

LESSON EIGHTEEN

THE LORD'S DAY

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet . . .

Rev. 1:10

This is the day which Jehovah hath made; We will rejoice and be glad in it.

Ps. 118:24

And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul discoursed with them, intending to depart on the morrow; and prolonged his speech until midnight.

Acts 20:7

Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come.

1 Cor. 16:2

God's Creation and Rest

God measured each day by the evening and the morning. He repaired the earth in six days, and on the seventh day He rested. About two thousand five hundred years

later, He gave the ten commandments in which He charged men to remember the Sabbath. All the other commandments are "shall" and "shall not"; only the fourth commandment calls us to remember God's work. In other words, this remembrance points back to the creation of the world. It is to recall how God restored the world in six days and how He then rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the seventh day is God's Sabbath. After more than two thousand years from the creation, God gave His Sabbath to men with the charge that they should rest on that day.

When God first gave the seventh day, the Sabbath, to men, He desired them to rest physically. Since God Himself rested on the seventh day and ceased from all His labor, He also desired men to work for six days and rest on the seventh day. The Sabbath was originally God's day of rest but He gave it to men, especially to the people of Israel in order that they too might cease from all works and thus might rest. The thought of rest on the Sabbath is quite clear in the Old Testament.

Man's First Day—The Original Seventh Day

The things in the Old Testament are but shadows of things in the New Testament. The Sabbath which God gave to men, like all other Old Testament types, has also a spiritual significance. God's seventh day was actually man's first day. God had just created man on the sixth day. So it became man's first day of life on the earth. Furthermore, as soon as he was created, he entered into God's rest. God worked for six days and then rested on the seventh day. But man first rested for one day before he started to work for six days. This is quite obvious.

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The fulfillment of the meaning of the Sabbath comes by entering into God's rest. But to enter into God's rest, we must accept His work. God works, so we work; God rests, so we rest. We do not enter into God's rest on our seventh day, for we never worked six days before resting. As a matter of fact, we rest before we work. This is a very basic principle to us, a principle basic to the gospel. Rest before work, rest preceding work—this is the gospel. God shows that in first providing us rest, He also enables us to work afterward. Praise God, having rested we are able to work.

For this reason, it was a great sin for anyone to violate the Sabbath. God gave this day for people to rest. How could men consider it as nothing if they worked on that day? Violation of the Sabbath was as sinful as Moses' striking the rock with the rod (see Num. 20). God commanded Moses to speak to the rock that it might give forth water; He did not charge him to strike the rock with the rod. This was because the rock had been struck once and so should not be smitten again. Moses needed only to give a command and the rock would flow forth with living water. When he struck it the second time, he destroyed the work of God. As a consequence, Moses never entered the land of Canaan. On the same principle, how can anyone say that it does not matter if he violates the Sabbath? Judging from God's truth, it matters a great deal. Man ought to enjoy God's rest before he ventures to work. He needs to have entered into the value of the gospel before he starts to work. First, he enters God's rest; then he can do God's work. If he violates the Sabbath, he destroys what it typifies. Hence, the Sabbath has a very prominent place in the Old Testament.

During the Old Testament days, if anyone went out to

the field on the Sabbath and gathered sticks for burning, he was to be stoned to death. This was because he had violated the Sabbath. By his actions he seemed to claim that he was capable of working and conducting himself well without having to enter first into God's rest. God rested on the Sabbath because He was satisfied with His work. If we are satisfied with God's work, we too should rest on the Sabbath as an expression of our acceptance of His work. For this reason, God commanded at the very outset that "the seventh day is a sabbath unto Jehovah thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates" (Ex. 20:10). Everyone in the house must cease working. This is the picture given us in the Old Testament.

The Sabbath in the New Testament

When it came to New Testament days, conditions were somewhat changed. It seems as if the Sabbath day became more positive in the New Testament. Whereas in the Old Testament there was the emphasis on not doing any work, in the New Testament the Lord Jesus read the law and the prophets in the synagogue on the Sabbath. That which was originally intended for physical rest had by then become a day for spiritual pursuit. This element is not found in the Old Testament. So there is progression in the New Testament: to physical rest has been added the hearing of the law and the prophets. The principle of setting apart one day out of seven for God is implied.

