

IS THE OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH BINDING ON BELIEVERS?

BY J. J. ANDREW.

G. I., who “believes nearly all that Christadelphians believe,” is convinced that their views are wrong on the Sabbath. He contends that the keeping of the Sabbath is as much binding in the present as in any previous dispensations. In support of this, he adduces a number of arguments which we will examine *seriatim*.

1.—G. I. admits that the Mosaic covenant was abolished at the death of Christ, but contends that the Ten Commandments never formed a part of that covenant. If so, how is it that Paul calls the stones on which they were written “*the tables of the COVENANT?*”—(Heb. 9:4.) The Decalogue had no connection with the Abrahamic covenant. To what other “covenant,” then, could Paul refer than the Mosaic? The fact that the tables of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written, were placed in “the ark of the covenant” (Heb. 9:4) which was specially connected with the ordinances of the Mosaic covenant, is sufficient evidence that the Decalogue formed a part of that covenant. This conclusion is more fully established by the following passage: “The Lord declared unto you His *covenant*, which He commanded you to perform, *even* TEN COMMANDMENTS; and he wrote them on two tables of stone.—(Deut. 4:13.) These words from part of a narrative by Moses of the events which occurred at Mount Horeb, in reference to which it is said: “The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, all of us who are here alive this day.”—(Deut. 5:2, 3.) We have thus arrived at these facts: first, that the Mosaic government was given at Horeb, a part of Sinai; second, that the Ten Commandments form part of that covenant. It is admitted that the Mosaic covenant was abolished at the death of Christ, the proof being Heb. 8:13 and Col. 2:14, No intimation is given by the apostles that the Ten Commandments constituted any exception to this abrogation How then, in the face of this evidence, can it be contended that the Decalogue was never repealed, and that, consequently, there is no re-enactment of all, but that portion referring to the Sabbath?

2.—Exod. 16:23, is quoted to prove that the Sabbath was observed before the Ten Commandments were given. True; but only by Jews, who constituted the remnant of the woman’s seed of that age. This injunction was but a preliminary enactment of the Sabbath law, afterwards embodied in the Mosaic covenant. It was given to Jews only, and was, therefore, binding on none others. The previous argument having failed, this one can, of course, have no weight. When a confirmation is repealed, the original enactment is repealed. It is only necessary to observe that this passage explains only the fourth commandment, and, unlike all the others, begins with the word “Remember.”—(Exod. 30:8.) The Israelites were commanded to remember that which they had already begun to observe.

3.—In answer to the statement that the Sabbath cannot now be kept according to the Mosaic law, if so much as a fire be lighted on that day, it is said that this injunction was abolished with

the manna and the durability of garments. But no evidence is furnished in proof thereof. This is anything but satisfactory. If the Mosaic Sabbath is to be kept at all, every jot and tittle of the injunctions connected with it must be observed. No portion must be left out to suit the will or fancy of any person or persons. If it be not kept as a whole, it is not kept at all.

4.—“Only one Sabbath was given to Adam, and only one remains to us.” The following passage gives the only account we have of the Adamic Sabbath: “On the Seventh Day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the Seventh Day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the Seventh Day, and sanctified it.”—(Gen. 2:2, 3.) No injunction is here given for Adam and his posterity to keep the Seventh Day holy, though it is not unlikely our first parents rested from their labours on that day. Neither is any punishment threatened for non-observance. How, then, can it constitute the basis for Gentiles of the present dispensation to keep the Seventh Day holy?

4—Heb. 4:1—11. On this passage it is said, “the Sabbath is the rest day that remaineth to the people of God.” The apostle Paul does not say so. Referring to the entrance of the twelve tribes into the land of Canaan, he says that this was not the state of things typified by God’s resting on the seventh day from all his works. “There remaineth, therefore, a rest to the people of God” (5:9.) What is this rest—present or future? Let Paul answer:—“*Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest*, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.” (5:11,) The apostle here assumes that he and those to whom he was writing had not then entered into the promised rest, by exhorting them to labour that they might not be excluded from it, after the manner in which the unbelieving Israelites were allowed to die in the wilderness, and so prevented crossing Jordan with Joshua. There is a sense in which the seventh day rest after the creation should be imitated by believers now. On the seventh day God rested from His works, which were of an earthly and material character. In like manner, believers at their immersion, should thenceforth rest from all their own works—the works of the flesh.

