To Him That Hath

Shall Be Given:

A Law Of The

Christian Sabbath

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XXVI.

TO HIM THAT HATH SHALL BE GIVEN:—A LAW OF THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH.

"Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance;
but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath."
—Matt. xiii. 12.

This remarkable saying of the Lord Jesus is, in substance, a generalized formula, capable of being profitably applied to a great variety of cases. The shortest and surest method of explaining a universal rule, is to apply it at once to a particular example. The principle will illustrate the fact; and the fact will illustrate the principle. The text, standing by itself, may be compared to a manufacturing machine, with all its parts fitted in, and all its wheels in motion. It is beautiful to look upon even now; but it is only when you feed it with a portion of suitable material, that you can form a judgment of its utility and power. A double benefit then accrues; you ascertain the power of the manufacturing machine, and get the use of the manufactured article.

At present I propose to place the law of the Sabbath under the action of this great evangelic principle.

In the Sabbath, it is well known, are two blessings, a higher and a lower, a spiritual and a temporal,—each very good according to its kind. One of its uses belongs to the dear children of God's family, and another to the frail creatures of God's hand. The Sabbath, like man
for whom it was made, has both a soul and a body. If we preserve its soul alive, we shall enjoy also the benefit of its body; but if we grasp only the body, we shall lose both. He who used it first himself and then gave it to us, is a jealous God; if we do not appreciate its higher uses, he will permit the lower to be taken away.

Using the text as a blank form, we shall, in this instance, fill it up from the Sabbath law, thus:—Whoever hath [a spiritual appreciation of the Sabbath's holiness], to him shall be given [also the use of the Sabbath as a day of bodily rest], and he shall have more abundance; but whoever hath not [a relish for the holy Sabbath], from him shall be taken away even that [weekly relief from toil] which he now hath.

The neglect of the Sabbath's higher ends involves, by God's law and according to man's experience, the loss of its temporal advantages; and, conversely, a just estimate of these higher ends opens in the wilderness both the upper and the nether springs for the refreshment of the weary pilgrims.

Let us illustrate the doctrine now by the experience of Nations, Classes, and Persons. Although the same facts and principles appear to a large extent in all these aspects of humanity, and consequently the distinction cannot be strictly maintained throughout the illustration, it will, notwithstanding, be of some advantage to show the operation of the law separately in each.

1. Nations. If there were any land in which the higher uses of the Sabbath were universally understood and enjoyed, we should be able to show there, in their
full measure, the temporal benefits with which it is charged; but, alas, such an example cannot be found on earth. We know what kind of fruit such a tree would bear, but nowhere do we find one growing. In default of a perfect example, we must turn to such imperfect specimens as can be found. In our own country and in America, notwithstanding manifold shortcomings, there is more of true Sabbath sanctification than in any other portions of the world. When a considerable proportion of the citizens individually sanctify the Sabbath, the mass of society is in some measure tinged with a better spirit; and even in such imperfect examples the principle of our text may be seen in operation. The salt, in proportion to its amount and its diffusion, preserves national privileges for the careless, without their knowledge, or against their will. A weekly rest from toil, as a boon to the labourer, is far more generally enjoyed, and far more securely guaranteed in countries where the sanctity of the day is in some measure respected, than in countries where it has been abandoned to frivolous amusement.

In Popish countries generally, and in some that are nominally Protestant, you may see the operation of the law in its threatening aspect. From those who have not kept the Sabbath holy, the weekly rest has been taken away. It is not necessary to adduce particular facts from the various countries of the European continent; in general, it is well known, where the people repudiate the gravity of godliness on the Sabbath, the crushing burden of mammon is, in some form, laid upon
their shoulders. In the medley of sounds which constitute the hum of Paris on the Lord's day, a Scottish Christian distinguishes with sadness the clatter of the mechanic's tool. The nation that gives up the day to pleasure does not retain the day for rest.

