

J. KYLE PAISLEY MEMORIAL FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Lord's Day Morning Sermon Notes

20th November 2005

Read: Hebrews 4

Text: v.v.9, 10

Observing the Lord's Day

For the past two weeks, in pursuit of this study on the subject of *Christian Worship*, we have been focusing on the matter of the actual day when the Christian Church should assemble for the exercise of public worship.

Two important points have already been covered. First, Scripture establishes that the institution of one day in seven as a day for ceasing from all earthly employment in order to engage in public worship was universal, perpetual and moral. In other words, the day of rest was made for all mankind to be obeyed as part of the moral law of God throughout all time. Second, we noted last week that the Lord Himself changed the day of the sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week. It was observed that the preparation of the way for this change was written into the O.T. Scriptures and then when the N.T. era dawned the change of the day for worship was introduced and established by Christ & the Apostles.

Thought there is all the evidence already noted to reveal & support these points there are those who insist and assert that the fourth commandment is not binding on the N.T. Church; that there is no specific reference in the N.T. to the command to keep holy one day in seven. However, such teaching is wrong in the light of the text on which our focus is set today. This is an important and crucial text: highly significant in that it reveals that the fourth commandment continues to require the Church to keep one day in seven; and it also signifies the change to the first day of the week for the observance of the day of rest. Note the following points –

1. In the main context Paul is dealing with the subject of the spiritual rest that is found in God's salvation. He takes up that subject in ch.3 : 7 and continues with it into ch.4.
2. The spiritual rest that salvation brings is found through Christ's finished work. See v.10 – this verse draws a parallel between Christ resting after He had completed the great work of redemption and God resting after He had completed the work of creation. Note carefully – the only one in history, who commenced a work and finished it so as to rest from his works as God did from His, is the Lord Jesus Christ. Having finished His work, Christ entered into His rest by rising again from the dead on the first day of the week.
3. Therefore, on the basis of Christ's finished work there remains "a rest to the people of God..." as v.9 states. There are two important words in this text – "remaineth" & "rest." *Remaineth* – this word is indicative of something left over from a previous order of things. This book of Hebrews deals with the O.T. state of things, things that in the N.T. era have been taken away – namely, the sacrifices, holy days, the Levitical rituals, the tabernacle & temple. But according to Heb 4: 9 there is something that remains from that order of things – this "rest" of which Paul speaks. *Rest* – the Greek word for "rest" is completely different from the other word that is translated "rest" in all of the other verses in this passage. The word for "rest" in v.9 is *sabbatismos* meaning – "a keeping of sabbath." Here then is the vital point: in the midst of all that was taken away by Christ's death & resurrection a keeping of sabbath remains. That is, it remains in force to be observed by "the people of God" – the principle of the one day in seven has not been repealed but continues in force for God's people. Moreover, according to v.10 again this sabbath-keeping that remains celebrates Christ's resurrection, which took place on the first day of the week. Thus, it is on that day that His people are to worship & observe the day of rest. Let us consider some reasons why we are to observe the Lord's Day or the Christian Sabbath.

1. The first reason is that the institution of the day of rest was for man's well-being

The institution of the day of rest or the sabbath day by the Lord was gracious in its purpose. Today the majority of people, including some professing Christians, look on the observance of the Christian Sabbath as being grinding & boring. But whatever reasons they may give for this view it is certainly not Scriptural. The Lord instituted the day of rest for the good of man, Mark 2: 27 – "the sabbath was made for man." Basically it was made for man's rest & refreshment, clear from the Scriptures – Exodus 23: 12. The expression *may be refreshed* is from the Hebrew word for "breath" – so the words could be read "catch your breath." God has given man a day on which he may catch his breath after the work of prior days and be refreshed for the week to come. Thus the institution of the day of rest was a significant and powerful piece of social legislation for the benefit of mankind; and generations of men have proved its wisdom & beneficence.

Of course, Scripture is clear that the Lord permits certain works on the sabbath. Christ Himself made this absolutely clear in His teaching and action as He dealt with the petty legalisms that the Pharisees imposed on the 4th commandment. Christ says in Mark 2: 28 that He is "*Lord of the sabbath.*" As such He permitted works of necessity, Luke 14: 5. The removal of the ox from the pit on the sabbath represents that class of duties that call for immediate action. From generation to generation whatever lawfully comes under "works of necessity" is going to change. A simple suggestion is that work that can be done before or after God's day is not a work of necessity. This also means that believers must exercise faith when faced with the challenge of companies demanding them to work on the Lord's Day. Trust the God who commands you to keep His day to find you another job.

Christ also permitted works of mercy. See Mark 3: 4 – these penetrating questions emphasise that works of a merciful kind are permitted by the Lord of the sabbath on the sabbath. He also permits works of piety, Matt 12: 5. Preachers, Bible teachers, evangelists etc, must labour hard on the Lord's Day to accomplish spiritual service.

