

CHAPTER 18

THE SABBATH IN THE RECORD OF THE EARLY FATHERS

The first reasons for neglecting the Sabbath are now mostly obsolete - A portion of the early fathers taught the perpetuity of the decalogue, and made it the standard of moral character - What they say concerning the origin of the Sabbath at Creation - Their testimony concerning the perpetuity of the ancient Sabbath, and concerning its observance - Enumeration of the things which caused the suppression of the Sabbath and the elevation of Sunday.

The reasons offered by the early fathers for neglecting the observance of the Sabbath show conclusively that they had no special light on the subject by reason of living in the first centuries, which we in this later age do not possess. The fact is, so many of the reasons offered by them are manifestly false and absurd that those who in these days discard the Sabbath, do also discard the most of the reasons offered by these fathers for this same course. We have also learned from such of the early fathers as mention first-day observance, the exact nature of the Sunday festival, and all the reasons which in the first centuries were offered in its support. Very few indeed of these reasons are now offered by modern first-day writers.

But some of the fathers bear emphatic testimony to the perpetuity of the ten commandments, and make their observance the condition of eternal life. Some of them also distinctly assert the origin of the Sabbath at creation. Several of them moreover either bear witness to the existence of Sabbath-keepers, or bear decisive testimony to the perpetuity and obligation of the Sabbath, or define the nature of proper Sabbatic observance, or connect the observance of the Sabbath and first day together. Let us now hear the testimony of those who assert the authority of the ten commandments. Irenaeus asserts their perpetuity, and makes them a test of Christian character. Thus he says:

"For God at the first, indeed, warning them [the Jews] by means of natural precepts, which from the beginning he had implanted in mankind, that is, by means of the DECALOGUE (which, if any one does not observe, he has no salvation,) did then demand nothing more of them."1

This is a very strong statement. He makes the ten commandments the law of nature implanted in man's being at the beginning; and so inherited by all mankind. This is no doubt true. It is the presence of the carnal mind or law of sin and death, implanted in man by the fall, that has partially obliterated this law, and made the work of the new covenant a necessity.2 He again asserts the perpetuity and authority of the ten commandments:

"Preparing man for this life, the Lord himself did speak in his own person to all alike the words of the Decalogue: and therefore, in the like manner, do they remain permanently with us, receiving, by means of his advent in the flesh, extension and increase, but not abrogation."3

By the "extension" of the decalogue, Irenaeus doubtless means the exposition which the Saviour gave of the meaning of the commandments in his sermon on the mount.4 Theophilus speaks in like manner concerning the decalogue:-

"For God has given us a law and holy commandments; and every one who keeps these can be

saved, and, obtaining the resurrection, can inherit incorruption."5

"We have learned a holy law; but we have as lawgiver him who is really God, who teaches us to act righteously, and to be pious, and to do good."6

"Of this great and wonderful law which tends to all righteousness, the TEN HEADS are such as we have already rehearsed."7

Tertullian calls the ten commandments "the rules of our regenerate life," that is to say, the rules which govern the life of a converted man:

"They who theorize respecting numbers, honor the number ten as the parent of all the others, and as imparting perfection to the human nativity. For my own part, I prefer viewing this measure of time in reference to God, as if implying that the ten months rather initiated man into the ten commandments; so that the numerical estimate of the time needed to consummate our natural birth should correspond to the numerical classification of the rules of our regenerate life."8

In showing the deep guilt involved in the violation of the seventh commandment, Tertullian speaks of the sacredness of the commandments which precede it, naming several of them in particular, and among them the fourth, and then says of the precept against adultery that

It stands "in the very forefront of the most holy law, among the primary counts of the celestial edict."9

Clement of Rome, or rather the author whose works have been ascribed to this father, speaks thus of the decalogue as a test:

"On account of those, therefore, who, by neglect of their own salvation, please the evil one, and those who, by study of their own profit, seek to please the good One, ten things have been prescribed as a test to this present age, according to the number of the ten plagues which were brought upon Egypt."10

Novation, who wrote about A.D. 250, is accounted the founder of the sect called Cathari or Puritans. He wrote a treatise on the Sabbath, which is not extant. There is no reference to Sunday in any of his writings. He makes the following striking remarks concerning the moral law:

