

Bishop J.C. Ryle: The Sabbath is a Day to Keep

How to keep the Day holy.

Sabbath: A Day to Keep

Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy.- Exodus 20:8.

By Bishop J. C. Ryle

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Notes

There is a subject in the present day which demands the serious attention of all professing Christians in the United Kingdom. That subject is the Christian Sabbath, or Lord's Day.

It is a subject which is forced upon our notice. The minds of many are agitated by questions arising out of it. "Is the observance of a Sabbath binding on Christians? Have we any right to tell a man that to do his business or seek his pleasure on a Sunday is a sin? Is it desirable to open places of public amusement on the Lord's Day?" All these are questions that are continually asked. They are questions to which we ought to be able to give a decided answer.

The subject is one on which "divers and strange doctrines" abound. Statements are continually made about Sunday, which plain unsophisticated readers of the Bible find it impossible to reconcile with the Word of God. If these statements proceeded only from the ignorant and irreligious part of the world, the defenders of the Sabbath would have no reason to be surprised. But they may well wonder when they find educated and religious persons among their adversaries. It is a melancholy truth that in some quarters the Sabbath is wounded by those who ought to be its best friends.

The subject is one which is of immense importance. It is not too much to say that the prosperity or decay of organized Christianity depends on the maintenance of the Christian Sabbath. Break down the fence which now surrounds the Sunday, and our Sunday schools will soon come to an end. Let in the Hood of worldliness and pleasure-seeking on the Lord's Day, without check or hindrance, and our congregations will soon dwindle away. There is not too much religion in the land now. Destroy the sanctity of the Sabbath, and there would soon be far less. Nothing in short, I believe, would so thoroughly advance the kingdom of Satan as to withdraw legal protection from the Lord's Day. It would be a joy to the infidel; but it would be an insult and offence to God.

I ask the attention of all professing Christians, while I try to say a few plain words on the subject of the Sabbath. As a minister of Christ, a father of a family, and a lover of my country, I feel bound to plead on behalf of the old Christian Sunday. My sentence is emphatically expressed in the words of Scripture -- let us "keep it holy." My advice to all Christians is to contend earnestly for the whole day against all enemies, both without and within. It is worth a struggle.

There are four points in connection with the Sabbath, which require examination. On each of these I wish to offer a few remarks.

1. THE AUTHORITY OF THE SABBATH

Let me, in the first place, consider the authority on which the Sabbath stands.

I hold it to be of primary importance to have this point clearly settled in our minds. Here is the very rock on which many of the enemies of the Sabbath make shipwreck. They tell us that the day is "a mere Jewish ordinance," and that we are no more bound to keep it holy than to offer sacrifice. They proclaim to the world that the observance of the Lord's Day rests upon nothing but Church authority, and cannot be proved by the Word of God.

Now I believe that those who say such things are entirely mistaken.

My own Firm conviction is, that the observance of a Sabbath Day is part of the Eternal Law of God. It is not a mere temporary Jewish ordinance. It is not a man-made institution of priestcraft. It is not an unauthorized imposition of the Church. It is one of the everlasting rules which God has revealed for the guidance of all mankind. It is a rule that many nations without the Bible have lost sight of, and buried, like other rules, under the rubbish of superstition and heathenism. But it was a rule intended to be binding on all the children of Adam.

What saith the Scripture? This is the grand point after all. What public opinion says, or newspaper writers think, matters nothing. We are not going to stand at the bar of man when we die. He that judgeth us is the Lord God of the Bible. What saith the Lord?

(a) I turn to the history of Creation. I there read that "God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it" (Gen. 2:3). I find the Sabbath mentioned in the very beginning of all things. There are five things which were given to the father of the human race, in the day that he was made. God gave him a dwelling-place, a work to do, a command to observe, a helpmeet to be his companion, and a Sabbath Day to keep. I am utterly unable to believe that it was in the mind of God that there ever should be a time when Adam's children should keep no Sabbath.