In a western county of Ireland I have seen, in one view, the children on the Lord's day playing ball against the wall of the chapel, and the grown people with brows sweating and backs bent reaping in the harvest-field. The daily wages of a workman in that country that year (1847) were twopence and his food. These simple facts contain several useful lessons: where the people of their own will make the Sabbath a day of sport, it will, against their will, become a day of toil. When a crush begins, the weakest goes to the wall: under the pressure of hunger, the poor man succumbs, and his rest is wrenched away. When the hosts of maimon close round the holy day, like an army investing a fortress, frivolous amusements have not pith to hold it: if light frothy pleasures have possession of the citadel, they are easily driven in, and a huge tide of toil inundates the labourer's rest. If you keep the Lord of the Sabbath by your side, filling its space with his word and worship, the onset of the enemy may be easily repelled; but when the people grow weary of God's service, banish sacredness from the day, and fill it up with mirth, they have lost their almighty defender, and lie at the mercy of the foe: the money power will surround them, and wrest away their birthright. When they repudiate the greater use of the Sabbath, they cannot retain the less.

the firmament, a place to hold the sun; but it will all be dark and cold if there is not a shining sun in its centre, sending light and warmth from its eastern morning to its western eve. The Sabbath is not a light; it is only a cleared space for holding Him who is the light of the world.

The Sabbath, like the Bible, is precious, not for its own sake as an end, but for the sake of Christ, whom believers seek and find in it. Both these good gifts become dead letters when he is not present as their life; but to those who know that chief use, both are fully charged also with subordinate blessings. If we make the Sabbath a day of spiritual communion with its Lord, he will make it for us a day of physical rest from the toils of time. Those who ask the greater get both: those who ask only the less get neither.

Christians, keep company with the Lord in that hollow path between the world's divided waters; and he will keep the path open for himself and you.
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give the treasure to him in trust for behoof of your child.

The Sabbath was made for man; he who contrived and bestowed it knows our need, and makes provision for it with all a father’s tenderness. But men are foolish and simple like little children; witness how cheaply they barter the boon away, as far as they have the power in their own hands; our Father in heaven made it for our use, but did not place it at our disposal. Christ has been constituted its Lord, and maintains it for our benefit. In his hands it is in safe keeping; it would have been unsafe in ours. For the privilege let us lean on his authority; greater is he that is for us than all that are against us. God, our Saviour, is legal guardian of the treasure, and will a man rob God? The Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath; all the efforts of covetousness and pleasure combined cannot wrench the title-deeds from the trustee’s hand.

But beware! the preciousness of the object may, through our blindness, become a snare. Although the image be of pure gold, it is not the less sinful to fall down and worship it. Man was not made for it; it was made for him. We must not serve it, but serve ourselves of it. The Sabbath is not the Saviour; it is a space cleared and left open, for the intercourse between Christ and Christians. If we do not personally meet and commune with the Lord on his day, it will avail us little that the buyers and sellers of this world were driven forth, in preparation for the interview. The Sabbath is to the world like the open space above us, which we are accustomed to call

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I have never seen a gang of labourers at ordinary work in the fields on the Lord’s day in Scotland, and I have never heard of a full grown man working for twopence a day there, at least in this generation. The community who part with their birthright do not even get a mess of pottage in return. Those who buy the workman’s Sabbath never pay for it; those workmen who sell their Sabbath, sell it for nought.

2. Classes. Hitherto we have spoken chiefly of the law as it operates on large communities; now we speak of it as it affects particular classes and characters within a community. Those classes in a great city or a nation who most fully employ the Sabbath for its higher ends, most fully enjoy its subordinate benefits: those who renounce the spiritual, lose the temporal too.