"The law was given to the children of Israel for this purpose, that they might profit by it, and RETURN to those virtuous manners which, although they had received them from their fathers, they had corrupted in Egypt by reason of their intercourse with a barbarous people. Finally, also, those ten commandments on the tables teach nothing new, but remind them of what had been obliterated - that righteousness in them, which had been put to sleep, might revive again as it were by the afflatus of the law, after the manner of a fire [nearly extinguished]."11

It is evident that in the judgment of Novation, the ten commandments enjoined nothing that was not sacredly regarded by the patriarchs before Jacob went down into Egypt. It follows, therefore, that, in his opinion, the Sabbath was made, not at the fall of the Manna, but when God sanctified the seventh day, and that holy men from the earliest ages observed it.

The Apostolical Constitutions, written about the third century, give us an understanding of what was widely regarded in the third century as apostolic doctrine. They speak thus of the ten commandments:

"Have before thine eyes the fear of God, and always remember the ten commandments of God, - to love the one and only Lord God with all thy strength; to give no heed to idols, or any other beings, as being lifeless gods, or irrational beings or demons."[12](#)

"He gave a plain law to assist the law of nature, such a one as is pure, saving, and holy, in which his own name was inscribed, perfect, which is never to fail, being complete in ten commands, unspotted, converting souls."[13](#)

This writer, like Irenaeus, believed in the identity of the decalogue with the law of nature. These testimonies show that in the writings of the early fathers are some of the strongest utterances in behalf of the perpetuity and authority of the ten commandments. Now let us hear what they say concerning the origin of the Sabbath at creation. The epistle ascribed to Barnabas, says:

"And he says in another place, 'If my sons keep the Sabbath, then will I cause my mercy to rest upon them.' The Sabbath is mentioned at the beginning of the creation [thus]: 'And God made in six days the works of his hands, and made an end on the seventh day, and rested on it, and sanctified it.' "[14](#)

Irenaeus seems plainly to connect the origin of the Sabbath with the sanctification of the seventh day:

"These [things promised] are [to take place] in the times of the kingdom, that is, upon the seventh day, which has been sanctified, in which God rested from all his works which he created, which is the true Sabbath, in which they shall not be engaged in any earthly occupation."[15](#)

Tertullian, likewise, refers the origin of the Sabbath to "the benediction of the Father:"

"But inasmuch as birth is also completed with the seventh month, I more readily recognize in this number than in the eighth the honor of numerical agreement with the Sabbatical period; so that the month in which Gods' image is sometimes produced in a human birth, shall in its number tally with the day on which God's creation was completed and hallowed."[16](#)

"For even in the case before us he [Christ] fulfilled the law, while interpreting its condition; [moreover] he exhibits in a clear light the different kinds of work, while doing what the law excepts from the sacredness of the Sabbath, [and] while imparting to the Sabbath day itself which from the beginning had been consecrated by the benediction of the Father, an additional sanctity by his own beneficent action."[17](#)

Origen, who, as we have seen, believed in a mystical Sabbath, did nevertheless fix its origin at the sanctification of the seventh day:

"For he [Celsus] knows nothing of the day of the Sabbath and rest of God, which follows the completion of the worlds creation, and which lasts during the duration of the world, and in which all those will keep festival with God who have done all their works in their six days."[18](#)

The testimony of Novation which has been given relative to the sacredness and authority of the decalogue plainly

implies the existence of the Sabbath in the patriarchal ages, and its observance by those holy men of old. It was given to Israel that they might

"RETURN to those virtuous manners which, although they had received them from their fathers, they had corrupted in Egypt."

And he adds,

"Those ten commandments on the tables teach nothing new, but remind them of what had been obliterated."[19](#)

He did, not, therefore, believe the Sabbath to have originated at the fall of the manna, but counted it one of those things which were practiced by their fathers before Jacob went down to Egypt.

