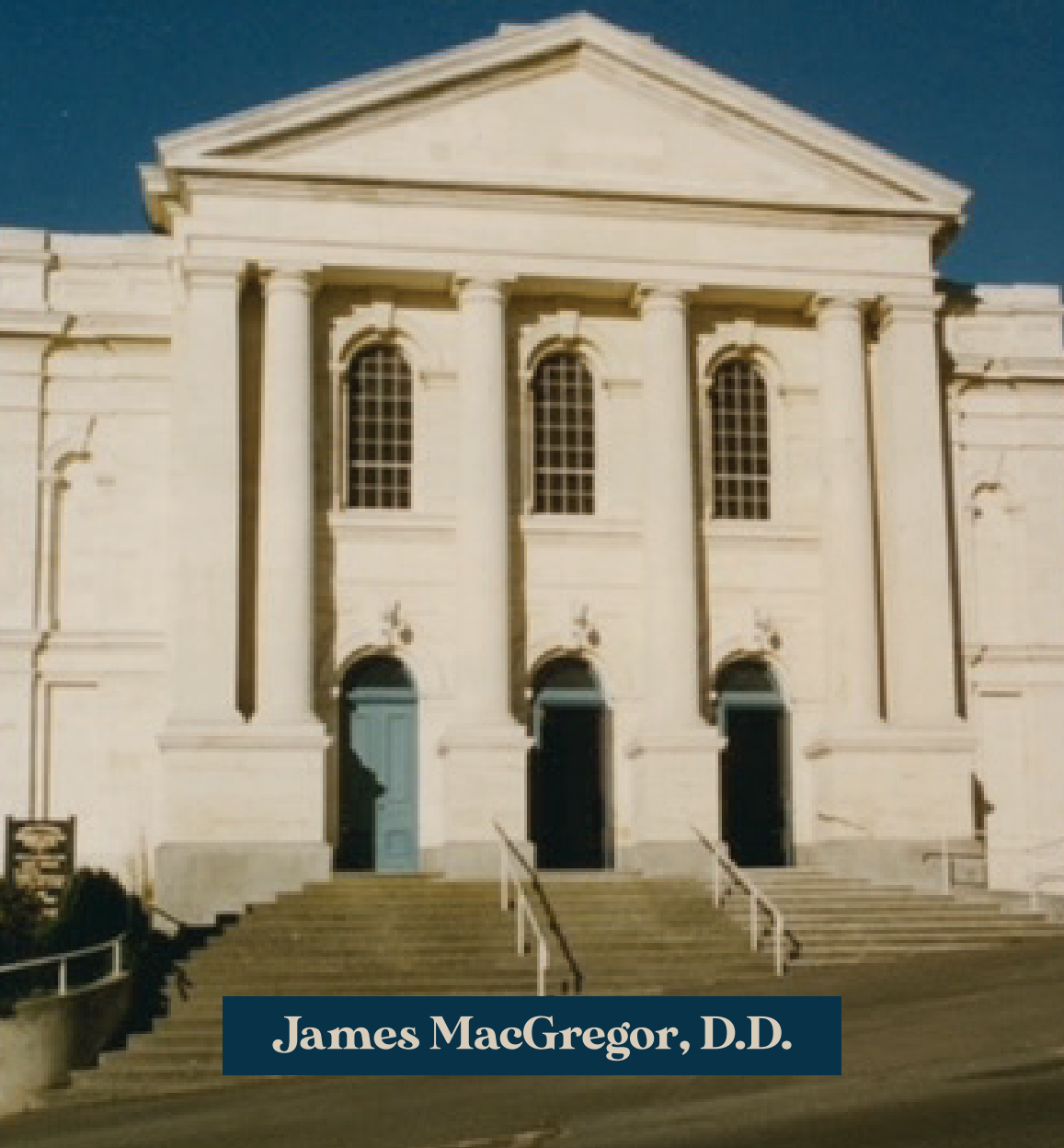


CHRIST and the Sabbath



James MacGregor, D.D.

CHRIST AND THE SABBATH

His Teaching

His Example

“And he said unto them, That the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath”. Luke 6:5.

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Oamaru NZ
Built in 1883 of Oamaru Stone
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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The following discussion has been extracted from the book, 'The Sabbath Question', (Edinburgh, D. Grant, 1866), by the Rev. James MacGregor (1830-1894), minister of the Free High Church, Paisley, later Professor of Systematic Theology in the New College, Edinburgh, and finally minister of Columba Church, Oamaru, New Zealand, until his death in 1894.

The treatment of the subject is clear, judicial and, above all, Scriptural. The concern is to bring out lessons derivable from the example and teaching of Christ with respect to the Law of God in general and the Fourth Commandment in particular. These are shown, on the basis of God's written Word, to have universal and perpetual obligation upon all men in all ages. In our day of prevalent ignorance and confusion with regard to these matters, it has been thought particularly appropriate to issue this pamphlet to the end that many may be brought to appreciate the spiritual nature of the Law, to reverence the Lord's Day and seek grace to obey God's Holy Law.

