

CHAPTER 25

HOW AND WHEN SUNDAY APPROPRIATED THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

The light of the Reformation destroyed many of the best Sunday arguments of the preceding Dark Ages - The controversy between the Presbyterians and Episcopalians of England brings Sunday sacredness to the test - The former discover the means of enforcing the observance of Sunday by the fourth commandment - How this can be done - Effects of this extraordinary discovery - History of the Sunday festival concluded.

The light of the Reformation necessarily dissipated into thin air many of the most substantial arguments by which the Sunday festival had been built up during the Dark Ages. The roll that fell from Heaven - the apparition of St. Peter - the relief of souls in purgatory, and even of the damned in hell - and many prodigies of fearful portent - none of these, nor all of them combined, were likely longer to sustain the sacredness of the venerable day. True it was that when these were swept away there remained to sustain the festival of Sunday, the canons of councils, the edicts of kings and emperors, the decrees of the holy doctors of the church, and, greatest of all, the imperious mandates of the Roman pontiff. Yet these could be adduced also in behalf of the innumerable festivals ordained by the same great apostate church. Such authority would answer for the Episcopalian, who devoutly accepts of all these festivals, because commanded so to do by the church; but for those who acknowledge the Bible as the only rule of faith, the case was different. In the latter part of the sixteenth century, the Presbyterians and Episcopalians of England were involved in such a controversy as brought this matter to an issue. The Episcopalians required men to observe all the festivals of the church; the Presbyterians observed Sunday, and rejected all the rest. The Episcopalians showed the inconsistency of this discrimination, inasmuch as the same church authority had ordained them all. As the Presbyterians rejected the authority of the church, they would not keep Sunday upon that ground, especially as it would involve the observance also of all the other festivals. They had to choose therefore between the giving up of Sunday entirely, and the defense of its observance by the Bible. There was indeed another and a nobler choice that they might have made, viz., to adopt the Sabbath of the Lord, but it was too humiliating for them to unite with those who retained that ancient and sacred institution. The issue of this struggle is thus related by a distinguished German theologian, Hengstenberg:-

"The opinion that the Sabbath was transferred to the Sunday was first broached in its perfect form, and with all its consequences, in the controversy which was carried on in England between the Episcopalians and Presbyterians. The Presbyterians, who carried to extremes the principle, that every institution of the church must have its foundation in the Scripture, and would not allow that God had given, in this respect, greater liberty to the church of the New Testament, which his Spirit had brought to maturity, than to that of the Old, charged the Episcopalians with popish leaven, and superstition, and subjection to the ordinances of men, because they retained the Christian feasts. The Episcopalians, on the other hand, as a proof that greater liberty was granted to the New Testament church in such matters as these, appealed to the fact that even the observance of the Sunday was only an arrangement of the church. The Presbyterians were now in a position which compelled them either to give up the observance of Sunday, or to maintain that a divine

appointment from God separated it from the other festivals. The first day could not do, for their Christian experience was too deep for them not to know how greatly the weakness of human nature stands in need of regularly returning periods, devoted to the service of God. They therefore decided upon the latter."¹

Thus much for the occasion of that wonderful discovery by which the Scriptures are made to sustain the divine appointment of Sunday as the Christian Sabbath. The date of the discovery, the name of the discoverer, and the manner in which he contrived to enforce the first day of the week by the authority of the fourth commandment, are thus set forth by a candid first-day historian, Lyman Coleman:

"The true doctrine of the Christian Sabbath was first promulgated by an English dissenter, the Rev. Nicholas Bound, D. D., of Norton, in the county of Suffolk. About the year 1595, he published a famous book, entitled, 'Sabbathum Veteris et Novi Testamenti,' or the True Doctrine of the Sabbath. In this book he maintained 'that the seventh part of our time ought to be devoted to God - that Christians are bound to rest on the Lord's day as much as the Jews were on the Mosaic Sabbath, the commandment about rest being moral and perpetual; and that it was not lawful for persons to follow their studies or worldly business on that day, nor to use such pleasures and recreations as are permitted on other days. This book spread with wonderful rapidity. The doctrine which it propounded called forth from many hearts a ready response, and the result was a most pleasing reformation in many parts of the kingdom. 'It is almost incredible,' says Fuller, 'how taking this doctrine was, partly because of its own purity, and partly for the eminent piety of such persons as maintained it; so that the Lord's day, especially in corporations, began to be precisely kept; people becoming a law unto themselves, forbearing such sports as yet by statute permitted; yea, many rejoicing at their own restraint herein.' The law of the Sabbath was indeed a religious principle, after which the Christian church had, for centuries, been darkly groping. Pious men of every age had felt the necessity of divine authority for sanctifying the day. Their conscience had been in advance of their reason. Practically they had kept the Sabbath better than their principles required.