(b) I turn to the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. I there read one whole commandment out of ten devoted to the Sabbath Day, and that the longest, fullest, and most detailed of all (Exod. 20:8-11). I see a broad, plain distinction between these Ten Commandments and any other part of the Law of Moses. It was the only part spoken in the hearing of all the people, and after the Lord had spoken it, the Book of Deuteronomy expressly says, "He added no more" (Deut. 5:22). It was delivered under circumstances of singular solemnity, and accompanied by thunder, lightning, and an earthquake. It was the only part written on tables of stone by God Himself. It was the only part put inside the ark. I find the law of the Sabbath side by side with the law about idolatry, murder, adultery, theft, and the like. I am utterly unable to believe that it was meant to be only of temporary obligation.¹

(c) I turn to the writings of the Old Testament Prophets. I find them repeatedly speaking of the breach of the Sabbath, side by side with the most heinous transgressions of the moral law (Ezek. 20:13, 16, 24; 22:8, 26). I find them speaking of it as one of the great sins which brought judgments on Israel and carried the Jews into captivity (Neh. 13:18; Jer. 17:19-27). It seems clear to me that the Sabbath, in their judgment, is something far higher than the washings and cleansings of the ceremonial law. I am utterly unable to believe, when I read their language, that the Fourth Commandment was one of the things one day to pass away.

(d) I turn to the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ when He was upon earth. I cannot discover that our Saviour ever let fall a word in discredit of any one of the Ten Commandments. On the contrary, I find Him declaring at the outset of His ministry, "that He came not to destroy the law but to fulfil," and the context of the passage where He uses these words, satisfies me that He was not speaking of the ceremonial law, but the moral (Matt. 5:17). I find Him speaking of the Ten Commandments as a recognized standard of moral right and wrong: "Thou knowest the Commandments" (Mark 10:19). I find Him speaking eleven times on the subject of the Sabbath, but it is always to correct the superstitious additions which the Pharisees had made to the Law of Moses about observing it, and never to deny the holiness of the day. He no

more abolishes the Sabbath, than a man destroys a house when he cleans off the moss or weeds from its roof. Above all, I find our Saviour taking for granted the continuance of the Sabbath, when He foretells the destruction of Jerusalem. "Pray ye," He says to the disciples, "that your flight be not on the Sabbath Day" (Matt. 24:20). I am utterly unable to believe, when I see all this, that our Lord did not mean the Fourth Commandment to be as binding on Christians as the other nine.

(e) I turn to the writings of the Apostles. I there find plain speaking about the temporary nature of the ceremonial law and its sacrifices and ordinances. I see them called "carnal" and "weak." I am told they are a "shadow of things to come," -- "a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ," and "ordained till the time of reformation." But I cannot find a syllable in their writings which teaches that any one of the Ten Commandments is done away. On the contrary, I see St. Paul speaking of the moral law in the most respectful manner, though he teaches strongly that it cannot justify us before God. When he teaches the Ephesians the duty of children to parents, he simply quotes the Fifth Commandment: "Honour thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise" (Rom. 7:12; 13:8; Eph. 6:2; 1 Tim. 1:8). I see St. James and St. John recognizing the moral law, as a rule acknowledged and accredited among those to whom they wrote (James 2:10; 1 John 3:4). Again I say that I am utterly unable to believe that when the Apostles spoke of the law, they only meant nine commandments, and not ten.'

(f) I turn to the practice of the Apostles, when they were engaged in planting the Church of Christ. I find distinct mention of their keeping one day of the week as a holy day (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). I find the day spoken of by one of them as "the Lord's Day" (Rev. 1:10). Undoubtedly the day was changed: -- it was made the first day of the week in memory of 'our Lord's resurrection, instead of the seventh: -- but I believe the Apostles were divinely inspired to make that change, and at the same time wisely directed to make no public decree about it. The decree would only have raised a ferment in the Jewish mind, and caused needless offence: the change was one which it was better to effect gradually, and not to force on the consciences of weak brethren. The spirit of the Fourth Commandment was not interfered with by the change in the smallest degree: the Lord's Day, on the first day of the week, was just as much a day of rest after six days' labour, as the seventh-day Sabbath had been. But why we are told so pointedly about the "first day of the week" and "the Lord's Day," if the Apostles kept no one day more holy than another, is to my mind whole inexplicable.

(g) I turn, in the last place, to the pages of unfulfilled prophecy. I find there a plain prediction that in the last days, when the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, there shall still be a Sabbath. "From one Sabbath to another shall all flesh come to worship before Me, saith the Lord" (Isa. 66:23). The subject of this prophecy no doubt is deep. I do not pretend to say that I can fathom all its parts: but one thing is very certain to me -- and that is that in the glorious days to come on the earth there is to be a Sabbath, and a Sabbath not for the Jews only, but for "all flesh." And when I see this I am utterly unable to believe that God meant the Sabbath to cease between the first coming of Christ and the second. I believe He meant it to be an everlasting ordinance in His Church.

