyed the exercise of obedience: It was a delight to him. It was his way of life. He could say such things as, 'I will walk at liberty for I seek Your precepts', and, 'Enlarge my heart and I will run the way of Your commandments.' He was like a tree planted by a flowing stream, fresh and fruitful.

And so on. We must see then that truly speaking the ordinances of God are a joy to know and obey. Amongst these ordinances is included the creational one of the Sabbath. It was not a bore to the Sabbath-keeper, but a source of renewal and delight. One indication of this is in Isaiah 58: 13-14: 'If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honourable ; if you honour it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.' We see then that the Sabbath is a delight, and so one will 'take delight in the Lord'.

If we were to understand-the Sabbath as a source of delight and not a day of gloom introduced by rigid legalists, then we would see the foolishness of not observing this 'day of delight'.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE NATURE AND MODES OF THE SABBATH

#### DAY OF JOY

We have just indicated that the Sabbath was not a mournful time, or a day of repression. It was a day of rest. Technically it was a day of 'desisting' from work. Work in its right place is pleasurable, even though man's work is connected with the curse on the land. Right as it is, it is also pleasurable to be free to rest from it for a given time. The commandment *takes away the guilt of not continuing in work*. As we will see, the work-ethic has often become a tyrannous burden to man.

In a number of places, especially in the *AV* and *RSV*, the term is 'enjoy the Sabbath'. The word technically means 'satisfy' or 'pay for', and is sometimes translated 'observe', but the thought is generally that the land needs the Sabbath, and so enjoys its rests. Note that it is not merely man, but also the land, i.e. not only the earth, but the creatures, the flora also. Why then should desisting from work be such a pleasure to man? It is not only that he is relieved of labour, but of responsibility. He has a 'smoko' between the seriousness of life, and the continuing responsibility of the original creational mandate. 'All work and no joy makes Jack a dull boy.'

As we shall see later deep joys reside in the process of thoughtfulness and meditation. Man is a rational and contemplative creature, and the Sabbath ensures him time for the same. His world is not work alone. He is a creature capable of great thinking and the doing of things outside his normal work. Marxian

dialectical thinking has the idea that man is alienated in his own universe where he has neither time nor opportunity to observe and delight in the works of his own hand. He cannot even observe his own work, so busy is he!

The very fact that God has blessed the Sabbath is grounds for believing it should be a day of blessing. His blessing of man and woman—male-female union—has brought rich delights to that relationship. Why not then the Sabbath?

#### DAY OF USEFULNESS

We will later examine the value of the Sabbath to the land. There was the weekly Sabbath which ensured the land had a rest. There was the seventh-yearly Sabbath which entirely rested the land, ensuring it was not overworked, over-cropped, and overeaten, so that the land would not erode, or become a dust-bowl. The nature of soil is that it needs to be given a rest, a time for the bacteria to do their work, and for the chemistry of the soil to enrich itself, and prepare plant food for the vegetation.

Much human thinking runs along the lines that we should earn as much as possible, accumulate what we earn, and so establish ourselves in security. Often this effort becomes frenetic. We are unable to stop. The Sabbath ensures this cessation from compulsion. It brings its blessings 'for its message is, 'In the six days you actually did what you should have done. To do more would be to do wrong. To do less would be to do wrong. Having done what you should have done, now enjoy an earned rest, and equip yourself for further work which will satisfy you, and be useful to your universe.'

#### DAY OF INTEREST

It takes little intelligence to realise that a day of rest is a day of social intercourse. Life can be so

busy that we fail to meet others, or have time for them. Now there is no excuse since there is no excessive business. We can give ourselves to social relationships. This may be in the context of recreation of mind and body, in hobbies or mutual interests. It may also be within the context of worship which is an exercise that profits a person greatly. Worship is always personal, and can sometimes be an individual exercise. For the most part it is corporate, drawing persons together in a common exercise of embodied adoration and service.

#### DAY OF HOLINESS

The idea of holiness in the OT was primarily one of separation. A holy thing was one which God had separated for His own use. He Himself was separate from evil, so that there was always in the universe that which was clean and pure, and which itself could attack evil and destroy it. However holiness for a human being is a state of sheer serenity and joy. It is a state of delight. Also it allows the worshipper to feel free and joyous in the presence of God. That he has a day separated for this purpose sets him at ease.

#### CONCLUSION

This brief analysis of the Sabbath tells us that it is conducive to the well-being of man and the creation. There is no question of a life that is rushed, lived in haste and panic. Perspective is made healthy when there is no pressure of time. The hasty spirit has opportunity to become calm. Work, too, is seen in better perspective. Man catches up in his mind with his own thoughts.

A thousand-and-one benefits present themselves when we think about the Sabbath. These become real when we actually observe the Sabbath. The disobedience of not observing this ordinance as other ordinances also is what disturbs man, making him unable to

settle into quietness, and desist from the guilt-compelled activity which is so often his.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE SABBATH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT—I

#### THE PRINCIPLE OF THE SABBATH

We have seen that the Sabbath was an ordinance structured in creation. If it were good for God to rest, then it must be even more beneficial for man. In Exodus 31:17 it is said that God rested on the seventh day, 'and was refreshed'. *The Sabbath then is a day of refreshment.*

It is also *a day which is given in relation to the covenant.* In fact in Exodus 31:16 it is said, 'Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a perpetual covenant.' It is not only a signification of the covenant, but is a covenant (or agreement) in itself. This of course applies specifically to Israel, but has general signification, from creation, for the whole human race.

In Exodus 16:21-30 it is shown that manna was not to be collected on the Sabbath. It was to be a day set aside entirely for rest. On the sixth day all that was necessary for the seventh day was given. We may draw the thought that if we labour as we should in the six days then *there will be provision made for the seventh.*

*The humanitarian principle is also present.* The wife was to rest. So must the servants. They too are protected *from* incessant labour and weariness. The cattle also were protected from excessive work. The problems which come with overwork, wrong distribution of labour and a host of ills do not arise in the same measure where the Sabbath is observed, and

thus becomes prophylactic against such suffering.

### THE HISTORY OF THE SABBATH

Genesis 2 does not in fact enjoin a Sabbath. We assume, reasonably enough, that the primal couple must have known the principle of the Sabbath. Adam was one who had to work. Genesis 1:28 outlines man's work-task. Genesis 2:15 says, 'The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.' '.... tilling and keeping', i.e. working and protecting are elements which can rightly be called labour and usefulness. Assuming there was a time of Edenic living before the Fall man must have enjoyed the Sabbath on the principles we have stated above.

Because sin has come into the world, and man is sinful, it is therefore difficult to accept the principle of law as beneficial rather than restrictive. Primal man must have had a view of all things as 'good', i.e. 'full of delight', rather than evil, i.e. 'full of pain'. The truth is that the world was complete. The Sabbath was saying, 'God has completed all things. Nothing has been left unfinished. He has made everything good. The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof. He has given man all things richly to enjoy.' Hence the Sabbath was the constant affirmation of this completeness and functional perfection. It was not a dreary Sabbatarian day, but, in fact, a Paradisical day. Doubtless it is to such a future day—a time of resurrection—that the writer of Hebrews refers when he says, '...there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God' (4: 9).

### ISRAEL AND THE SABBATH

The question arises as to whether mankind kept a Sabbath. For example, did the patriarchs keep the Sabbath? We have seen the early Scriptures were written for the mind and understanding of the tribes

of Israel wandering in the desert, or settling in Canaan and growing as a kingdom. The Sabbath is rationalised by the creation account (Gen 2: 1-3). Yet also we see from Deuteronomy 5 that the Decalogue is given because Israel had been a slave people liberated by God. Was then the Sabbath ordinance really rooted, and only rooted, in the Exodus?

In Exodus 16:22ff the command to gather twice as much on the sixth day to make provision for the seventh implies that Israel had known the Sabbath for some time. Numbers 15: 32-36 also indicates that the Israelites knew the truth of the Sabbath, and that violation of it was virtually unknown. Scholars question whether (a) There was a Sabbath such as Israel had in Mosaic and later times which existed prior to that time, and (b) The Sabbath as practised by Israel was not, in fact, derived from either Babylonian or Canaanite origins. What emerges from that debate is that although the Hebrew *shabbath* and the Babylonian *shabattu* have etymological similarity, yet the idea behind the Babylonian sabbath was different from the Hebrew concept. *Shabattu* is 'the day of appeasing the heart', and also 'the fifteenth day'. It is suggested that the Babylonian sabbath was to appease the heart of the gods, and not one's own-heart. It was a cultically appeasing day. It was not for man so much as for the gods. Moreover it was not a regular seven-day observance, for the *shabattu* was observed in certain months, on a religious basis.

Doubtless there is little evidence of the universal observance of a Sabbath, and virtually none in the antediluvian period, and the period of the patriarchs. Nevertheless as it was a creational ordinance, in principle if not in practice, then it was as significant as other moral principles, eg. the prohibitions against stealing, killing, and adultery.

In accordance with Romans 1:18-32 we would not expect to find a universal ethic or morality following the Fall. If we take Paul's statement in Romans 2: 14-15 to mean that all men have a *sense* of the law, even

though they do not obey it, then we would assume some kind of a *thrust* towards a Sabbath. Doubtless this is conjectural and speculative, but it needs examination. Romans 1:18 clearly suggests that man is deliberately suppressing what is the truth, i.e. he is rebelling against things as they really are, and he has a sense that this is how they really are. Non-keeping of the Sabbath could well be one of these.

Further to this, we must consider the principle of worshipping the creature (or, creation) rather than the Creator. Man's philosophy is that he gets what he gets by his own labours. Being autonomous he is independent of God. His idols are his own work. Indeed all he does is in this sense idolatrous. The Sabbath, for the Hebrew, was the acknowledgment that he did not have to work incessantly and frenetically, and in fact he was dependent upon God, and had every reason for so being. This being so we would expect rebellious man to oppose the principle of the Sabbath most energetically. The other side of the matter is that ego-seeking, idol-making, autonomous action becomes a compulsive drive by nature of the case. Man becomes the servant of his own tyrannous gods. There is no time to stop for contemplation, and should one be able, then the contemplation is ego- and idol-oriented. Israel, ideally speaking, was delivered from this by its worship of Yahweh.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE SABBATH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT—II

#### ISRAEL'S OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH

We have seen that so far as *ritual* is concerned, the two injunctions of Exodus 20: 8-11 and Deuteronomy 5: 12-15 enjoin rest from all work by man and beast. As to the idea of the day being *holy to God*, we need to ponder the following references:—Exodus 23:12, 31:13ff, 34:21, Leviticus 19:3, 30, 23:3, 24:8, cf. 26:34-35, 43. As regards *covenant*, i.e. liberation, we need to refer to Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, amongst other similar passages. As regards *observance*, we have the prohibition of lighting a fire in Exodus 35:3 (cf. Num 15: 32-36). We also have the prohibition against seeking manna on the Sabbath in Exodus 16.

According to their textual approach to the Old Testament scholars debate the time of origin of the Sabbath in Israel. This is a complex question, and we cannot here deal with it. If, however, we take the text as it proceeds we gather some of the following details:

- (i) *There were offerings for the Sabbath.* They are enumerated in Numbers 28: 9-10. We are apt to read back Jewish custom contemporary with Christ, or current Christian custom which makes the Lord's Day a day of worship. It seems the Jewish Sabbath was for rest rather than worship. We have seen that offerings were very minimal. Other days were more worship days.
- (ii) Leviticus 24:8 states that *fresh shewbread was to be placed in the tabernacle on the Sabbath.*
- (iii) II Kings 4:23 suggests that *the sabbath (or*

*new moon*) was the appropriate time to visit the prophets.

(iv) Bearing burdens or having commerce on the Sabbath was forbidden. This is seen in the warnings of the prophets. So Jeremiah (17:19ff), Amos (8: 4-5). In the time of Nehemiah Israel was warned against using the Sabbath for commerce (13:15-22), Nehemiah pointing out that it was because of profanation that God had punished Israel (vs. 17-18). Jeremiah's warning is that if Israel does not keep the Sabbath then God will destroy it. Keeping the Sabbath will bring prosperity and peace to Israel (17:24-27).