The operation of the rule may be distinctly seen in the experience of those workmen who fear God and sanctify the Sabbath, in our own community; having much, they obtain more. The room is occupied, and the evil spirits cannot come in: to fill the day with spiritual worship is the sure and only way of keeping out physical toil. These men do not enjoy the boon as a matter of course, and without an effort: speculators approach them from time to time, and bid for their Sabbath. To some pleasure is offered as the price, and to others profit. In certain circumstances these temptations exert formidable power. If the labourer had no other defence than an inference from the doctrines of political economy, to the effect that the transaction would be unprofitable in the end, he could not long hold out. His principle may be
sound, and his inference correct, but they lack the power to protect him. The appetite for food or for pleasure would soon force all the defences that even sound economic philosophy could rear around the day of rest. To keep the day holy because it is the Lord’s is a shorter process: it takes hold of a man by the conscience, and that is the surest hold; when a law or a practice is deeply bedded there, it will not so readily slip even under a great strain. Some companies who have enticed their labourers to work on the Lord’s day, have proposed to give them Tuesday instead of it, as a day of rest: but the plan must necessarily fail at the first trial. What the mercantile company give to-day, they can take away tomorrow. Workmen who are wise will not consent to hold their weekly day of rest at the will of any body of capitalists; they hold their title directly of the Supreme, and it is recorded in the oldest charter extant. When these men keep the day for God, God keeps the day for them.

A class of an opposite character may be found in the same city, and even in the same street; they do not recognise the Sabbath as a day of religious exercises and spiritual worship; they do not read the Bible; they have lost the way to the worshipping assembly, or never found it. These have not the Sabbath in its higher employment, and therefore it is taken away from them in its lower uses. Their souls do not appreciate its sacredness; and therefore their bodies do not enjoy its ease. They are under the inexecutable law: “He that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.”

There may be here and there an exception, in which or less, into a day of labour, and then quote the Bible in favour of their plan!

But besides intimating that a rest was appointed by divine authority, that remarkable word of Jesus declares that it was made “for man.” This is like the other gifts of God,—like air and water, the rest is for all. But ere this text can really support those who invoke its aid, we must read it, The Sabbath was made for rich men and shareholders, not for firemen and enginemen. The clerk, the guard, the mechanic, the postman, and others whom the passion for gain or pleasure would chain to the oar on all the days of the week, are men; for these, as well as for others, our Father in heaven made the rest. What God has given, let no man dare to take away.

The Giver of the day of rest knew the dangers to which it would be exposed, and made provision for repelling them. At the same place of Scripture (Mark ii. 27, 28) where we learn that the Sabbath was made for man, we learn also that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. It is made for man’s benefit, but not given over to his will. Having a large fortune, and an only son, yet a little child, and apprehending that the time of your departure is at hand, you consider anxiously what disposition of the property will best secure the interests of the orphan heir. Paternal love induces you to bequeath your wealth for behoof of your child; but your knowledge of the world will not permit you to place it in his hands; the first sharper who might pass would snatch it from him. You search for one who is wise, and good, and powerful, and constitute him guardian of your infant’s inheritance; you
let the soul slip and cleave to the body, the body without the spirit will putrify in our hands. When the body is dead it becomes noisome, and we are fain to bury it out of our sight. Thus the weekly Sabbath, where its spiritual uses are lost, becomes a loathsome thing. In the experience of individuals and of families, may be often seen the operation of the dread divine law that where the greater is rejected the less is turned into a curse. A Sabbath unsanctified becomes in many cases the vilest day of all the seven; as a body bereft of the spirit becomes more noisome than common dust. When the Lord is banished from his day, the adversary takes possession of it, and makes it the period of heaviest drudgery to his slaves.

