

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT—A
DUTY OR DELIGHT

(Report on Sabbath Observance)

At the time of the giving of the law, God enjoined the Israelites to "Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy." More specific instructions followed, mostly of a prohibitive nature, and upon these sayings the Jews built an elaborate system of rules for conducting themselves on the Sabbath Day. Anyone failing to live up to those laws in the most minute detail was dealt with very severely. God was trying to teach the people, by requiring carefulness in their outward practice, that He desired inner purity in all their living.

But the spirit of the law became lost in their concern to obey the letter. When Jesus came He found it necessary to make great reforms in the Jews' interpretation of the law, including their practice regarding Sabbath observance. Throughout all of Jesus' teaching regarding the old law runs the theme: "The spirit of the law is more important than the letter. Keep the spirit high and holy, and you must more than obey even the letter." Another characteristic of Jesus' teaching was His emphasis on the positive, rather than the negative, side of godly living. This was so forcefully exemplified in His keeping of the Sabbath Day that we would do well to note an actual instance.

It is recorded in Matthew 12:1-13: The disciples of our Lord plucked grain and ate it on the Sabbath. At the Pharisees' criticism, Jesus cited the example of David in his necessity eating the shewbread, and He silenced them with the statement that "the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath Day." That same day He healed the man with the withered hand, and defended His action by asking the Jews if they would not rescue a sheep if it had fallen into a pit, on the Lord's Day.

By these and other examples we learn that on the Sabbath Day Jesus healed, cast out demons, taught, allowed His disciples to gather needed food, and did everything possible to honor God and lead men to Him. Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27). He was not reasoning that man might disregard the Sabbath if he chose; He was showing instead that man's best good was to **keep** the Sabbath Day, as the day had been set apart especially for the glorification of God and the highest welfare of man.

The apostles confirmed the practice of our Lord in keeping the Sabbath by preaching, teaching, and doing good as they had opportunity. It was probably their influence which caused the early Christians to recognize the first day of the week as "the Lord's Day," in honor of the risen Saviour. That day has come down to us as the Christian Sabbath, which we commonly call Sunday.

We have spoken of the Jews' observance of the Sabbath, of Jesus' teaching regarding it, and the disciples' practice of His words and example. But what of present conditions? Are men today keeping the Sabbath? Probably as well as the people of Jesus' day. The people were then, as now, divided into about four classes in their observance of the Sabbath Day: those who kept the letter but disregarded the spirit, those who only obeyed while the law watched and said, "You must," those who openly disobeyed, and the few who carefully sought the will of God and truly "sanctified the Lord's Day."

We have those same classes with us today. For the first three there are civil laws, to prevent too flagrant disregard of the day hallowed to God and to protect the minority who choose to honor the Lord by keeping His day holy. Of those first three classes we mention little, feeling they are scarcely represented here. Our government has made laws which, if enforced, would go far to cut down overt desecration of the Lord's Day. In spite of such good regulations we often see and hear of people going hunting and fishing, doing unnecessary labor, making light social visits, and indulging in amusements far from being in keeping with the day. But the most widespread evil is that Sunday seems to be developing into a national—and international—day of recreation alone, a day when the parents "sleep in," the children run wild, and the whole family lolls around aimlessly, turning God's day into a general lazy day. God was emphatic when He said, "**Remember** the Sabbath Day"—let it stand out as a day in which we grow closer to God and do extra work in **His** service.

But it must be recognized that we, as Christians, "set the style" in Sabbath observance. Responsibility for keeping the day holy must fall upon us first, before we can judge or condemn others. Let all who profess to follow Jesus Christ honor the day which He Himself recognized as one set apart holy unto God.

Perhaps it would be in order to mention here a few practical suggestions for Christian Sabbath-keeping, using the behaviour of Jesus Christ as our example. We cannot forgive sins, as He did, but we can win others to Christ, and what better employment could we have in the Lord's Day than soul-winning? Jesus healed and helped people on the Sabbath; perhaps we might partly use the day to pray with the sick and afflicted, the imprisoned, and the poor, giving them what human comforts we are able, and above all, pointing them to our own great Comforter.

What an opportunity there is for a group of young people, interested in Christian work, to visit hospitals, prisons, missions, and social service centers, holding a simple gospel service of song, prayer and testimony. What a help and encouragement to those unfortunate ones, of whom some would perhaps even find their way to the cross. And what a tribute to the Christian way, for those who profess the name of Jesus to manifest His own love and compassion for human souls so practically and realistically.

But the Sabbath Day has first of all a personal meaning for every Christian. Aside from the obvious and generally recognized duties of church and Sunday school attendance, the Christian has an individual duty to himself and to God to take advantage of Sabbath leisure for hours of study and meditation on the Word of God. Here is that opportunity denied to most of us during the week to really delve deeply into the Scriptures. This is the day when we can take time to "wait on the Lord" for new revelations of His truth and will in our lives, the day whose atmosphere calls from us the urge to spend time and tears in real, heartfelt intercession for needy souls. Hours spent in meditation on God and His truth bring greater vision and new zeal for the cause of Christ. And it is in quiet communion with God that we find strength for the deep consecration and sacri-

fice essential to the extension of His kingdom on earth.

These suggestions for Sabbath-keeping might, indeed, be followed any day of the week. It seems, however, that the fast pace of modern living, felt from the most remote farm to the busiest city street corner, has so enchained us that we simply do not have hours to spend alone with God every day of our lives. That presents even stronger reason why we must find those hours on the Sabbath Day. It isn't a matter of what is a nice way to occupy a long Sunday; for Christians it is becoming a vital question of our very spiritual existence. We are being stifled and strangled by a materialism that would creep into our very churches. Unless Christians insist on drawing apart to breathe the pure fresh air of God's presence we shall become stale and lifeless. Outsiders are quick to sense this, and we shall lose our influence first with them. Conscientious, spirit-filled observance of the Lord's Day is a foundation stone in every Christian's experience.

But is careful Sabbath observance merely a duty, even as the ancient Pharisees meticulously carried out the last jot and tittle of the law? Not unless it is a painful chore to know the warmth of greater understanding of and sympathy for one's neighbor, and to feel the soul scaling new heights of beauty and glory under the guiding influence of the Holy Spirit! No, keeping the Sabbath as God intended man to observe it is one of the glorious privileges belonging to the Christian. We remember Isaiah's great admonition and promise from the Lord (Chap. 58: 13-14):

"If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasures on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words; then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

Truly the Lord designed great things for His day! May we, as Christians, not stop short of all the rich blessings God would pour upon His children on this day sacred to His Name.

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DANGEROUS CONFORMITY
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someone that her mother hasn't always been a good woman. But by the grace of God, she shall never be able to say that I was a careless mother, for I shall guard her purity as the most precious thing on earth; not only the purity of her young womanhood, but of her childhood, as well. And because I want her to be a modest as well as virtuous child, I shall not put dresses on her which only half cover her little body."

"I believe that you are going to be a wise and good mother, Annie," said Mrs. Burnett; "and there is no reason why I shouldn't be also. I am going for a few minutes out to see what the children are doing." She paused at the door and looked back. "And while I am gone you may begin to rip the hems out of those dresses; we will let them down so that they will cover the little girls' knees," she said.—Christian Witness.