

Of The Harmony Of The Law And The Gospel

We believe that the Law of God is the eternal and unchangeable rule of his moral government; that it is holy, just, and good; and that the inability which the Scriptures ascribe to fallen men to fulfill its precepts arises entirely from their love of sin; to deliver them from which, and to restore them through a Mediator to unfeigned obedience to the holy Law, is one great end of the Gospel, and of the means of grace connected with the establishment of the visible Church.

On The Christian Sabbath

Position of the New Hampshire Confession of Faith

We believe that the first day of the week is the Lord's Day, or Christian Sabbath; and is to be kept sacred to religious purposes, by abstaining from all secular labor and sinful recreations; by the devout observance of all the means of grace, both private and public; and by preparation for that rest that remaineth for the people of God.

Position of Providence Church

We believe the Sabbath was primarily intended to be a picture of salvation and that it has found its ultimate fulfillment in the finished work of Christ (Colossians 2:16,17). Salvation is realized as we stop working and “rest” (believe) in the saving work of Christ. We see this spelled out clearly in Romans 4:3-5 and Hebrews 4:9,10.

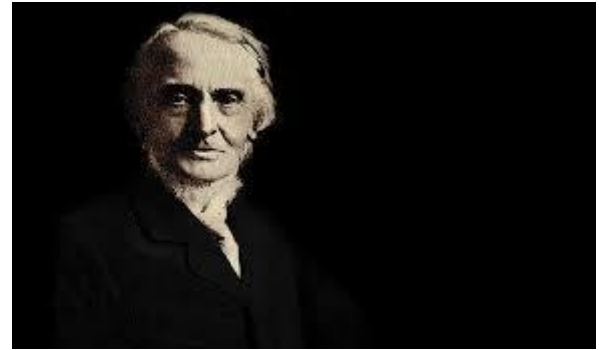
This means that the strict Sabbath regulations given in the Old Testament are now non-binding. Additionally, this fundamental transition is underscored in the change of the day for Christian worship from the Sabbath (Saturday) to the “first day of the week” (Sunday—see Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2). This transition is also anticipated in Jesus’

apparently repeated and intentional confrontations with the Jewish leaders over His numerous Sabbath healings.

We acknowledge that it is wise and helpful to practice the Sabbath principle of setting aside regular time to rest and to devote oneself to worship, but that it is no longer to be observed in a legalistic way as it was before the coming of Christ. However, the particular practices and convictions of individual Christians are a matter between them and the Lord (Romans 14:1-9).

Alexander MacLaren

Baptist preacher and expositor



MacLaren was born in Glasgow on February 11, 1826, and died in Manchester on May 5, 1910. He had been for almost sixty-five years a minister, entirely devoted to his calling. He lived more than almost any of the great preachers of his time between his study, his pulpit, his pen.

He subdued action to thought, thought to utterance and utterance to the Gospel. His life was his ministry; his ministry was his life. In 1842 he was enrolled as a candidate for the Baptist ministry at Stepney College, London. He was tall, shy, silent and looked no older than his sixteen years. But his vocation, as he himself (a consistent Calvinist) might have said, was divinely decreed. "I cannot ever recall any hesitation as to being a minister," he said. "It just had to be."

In the College he was thoroughly grounded in Greek and Hebrew. He was taught to study the Bible in the original and so the foundation was laid for his distinctive work as an expositor and for the biblical content of his preaching. Before MacLaren had finished his course of study he was invited to Portland Chapel in Southampton for three months; those three months became twelve years. He began his ministry there on June 28, 1846. His name and fame grew.

His ministry fell into a quiet routine for which he was always grateful: two sermons on Sunday, a Monday prayer meeting and a Thursday service and lecture. His parishioners thought his sermons to them were the best he ever preached. In April 1858 he was called to be minister at Union Chapel in Manchester. No ministry could have been happier. The church prospered and a new building had to be erected to seat 1,500; every sitting was taken. His renown as preacher spread throughout the English-speaking world. His pulpit became his throne. He was twice elected President of the Baptist Union. He resigned as pastor in 1905 after a ministry of forty-five years.

MacLaren's religious life was hid with Christ in God. He walked with God day by day. He loved Jesus Christ with a reverent, holy love and lived to make Him known. In his farewell sermon at Union he said: "To efface oneself is one of a preacher's first duties."

Source: <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/maclaren>

Maclaren Quote 1

The practical conclusion drawn is very noteworthy, because it seems much narrower than the premises warrant. Paul does not say-*therefore let no man observe any of these any more; but takes up the much more modest ground-let no man judge you about them.* He claims a wide liberty of variation, and all that he repels is the right of anybody to drag Christian men into ceremonial observances on the ground that they are necessary. He does not quarrel with the rites, but with men insisting on the necessity of the rites.