I ask serious attention to these arguments from Scripture. To my own mind it appears very plain that wherever God has had a Church in Bible times, God has also had a Sabbath Day. My own firm conviction is, that a Church without a Sabbath would not be a Church on the model of Scripture.²

Let me close this part of the subject by offering two cautions, which I consider are eminently squired by the temper of the times.

For one thing, let us beware of under-valuing the Old Testament. There has arisen of late years a most unhappy tendency to slight and despise any religious argument which is drawn from an Old Testament source, and to regard the man who uses it as a dark, benighted, and old-fashioned person. We shall do well to remember that the Old Testament is just as much inspired as the New, and that the religion of both Testaments is in the main, and at the root, one and the same. The Old Testament is the Gospel in the bud; the New Testament is the Gospel in full flower. The Old Testament is the Gospel in the blade: the New Testament is the

Gospel in full ear. The Old Testament saints saw many things through a glass darkly: but they looked to the same Christ by faith and were led by the same Spirit as ourselves. Let us, therefore, never listen to those who sneer at Old Testament arguments. Much infidelity begins with an ignorant contempt of the Old Testament.

For another thing, let us beware of despising the law of the Ten Commandments. I grieve to observe how exceedingly loose and unsound the opinions of many men are upon this subject. I have been astonished at the coolness with which even clergymen sometimes speak of them as a part of Judaism, which may be classed with sacrifices and circumcision. I wonder how such men can read them to their congregations every week! For my own part, I believe that the coming of Christ's Gospel did not alter the position of the Ten Commandments one hair's breadth. If anything, it rather exalted and raised their authority. I believe, that in due place and proportion, it is just as important to expound and enforce them, as to preach Christ crucified. By them is the knowledge of sin. By them the Spirit teaches men their need of a Saviour. By them the Lord Jesus teaches His people how to walk and please God. I suspect it would be well for the Church if the Ten Commandments were more frequently expounded in the pulpit than they are. At all events, I fear that much of the present ignorance on the Sabbath question is attributable to erroneous views about the Fourth Commandment.

2. THE PURPOSE OF THE SABBATH

The second point I propose to examine, is the purpose for which the Sabbath was appointed.

I feel it imperatively necessary to say something on this point. There is no part of the Sabbath question about which there are so many ridiculous misstatements put forward. Many are raising a cry in the present day, as if we were inflicting a positive injury on them in calling on them to keep the Sabbath holy. They talk as if the observance of the day were a heavy yoke, like circumcision and the washings and purifications of the ceremonial law.

But the Sabbath is God's merciful appointment for the common benefit of all mankind It was "made for man" (Mark 2:27). It was given for the good of all classes, for the laity quite as much as for the clergy. It is not a yoke, but a blessing. It is not a burden, but a mercy. It is not a hard wearisome requirement, but a mighty public benefit. It is not an ordinance which man is bid to use in faith, without knowing why he uses it. It is one which carries with it its own reward. It is good for man's body and mind. It is good for nations. Above all, it is good for souls.

(a) The Sabbath is good for man's body. We all need a day of rest. On this point, at any rate, all medical men are agreed. Curiously and wonderfully made as the human frame is, it will not stand incessant work without regular intervals of repose. The first gold-diggers of California soon found out that! Reckless and ungodly as many of them probably were -- urged on as they were, no doubt, by the mighty influence of the hope of gain -- they still found out that a seventh day's rest was absolutely needful to keep themselves alive. Without it they discovered that in digging for gold they were only digging their own graves. I firmly believe that one reason why the health of working clergymen so frequently fails, is the great difficulty they find in getting a day of rest. I am sure if the body could tell us its wants, it would cry loudly "Remember the Sabbath Day."

(b) The Sabbath is good for man's mind. The mind needs rest quite as much as the body; it cannot bear an uninterrupted strain on its powers; it must have its intervals to unbend and recover its force. Without them it will either prematurely wear out, or fail suddenly, like a broken bow. The testimony of the famous philanthropist, Wilberforce, on this point is very striking. He declared that he could only attribute his own power of endurance to his regular observance of the Sabbath Day. He remembered that he had observed some of the mightiest intellects among his contemporaries fail suddenly at last, and their possessors come to

melancholy ends; and he was satisfied that in every such case of mental shipwreck the true cause was neglect of the Fourth Commandment.