Lactantius places the origin of the Sabbath at creation:

"God completed the world and this admirable work of nature in the space of six days (as is contained in the secrets of holy Scripture) and CONSECRATED the seventh day on which he had rested from his works. But this is the Sabbath day, which, in the language of the Hebrews, received its name from the number, whence the seventh is the legitimate and complete number."[20](#)

In a poem on Genesis written about the time of Lactantius, but by an unknown author, we have an explicit testimony to the divine appointment of the seventh day to a holy use while man was yet in Eden, the garden of God:

"The seventh came, when God
At his work's end did rest, DECREEING IT
SACRED UNTO THE COMING AGE'S JOYS."[21](#)

The Apostolical Constitution, while teaching the present obligation of the Sabbath, plainly indicate its origin to have been at creation:

"O Lord Almighty, thou hast created the world by Christ, and hast appointed the Sabbath in memory thereof, because that on that day thou hast made up rest from our works, for the meditation upon thy laws."[22](#)

Such are the testimonies of the early fathers to the primeval origin of the Sabbath, and to the sacredness and perpetual obligation of the ten commandments. We now call attention to what they say relative to the perpetuity of the Sabbath, and to its observance in the centuries during which they lived. Tertullian defines Christ's relation to the Sabbath:

"He was called 'Lord of the Sabbath' because he maintained the Sabbath as his own institution."[23](#)

He affirms that Christ did not abolish the Sabbath:

"Christ did not at all rescind the Sabbath: he kept the law thereof, and both in the former case did a work which was beneficial to the life of his disciples (for he indulged them with the relief of food when they were hungry), and in the present instance cured the withered hand; in each case

intimating by facts, 'I came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it.' [24](#)

Nor can it be said that while Tertullian denied that Christ abolished the Sabbath he did believe that he transferred its sacredness from the seventh day of the week to the first, for he continues thus:

"He [Christ] exhibits in a clear light the different kinds of work, while doing what the law excepts from the sacredness of the Sabbath, [and] while imparting to the Sabbath day itself, which from the beginning had been consecrated by the benediction of the Father, an additional sanctity by his own beneficent action. For he furnished to this day DIVINE SAFEGUARDS - a course which his adversary would have pursued for some other days, to avoid honoring the Creator's Sabbath, and restoring to the Sabbath the works which were proper for it." [25](#)

This is a very remarkable statement. The modern doctrine of the change of the Sabbath was unknown in Tertullian's time. Had it then been in existence, there could be no doubt that in the words last quoted he was aiming at it a heavy blow; for the very thing which he asserts Christ's adversary, Satan, would have had him do, that modern first-day writers assert he did do in consecrating another day instead of adding to the sanctity of his Father's Sabbath.

Archelaus of Cascar in Mesopotamia emphatically denies the abolition of the Sabbath:

"Again, as to the assertion that the Sabbath has been abolished, we deny that he has abolished it plainly; for he was himself also Lord of the Sabbath." [26](#)

Justin Martyr, as we have seen, was an outspoken opponent of Sabbatic observance, and of the authority of the law of God. He was by no means always candid in what he said. He has occasion to refer to those who observed the seventh day, and he does it with contempt. Thus he says:

"But if some, through weak-mindedness, wish to observe such institutions as were given by Moses (from which they expect some virtue, but which we believe were appointed by reason of the hardness of the people's hearts), along with their hope in this Christ, and [wish to perform] the eternal and natural acts of righteousness and piety, yet choose to live with the Christians and the faithful, as I said before, not inducing them either to be circumcised like themselves, or to keep the Sabbath, or to observe any other such ceremonies, then I hold that we ought to join ourselves to such, and associate with them in all things as kinsmen and brethren." [27](#)

These words are spoken of Sabbath-keeping Christians. Such of them as were of Jewish descent no doubt generally retained circumcision. But there were many Gentile Christians who observed the Sabbath, as we shall see, and it is not true that they observed circumcision. Justin speaks of this class as acting from "weak-mindedness," yet he inadvertently alludes to the keeping of the commandments as the performance of "the ETERNAL and NATURAL ACTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS," a most appropriate designation indeed. Justin would fellowship those who act thus, provided they would fellowship him in the contrary course. But though Justin, on this condition could fellowship these "week-minded" brethren, he says that there are those who "do not venture to have any intercourse with, or to extend hospitality to, such persons; but I do not agree with them." [28](#) This shows the bitter spirit which prevailed in some quarters toward the Sabbath, even as early as Justin's time. Justin has no word of condemnation for these intolerant professors; he is only solicitous lest those persons who perform "the eternal and natural acts of righteousness and piety" should condemn those who do not perform them.

