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Propositions on the Sabbath-Sunday Question

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Propositions on the Sabbath-Sunday Question.

1. The observance of one particular day, the seventh day of the week, is not a part of the Natural Law written in the hearts of men at the beginning and later codified in the Moral Law. We have no evidence of a command of God in the time of the Patriarchs, before and after the Flood, by which the Sabbath may be said to have been instituted.

NOTE.— Gen. 2, 2, 3 simply speaks of God's sanctifying the seventh day, to which statement, however, no command is attached with reference to its observance by man. Luther indeed surmises (III, 950) that the believers, who had the true service of God, came together on that day to call upon God, but he offers no proof. Heb. 4, 4 ff. connects the Genesis passage with the promise of the final rest reserved for all faithful believers.— While rest-days are observed in the primitive religions, they are not, as a rule, periodic in character, nor are they necessarily consecrated to a deity and employed for religious services. Even in the Babylonian system of time the rest-day on the seventh, fourteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eighth day of the month was connected with the period of lunation, since the moon was regarded as resting at the height of her brilliancy. (Cp. Hastings, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, sub voce "Sabbath.")

2. The Jews were given the specific command to keep the seventh day of the week, the Sabbath, as a day of cessation from labor and of a holy assembly with sacrificial offerings. Its observance was included in both the Civil and the Ceremonial Law.

NOTE.— That the keeping of the seventh day as a day of rest and worship was not a self-evident matter appears from the specific command of God in the wilderness in Ex. 16, 23 ff. Cp. chap. 20, 8 ff.; 31, 15 ff. To the children of Israel the Sabbath-day was a day of cessation from labor, Ex. 16, 29; 20, 10; 35, 3; Num. 15, 32—36; Amos 8, 5, 6, and of a holy assembly with special offerings, Num. 28, 9 f.; Lev. 24, 8; Is. 58, 13 f.

3. The Old Testament Sabbath has been abrogated in the New Testament and hence also the Jewish provisions regarding compulsory rest on that day as by divine command.

NOTE.— This appears clearly from the principle which Jesus enunciated, namely, that the Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath-day, Matt. 12, 8, as well as from the fact of His ignoring the traditional observance of the Sabbath in performing miracles of kindness on that day, Matt. 12, 5 ff.; Mark 3, 4; 2, 27; Luke 13, 14 ff.; 14, 5; John 7, 23; 9, 14, and in setting forth the spirit of the Moral Law pertaining to the worship of God, John 4, 24, apart from all external ceremonies connected with place and time.— The specific principle of the New Testament is stated in Col. 2, 16, where Sabbaths are expressly mentioned, and in Gal. 4, 9—11.

4. The first day of the week, or Sunday, was chosen as the day of worship by the Church of the New Testament, partly on the basis of the apostolic example, partly in perpetual commemoration of the day of Christ's resurrection.

NOTE.— The first direct reference to Sunday as a day of worship is in 1 Cor. 16, 2: "Upon the first day of the week" (*κατὰ μίαν σαββάτου*).

Just about a year later we find that Paul conducted a service in Troas "upon the first day of the week," Acts 20, 7 (*ἐν τῇ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων*). And that this first day of the week soon received recognition as a day set apart from others seems to be evident from Rev. 1, 10, where John speaks of "the Lord's Day" (*ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ*). — In the subapostolic and postapostolic age we have the witness of the *Didache*: "On the Lord's Day (*κατὰ κυριακῆν*) of the Lord come together" (chap. XIV). This is supported by the *Apostolic Constitutions*, where we are told: "On the day of the resurrection of the Lord, which we call the day of the Lord, you are to come together without delay" (Book VII, chap. 30). The *Epistle of Barnabas* has the statement: "Wherefore we also celebrate with gladness the eighth day, in which Jesus also rose from the dead" (chap. 15). In the *First Apology* of Justin Martyr we read: "On the day which is named after the sun a gathering of all those who live in the city and in the country takes place" (chap. 67). For further witnesses see Augusti, *Handbuch der christlichen Archæologie*, I, 513 ff.

5. It is not in accordance with Scriptures to attach the ceremonial ordinances of the Old Testament to the New Testament Sunday.

NOTE. — It is essential that we stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage, Gal. 5, 1. The esteeming or regarding of days, Rom. 14, 5, 6, is a matter which is left to the wisdom of the Christians, and the special Sabbath laws of the Old Testament have nothing to do with the Christian Sunday. Augsburg Confession, Art. XXVIII: "For those who judge that by the authority of the Church the observance of the Lord's Day instead of the Sabbath-day was ordained as a thing necessary do greatly err. Scripture has abrogated the Sabbath-day; for it teaches that, since the Gospel has been revealed, all the ceremonies of Moses can be omitted." (*Trigl.*, 90 f. Cp. Large Catechism, p. 602, § 79 ff. Cp. Luther, III, 1084 ff.)

6. We observe or celebrate Sunday in Christian liberty "that on such day of rest (since we can get no other opportunity) freedom and time be taken to attend divine service, so that we come together to hear and treat of God's Word and then to praise God, to sing and pray." (Large Catechism, *Trigl.*, p. 605, § 84.)

7. Christian liberty may never become license; hence he who without adequate reason and sufficient excuse refuses to attend Sunday or festival services, disrupts the orderly procedure of the congregation, forsakes the assembly of the Christians, and is apt to come under the condemnation of the Lord.

NOTE. — There is always danger that some people will use their liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, 1 Pet. 3, 16, and for that reason instruction in the true meaning of Christian liberty must constantly be given. It is the Lord who wants all things in the congregation to be done decently and in order, 1 Cor. 14, 40, who condemns the forsaking of the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, Heb. 10, 25, and who solemnly states: "He that is of God heareth God's words; ye therefore hear them not because ye are not of God," John 8, 47.

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