It is indeed marvelous to see the Sabbath in the New Testament turned into something more positive. On the

Sabbath, people attended the synagogue to listen to the law and to the prophets. The Lord Jesus preached in the synagogue on the Sabbath; the apostles, including Paul himself, also preached and reasoned in the synagogue on the Sabbath. The Sabbath became not only a day of rest but also a day of positive use. Special emphasis was now laid on the spiritual side.

The Change of Position of the Sabbath

In studying the Bible, we must pay attention to the spirit of the Word. If we have a teachable spirit, we will notice how frequently there are shifts of position in the Bible. This is what we mean by finding facts. For in these facts, light is hidden. When the facts change, light also changes. Such, we find, is the case with the Sabbath. In the very beginning, the seventh day was the Sabbath. If anyone did not rest, he was punished by being stoned to death.

The four gospels show us that the Lord Jesus was raised on the first day of the week. He manifested Himself afterward five different times on that same first day of the week. The book of Acts records that the day of Pentecost also fell on the first day of the week since the fiftieth day was actually the first day of another week. The first day of the week is the eighth day. Nowhere in the Bible are we told that God ordered the Lord's day to be substituted for the Sabbath. No, God simply made the change seen in the facts.

In reading the Old Testament, it seems as if each seven days forms a period which ends with the seventh day. According to typology, the first seven days speak of the old

creation. God worked for six days and then He rested on the seventh day. This is the story of the old creation, concluded with the seventh day. God did not divide the days into months and years only; He especially divided them into weeks.

If the resurrection of the Lord Jesus had taken place at the end of the week, then the Old and the New Testaments would have been confused forever, for we then would have had the new creation and the old creation in the same week. But the Lord Jesus rose on the first day of the week, thereby marking a new beginning—that of the new creation. We desire that new believers would remember this principle in the Bible, that one day out of each seven days is set apart for spiritual purposes. On that day, no secular work should be done so that one may devote the time to spiritual affairs. The church in the New Testament has been quite naturally led by the Holy Spirit into having this day on the first day of the week, the resurrection day of the Lord Jesus. Unlike those living in Old Testament days, we are not charged as to what we cannot do. No, in the New Covenant there is no Sabbath, only the Lord's day. God does not forbid the doing of certain things on the Lord's day as He formerly had done for the Sabbath.

The Sabbath in the Old Testament is but a type. With the coming of the reality, the type has passed away. The Sabbath, like the sacrifice of bullocks and sheep, has passed away. The gospel has come. Man has entered into rest through the gospel. He is now able to serve God. This is the reality of the Sabbath.

So, under the New Covenant we have nothing to do with the Sabbath. This is not as simple as it may seem. If our interpretation of Revelation chapters 2 and 3 is cor-

rect, the legalistic party found in Christianity will be on the increase. New believers, therefore, must know the difference being presented here.

The principle of the Sabbath is as much a part of the gospel as our Lord's sacrifice on the cross. All the Old Testament cattle and sheep point to the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus. When He came, the cattle and sheep were no longer effectual. Should anyone today offer a bullock or a sheep as a sacrifice, he blasphemes our Lord. The Lord has become the sacrifice, so how can a bullock or sheep be offered again? In the same manner, now that the gospel has come, people can rest in God. God has finished all the work of redemption in the cross of His Son. We who listen to God's Word enter into rest, not into work. Through the gospel we are enabled to rest before God. Only after entering into this rest can we rise up to serve. Since the rest of the gospel has come, naturally the Sabbath day has passed away. For us believers, the Sabbath has passed away just as much as has the sacrifice of cattle and sheep. Just as there are now no more cattle and sheep to be offered, so there is no longer a Sabbath day.

Let us be very careful in the use of the Word. Nowhere in the Bible can we find a *Christian* Sabbath day, for these two are contradictory. If we are Christians, then there is no Sabbath. If there is a Sabbath, then we are not Christians. The Sabbath belongs to the Old Testament. In the New Testament it has passed away.

The Lord's Day in the New Testament

The New Covenant, however, does have its own day, based not on the Sabbath, but on one day out of every

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seven days. The Sabbath day has not been changed to become the Lord's day; another day entirely has been chosen. Under the Old Covenant God chose the seventh day, but in the New Covenant He chose the first day of the week.