Clement of Alexandria, though a mystical writer, bears an important testimony to the perpetuity of the ancient Sabbath, and to man's present need thereof. He comments thus on the fourth commandment:

"And the fourth word is that which intimates that the world was created by God, and that he gave us the seventh day as a rest, on account of the trouble that there is in life. For God is incapable of weariness, and suffering, and want. But we who bear flesh need rest. The seventh day therefore, is proclaimed a rest - abstraction from ills - preparing for the primal day, our true rest."[29](#)

Clement recognized the authority of the moral law; for he treats of the ten commandments, one by one, and shows what each enjoins. He plainly teaches that the Sabbath was made for man, and that he now needs it as a day of rest, and his language implies that it was made at the creation. But in the next paragraph, he makes some curious suggestions, which deserve notice:

"Having reached this point, we must mention these things by the way; since the discourse has turned on the seventh and the eighth. For the eighth may possibly turn out to be properly the seventh, and the seventh manifestly the sixth, and the latter properly the Sabbath, and the seventh a day of work. For the creation of the world was concluded in six days."[30](#)

This language has been adduced to show that Clement called the eighth day, or Sunday, the Sabbath. But first-day writers in general have not dared to commit themselves to such an interpretation, and some of them have expressly discarded it. Let us notice this statement with especial care. He speaks of the ordinals seventh and eighth in the abstract, but probably with reference to the days of the week. Observe then,

1. That he does not intimate that the eighth day has become the Sabbath in place of the seventh which was once such, but he says that the eighth day may possibly turn out to be properly the seventh.
2. That in Clement's time, A.D. 194, there was not any confusion in the minds of men as to which day was the ancient Sabbath, and which one was the first day of the week, or eighth day, as it was often called, nor does he intimate that there was.
3. But Clement, from some cause, says that possibly the eighth day should be counted the seventh, and the seventh day the sixth. Now, if this should be done, it would change the numbering of the days, not only as far back as the resurrection of Christ, but all the way back to the creation.
4. If, therefore, in this place, designed to teach that Sunday is the Sabbath, he must also have held that it always had been such.
5. But observe that, while he changes the numbering of the days of the week, he does not change the Sabbath from one day to another. He says the eighth may possibly be the seventh, and the seventh, properly the sixth, and the latter, or this one [Greek, *e men kurios einai sabbaton*], properly the Sabbath, and the seventh a day of work.
6. By the latter must be understood the day last mentioned, which he says should be called, not the seventh, but the sixth; and by the seventh must certainly be intended that day which he says is not the eighth, but the seventh, that is to say, Sunday.

There remains but one difficulty to be solved, and that is why he should suggest the changing of the numbering of

the days of the week by striking one from the count of each day, thus making the Sabbath the sixth day in the count instead of the seventh; and making Sunday the seventh day in the count instead of the eighth. The answer seems to have eluded the observation of the first-day and anti-Sabbatarian writers who have sought to grasp it. But there is a fact which solves the difficulty. Clement's commentary on the fourth commandment, from which these quotations are taken, is principally made up of curious observations on "the perfect number six," "the number seven motherless and childless," and the number eight, which is "a cube," and the like matters, and is taken with some change of arrangement almost word for word from Philo Judaeus, a teacher who flourished at Alexandria about one century before Clement. Whoever will take pains to compare these two writers will find in Philo nearly all the ideas and illustrations which Clement has used, and the very language also in which he has expressed them.³¹ Philo was a mystical teacher to whom Clement looked up as to a master. A statement which we find in Philo, in immediate connection with several curious ideas, which Clement quotes from him, gives, beyond all doubt, the key to Clement's suggestion that possibly the eighth day should be called the seventh, and the seventh day called the sixth. Philo said that, according to God's purpose, the first day of time was not to be numbered with the other days of the creation week. Thus he says:

"And he allotted each of the six days to one of the portions of the whole, TAKING OUT THE FIRST DAY which he does not even call the first day, that it may not be numbered with the others, but entitling it ONE, he names it rightly, perceiving in it, and ascribing to it, the nature and appellation of the limit."³²