"Public sentiment, however, was still unsettled in regard to this new doctrine respecting the Sabbath, though a few at first violently opposed it. 'Learned men were much divided in their judgments about these Sabbatarian doctrines; some embraced them as ancient truths consonant to Scripture, long disused and neglected, now seasonably revived for the increase of piety. Others conceived them grounded on a wrong bottom; but because they tended to the manifest advance of religion, it was a pity to oppose them; seeing none have just reason to complain, being deceived unto their own good. But a third sort flatly fell out with these propositions, as galling men's necks with a Jewish yoke against the liberty of Christians; that Christ, as Lord of the Sabbath, had removed the rigor thereof, and allowed men lawful recreations; that this doctrine put an unequal lustre on the Sunday, on set purpose to eclipse all other holy days, to the derogation of the authority of the church; that this strict observance was set up out of faction, to be a character of difference to brand all for libertines who did not entertain it.' No open opposition, however, was at first manifested against the sentiments of Dr. Bound. No reply was attempted for several years, and 'not so much as a feather of a quill in print did wag against him.'

"His work was soon followed by several other treatises in defense of the same sentiments. 'All the Puritans fell in with this doctrine, and distinguished themselves by spending that part of sacred time

in public, family, and private devotion.' Even Dr. Heylyn certified the triumphant spread of those puritanical sentiments respecting the Sabbath. . . .

"`This doctrine,' he says, `carrying such a fair show of piety, at least in the opinion of the common people, and such as did not examine the true grounds of it, induced many to embrace and defend it; and in a very little time it became the most bewitching error and the most popular infatuation that ever was embraced by the people of England.'" [2](#)

Dr. Bound was not absolutely the inventor of the seventh-part-of-time theory; but he may be said rather to have gathered up and combined the scattered hints of his predecessors, and to have added to these something of his own production. His grounds for asserting Sunday to be the Sabbath of the fourth commandment are these:

"That which is natural, namely, that every seventh day should be kept holy unto the Lord, that still remaineth: that which is positive, namely, that day which was the seventh day from the creation, should be the Sabbath, or day of rest, that is now changed in the church of God." [3](#)

He says that the meaning of the declaration, "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God," is this:

"There must be one [day] of seven and not [one] of eight." [4](#)

But the special key to the whole theory is in the statement that the seventh day in the commandment was "genus," that is to say, it was a kind of seventh day which comprehended several species of seventh days, at least two. Thus he says:

"So he maketh the seventh day to be genus in this commandment, and to be perpetual: and in it by virtue of the commandment to comprehend these two species or kinds: the Sabbath of the Jews and of the Gentiles, of the law and of the gospel: so that both of them were comprehended in the commandment, even as genus comprehendeth both his species." [5](#)

He enforces the first day by the fourth commandment, as follows:

"So that we have not in the gospel a new commandment for the Sabbath, diverse from that that was in the law; but there is a diverse time appointed; namely, not the seventh day from the creation, but the day of Christ's resurrection, and the seventh from that: both of them at several times being comprehended in the fourth commandment." [6](#)

He means to say that the fourth commandment enforces the seventh day from the creation to the resurrection of Christ, and since that enforces a different seventh day, namely, the seventh from Christ's resurrection. Such is the perverse ingenuity by which men can evade the law of God and yet make it appear that they are faithfully observing it.

Such was the origin of the seventh-part-of-time theory, by which the seventh day is dropped out of the fourth commandment, and one day in seven slipped into its place; a doctrine most opportunely framed at the very period when nothing else could save the venerable day of the sun. With the aid of this theory, the Sunday of "Pope and Pagan" was able coolly to wrap itself in the fourth commandment, and then in the character of a divine institution, to challenge obedience from all Bible Christians. It could now cast away the other frauds on which its very existence had depended, and support its authority by this one alone. In the time of Constantine it ascended the throne of the Roman Empire, and during the whole period of the Dark Ages it maintained its supremacy from

the chair of St. Peter; but now it had ascended the throne of the Most High. And thus a day which God "commanded not nor spake it, neither came it into" his "mind," was enjoined upon mankind with all the authority of his holy law. The immediate effect of Dr. Bound's work upon the existing controversy is thus described by an Episcopalian eye-witness, Dr. Heylyn:

"For by inculcating to the people these new Sabbath speculations [concerning Sunday], teaching that that day only `was of God's appointment, and all the rest observed in the church of England, a remnant of the will-worship in the church of Rome;' the other holy days in this church established, were so shrewdly shaken that till this day they are not well recovered of the blow them given. Nor came this on the by or besides their purpose, but as a thing that specially was intended from the first beginning."⁷

