

# Keeping the Lord's Day Holy

by C. E. Hunter

*"If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shalt honor 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."*—Isaiah 58:13, 14

The question of Sabbath observance is not a modern one. It is as old as the human race. In the days of Adam, God set the seventh day apart from the other six as a day of rest. "He rested on the seventh day from all His work which God created and 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)

In the giving of the law at Mount Sinai the fourth commandment was so framed as to point to the original institution of the Sabbath at creation: "Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy" (Exo20:8). Sabbath observance therefore is part of the moral law of God. It has not been abolished by the Gospel any more than the other nine commandments, and the Christian must keep it. The purifying, uplifting effect of the Christian Sabbath is indispensable if the Christian witness is to be maintained. The Christian's heart and lips should respond with a hearty "Amen" to this Old Testament text.

Some find fault with the term "sabbath," saying that it belongs to the Old Testament dispensation. But the word just means "rest day;" it is taken from the Hebrew word "Sabbath," meaning "rest."

The word "sabbath" is also used in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus kept the Sabbath day. The change from the seventh to the first day of the week rather confirms than abolishes this divine institution. Call it the Lord's day in preference to the Sabbath, if you so desire. The term "Lord's day" rather enforces than diminishes our obligation to its proper observance.

In our text in Isaiah 58:13, 14 we see the

## **Ways in Which the Sabbath Is Desecrated**

1. **Unnecessary travelling.** The words of Isaiah seem quite up-to-date; they are couched in language which describes the very sins by which the Sabbath is profaned today. "If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath." The foot is the instrument of motion, and this suggests the thought of the vast amount of unnecessary travelling on the Lord's day. What an endless stream of traffic! I venture to say that ninety per cent of the train, bus and motor traffic on the Lord's day is absolutely unnecessary. In a very literal sense the Lord's day is sacrilegiously trampled upon. One feels sick at heart with the sight of the thoughtless Sunday crowds who are bent on nothing but their own pleasure. Worst of all is the thoughtlessness of some professing Christians in this matter. **Every Christian who values the sanctity of the Sabbath will refrain from unnecessary travelling on that day.**

2. **Pleasure seeking and unnecessary works** are also condemned; "not doing **thine own** ways, nor finding **thine own** pleasure." The modern attitude to the Sabbath is "I will do as I like." Men break the Sabbath because they like to do so. The Christian attitude is, "The Lord's will is my pleasure." A man will work and sweat and groan in his garden on the Lord's day just because it pleases him to do so. For the same reason we have Sunday golf, Sunday excursions and Sunday trading, though the element of profit-making enters into the last mentioned.

The traffic in Sunday newspapers is one of the greatest hindrances to Sabbath observance. What mighty instruments of the devil are the Sunday papers, and much of the Sunday radio program! The devil must do all in his power to keep men from the Word of God. If they must read, Satan sees to it that they read his Sunday bible—for example, articles on the life of Joseph Stalin, or on the career of some notable prize-fighter or film star, or it may be on some great divorce scandal. Let us make no mistake about it; the devil is in real earnest to accomplish the damnation of souls. To this end he must not let people think quietly on one day of the week. They must not be permitted to ask, Why the Lord's day? Why the Word of God? Where are

we going? Why did Jesus come and die? He seeks to turn men away from God's day as a day of serious inquiry after the way of life.

3. **Our tongues and thoughts.** We have all been guilty of this form of Sabbath desecration—"speaking our **own words** ." Not only may we break the Sabbath with our feet ("If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath)," and with our hands ("doing thy pleasure on My holy day...doing **thine own ways**") but also with our tongues ("speaking **thine own words**)." Oh! how much we need to be on our guard just here? We need to pray, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips" (Psa 141:3). **How easily we are drawn to talk about our everyday affairs on the Lord's day!** Some great political movement engages our attention, or we are occupied with plans for the future of a very secular kind! You can preach a very forcible sermon in the company of others by quietly asking to be excused from engaging in conversation about worldly matters on the Lord's day. You would be quite justified in withdrawing from company which persisted in endeavoring to draw you into such conversation. We talk about being filled with the Spirit, becoming more spiritual, praying more— these things are quite scriptural. But do let us begin to be practical in ways like these, and the effect will be very wholesome.

#### **Ways in Which God Would Have His Day Observed**

"If thou...call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shalt honor Him." If we would please the Lord with reference to His day, we must "call the sabbath a delight." It is man's sinful nature which makes the Sabbath and its proper observance so hateful to him. **The Sabbath calls upon us to discipline our lives.** Man by nature hates such discipline. "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom 8:7). The law of the Sabbath is a part of the moral law of God. Who is it therefore who calls the Sabbath a delight? It is the child of God. It is the saving grace in Christ which alone enables a man to delight in the will of God. Paul as a saved man said, "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom 7:22).

The Sabbath is to be regarded as a **holy** day and honorable. Matthew Henry says, "We then put honor upon the day, when we give honor to Him that instituted it, and to whose honor it is dedicated."

"The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy."

#### **Promises Attached to Sabbath-Keeping**

1. "Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord." There is nothing the Christian desires so much as this delighting of himself in the Lord. There is one sure way to the experience of it—keep **holy** the Lord's day. **God delights to reveal Himself to those who obey and honor Him.** Of this the Scriptures afford abundant proof. The men who knew God best were the men who obeyed Him most. Abraham, Moses, Daniel and Paul were all saved by grace, and they were also outstanding in their submission to the will of God. We read that the Lord appeared to Abraham; that Moses talked with God as a man with his friend; that Daniel by visions and dreams was in closest communion with the Most High; and that Paul was caught up into paradise. They delighted themselves in the will of God and were blessed accordingly.

2. "And I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father." When God led His people out of Egypt, it is written, "He made him ride on high places of the earth" (Deut 32:13). Another rendering of this promise is, "I will make thee supreme lord of the land." Vitringa says the promise is taken from a conqueror riding in his chariot and occupying the hills fastnesses of a country. It is certainly true that a special blessing attaches to the land which keeps holy the Lord's day.

#### **Conclusion**

Is it going too far to say, that if our nation repented of its sin in this matter and returned to the old path of Sabbath observance, we would again become the leading nation of the world? In the light of this promise of Isaiah, I believe that great blessing would follow, blessing far beyond our expectations. But though the nation does not return, **let us as individuals, and as a church,** put this promise to the test and we shall find the Lord faithful.