5.—Matt. 19:17. “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.” This injunction, it is said, “places the Sabbath on a firm basis.” It is forgotten, however, that this was spoken by Jesus to a Jew before the Mosaic covenant had been abolished. The ten commandments were then binding. Its utterance by Jesus has nothing, therefore, to do with the question of the present observance of the Sabbath.

6.—Ps. 89:34, “My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips,” is quoted in proof of the unchangeableness of the Sabbath. Its connection with the subject in hand is by no means clear. The spirit in David is not saying anything in this Psalm about the Sabbath. Its most prominent topic is the re-establishment of the throne of David. It is the Davidic covenant to which the above verse refers. The verse following proves this: “Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not be unto David.” No attempt is made to show that the Sabbath forms part of the Davidic covenant. Therefore this passage is quite foreign to the subject in hand. If it be intended to show that when God once enacts a law, or ordains a covenant, He never abolishes them, it is strangely inconsistent with the admission that the Mosaic covenant has been abrogated.

7.—Jas. 2:10. “Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” This verse forms part of a rebuke administered by James to certain believers who paid more attention to the rich than to the poor. They thus ignored the command, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;” an injunction which had been uttered by Jesus—(Matt. 12:39) and Paul—(Gal. 5:14). This was one of the two commands on which, said Jesus, hung all the law and the prophets. It is, therefore, very appropriately called by James “the royal law.” (ch. 2:8.) It is a

mistake to say that this appellation is applied to the whole Decalogue. The apostle does not say so. He singles out one particular commandment and calls that “the royal law.” The principle contained in this command was equally binding after as before the abolition of the Mosaic covenant. Many of the injunctions to disciples of Jesus Christ embody it. James’s reference to “the whole law” was by way of illustration, not to enforce its compliance in every particular. Addressed, as it was, to believing Jews, it would have special weight. Having shown that one under the law who commits no adultery, yet kills, is a transgressor, he says. “So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be *judged by the law of liberty*.” (5:12.) This is equivalent to saying. “Although ye are not under the Mosaic law, ye are under the law of liberty, which in principle is the same: Ye will be judged by that law; therefore, act so that ye will not be condemned by it, through having respect to persons.” To represent James as enforcing the whole Decalogue, would be to place him in antagonism to Paul, who says to the Roman believers, “Ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14); “Ye are become dead to the law by the body of Christ” (Rom. 7:4); “Now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held.” (5:6.) It will be seen that Paul uses the same term here, the law,” as is used by James in writing about the Decalogue. If it comprises the Ten Commandments in the latter case, these cannot consistently be excluded in the former. Therefore there is no other course than to admit that Paul teaches the abrogation of the Decalogue.

8.—Psalm 19:7: “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.” How can this have reference to the Ten Commandments? They contain nothing of a converting tendency. They were never designed for any such purpose; for they contained no promise of a future life. They were “added because of transgressions, till the seed should come, to whom the promise was made.”—(Gal. 3:19.) The meaning of the Psalmist is made clear by the latter clause of the same verse: “the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.” The ‘testimony’ and the ‘law’ are here synonymous, and comprise the whole of Jehovah’s revealed will. The same remarks apply to Psalm 119:9; Mark 2:27: “The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.” This is merely a statement of the object for which the Sabbath was instituted. It is not a command to obey the Sabbatic law. Even if it were, it would not be authoritative in the present dispensation without some subsequent confirmation, seeing that it was uttered before the abolition of the Mosaic covenant. It is remarkable that Jesus never, during his ministry, specifically enjoined the Jews to obey the commandment about the Sabbath. The circumstance which gave rise to these words was the plucking of ears of corn by the disciples on the Sabbath Day, to the great horror and indignation of the Pharisees. They were immediately followed by the statement that “the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” They constitute, therefore, not a reproof, but a justification for the disciples’ conduct. It does not follow that what is good for man in one age is good for man in every age. That which could be carried out with ease by Jews living under a theocracy, could not be so easily and completely complied with by Gentiles under the laws of different nations. This was, doubtless, one reason why the Sabbatic law was not re-enacted, when the time arrived for extending the way of salvation to the non-Jewish races.