The fourth commandment says, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy . . . but the seventh day is a sabbath unto Jehovah thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work . . ." (Ex. 20:8, 10a). But under the New Covenant, when God selected another day, He did not prohibit anything. Nothing negative was ever mentioned. He never stated what may not be done on the Lord's day; He only told us what should and can be done. The prime characteristic of the Lord's day lies in its positiveness.

There is a very clear distinction between the Old and the New Covenants. So far as God's appointed days are concerned, one came at the end of the week while the other came at the beginning of the week. The Old Covenant terminated with the seventh day; the New Covenant commenced with the first day of the week. The first week belonged exclusively to the old creation, but beginning on the first day of the next week there was only the new creation. There is absolutely no confusion, no mixing of the old and new within the same week. The Lord Jesus rose on the first day of the week; the church was born on the day of Pentecost, also the first day of the week.

Consequently, should anyone desire to go back and keep the seventh day, he confuses the New and the Old Covenants. There is absolutely no basis in the Bible for doing so. In reading Scripture, is it not surprising to find that seven days after the resurrection of the Lord, the disciples were found assembled together again on the first day of the

second week? We do not know why they did not meet on the Sabbath day, but we do know that they did meet on the first day of the second week.

Scriptural Basis for the Lord's Day

We think the following passages are of great importance: "The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner. This is Jehovah's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which Jehovah hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps. 118:22-24).

"Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even in him doth this man stand here before you whole. He is the stone which was set at nought of you the builders, which was made the head of the corner" (Acts 4:10-11).

Here the phrase is found "the stone rejected by the builders." Who decides whether a stone is usable or not? It is the builders. If the mason says that a certain stone is unfit to build the house, you do not need to ask anybody else. Whatever the builder decides is final. But a strange thing happened. The stone which the builders rejected became the head of the corner. God put upon it the most important responsibility. What the builders considered useless, God made the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing. It is marvelous in our eyes. It is indeed marvelous. Verse 24, however, gives us an added marvel related to the Lord's day. "This is the day which Jehovah hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." The day which the Lord has appointed is the day when the stone rejected by the builders became the chief cornerstone.

It is a day when we will rejoice and be glad. All should fear God and rejoice in His presence. Let us, then, find out what day it was when the stone rejected by the builders became the head of the corner. This we discover in Acts 4:10-11. Verse 10 says, "Whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead." Verse 11 continues, "He is the stone which was set at nought of you the builders, which was made the head of the corner." In other words, this is the day of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. God, not man, determined the day when He who was rejected by men was to be raised from the dead. Let there be no confusion. The Bible puts it very clearly that this is the day the Lord has made. What day is it? It is the day of resurrection. So let all the children of God gather in the name of God's Son on that day and be glad.

Do you see the difference between the Lord's day in the New Testament and the Sabbath day in the Old Testament? The latter is negative, full of "shalt not's" and the threat of the punishment of death; the former, though, is a day of great rejoicing.

Things to Be Done on the Lord's Day

In regard to the first day of the week, three things receive special attention in the Bible:

1. REJOICE—THE PROPER ATTITUDE

The first thing concerns our attitude. As we have just read, all the children of God should rejoice and be glad on the first day of the week, for this is the day our Lord was raised from the dead. There was no need to tell Peter and the other apostles to rejoice. During the days when their

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Lord was laid in the tomb, they experienced great disappointment and sadness. Then they found that the tomb was empty! They could not but rejoice and be glad.

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us maintain an attitude of rejoicing. There is no other day as marvelous as this day, for this is the day of the resurrection of our Lord. On the first day of the week, the Lord came to gather with the apostles; He came again on the first day of the second week. He must have appeared to them at least five times on the first day of the week. Later on, the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles and those gathered together on the first day of the week. It was at that time that Peter's eyes were opened to see how the stone rejected by the builders had become the head of the corner as prophesied in Psalm 118. In His crucifixion He was rejected by the builders but by His resurrection He became the head of the corner. The Holy Spirit gave Peter this understanding. Who but the Holy Spirit could point out the Lord Jesus in this psalm? He was rejected by the builders, but in His resurrection, He became the head of the corner. This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad. It is the natural consequence of such a day.

2. ASSEMBLE TO BREAK BREAD

“And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread” (Acts 20:7a). Notice the grammatical structure here. The second clause is in apposition to the preceding phrase, meaning that the first day of the week is the time when they gathered to break bread. It does not point to any specific first day of the week, but simply refers to every first day of the week. So naturally this has become the day when all the churches gather to

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break bread in remembrance of the Lord. What day is more excellent than this, the first day of the week?

