

An Address on Sabbath Keeping¹

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DEAR Friends,- Considering the present unsettlement of opinion as to the authority, and change of practice as to the observance of the Fourth Commandment, in various districts of our country, and observing some symptoms of degeneracy in sentiment and conduct, as to the Sabbath, within our own bounds we deemed it our duty, in kindness and faithfulness, to admonish you, with a view, by the blessing of God, to deepening on your consciences an impression of the divine authority of the Sabbath law, and to, dissuade you from yielding to any inducements that would draw you away from its observance.

I. In order to your establishment, in the faith of the perpetual obligation of the Fourth Commandment, we would entreat your attention to the following remarks.

No sooner was the work of creation finished than God announced His appointment of a Sabbath, as a memorial of His rest when that work was finished. The first entire day spent by man on earth was a Sabbath. This appointment was necessary because of what God is, as well as because of what He had done. God cannot be what He is, in the infinite majesty of His being, and in the infinite glory of His character, and be just to Himself, without requiring men, at certain times, to withdraw themselves from all "worldly employments and recreations," in order to devote themselves exclusively to, His worship; and He owed it, as a tribute to His own glory, as displayed in His work, as Creator, that the seventh day of the week should thus be observed. A memorial of the divine rest, and in this form, there must be. This appointment was necessarily in force, from the first announcement of the Sabbath law, till the Decalogue was promulgated from Sinai. It was no new precept, nor one intended exclusively for the Jews, that was then delivered, in the Fourth Commandment, from amidst the, awful glory which marked the place of Jehovah's presence on Mount Sinai. On the mount "that might be touched and that burned with fire," God's voice uttered the Fourth Commandment, and

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His finger wrote in on the table of stone. It was divinely engraved in the midst of the Ten Commandments, because the Lord never intended that it should be set aside. And declarations of the divine authority of the Sabbath law were given throughout the ages till the coming of Christ; the prophets representing Sabbath keeping to the people as a sign of the Lord's goodness to them, and of their loyalty to Him.

When Christ came "in the fullness of time" He found the Fourth Commandment in the law, and He expressly tells us that He came "not to destroy one jot or tittle" of that law. He declared Himself to be "Lord of the Sabbath," thus intimating that He took it under His patronage as well as under His rule. He proved His regard for it by denouncing the conduct of those who did not spiritually observe it, and He exercised His sovereignty in changing from the Seventh to the First day of the week, the Sabbath which, in New Testament times, is to be kept holy to the Lord. The memorial of His rest after creation He did not cause to cease, in effecting this change, for one day in seven is still to be observed; but He has given us, in the First day, instead of the Seventh, a memorial of a work still greater than creation. He Himself was Creator as surely as He was Redeemer. He counted His work, as Redeemer, the greater, and the day on which He rose from the dead, and began to enter into His rest, after redemption by His blood had been procured - "the First day of the week" - must in future be the Sabbath "holy to the Lord." The very ground on which the appointment of the Seventh day Sabbath rests requires the change to the First - the consideration of a great divine work having been finished. If there must be a memorial of a great, there must surely be of a greater. The very fact that the seventh day was the Sabbath of the Old Testament, makes it indispensable that the First be the Sabbath of the New. Christ's own example, and the recorded practice of those who had the unerring guidance of His Spirit, amply sanctioned the change.

Thus the change of day leaves the Fourth Commandment utterly unaffected, and its divine authority demands the observance of the First day of the week as the Christian Sabbath, as surely as it made binding of old the hallowing of the Seventh. If the Lord "hallowed" the Sabbath day, by setting it apart for His own worship, surely the fuller manifestation of His glory, through Christ Jesus, cannot be a reason why one of His claims should be withdrawn by Him and the concession of it refused by His people; and if He, "blessed" the Sabbath, that it might be a benefit to men, are we to expect that, after He has given the highest commendation of His love, He shall withdraw a "sign" of His favour,

and that His people shall withhold a token of their reverence and love? Those who desire to be rid of the obligation of the Sabbath law do so that the sanctity, which it claims, may not act as a check on their sinning, nor scare them away from the enjoyments which in their folly they desire. They deny to God homage which is His due, and refuse a gift which was intended to benefit themselves. A new sanction has been given to the claim of the Fourth Commandment, and mighty inducements have been super-added to move men to obey it. This, and not its removal from the Decalogue, is what was effected by Christ bearing on the law of the Sabbath. In the faith of these truths may the Spirit of the Lord establish you!

II. We would affectionately warn you, not, only of the danger of imbibing false views of the Sabbath law, but also of the danger of being led astray by an example of Sabbath breaking, whoever the parties may be, who set such an example before you. The very habit of seeing the Sabbath profaned, as in the case of those who cannot but observe the Sabbath train, is dangerous. It may unconsciously chill the sense of sacredness associated with the day of the Lord, and be used as an encouragement to transgress. There can be no approach to a right state of feeling in the hearts of those who take advantage of the facility for Sabbath travelling afforded by the running of trains on that day. But let all who are accustomed to speak to the Lord make the sight or sound of a Sabbath train an occasion for prayer, that the Lord would interpose to put a stop to the evil, and that He would have mercy on those who support it.