Ezekiel has much to say on the matter of Israel's Sabbath observance. In chapter twenty he makes a number of points:- (i) They actually did not observe His Sabbath in the wilderness. (ii) The Sabbath rejection was related to their rejection of God and their desire for the idols. This is important, because it leads to (iii) They refused the sign of the Sabbath, i.e. it was a sign between Israel and God that Israel was holy to God and God holy to Israel. That was the significance of the Sabbath—a hallowing and a covenant. *Instead of this they preferred the idols* (verses 16 and 24).

In Ezekiel 22: 6-12 the prophet describes the whole gamut of moral evil in Israel, so that Sabbath profanation is linked with all kinds of evil and immorality. It seems that the point we have made before is again emphasised, namely that Sabbath keeping is linked with, and equal to, all the other commandments. In 23:36-42 the prophet repeats the same theme, adding to it the abomination of syncretism in practice. Israel goes to its gods, offers bloody sacrifices to them, including the slaughter of children, and on the same day comes to worship at the temple. As a result of this evil God will judge the land.

*Isaiah* also has something to say regarding the Sabbath. Isaiah 1:13 shows God despising the empty observance of Sabbath. Those who do such have missed the meaning and so the true practice of this

ordinance. In Isaiah 56:1-8 the prophet predicts that those who keep the Sabbath, even though aliens from Israel and eunuchs who were not normally eligible for Israel, such would be acceptable to God if they kept His Sabbath. In verse 6 keeping the Sabbath and holding fast the Covenant are both equated. Thus true Israelites and true worshippers of God, though not Jews, will all be called to the house of the Lord, the place of prayer and worship.

We have looked at Isaiah 58:13 and 14 where to keep the Sabbath is actually a delight and not a burdensome ordinance. Finally in 66:23 the Lord depicts a universal worship of Himself. This will be in the eschaton: "From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before Me," says the Lord.' This then is a universal Sabbath-keeping, stemming no doubt from its innately universal nature as an ordinance and a functional principle.

#### THE INTER-TESTAMENTAL PERIOD

With the return to Jerusalem of the exiles there is no doubt that the Sabbath became emphasised. We have seen in Nehemiah 13 that Nehemiah introduced reform to change the people to true Sabbath observance. In 10:28-31 the rest of the people join with Nehemiah and the nobles in a solemn pact to obey God's law. In a way it is a renewal of the Covenant-Pact of Exodus 24. Embedded in this vow is the promise to keep the Sabbath:- 'If the peoples of the land bring any wares of any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day.' Again this principle was related to other ordinances given in the Law.

The observance of the Sabbath became extremely rigid. In the Maccabean period the ultra-orthodox Jews would not fight on the Sabbath and so were killed. Later on the Jews held it lawful to defend themselves on the Sabbath, but not lawful to take the

offensive on the same day. Thirty-nine principal forms of work and many minor ones were forbidden on the Sabbath. At the same time the rituals of the Temple involved work. Circumcision was permitted, and assistance at childbirth was allowed. Tending the sick if they were in danger of death was also permitted.

By the time of the coming of our Lord much observance was legalistic and even unreal. It is at this point we come to those views of the Sabbath which are revealed to us in the Gospels.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE SABBATH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

It is usual, for some readers of the NT, to see the Sabbath in Jesus' time as a legalistic ordinance, from which all the joy had gone. 'This is a generalisation. -True as it was in certain respects, yet the Sabbath was highly esteemed and actually enjoyed. 'The Sabbath day is celebrated by the very people who did observe it, in hundreds of hymns which would fill volumes, as a day of rest and joy, of pleasure and delight, a day in which man enjoys some presentiment of the pure bliss and happiness which are stored up for the righteous in the world to come. To it such tender names as "Queen Sabbath", the "Bride Sabbath", and "the holy, dear, beloved Sabbath" were applied. ' (Montefiore, 'Hibberd Lecture 507', quoted Dictionary of the Bible [Vol.IV], p.321, Hastings, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1902.) Josephus records,<sup>1</sup> 'There is not any city of the Grecians, nor any of the Barbarians, nor any nation whatsoever, whither our custom of resting on the seventh day has not come.' (Apion, 2: 40, quoted Schfall-Herzog Encyclopaedia of Religious Knowledge [Vol. 10], p. 136. ) It is interesting to speculate whether Israel had stirred the consciences of races which had opposed or lost the principle of the Sabbath, and had come to capitulate to a functional need of all mankind!

### THE SABBATH IN THE GOSPELS

The observance of the Sabbath was by this time, as we have observed, punctilious. Jesus himself observed the Sabbath. He attended the synagogue on

the Sabbath (Luke 4:16, cf. Mark 1:21, 3:1f, Luke 13: 10). Jesus of course upheld the law as given in the OT We see this in Matthew 5: 17-20, 15: 1-6, 19: 16-19, 22: 35-40, Luke 16: 17. Like the prophets he had no time for empty observance of the law (cf. Matt 5:21-48, 19:3-9).

He often crossed the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders by the way he used the Sabbath. On six different occasions he did this. He defended his disciples eating grain from the wheat they had plucked on the Sabbath. He referred to the time when David ate the shewbread because that was the commonsense thing to do (Matt 12: 1-4, Mark 2:23-26, Luke 6: 1-4). In Matthew 12:5 he stated that the priests in the Temple technically profaned the Sabbath, but insisted that they were really guiltless in the light of the true meaning of the Sabbath. Children had to be circumcised on the eighth day and by nature of the case this would often be the Sabbath.

His opposition to the current legalism was based on the true nature of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. What then did this mean but that the Sabbath was there for man to use and enjoy. It ministered to him rather than he to it. It was a time of refreshment for him. Once it became a burden to him then it was not a day of rest, but one of tension. Hence When Jesus healed a man of his withered hand (Mark 3: 1-5) it was surely consonant with the true spirit of the Sabbath. Likewise when he healed a woman who was jack-knifed (Luke 13:10-17) he said it was valid to free her from this spirit of infirmity. He insisted she was a daughter of Abraham. If Jews could untie their animals and lead them to water on such a day, then how much more should a woman-under other (demonic) bondage be released! Likewise when Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath, who had dropsy, and was criticised (Luke 14: 1-6), he asked his critics whether they would not rescue an ox which had fallen into a well on the Sabbath.

in John's Gospel there are two accounts of Sabbath-healing by Jesus. The first (in chapter 5) is the healing of the impotent man at the pool. When he is criticised for doing this on the Sabbath he tells his listeners a startling truth. 'My Father ,' he says, 'has always been working, and I, also, work.' He means that the Father had not ceased to work on that first Sabbath. To the contrary He had rested only from one work to take up another. The Son, like the Father, was ever to be involved in true work. In John 9 we see the occasion of the healing of the blind man. Jesus uses the action on the Sabbath to point out that his opponents walk in darkness. They are blind to spiritual truth and reality.

It is not difficult to draw conclusions from these events. Jesus was unmasking the absurdity of a legalised Sabbath. Its original intention was rendered null and void by such an approach. Jesus was restoring it to its rightful place. It is to be doubted whether he was trying to prepare the way for the obliteration of the Sabbath. He was seeking primarily to obliterate wrong ideas concerning the ordinance.

### THE APOSTLES AND THE SABBATH

There is no doubt that the early Christians attended the Temple daily, especially for the Prayers which were third-hourly (Acts 2: 46, 5: 42). They also attended the synagogue (Acts 9:20, 13:14, 17:1., 2, 10, 18: 4). They claimed to revere the law of Moses (15:1). There were, however, problems. With the influx of Gentiles into the church many questions arose. For the most part these were resolved in the judgement at Jerusalem that circumcision was not necessary for them, nor the sacrifices. In fact there was no endeavour to get them to attend either Temple or synagogue.

It was shown that both Jews and Gentiles were now free from the ritual, sacrificial and ceremonial laws of the Mosaic covenant. Doubtless there was much confusion, and certainly some division over such judgements

Galatians ought to be read in this respect. Those in Christ are freed from the law. Ephesians 2: 11-18 shows that the Cross finished the hostility between God and man, and between Jew and Gentile. There was no longer extant an authentic Jewish law, and the guilt of man whether Jew or Gentile had been dissolved in the Cross of Christ.

As to worship, there is no doubt that the Christians had their special worship day on the Sunday, i.e. the Lord's day, the day of his resurrection. That day spoke of new things. So then the Lord's Day was greatly significant. A study of Acts 20:7 certainly shows the Christians worshipping on that day, and I Corinthians 16:2 suggests the day was of some significance. However the claim that the Sabbath was virtually abrogated by the New Covenant is not easy to substantiate.

Suggestions are made that Christ placed the Sabbath on the same level as other Jewish ordinances. For example he showed the eating of the shewbread was valid, and so the Sabbath was on the same level. When the shewbread was abolished by reason of the Cross, so was the Sabbath. This argument is a little too neat, and certainly simplistic. Without doubt in Galatians Paul is saying that the ceremonial-ritual law does not obtain for believers in Christ. Yet he does say that the summary of the law is love to one's neighbour. One is freed from the bondage of law as a way of justification, and particularly Jewish law as a way of righteousness. However Paul speaks of 'the law of Christ', and the law of love, and in Romans 13: 9 says, 'The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."' This must mean that every commandment, i.e. the whole ten, are included in, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'

It is not true, then, to say that the Sabbath is evidently abolished in the New Testament. It may well

be true to say that the penalty for Sabbathbreaking has been borne by Christ and therefore we are free from that law as a means of judgement. The question of whether the Sabbath is valid or not for all Christians is another one altogether.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE SABBATH AND THE LORD'S DAY

We now come to an important matter. It is recognised that universally Christians worship on the first day of the week. Jews keep their Sabbath on the seventh day. So do Seventh Day Adventists and some others of the sects. If all the commandments are binding upon all Christians, then why did they not keep the Sabbath, and keep it on the seventh day of the week? This is a valid question.

Before we answer it directly we must examine the Pauline view of keeping days. In Romans 14:5-12 he says: 'One man esteems one day as better than another, while another man esteems all days alike.

Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it in honour of the Lord. He also who eats, eats in honour of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; while he who abstains, abstains in honour of the Lord and gives thanks to God. None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, -we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. Why do you pass judgement on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgement seat of God; for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." So each of us shall give account of himself to God.'

It is important that we understand what he is talking about. He is not only referring to the Jewish

Sabbath. At the same time he cannot be excluding it. He is surely saying that some people keep certain days as holy days, or festival days. So far as they are concerned he sees no problem, but he does think they are the weak brethren. If they were not weak they would not be concerned about such day-keeping. It is interesting to note from a comparison of Romans 14 with I Corinthians 8, that the weak brother is the one with a weak conscience and a weak faith. Both are in the one bundle. Doubtless the weak conscience and weak faith work this way: 'I cannot be sure of my salvation (i.e. justification) if I disobey in any way. Therefore I am bound to do certain things such as keeping special days, and not eating meat, but rather being only a vegetarian.'

In other words, assurance of salvation and certainty in regard to justification determine to a great degree whether a person can live the Christian life authentically. If one is somewhat doubtful then he will be afraid to disobey, or fail to obey those things which he thinks—although he may never express it thus—are necessary for him to *retain, maintain, and sustain* salvation, i.e. justification. This goes perilously close to justification by works, though works-after-faith. This was the problem which faced Paul at Galatia. Circumcision and the law things, for the Judaisers, were essential to be sure of justification.

There are, of course, certain observances of days and rituals which are not merely part of the old Jewish system, but pagan. It is surely to these Paul refers in Galatians 4: 8-14: 'Formerly, when you did not know God, you were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods; but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days, and months, and seasons, and years: I am afraid I have laboured over you in vain.' Paul is surely alluding to gnostic or other pagan practices.