This would simply change the numbering of the days, as counted by Philo, and afterward partially adopted by Clement, and make the Sabbath, not the seventh day, but the sixth, and Sunday, not the eighth day, but the seventh; but it would still leave the Sabbath day and the Sunday the same identical days as before. It would, however, give to the Sabbath the name of sixth day, because the first of the six days of creation was not counted; and it would cause the eighth day, so called in the early church because of its coming next after the Sabbath, to be called seventh day. Thus the Sabbath would be the sixth day, and the seventh a day of work, and yet the Sabbath would be the identical day that it had ever been, and the Sunday, though called seventh day, would still, as ever before, remain a day on which ordinary labor was lawful. Of course, Philo's idea that the first day of time should not be counted, is wholly false; for there is not one fact in the Bible to support it, but many which expressly contradict it, and even Clement, with all deference to Philo, only timidly suggests it. But when the matter is laid open, it shows that Clement had no thought of calling Sunday the Sabbath, and that he does expressly confirm what we have fully proved out of other of the fathers, that Sunday was a day on which, in their judgment, labor was not sinful.

Tertullian, at different periods of his life, held different views respecting the Sabbath, and committed them all to writing. We last quoted from him a decisive testimony to the perpetuity of the Sabbath, coupled with an equally decisive testimony against the sanctification of the first day of the week. In another work, from which we have already quoted his statement that Christians should not kneel on Sunday, we find another statement that "some few" abstained from kneeling on the Sabbath. This has probable reference to Carthage, where Tertullian lived. He speaks thus:

"In the matter of kneeling also, prayer is subject to diversity of observance, through the act of some few who abstain from kneeling on the Sabbath; and since this dissension is particularly on its trial before the churches, the Lord will give his grace that the dissentients may either yield, or else indulge their opinion without offense to others."³³

The act of standing in prayer was one of the chief honors conferred upon Sunday. Those who refrained from kneeling on the seventh day, without doubt did it because they desired to honor that day. This particular act is of no consequence; for it was adopted in imitation of those who, from tradition and custom, thus honored Sunday; but we have in this an undoubted reference to Sabbath-keeping Christians. Tertullian speaks of them, however, in a manner quite unlike that of Justin in his reference to the commandment-keepers of his time.

Origen, like many other of the fathers, was far from being consistent with himself. Though he has spoken against Sabbatic observance, and has honored the so-called Lord's day as something better than the ancient Sabbath, he has nevertheless given a discourse expressly designed to teach Christians the proper method of observing the Sabbath. Here is a portion of this sermon:

"But what is the feast of the Sabbath except that of which the apostle speaks, 'There remaineth therefore a Sabbatism,' that is, the observance of the Sabbath by the people of God? Leaving the Jewish observances of the Sabbath, let us see how the Sabbath ought to be observed by a Christian. On the Sabbath day all worldly labors ought to be abstained from. If, therefore, you cease from all secular works, and execute nothing worldly, but give yourselves up to spiritual exercises, repairing to church, attending to sacred reading and instruction, thinking of celestial things, solicitous for the future, placing the Judgment to come before your eyes, not looking to things present and visible, but to those which are future and invisible, this is the observance of the Christian Sabbath."[34](#)

This is by no means a bad representation of the proper observance of the Sabbath. Such a discourse addressed to Christians is a strong evidence that many did then hallow that day. Some, indeed, have claimed that these words were spoken concerning Sunday. They would have it that he contrasts the observance of the first day with that of the seventh. But the contrast is not between the different methods of keeping two days, but between two methods of observing one day. The Jews in Origen's time spent the day mainly in mere abstinence from labor, and often added sensuality to idleness. But the Christians were to observe it in divine worship, as well as sacred rest. What day he intends cannot be doubtful. It is DIES SABBATI, a term which can signify only the seventh day. Here is the first instance of the term Christian Sabbath, Sabbati Christiani, and it is expressly applied to the seventh day observed by Christians.