For the posting, delivery, and receiving of letters and newspapers on the Lord's Day there is no excuse. If London, the largest city in the world, can dispense with a Sabbath delivery of letters, there is surely no city, nor town, nor village, nor hamlet, nor mansion, nor cottage, in all our land, in which the plea of necessity or of mercy can be reasonably used in defence of the practice. Is it much to yield to God that a man should so far refrain from the lawful employment of the week?

To refuse to yield, to this small extent, what is claimed by the Lord of all, indicates an ungodliness of feeling, which anyone in a so-called Christian country should be ashamed to exhibit. And yet a few of these, in a town or district, can secure a concession of what they crave, and thus be successful in grieving the hearts of the great majority of the people. But let none of you, who do not openly disavow all respect for the Sabbath, participate in or

countenance, the transgression of the fourth commandment to which we have now referred.

The practice of Sabbath walking is, we fear, extending. The plea of health is urged as an excuse by some of those who are guilty of this form of Sabbath profanation. But ere one's health can be promoted, there must come, the blessing of the Lord on the means employed either to restore or to confirm it; and can anyone expect that blessing, if he puts himself in contact with temptations, which cause him to forget both the Sabbath and its Lord? Let no one who is careful to observe the Sabbath be, afraid that the Lord will not be careful to preserve his health. And how few of the Sabbath walkers have any reason for using this plea of mercy as an excuse for their conduct, or ever think of anything higher than their own amusement. Others affect to be engaged in the study of the works of God, in creation around them, when they are in the open field or on the highway on Sabbath, instead of being in their closets. But those, who turn aside from contemplating the glory of God, as displayed in the work of redemption, of which the Christian Sabbath is a memorial, will be little disposed to meditate on His glory as revealed in any other operation of His hand.

Let parents remember their duty towards their families on Sabbath. In each household let there be the worship of God, and let this be also the practice on each day of the week. Let religious instruction be given at home to children, and let no parents pass over this duty, but in exceptional cases, to any other parties whatever. If any of them find themselves incompetent to instruct their children, let them seek gracious preparation for the work from the Lord, and let them apply for the aid of the office-bearers of their church; and if they send their children to the Sabbath School, let them take care that their conduct in going and returning be such as become the holiness of the Sabbath. And let them see to it that their children are early trained regularly to attend in the house of God during the ordinary diets of worship. Much depends on this, for if a child is trained in the way in which he should walk, he will not depart from it when he is old. But children who receive no Christian instruction, and see no Christian example at home, and who form not the habit of habit of being regularly in church, will grow up undutiful to their parents and indifferent as to eternal things.

Let masters seek grace to be dutiful to their servants on Sabbath. Let them never forget that those who serve them have sinful and ever-existing souls,

and that they cannot be related to them, as they are, without being responsible to God for the part which they act towards them. It is their duty to instruct them in the knowledge of the Scriptures on the Sabbath, and at all other times when they have an opportunity of doing so; and to make arrangements as to their work which shall admit of their being as often as possible in church. And let no servants seek to escape from such efforts as their masters may make to instruct them, nor frame excuses for absence from the house of God.

Let young men beware of acting the part of cowards before the scorn of the ungodly, and of being simpletons when plied with the reasonings of the sceptic. What though you should be laughed at for having respect to the commandment of God? Is that a reason why you should turn aside from the way in which He would have you to go? And do not be scared by those who call the Sabbath "a weariness" instead of calling it "a delight." If you had a heart to know the Lord, and had once tasted the joy of His communion and the peace of His service, you would not be driven from Sabbath keeping by the fear of its being dull. And do not be disposed to make much of the reasonings of the sceptics. Of all the things, which float in air over this earth there is nothing lighter than objections to taking the plain statements of the Word of God as the directory of faith and practice. The ostentation with which these objections are paraded, and the show of learning, with the attractiveness of apparent novelty, with which they are invested, will soon be removed by a prayerful consideration of them in the light of God's Word, and nothing would then remain to be dealt with but a palpable and loathsome lie. "Thus saith the Lord," "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." This is the law of God, and let inducements to act in opposition to that injunction come from whatever quarter they may, they are merely groundless and wicked temptations, to which no quarter should be given.

And let the children beware of making their work in the Sabbath School their only Sabbath service. The Lord calls them to pray in their closets as surely as He calls their parents to do so. He requires them also to read His Word. He commands them to be where His Word is preached; and when they go to the Sabbath school or "to the church," let them listen to the counsel of Him who said, "Turn you at my reproof; behold I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you."

And let all remember that it is not a merely outward observance of the fourth commandment, nor a constrained service on His holy day that God requires. He "desires truth in the inward parts." He seeks such as worship to worship Him in spirit and in truth." He requires you with your heart to "call the Sabbath a delight, holy to the Lord, honourable," and because so regarding it, to "turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on His holy day," and to "honour Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words. Only those who thus love, and honour, and observe the Sabbath can delight themselves in the Lord.

It is because we fear that those among you who thus observe the Sabbath are becoming fewer in number, and less faithful in their witness-bearing, that we have felt constrained to address to you this exhortation and warning. The Lord said to Israel of old, "and He says to us now, "Hallow my Sabbaths, and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I am the Lord your God;" and when any individual or community ceases to hallow the Sabbath of the Lord, a dark token of a anger shall take the place of the bright sign of His favour. For now, as of old, the Lord will not leave unpunished the sin of Sabbath-breaking. "If ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the Sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof , and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched."