

keep holy any day, rests solely upon the divine command to do so. Our reason or conscience would never have suggested such a law.

But we need no positive divine command to tell us that we ought to respond to nature's necessities as regards hunger and thirst; that we should do good to all men as we have opportunity; that truth-speaking is a virtue, and many such like. If keeping the Sabbath compels us to do violence to these higher and specifically moral laws, then we really pervert the right use of the Sabbath and in spirit dishonor it.

So in regard to shew-bread. There was no reason why anybody might not eat it, except that it had been forbidden to any but the priests. So when the claim of starving men came in conflict with this Levitical restriction, the latter rightly was set aside. The law of clean and unclean meats was another positive enactment. It was wholly abrogated when it stood in the way of the spread of the gospel.

2. God is best served by doing good.

No amount of formal service can atone for neglect of the claims of human suffering. The church which manifests its religious life by caring for the sick, the orphans, and the widows, feeding the hungry and clothing the naked, has the best claim to be the Church of Christ. The self-righteous formalist who scrupulously attends to the outward observances of religion, but gives little of his money and none of his personal service for religious or benevolent objects, is in great danger of hearing the Master say "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it not to me." "Depart ye cursed."

3. Religious work is Sabbath employment.

Opponents of "Sabbath observance" often urge that if the law is to be strictly enforced, ministers must cease to preach, and all work necessary to the carrying on of religious or philanthropic enterprises must stop. But "the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are guiltless."

Whatever is necessary in order that the Sabbath may be properly observed by Christian people is itself an observance of the day. The spirit in which we labor gives its moral character to all our activity. Building the fires and lighting the lamps in the Church or mission hall, may be as truly a means of grace as preaching a sermon or kneeling in prayer.

The Sabbath is a day of worship and service, cessation from secular duties and recreations is only a means to this end.

4. Whatever promotes our spiritual welfare is suited to the Sabbath.

This will be a practical test easily applicable to all doubtful matters. Whatever secularizes the day, and drags us back into the business and worry of week-day life, antagonizes Sabbath rest. Whatever dissipates serious impressions and fills the mind with frivolity, unfits us for communion with God or meditation upon sacred subjects. No one may lay down an arbitrary law now any more than in the time of Christ. Every conscience must decide for itself. But let each one consider the object of the day and use his best efforts to improve the inestimable privileges it affords.

2.—Works of Mercy.

The second incident occurred on another Sabbath, but is placed here so as to group together our Lord's teachings on the Sabbath questions of his day and illustrate the growing opposition of the religious leaders to his teaching. From it we learn:

1. Those who go to church to meet Jesus will receive a blessing from him.

This afflicted man came to the synagogue, not to criticize, but to profit by, the teaching of Jesus. His prompt obedience shows that he had "faith to be healed." He doubtless received the spiritual good he came for, and, over and above, he was healed of his infirmity.

The reason why going to church does some people so little good is because they do not go there to commune with God. They go from the force of custom, conscience, or sense of respectability. They are attracted by the music, or the preacher, not by the Divine Presence which should give all its glory to the house. "Verily they have their reward" is a far reaching principle. We get what we come for. Prepare the mind and heart by prayer and fitting meditation, realize the sacred character of the service; with open mind and tender conscience receive the grace exhibited and conferred, and you cannot fail to be abundantly blessed in your own soul. "He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away," expresses God's method of bestowing his gifts.

2. We get strength to bear our trials by waiting upon God in his appointed means of grace.