

Will They Do It?

At the annual meeting of the London Nonconformist Council, the president, Dr. Clifford, said in the course of his address that the business of the Free Churches is "to inform as well as to quicken the conscience of men everywhere, . . . to put into the category of sins all violations of the laws of God, though they might be sanctioned by the customs and upheld by the inherited prejudices and traditions of men."

Very good. The question is, Will they do it? If they are sincere, let them begin at once to put Sunday observance and Sabbath desecration into the category of sins.

The seventh commandment says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," and the eighth says, "Thou shalt not steal;" and violations of those commandments are quite generally put into the category of sins; but neither the seventh nor the eighth commandment is so explicit and plain as the fourth, which says:—

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it."

Now on what ground of consistency can those who put violations of the seventh and eighth commandments into the category of sins, refuse to put violation of the fourth commandment in the same category?

Some one will say, "We do put violations of the fourth commandment into the category of sins, for we call it a sin to labour on the first day of the week, or Sunday." But to such we will let the Churchman, Dr. Williams, reply:—

In the first place we are commanded to keep holy the seventh day; but we do not think it necessary to keep the seventh day holy; for the seventh day is Saturday. It may be said that we keep the first day instead; but then surely this is not the same thing; the first day cannot be the seventh day; and where are we told in Scripture to keep the first day at all? We are commanded to keep the seventh; but we are nowhere commanded to keep the first day.—"The Church Catechism," p. 534.

This is simple fact, and nobody can gainsay it. To it we may add the admission of the late Dr. Dale, who is counted as a pillar of orthodoxy:—

The Sabbath was founded on a specific, Divine command. We can plead no such command for the observance of Sunday.—"The Ten Commandments," Hodder & Stoughton.

Or Canon Eyton:—

No commandment of God bids us do this or not do that on Sunday; we are absolutely free as far as His law goes.—"The Ten Commandments," Trubner & Co.

The facts are, as admitted by the most eminent Sunday-observers, that the fourth commandment of the law of God does require the faithful observance of the seventh day of the week; while neither that nor any other commandment of God requires any kind of observance of the first day of the week. It is simply classed among "the six working days." Eze. 46:1. Hence the observance of the first day of the week instead of the seventh is a direct and positive violation of the fourth commandment, and is sanctioned only "by the customs and upheld by the inherited prejudices and traditions of men." Dr. Williams, previously referred to, says:—

The reason why we keep the first day of the week holy instead of the seventh, is for the same reason that we observe many other things, not because the Bible, but because the Church, has enjoined it.

Nine out of ten persons with whom you talk will defend the observance of Sunday on the ground that "everybody keeps it." Custom and tradition form its sole support. To be sure they say that "the church" enjoins it; but that is only emphasising the statement that it is "upheld by the inherited prejudices and traditions of men." The "church" which enjoined Sunday observance is the same church that enjoined the observance of "Ash Wednesday," "Good Friday," "Ascension Day," etc., so that the "Catholic Christian Instructed" well says:—

The best authority we have for this ancient custom is the Church. And therefore those who pretend to be such religious observers of the Sunday, whilst they take no notice of other festivals ordained by the same authority, show that they act more by humour than by reason and religion; since Sunday and holidays all stand on the same foundation, viz., the ordinance of the Church.

We take the churches at their word. The "Free Churches" say that they desire to have all violations of the law of God, no matter how strongly entrenched in custom and tradition, put into the category of sins, which means, of course, that they do not intend to be guilty of such violations. The Church of England has the ten commandments read every Sunday, with a prayer after each and after them all together, that their hearts may be inclined to keep this law. Both Churchmen and Nonconformists are therefore committed to commandment-keeping; and leading men in both communions admit, what any child can easily see from the Bible, that the seventh day of the week is the only Sabbath of the commandment. The question then is, Will they be consistent with their profession, and keep "the Sabbath day, according to the commandment"?

"The Lord said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee; they have well said all that they have spoken. O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!" Deut. 5:28, 29.

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The Present Truth 11, 50 (December 12, 1895).