(c) The Sabbath is good for nations. It has an enormous effect both on the character and temporal prosperity of a people. I firmly believe that a people which regularly rests one day in seven will do more work and better work in a year than a people which never rest at all. Their hands will be stronger; their minds will be clearer; their power of attention, application, and steady perseverance will be far greater.³

(d) Last, but not least, the Sabbath is an unmixed good for man's soul. The soul has its wants just as much as the mind and body. It is in the midst of a hurrying, bustling world, in which its interests are constantly in danger of being jostled out of sight. To have those interests properly attended to, there must be a special day set apart; there must be a regularly recurring time for examining the state of our souls; there must be a day to test and prove us, whether we are prepared for an eternal heaven. Take away a man's Sabbath, and his religion soon comes to nothing. As a general rule, there is a regular Right of steps down from "no Sabbath" to "no God."

I know well that many say that "religion does not consist in keeping days and seasons." I agree with them. I am quite aware that it needs something more than Sabbath observance to save our souls. But I would like such persons to tell us plainly what kind of religion that is which teaches people to keep no days holy at all.

I know well that there are some good people who contend that "every day ought to be holy" to a true Christian, and on this ground deprecate the special sanctification of the first day of the week. I respect the conscientious convictions of such people. I would go as far as anyone in contending for an "every day religion," and protesting against a mere Sabbath Christianity; but I am satisfied that the theory is unsound and unscriptural. I am convinced that, taking human nature as it is, the attempt to regard every day as a Lord's Day would result in having no Lord's Day at all. None but a thorough fanatic, I presume, would say that it is wrong to have stated seasons for private prayer, on the ground that we ought to "pray always"; and few, I am persuaded, who look at the world with the eyes of common sense, will fail to see, that to bring religion to bear on men with full effect, there must be one day in the week set apart for this purpose.

Whether we know it or not, our Sabbath is one of our richest possessions. It is good for our bodies, minds, and souls. Of it the famous words may be truly used, that "it is the cheap defence of a nation."

3. HOW IT SHOULD BE KEPT

I propose, in the third place, to show the manner in which the Sabbath ought to be kept.

This is a branch of the subject on which great difference of opinion exists: it is one on which even the friends of the Sabbath are not thoroughly agreed. Many, I believe, would contend as strongly as I do for a Sabbath, but not for the Sabbath for which I contend. My desire is simply to state what appears to be in the mind of God as revealed in Holy Scripture.

Once for all, I must plainly say that I cannot entirely agree with those who tell us that they do not want a Jewish Sabbath, but a Christian one. I doubt whether such persons clearly know what they mean. If they object to a Pharisaic Sabbath, I agree with them; if they object to a Mosaic Sabbath, I would have them consider well what they say. I can find no clear evidence that the Old Testament Sabbath was intended by Moses to be more strictly kept than the Christian Sunday.

What then appears to be the will of God about the manner of observing the Sabbath Day? There are two general rules laid down for our guidance in the Fourth Commandment, and by them all questions must be decided.

One plain rule about the Sabbath is that it must be kept as a day of rest, All work of every kind ought to cease as far as possible, both of body and mind. "Thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates." Works of necessity and mercy may be done. Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us this, and teaches also that all such works were allowable in the Old Testament times. "Have ye not read," He says, "what David did?" -- "Have ye not read that the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?" (Matt. 12:5). Whatever, in short, is necessary to preserve and maintain life, whether of ourselves, or of the creatures, or to do good to the souls of men, may be done on the Sabbath Day without sin.

The other great rule about the Sabbath is, that it must be kept holy. It is not to be a carnal, sensual rest, like that of the worshippers of the golden calf, who "sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play" (Exod. 32:6). It is to be emphatically a holy rest. It is to be a rest in which, as far as possible, the affairs of the soul may be attended to, business of another world minded, and communion with God and Christ kept up. In short, it ought never to be forgotten that it is "the Sabbath of the Lord our God" (Exod. 20:10).

I ask attention to these two general rules, I believe that by them all Sabbath questions may be safely tested. I believe that within the bounds of these rules every lawful and reasonable want of human nature is fully met, and that whatsoever transgresses these bounds is sin.