10.—1 John 2:17: “He that doeth the will of God endureth for ever.” This is a passage which can only be adduced in support of Sabbath observance, when it has been proved from other passages that such is required. “The will of God,” in this verse, is a phrase which comprehends the commandments pertaining to the present dispensation. It does not include repealed laws.

11.—Matt 24:20. “Pray ye that your flight be not on the Sabbath day.” This injunction having reference to an event subsequent to the crucifixion, is supposed to countenance the retention of that institution after the Mosaic covenant had been abolished. This is equivalent to saying that

there is no other circumstance which will account for the prophetic admonition of Jesus, But are we shut up to this explanation? Is there no other? Did not the Jewish nation as a whole, continue to observe the various Mosaic laws and ceremonies after they had been legally repealed? This observance on the part of unbelieving Jews made it necessary for the believing Jews, constituting a very small minority, to manifest some deference to the ancient institution They could not take a journey longer than the prescribed or customary length, on that day, without being liable to persecution by their fellow-countrymen. Neither could they carry a burden or travel with cattle. How then could they with any comfort or safety take flight on that day? In attempting to flee from the Roman armies which surrounded Jerusalem, they might have suffered a fate equally as bad, if not worse, from the hands of their own nation. Thus, the very object of their flight would have been frustrated. It was, therefore, very wise and merciful, on the part of Jesus, to instruct them to pray that it might not be necessary for them to flee either in the winter or on the Sabbath-day.

12.—Acts 13:42. This verse simply states that certain Gentiles besought Paul to preach to them the next Sabbath. These were, evidently, unbelieving Gentiles. Hence they would have no predilections either one way or the other on the Sabbath question. The synagogue, a purely Jewish institution, would probably be open on that day only. So that the Gentiles would conclude that they could only hear Paul on that day.

13.—Acts 18:3, 4, describe the preaching of Paul to the Corinthian synagogue on the Sabbath. The same remarks apply to this passage as to the last one. Paul simply preached on the Sabbath day because the Jews assembled in their synagogues on the seventh day. Under the circumstances he could not have adopted a wiser course.

14.—Acts 16:3. “On the Sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spoke unto the women who resorted thither.” This incident occurred at Philippi, and has reference to Paul and Silas. But, it furnishes no evidence of Sabbath observance on their part. It was the first apostolic visit to Philippi, and in all probability there were no believers in the truth, as it is in Jesus, living there previously. Who, then, were wont to pray by the river side on the Sabbath day? Jews, or Jewish converts, no doubt. This practice simply furnishes evidence that they still clung to the Mosaic law. Why did Paul and Silas visit the river side at this particular time? The answer is obvious. It was for the same reason that they visited the synagogues. It afforded the most suitable field for sowing the seed of the kingdom. And what was the result? Lydia, a worshipper of God, was one of the women who listened to Paul She was converted to the truth, and then she and her household were baptized into the name of Christ.

15.—“*Nowhere can it be found that Paul or any of the apostles either laboured or went on a journey on the Sabbath.*” Certainly there is no evidence of their labouring on the Sabbath; nor is there any evidence of their abstaining from work on that day. Consequently no precedent can be drawn from their personal conduct in the matter. Doubtless it would have been dangerous for them to follow their occupations while sojourning in Jewish cities, but no such danger would exist among Pagan communities. As a matter of prudence, however, they would most likely abstain, in order not to offend the prejudices of the Jews scattered up and down the Roman empire. This was one of the cases to which it would be proper to apply Paul’s principle, when he said, “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient.” In the matter of taking a journey, the facts are somewhat different. Paul could not have gone by sea to some of the places he visited without travelling on the Sabbath. That he did go such a journey on the seventh day, is

evident from the narrative of his voyage to Rome, which speaks of his being on the sea for the “fourteenth night.”—(Acts 27:27, 33.)

