

Major Bible Themes

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CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE LORD'S DAY AND THE NEW CREATION

The first day of the week has been celebrated by the church from the resurrection of Christ to the present time. This fact is proven by the New Testament records, the writings of the early fathers, and the history of the church. There have been those in nearly every century who, not comprehending the present purpose of God in the New Creation, have earnestly contended for the observance of the seventh-day sabbath. At the present time, those who specialize in urging the observance of the seventh day combine these appeals with other unscriptural doctrines. Since the believer is appointed of God to observe the first day of the week under the new relationships of grace, confusion arises when that day is invested with the character of, and is governed by, the seventh-day sabbath laws. All such teachings ignore the New Testament doctrine of the New Creation.

I. THE NEW CREATION

The New Testament reveals that the purpose of God in the present unforeseen dispensation is the out-calling of the Church (Acts 15:13-18), and this redeemed company is the New Creation, a

heavenly people. While it is indicated that there are marvelous glories and perfections which are to be accomplished for this company as a whole (Eph. 5:25-27), it is also revealed that they individually are the objects of the greatest divine undertakings and transformations. Likewise, as the corporate body is organically related to Christ (1 Cor. 12:12), so the individual believer is vitally joined to the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 6:5; 1 Cor. 12:13).

Concerning the individual believer, the Bible teaches that, (a) as to sin, each one in this company has been cleansed, forgiven, and justified; (b) as to their possessions, each one has been given the indwelling Spirit, the gift of God which is eternal life, has become a legal heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ; (c) as to their positions, each one has been made the righteousness of God by which he is accepted in the Beloved forever (2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 1:6), a member of Christ's mystical body, a part of His glorious bride, and a living partaker in the New Creation of which Christ is the Federal Head. "We read: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature [creation]: old things [as to positions, not experience] are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all [these positional] things are of God" (2 Cor. 5:17, 18; Eph. 2:10; 4:25; Gal. 6:15). Peter, writing of this company of believers, states: "But ye are a chosen generation" (1 Pet. 2:9), which means a distinct heaven-born race, or nationality -- a stock, or kind -- which has been directly created by the power of God. As the first Adam begat a race which partook of his own human life and imperfections, so Christ, the Last Adam, is now begetting by the Spirit a new race which partakes of His eternal life and perfection. "The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening [life-giving] spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45).

Having partaken of the resurrection life of Christ, and being in Christ, the believer is said to be already raised (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12, 13; 3:1-4). However, as to his body, the believer is yet to receive a glorious body like unto the resurrection body of Christ (Phil. 3:20). In confirmation of this we also read that when Christ appeared in Heaven immediately following His resurrection, it was as the "firstfruits," implying that the whole company that are to follow will be like Him (1 John 3:3) even to their glorified bodies.

In the Word of God, the New Creation -- which began with the resurrection of Christ and consists of a born-again, heavenly company who are in Christ -- is everywhere held in contrast to the old creation, and it is from that old and ruined creation that the believer is said to have been saved and delivered.

As the sabbath was instituted to celebrate the old creation (Exod. 20:10, 11; 31:12-17; Heb. 4:4), so the Lord's day celebrates the New Creation. Likewise, as the sabbath was limited in its application to Israel as the earthly people of God, so, also, the Lord's day is limited in its application to the Church as the heavenly people of God.

II. THE LORD'S DAY.

In addition to the fact that the sabbath is nowhere imposed on the children of God under grace, there are abundant reasons for their observance of the first day of the week.

1. A New Day is Prophesied and Appointed under Grace.

According to Psalms 118:22-24 and Acts 4:10, 11, Christ in His crucifixion was the Stone rejected by Israel the "builders"; but, through His resurrection, He has been made the Head-Stone of the corner. This marvelous thing is of God, and the day of its accomplishment is divinely appointed as a day of rejoicing and of gladness. In accord with this, Christ's greeting on the resurrection morn was, "All hail!" (Matt. 28:9, which is more literally, "O joy!"), and being "the day which the Lord hath made," it is rightfully termed "The Lord's Day."

2. Observance of the First Day is Indicated by Various Events.

- a. On that day Christ arose from the dead (Matt. 28:1).
- b. On that day He first met His disciples in the new fellowship (John 20:19).
- c. On that day He gave them instruction (Luke 24:3-45).
- d. On that day He ascended into heaven as the "firstfruits," or wave sheaf (John 20:17; 1 Cor. 15:20, 23; Lev. 23:10-12).
- e. On that day He breathed on them (John 20:22).
- f. On that day the Spirit descended from Heaven (Acts 2:1-4).
- g. On that day the Apostle Paul preached in Troas (Acts 20:6, 7).
- h. On that day the believers came together to break bread (Acts 20:6, 7).
- i. On that day they were to "lay by in store" as God had prospered them (1 Cor. 16:2).
- j. On that day Christ appeared to John on Patmos (Rev. 1:10).