The longer form of the reputed epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians was not written till after Origen's time, but, though not written by Ignatius, it is valuable for the light which it sheds upon the existing state of things at the time of its composition, and for marking the progress which apostasy had made with respect to the Sabbath. Here is its reference to the Sabbath and first day:-

"Let us therefore no longer keep the Sabbath after the Jewish manner, and rejoice in days of idleness; for 'he that does not work, let him not eat.' For say the [holy] oracles, 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy bread.' But let every one of you keep the Sabbath after a spiritual manner, rejoicing in meditation on the law, not in relaxation of the body, admiring the workmanship of God, and not eating things prepared the day before, nor using lukewarm drinks, and walking within a prescribed space, nor finding delight in dancing and plaudits which have no sense in them. And after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's day as a festival, the resurrection day, the queen and chief of all the days [of the week]. Looking forward to this, the prophet declared, 'To the end, for the eighth day,' on which our life both sprang up again, and the victory over death was obtained in Christ."[35](#)

This writer specifies the different things which made up the Jewish observance of the Sabbath. They may be summed up under two heads. 1. Strict abstinence from labor. 2. Dancing and carousal. Now, in the light of what Origen has said, we can understand the contrast which this writer draws between the Jewish and Christian observance of the Sabbath. The error of the Jews in the first part of this was that they contented themselves with mere bodily relaxation, without raising their thoughts to God, the Creator, and this mere idleness soon gave place to sensual folly.

The Christian, as Origen draws the contrast, refrains from labor on the Sabbath that he may raise his heart in grateful worship. Or, as this writer draws it, the Christian keeps the Sabbath in a spiritual manner, rejoicing in meditation on the law; but to do thus, he must hallow it in the manner which that law commands, that is, in the observance of a sacred rest which commemorates the rest of the Creator. The writer evidently believed in the observance of the Sabbath as an act of obedience to that law on which they were to meditate on that day. And the nature of the epistle indicates that it was observed, at all events, in the country where it was written. But mark the work of apostasy. The so-called Lord's day for which the writer could offer nothing better than an argument drawn from the title of the sixth psalm (see its marginal reading) is exalted above the Lord's holy day, and made the queen of all days!

The Apostolical Constitutions, though not written in apostolic times, were in existence as early as the third century, and were then very generally believed to express the doctrine of the apostles. They do therefore furnish important historical testimony to the practice of the church at that time, and also indicate the great progress which apostasy had made. Guericke speaks thus of them:

"This is a collection of ecclesiastical statutes purporting to be the work of the apostolic age, but in reality formed gradually in the second, third, and fourth centuries, and is of much value in reference to the history of polity, and Christian archaeology generally."[36](#)

Mosheim says of them:

"The matter of this work is unquestionably ancient; since the manners and discipline of which it exhibits a view are those which prevailed amongst the Christians of the second and third centuries, especially those resident in Greece and the oriental regions."[37](#)

These Constitutions indicate that the Sabbath was extensively observed in the third century. They also show the standing of the Sunday festival in that century. After solemnly enjoining the sacred observance of the ten commandments, they thus enforce the Sabbath:

"Consider the manifold workmanship of God, which received its beginning through Christ. Thou shalt observe the Sabbath, on account of Him who ceased from his work of creation, but ceased not from his work of providence: it is a rest for meditation of the law, not for idleness of the hands."[38](#)

This is sound Sabbatarian doctrine. To show how distinctly these Constitutions recognize the decalogue as the foundation of Sabbatic authority we quote the words next preceding the above, though we have quoted them on another occasion:

"Have before thine eyes the fear of God, and always remember the ten commandments of God, - to love the one and only Lord God with all thy strength; to give no heed to idols, or any other

beings, as being lifeless gods, or irrational beings or daemons."[39](#)

But though these Constitutions thus recognize the authority of the decalogue and the sacred obligation of the seventh day, they elevate the Sunday festival in some respects to higher honor than the Sabbath, though they claim for it no precept of the Scriptures. Thus they say:

"But keep the Sabbath, and the Lord's day festival; because the former is the memorial of the creation, and the latter of the resurrection."[40](#)

"For the Sabbath is the ceasing of the creation, the completion of the world, the inquiry after laws, and the grateful praise to God for the blessings he has bestowed upon men. All which the Lord's day excels, and shows the Mediator himself, the Provider, the Law-giver, the Cause of the resurrection, the First-born of the whole creation."[41](#)