Even so the principle of Paul stands sure, 'Let

every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.' If he is a Jew who feels he must observe some special day then it does not mean he is right, just because he feels it. His weakness, though taken into account, *is not good enough*. If he is not strong, then he ought to become strong. Meanwhile the strong must bear with him, and presumably, gradually bring him to conscience-strength and faith-strength. However, if the issue of the grace of the Gospel is involved, as it was in the Galatian heresy, then that view is anathema. It is not to be tolerated. Weakness cannot be pleaded since this so-called weakness is a rejection of the full grace of the Gospel. To be fully persuaded in one's own mind does not mean, 'Well, that is how I see it,' but, 'I have honestly looked at this matter from every point of view and I cannot see it otherwise, and at this point I see it as consistent with the fair h. '

Given all this in, what is Paul's principle of the observance of days? It may be summed up, 'There need be no observance of any day as above or below another. Until the weak who hold that there is come to a place of strength, aid and help them, placing no stumbling block in their way.' Because the principle of day-observance is the same as not-eating-meat observance, the weaker brother must be aided. It does not however mean that his day-observance is authentic, or his vegetarian principle *correct*. If in any way such observances are based on pagan notions, or attack grace, then they must be abandoned.

The question then is, 'Would Sabbath observance come into the category mentioned *above*?'

The answer to the above question must be, 'Yes, and No.' If any believer thinks that the keeping of the Sabbath in any way justifies him then his *view* of Sabbath observance is incorrect. If he thinks that by not observing the Sabbath his justification is made null and void, then his *view* is incorrect. If on the other hand he believes the Jewish principle of the Sabbath is in fact not primarily Jewish but creational,

then he should obviously obey it, though without any connotation of justification. Justification enables us to obey, but is not enhanced if we obey nor put in jeopardy if we do not. In other words, when a man is fully persuaded in his own mind that the Sabbath is creationally enjoined upon man in the same way as are the other commandments, then he must surely observe it.

If, however, he cannot see from Scripture that the Sabbath is creational, and is indeed Mosaic, then he is certainly free to feel himself free from its injunction. His non-observance would certainly meet the Pauline criteria of 'being fully persuaded in his own mind.' In fact if he saw this commandment as only for the Mosaic dispensation then he would be sinning by observing it, any way, in order to persuade himself he was right before God.

We must then examine the question of whether or not the Sabbath observance ordinance is creational.

## CHAPTER NINE

### THE NATURE OF THE SABBATH REST

The clear facts are that God rested on the seventh day, and that Israel was enjoined to keep a Sabbath based on two things, (i) The seventh day rest which God has taken, and (ii) His deliverance of Israel from Egypt. For Israel the day was one of rest for all humans and domestic creatures. It was a day which was blessed, and so would be a source of blessing. It was a day which was holy, and as such a sign of the covenant between God and Israel. As such this ordinance would be binding on Israel until revoked.

In regard to its universal nature as a creational ordinance we see that the creational ordinances were explicitly marriage, and labour. Implicitly they included love to God and neighbour. The real question then is the significance of Genesis 2:1-3. Was it designed simply to rationalise the Sabbath to the Israelite, or was it intended to convey the truth to mankind that the Sabbath is an integral part of God's creational pattern? Unfortunately the debate has degenerated into an 'either'-or', i.e. that either the Sabbath was an ordinance given by God only to Israel, and is not part of the basic moral law, but is partly didactic, partly ceremonial, and partly covenantal, or it is wholly creational, and can never be abrogated and must be obeyed to the letter by all, and forever.

There are problems in these 'either'-or' arguments. It cannot be denied that the ordinance is creationally related, and if so then is no more to be abrogated than is labour or marriage. On the other hand it cannot be denied that the Sabbath was given specifically to Israel, was a day to be kept under threat of

judgement, and was locked into the covenantal situation. It is a perilous exegesis, however, which associates it with ceremonial law, and believes that it, like circumcision and other such matters was abrogated, or rather was the strict law from which those under grace were liberated. Both wings of this 'either'-or' are too cavalier in their treatment.

### THE SABBATH AND THE LAW AND GRACE

We must first distinguish what it is concerning law from which the believer under grace in the New Covenant is released. The first thing he is released from is the penalty of the law. This is clear from such passages as Romans 3:24f, Galatians 2:16ff, and Romans 6:7 (cf. 7:6). When the penalty due to be paid to the law is remunerated then there is no guilt or condemnation to the believer. In this sense man is free from law.

The second sense in which man is free from law is that he is free from the principle of having to obey law impeccably in order to escape its penalty. It is impossible for fallen persons to do this. Allied with this freedom from having to obey law is the fact that one is justified by faith through the free gift, the grace of God effective because of the atoning propitiation of Christ. In fact the O.T. does not really hold the view that a man can be justified by works of the law. That was errant Jewish thinking.

Since then man does not have to justify himself by obedience to the law, and since he is free from its penalty, he is now free to obey the law, that is to say whatever law the New Testament sets down for the believer. This is called 'the law of Christ' (cf. Gal 6: 2, John 13:34 with John 14:15, and I Cor 9:21). When we ask what law this is we are told, 'the law of love', which is true. When we ask, 'What is the law of love?' then we are shown Galatians 5: 13-14, and Romans 13: 8-10, the sum of which is love, or love to one's neighbour. We also remember that it was Christ

who said that the law and the prophets were summed up in the two commands, (i) 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength,' and (ii) 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'

We cannot evade the fact that—excepting the Sabbath commandment—love to God and neighbour are nine of the commandments. Why then, when the nine are taken as moral laws, should the Sabbath commandment be called ceremonial, and worthy only of abrogation in a time of grace? This certainly sounds like special pleading. It is hard to escape the fact that when Paul says in the context of Romans. 13: 8-10, 'and any other commandment', this must surely include the commandment concerning the Sabbath. What then is the answer to our question, 'Is the Sabbath commandment abrogated or not?'

### THE SABBATH, ABROGATED OR NOT?

The answer pivots around the point of the nature of the Sabbath, and the command relating to it, namely, 'Is the Sabbath ordinance a moral, or merely a ceremonial one?' Surely it is a moral one. In a later chapter we will deal with the intrinsic nature of the Sabbath and its indispensability to the well-being of man, including his moral well-being. Here we make the point that the Sabbath is self-evidently a creational principle, and *can by no means be abrogated*. We might as well seek to revoke marriage! We might as well seek to revoke the mandate God has given to man for his vocation on earth!

The answer surely runs along lines such as these. 'The Sabbath is a creational matter. Men should keep it: they would benefit by so doing. Indeed it is essential to labour and marriage, both of which cover the whole gamut of human endeavour and living. However *God never made it an issue until He gave it to His covenantal people, Israel, along with the other moral principles*. It was especially rooted in the fact that

Israel was a holy people, that they needed to know rest where they had laboured without it, as they also needed to give rest to their own servants or slaves a sign that they remembered the mercy of God in liberating them from Egypt. God made a special issue with Israel on these scores, but then a new situation was to come. The prophet predicted that the Sabbath had eschatological and prophetic connotation. The *coming of the Kingdom would bring liberation at a deeper level than ever known in emancipation from Egypt*. The new prophet, the new Moses (cf. Deut 18:15-22, cf. Acts 3:22-26, Heb 3:1-6, etc.), the Messiah, the Davidic King, the mediator of the New Covenant, the Suffering Servant—this One Liberator (Luke 4: 18, Isa 61: 1, John 8: 34, Luke 1:71-75) would usher in the era of the Kingdom, of the New Covenant, of redemption and true sonship. In this era obedience would be from the heart (Rom 6: 17, cf. Deut 30:6, John 14:15, I John 5:1-3). Grace, in this age, would be the true teacher, and not law (Titus 2: 11-13). The law of love would be fulfilled from the heart (Jet 31: 31-34), and that law would be the internal work of the Spirit, i.e. the 'internalised law of love'. Cf. Romans 5:5, Galatians 5:22-23, 5:16, 18, 25.

'In this new era the Sabbath would not obtrude as a mandatory sign and condition of the New Covenant. The Covenant with Moses was one of promised obedience (Exodus 24), and carried penalties for the breaking of it. The New Covenant has no such explicit conditions. If the Sabbath is to be kept, then no more or less than the other commands. In other words, whilst the principle of the Sabbath is not abrogated, the explicit injunctions, given only to Israel in all mankind, are abrogated.

'One then observes the Sabbath principle as one observes the principles of love to God, and love to neighbour, although in the New Covenant these are all subsumed under the law of Christ. The modes of observance are set down for Israel. They are not set

down thus for the people of the Kingdom, the New Covenant people, the sons of the prophets.'

## CHAPTER TEN

### THE TRUE NATURE OF THE SABBATH ISRAEL'S OBLIGATORY OBSERVANCE

It is clear that no modes were set down prior to the time of the covenant with Israel. We assume that Abraham, for example, observed the principle of the Sabbath. This would be included in God's commendation of his obedience to Him (Gen 26: 4-5). The fact that there is no mention of Sabbathbreaking or Sabbath-keeping from Genesis to Exodus must surely indicate that it was not treated with the special importance it is treated when it comes to Israel and its significance for the Covenant.

This figures, of course. A people which was idolatrous could not possibly keep the Sabbath with the principle of rest. The Babylonians had a Sabbath of sorts but it was a day which was unlucky. One had to pacify the gods rather than receive their gifts of rest and contemplation! We have seen that Ezekiel, time and again, conveys the thought that the Sabbath is inimical to idolatry as idolatry is inimical to the Sabbath. In fact for *Israel* the Sabbath was indispensable to true worship and service of God.

When we discover this key we can really understand why Sabbathbreaking was so reprehensible. It meant that Israel was idolatrous where it failed to keep the Sabbath. Sabbathbreaking accelerated idolatry in that conditions were favourable to idolatry, and inimical to true rest, meditation, contemplation, adoration and worship! Trusting in the works of one's hands, depending on one's abilities, and insisting upon autonomy are all elements of man's idolatrous nature.

This brings us to the puzzling statement in II Chronicles 36:20-21: 'He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfil seventy years.' This passage should be read with Jeremiah 29: 10-14: 'For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfil to you My promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek Me and find Me; when you seek Me with all your heart, I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.' We conclude from these two passages that God is insisting upon a retribution for Sabbaths unkept. It is not merely a matter of vengeance, or even of justice, but of the profanation of His Name. We have seen from Ezekiel that Israel profaned the Lord by breaking the Sabbath. It was the sign of the holiness of the Lord, the land, and His people. Israel had defiled God, the elect people, and the land in the eyes of others by its twin evils of profanation of the Sabbath and idolatry.

This then underlines what we have said above, that the Sabbath is not only a creational ordinance, but *in addition* it is of special significance so far as God, the Covenant, and Israel are concerned. *It is that special significance which does not and cannot obtain for the new people of God (the church), and the new modes of the Kingdom of God.* We may even say that an era has come, with Christ, which transcends any era before it in history. We would expect

then, not to abrogate the Sabbath, and not to enforce it after the Mosaic order of covenant, but for it to be greatly enhanced by the new aeon, principle or system in which we live as grace comes to God's people through Jesus Christ.

This is exactly the case. Before we look at the point we have raised we need to return to the principle outlined above in the two passages, one from II Chronicles, and the other from Jeremiah. In Leviticus 25:1-7 the principle of practising the Sabbath year, i.e. the seventh year, is outlined. Weekly the land would not be worked on the Sabbath day, but in the sabbatical year it was not worked at all. It rested. Verse two says, '...the land shall keep a Sabbath to the Lord.' Verses four and five say, '...it shall be a year of solemn rest for the land'. Hence not only must the people be holy and observe the sign of that holiness, the Sabbath, but the land too, must be holy, the sign of which is its rest each seventh year. Doubtless it is to this principle that II Chronicles 36: 21 is speaking.

Jeremiah, as we have seen, prophesied that seventy years would have to pass. The Chronicler says this was to rest the land, and so to sanctify the Name of the Lord, the Holiness of Yahweh. Daniel in his prophecy (9: 2) refers to the prophecy of Jeremiah, and then proceeds in the same chapter to confess the sin and sins of his people, and plead with God for them. The answer he receives relates to the coming of the 'Anointed One'. Once the appointed time has been fulfilled, God will visit his people. They will be restored.

All of this tells us Israel could not disobey God as His covenant people, and not be punished. However, at the end of the period of punishment good things were to happen. In the passage of Jeremiah 29: 10-14 God says, 'I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.'