3. The Eighth Day was the Day of Circumcision.

The rite of circumcision, which was performed on the eighth day, typified the believer's separation from the flesh and the old order by the death of Christ (Col. 2:11), and the eighth day, being the first day after a completed week, is symbolical of a new beginning.

4. The New Day is of Grace.

At the end of a week of toil, a day of rest was granted to the people who were related to God by law-works; while to the people under grace, whose works are finished in Christ, a day of worship is appointed, which being the first day of the week, precedes all days of work. In the blessing of the first day the believer lives and serves the following six days. A day of rest belongs to a people who are related to God by works which were to be accomplished; a day of ceaseless worship and service belongs to a people who are related to God by the finished work of Christ. The seventh day was characterized by unyielding law; the first day is characterized by the latitude and liberty belonging to grace. The seventh day was observed with the hope that by it one might be acceptable to God. The first day is observed with the assurance that one is already accepted of

God. The keeping of the seventh day was wrought by the flesh; the keeping of the first day is wrought by the indwelling Spirit.

5. The New Day has been Blessed of God.

Throughout this age the most Spirit-filled, devout believers to whom the will of God has been clearly revealed, have kept the Lord's day apart from any sense of responsibility to keep the seventh day. It is reasonable to suppose that had they been guilty of sabbath breaking, they would have been convicted of that sin.

6. The New Day is Committed only to the Individual Believer.

a. It is not committed to the unsaved.

It is certainly most misleading to the unsaved to give them grounds for supposing that they will be more accepted of God if they observe a day; for apart from the salvation which is in Christ, all men are utterly and equally lost. For social or physical reasons a day of rest may be secured to the benefit of all; but the unregenerate should understand that the observance of such a day adds nothing to their merit before God.

b. It is not committed to the Church as a body.

The responsibility relative to the observance of the first day is of necessity committed to the individual believer only, and not to the Church as a whole, and the manner of its celebration by the individual is suggested in the two sayings of Christ on the morning of His resurrection: "O Joy!" and "Go Tell." This calls for ceaseless activity in all forms of worship and service; and such activity is in contrast to the seventh-day rest.

7. No Command is Given to keep the First Day.

Since it is all of grace, a written requirement for the keeping of the Lord's day is not imposed, nor is the manner of its observance prescribed. By this wise provision, none are encouraged to keep the day as a mere duty; it is to be kept from the heart. Israel stood before God as immature children under tutors and governors and needing the commandments which are given to a child (Gal. 4:1-11); while the Church stands before God as adult sons. Their life under grace is clearly defined, but it is presented only as the beseechings of God with the expectation that all shall be done willingly (Eph. 4:1-3; Rom. 12:1, 2). There is little question as to how a well-instructed, Spirit-filled believer (and the Scripture presupposes a normal Christian to be such) will be occupied on the day which commemorates Christ's resurrection and the New Creation. If perchance the child of God is not yielded to God, no unwilling observance of a day will correct his carnal heart nor would such observance be pleasing to God. The issue between God and the carnal Christian is not one of outward actions, but of a yielded life.

8. The Manner of the Observance of the Lord's Day may be Extended to All Days.

Christ was not more devoted to His Father on one day than on another. Sabbath rest could not be extended to all days alike; but, while the believer may have more time and freedom on the first

day of the week, his worship, joy and service, which characterizes the keeping of the Lord's day, should, so far as possible, be his experience all the days (Rom. 14:5).

QUESTIONS

1. On what evidence is it claimed that the first day of the week has been celebrated since the resurrection of Christ?
2. a. What is the present divine purpose?
b. What may be said of the relation the believer sustains to Christ?
3. What has been accomplished for the Christian?
4. What passages refer to the New Creation?
5. To what extent was Adam a type of Christ?
6. Define the believer's relation to Christ in His resurrection.
7. When did the New Creation begin?
8. What prophecy anticipates the celebration of the Lord's day?
9. Name the important events which are said to have transpired on the first day of the week.
10. In what particular does the Lord's day symbolize grace as in contrast to law?
11. Why should not the Lord's day observance be imposed on the unsaved?
12. How is the Lord's day to be observed?
13. a. Explain why there are no commands for the keeping of the Lord's day.
b. What is God's contention with a carnal Christian?
14. Does the Lord's day call for more piety and devotion to God than the other days of the week?