I am no Pharisee. Let no hard-working man who has been confined to a close room for six weary days, suppose that I object to his taking any lawful relaxation for his body on the Sunday. I see no harm in a quiet walk on a Sunday, provided always that it does not take the place of going to public worship, and is really quiet, and like that of Isaac (Gen. 24:63). I read of our Lord and His disciples walking through the cornfields on the Sabbath Day. All I say is, beware that you do not turn liberty into licence -- beware that you do not injure the souls of others in seeking relaxation for yourself -- and beware that you never forget you have a soul as well as a body.

I am no enthusiast. I want no tired labourer to misunderstand my meaning, when I bid him to keep the Sabbath holy. I do not tell anyone that he ought to pray all day, or read his Bible all day, or go to church all day, or meditate all day, without let or cessation, on a Sunday. All I say is, that the Sunday rest should be a holy rest. God ought to be kept in view; God's Word ought to be studied; God's House ought to be attended; the soul's business ought to be specially considered; and I say that everything which prevents the day being kept holy in this way, ought as far as possible to be avoided.

I am no admirer of a gloomy religion. Let no one suppose that I want Sunday to be a day of sadness and unhappiness. I want every Christian to be a happy man: I wish him to have "joy and peace in believing," and to "rejoice in hope of the glory of God." I want everyone to regard Sunday as the brightest, cheerfulest day of all the seven; and I tell everyone who finds such a Sunday as I advocate a wearisome day, that there is something sadly wrong in the state of his heart. I tell him plainly that if he cannot enjoy a "holy" Sunday, the fault is not in the day, but in his own soul.

I can well believe that many will think that I am setting the standard of Sabbath observance far too high. The thoughtless and worldly, the lovers of money and lovers of pleasure, will all exclaim that I am requiring what is impossible. It is easy to make such assertions. The only question for a Christian ought to be, "What does the Bible teach?" God's measure of what is right must surely not be brought down to the measure of man: man's measure should rather be brought up to the measure of God.

I maintain no other standard of Sabbath observance than that which all the best and holiest Christians of every Church and nation have maintained almost without exception. It is extraordinary to mark the harmony there is among them on this point. They have differed widely on other subjects in religion: -- they have even disagreed as to the grounds on which they defend Sabbath sanctification: -- but as soon as you come to the practical question, "how the Lord's Day ought to be observed," the unity among them is truly surprising.

Last, but not least, I want no other standard of Sabbath observance than that to which a calm, rational reflection on things yet to come will lead every sober-minded person. Are we really going to die one day and leave this world? Are we about to appear before God in another state of existence? Are these things so, or are they not? Surely, if they are, it is not too much to ask men to give one day in seven to God; it is not too much to require them to test their own meetness for another world by spending the Sabbath in special preparation for it. Common sense, reason, conscience, will combine, I think, to say that if we cannot spare God one day in a week, we cannot be living as those ought to live who must die one day.

4. WAYS IN WHICH IT IS PROFANED

The last thing I propose to do, is to expose some of the ways in which the Sabbath is profaned.

There are two kinds of Sabbath desecration which require to be noticed. One is that more private kind of which thousands are continually guilty, and which can only be checked by awakening men's consciences. The other is that more public kind, which can only be remedied by the pressure of public opinion, and the strong arm of the law.

When I speak of private Sabbath desecration, I mean that reckless, thoughtless, secular way of spending Sunday, which everyone who looks round him must know is common. How many make the Lord's Day a day for giving dinner parties -- a day for looking over their accounts and making up their books -- a day for going unnecessary journeys and quietly transacting worldly business -- a day for reading newspapers or novels -- a day for talking politics and idle gossip -- a day, in short, for anything rather than the things of God.

Now all this sort of thing is wrong, decidedly wrong. Thousands, I firmly believe, never give the subject a thought: they sin from ignorance and inconsideration. They only do as others; they only spend Sunday as their fathers and grandfathers did before them: but this does not alter the case. It is utterly impossible to say that to spend Sunday as I have described is to "keep the day holy": it is a plain breach of the Fourth Commandment, both in the letter and in the spirit. It is impossible to plead necessity or mercy in one instance of a thousand. And small and trifling as these breaches of the Sabbath may seem to be, they are exactly the sort of things that prevent men communing with God and getting good from His Day.