So then we would expect that the future God has

for His people will not be merely a restoration of the land, and the people, and the sanctification of Himself in the eyes of the heathen, but this new era of which great passages such as Ezekiel 36:24-28, Jeremiah 31: 31-34, and Ezekiel 37 speak, i.e. the national and personal renewal of the people of God. There are other great passages also, Messianic passages which project themselves perhaps even further into the future when the New Covenant and the Kingdom of God will come, and when the Spirit will be poured from on high, and the years which the locusts have eaten will be restored.

It is in such times as these that we would expect the Sabbath to be enhanced, and the promises of this are also prophetically present. Isaiah 58:13 and 14 should be read time and again: 'If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honourable ; if you honour it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.' Also Isaiah 56: 6-8 should be read, for here not only those of Israel but the 'foreigners' also shall keep the Sabbath: '*...every one who keeps the Sabbath, and does not profane it, and holds fast My covenant, these I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer .... for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.*'

It is only when we realise the new era which came with the Son, Jesus Christ, that we recognise the fulness of Sabbatical peace and joy was not fully known under the Covenant with Moses. No wonder it is the writer of Hebrews who, in speaking of a better Covenant does not despise the Sabbath rest, but rather makes of it the high concept of the ultimate rest and bliss.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### THE TRUE NATURE OF THE SABBATH—II

When we understand what the first Sabbath meant to God as Creator, then we can understand the principle of the Sabbath much better. When we also understand the ultimate Sabbath, that which is mentioned in Psalm 95, and taken up in Hebrews, chapters three and four, then we who stand in the time between the two, and who are released from Sabbath-keeping as a primary covenant-keeping ordinance, can surely come to know the magnificence of the Sabbath principle, and learn to live in the goodness of it.

What is it about the Sabbath that is so fascinating? Why does man feel compelled to seek rest? Why do we have 'rest homes', and why do we speak of 'retreats'? Is it that man is compelled at some time or another to seek such a rest, a time of desisting from life as he has known it, a renewing retreat from frenetic 'reality'? Why is it that men leave the rush of the world and like Thoreau or some monk or acolyte seek refuge in silence? Why do meditators look inward, or outward, seat themselves like Simon Stylites on a pole, seeking to find more than they are trying to escape from?

If we think of the Sabbath as an imposition on Israel, a standard they must reach which is repugnant to their vital spirits, then we are wrong. The Sabbath is tailored to meet man's deepest needs. He was not created to be a creature of incessant compulsive action, but to have only that action which issues from a true relationship with his Creator-Father. He was to know only the will of God, and to do that alone. That will was meant to be his freedom, not his bond-

age. The Son who became incarnate had written of him, in the volume of the book, 'I delight to do Thy will, O God!'

When we ask how he knew that will we are told that he would spend all night in prayer on some occasions; that he talked with his Father about what he should do, whom he should choose for his disciples, albeit one of them must be Judas. We know then that he drew aside from even the legitimate pressures of life in order to be quiet. He too took his Sabbaths. He lived in good mental and spiritual and physical health, for these were all of the one piece.

*That is why he was man's true Sabbath.* On one occasion he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and cried, 'Father, Lord of heaven and earth.' What knowledge, and what confidence.' Then he said, 'I thank Thee, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for it seemed good in Thy sight.' He did not complain that the brilliant did not understand him but the simple did. He was glad to accept the Father's will, whatever it was. *For him the Father's will was not strain.*

This was why, and this was how, he could be the true Sabbath. He said, at this point, 'Come unto me all you who labour and are heavy laden, and *I will give you rest.*' There it was'. They had laboured and not entered into rest. Even though they had kept a Sabbath time and again, they had not had rest from it. They *were* still working, still carrying the burdens of life. *They did not know how to use the Sabbath.*'

So he became the Sabbath. He added, 'Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you shall find *rest* to your souls. *For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*' He was the Son of the Father, and never found the Father's yoke heavy upon him. The same yoke he wished to share with his brethren, that they might find rest.

*Compare* it then with the yoke of the idols, the

cruel lords and the gods. No wonder Paul uttered his words in tones of amazement when he spoke to the once-liberated Galatians who were now drifting back to a soulless bondage, '... now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known of God, how can you turn back to the weak and beggarly elements, whose *slaves you want to be once more?*' No Wonder he urged, 'For freedom Christ has set us *free.* Stand fast *therefore,* and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.'

When we think of man in his early days we hear God's commentary, 'Every thought of man's heart is evil only continually', and '...the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth'. It does not take much to imagine the lust inflamed idolaters hastening to their wild worship groves amongst the trees, their passions flowing in the channels cut for them of the idols and their own imaginations. No quiet spirit *here.*

We are reminded of Whittier's hymn, *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind*'. It is without doubt the classic on the principle of Sabbath rest.

*'Dear Lord and Father of mankind,  
Forgive our foolish ways.'*

*Reclothe us in our rightful mind,*

*In purer lives Thy service find,*

*In deeper reverence, praise.*

*In simple trust like theirs who heard*

*Beside the Syrian sea*

*The gracious calling of the Lord,*

*Let us, like them, without a word,*

*Rise up and follow Thee.*

*O Sabbath rest by Galilee:*

*O calm of hills above,*

*Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee*

*The silence of eternity*

*Interpreted by love.'*

*With that deep hush subduing all  
 Our words and works that drown  
 The tender whisper of Thy call,  
 As noiseless let Thy blessing fall  
 As fell Thy manna down.  
 Drop Thy still dews of quietness,  
 Till all our strivings cease;  
 Take from our souls the strain and stress,  
 And let our ordered lives confess  
 The beauty of Thy peace.  
 Breathe through the heats of our desire  
 Thy coolness and Thy balm;  
 Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;  
 Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,  
 O still, small, Voice of calm."*

What more powerful words than, *'The silence of eternity, interpreted by love.'*? What greater yearning than,

*'Drop Thy still dews of quietness,  
 Till all our strivings cease;  
 Take from our souls the strain and stress,  
 And let our ordered lives confess  
 The beauty of Thy peace. '?*

Then the final verse, taken from the life of Elijah when he drifted into the wilderness out of fear and inner exhaustion. God taught him that not in the dramatic—the earthquake, the wind and the *fire*, all of which he had witnessed—was the answer. In fact he had been a fireman upon on *Carmel*, but now it was *the inner voice* which moved him deeply: *'...and after the fire a still small voice. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle, and stood at the entrance of the cave ....'*

How moving is this hymn we often sing, but how many of us know that it was the latter part of a longer hymn, and that the first part speaks of the utter restlessness of mankind? Read it and see the poet's penetration to the heart of fallen human experience, and his knowledge of the idolatrous spirit of man:-

*'The fagots blazed, the caldron's smoke  
 Up through the green wood curled;  
 "Bring honey from the hollow oak,  
 Bring milky sap," the brewers spoke,  
 In the childhood of the world.*

*And brewed they well or brewed they ill,  
 The priests thrust in their rods,  
 First tasted, and then drank their fill,  
 And shouted with one voice and will,  
 "Behold the drink of gods." '*

*They drank, and lo.' in heart and brain  
 A new, glad life began;  
 The gray of hair grew young again,  
 The sick man laughed away his pain,  
 The cripple leaped and ran.*

*"Drink mortals, what the gods have sent,  
 Forget your long annoy."  
 So sang the priests. From tent to tent  
 The Soma's sacred madness went,  
 A storm of drunken*

*Then knew each rapt inebriate  
 A winged and glorious birth,  
 Soared upward, with strange joy elate,  
 Beat, with dazed head, Varuna's gate,  
 And sobered. sank to earth.*

*The land with Soma's praises rang;  
On Gihon's banks of shade  
Its hymns the dusky maidens sang;  
In joy of life or mortal pang  
All men to Soma prayed.*

*The morning twilight of the race  
Sends down these matin psalms;  
And still with wondering eyes we  
trace The simple prayers to Soma's grace,  
That Vedic verse embalms.*

*As in that child-world's early year,  
Each after age has striven  
By music, incense, vigils drear,  
And trance, to bring the skies more near,  
Or lift men up to heaven.'--*

*Some fever of the blood and brain,  
Some self-exalting spell,  
The scourger's keen delight of pain,  
The Dervish dance, the Orphic strain,  
The wild-hatred Bacchant's yell,--*

*The desert's hair-grown hermit sunk  
The saner brute below;  
The naked Santon, hashish-drunk,  
The cloister madness of the monk,  
The fakir's torture-show:*

*And yet the past comes round again  
And new doth old fulfil;  
In sensual transports wild as vain  
We brew in many a Christian fane  
The heathen Soma still:*

*Dear Lord and Father of mankind,  
Forgive our foolish ways.'*

*Reclothe us in our rightful mind,  
In purer lives Thy service find,  
In deeper reverence, praise.*

*In simple trust like theirs who heard  
Beside the Syrian sea  
The gracious calling of the Lord,  
Let us, like them, without a word,  
Rise up and follow Thee.*

*O Sabbath rest by Galilee:  
O calm of hills above,  
Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee  
The silence of eternity  
Interpreted by love.'*

*With that deep hush subduing all  
Our words and works that drown  
The tender whisper of Thy call,  
As noiseless let Thy blessing fall  
As fell Thy manna down.*

*Drop Thy still dews of quietness,  
Till all our strivings cease;  
Take from our souls the strain  
and stress, And let our ordered lives confess  
The beauty of Thy peace.*

*Breathe through the heats of our desire  
Thy coolness and Thy balm;  
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;  
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,  
O still, small, Voice of calm.'*

We are driven, then, to see that idolatry is not an accident, not an arbitrary action of helpless man. It is as deliberate a principle as ever man adopted. A

reading of Romans 1:18-32, as also Acts 17:24-30 (amongst other passages) shows us that man is a worshipping creature. He must worship or he will shatter himself to pieces. He must have an object of worship, love, and adoration. The image of God in him makes him thus. Hence he can no more do without his idols than an addict without his drugs, or his alcohol, his compulsive work or eating or ambition, his sex or his possessions. In fact these are his idols. He may choose from the range of them—and more: But he *may not not choose!* He is bound to by his idols, and his case is hopeless. ‘Ephraim is joined to his idols. Let him alone!’ Ephraim and his ilk are compulsively snared, hopelessly addicted. *They cannot enjoy a Sabbath.* If they were given it, and if they were to take it, they could only use it to further meditate their idols, and to spread their lives out in worship to their ruthless masters and lords’.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### THE TRUE NATURE OF THE SABBATH—III THE PLACE OF TRUE QUIETNESS

The Old Testament has statements which have not been neglected by its readers. ‘Some of them have passed into our language as though they were always part of it.

‘Be still and know that I am God’ (Psa 46: 10).

‘Know that the Lord is God!’ (Psa 100: 3).

‘They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength’ (Isa 40: 31).

‘He who believes shall not be in haste’ (Isa 28: 16).

There are many more such statements in the Old Testament. In the New Testament the spirit is drawn like a magnet to Christ’s invitation,

‘Come unto me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. You shall find rest unto your soul.’

No less the theme of the writer on God’s rest, the true and holy Sabbath rest, draws us to the Epistle to the Hebrews. The writer promises,

‘So then there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.’

Before we examine this passage let us understand that the heart of man does seek a haven of refuge, a refuge of quietness. The writer of Proverbs speaks of ‘a handful of quietness’. History is filled with the mystics who sought gentle quiescence. Quietude has been the goal of countless pilgrims who seek after it. In most religions there are mystics who scorn the activism, the turbulence of idolatry, and wish to find God. What they will do to attain to it is remarkable. There is a great history to the endeavour of man to

discover peace. The short-term endeavour may be basically chemical—the use of drugs—but there are devotees of peace who spurn these cheap ways, and reach out for genuine and deep silence in the soul. They long for a true Sabbath.

The history of the Christian faith is studded with the quietists, the Quakers of the spirit. The mystics such as Gerhard Teersteegean, Jakob Boehme, William Law, and William Blake—to name just a few—are linked with the theology of the spirit, and the practice of the soul. Quietism has had such strong critics as Martin Luther and John Wesley, who saw them as ‘a dagger in the vitals of a man’s soul.’ Often the mystical search for silence and peace has drawn men from the path of reality. In rejecting the restlessness of the world they have failed to enter into its need. Union with God is surely taught in the Christian Scriptures but the union, if it can be called *mystical*, must go by the name *faith-mysticism*. Our union is one of faith. We walk not by sight, but by faith. The objective reality of the truth can alone save us from the cloying subjectivity of the untrustworthy spirit of man. The esoteric can be highly dangerous. The occult is evil be it of the white or the black variety.

‘The things which are secret belong unto the Lord our God: but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law’ (Deut 29: 29). Note that what we know is what we are committed *to do*. Nothing could be more objective. The pattern is set out. There is no gnostic truth, no esoteric knowledge, no elitism of the spirit or mind. God is wholly practical. Our faith is trust in reality and obedience to that truth.

In other words, there is only one quietness we can obtain, and one rest that we can enjoy. It is that which is both commanded and given of God.

### THE SABBATH REST OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT

If we talk in practics of the human person, then

we know what the Sabbath is all about. *It is first about rest.* ‘God,’ we are told, ‘was refreshed’ (Exod 31: 17). Man therefore must keep this Sabbath and be refreshed also (Exod 20:11, 23:12, 31:17, 34:21, 35:2-3, Lev 23: 3, Deut 5:12ff, etc.). The rest is for domestic beasts, for the family and for slaves and foreigners, so far as Israel is concerned. *Secondly it is a holy day.* ‘The Lord hallowed it.’ Both these elements are shown in the creational statement of Genesis 2:1-3.

*So far as Israel was concerned* the Sabbath was a prophylaxis against idols (Exod 23: 12-13). It was the sign of the Lord having completed the work of creation, and the sign was between God and Israel—not the other nations specifically {Exod 31: 17}. For Israel it was a time of rest, even in harvest (Exod 34: 21). For Israel it was ‘a holy Sabbath of solemn *rest*’ (Exod 35:2-3). Leviticus 23:3 says, ‘Six days shall work be done; but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation; you shall do no work; it is a Sabbath to the Lord in all your dwellings.’ Notice that this is ‘in all your dwellings’. It was a convocation, i.e. the whole congregation before the Lord, although whether in actual assembly or simply eating as a community—each family in its own home is not quite clear. For Israel it is the sign that God sanctifies them as His people: God sanctifies them (Exod 31: 13, Ezek 20: 12).

So far as humanity is concerned there is no reason to think the Sabbath is not the gift of God to bring peace, serenity, *refreshment*, and renewal to it. The reasons and modes of the Sabbath are specific for Israel, but this does not mean they cannot apply in general to the human race. Whilst the death penalty for not keeping the Sabbath is not applied specifically outside Israel it does not mean that in God’s eyes it is not a ‘solemn rest’ available to all. As a prophylaxis against idolatry its principle must still stand.

How then does the human spirit come to the calm it needs, the serenity which was part of created man,

and the tranquillity which is essential to man? How does man discover this 'handful of quietness'? That he needs it, and that it is indispensable to him is what Proverbs 14:30 says quaintly, 'A tranquil mind gives life to the flesh, but *passion* rots the bones.' *Passion* really means envy, jealousy, intensity, compulsive zeal, and the like.

The rest of the human spirit is easy to define. It is simply a human being who accepts the truth of God, His creation, His mankind, and all things and lives in accordance with these. A simpler way of saying it: 'He who lives according to the moral law of God, with obedience from the heart.' The moral law can be seen as the Ten Commandments, or as the law of love. He who lives this way will be free from idolatry, free in the true and full expression of his love, worship and adoration for God, and his love for all men, friends and enemies alike.

Whilst the statement is simple enough the difficulties can be seen to be immense. Who would live as we have just indicated? Yet man, loved and redeemed by God can set out to do just that. In doing this he can have peace in his spirit. It is in fact from his experience of God's love that he has peace in his spirit, and this motivates him to heartfelt obedience. This is the man who needs his Sabbaths to aid, renew and recreate him. In other words, when a man has peace with God, and so peace from God, he needs constant renewal in that peace by times of rest from general labour, times of contemplation and meditation and times of worship and adoration of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### THE TRUE NATURE OF THE SABBATH—IV

#### THE NEW ERA, THE SABBATH & THE 'LORD'S DAY

Sabbatarians are divided into two groups. Both agree on the meticulous observance of the day. Their only major difference is, 'What day? The Saturday or the Sunday?' What they mean is, 'The seventh day, as in Israel, or the first day, as has become the tradition of historic Christianity?' Both, however, agree that the Sabbath rest is what counts. Those holding to the seventh day naturally enough base it upon creation, and the added attestation of Israel's practice. Those who speak of 'the Lord's Day' base their changed day on the fact of the new era, the day of grace, freedom from ceremonial law, and the whole new way of life which has come out of grace. Whose claim is correct?

The answer is, 'Probably neither is undebatably correct.' He who is brave enough to say this will 'draw flack from both sides. Let us nevertheless look at both claims.

#### THE SEVENTH DAY: THE LORD'S DAY

This has all the commendations of creation, and the covenant with Moses and his people. The claim that the Sabbath was only ceremonial and therefore was abrogated by grace is not really a good enough argument. It surely also has as much moral connotation as any of the remaining nine commandments. Nevertheless the claim that the modes of observance related to Mosaic law are surely correct. These modes were never enunciated before the time of Israel.

Whilst the Lord and his disciples observed what was truly of Moses they rejected many of the interpretations of Sabbath observance which were contemporary. In fact Jesus threw new light on the Sabbath. He showed that it was a day made for man, i.e. for his blessing and benefit. Also that it was a day in which much could be done that was formerly called work.

It is clear that the practice of the early Christians was to attend the Temple and synagogue, at least in the case of those who had grown up as Jews. It was not the practice, naturally enough, of Gentile converts. In fact we know nothing about their actual Sabbath keeping. We have certain indications that the first day of the week was significant to Christians, eg. in Acts 20:5-12 we have the account of the church gathering together on the first day of the week. Such accounts of the church using the first day are plentiful enough in early church history. The setting aside of the collection for the poor on the first day of the week, as seen in I Corinthians 16: 1-2, is an indication that the day signified something to the Christian. The use of the term 'Lord's Day' in Revelation 1:10 is generally taken to mean the day that the Lord rose from the dead, the day his Lordship was made known by resurrection. This being so, it would account for the Christians using this as a special day.

It is often said that the Christians worshipped on the first day of the week, and there is historical verification for this. However they worshipped every day so far as we can discover. Doubtless Jewish Christians paid attention to the Sabbath on the seventh day. Beyond that we have no evidence of Christians observing the Sabbath, as such. If it comes to dogmatic insistence on a special day it seems there is a stalemate. Doubtless both sides would be motivated in their arguments by the position they hold. Few, if any, would be objective enough to see that neither argument can be conclusive. An excellent compromise would be for all Christians to keep the Sabbath on a

Saturday, and use the Sunday for the Lord's Day.

Once a statement like this is made it appears absurd to both sides. Both would argue for one day, that day to be a Sabbath and also the Lord's Day. Two days devoted to such would be uneconomical, impracticable, and so on. The facts of history are that the Christian Church eventually changed to the Sunday as its day of worship. Much is made of Constantine's edict concerning the same, and much is made of the fact that Sunday was the day of worshipping the Sun. Yet the issue is not quite so simple. Christians were using the first day of the week, anyway, and long before the time of the Emperor Constantine. Doubtless it was the fact of the Lord's Day which figured largely with them.

Jesus arose from the dead on that day, and for some reason or other chose to visit his disciples on the first two Sundays, and not during the week. This is an argument that is not easily sustained, for Acts 1 tells us that he visited them throughout forty days, and we cannot dogmatically say he only appeared on Sundays: Nevertheless the day was charged with great significance.

If we add to this fact the abrogation of the ceremonial and ritual and sacrificial laws that gradually became understood by Christians, and relate that to the inclusion of the Gentiles, then we can easily see that the modes of Sabbath observance were no longer obligatory on Christians. We have seen that one covenantal element was the liberation from Egypt, but here was a greater Moses with a greater liberation, and one which was declared on the first day of the week. We could easily argue that the Sabbath *principle*, whilst not being abrogated, does not necessarily demand the Sabbath *modes* as practised by Israel. We can argue that the new era had a right to its own times and seasons, if indeed it needed any. When we add to these thoughts Paul's statements regarding the keeping of days in Romans 14:1-13, then we are in the atmosphere of a life emancipated from the bondage

which the meticulous brings. Paul's principle is, 'He who observes the day, observes it in honour of the Lord.' This surely allows scope for the Lord's Day. It also adds meaning to his statement, 'One man esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind.'

It may be claimed that such a position would bring anarchy. If so now, then also then. Paul was prepared for the sake of love and unity to hang loose, so to speak, in the interests of love. He was not prepared to override the conscience of a person who was weak.

### CONCLUSION: FIRST OR SEVENTH DAY ?

The real question is, 'Does it matter?' Has mankind in fact kept the seventh day in all truth? What of calendars, date lines, loss of days in history, eg. 'when the sun stood still,' and so on? What of date lines? What of the loss of a day, and one part of the world keeping Sabbath at a time different to another time? These are nit-picking questions, but they indicate that a seventh day at this time in history may in fact be a first or a fifth day through the quirks of history. Who knows? And who cares? Surely it is the *principle* of the Sabbath that matters. The Sabbath is a precious gift from God, given to man for his well-being, and significant of holiness—both of God and man. Why then not observe the principle, and keep away from the legalism of the day, whether it be Saturday, Sunday, or even Wednesday? It is doubtful whether the Lord of Creation and Redemption is legalistic as to this point, even if men are dogmatically

What really does matter is that man does not cut across the principle of devoting one day in seven to observing a Sabbath. The Sunday, or Lord's Day is often one of the most busy and demanding of all days of the week, and scarcely a day of rest for man.

Since the seventh day was not originally a day of worship as such, although it did permit domestic worship, we may have to revise our ideas of the Sabbath, and be pragmatic about the whole matter.

What is essential, functionally, to man's well-being is the true use of the Sabbath. This we will now proceed to examine.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### TRUE PRACTICAL REST AND RENEWAL

In chapters 12 and 13 we saw something of the need for quietness of spirit in man. We contrasted the restlessness of humanity caught up in idolatry and self-service, and stated that true worship of God is essential for true well-being of man. We will now seek to examine this a little more closely.

#### THE TWO SABBATHS

We can trace something of what the initial Sabbath meant, both to God and man. We can also seek to know what is the ultimate Sabbath rest creation will know, especially as it is set out in the 3rd and 4th chapters of the letter to the Hebrews, together with linked references. The Sabbath God observed, and—it may be—is still observing, was a situation in which God is said to be refreshed. This, of course, is anthropomorphic language, but it enshrines a principle. God has completed one kind of work, and it is pleasing to Him both to sustain and maintain that, as also to commence His newer work, predestined salvation and the glorification of man, and His creation. Such a principle kills defective views of Sabbath-keeping, and takes them out of the realm of dreary legalism and rigid practice. The day assures us of a work completed, and God continuing in His universe. John 5:17 and the comments of Jesus on the Sabbath undergird this rich understanding.

This first Sabbath also puts us into perspective regarding what we call 'creativity'. In fact there is

no such thing as human creativity. Only God is Creator. The temptation by the serpent was that man would be as God. This would have to mean that man could be creative. Man in fact can only cultivate what is already in existence. He cannot create out of nothing. He may cherish the illusion that he can, but he cannot. The Sabbath seals the fact that creation has happened. Man is not put upon to create, although he is given the privilege of cultivation. He can 'tend the garden and keep it,' but he cannot create it. He may even hybridise but he cannot bring a new species into being. His hybrid, given time, will also revert or its original stock be lost, but no new creation will appear.

The second Sabbath, that spoken of in Hebrews and other places, must also be significant.

