

## 4th. John Murray on Romans 14.5

### Introduction

Paul says, **One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind (Rom. 14.5).** Clearly, from the context, people with weak consciences "esteem one day better than another" just as the weak abstain from meat: **As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. <sup>2</sup> One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables (14.1-2) and wine (14.21).** There is to be mutual tolerance and understanding but Paul definitely sides with the strong. Thus, the spiritually mature position is the view that considers **all days alike**. How can we square this with an abiding duty to the Sabbath? This text is decisive for many readers as a clear abrogation of the 4th command. In his commentary on Romans, John Murray discusses this question revising it to this: is the weekly Sabbath included in the references to days in 14.5 (one better than another vs. all days alike)? Does the weekly Sabbath Day come within the scope of the passage?

#### 1A. Implications if the Sabbath is in view

- 1) The 4th is abrogated; one of the 10 has relevance no longer
- 2) The first day of the week would have no prescribed religious significance; it is not to be distinguished from any other day as a memorial of the resurrection or as the Lord's Day for special devotion to the Lord for worship and service.
- 3) It is the person who is weak in faith, per 14.5, that fails to recognize the abrogation of the 4th and the fact that every day is the same in religious significance: every day is the Lord's and is to be lived in devotion to Him.

#### 2A. Considerations showing that the Sabbath is not in view

##### 1) Abrogation

The 4th is grounded in creation (Ex. 20.8, 11: **Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy... <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy**). Therefore, it is a creation ordinance for man's benefit as long as creation abides, and our Lord became its new covenant Lord (Mk. 2.27-28, **The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. <sup>28</sup> So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath**).

Thus, Murray argues that if the Sabbath is in view in Rom. 14.5, then God's pattern of work and rest would no longer have any relevance for man's life on earth, we are to live by only nine of the 10 commands, the benefit of the Sabbath nor longer applies to man, and Jesus' lordship over the Sabbath is essentially negative for the purpose of abolishing it. These things support (by *reductio ad absurdum*) the conclusion that the Sabbath is not in view in 14.5.

a) What is *reductio ad absurdum* [*reductio* for short] in an argument and how does it work?

b) How does Matthew 5.17-19 confirm Murray's response to abrogation of the 4th?

<sup>17</sup> **Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. <sup>18</sup> For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. <sup>19</sup> Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.**

The 10 are in view, included with all the Law and prophets; Jesus shows the relevance of the Ten by expounding on some of them in the Sermon on the Mount.

First step in thinking about them in interpretation is the negative: not abrogation but fulfillment; not discontinuity (though it truly exists) but continuity (the important point of abiding relevance, which in fact, extends to the end of history).

Thus, the idea that 14.5 teaches that the Lord abrogated the Sabbath being Lord of the Sabbath (Mk. 2.28) does not fit with His insistence that we are not to think abrogation but fulfillment of the commandments. Whatever we do, we cannot simply think of the Sabbath as dropped from the Ten with no abiding relevance under the Lordship of Christ.

How can we fill out the relation of Christ's Lordship to the Sabbath in this discussion?