It is our sincere hope and prayer, then, that the Sovereign and Triune God may be pleased to use this tract to His own glory and cause many to walk after the commandments of Christ (II John 6) who is Lord also of the sabbath, Luke 6:5. In this connection the words of the prophet Isaiah are surely most apposite, — "If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words.

Then thou shalt delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it". (Isa., 58:13-14).

CHRIST AND THE SABBATH

by Rev. James MacGregor, D.D.

It is true that, from the first verse of Genesis to the last verse of Revelation, every word of God prepares the believer for the due apprehension of all that follows; and that no one is duly prepared for apprehending any part of Scripture who has not been educated, in faith and love, by all that has gone before. Yet in a very obvious respect the Gospel story of Jesus the Christ is the centre and foundation of all theological study. For He is the key-stone of the Biblical system of evidence: everything rests on His purity and truthfulness as a man: no one who acknowledges His personal purity and truthfulness can consistently stop short of receiving the Bible as a true revelation of God. And Jesus the Christ is the life-giving Sun of the Bible system of doctrine: without Him, that doctrine is a system without a sun, a body without a soul: He is "The Truth". We therefore welcome any prevalent disposition of Christians to give peculiar prominence to the living person of Jesus.

Against our doctrine, with reference to the question of the Sabbath,¹ to the wider question of the commandments

1. i.e. the Sabbatarian doctrine. Sabbatarians, while not denying the Apostolic institution of the Lord's-day, represent the institution as organically connected with the whole historical revelation of God in His Word, and specifically hold,

- (i) in general, that the Decalogue is a code of moral laws, binding all men in all ages and lands, and,
- (ii) in particular, that the Fourth Commandment is a moral law of permanent and universal obligation. (See Appendix).

In opposition to this doctrine is the so-called Dominical theory which, basically, represents the Lord's-day as merely a positive Apostolic institution (thus the designation 'Dominical', c.f. A.D. *Anno Domini*, i.e. dominical year — since the time of our Lord (Apostolic times)), having neither vital connection with what went before, nor anything to do with the Fourth Commandment. Implicit in this view is — (i) a desire to get rid of the Fourth Commandment, even as prescribing the form of Lord's-day observance, and, (ii), the denial of the doctrine of the perpetual obligation of the Decalogue in general and the Fourth Commandment in particular,

of God in general and to the yet wider question of the written Word of God, an appeal has been made to Jesus by morbid pietists² on the one hand and by coldblooded Sadducees³ on the other. They claim Him as their authority for rejecting the Sabbath law, and disclaiming allegiance to detailed commandments in general, and disdainfully disregarding the letter or form of the express mind of God as communicated in the Bible. They maintain that His person and life constitute an all-sufficient revelation of truth and law, so that the Incarnate Word really supersedes the written Word of God. And it will be profitable here to consider the real bearing of the Saviour's personal history and teaching on the varied aspects of the question now before us.

(1) As to the WRITTEN WORD OF GOD.

There are many who make some confused reference to the distinction between the letter of the word and its spirit. But this distinction is nothing to their purpose. In any written word, the spirit or meaning is inseparable from the letter or form: on the one hand, the letter without the spirit is mere printer's ink; and on the other hand, it is only in the letter that the spirit has "a local habitation and a name". *Where*, if not in the letter of the written word, do our *falsetto* spiritualists find the spirit of God's mind which is revealed in Scripture? Is it in some "innermost divine consciousness of their own", independent of that written word which is His mind expressed? If it be, then let them give up the name of Christian; for Christianity, under one leading aspect, consists in believing "the *Word* of Christ" as prophet of the Church. But they have appealed to Jesus; and to Jesus we shall go with them.

2. PIETISTS: Those persons who cultivate, or lay stress on, depth of religious feeling or strictness of religious practice, especially as distinct from *intellectual* belief. (Ref. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary: 3rd Ed., rev. p. 1499).

3. SADDUCEES: Those persons of a Sadducean disposition (after the Sadducees, a sect of the Jews prominent at the time of Christ and characterised by religious scepticism, being deniers, among other things, of the resurrection of the body) — materialists, i.e. those in the character and spirit of the Sadducees, — materialistic unbelief. (Op. cit. p.1777).

They choose to reject the written word in favour of some "spirit" which they represent as peculiarly Christ-like and Christian. But this "spirit" is plainly antichristian: their Antinomian⁴ cant about a spirit which rejects the word is directly opposed to the teaching of Christ, — e.g. in John 14:21-26, where He represents it as one great work of His Spirit of truth to lead men to receive and cherish the Word which expresses the truth. And this part of His teaching is amply illustrated by His example.