In Hebrews 3:7 to 4:11 the writer is setting out his thesis. It is this:- 'God has His rest, i.e. that which began when He had completed the work of salvation. This He offers to men of faith. Men of faith must take into account those other "men of faith", i.e. Israel in the wilderness. When the spies returned at Kadesh Barnea almost all Israel—excepting only Moses, Joshua and Caleb—refused to go into Canaan. As a result the adults perished in the wilderness. Only the true men of faith entered into rest. However, in one sense, no one entered into God's true (eschatological) rest. That rest is not itself future. It has been since creation. However men of faith will ultimately enter into it. In this sense it was not entered into when Israel reached the Promised Land. Joshua did not give them the ultimate rest. That can only be entered into when we cease from our labours, as God Himself had His rest when He ceased from His (creative) labours. We must labour on then until it is time for us to come into that rest.'

In Deuteronomy 12:9-10 God speaks of Israel as moving towards the *rest* of the promised land, and speaks of giving them *rest* from their enemies. In this sense Israel did enter into a rest. In Exodus 5:5

Pharaoh is angry with Moses for trying to get Israel rest from labouring. The term rest is used for the hand when it is not in battle, for deliverance from enemies, and so on. Thus Solomon says, 'The Lord my God has given me rest on every hand' (I Kings 5: 4).

The rest God gives to humans is freedom from restlessness. David had cried, 'Oh, my God, I cry by day but Thou dost not answer me; and by night but find no rest' (Psa 22: 2). On another occasion, 'Return, Oh my soul, to your rest; for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you' (Psa 116: 7). Job cries out, 'I am not at ease. I am not quiet. I have no rest' (Job 3: 26).

God's rest, according to the writer of Hebrews, is not simply a rest which God gives, but participation in His rest. This is heaven. However the believer is warned not to be presumptuous, unbelieving or lazy. He must labour to enter that rest. Rest is given in grace, but it must be appreciated in works (cf. Phil 2: 12--13, 3:10-14).

What then is this ultimate rest? It is cessation from labour, from unquiet, from the pilgrim age, from suffering and persecution. It is the very rest of God. It is peace, serenity, and the sense of fulfilment, i.e. just as God completed His work and could rest legitimately, so man may do this. Relevant is Revelation 14: 13, 'And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them!" " In this sense Stephen (Acts 7: 49) sees the place of rest: 'Heaven is My throne, and earth My footstool. What house will you build for Me, says the Lord, or what is the place of My rest?' He then sees the Son of man standing at the right hand of God, and as he is being killed cries, 'Lord Jesus receive my spirit!' Praying for his persecutors he then 'fell asleep', i.e. entered into his rest. His works did then follow him.

Reverting to Revelation 14:13 we see an important

point. Marx claimed that the alienation man feels in this life is because he is not allowed the enjoyment of the works of his hands since they are exploited, and he, the workman, with them. This cry of the angel tells us that nothing we do will not be enjoyed. Our *works follow us into heaven*. Nothing is lost. Of course these are the true works, the works of love and obedience. The rest will be destroyed by fire as unworthy of eternal contemplation.

Living then, between the Sabbath rest of the seventh day, and the gift of the ultimate Sabbath rest—for they are one and the same—we are people who live in hope. Already we have the rest Christ has offered in his invitation, 'Come unto me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest...you shall find rest unto your souls.' That rest we have, for we have his peace. We are also assured that there are many mansions in His Father's house, or, as it is sometimes translated, 'many resting places.'

The rest we have is a gift from the restlessness of our sins, and the promise on which we base our hopes is an ultimate and perfect rest in eternal life. There will be no more sickness, the sun will not smite by day nor the moon by night. There will be no more pain, no more tears, and *no more death*.'

Finally let us observe a point from Hebrews 3 and 4. Some exegetes suggest there is a rest which we enter into *now* if we rest *now* from our labours. This is the (supposed) rest of the quietist. Enough cannot be said against such a view. Whilst it is true that the redeemed person is at rest *from* the penalty and effects of sin, yet his rest is not complete until he has laboured to the finish. To rest from one's labours does *not* mean to rest from one's own self-efforts. Certainly we should have none of those, but there are legitimate labours in which we must participate, and cessation from those can only be at the end of this mortal experience of life.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### THE SABBATH IN THE NOW-TIME—I OBSERVING THE SABBATH

We have concluded that Sabbatarianism must not be a tyrant. We must think of the Sabbath as an opportunity to rest from pressures of life which can be wearing and enervating, as also to 'have a break' from those labours which may be distinctively enriching and quite interesting, lest they too catch us up into a round of ceaseless activity. We need time to stop and think, to take stock of our lives, to contemplate the richest things of life, and to meditate. In all this we may also be working in a similar manner to Christ when he healed and taught on the Sabbath. We know that he did none of this without constant prayer and meditation, spending time as he did with His Father.

We first must be honest about the Sabbath. Every day can rightly be said to be 'the day that the Lord has made,' so that we can 'rejoice in it and be glad.' We can say 'Every day is a Sabbath,' but often when every day is a Sabbath no day is a Sabbath. We must be sincere and definite, setting aside the time. In this age when Sunday is no longer a day of opportunity for rest for everyone, we must select our day. We must be fair to our bodies, our minds and our spirits. We must receive the gift of the Sabbath, honour and cherish it, and rightly use it.

Some may see the seventh day as the ideal day. It may even be free of the labours called for in Christian evangelism, teaching, and pastoral ministry. Worship is a wonderful gift of God, but it can be for some very demanding, especially if they are called to lead it.

For some a weekday may have to be the Sabbath. Often for pastors Monday is the best day, although not necessarily. Having selected the day and time, what then may we do?

The answer is that the day should not become a stereotype. Doubtless in Israel it was a day of social intercourse, recreation of profitable kinds, contemplation and meditation, and to some degree worship and adoration. Since this is the age of the Spirit, of the Lordship of Christ and sonship under the Father, we will walk in the light of these relationships and ruminate on the gifts of God. Such will not produce stereotype 'How To' answers or methods. We may then consider the *principles* of Sabbath practice rather than detailed methods. Where there is obedience from the heart it is not likely we will develop stereotypes or stultify the dynamic things of the Spirit.

#### RECREATION

We have said that God alone can be creative, but we can cultivate what He has created. We can become jaded with constant work, especially if it does not lend itself to true cultivation. Hence a hobby may sometimes be recreative. Being quiet and listening may help in that direction. The use of the arts such as reading literature, listening to or participating in music, painting, sculpture and the like may be recreative. Physical action such as walking, running, swimming may bring renewal to the body and mind.

Even so the motives for these must be examined. Paul's prescription for the mind in Philippians 4:8-9 is helpful for guidelines:- 'Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you.' Some use of art and literature, sculpture and

music stimulates along unhelpful lines. Often sport becomes a passionate obsession. A hobby becomes a tyranny. One unwittingly is launched into a pastime which becomes obsessive. If, however, these forms of recreation are used in the midst of simple quietness of mind and body, and along with contemplation and worship, they will surely prove most useful.

### MEDITATION \*

Martha was obsessively occupied with doing things and Jesus rebuked her by saying, 'Martha, you are troubled and anxious about many things.' Mary on the other hand was interested in one thing only. She was able to be quiet and sit at Jesus' feet. She could take the opportunity because she had a tranquil mind.

Meditation is not easy to come to, and is an art to be learned and practised. The Scripture has much to say about meditation. Something in the human spirit knows that meditation is a part of true human living. Yet we often hedge away from it, feeling it will make intimate demands upon us. This is true. It does. Yet it gives us great rewards. It changes us from people who are obsessively busy to quieter, more contemplative people. It keeps us in our true personhood. We often think that people are by nature contemplative or they are not. We think it to be a matter of temperament or disposition, but this is not wholly the case. The tranquil mind is a matter of attitude, determined by our relationship with God.

When it comes to the way of meditation we can learn much from Scripture. On the negative side we see that man in his sinfulness has 'a foolish heart' for it was 'darkened'. His mind has become 'senseless', and his thinking 'futile'. That does not mean he does not meditate. He does, but it is on his own things, not the things of God. Paul talks about the 'lusts of

the flesh and of the mind'. Man is caught up in contemplation of his idols. His meditation, then, is greatly harmful.

The man of God has three primary things on which he meditates, namely God, the works of His hands, and His law. A beautiful example of *meditation upon God* is Psalm 63: 1-8:

'O God, Thou art my God,  
I seek Thee,  
my soul thirst for Thee;  
my flesh faints for Thee,  
as in a dry and weary land where no water is.  
So I have looked upon Thee in the sanctuary,  
beholding Thy power and glory.  
Because Thy steadfast love is better than life,  
my lips shall praise Thee.  
So I will bless Thee as long as I live;  
I will lift up my hands and call on Thy name.  
My soul is feasted as with marrow and fat,  
and my mouth praises Thee with joyful lips,  
when I think of Thee upon my bed,  
and meditate on Thee in the watches of the night;  
for Thou hast been my help,  
and in the shadow of Thy wings I sing for joy.  
My soul clings to Thee;  
Thy right hand upholds me.'

Notice the rich experience of the man who meditates upon God. Other Psalms indicate similar experience. Psalm 16:7-8 says, 'I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. I keep the Lord always before me; because He is at

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\* See *The Making & Meaning of Christian Meditation*, G.C. Bingham (NCPI, 1979).

my right hand, I shall not be moved.' Psalm 42:8 speaks of the desire of the Psalmist to know God in the hours of the night: 'By day the Lord commands His steadfast love; and at night His song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.' In Psalm 119:55 the Psalmist says, 'I remember Thy name in the night, O Lord, and keep Thy law.'

Meditation will be pleasing to God, for only man in union with Him meditates truly. The idolater is in union with his idol or thing or person, seeking a response. Man knows that it is 'the Father Who ever seeks His children to worship Him.' He prays, 'Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight' (Psa 19: 14), and says, 'May my meditation be pleasing to Him, for I rejoice in the Lord' (Psa 104: 34).

When it comes to *meditating upon God's work* we have the following:- Psalm 8:3 (AV), 'When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained'. Psalm 111:2, 'Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who have pleasure in them.' Psalm 77: 11-12, 'I will call to mind the deeds of the Lord; yea, I will remember Thy wonders of old. I will meditate on all Thy work, and muse on Thy mighty deeds.' Psalm 145:5, 'On the glorious splendour of Thy majesty, and on Thy wondrous works, I will meditate.' Psalm 119:27 links the law and meditation when it is said, 'Make me understand the way of Thy precepts, and I will meditate on Thy wondrous works.'

Sinful man, of course, does not really meditate upon the works of God's hands. He cannot afford to give God the praise, but chiefly he is unable to appreciate it all, since he is not in union with God.

Finally, man *meditates on the law of God*. In Joshua 1:8 we find that leader being told by God to meditate in the book of the law. The man of Psalm 1 has his delight in the law of the Lord, and in it he meditates day and night. This causes Paul to cry, in Romans 7, 'I delight in the law of God after the inward

man.' The writer of Psalm 119 speaks similarly. In verse 15 he says, 'I will meditate on Thy precepts, and fix my eyes on Thy ways.' In verse 23 he says, 'Even though princes are plotting against me, Thy servant will meditate upon Thy statutes', a thought he repeats in verse 78. In verse 97 he cries, 'Oh, how I love Thy law! *It is my meditation all the day.*' He claims in verse 99, 'I have more understanding than all my teachers, *for Thy testimonies are my meditation.*' Verse 148 has it, 'My eyes are awake before the watches of the night, *that I may meditate upon Thy promises.*'

We have touched, then, on the edge of the great experience of meditation. We observe that it needs practice and cultivation, and that it yields great rewards. The true Sabbath of the human spirit is not confined to one special day, but it is on that special day where it is best fostered.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### THE SABBATH IN THE NOW-TIME—II

#### THE EXERCISE OF PRAYER\*

When we come to this subject the scope is endless. Many too, are the manuals of prayer. However prayer is the life lived in conscious union with the Father, and it embraces the meditation we have been speaking about, as also worship, adoration, and burgeons out in praise, in intercession, petition and supplication.

Prayer in its simplest and best form is speaking with God. It is the same communing as is found in meditation, but then it does not stop there. This fellowship with God is the exercise which aids us in knowing the will of God, and it is within that will, and according to it, that we pray. We are told that if we ask in faith God will answer our petitions (Mark 11: 24), but then faith is, in the ultimate, obedience. We pray because we are led that way, and can do nothing else. If we ask what we will then He answers, but then we must only ask what He wills or He may not answer. Indeed He will not answer. Hence Jesus calls on us many times to pray in his (Jesus') name. Yet to pray in his name is to abide in him, since he is the vine and we are the branches.