"So that the Lord's day commands us to offer unto thee, O Lord, thanksgiving for all. For this is the grace afforded by thee, which, on account of its greatness, has obscured all other blessings."[42](#)

Tested by his own principles, the writer of these Constitutions was far advanced in apostasy; for he held a festival, for which he claimed no divine authority, more honorable than one which he acknowledged to be ordained of God. There could be but one step more in this course, and that would be to set aside the commandment of God for the ordinance of man, and this step was not very long afterward actually taken. One other point should be noticed. It is said:

"Let the slaves work five days; but on the Sabbath day and the Lord's day let them have leisure to go to church for instruction in piety."[43](#)

The question of the sinfulness of labor on either of these days is not here taken into the account; for the reason assigned is that the slaves may have leisure to attend public worship. But while these Constitutions elsewhere forbid labor on the Sabbath on the authority of the decalogue, they do not forbid it upon the first day of the week. Take the following as an example:

"O Lord Almighty, thou hast created the world by Christ, and hast appointed the Sabbath in memory thereof, because that on that day thou hast made us rest from our works, for the meditation upon thy laws."[44](#)

The Apostolical Constitutions are valuable to us, not as authority respecting the teaching of the apostles, but as giving us a knowledge of the views and practices which prevailed in the third century. As these Constitutions were extensively regarded as embodying the doctrine of the apostles, they furnish conclusive evidence that, at the time when they were put in writing, the ten commandments were very generally revered as the immutable rule of right, and that the Sabbath of the Lord was by many observed as an act of obedience to the fourth commandment, and as the divine memorial of the creation. They also show that the first-day festival had, in the third century, attained such strength and influence as to clearly indicate that ere long it would claim the entire ground. But observe that the Sabbath and the so-called Lord's day were then regarded as distinct institutions, and that no hint of the change of the Sabbath from the seventh day to the first is even once given.

Thus much out of the fathers concerning the authority of the decalogue, and concerning the perpetuity and

observance of the ancient Sabbath. The suppression of the Sabbath of the Bible, and the elevation of Sunday to its place, has been shown to be in no sense the work of the Saviour. But so great a work required the united action of powerful causes, and these causes we now enumerate.

1. Hatred toward the Jews. This people, who retained the ancient Sabbath, had slain Christ. It was easy for men to forget that Christ, as Lord of the Sabbath, had claimed it as his own institution, and to call the Sabbath a Jewish institution which Christians should not regard.⁴⁵

2. The hatred of the church of Rome toward the Sabbath, and its determination to elevate Sunday to the highest place. This church, as the chief in the work of apostasy, took the lead in the earliest effort to suppress the Sabbath by turning it into a fast. And the very first act of papal aggression was by an edict in behalf of Sunday. Thenceforward, in every possible form, this church continued this work until the pope announced that he had received a divine mandate for Sunday observance [the very thing lacking] in a roll which fell from Heaven.

3. The voluntary observance of memorable days. In the Christian church, almost from the beginning, men voluntarily honored the fourth, the sixth, and the first days of the week, and also the anniversary of the Passover and the Pentecost, to commemorate the betrayal, the death, and the resurrection, of Christ, and the descent of the Holy Spirit, which acts in themselves could not be counted sinful.

4. The making of tradition of equal authority with the Scriptures. This was the great error of the early church, and the one to which that church was specially exposed, as having in it those who had seen the apostles, or who had seen those who had seen them. It was this which rendered the voluntary observance of memorable days a dangerous thing. For what began as a voluntary observance became, after the lapse of a few years, a standing custom, established by tradition, which must be obeyed because it came from those who had seen the apostles, or from those who had seen others who had seen them. This is the origin of the various errors of the great apostasy.

5. The entrance of the no-law heresy. This is seen in Justin Martyr, the earliest witness to the Sunday festival, and in the church of Rome of which he was then a member.