After His baptism, or public consecration as the Christ of God, the first words which we find Him uttering are, "It is written . . . It is written . . . It is written again". The enemy, after exhausting the lower forms of temptation, when driven to his last resort, has looked for the least ignoble temptation that can be presented to a rational spirit, and quotes one of the noblest texts of one of the noblest chapters of the Bible. (Psalm 91.) Thus one of the two greatest spirits that ever met in mortal conflict reluctantly confesses the supreme importance of the "written" Word of God. But the spirit of Jesus has made the same confession from the first. From the beginning of His wilderness temptation to its end, so far from drawing upon that "innermost divine consciousness" which *with Him* was an independent reality, — He rests with a babe-like simplicity on that "It is written, it is written, it is written again", which is to this hour the stay of believers — and the scorn of Sadducees. Such is the example He sets us in that temptation which is His probation as the Christ, the trial of His qualification for the mediatorial office and work.

And such is the example He continues to set us throughout the temptation or trial of His life to its close, — until, on the cross, He breathes out His life in a sentence of Old Testament Scripture. The whole course of His ministry was in keeping with its beginning and end. The human life of God's incarnate Son is the most impressive illustra-

4. After ANTINOMIANS, those persons who are opposed to the obligatoriness of the moral law, maintaining that it is not binding on Christians as a rule of life.

tion on record of the first sentence of that ministry: "It is written that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every *Word* of God". Though under one aspect His ministry accomplished a revolution, by subverting the dominant Pharisaism and Sadduceeism, yet in its leading aspect it was a re-formation, — a re-utterance of the old Word of God, in a form adapted to the circumstances of Teacher and taught in "the fulness of the time". No one who has not made a special study of the subject can be aware to how large an extent the instructions of Jesus are a reproduction of the very words of Old Testament Scripture. There is no leading principle uttered by Him that had not in substance been uttered by His Spirit of old. There is hardly an illustration, even among the detailed parables, that had not been previously given, at least in germ, in that Scripture which was then in the hands of the church. Throughout his ministry, He avowedly rested on the Old Testament Scriptures as His warrant and witness in all things. And even when there was no obvious occasion for a reference to that Scripture, its words came unbidden to His lips, as if the old Hebrew Bible had indeed been to Him as the breath of life. If, then, we will follow His example, we too shall act on His maxim, "Man shall live only by the *Word* of God".

But Jesus, if we will believe Him, is not only the model Man but also a teacher from God. And if we will in good faith appeal to Him, we must not only look to the practice of Jesus the Man but listen to the precepts or doctrinal instructions of Jesus the prophet. But if we will receive His instructions, — e.g., as delivered in John 14:26, and 15:26, 27, — we shall accept at least the New Testament written word as a divine external rule of our faith and practice. And if we will obey His precepts, — e.g., as recorded in John 5:39-47, — we shall receive the Old Testament Scriptures as being no less divine and authoritative. It is strange that our modern Sadducees should have appealed to Jesus as an incarnate reason why we should repudiate Moses; for Jesus Himself has said, "If ye believe

not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" This question, no doubt, was primarily addressed to Jews under the Old Testament, with whom belief or disbelief in Moses was practically equivalent to belief or disbelief in the God who had spoken through Moses. But it has an obvious application to us. Jesus has set upon Moses the seal of His authority; so that no one can reject the Jewish lawgiver without virtually rejecting the Saviour who has sealed Him. Jesus has set His seal on "the (Old Testament) Scriptures" as a whole; so that it is logically impossible to rest upon Him as the chief corner-stone without consenting to be built on the foundation of the prophets as well as the apostles. In short, if we will really receive this Jesus as a teacher from God we shall accept the whole written word as a revelation of God for our guidance to this hour.

Once more, if we will believe Him, Jesus is not only a prophet of God but God's eternal Son, one in substance with the Father, His equal in power and glory, so that He can say with truth, "I and the Father are one (Being)". And if we thus regard Him, we shall receive "all Scripture" as being not only sealed with His authority, but "given by inspiration" of His Spirit. For "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy", and the Apostles avowedly have delivered to us only what they have received from the Lord; so that he who rejects any part of the written word, Old Testament or New, really rejects the Saviour Son of God speaking for our healing and guidance in His Word.

(2) As to THE COMMANDMENTS of God

The Commandments of God, in general, are now represented as *superseded* by love, or by a *lawless* liberty which does *not* find its glorious realisation in keeping the commandments. It will be seen that this objection really tells against commandments *as such*, i.e., against all detailed precepts, positively revealed, whether moral in their nature or not. But in the first instance at least it is meant to tell

against the Ten Commandments of the Decalogue. And it is with special reference to these that we now look at the practice and precepts of our Master.