The scope of, prayer is enormous since we are told to pray for all men (I Tim 2: 1-3), for authorities and powers (I Tim 2:2), for the brethren (Ephes 6:18), and indeed we need to pray for ourselves. The pattern and principal prayer—often called the Lord's

Prayer, because it was he who gave it—we pray corporately. We pray not only personally, but also collectively. We ask for His will to be done amongst us all, and for us all to have bread and forgiveness.

The subject is endless. The experience, likewise, is unlimited. Prayer is an exercise as is meditation. If we wait for feelings to come so that we may pray, then we will wait endlessly. Prayer is deliberate fellowship with God, and hosts of evil will do their worst to prevent us from having that communion. It is prayer which unseats evil powers and enthrones the good. What better time then than the Sabbath to give ourselves to this exercise? On the one day in which we can come aside from weekly busyness to seek the face of the Father, to pray through the Son as we are led by the Spirit gives meaning to Sabbath-keeping.

#### WORSHIP\*

Man undoubtedly is a creature who must worship, whether it be God, the gods, things or himself. His life, it can be said, is wholly absorbed in worship. Worship, then, is a relationship, in which, and on the basis of which, man serves the object of his worship. It can be said that worship is indispensable to man, and if he does not have the true object of worship, then he will never know complete emotional fulfilment, and so, in this life will never know complete satisfaction of being.

The joyous story of man was his fellowship with God prior to the fall. His sad story is his refusal to give glory to God, to be thankful, and his fearsome change of mind which caused him to 'worship and serve the creature (creation) rather than the Creator'. Sinful man is occupied in seeking out his idols. He makes a part or detail of the creation (which pleases

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\* See The Practice and Meaning of Prayer, G. C. Bingham, (NCPI, 1977).

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\* See Worship: Its Meaning, Significance & Experience, G. C. Bingham (NCPI, 1977).

or threatens him) to be the object 'of his worship rather than the Creator-Father.

In the Scriptures *worship* and *service* are synonymous or interchangeable concepts. In practice they are the one and words in both Hebrew and Greek carry this idea. Worship as we have said is conducted in the context of a relationship. *True* worship is true love, adoration and service. In Deuteronomy 10: 12-13, 11:1, and 11:13 the condition of loving God is laid down for true worship, eg. 'What does the Lord require of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and soul'. 'You shall therefore love the Lord your God and keep His charge'. ' . . . to love the Lord your God, and to serve Him with all your heart'.

The true mind also relates to true worship. Paul in Romans 12:1-2 speaks of the transformed mind and says that the surrender of ourselves as living sacrifices is our true 'reasonable' or 'logical' worship. This of course as against the psychic abandonment of one's person as we see in fanatical worship, and ritual orgies. True worship is our whole way of life. Our bodies continually show our attitude to God and man, and the levels of our worship are measured by these acts.

Family worship, and corporate worship are two ways of expressing the adoration and service for God that is in our hearts. Private and personal worship is excellent, and no less enriching and useful is corporate worship, whether in the domestic family of the home, or the wider family of the church. The Psalmist said, 'All Thy works praise Thee,' and man is never freer than when giving expression to his worship of God. There is something about combined worship which is not present in simple private worship, and of course, the obverse is also true. Families are drawn closer together and enriched by sharing worship, since God initiates that worship—the Father ever seeketh such (His children) to worship Him.'

Again we point to the Sabbath. The day of withdrawal from the business and busyness of life helps us develop the mind of worship, and then we are prepared in a good way to go back to it, and work better and more usefully. Worship, viewed from one angle, can be a drudgery. From another it can be stimulating, joyful, and bring us into dimensions of adoration and understanding of God which lift us from the mediocre and the humdrum into a way of life which contributes to the whole life of humanity.

### THE READING OF THE SCRIPTURES\*

Many Christians read the Scriptures daily, and this is a good exercise. Even so this habit is often exercised under pressure. There are many demands upon our time, some which are circumstantial, and some which we invent ourselves to keep us from serious reading, worship, and prayer. Be they as they may, the reading of the Scriptures is most profitable. Doubtless the reading of God's Word is the basis of meditation, prayer and worship, as well as gathering knowledge on the nature and purposes of God.

The Sabbath is a good time to give extra attention to the Word, and hear what it is saying to us as persons, to our families, our churches and our community. The daily reading can become a ritual. The Sabbath-reading allows us to extend ourselves. The use of aids to the Scripture such as concordances, commentaries, and even Bible Dictionaries and Encyclopaedias is a helpful thing. We gather up the labours of others in these aids, but they must always be supplementary to our own primary reading and study. Most of all we need to know what God is saying to us in the Scripture.

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\* See *How to Study the Bible*, G.C. Bingham (NCPI, Adelaide, 1980).

### FELLOWSHIP

The Sabbath is an excellent day to have unhindered intercourse with others. This will depend to a great degree on the day we have to select for Sabbath-living. Others may not have that day. If it is the Sunday then probably there are more opportunities both in worship-situations and social availability. The early church certainly had social intercourse as they ate from house to house, and as they cared, prayed, and shared their goods and gifts where there was need.

Our primary fellowship lies within our families. If it is not there first, then fellowship outside the family is unreal. Nevertheless fellowship across the church, other families, and the community always strengthens the fellowship within the family. Many families are too busy to devote their Sabbath time to warm family life.

### SERVICE

The family which is always inward-looking eventually suffers from its selfishness. It is richer for serving others as well as itself. The Christian is always involved in ministry. That is part of his life. He cannot serve God without also serving others. Indeed serving others is generally the way he serves God. 'By love serve one another,' Paul said. He also said, 'Do good unto all men, especially those who are of the household of God.'

Service includes many things. It is caring for people, discerning their needs, sharing the gifts we have where they are needed, and having pastoral concern for the flock. It is proclaiming the Gospel which liberated us to love God and share His gifts. We may call the latter *evangelism*, but then we tend to professionalise and specialise it by such terms. True evangelism is almost unconscious. It is simply sharing with others that which has been Good News to us, and

which can become that to them. It is all part of service.

### CONCLUSION ON THE SABBATH IN THE NOW-TIME

We know the history of dreary, prohibitive, restrictive, legalistic and dull Sabbaths. That does not mean that true Sabbath-keeping need be that way. It can be a rich joyous day, freshening us, recreating mental, physical and moral tissue and renewing us for the days ahead. Nevertheless we need to be taught about the whole matter, and allow it to be a day of grace and peace.

Doubtless the eschatological Sabbath will be a 'day of delight' (Isa 58: 13), but it can also be that now. The world may rush on its own way, pell-mell, since 'the way of a man is not in himself', but the community of God's people can learn to enrich themselves, now, with its true gifts and delights.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON THE SABBATH AND THE LORD'S DAY

To some degree we have discussed the relationship of these two days. We have seen that the Gentiles seemed to have had no sense of obligation to the Jewish Sabbath, and that they did not worship especially on that day. Some of the 'God-fearers'—Gentiles who had come to Jewish synagogues prior to Christian conversion—would have understood, and perhaps to some degree have observed elements of the Sabbath.

It does seem, however, that converted Gentiles probably looked to the first day of the week as the Lord's Day. Certainly it must have been a known day for John to have used the term in the hook of the Revelation: 'I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day.' We have seen that this was certainly a day of worship for Christians.

Leaving aside the debate as to what day should constitute the Sabbath we know the Lord's Day was significant. Jesus rose on that day, and it was the day which sealed his Lordship. The message of the early Christians was, 'Jesus is Lord.' Without doubt the Lord's Day spoke of great things, and frankly of things which the Sabbath of itself, had not spoken. The Sabbath had spoken of God's rest from creation, but whereas all the other days were, so to speak, 'closed off' by the statement, 'There was evening and there was morning—the nth day,' this was not said of the seventh. Technically speaking it may still be going on.

If it is still doing on then it means that it is not only the day of rest and providence, but also the day

redemption, in which case 'The Lord's Day' is a good title. If we take the Old Testament and New Testament title, 'The Lord's Day' to mean 'the day of judgement for evil, and of glorification for God's people, then the concept of 'God's rest', as used in Hebrews, eschatological Sabbath. and Lord's Day all come together, so that this is the dispensation or era of all which is moving towards that climax. Hence the value of the Sabbath-Lord's Day is not confined to rest, recreation and the like, but is also the day which assures us of dynamic renewal by the Gospel and the Spirit. It is representative of the resurrected Lord and the Pentecostal Spirit.

#### THE DAY OF RENEWAL AND RESTORATION

Under the principle of creation the Sabbath meant (a) God had created all things, and (b) Labour, confined to six days, was given dignity by a rest on the seventh so that on the one hand labour did not become endless and soulless—a slavery as in Egypt, and on the other that it was invigorated by the dignity of rest. One could be renewed for it. Labour of course was primarily to fulfil the mandate of God given to man in Genesis 1: 28.

However there is another restoration man needed. We saw his restlessness and inner weariness come from his sin and rebellion. We have observed that man is compulsively active in the 'rat-race' of human endeavour. Against this Christ spoke strongly in the Sermon on the Mount. However it is not merely a case of trying to desist from the rat-race, but to have our guilt healed which compels us to be part of that race.

Now it is the message of the Lordship of Christ his victory over sin, guilt, death, law, Satan, powers of evil, conscience, the wrath of God and the flesh which bring rest to the spirit of man. It is the invitation of Christ come to fulfilment—, 'Come unto me all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' Man finds rest in cessation of guilt, and

cleansing, from pollution. Yet he must go on. This Sabbath-healing—to coin a term—must be followed by the taking of the yoke of Christ: discipleship, if you will. Yet this ‘yoke is easy’, and this ‘burden is light’, and a man ‘finds rest unto his soul’ This kind of rest the Jewish Sabbath could not give.

### THE SABBATH IS SACRAMENTAL AND FUNCTIONAL

Once having come to this rest, the Lord’s Day-Sabbath Day now represents the fact of the act of giving rest. Man in addition may ponder, meditate, and renew faith in God on this day. On the one hand the definitive work of creation releases him from being a human creator, or fearing some new event in creation. On the other hand the Lordship of Christ which he celebrates in the Lord’s Supper reassures him of the continuing rest of Christ. His guilt has been removed. He enacts the Last Events in the Eucharist and looks backwards to the Saving Events, contemplates the grace of them in the now-time, and looks forward to the Eschaton when all will be sealed for him for ever. This, for him, is the value of the Sabbath become the Lord’s Day, and the Lord’s Day become the Sabbath.

Thus the Sabbath is no static day. His exercises of meditation, rest, prayer, worship, reading of the Scriptures, recreation, fellowship and service are no structured endeavour. The whole is dynamic and powerfully motivated in the light of the victory of Christ. Thus the frayed nerves, the restless spirits, the inner turmoil, the exhausted and satiated emotions of man are quietened, and the whole person is renewed.

As he views the Ultimate, the Day of Glory, the Eternal Sabbath, the crowning Lord’s Day with its eschatological climate, he marvels at the present sacramental and functional ministry of this day, and to it he submits himself humbly and gladly, for it is submission to the Lord of the Sabbath, the Son of man,

the true Son of the Eternal Father.

He can say with quiet confidence and at the same time exuberant joy,  
*‘This is the day that the Lord had made: Let us rejoice and be glad in it.’*

Also he can say, ‘Because of the Cross and Resurrection, because of the victory of Christ the true Sabbath has come to man’s heart. That release into peace and freedom makes every day a true Sabbath of the Lord:

## APPENDIX ONE

## THE SON OF MAN LORD OF THE SABBATH

‘One sabbath he was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. And the Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?” And he said to them, “Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?” And he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath; so the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”’ (Mark 2:23-28)

Jesus obviously did what he felt was correct on the Sabbath. In the text of our book we have seen that he disallowed the legalisms which had grown up around it. He saw it as a day of work where that work was beneficial to man (healing, renewing, etc.) as in John 5. He said his Father had always worked, and he also, along with his Father. The Pharisees saw things as being either lawful, or unlawful, whereas Jesus saw them as being either beneficial or harmful. This does not mean he refused laws, but he refused laws which were legalistic in temper.