6. The extensive observance of Sunday as a heathen festival. The first day of the week corresponded to the widely observed heathen festival of the sun. It was therefore easy to unite the honor of Christ in the observance of the day of his resurrection with the convenience and worldly advantage of his people in having the same festival day with their heathen neighbors, and to make it a special act of piety in that the conversion of the heathen was thereby facilitated, while the neglect of the ancient Sabbath was justified by stigmatizing that divine memorial as a Jewish institution with which Christians should have no concern.

1 Irenaeus Against Heresies, book iv. chap. xv. sect. 1.

2 Jer.31:33; Rom.7:21-25; 8:1-7.

3 Irenaeus Against Heresies, book iv. chap. xvi. sect. 4.

4 Matt. Chapters 5, 6, 7.

5 Theophilus to Autolycus, book ii. chap. xxvii.

6 Id. BOOK III. CHAP IX.

7 Id.Ib.

8 De Anima, chap. xxxvii.

9 On Modesty, chap. v.

10 Recognitions of Clement, book iii. chap. iv.

11 Novation on the Jewish Meats, chap. iii.

12 Apostolical Constitutions, book ii. sect. 4. par. 36.

13 Id. book vi. sect. 4, par. 19.

14 Epistle of Barnabas, chap. xv.

15 Irenaeus Against Heresies, book v. chap. xxxiii. sect. 2.

16 De Anima, chap. xxxvii.

17 Tertullian Against Marcion, book iv, chap. xii.

18 Origen Against Celsus, book vi. chap. lxi.

19 Novatian on the Jewish Meats, chap. iii.

20 Divine Institutes of Lactantius, book vii. chap. xiv.

21 Poem on Genesis, Lines 51-53.

22 Apostolical Constitutions, book vii. sect. 2, par. 36.

23 Tertullian Against Marcion, book iv. chap. xii.

24 Id.Ib.

25 Tertullian Against Marcion, book iv. chap. xii.

26 Disputation with Manes, sect. 42.

27 Dialogue with Trypho, chap. xlvi.

28 Id.Ib.

29 Clement's Miscellanies, book vi. chap. xvi.

30 Id.Ib.

31 Compare Clement of Alexandria, vol. ii. pp. 386-390, Ante-Nicene library edition, or the Miscellanies of Clement, book vi. chap. xvi. with Bohn's edition of Philo, vol. i. pp. 3, 4, 29, 30, 31, 32, 54, 55; vol. iii. p. 159; vol. iv. p. 452.

32 Bohn's edition of Philo Judaeus, vol. i. p. 4.

33 Tertullian on Prayer, chap. xxiii.

34 Origen's Opera, Tome 2, p. 358, Paris, 1733, "Quo est autem festivitas Sabbati nisi illa de qua Apostolus dicit, `relinqueretur ergo Sabbatismus,' hoc est, Sabbati observatio, `populo Dei?" Relinquentes ergo Judaicas Sabbati observationes, qualis debeat esse Christiano Sabbati observatio, videamus. Die Sabbati nihil ex omnibus mundi actibus oportet operari. Si ergo desinas ab omnibus saecularibus operibus, et nihil mundanum geras, sed spiritualibus operibus vaces, ad ecclesiam convenias, lectionibus divinis et tractatibus aurem praebeas, et de ecclestibus cogites, de futura spe sollicitudinem geras, venturum iudicium prae oculis habeas, non respicias ad prae sentia et visibilia, sed ad invisibilia et futura, haec est observatio Sabbati Christiani." - Origenis in Numeras Homilia 23.

35 Epistle to the Magnesians (longer form) chap. ix.

36 Ancient church, p. 212.

37 Historical Commentaries, cent. 1. sect. 51.

38 Apostolical Constitutions, book ii. sect. 4, par. 36.

39 Id.Ib.

40 Id. book. vii. sect. 2, par. 23.

41 Id. book vii. sect. 2, par. 36.

42 Apostolical Constitutions, book ii, sec. 4. par. 36.

43 Id. book viii. sect. 4, par. 33.

44 Id. book vii. sect. 2, par. 36.

45 Victorinus says, "Let the sixth day become a rigorous fast, lest we should appear to observe any Sabbath with the Jews." - On the creation of the World, sect. 4. And Constantine says, "It becomes us to have nothing in common with the perfidious Jews." - Socrates' Eccl. Hist. book v. chap. xxii.

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