We today are people of the New Covenant. One of its characteristics is that we meet the Lord on the first day of the week. This is the day of His resurrection, a day in which we rejoice and are glad. We break bread to testify that our Lord has already died for us; we break bread to attest to the oneness of the church. Other than this one thing that we must do, there also are other things that can be done on this day.

The breaking of bread has two meanings in Scripture: one is to remember the Lord and the other is to fellowship with all the children of God. One shows our communion with God and His Christ; the other discloses our fellowship with the body of Christ which is the church. When we break the bread, we commune with our Lord, for the bread represents the Lord. But also when we break the bread, we fellowship with all the saints, because this same bread represents the church—we, being many, are one bread. For this reason, the Lord's day is the best time for us to fellowship with all of God's children as well as to commune with the Lord.

It is literally impossible for me to give the right hand of fellowship to every one of God's children on earth. Yet on each Lord's day, all the children of God touch the one bread. Wherever they may be, they touch the same bread as I. In this way I touch all the children of God. Here I meet all my brothers and sisters as well as my Lord. I not only have fellowship with those who break the bread with me in the meeting but also with all whose hands touch the bread throughout the world. We, being many, are one

bread. As I break bread with them, I also fellowship with them.

New believers should learn to maintain an unclouded relationship with all God's children. They ought to learn love and forgiveness from the very outset. Who is it that the Bible teaches should not touch the Lord's table? It is he who is unforgiving. If he does not forgive, he is unfit to touch the bread. By not forgiving another's fault, he will have something between him and that other child of God. We must neither be jealous of anyone nor refuse to fellowship with anyone. Nothing should be allowed to come between the brethren. Other than those who have been excommunicated for reasons of conduct or truth, we must not refuse fellowship to anybody. All God's children everywhere should be in fellowship. Hence, there is a very real need for forgiveness and love. May our hearts go out toward all of God's children.

"And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread"—this is the way distinctly laid before us in the Bible. It has nothing to do with the Sabbath. The one and only similarity is that both were chosen out of the week for a specific purpose. The Bible never sanctions any attempt to change the Sabbath into the Lord's day. Under the New Covenant God chose another day for us to remember our Lord.

3. GIVE

"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I gave order to the churches of Galatia, so also do ye. Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when

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I come" (1 Cor. 16:1-2). Here we find the second thing which should be done on the first day of the week. Paul repeated an order to the churches in Achaia that he formerly had given to the churches in Galatia. On each Lord's day there was something to be done. It is quite evident that during the apostolic time, the first day of the week was a special day.

If Paul wanted to find the Jews, he looked for them on the Sabbath; but if he wanted to find the Christians, he had to do it on the first day of the week. This was not only true of the churches in Achaia and in Galatia but also true of the churches everywhere, for the first day of the week is a very special day to Christians. On that day we break bread to remember the Lord. On that day we give as the Lord has prospered us. Is it not surprising to find that giving is to be done once a week, not once a month? Many wait until the end of the month and some even wait until the end of the year; but Paul tells us, we must balance our accounts before God on the first day of each week. We should lay aside our contribution to the Lord as He has prospered us each week.

I work throughout the week, so then I put aside a certain amount out of that with which the Lord has prospered me during that week and give it to Him. I always feel this is an excellent thing. We break bread on the one hand and give on the other hand. We remember how the Lord has given Himself to us; now we also give something to the Lord.

Remember that he who receives more from God ought to give more. Among all the praises and thanks to the Lord, giving is also reckoned as a sacrifice of praise (see Heb. 13:16). It is a sacrifice which we must offer. At the

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breaking of bread, we remember what the Lord has done for us. After the bread is broken, we lay before the Lord a token of that with which He has prospered us. We merely put into the Lord's hand that which He has first given us. To me, this is most beautiful. It is indeed an excellent thing to give on the Lord's day.

If you will pardon me, I would like to speak very frankly to new believers. According to the New Testament, there are only two things which we must definitely do. The Lord has not said, "What if a lamb falls into a pit?" or "What if there is a paralytic?" There is not the slightest hint of the old Sabbath, for it has already passed away. It has been fulfilled so far as its spiritual significance is concerned. We have arrived at its reality in the gospel. The type gives way to the antitype. The Old Testament dispensation is over. In the church, the Lord has chosen another day. On the Lord's day, the church should break bread and give offerings.