16.—Matt. 28:1. “In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn towards the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, to the sepulchre.” It is alleged, on the authority of this passage, that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead before the close of the Sabbath, and not on the first day of the week. But how, it will be asked, does this harmonise with the phrase, “as it began to dawn”? This, it is suggested, should be rendered, “as it began to approach.” But there does not appear to be sufficient reason for making this alteration. The original word is *ἐπιφωσκούση*, from *ἔπι*, *towards*, and *φως*, *light*. Its primitive meaning, therefore, is towards the light, which is equivalent to “began to dawn.” *Ὅψε*, translated, “in the end,” only occurs in two other passages in the New Testament—Mark 11:19., 13:35—where it is rendered “even,” *i.e.*, evening. In no other case is it used for “the end.” It may be translated *evening* or *after*. The choice must be determined by the facts of the case or the context. In this instance, the phrase, *towards down*, shows that the word *after* must be chosen, for the Sabbath ended about twelve hours before dawn. This conclusion is further warranted by the parallel passages in the narratives of the other Evangelists. Mark says, “*very early in the morning, the first (day) of the week, they came into the sepulchre at the rising of the sun*”—(ch. 16:2). Luke says, “*Now upon the first (day) of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre*.”—(ch. 24:1). And John says, “*The first (day) of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre*” (ch. 20:1). Thus Mark, Luke, and John all agree in fixing the visit to the sepulchre early in the morning of the first day of the week. The only difference is, that Mark says “at the rising of the sun,” whereas John says “when it was yet dark.” Putting these two statements together, we can easily perceive that it was just about, or immediately preceding, the dawn. And this is precisely what Matthew says. In the face of such overwhelming testimony as this, it is impossible to assert that the resurrection of Jesus took place on the seventh day. Therefore the grounds on which this event is commemorated on the first day of the week are sound and scriptural, and the practice is not based upon a Papal tradition.

17.—Acts 20:7: “Upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow, and continued his speech until midnight.” It is asserted that this passage does not afford any evidence that it was customary, in apostolic times, to break bread on the first day of the week, now called Sunday. The morrow on which Paul’s departure was to take place was, it is said, the morning of the first day of the week, consequently, the meeting, which continued until midnight, was on the morning of the seventh day, now called Saturday. Supposing, for the sake of argument, that this meeting took place on Saturday evening instead of Sunday evening, what is gained? The Jewish Sabbath began at sunset on Friday, and ended at sunset on Saturday. It did not comprise Saturday evening. Any meeting, therefore, after sunset on Saturday, would be strictly within the limits of the Jewish first day of the week—on which the Messiah was raised from the dead. The same may be said of any meeting which is held on Sunday before sunset. In whatever way the Seventh Day is reckoned, whether its termination is fixed at sunset on Saturday or midnight on Saturday, there can be no doubt that the meeting of the disciples at Troas took place after the Sabbath had terminated; for the record says distinctly “upon the first day of the week.” To make an assertion to the contrary, is to set the inspired narrative at defiance. Hence the modern practice of breaking bread on the first day of the week—whether it be in the forenoon or afternoon of Sunday—is in perpetual accord with apostolic practice. 1 Cor. 16:2 affords confirmatory evidence of this. Why should

Paul specify “the first day of the week” as the time when each one should lay by him in store as God hath prospered him,” unless there were a meeting on that day when collections were made?

18—Luke 23:56: “They (the women) returned (from the sepulchre, after the burial of Jesus) “and prepared spices and ointment, and rested the Sabbath Day according to commandment.” Why, it is asked, did they do this if the Sabbath had been abolished? Because they did not know it. The fact had not then been proclaimed. The resurrection of Jesus was not believed in, and hence the significance of his death was not realised. The statement in this passage, that the woman “rested on the Sabbath Day,” incidentally confirms the conclusion already arrived at, that they did not revisit the sepulchre until after the Sabbath had terminated. The verse immediately following describes what they did in the morning of the first day. It is rather inconsistent, therefore, to adduce this passage, and, at the same time, assert that their journey of love and sorrow was taken before the Sabbath had ended.