(i) Let us look at the *example* of Jesus the Man. He was "made under the law". *He perfectly obeyed the Ten Commandments*, so that, if we will follow His example, we will go and do likewise. So even of believers, who do not regard His obedience merely as exemplary, but know that it was vicarious. They know that His obedience though not *merely* an example *is* really an example. They, therefore, though consciously freed by His vicarious obedience unto death from slavish fear of death and from the burden of Old Testament ceremonial, yet feel bound by His example to obey the written commandments of God, especially those which are not ceremonial or positive but natural or moral. But the lesson comes home with peculiar force to those Sadducees who believe that His obedience is *merely* exemplary and not vicarious, that it is *nothing but* an example: they, in logical consistency, should feel bound to obey, not only those moral commandments which we recognise as binding all men, but also that whole ceremonial system, "the law of commandments contained in ordinances", from which we believe His vicarious obedience has set us free.

(ii) Let us listen to the *teaching* of Jesus the Prophet. He employs "the commandments" of the Decalogue as the instrument of testing the character of man in his relation to God. He declares with special reference to the Decalogue, that He has not come to destroy the law but to fulfil; and that whoever will break — literally, "loosen", or "deny the *binding* force of" — the least of the commandments, and teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. And so far from saying that love supersedes the law, he declares that the law is only the detailed application of the "two great commandments", Love God, Love thy neighbour, — that "on those two commandments hang all the law and the prophets". These

two great commandments, therefore, if we will believe Him, are the soul of the Old Testament system, the life-giving spirit which keeps the body from corruption and dissolution; and which only in that body has a sensible being and power. Hence, all who seriously receive Him as a teacher from God, "if they love Him will keep His commandments": if they love God and their neighbour, they will obey those Ten Words (i.e., the Ten Commandments) which are the embodiment and detailed application of the "royal law of love".

This lesson for all men comes home with peculiar force to those who lay peculiar emphasis on the commonplace truth, that the Decalogue lay at the foundation of the Old Testament Church-constitution, or of God's covenant with His Church of old. That Church-constitution had on the face of it a veil of evanescent ceremonial, which has passed away with the evanescent circumstances of the Old Testament Church. But in its substance, as distinguished from evanescent circumstances, that Old Testament constitution remains for the church of all ages and lands; so that, if the Decalogue lay at the foundation of that constitution, it may be assumed that it is of perpetual obligation at least on Christians. Again, the covenant of God with His people cannot have been merely ceremonial, superficial, formal, — i.e., Pharisaical. It must have included some moral element; it must have bound them to do what man is bound to do as man. And that moral element — where is it to be sought for, if not in the code which lay at the foundation of the covenant? They, therefore, who lay peculiar emphasis on the commonplace truth, that the Decalogue lay at the foundation of the Church's constitution and of God's covenant with her, are under superadded obligation to believe what we believe on the authority of Christ, that the Ten Commandments are of universal and perpetual obligation, and that the obligation is peculiarly incumbent upon Christians.

(iii) Let us remember that this Prophet is "*God* manifested in the flesh", — the *same* God who gave the law to Israel on Sinai. This fact is surely forgotten by those who venture to speak of the Old Testament law with contempt, or plainly show that they despise the Old Testament even when they profess to revere it. The heretic Marcion⁵, maintained that the Old Testament Creator is not the same God as the Redeemer of the New, but rather a malignant demon from whom the New Testament Redeemer has delivered us. There is nothing new under the sun. Those who express a contemptuous hatred of the Old Testament as opposed to the New, in whole or in part, really speak against Jesus as the Son of God, blaspheme Him who as "Angel of the Covenant" was revealed to the ancient Israel, and now has been manifested to the modern Israel in the flesh. They unconsciously ventilate the vile old heresy of Marcion in a new (?) form. For the only ground on which their appeals to Jesus *against* the Old Testament can rest is the principle of Marcion, that the Old Testament Creator is not the New Testament Redeemer — or the Manichæan⁶ principle, that there are really two Gods, the one evil and malignant (revealed in the Old Testament), and the other good and benignant (revealed in the New).

We, on the other hand, who really believe that the one true God is revealed in "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever", of course believe that the commandments, which yesterday were in a sense the foundation of His covenant with Israel, are today in the same sense, as a rule of life, the foundation of His covenant with the same Israel under the New Testament, and shall tomorrow be His instrument in judging the whole world, and determining the destiny of all men through the eternal day—or night.

5. Marcion, of Pontus (c.85—c.160 A.D.)

6. After Mani, a philosopher of Persia (c.216—c.276 A.D.)

(3) As to the FOURTH COMMANDMENT

This our adversaries regard as *the* illustrative sample, in relation to which our Saviour's sayings and doings justify them in assailing not only the Sabbath law but the whole Decalogue, and even the written Word of God as such. And on this account, and also because it concerns us at present, we now speak fully of the example and precepts of Jesus in reference to this one of God's Ten Words.