Those who strive to induce one portion of the people to play, and another to work on the Lord’s day, employ the text, “the Sabbath was made for man,” as a staple in their argument. They handle the Scriptures awkwardly — those who grasp a sword by the blade will probably hurt only themselves. It seems a “Sabbath was made” by divine authority; and what is a Sabbath? It is rest, especially rest of a religious character. This is the meaning of the word, and this is the thing which the word has designated in all time. The Lord Jesus said that a rest-day “was made,” and he certainly did not unmake it; but who are those who quote the Saviour’s words, and at the same time endeavour to demolish the thing which the words signify? God made one day in seven a rest; they propose to change that day also, more

infidel opinions are allied to sobriety of outward conduct; but among the labouring population this is the exception. The rule, as all who mix among the people know, is that those who do not make a good use of the Sabbath make a bad use of it; generally those who do not make it a time of spiritual profit to their souls, find it a time of material injury to their bodies. Until a recent period the irreligious portion of society in Scotland made the day of rest the chief day of debauch. Workmen who deserted the church; frequented in large numbers the public-house; and so far were they from being prepared by rest for the labour of the following week, that Monday was the day on which the greatest number of hands were missing from the workshop. When they refused to rest with God on his day, the devil would not suffer them to rest at all. They were kept toiling in the fires for a hard master all the Sabbath, and were therefore on Monday more worn than they would have been if no Sabbath had ever dawned. This terrible feature of our city’s wickedness has of late been greatly changed for the better, not by a spontaneous movement of the Sabbath breakers, but by a more paternal legislation. The measure which shut the houses where intoxicating drinks are sold, on the day when all other places of merchandise are shut, was a tardy instalment of justice and mercy to a wretched crowd of self-destroying men. To shut by law all ordinary places of business, and open the spirit-shops, was an act of national suicide: if that policy were thoroughly and permanently reversed, it would leave, at least, a fair field for educational and missionary operations.
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While we are speaking of classes in the community, it may be of use to point out that by the ordinations of providence each is made his brother’s keeper, and punished if he prove unfaithful to his trust: those who without mercy deprive their neighbour of his rest to-day, may without mercy be deprived of their own to-morrow. If clerks and shopkeepers for their own pleasure keep seamen, and firemen, and enginemen bound to their ordinary tasks on the day of rest, they may soon find themselves compelled, for the pleasure of another class, to sit at the desk or stand behind the counter all the seven days of the week. If one trade must toil, why should not another? At present you have not the will to preserve your brother’s rest; by and by you will lack the power to keep your own. But what of the capitalist who uses the appetites of one class to enslave the other, in order that he may make money out of both? By the loss of the Sabbath’s sacredness which he does not value, the money which he does value will become less worth.

An estate will not bring so much in a country where the Sabbath is profaned, as in a country where it is kept holy: the long arm of vengeance in the providential laws reaches the highest of the transgressors, and brings down the strongest.

3. Persons. The law holds good in the experience of individuals as well as in that of communities and classes; those who do not value the higher uses of the Sabbath, will fail to attain the lower. That holy day intervening between a week of the great world’s strife on either side, is like the hollow path on which the emancipated Hebrews in the Exodus marched through the sea, with the angry waters rising like a heap on the right and on the left. The waters did not close and cover the fugitives, although it was the law of their nature to do so, because they were held back by the presence of God with his people; but when Israel had passed over, and Egypt came on, God being no longer with those who occupied the avenue to keep the waters out, the waters came wildly in: the sea, in obedience to its own law of gravity, levelled itself over the path, and all who were in it perished.

As steadily and strongly as the Red Sea’s waters pressed in by their own law, to fill that hollow space in their midst, so steadily and strongly the sea of the world’s cares presses in to swallow up the Sabbath, which dares to divide it into two. It is not the nature of either sea to stand up like a wall on this side and a wall on that side; these strong waters are kept at bay by a stronger One; when he is permitted to depart they will close and cover us.

The only way of keeping the world out of our Sabbath is to keep Christ in. If in our own hearts individually and in our families, we value and enjoy the greater we shall retain also the less; but if, from want of taste for it, we abandon spiritual communion with the Lord on his own day, the material benefit of bodily rest will slip from our hands. The evil spirits hovering round, press like air upon the privilege; the moment that they find the room empty they rush in.

If we succeed in cherishing the living soul of the Sabbath, we shall enjoy also a healthy body; but if we