



THE  
LORD'S  
DAY

PHILIP SCHAFF

## THE LORD'S DAY

by Philip Schaff

As every place, so is every day and hour alike sacred to God, who fills all space and all time, and can be worshipped everywhere and always. But, from the necessary limitations of our earthly life, as well as from the nature of social and public worship, springs the use of sacred seasons. The apostolic church followed in general the Jewish usage, but purged it from superstition and filled it with the spirit of faith and freedom.

1. Accordingly, the Jewish hours of *daily prayer*, particularly in the morning and evening, were observed [by early Christians] as a matter of habit, besides the strictly private devotions which are bound to no time.

2. The LORD'S DAY took the place of the Jewish Sabbath as the weekly day of public worship. The substance remained, the form was changed. The institution of a periodical weekly day of rest for the body and the soul is rooted in our physical and moral nature, and is as old as man, dating, like marriage, from paradise (Genesis 2:3). This is implied in the profound saying of our Lord: "The Sabbath is made for man."

It is incorporated in the Decalogue [the Ten Commandments], the moral law, which Christ did not come to destroy, but to fulfill, and *which cannot be robbed of one commandment without injury to all the rest.*

At the same time the Jewish Sabbath was hedged around by many national and ceremonial restrictions, which were not intended to be permanent, but were gradually made so prominent as to overshadow its great moral aim, and to make man subservient

to the sabbath instead of the sabbath to man. After the exile and in the hands of the Pharisees it became a legal bondage rather than a privilege and benediction. Christ as the Lord of the Sabbath opposed this mechanical ceremonialism and restored the true spirit and benevolent aim of the institution. When the slavish, superstitious, and self righteous sabbatarianism of the Pharisees crept into the Galatian churches and was made a condition of justification, Paul rebuked it as a relapse into Judaism.

The day was transferred from the seventh to the first day of the week, not on the ground of a particular command, but by the free spirit of the gospel and by the power of certain great facts which lie at the foundation of the Christian church. It was on that day that Christ rose from the dead; that He appeared to Mary, the disciples of Emmaus, and the assembled apostles; that He poured out His Spirit and founded the church; and that he revealed to His beloved disciple the mysteries of the future. Hence, the first day was already in the apostolic age honorably designated as "the Lord's Day." On that day Paul met with the disciples at Troas and preached till midnight. On that day He ordered the Galatian and Corinthian Christians to make, no doubt in connection with divine service, their weekly contributions to charitable objects according to their ability. It appears, therefore, from the New Testament itself, that Sunday was observed as a day of worship, and in special commemoration of the Resurrection, whereby the work of redemption was finished (John 20:19,26; Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10).

The universal and uncontradicted Sunday observance in the second century can only be explained by the fact that it had its roots in apostolic practice. Such observance is the more to be appreciated as it had no support in civil legislation before the age of Constantine, and must have been connected with many inconveniences, considering the lowly social condition of the majority of Christians

and their dependence upon their heathen masters and employers. Sunday thus became, by an easy and natural transformation, the Christian Sabbath or weekly day of rest, at once answering the typical import of the Jewish Sabbath, and itself forming in turn a type of the eternal rest of the people of God in the heavenly Canaan (compare Hebrews. 4:1-11; Revelation 14:13). In the gospel dispensation the Sabbath is not a degradation, but an elevation, of the week days to a higher plane, looking to the consecration of all time and all work. It is not a legal ceremonial bondage, but rather a precious gift of grace, a privilege, a holy rest in God in the midst of the unrest of the world, a day of spiritual refreshing in communion with God and in the fellowship of the saints, a foretaste and pledge of the never-ending Sabbath in heaven.

The due observance of it, in which the churches of England, Scotland, and America, to their incalculable advantage, excel the churches of the European continent, is a wholesome school of discipline, a means of grace for the people, a safeguard of public morality and religion, a bulwark against infidelity, and a source of immeasurable blessing to the church, the state, and the family. Next to the Church and the Bible, the Lord's Day is the chief pillar of Christian society.

Besides the Christian Sunday, the Jewish Christians observed their ancient Sabbath also, till Jerusalem was destroyed. After that event, the Jewish habit continued only among the Ebionites and Nazarenes.

As Sunday was devoted to the commemoration of the Saviour's resurrection, and observed as a day of thanksgiving and joy, so, at least as early as the second century, if not sooner, Friday came to be observed as a day of repentance, with prayer and fasting, in commemoration of the sufferings and death of Christ.

Of other [days and] annual festivals, the New Testament contains not the faintest trace. Christmas came in during the fourth century by a natural development of the idea of a church year as a sort of a chronological creed of the people. The festivals of Mary, the Apostles, Saints and Martyrs followed gradually, as the worship of saints spread in the Nicene and post-Nicene age, until almost every day was turned first into a holy day and then into a holiday. As the saints overshadowed the Lord, the saints' days overshadowed the Lord's Day.

(Taken from the eight volume *History of the Christian Church* by Philip Schaff; volume 1, pages 476-480.)