In a former chapter, we called attention to the fact that Sunday can be maintained as a divine institution only by adopting the rule of faith acknowledged in the church of Rome, which is, the Bible with the traditions of the church added thereto. We have seen that in the sixteenth century the Presbyterians of England were brought to decide between giving up Sunday as a church festival and maintaining it as a divine institution by the Bible. They chose the latter course. Yet while apparently avoiding the charge of observing a Catholic festival, by claiming to prove the Sunday institution out of the Bible, the utterly unsatisfactory nature of the several inferences adduced from the Scriptures in support of that day, compelled them to resort to the traditions of the church, and to add these to their so-called biblical evidences in its behalf. It would be no worse to keep Sunday while frankly acknowledging it to be a festival of the Catholic church, not commanded in the Bible, than it is to profess that you observe it as a biblical institution, and then prove it to be such by adopting the rule of faith of the Romanists. Joannes Peronne, an eminent Italian Catholic theologian, in an important doctrinal work, entitled, "Theological Lessons," makes a very impressive statement respecting the acknowledgment of tradition by Protestant Sunday-keepers. In his chapter "Concerning the Necessity and Existence of Tradition," he lays down the proposition that it is necessary to admit doctrines which we can prove only from tradition, and cannot sustain from the Holy Scriptures. Then he says:

"It is not possible, indeed, if traditions of such character are rejected, that several doctrines, which the Protestants held with us since they withdrew from the Catholic church, could, in any possible manner, be established. The fact is placed beyond a venture of a doubt, for they themselves hold with us the validity of baptism administered by heretics or infidels, the validity also of infant baptism, the true form of baptism [sprinkling]; they held, too, that the law of abstaining from blood and anything strangled is not in force; also concerning the substitution of the Lord's day for the Sabbath; besides those things which I have mentioned before, and not a few others."⁸

Dr. Bound's theory of the seventh part of time has found general acceptance in all those churches which sprung from the church of Rome. Most forcibly did old Cotton Mather observe:

"The reforming churches, flying from Rome, carried, some of them more, some of them less, all of them something, of Rome with them."⁹

One sacred treasure which they all drew from the venerable mother of harlots is the ancient festival of the sun. She had crushed out of her communion the Sabbath of the lord, and having adopted the venerable day of the sun, had transformed it into the Lord's day of the Christian church. The reformed, flying from her communion, and carrying with them this ancient festival, now found themselves able to justify its observance as being indeed the veritable Sabbath of the Lord! As the seamless coat of Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, was torn from him

before he was nailed to the cross, so has the fourth commandment been torn from the rest-day of the lord, around which it was placed by the great Law-giver, and given to this papal Lord's day; and this Barabbas the robber, thus arrayed in the stolen fourth commandment, has from that time to the present day, and with astonishing success, challenged the obedience of the world as the divinely appointed Sabbath of the most high God. Here we close the history of the Sunday festival, now fully transformed into the Christian Sabbath. A rapid survey of the history of English and American Sabbath-keepers will conclude this work.

1 Hengstenberg's Lord's Day, p. 66. [Return](#)

2 Coleman's Ancient Christianity Exemplified, chap. xxvi. sect. 2; Heylyn's Hist. Sab. part ii. chap. viii. sect. 7; Neal's Hist. Puritans, part. i. chap. viii. [Return](#)

3 Sabbathum Veteris et Novi Testamenti; or, the True Doctrine of the Sabbath, by Nicholas Bound, D. D., sec. ed. London, 1606, p. 51. [Return](#)

4 Id. p. 66. [Return](#)

5 True Doc. of the Sab. p. 71. [Return](#)

6 Id. p. 72. [Return](#)

7 Hist. Sab. Part ii. Chap. viii. sect. 8. [Return](#)

8 Praelectiones Theologicae, vol. i. part ii. sect. 2, cap. i. p. 194. Propositio. Praeter sacram Scripturam admitti necessario debent Traditiones divinae dogmaticae ab illa prorsus distincte." "Non posse praeterea, rejectis ejusmodi traditionibus, plura dogmata, quae nobiscum retinuerunt protestantes cum ab Ecclesia catholica recesserunt, ullo modo adstruis, res est citra comnis dubitationis aleam posita. Etenim ipsi nobiscum rotinuerunt valorem baptismi ab haereticis aut intidelibus administrati, valorem item paedobaptismi, germanam baptismi formam, cessationem legis de abstinentia a sanguine et suffocato, de die dominico Sabbatis suffecto, praeter ea quae superius commemoravimus aliaque haud pauca." [Return](#)

9 Backus Hist. of the Baptists in New England, p. 63, ed. 1777. [Return](#)

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