In his own practice he gave the best commentary on his meaning. When they said to him, "You must circumcise Titus," he said, "Then I will not." When nobody tried to compel him, he took Timothy, and of his own accord circumcised him to avoid scandals. When it was needful as a protest, he rode right over all the prescriptions of the law, and "did eat with Gentiles." When it was advisable as a demonstration that he himself "walked orderly and kept the law," he performed the rites of purification and united in the temple worship.

In times of transition wise supporters of the new will not be in a hurry to break with the old. "I will lead on softly, according as the flock and the children be able to endure," said Jacob, and so says every good shepherd.

The brown sheaths remain on the twig after the tender green leaf has burst from within them, but there is no need to pull them off, for they will drop presently. "I will wear three surplices if they like," said Luther once. "Neither if we eat are we the better, neither if we eat not are we the worse," said Paul. Such is the spirit of the words here. It is a plea for Christian liberty. If not insisted on as necessary, the

outward observances may be allowed. If they are regarded as helps, or as seemly adjuncts or the like, there is plenty of room for difference of opinion and for variety of practice, according to temperament and taste and usage. There are principles which should regulate even these diversities of practice, and Paul has set these forth in the great chapter about meats in the Epistle to the Romans. But it is a different thing altogether when any external observances are insisted on as essential, either from the old Jewish or from the modern sacramentarian point of view. If a man comes saying, "Except ye be circumcised, ye cannot be saved," the only right answer is, Then I will not be circumcised, and if you are, because you believe that you cannot be saved without it, "Christ is become of none effect to you." Nothing is necessary but union to Him, and that comes through no outward observance, but through the faith which worketh by love. Therefore, let no man judge you, but repel all such attempts at thrusting any ceremonial ritual observances on you, on the plea of necessity, with the emancipating truth that the cross of Christ is the death of law.

Maclaren Quote 2

A few words may be said here on the bearing of the principles laid down in these verses on the religious observance of Sunday. The obligation of the Jewish sabbath has passed away as much as sacrifices and circumcision. That seems unmistakably the teaching here. But the institution of a weekly day of rest is distinctly put in Scripture as independent of, and prior to, the special form and meaning given to the institution in the Mosaic law. That is the natural conclusion from the narrative of the creative rest in Genesis, and from our Lord's emphatic declaration that the sabbath was made for "man that is to say, for the race. Many traces of the pre Mosaic sabbath have been adduced, and among others we may recall the fact that recent researches show it to have been observed by the Accadians, the early inhabitants of Assyria. It is a physical and moral necessity, and that is a sadly mistaken benevolence which on the plea of culture or amusement for the many, compels the labour of the few, and breaks down the distinction between the Sunday and the rest of the week.

The religious observance of the first day of the week rests on no recorded command, but has a higher origin, inasmuch as it is the outcome of a felt want. The early disciples naturally gathered together for worship on the day which had become so sacred to them. At first, no doubt, they observed the Jewish sabbath, and only gradually came to the practice which we almost see growing before our eyes in the Acts of the Apostles, in the mention of the disciples at Troas coming together on the first day of the week to break bread, and which we gather, from

the Apostle's instructions as to weekly setting apart money for charitable purposes, to have existed in the Church at Corinth; as we know, that even in his lonely island prison far away from the company of his brethren, the Apostle John was in a condition of high religious contemplation on the Lord's day, ere yet he heard the solemn voice and saw "the things which are."

This gradual growing up of the practice is in accordance with the whole spirit of the New Covenant, which has next to nothing to say about the externals of worship, and leaves the new life to shape itself. Judaism gave prescriptions and minute regulations; Christianity, the religion of the spirit, gives principles. The necessity, for the nourishment of the Divine life, of the religious observance of the day of rest is certainly not less now than at first. In the hurry and drive of our modern life, with the world forcing self on us at every moment, we cannot keep up the warmth of devotion unless we use this day, not merely for physical rest, and family enjoyment, but for worship. They who know their own slothfulness of spirit, and are in earnest in seeking after a deeper, fuller Christian life, will thankfully own, "the week were dark but for its light." I distrust the spirituality which professes that all life is a sabbath, and therefore holds itself absolved from special seasons of worship. If the stream of devout communion is to flow through all our days, there must be frequent reservoirs along the road, or it will be lost in the sand, like the rivers of higher Asia. It is a poor thing to say, keep the day as a day of worship because it is a commandment. Better to think of it as a great gift for the highest purposes; and not let it be merely a day of rest for jaded bodies, but make it one of refreshment for cumbered spirits, and rekindle the smoldering flame of devotion, by drawing near to Christ in public and in private. So shall we gather stores that

may help us to go in the strength of that meat for some more marches on the dusty road of life.