(i) *He perfectly obeyed the Sabbath law.* Our modern Sadducees loudly praise Him as a Sabbath desecrator. The ancient Pharisees no less loudly condemned Him as a Sabbath desecrator. But here Pilate and Herod combine in crucifying The Truth. If we will believe Him, He was no desecrator of the Sabbath, but perfectly obeyed the Sabbath law. This is the ground on which He *invariably* stood in self-defence, on all the occasions on which He was accused of perpetrating or sanctioning a violation of the law. He did not plead that He had a right to break it, but He maintained that He had perfectly obeyed it. If, then, we will be ruled by His example, we shall not violate the law which He perfectly obeyed.

The law thus perfectly obeyed by Him was the Sabbath law, not merely as given to mankind in the Fourth Commandment, but as given to the Jews, with ceremonial circumstances, and a penal sanction of death, peculiar to them under the Mosiac discipline. Here, then, we mark the culmination of a lesson which we have been learning from the outset of this paper. Some Christians profess to have *outgrown* the Old Testament, to have a spirit *too large* for the letter of God's Word, a love which cannot find room for its fullness ~~in the commandments of His law.~~ They have thus not been ashamed to echo, in sense if not in sound, what unbelievers have dared to say of God's Old Testament revelation, that it is merely a suit of "Hebrew old clothes", immeasurably too small for the great men of our enlightened generation. Considering the character of those who speak thus, as compared with Moses, and David,

and Isaiah, their airs of superiority are simply ludicrous. But the foolish pretension assumes an aspect of profound impiety, when we remember that the word thus despised occupied the whole mind, and the commandments thus rejected gave scope to the whole heart's love of God's incarnate Son. And the mingled impiety and folly become most glaringly obvious when we consider the contrasted aspects of Him and of the despisers towards this one commandment of the Sabbath. The contrast begins to appear in the fact, that He perfectly obeyed the Sabbath law. This part of the suit of "Hebrew old clothes," immeasurably too small for our Sadducean Christians, has been worn by Jesus the Son of God. But the contrast will appear more fully as we proceed.

(ii) *He declared the purpose of the law to be "mercy and not sacrifice.* Hence the exception in cases of "necessity and mercy". On account of our professing to recognise this exception to the rule, we Sabbatarians are scoffed at by our critics. In recognising that exception, we do but follow the example of the Son of God. And the exception as declared by the incarnate Word or Reason of God (Logos — ratio vel oratio), commends itself to the reason of man. The purpose of the Sixth Commandment is to guard the sacredness of human life. But for this purpose, which is the spirit or meaning of the law, it may be necessary to depart from the letter of the law, "Thou shall not kill:" e.g., in the death-punishment of murderers, what society seeks is not the destruction of life but really the preservation of life, by solemn judicial vindication of its sacredness. And in thus departing from the letter of the law in order to obey its spirit, society does not reject the written Word of God, but accepts the letter of that word as the instrument of expressing the spirit of it, and obeys the word itself by doing what God really means men to do: i.e., by effectually providing for the protection of human life. So of the Fourth Commandment. What God really means in this commandment is to give rest to man's

body and soul. Therefore, He means that we should do everything we innocently can for the realisation of that rest; for example, that all should make due needful provision for bodily ease and comfort, and that ministers should be doing their great work for the healing and comforting of souls. And thus in all cases of real "necessity and mercy", in working for the realisation of the God-given rest of body and soul we are not breaking the law but really obeying it, that is, doing what God really means us to do.

Hence, too, the law itself. Our adversaries appear to imagine that "mercy" is shown only in the exceptional cases; that the law itself is unmerciful, imposing a painful burden; and that the cases of "necessity and mercy" are simply cases in which the harshness of the law becomes intolerable, that is, extreme cases of the ordinary inhuman spirit of the law. It is not from the gospel history of Jesus that they have learned to think thus, but from their own unconscious Manichaeism. He has taught us that the whole Old Testament system is pervaded by the "mercy" of God to man. He sets forth the decalogue in general as a notable instance of that love of God, because it gives man so many calls and inducements to the blessedness of loving God and his neighbour. And what He gives us to understand with reference to the Ten Commandments in general He shows to be conspicuously true of the Sabbath law in particular.

It is a significant illustration of the unchristian position of many in our day that this law, which they have selected as the illustrative example of the harshness and inhumanity of the Old Testament religion as opposed to the religion of Jesus, is the one only commandment selected by Jesus Himself as an illustrative sample of that "mercy and not sacrifice" which He declares to be the spirit of the Old Testament religion as a whole (Matth. 12:7).