When I speak of public desecration of the Sabbath, I mean those many open, unblushing practices, which meet the eye on Sundays in the neighbourhood of large towns. I refer to the practice of keeping shops open, and buying and selling on Sundays. I refer especially to Sunday pleasure excursions by public transport and the opening of places of public amusement; and to the daring efforts which many are making in the present day to desecrate the Lord's Day, regardless of its Divine authority. "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy."

On all these points I feel not the smallest doubt in my own mind. These ways of spending the Sabbath are all wrong, decidedly wrong. So long as the Bible is the Bible, and the Fourth Commandment the Fourth Commandment, I dare not come to any other conclusion. They are all wrong. These ways of spending Sunday are none of them works of necessity or works of mercy. There is not the slightest likeness between them and any of the things which the Lord Jesus explains to be lawful on the Sabbath Day. To heal a sick person, or pull an ox or ass

out of a pit, is one thing: to travel in excursion trains, or go to concerts, theatres, dances and cinemas, is quite another. The difference is as great as between light and darkness. These ways of spending Sunday are none of them of a holy tendency, or calculated to help us heavenward. No, indeed! all experience teaches that it needs something more than the beauties of art and nature to teach man the way to heaven.

These ways of spending Sunday have never yet conferred moral or spiritual good in any place where they have been tried. They have been tried for hundreds of years in Italy, in Germany and in France. Sunday amusements and sport have been long tried in Continental cities. But what benefit have they derived that we should wish to imitate them? What advantages have we to gain by making a London Sunday like a Sunday in Paris or other continental cities. It would be a change for the worse, and not for the better.

Last, but not least, these ways of spending Sunday inflict a cruel injury on the souls of multitudes of people, Public transport cannot be run on Sundays without employing thousands of persons if people will make Sunday a day for travelling and excursions. Entertainments cannot be opened on Sundays without the employment of many to cater for those who patronise them. And have not all these unfortunate persons immortal souls? Do they not all need a day of rest as much as anyone else? Beyond doubt they do. But Sunday is no Sunday to them, so long as these public desecrations of the Sabbath are permitted. Their life becomes a long unbroken chain of work, work, unceasing work: in short, what is play to others becomes death to them. Away with the idea that a pleasure-seeking, Continental Sabbath is mercy to anyone! It is nothing less than an enormous fallacy to call it so. Such a Sabbath is real mercy to nobody, and is positive sacrifice to some.

I write these things with sorrow. I know well, to how many of my fellow-countrymen they apply. I have spent many a Sunday in large towns. I have seen with my own eyes how the day of the Lord is made by multitudes a day of wordliness, a day of ungodliness, a day of carnal mirth, and too often a day of sin. But the extent of the disease must not prevent us exposing it: the truth must be told.

There is one general conclusion to be drawn from the conduct of those who publicly desecrate the Sabbath in the way I have described. They show plainly that they are at present "without God" in the world. They are like those of old who said, "When will the Sabbath be gone?" -- "What a weariness it is!" (Amos 8:5; Mal. 1:13). It is an awful conclusion, but it is impossible to avoid it. Scripture, history, and experience all combine to teach us, that delight in the Lord's Word, the Lord's service, the Lord's people, and the Lord's Day, will always go together. Sunday pleasure-seekers are their own witnesses. They are every week practically declaring, "We do not like God -- we do not want Him to reign over us.

It is not the slightest argument, in reply to what I have said, that many great and learned men see no harm in Sunday entertainment, sport and pleasure. It matters nothing in religious questions, who does a thing: the only point to be ascertained is, "whether it be right."

Let us take our stand on the Bible, and hold fast its teaching. Whatever others may think lawful, let our sentence ever be that one day in seven, and one whole day, ought to be kept holy to God.

A FINAL APPEAL

And now I wish to address a parting word to several classes of persons who may read these pages. I write as a friend. I ask for a fair and patient hearing.

(1) I appeal first of all to all who are in the habit of breaking the Sabbath. Whether you break it in public or private, whether you break it in company or alone, I have somewhat to say to you.

I ask you to consider seriously, how you will answer for your present conduct in the day of judgment. I put it solemnly to your conscience. I ask you to think quietly and calmly, how utterly unfit you are to appear before God. You cannot live always: you must one day lie down and die. You cannot escape the great assize in the world to come: you must stand before the great white throne, and give account of all your works. These are great realities, and you know they are true. I repeat it deliberately: unless you are prepared to take up some fable of man's invention, and to be that poor credulous creature, a sceptic, you know these things are true.