In the light of Christ's permission of these works on the sabbath we can see how empty is the frequent complaint that the observance of the Lord's Day is a harsh, restrictive requirement. In actual fact such complaining is rebellion against the Lord. The world rejects the 4th commandment out of greed, Neh 13: 15-22; and because of the lust for carnal pleasure, Isaiah 58: 13. The opening part of this verse is to be understood in the light of the second part – men should turn away their feet from doing their pleasure on God's day and instead delight in and honour that day and then reap the blessings that will follow. Others still compromise God's law by only keeping a portion of His day. They rush from the Lord's house to all kinds of carnal pursuits and then wonder why society in general is so lawless. Jer 17: 19-27 – Jeremiah was told to go and deliver a message that signalled the coming destruction of the nation because of its sabbath-breaking. Note especially v.27.

2. A second reason concerns the issue of worship.

We have touched on this point already – but it must be underlined that the Lord instituted the one day in seven to be a day of worship. Remember again that the word “sabbath” means *rest* or *cessation*. This cessation not only includes rest from work in order to be refreshed, it also signifies cessation from work in order to be able to give oneself to the worship of God in an unfettered a manner as possible. See the following Scriptures – Lev 19: 30; 23: 3. Primarily the day was to be given to the hearing of God's word. See 2 Kings 4: 23 – the words of the husband of the Shunammite woman imply that the sabbath was a day for hearing God's Word.

Thus, there is no doubt but that the Lord intended the sabbath to be the day for public worship. The New Testament testifies to this point clearly. See also Acts 15: 21, the law of which Moses was the penman, was read in the synagogues “*every sabbath day*.” It was the established practice; it was no new custom; it was “of old.” Hence it was the ancient Jewish way of spending the sabbath -- under the hearing and exposition of the word, Acts 13: 14, 15. Christ Himself was accustomed to the observance of the sabbath for the purpose of obtaining spiritual blessing, Luke 4: 16. Clearly, Christ practised sabbath worship – He saw the one day in seven to be for that purpose.

Therefore, what great spiritual loss is suffered when believers fail to avail themselves of the opportunity of gathering on the Lord's Day, Heb 10: 25. This command could have no weight if Paul had no moral mandate for issuing it. But, as we have seen he did have such a mandate – the 4th commandment. Moreover, he is addressing N.T. Christians on the issue of assembling together for worship. The word “assembling together” literally mean *synagoguing*, and the synagogue was a centre of worship where the Scriptures were read & expounded.

Moreover, the whole day is to be given to worship. To take any part of God's day and spend it in pursuits other than worshipping the Lord is to violate God's commandment. It can only lead to spiritual impoverishment. For example, see John 20: 24. We wonder where Thomas had been. Note that it was the evening of the Lord's day. Result was that Thomas was full of doubts about the Lord. One of the chief causes of spiritual ills among believers is failure to appropriate the blessing of sitting under the means of grace on the Lord's Day. When God has appointed the sabbath for our blessing, what else should we expect but spiritual problems if we are negligent of the day or even part of the day. Thus Scripture shows that the sabbath is given as a means of sanctification. A day for the expounding of the covenant of grace that sinners might be saved, believers edified, and God's work promoted.

3. Then believers are to keep the Lord's Day as a sign of being His people.

Remember Ex 20: 11 – note the clear inference: keeping the day of God expresses likeness to Him. God rested on one day in seven. He hallowed that day. Now, it is His will that His people should be like Him, should be conformed to His image in the pursuit of true holiness, Eph 5: 1 – “Be ye therefore followers (*imitators*) of God as dear children.” Part of our obedience to this command is to keep the sabbath for the Lord Himself did.

See Deut 5: 15 – note in this account of the 4th commandment the reason for its observance is essentially that of redemption. Initially, the keeping of one day in seven was a memorial of creation, but when the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt He gave that redemptive act as an additional reason for keeping the sabbath. The logical teaching of this verse is clear – the Lord has delivered the believer from the bondage of sin in order to keep the 4th commandment along with all the rest. He has given His people liberty to do His will by delighting in His day. How wrong then for any redeemed soul to accept the perverted teaching that keeping the sabbath is a form of bondage!

Therefore, to every individual keeping one day in seven is a reminder that he is a creature of God (which is why John G. Patton, missionary to the New Hebrides taught the natives the 4th commandment before he taught them anything else). But to every Christian the sabbath is a glorious statement of redemption by grace. Thus, God's people keep the Lord's Day, not out of legalistic bondage, but out of a recognition of being a redeemed people through Christ's finished work.

See Exodus 31: 13 -- the Lord says that the keeping of the sabbath was a sign between Him and His people, which is still true though the day has changed. In this era therefore, keeping the Christian sabbath is a testimony of our allegiance to Christ Who arose on that day, having accomplished redemption. The sabbath then, is to be regarded as a means of professing that God alone is our God; that Christ alone is our Saviour; that we are the covenant people of God. The Christian Sabbath points to the covenant of grace and all that it includes, since Christ arose on that day to signify that He had sealed the covenant with His blood. **Hence the observing of the Christian Sabbath is for a very spiritual purpose.** It is a witness to the world of the God we worship and serve; what system of salvation it is that we follow; what Saviour we trust in for eternity, and what our destiny actually is – the everlasting sabbath with Christ in which we will worship Him forever.