In this passage he enunciates two principles:-

- (i) *The Sabbath is made for man.* That is man is to benefit by the Sabbath. It is God’s gift to him. Doubtless he must not misuse the gift, but then *the gift does not become his lord.*
- (ii) *The Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath.* The term ‘son of man’ could simply mean ‘man’, and suggest that man has authority over the Sabbath. This is almost certainly true. Yet in this case the term ‘Son of man’ is a name for the person of Daniel 7:14ff. This one has Lordship over all the nations and he leads ‘the saints of the Most High’. He is head over the Kingdom. In other places the Son of man is important. In Matthew 9:6 this Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins. This is important for God only can forgive sins. In Matthew 13:41 the Son of man will send forth his angels. In Matthew 16:27-28 this Son of man will come in glory.

There are many similar statements so that we conclude the Son of man is a messianic figure. What then is his authority or Lordship over the Sabbath? The Pharisees in their pronouncements concerning the Sabbath were, in a sense, legislating for it. In this sense they were exercising a judicial lordship concerning it. Jesus was saying that only he could properly exercise authority. Therefore what he did was what was in keeping with the true principle of the Sabbath.

Whilst Jesus does not say whether or not he could or would abrogate the Sabbath, only he, if any, was in a position to do so. Hence the Sabbath still obtains until he does such a thing. By his statement he also affirms the Sabbath as being of God.

## APPENDIX TWO

### THE PRINCIPLE OF THE SABBATH REST FOR THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE

'The Lord said to Moses on Mount Sinai, "Say to the people of Israel, When you come into the land which I give you, the land shall keep a Sabbath to the Lord. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in its fruits; but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the Lord; you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. What grows of itself in your harvest you shall not reap, you shall not gather; it shall be a year of solemn rest for the land. The Sabbath of the land shall provide food for you, for yourself and for your hired servant and for the sojourner who lives with you; for your cattle also and for the beasts that are in your land, ! all its yield shall be for food.' (Lev 25: 1-7)

This is the first section of the chapter which deals with the sabbatical principle in Israel. Modern farming demands fallowing, especially in dry farming, and areas where the soil does not have the opportunity to recover quickly. Israel was told to rest the land. It is to be 'a solemn rest' for the land, the same kind of rest that the people were to have weekly.

In the Sabbath year the people were, so to speak, to trust God for their needs. They may have stored

up, but in the seventh year anyone could use what had grown, no matter where it was—which would be a great help to slaves and other indigent types. This rather helped to maintain a reasonably egalitarian society.

Following the passage above comes instruction for the Jubilee year, the fiftieth year. Technically the forty-ninth year would be the seventh year in a cycle of seven sevens. This would appear to mean two sabbatical years followed which would be extremely difficult for the society. However there are explanations given which seem satisfactory.

In any case the Jubilee year was the time when manumission of slaves, liberation of captives, and remission of debts took place. The whole chapter needs to be read to see what a prophylaxis this system was against injustice, and human greed. The main thing is that, in a manner of speaking, society too was rested. It would be difficult to assess what enriching effects this would have upon society, the land and persons also.

Without going into technical details of the Jubilee year or the sabbatical years, we can see they did much to alleviate tensions and strains that would otherwise have accumulated. Above all we have to keep in mind that all that Israel had was a gift from the Lord. Even the land did not belong to them for Leviticus 25:23 says, 'The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me. ' Men, then, had to exercise stewardship and use the gifts God had given them in the way which would be best to all and honouring to God.

## APPENDIX THREE

SOME LITERARY REFERENCES  
TO THE SABBATH

Nursery rhyme:

*'A child that's born on the Sabbath Day, Is fair and wise and good and gay.'*

Quoted by A. E. Bray, "Traditions of Devonshire" (1838).

*'Or break the eternal Sabbath of his rest. '*

"The Spanish Friar". John Dryden.

*'Hail Sabbath. ' thee I hail, the poor man's day. '*

"The Sabbath". John Grahame.

*'Tis sweet to him who all the week*

*Through city crowds must push his way,  
To stroll alone through fields and woods,  
And hallow thus the Sabbath-Day. '*

"Home Sick". Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

*'The sabbaths of Eternity,*

*One sabbath deep and wide*

*A light upon the shining sea -*

*The Bridegroom and his Bride. "*

"St. Agnes Eve". Alfred, Lord Tennyson.

*'Peccavimus; but rave not thus. '*

*and let a Sabbath song,*

*Go up to God so solemnly*

*the dead may feel no wrong. '*

Lenore 1: 13. Edgar Allan Poe.

*'For all that moveth doth in change delight:*

*But henceforth all shall rest eternally*

*With Him that is the God of Sabbaoth hight:*

*O that great Sabbaoth God, grant me that Sabbooth's sight. '*

"The Faerie Queene". Edmund Spenser. (Note that Spenser mistakenly used *Sabbaoth* for *Sabbath*).

*'Upon a Sabbath day it fell;*

*Twice holy was the Sabbath bell,*

*That called the folk to evening prayer. '*

"The Eve of St. Mark". John Keats.

*"But the sound of the church-going bell*

*These valleys and rocks never heard, Never sighed at the sound of a knell,*

*Or smiled when a sabbath appeared. '*

"Sonnet to Mrs. Unwin". William Cowper.

*"If a man once indulges himself in murder, very soon he comes to thinking little of robbing; and from robbing he comes next to drinking and sabbathbreaking, and from that to incivility and procrastination. '*

"Supplementary Papers". Thomas De Quincy.

*'Oh, what the joy and the glory must be,*

*Those endless Sabbaths the blessed ones see. '*

"Oh, What the Joy". Abelard (translated from the Latin by James Mason Neale).

**DEAR HOLY SABBATH**

*Dear holy Sabbath, day of calm,  
Calm happy day, one of the seven,  
Seventh of seven in the days of making  
The rolling universe, the high creation  
Of the holy Father; He  
Bringing to light the things of light  
And charging all time  
With the glory of His thinking.*

*Command on command and see  
The host of the heavens and the earth,  
The world of beauty, and  
The worlds of holy happiness:  
Joy upon joys, the surging joyousness,  
Beauty for contemplating and the myriad  
Glorious holy ones, all working  
In the rounds of time as set -  
Six days for toiling joyfully  
And the seventh for rest.*

*Day so mysterious. Day  
So filled with contemplation,  
Meditation of the greatness,  
Until all things, resting in His love  
Give vent to joy unspeakable,  
Give utterance to the praise and honour  
Of the high King, the adorable Father,  
The immutable Creator, ineffable in holiness  
And the substantial splendour of His Eternal Sell*

*Day so commanded, command to blessing,  
Man resting, unhasting, and unfrenetic,  
Building up the holy reservoir, the teeming  
Reserves of rich powers. Not merely to while  
The empty hours, the boring vacuity,  
The flaccid indolence of uncreative thought,*

*But the incredible joys of human meditation,  
Thinking on things so splendid  
That the soul surges with newfound powers  
And comprehends the eternal purposes  
Of the high King.*

*Comes the rebellion,  
Comes the dark Satanic and anarchic upthrust,  
The grasping at golden godhead, the autonomy  
Of imagined brilliance, the curving away  
From quiet contingency, the dependency  
Upon the loving Creator. Man too,  
Powerful in glory, full in purpose,  
Given the gift of telos, but now  
Puny in imagined godhead, taking the weight  
Of eternal glory, dizzy with imaginings  
That bring no fruit, no essential being  
But only the darkness of no purpose, the puerility  
Of non-creativity.*

*Guilt grasps the spirit in a cruel bind,  
Soul that is soulful soulless finds its soul  
Bent on the hastening of its powers,  
The frenetic endeavour, the harsh exertion,  
The empty nisus, the futile conatus,  
Which, not succeeding empissions man  
To yet more effort, more futile aim  
Until the spirit can no longer rest.  
Caught in the ceaseless toiling  
Of its own endeavour, the mill-race  
Of endless unarriving it seeks  
Goal and after goal, and each  
Spinning away, haste-borne, unresting,  
Until the spirit, dizzy with endeavour  
Breaks. shattering down to atomic incoherence,  
An anarchy of self  
Doomed to pointless effort, unreachable goals,  
And inner aching restlessness.*

*Satan the accuser, Satan the critical,  
Satan the unseeing of the glory of the sons,  
Roves to and fro. On his own confession  
Roves to and fro across earth's face  
Endlessly seeking, endless burning  
The powers of his given glory on piffling nothing,  
Wild imaginings of greater glory  
But earning nothing, slave of his own bondage,  
Puerile in dreams, restless with non-cessation,  
Goaded by the overplus Of untranquillity.*

*Man linked with evil, dreaming too  
As the evil prince, the worldly god,  
The cruel dealer of mortality, the compulsive  
Thief of holy tranquillity, imagines  
Sheer joys of the occult, gifts  
Of drugged tranquillity, promises  
Of sure sedation, or imaginings  
Of gnostic stimulations, the knowing  
That brings assurance of unchanging godhead.*

*In the dizzy heights of his fantasy,  
The fevered fancies of psychedelic illusions  
The proud mind reaches out for accomplishment.  
Driven by ambition, grasping nothing  
In his nerveless gripping; the spirit  
Is driven on. Searching the shrines of demons,  
Fashioning the gods of his conceptions  
He seeks power, and with that power  
Peace that the haunted, frenzied spirit  
Cries for in its orgies of endeavour.  
Nothing is the answer, nothing is the wind  
That the wild grasp holds, the evasion  
Of the true tranquillity.  
Dear holy Sabbath, unhasting,*

*Gentle in healing, renewing  
The hours of endeavour that waste  
The spirit of man. Rest from the selfish,  
The human futility of unbeing. Sabbath hours  
Restore the new man, making newer,  
Opening the mind, the spirit and the soul  
As refreshment surges  
In the deepest depths, the subterranean  
Reserves of renewal. A man is wise  
Who ceases from futility, from vacuity  
And takes the gifts of holiness,  
Contemplation and creative meditation.*

*God is his thought, his aim,  
His lofty endeavour, and God's world  
The brilliant creation, the multi-coloured,  
The law of love, the anthropos-in-God,  
The unique and various forms that tell,  
Articulating the marvellous, showing the simple,  
Depthing the profundity  
Of the depthless creation. On these  
Men may think, and contemplating  
Grow to maturity, the mysterious gift  
Of the Eternal Father Who alone knows giving.*

*Draws then the day to its zenith  
And the wearied spirit of man made new  
Looks to the horizons of the telos and knows  
No apathy of spirit; knows the upsurging  
And incessant powers. Knows the new outflowings  
Of perpetual love. Creative powers fill afresh  
The once tired spirit: make anew  
The true endeavour, the rich conatus,  
The knowing nisus, the authentic  
Goals of God. Livingly the mind arises  
Setting out with the entire humanity,  
The caravanserai of the holy community  
Moving towards the eternal Sabbath*

*The dear and sheer delights of Deity,  
The true reward of the tranquil minds,  
The home of holy endeavour and true  
Obedience.*

*Dear holy Sabbath, Sabbath which is the Son  
Giving rest from his eternal reservoirs,  
The mild yoke of the Redeemer, the destroyal  
Of guilt compulsive, sinweight (in a yoke  
That crushed the rebellious spirit giving  
Only unholy anger, driving restlessly  
The unresting, the purposeless passionate  
And the ceaselessly compulsive); giving quiet  
To the unquiet, the weary whose spirit  
Cannot rest, the eternal tranquillity  
Wrought in the Cross, the coinage  
Of eternal serenity, the peace  
Of the home of the Father holy.*

*Such are the true people of God,  
The community of the quiet ones.  
Such is the renewal of an unchanging  
And eternal Sabbath. These are the wells,  
The true places of drinking, the commanded  
Blessings of God, the mandate of receiving,  
The renewing resting, the desisting  
From mad endeavour, vaunting ambition  
And overworking. This is the Sabbath of God  
Commanded from creation and reaching  
Into the endlessness of Eternity  
The gentle Bosom of the Father,  
The perpetual Paradise  
Of the unhasting God.*

G. Bingham,  
31st March, 1981.