In selecting this law for that purpose, he does not, of course, deny, but virtually affirms the mercifulness of that religion of which it is an illustrative example. This virtual

affirmation extends to those minute ceremonial regulations, and even to those severe penal sanctions, of the theocratic system, which have been abrogated by His death. "He that spareth his rod hateth his son". Under the Old Testament the Church was a child. What a child needs, in order to be trained for a healthful maturity, is a daily and hourly subjection to positive precepts, all imbued with parental tenderness as well as invested with parental authority, and all combining to form a *habit of subjection* to lawful authority, — a habit which shall remain after the precepts which instrumentally formed it have long been forgotten. And even the severe penal sanctions were fitted to train the Church to feel the great *value* of the ordinances which were guarded at such a cost. Such is the training which every generation of children receives in well-conditioned Christian families. This training God gave to His Church in her Old Testament childhood by the ceremonial regulations and penal sanctions which are abrogated now. And we, who enjoy the fruits of that training in a disciplined habit of subjection to God's law, may well confess, as we look back to the Old Testament discipline, that its presiding spirit was always "mercy and not sacrifice".

But in selecting the Sabbath-law as *the* illustrative example of that merciful spirit, the Saviour tells us, in effect, that *this* law is so *manifestly and signally* merciful as to be of itself a vindication of the mercifulness of the whole Old Testament system to which it pertained as a part. And that it actually is so can be easily seen by anyone who will read the Fourth Commandment in a really judicial spirit. A gentleman who does not make what we regard as a visible profession of Christianity told the author that he thought himself "broad" enough, but not nearly so "broad" as some theologians and that as to the Fourth Commandment, he needed no proof of its divinity : in his estimation the commandment itself has internal evidence of the being of God; for the careful provision it makes for the comfort of slaves and even of beasts would never have

been spontaneously made by any nation of selfish men. Such is the impression naturally produced by the commandment on a clear and unsophisticated mind: nothing but the artificial sophistry of the schools could ever have blinded learned Doctors of Divinity to its manifest spirit of mercy.

The Sabbath which the Saviour thus characterised as a *signal* illustration of the mercifulness of His religion as revealed of old, was the *Jewish* Sabbath; for it was in its Jewish form alone that the Sabbath existed in His day. From this we may learn what was the true character of that Jewish Sabbath of whose harshness, austerity and gloomy asceticism so much has been ignorantly said. The impression of the first Reformers and of our modern Sadducees regarding the Sabbath of the Old Testament Church, appears to have been derived from the *pharisaical* custom of Sabbath observance. The pharisaical notion of the Sabbath was really antagonistic to that of spiritual-minded Jews under the Old Testament. Of the true spirit of Old Testament Jewish Sabbath-keeping, we have a fine illustration in the 92nd Psalm, one of those which are headed, "A psalm for the Sabbath-day". The whole song is replete with festive gladness, without any allusion to "first-rate dinners". The reader of that psalm will probably believe that the Old Testament saint was very much more truly and highly spiritual than those who now object to the Old Testament Sabbath on the ground of its being incompatible with *their* "spirituality" — as I have no doubt it is. Again, we have a description of the true spirit of Jewish Sabbath-keeping in Is. 58:13, 14. There we see that what our Sadducees represent as a degrading bondage the true Old Testament Israel called "a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable", enabling them to "delight themselves in the Lord", and to "feed on the heritage of Jacob their father", i.e., on God's redeeming love. And the conclusion thus suggested by the nature of the Sabbath law, and by the spirit in which it was received by the true Old Testament Church, is abundantly established by the example and words

of our Lord : *that* cannot have been a degrading bondage of the letter which He felt and confessed as a signal illustration of the merciful spirit of that religion which in the Old Testament He had revealed⁷.

(iii) *He declared that "the Sabbath was made for man"*. In this respect the law of the Sabbath, like the law of the family, is contrasted with the eight imperial laws of the Decalogue. These, no doubt, were made for men in the sense of being fitted and intended to serve as a boon to bless his life, and much more as a law to rule his life. But the two provincial laws of the Sabbath and the family are distinguished from the imperial by the circumstance of having been made for man *alone*, and of having been made for him mainly in order to be a boon to bless his life. God might have made man, like the other rational creatures, so as to be naturally incapable of receiving the Sabbath and the family; or, having made him as He has made him, He might not have given him these two institutions, which his actual constitution as man requires for the fullness of his completed well-being. And therefore, in first making man such as to be naturally susceptible of the law, and then building the law on the basis of the human constitution, the Creator has bestowed on mankind a signal gift of that tender mercy which extends over all His works. They, therefore, who break the Sabbath law are

7. "The subject of "The Jewish Sabbath" is admirably treated by the Rev. D. T. K. Drummond, of St. Thomas' Chapel, Edinburgh, in a pamphlet published by John Maclaren, Edinburgh, 1862. From him the following notes are taken: 1. The prohibition to kindle a fire on the Sabbath was delivered in connection with the building of the Tabernacle; and was presumably meant merely with reference to that occasion, to guard the chosen people, in the ardour of their enthusiasm, from going on with the work on the day of rest; and for this purpose kindling the fire of their furnaces, for the molten work of the sanctuary. 2. Under the general name of 'Sabbath' or 'rest' were included several species of holy days in addition to the weekly day of rest; some of these, like our sacramental fast days, were superficially gloomy and ascetic, intended for the salutary discipline of 'afflicting men's souls'; the pharisaic ascetism spread this gloom over *all* God's Sabbaths, even at the cost of presumptuously adding to His word; and hence the mistake of the Reformers regarding the Jewish Sabbath, and the mistake of our adversaries, who ought to know that a *Judaical* or pharasaical Sabbath is antichristian, while the true Jewish Sabbath is Christian in its substance though antiquated in its form".

guilty of treading under foot in gross ingratitude and ignorance a precious jewel, which should be all the more dearly prized by man because it is given to man alone.

