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The perpetual obligation of the Sabbath

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Joseph Criswell,

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Wilson, Niagara Co.,
N.Y.

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Dear Dr. Townsend,

Enclosed please find my thesis. It is by no means satisfactory to myself; but it is the best I can write at present. During my second and third years at the seminary I preached nearly every Sabbath, and I find myself thoroughly exhausted. Had I been in suitable condition I should have taken a different subject.

My address during the summer will be as above.

Yours respectfully
J. Garrison

The Perpetual Obligation of the Sabbath.

There is even among Christian people too much looseness in the observance of the Sabbath. This arises in part, we think, from the absence of profound conviction that this institution is obligatory under the present dispensation. Our object is to counteract this looseness, as far as we may be able, by showing that the Sabbath is of perpetual obligation. To this end we present the following considerations.

I The Sabbath was instituted at the close of creation before the fall of man. This is expressed thus: "On the Seventh day God ended his work which

he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made." (Gen 2: 2, 3)

Here we see the seventh day is set apart as having a peculiar sanctity.

But says one the day was sacred as related to God and not as related to man. We reply, the Bible does not narrate events which concern the Divine mind alone. Again all days are alike to God in himself. This seventh day must therefore be a peculiar day between God and his intelligent creation, man. This question is fully

settled by the fact that later the children of Israel were com-
manded to observe the Sabbath on the ground that the Lord had hallowed it at the close of creation; thus; "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day ^{and} hallowed it." (Ex. 20: 9, 11.)

But it is objected further that nothing is said in the scriptures in reference to the Sabbath, after its so-called institution, till the time the children of Israel were fed upon manna in the wilderness. We must remember that the Bible gives us a very brief synopsis of the

history of those early times, and there are other omissions perhaps quite as remarkable as this. The allusions to prayer in the Pentateuch are very few. Though circumcision was the sign of God's covenant with Israel, yet from the time of their settlement in Canaan until Christ there is not one instance of it recorded; yet it was without doubt practiced all this time.

But though there is no direct mention of the Sabbath in the period mentioned, time was divided into weeks of seven days. Noah after the return of the dove, "staid yet other seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark." The dove

returned once more and "he staid yet other seven days and sent forth the dove; which returned no more" Laban used the term "week" in referring to the misdeeds of Jacob and Leah. Joseph and his brethren mourned for their father "seven days" Moreover when the ~~miracles~~ was given — before the giving of the law on Sinai — the Sabbath was spoken of as a well known institution which the people were to observe. In view of these facts the objection falls away.

That the Sabbath is of perpetual obligation is seen II In that it is made the subject of one of the ten commandments. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it

holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh ^{day} is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it." (Ex. 20: 5-11)

Effort has been made to show that this commandment is not binding upon us because it

is said to ~~contain~~ a positive, while the other nine are moral. Whether this commandment may be called positive or not it is based - as we hope to show later - upon a fundamental need in human nature. Since then this commandment is honored with a place in the decalogue, and is grounded upon man's need, it seems to me we are not justified in declaring it obsolete simply because it is said to contain a positive element. But there are other reasons for believing this commandment obligatory. Nothing in the Old Test. is made obsolete by the New except

what is incapable of existing with Christianity.

In proof of this we appeal to Christ and his apostles. These treated the Old Test. as authoritative. Moreover they tell us directly the relation of the two dispensations. Jesus says "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets I am not come to destroy but to fulfill." Take it that our Lord meant the whole law both moral and ceremonial. He could only fulfill the ceremonial by realizing its types; and the moral by upholding its authority. In the same manner St. Paul teaches that the law is supported

by Christianity. He asks "Do we then make void the law? God forbid, yea we establish the law." The Sabbath can not be wrested from its place; ^{in the law} therefore it is to be observed.

That the Sabbath is of perpetual obligation is seen
III In its typical significance.

It is a type of that heavenly rest which remains for the people of God. (See Heb 4, esp. 9 verse, Greek) All types remain till the thing signified by them is realized. The rest signified by the Sabbath can not be realized till the people of God shall cease from their work as God did from his (Heb 4:9). Therefore the Sabbath will stand as a type till that grand consummation

That the Sabbath is of perpetual obligation is shown
 IV. By the fact that man's highest good demands it.
 Man needs it physically and intellectually. The body and mind ought to be relieved of ordinary labor one day in seven. Six days of vigorous physical or mental effort sufficiently tax our system for one week. Dr. Farre testified before the House of Commons that in his opinion one who works six days in a week will be more healthy and live longer, other things being equal, than one who works seven; and that such will do more work, and do it in a better manner. An association of

of twenty physicians voted unanimously that they thought Dr. Farre's position to be correct. I do not suppose my own experience would be of much use to others; but it fully convinces me of nature's demands. Several times after preaching on the Sabbath I have tried to study six days in the week for a number of weeks together. My experience each time has been that after a few weeks I would begin to feel dull, study would become irksome, and I could not accomplish so much as when proper time is taken for rest. It is a law of nature and therefore a law of God that time must

be taken for rest. And it is much better that it should be taken systematically rather than at haphazard. Certainly the present, when competition is so close in every department of activity, and when success requires quick decisive action, is no time, even from a physical and intellectual ^{of view} point, for the destruction of that blessed day of rest when all worldly cares are laid aside, as though they did not exist, and sweet draughts of refreshment can be drawn from higher sources.

Allow me at this point to say further that the law of rest requires that

the thoughts and cares of our daily toil should not be allowed to trespass upon this sacred period. Many persons get into the habit of discontinuing actual labor yet carry with them all the burdens of their work. This can do no good, but it does much harm. Much better is it to take hold of our work with energy when we do work, then leave it with its cares wholly behind. For these, when they follow us, are fearfully destructive to vital force.

2 Man needs the Sabbath morally and religiously. During the week the mind is largely absorbed in secular pursuits, how

refreshing to the moral and spiritual nature to have regular stated times for quiet contemplation and worship. Men possessing any degree of moral earnestness, must find it profitable to take time for serious thought. Each one needs to ask: Whence came I? What am I in myself and in my relations to the universe? What will be my destiny? How can I improve my inner self? These and other similar questions should be pondered. The power they have possessed over the minds of men show their importance. We have no sympathy with that moral indiffer-

ence which allows immortal men to drift on, and without thought, even though surrounded with spiritual forces. The Sabbath furnishes the opportunity for this thought and therefore meets human needs.

Again we need public religious services. Without dwelling upon this, suffice it to say that if Christian communities did not set apart a sacred day we fear ~~we fear~~ public religious assemblies would soon become almost unknown; and without these Christianity would be scarcely able to hold its own much less make itself felt as a

mighty aggressive power.

The foregoing considerations are, we think, of sufficient weight to sustain our position.

The Sabbath was instituted at the close of creation before the fall of man; it was honored with a place in the law written on the two tables of stone, which is not repealed; it is typical of the heavenly rest, not yet realized; it is based upon human need, physical, intellectual ~~and~~ moral and religious; and is therefore of perpetual obligation.

Some one may now say I have placed myself in a dilemma; that if the Sabbath is of

perpetual obligation, the seventh day of the week must be observed. If it be so, that is, if I must either deny the perpetual obligation of the Sabbath, as a God given institution, or observe the seventh day of the week, I should say by all means observe the seventh day of the week. Because I know of no possible way of avoiding the conclusion reached; and besides I am not willing to accept the results which would follow the denial of the same.

But we do not think we are placed in any such dilemma. The Sabbath may be regarded as consisting of two parts, the essential.

and the non-essential or the accidental. The essential is that same day—approved by God—should be set apart which will answer to human need, ^{physique,} intellectual, and religious. But it is non-essential as to the particular day, provided it has the Divine sanction.

Furthermore we do not believe that the fourth commandment teaches that the seventh day of the week is necessarily the Sabbath. It does not read "Remember the seventh day of the week to keep it holy;" but "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." True it says "the seventh day is the Sabbath;" yet we do not understand

this to mean the seventh day of the week, but the seventh in reference to the six of work. "Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work; but the seventh is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God." This language will certainly be satisfied if the seventh day, with reference to the six of labor, is observed. If the language used in the fourth commandment, and at the time of the original institution of the Sabbath does definitely fix the time of the Sabbath, it teaches that as viewed by God it corresponds exactly with every seventh revolution of the earth from creation. Hence for men to observe the true Sabbath it would be necessary

to know just when every seventh revolution of the earth from creation commences. It is needless to say that we have not the data to make such a calculation, and the law does not aid us in making the discovery. This alone is a sufficient reason why such an interpretation should not be forced upon the passages referred to. In our judgment the language was never designed to cover the non-essential but only the essential part of the Sabbath.

Well then continues the objector we will admit that the original command is fulfilled, as far as time is concerned,

if each nation or community— with the Divine approval— sets apart one day in seven as sacred ~~to~~, but the original Sabbath was ~~was~~ observed in commemoration of creation— or of the Divine rest at the close of creation— whereas the Christian Sabbath is observed in commemoration of the resurrection of Christ. It has just been conceded that creation can be commemorated by observing every seventh day, whether or not our seventh day if traced backward would correspond with the seventh day first set apart. Just as Christmas is now observed in commemoration of the birth of Christ though it is

by no means certain that Christ was born on the twenty fifth of December. This concedes all we need. The Christian Sabbath can then point both to creation and to redemption. And this seems to be the whole truth. As an institution it is a memorial of creation as to the particular day it is a memorial of redemption. The Sabbath had a twofold significance to the Jews. Their Sabbath was the original Sabbath with something added to it. The original Sabbath was commemorative of creation. It was so to the Jews. (Ex. 20: 8-11) But there was also another reason given why they should

Keep it - their redemption from Egypt. "Remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm; therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath." ^{Deut 5: 15} Thus the Jewish Sabbath was commemorative of creation and their typical deliverance, while the Christian Sabbath is commemorative of creation and the real deliverance. The commemoration of creation by the original Sabbath was very appropriate. It was then the greatest work that God had done for man; and the recurrence of this sacred day pointed

to God as the source of all good. Redemption is even greater than creation. How appropriate that it should be commemorated by this sacred day. Thus the Christian Sabbath points us to our Creator and Redeemer, one God high over all, blessed forever.

May 6th 1879.

Joseph Criswell.