19.—Dan. 7:25, which predicts that the Little Horn would change times and laws, is referred to for the purpose of shewing that it was the Papacy which changed the day of worship from the seventh day to the first day, and not Jesus or his apostles. The Papacy, it is said, established the Pagan institution called the Sun’s Day, or Day of the Sun. How this can be, in view of the fact that the Little Horn did not spring up until long after worship had been practised on Sunday, it is difficult to perceive. Not to speak of the Constantinian enactment, it is well known that it had, for a long time previously, been the custom of the early Christians to meet together for the breaking of bread on the first day of the week, called by the Pagans, Sunday. Justin Martyr, who lived in the first half of the second century, gives the following testimony on this point: “On the day which is called Sunday, there is an assembly in one place of all who dwell either in towns or in the country, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as the time permits. Then, when the reader hath ceased, the president delivers a discourse, in which he reminds and exhorts them to the imitation of all these good things. We then stand up all together and put forth prayers. Then, as we have already said, when we cease from prayer, bread is brought, and wine and water; and the president, in like manner, offers up prayers and praises with his utmost power; and the people express their assent by saying Amen. The consecrated elements are then distributed and received by everyone.”

By meeting to break bread on Sunday, it is alleged that the Pagan worship of the sun is sanctioned. If this day were selected with a view of paying homage to the sun, there would be force in such a charge. But, as no such thought enters the mind, there is no ground for condemnation. The worship of the sun by the Pagans and the resurrection of Jesus Christ on the first day of the week, is a mere coincidence. There is nothing evil in the day itself. It only assumes an evil form when false ideas are associated with it. Although the brethren of Christ meet on this day, they do not countenance any of these false ideas. The only sun they honour on the Sunday is the future Sun of Righteousness.

20.—Isaiah 66:23, and 56:2–7, are adduced to show that the Sabbath is to be on the seventh day in the age to come, in opposition to the conclusion drawn from Ezek. 43:27, that it is to be on the eighth or first day. Assuming that both the passages from Isaiah refer to the future, they do not decide the matter. They speak of “the Sabbath,” but do not say anything about the seventh day. The first and eighth days have both been called Sabbaths in the past (Lev. 23:39), and, therefore, there is nothing incongruous in the Sabbaths of the next dispensation being on the first and eighth days. The fact that it has taken place once, is evidence that it may again.

21.—Col. 2:16. An attempt is made to get rid of the force of this passage by saying that it is a Jewish Sabbath, not the Sabbath of the Lord, which was blessed and hallowed from creation. The

simple answer to this is that Paul makes no such distinction. This is a modern invention. The apostle says distinctly, “Let no man, therefore, judge you . . . in respect of *our holy-days*, or of the new moon, or of *the Sabbath days*.” It makes no difference whatever, whether “days” be quoted or not. It is in italics, and, therefore, not in the original text. Correctly speaking it should be Sabbaths instead of Sabbath days. But if this expression does not exclude the necessity for Sabbath observance, the word “holy-day” is sufficiently comprehensive to do so. The Sabbath instituted at the creation was “blessed” and “sanctified.” To sanctify is synonymous with making holy. Therefore, the seventh day was made a holy-day, and so comes under the apostolic injunction that no man is to be judged in respect of it. If this is not sufficient, how are the words of the same apostle in Rom. 14:5, 6, to be regarded? He says, “One man esteemeth one day above another; another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded 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.” These words were addressed to a mixed community of Jews and Gentiles, the former of whom were zealous for the observance of the Mosaic law. Hence they were for setting apart certain days as holy-days, or days devoted to the Lord. If it were necessary, in this dispensation, to keep any day holy, Paul could not have passed by such a dispute as this without giving specific injunctions about it. But he makes no command that any one day is to be observed above another. He refers the disputed point to the conscience. So that Gentiles who had never been in the habit of keeping Sabbaths or other holy days need not commence the practice, and Jews who were so wedded to the customs in which they had been trained from infancy, could still observe certain days as holy, or sacred. Thus, provision was made by which the consciences of both could be satisfied. If it had been an absolute command, this could not have been done. Whatever is relegated to the conscience, cannot be binding on all; it is simply binding on those who think it ought to be done. The conscience was not allowed to judge as to the observance or non-observance of the Ten Commandments. Neither is it in the present age in regard to baptism. In each case the command when given was absolute.

The non-necessity for keeping the Sabbath in this dispensation is further shown by Acts 15:24, 28, 29. If the Sabbath had never been abrogated, the apostles and the Holy Spirit would not have omitted it from the Mosaic injunctions which the Gentiles were to observe.

*April, 1872.*¹

¹ (2001). *The Christadelphian*, 9(electronic ed.), 314–320.