Further the Saviour teaches that the Sabbath was made, not merely for the Jew, the man in exceptional circumstances, but "for *man*", the man *as such*, i.e., for all men in all ages and lands. From this it follows that, both as a law to rule man's life and as a boon to bless it, God has made the Sabbath for all nations and ages. There must therefore be a Sabbath in the New Testament Church. But *where* is this Sabbath in the New Testament Church? It is, and can be, only in the Lord's-day, for this is the only festival which either we or our adversaries recognise as being divinely instituted for the Church of the new dispensation. So that it is not merely from ancestral tradition, nor merely from our own theological speculation, but really from the lips of Christ, that we have received the truth that the New Testament Lord's day is the "Christian Sabbath".

Moreover, what He declared to be made for man is a *Sabbath*. By a Sabbath, His hearers must have understood Him to mean a day set apart for religious rest; for this is the only sort of resting-day made known by that name in the Old Testament. And that this is what He actually meant appears from the fact that in His own defence He reasoned from the analogy of the temple and the shew-bread. From this reasoning it appears, if we will believe Him, that, so far as His argument is concerned, the "Sabbath" made for man is of the same nature as the temple and the shew-bread. Now what, so far as His argument is concerned, is the nature of the temple and the shew-bread? The temple as distinguished from all other houses, and the shew-bread as distinguished from all other bread, are "holy" in the sense of being set apart for the worship of God. If, then, the Sabbath be really of the same nature as theirs, this day made for man is distinguished from all other days by being a "holy" day, set apart for the worship

of God. And if the Lord's-day be the Christian Sabbath, it is thus "one whole day in seven", set apart from the ordinary purposes of human life, and consecrated, with all due regard to emergent claims of "necessity and mercy", to religious rest. So that, not merely from ancestral tradition, nor merely from theological speculation of our own, but really from the lips of Christ, we Sabbatarians have received our doctrine of the form of Lord's-day observance.

(iv) *He declared that He, as "the Son of Man, is Lord also of the Sabbath"*. He is Lord of the Sabbath and of the family in some such sense as He is "greater than the temple". The Sabbath and the family, though natural institutions, existing in Eden before man fell, had been to a large extent lost to man, as their blessings had been forfeited by his fall. And though the law of the twin institutions was revealed anew on Sinai, yet the institutions themselves, in their fullness of blessing, have been actually restored to man only by Christ's redeeming work of grace. He has restored this among other things which constituted man's natural heritage of blessing forfeited by sin. And therefore He claims a "propriety in" or lordship over both the Sabbath and the family, not only on the ground of His nature as the eternal Son of God, but also and especially on the ground of His grace as the mediatorial Son of Man. His claim as to the family He asserts and seals in constituting every Christian family a "Church in the house", baptizing the natural institution into His new kingdom of grace. And as to the Sabbath He asserts and seals the same claim by transposing the resting-day to the week's beginning from its end, and giving to this Christian Sabbath the name of "the Lord's-day".

Here we see the truth that He, and He alone, has *competent authority* to effect that transposition. No human authority, of prince, or priest, or people, — no mere creature, — has power of right to alter even the form of a God-given law or institution. But the Son of Man in the case now before us, has that power of right. What the

Sabbath law requires in its substance is the consecration of one day in seven. Which day in seven shall be consecrated, is merely a question of form. And this question of form, not determined by the substance of the Sabbath law, falls to be determined by the positive institution of Him who is "the Lord of the Sabbath". When, therefore, we find reason to believe that the resting-day has been transposed by Him to the beginning of the week, we have no difficulty in believing this evidenced fact, but rather see in the evidenced transposition an incidental proof of the deity of Him by whom the change has been effected.

