

J. KYLE PAISLEY MEMORIAL FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Lord's Day Morning Sermon Notes

27<sup>th</sup> November 2005

Read: Isaiah 58: 8-14

Text: v.v. 13, 14

*Delighting in the Sabbath*

By the Lord's help we have been giving particular attention to a certain feature of this subject of Christian Worship, namely that Scripture teaches that there is a particular day on which God's people are to gather together for the purpose of engaging in the public worship of Almighty God. That day is what Scripture calls "the Sabbath Day" which, as we have noted, means *the day of rest*, which signifies the concept of ceasing from work in order to give ourselves to the public worship of the living God.

As we have noted and emphasised a number of times in our consideration of this matter of the day of worship, the principle of the fourth commandment is that God commands us to observe one day in seven as the weekly sabbath. In other words, it is part of God's moral law that mankind observe one day of the week as God's day. Moreover, while the Lord Himself changed the observance of the sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week, the moral obligation of the fourth commandment has not been repealed. God has never repealed any of the Ten Commandments, and He certainly has not abrogated the fourth.

However, as has been indicated a number of times, there are those who deny the permanence of the fourth commandment, many of whom are professing evangelical Christians. In an attempt to prove their point they appeal to certain N.T. Scriptures, which are allegedly in favour of their position, chiefly Rom 14: 5, 6 & Col 2: 16, 17. In the minds of those who appeal to these verses, it is concluded that the mere recitation of them is enough to dismiss any argument for the permanence of the fourth commandment. It is confidently stated by those who cite these verses that they present the proof that the observance of the fourth commandment is not binding any more on the Lord's people, yet that confidence is utterly misplaced. They miss the vital point that none of these passages makes any reference to the fourth commandment sabbath. Rather, the reference is to the different days of rest that were observed by the Jews under the ceremonial law. In Old Testament worship there were many ceremonial sabbaths; and being purely ceremonial they passed away being abolished by the coming of Christ and the dawn of the New Testament era. But nowhere in the N.T. does the Lord speak a word about removing the fourth commandment or abrogating the weekly sabbath. Indeed, as was seen last week from Hebrews 4: 9 – "*there remaineth a keeping of sabbath to the people of God.*"

Today I wish to come back to the line of thought that was in view in last week's message, which was to present various reasons that God gives for observing the Lord's Day or the Christian Sabbath as it has been so often described. We considered the first of a number of reasons why the Lord's Day should be observed, namely that God ordained the day of rest for man's entire well-being. In other words, there was a gracious purpose in the institution of the sabbath in that it was designed to give man rest & refreshment of body and soul. While the Lord permits works of necessity, mercy and piety on His day, He commands men to cease from their work in order to the welfare of their entire being. Thus, when society refuses to obey the fourth commandment it is rejecting the gracious purpose of God and will inevitably suffer dire consequences that always follow such rebellion. But let us move on and consider some additional reasons for the observance of God's Day.

I. 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 as 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 Acts 15: 21, which reveals that the law of which Moses was the penman, was read in the synagogues "*every sabbath day.*" It was the established O.T. 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 4<sup>th</sup> commandment, see again ch.4: 9, 10. What he mandates in Heb 10: 25 is spoken against the background teaching in ch.4. Moreover, he is addressing N.T. Christians on the issue of assembling together for worship. The words "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.

We must guard the day carefully, therefore, against the spirit of the age. The record of Scripture shows how quick God's people are to copy the patterns dictated by the world. See Neh 13: 15-18 – note in v.v. 15 & 16 that God's people were aping the practices of the ungodly. Note also the key words in v.17 with respect to profaning the sabbath day; and then the reminder that they were repeating the sin of their fathers that had brought the captivity.

## II. THEN BELIEVERS ARE TO KEEP THE LORD'S DAY AS A SIGN OF BEING HIS PEOPLE

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.

### 1. Believers show their relationship with the Lord by being like Him.

It is God's 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.” Therefore, with regard to the observance of one day in seven, part of our obedience to this command is this issue of likeness to the Lord. The Lord kept the one day in seven, and so should 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. So should we.

### 2. Believers show their relationship with the Lord by freedom from sin's bondage in order to serve Him.

When the Lord saves He grants His people freedom from the bondage of sin to serve Him and demonstrate that they are His people, Rom 6: 18. From this perspective the observance of the sabbath is a testimony to the gospel liberty that Christ has given His people.

See Deut 5: 15 – note in this account of the 4<sup>th</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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! To every Christian the sabbath is a glorious statement of redemption by grace. The Christian Sabbath points us to the cross, the empty tomb; therefore to the merits of Christ's finished work. The Christian Sabbath is a witness to the mighty finished work of Christ by which He purchased and secured our salvation before entering into His rest. By trusting in that finished work sinners enter into the rest of pardon and acceptance with God.

Thus, God's people keep the Lord's Day, not out of legalistic bondage, but out of recognition of being a redeemed people through Christ's finished work & glorious resurrection on the Christian Sabbath, the first day of the week. And as they keep that day holy they are sending out to the world around the great message that in Christ alone there is rest for the sinner.

## III. FINALLY, BELIEVERS KEEP THE LORD'S DAY AS A REMINDER OF THE ETERNAL SABBATH

The day of rest that is to be observed every week points forward to that eternal rest that the child of God enters when he leaves this world. See Rev 14: 13 which speaks of the blessedness or happiness of those who die in the Lord, supplying one main reason for that blissful state – “*that they may rest from their labours.*” Here is the very nature of the eternal state of the child of God – perfect rest.

Therefore, the fourth commandment challenges God's people to keep the one day in seven as a reminder of what is yet to come. Thus, when the Lord's Day comes the believer leaves aside the demands & labour of his earthly occupation and goes to meet with his God as a sign that there is this eternal goal in his thoughts and in his heart. Keeping the Lord's Day is a testimony that the believer's ultimate goal is to go to be with Christ and enter into that state of everlasting bliss with the Saviour; that he does not belong to this world but is on a pilgrimage to the world to come, 2 Pet 3: 10-13.

Rev. John Greer