

CORRESPONDENCE RE “THE SABBATH”

Brother J. HAWKINS, of Grantham:—“The recent unsettled state of some men upon the question of Jewish Sabbath keeping, and its incumbency upon modern disciples, has some notice paid to it by a brother, F. C., in the February number of the *Christadelphian*. There is, however, a further development of our liability ‘under law to Christ’ which he made incumbent upon all his disciples, Jew and Gentile alike. Mosaic institutions were (1) national, (2) individual: a righteous nation was thus sought for through the aggregate of obedience among the people. If a man sought life, he sought it by keeping the ordinances of Moses contained in the commandments, as well as by ordinances of ceremony; and his motive power was ‘faith.’ Had this principle been all-pervading, the result would have been ‘a righteous nation.’ But a righteousness was sought by the multitude through a slavish observance of the law’s technicalities, the result showing an almost entire lack of the faith of our father Abraham; and the nation as a whole, became a miserable failure. The indictment brought against the leaders of the people by the Lord Jesus was (Mark 7:8, 9), ‘For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, . . . full well ye reject the commandment of God that ye may keep your tradition (13 v.), making the word of God of none effect.’ The consequence of this being the aggregate of the national development, the law had failed of its object, and, finally, it was swept away, ‘But,’ says one, ‘the Sabbath was not set aside;’ if the law was set aside, the Sabbath, as part of it, was also; and though it may be argued that the Sabbath existed before the law, the same holds good of animal sacrifices, of circumcision, &c.; all of which were shadows of good things to come, and are to be held needful for the growth of a kingdom when the people are gathered. ‘You only have I known of all the families of the earth,’ was prospective, as well as present and retrospective—and so circumcision was given, and so circumcision is practised by the modern Jew, and thus evolution—true evolution—the result of ‘the gifts and callings’ of the Father, perpetuates the Hebrew, who perpetuates his Sabbath also. Who does not, knowing the truth, rejoice in his tenacity, and sing:

‘Hasten, O Lord, the promised days,
When Israel shall rejoice?’

It is notorious that many of the early brethren were poor men: conditions of ancient life were those of bondsmen. The time of these men was not at their own disposal, and no plea of Sabbath observance would be held good by their Roman owner for instance. The man was a chattel absolutely: his serfdom tempered by such laws as might exist on his behalf; or contrariwise, by no laws for him but the will of his imperious master. To such the injunctions to Timothy applied, with a force such as we can hardly understand: ‘Let as many servants (slaves) *as are under the yoke*, count their masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and His doctrine be not blasphemed.’—(1 Tim. 6:1) This admonition is also given to the Ephesians (6:5); to the Colossians (3:22); to Titus (2:9); and again by Peter (1 Peter 2:18), showing the universality of the institution of slavery and its recognition as a condition of ancient life; the freedom to which such brethren were entitled being part of their future great reward. If slaves then, were to be ‘obedient in all things’ was it reasonable, was it possible, that they could keep from all labour from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset? He must be a wilfully ignorant man who could suppose such a thing—and a slave must know such a condition, surely, before he could become a disciple of Christ. Therefore, his master’s will would be set aside if he undertook to be a Christian, and an obedience ‘in all things,’ as the apostles inculcated, would be abuse of terms to such men.

Besides, we should have had indicated to us by record, as well as by instance of observance, that a day was kept as a Sabbath. Instead of that, we have the whole question of observances of days made one of individual taste by Paul, that Pharisee of the Pharisees, whereof he says: 'One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day: let every man be fully answered in his own mind. He that regardeth the day regardeth it unto the Lord: and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it.'—(Rom. 14:5, 6). And in another place he makes 'observance of days' a cause for rebuke, inasmuch as by this a chain was being forged, like the one (Gal. 4:9, 10) from which men had ceased to be held in bondage to the ceremonial law; and so, seeing the consequences, he says (5:11): 'I am afraid for you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.' But, some one will properly ask, did the Lord Jesus re-enact for his disciples anything which the law contained? We say, Yes: for he seized such commands (not contained in ordinances) as were necessary for the perfection of individual character, the units of the body of Christ, and re-enacted these:

1. As to belief in Jehovah—(Deut. 6:4): 'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God (Mark 12:29) is one.'
2. 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' (Mark 12:31); and, in addition, in reply to his questioner, a ruler, he added;
3. Thou shalt do no murder.
4. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
5. Thou shalt not steal.
6. Thou shalt not bear false witness.
7. Honour thy father and mother.

The apostolic injunctions, also, are precisely these, as was necessary they should be (Rom. 13:8, 9), and they are declared to be all comprised in what James calls 'the royal law' (Jas. 11:8) 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.'"¹

¹ (2001). *The Christadelphian*, 17(electronic ed.), 127–128.