Here we see a special reason why we should recognise the Lord's-day as the Christian *Sabbath*. In order to give Jesus all due glory as the Lord, we must recognise Him as one who has restored "*all things*". Thus in our family worship we must acknowledge Him as the God-given and divine Head of the Christian household, restored by His grace. And thus in our Lord's-day observance we must own Him and adore Him as "Lord of the *Sabbath* also", i.e., we must openly confess that He who on Sinai revealed the Sabbath as an institution of nature has restored it on Calvary by His grace as Redeemer. The Dominical theory of the Lord's-day, detracts from the glory due to Jesus as the Lord. The practical looseness of Lord's-day observance countenanced by the advocates of that theory deserves the righteous wrath of Jesus, not only as Creator but also as Redeemer. And they who profane the day on the ground that "the Sabbath was made for man", are as perverted in their understanding as in their heart. The proper inference from the humane destination of the Sabbath is, that "the Son of Man is Lord of it"; that this "pearl of days" is His by a blood-bought right; and that, therefore, the man who by profaning the day treads the jewel underfoot at the same time violates the majesty of that divine Son of Man who has redeemed the Sabbath for man with His blood.

APPENDIX

The Westminster Confession of Faith, Cap. XXI, Sec. VII.

As it is of the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in his word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment, binding all men in all ages, he hath particularly appointed one day in seven for a sabbath, to be kept holy unto him: which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which in Scripture is called the Lord's Day, and is to be continued to the end of the world as the Christian Sabbath.

Cap. XXI, Sec. VIII.

This sabbath is kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest all the day from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations; but also are taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of his worship, and in duties of necessity or mercy.

The Helvetic Confession (Zwinglian) 1566 A.D.

XII. We teach that by the Law of God there is expounded to us the will of God, what He wills or forbids us to do, what is good and right, or what is evil and wrong. We therefore confess that the law is good and holy. And this law (we confess), on the one hand, has been written by God's finger on the hearts of men, and is called the law of nature; but, on the other hand has been engraved by His finger on the two tables of Moses, and more fully expounded in the books of Moses. We distinguish it for the sake of perspicuity into: *moral* (the law, which is comprehended in the Ten Words or Two Tables); *the ceremonial* (which ordains regarding ceremonies and the worship of God);

and the *judicial* (which is occupied with political and economical matters).

We believe that by this law the whole will of God, and all the precepts necessary for every part of life, are most aptly revealed to us. We teach that this law is not given to men in order that they may be justified by observing it : but rather in order that by its judgments we may be lead to recognise our own weakness, sin, and condemnation, and despairing of our own powers may be converted in faith to Christ . . . Yet we do not disdainfully reject the law. For we remember the words of the Lord, saying, Matt. 5, I have not come to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil. We know that by the law is given to us rules and tests (formulas) of virtues and vices. We know that the written law, if it be expounded by the Gospel, is useful to the Church, and therefore the reading of it ought not to be rooted out of the Church. For though there was a veil on the face of Moses, yet, the Apostle shows, the veil (not Moses) has been taken away and been abolished by Christ. We condemn all that ancient and recent heretics have taught against the Law of God.

FOR FURTHER READING

REGARDING THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH

THE ABSOLUTE AND THE LORD'S DAY
- THE REV. MURDO A. MACLEOD, M.A.

THE PATTERN OF THE LORD'S DAY
- PROFESSOR JOHN MURRAY.

THE SABBATH INSTITUTION
- PROFESSOR JOHN MURRAY.

THE SABBATH IN THE BIBLE
- DR. NIGEL LEE.

THE LORD'S DAY
- DR. J. C. RYLE.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE SABBATH
- DR. B. B. WARFIELD.

THE LORD'S DAY
- DANIEL WILSON, D.D.

THE DAY CHANGED AND THE SABBATH PRESERVED
- A. A. HODGE, D.D.

I LOVE THE LORD'S DAY
- ROBERT M. MCCHEYNE

FURTHER READING

REGARDING DR JAMES MACGREGOR

PREACHER, THEOLOGIAN AND DEFENDER OF THE FAITH
- JOHN W KEDDIE (2016)

PROFESSOR JAMES MACGREGOR:
THEOLOGICAL AND PRACTICAL WRITINGS
- JOHN W KEDDIE (2011)

THE BASICS OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE
- DR JAMES MACGREGOR (2025)

THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE - DR JAMES MACGREGOR
- GEOFFREY MACPHERSON (2014)

DR JAMES MACGREGOR

James MacGregor was born on 6 January 1829 in Callander, in the Gaelic-speaking area of Perthshire, Scotland.

In 1861 MacGregor became minister of the Free High Church, Paisley, where he was involved in controversy over sabbath observance with Dr Norman Macleod of Glasgow; he demonstrated theological abilities of a high order in his defence of classical Calvinism. In 1868 he was inducted to a theological chair at New College in Edinburgh, and in 1871 was awarded a DD by the University.

The ill health of their children persuaded the MacGregors to immigrate to New Zealand. James MacGregor became the first minister of Columba Presbyterian Church, Oamaru, on 23 March 1882.

James MacGregor was, in his time, the best-known Presbyterian theologian in Australasia. After a stroke, he died in Oamaru on 8 October 1894.

(See also Ian Breward. 'MacGregor, James', Dictionary of New Zealand Biography and John. W. Keddle "James MacGregor: Preacher, Theologian and Defender of the Faith". 2018.)