My brothers and sisters, do not come to meetings and give thoughtlessly. This is entirely wrong. You must carefully consider it before the Lord and have your offering ready as you come. Your coming to remember the Lord is not accidental; likewise, your giving should be planned and prearranged. On each Lord's day, set aside a portion of what the Lord has prospered you with and bring it to the Lord. Let each one decide his own percentage. Give more if you are given more; less if you have less. The important thing is that you give your portion joyfully.

It looks ugly for anyone to fish out some money from his pocket and cast it carelessly into the offering box. It is almost unbearable to see such an action. Before you come to the meeting, you should have your offering ready. An

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offering is as serious as the breaking of bread. The breaking of bread signifies what God has given me, while the offering represents that which I present to God as a sacrifice. Do remember that an offering is a sacrifice. I must prepare my heart, set aside a portion, and bring it to God.

I often think (I wonder if you have thought of this too?) how at His return the Lord will settle accounts with His servants—the servant with the one talent, the one with the two talents, and the one with the five talents. Each Lord's day is the time when we settle our accounts with the Lord, but one day the Lord will come and make a reckoning with us. He will examine how we have used the money and how much we have earned. Now, though, on the first day of each week, we make a reckoning with the Lord, saying, "Oh, Lord, I take out a portion of what I have earned during this week and offer it to you." If we do this every week, we will have no fear at the judgment seat. Nothing unexpected will happen to us for our accounts will have been in order week after week.

The first day of the week is different from the Sabbath of the Old Testament. It is not a day of judgment, nor is it merely a day for physical rest. The cessation of all work is not required. Neither is judgment pronounced on those who do work. This day rather points out what two things we especially ought to do: one is to come to the Lord in order to receive grace, and the other is to offer our gift to the Lord. It is a day for us to rejoice and be glad. It is the Lord's day.

We hope that new believers will enjoy the Lord's grace and serve Him well on His day. God has chosen this day of the week for us. The Bible calls it the Lord's day (see Rev.

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1:10). Do not confuse the Lord's day with the day of the Lord.

In reading the writings of the so-called church fathers, we find many of them verify that the Lord's day points to the first day of the week. Many writings of the second and the third centuries attest to this fact. The day which the church gathered together during the second and the third centuries was the first day of the week, not the Sabbath. It is not true to say that the day was originally on the Sabbath but was changed to the first day of the week during the fourth century. At least twenty to thirty church fathers, starting with the disciples of the apostle John and continuing through the second, third, and fourth centuries, all agree that it was the first day of the week.

The Lord's Day—the First Day of the Week

Why do we deal with this subject? What is the practical value of it? The application involved is most significant. The Lord has set apart one day in the week and called it the Lord's day. If you ask me whether you can travel or buy things on this day, I frankly acknowledge that I do not know. But one thing I do know, and that is, this day is the Lord's day, a day which belongs to Him. So you can do on this day whatever the Lord does and you cannot do what He does not do.

Throughout my life, I should set aside the Lord's day as a very special day. If I live till seventy years of age (see Ps. 90:10), I can bow my head and say that out of these seventy years, I have taken ten years wholly for the Lord. It is very exact indeed. I set aside the first day of each week for

the Lord. The day is not mine, but the Lord's. Its hours do not belong to me, but to the Lord. If I rest, I rest for the Lord; if I work, I work for the Lord. Whether I do a thing or do not do a thing, it is all unto the Lord. There is no flavor of the Sabbath, no hint of punishment in it. I just simply offer the day completely to the Lord.

I think the apostle John spoke well when he wrote, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10). As he waited upon the Lord, he came into the Spirit. Many can testify that they are moved by the Holy Spirit on the Lord's day. May this day be the day when the Holy Spirit moves the church. May this be a day of blessing to us. It is well to say, "I am in the Spirit on the Lord's day." I hope all new believers will see what the Lord's day is and thus offer it to Him saying, "Lord, this is your day." It will be a great blessing to the church if many will begin from their youth to offer this day to the Lord. "O Lord, on this day I joyfully break the bread in remembrance of You; I also bring what I have and offer it to You. All my time throughout this day is to be spent for You." If this is true, the blessing of God will be poured down abundantly upon the church.