Where is your preparedness for meeting God and reckoning with Him? Where is your readiness for an eternity in His company, and the society of saints and angels? Yes! I may well ask, Where? You cannot give an answer. You cannot give God one single day in seven! It wearies you to spend one-seventh part of your time in attempting to know anything about Him, before whose bar you are going one day to stand!

Oh, Sabbath-breaker, consider your ways, and be wise!

What harm has Sunday done to the world, that you should hate it so much? What harm has God done you, that you should so obstinately turn your back on His laws? What injury has the Christian Faith done to mankind, that you should be so afraid of having too much? Look on the heavens above you, and think of the mighty Being, Who is the eternal God.

Go to the house of God, and hear the Gospel preached. Confess your past sin at the Throne of Grace, and ask pardon through that blood which "cleanses from all sin." Arrange your time on Sunday so that you may have leisure for quiet, sober meditation on eternal things. Avoid the company that would lead you to talk only of this world. Take down your long-neglected Bible, and study its pages. Do it, do it without a week's delay! It may be hard at First, but it is worth a struggle. Do it, and it will be well for you both in time and eternity.

(2) I appeal, in the next place, to all who either belong to the industrial community, or profess to fake an interest in their condition.

I ask you then, never to be taken in and deluded by those who want the sanctity of the Lord's Day to be more publicly invaded than it is, and yet tell you they are "the friends of the working-classes." Believe me, they are in reality their worst enemies: they are taking the surest course to add to their burdens. They do not mean it, very likely, but in reality they are doing them a cruel injury.

Be assured that if our Sundays are ever turned into days of play and amusement, they will soon become a day of labour and work. It is vain to suppose that it can be avoided: it never has been in other countries; it never would be in our own land.

I do trust that all working people in England will not be deceived about this Sabbath question. Of all people on earth they are the most interested in it. None have so much to lose in this matter as they, and none have so little to gain.

(3) I appeal, in the next place, to all who profess to reverence the Sabbath, and have no wish to see its character changed.

I ask you to consider whether you may not be more strict in keeping the Sabbath Day holy than you have been hitherto. I am sadly afraid there is much laxity in many quarters on this point. I fear that many who have no thought of infringing the Fourth Commandment are culpably inconsiderate and careless as to the way in which they obey its precepts. I fear that the world gets into the Sundays of many a respectable church-going family far more than it ought to do. I fear that many keep the Sabbath themselves, but never give others a chance of keeping it holy. I fear that many, who keep the Lord's Day with much outward propriety when they are at home, are often grievous Sabbath-breakers when they go abroad. I fear that

hundreds of British travellers do things on Sundays on the Continent, which they would never do in their own land.

This is a sore evil; if we really love the Lord's Day, let us prove our love by our manner of using it. Wherever we are, whether at home or abroad -- whether in Protestant or Roman Catholic countries -- let our conduct on Sunday be such as becomes the day. Let us never forget that the eyes of the Lord are in every place and that the Fourth Commandment is just as binding on us in Italy, Switzerland, Germany, or France, as it is in our own country. Last, but not least, let us remember that the Fourth Commandment speaks of our "man-servant and maid-servant," as well as ourselves.

(4) I appeal, in the last place, to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and are zealous in His cause. I ask you, then, to consider whether it does not become the solemn duty of all true Christians to take far more effectual measures than we have done hitherto, to preserve the holiness of the Lord's Day?

We form societies to defend the Lord's Day, and propose measure after measure in Parliament to stop Sunday trading. But is that enough? No: it is not!

The truth must be spoken: -- we must begin lower down. We cannot make people religious by Acts of Parliament alone. We must teach right as well as forbid wrong: we must try to prevent evil as well as repress it. We must strike at the root of the evils we deplore. We must endeavour to evangelize the masses of men and women who now break their Sabbaths every week. We must show them a better way. We must divert this fountain of Sabbath-breaking into different channels and not content ourselves with damming up its waters when they overflow.

I commend these things to the attention of all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Let London, Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, and other large towns be thoroughly evangelized, and you will strike a deadly blow at the root of all Sabbath breaking.

The plain truth is, that the Sabbath-breaking of the present day is one among many proofs of the low state of vital religion. I pray God that we may all learn wisdom and amend our ways before it be too late. We want more work for Christ. We want a return to the old paths of the Apostles in every branch of the Church; we want a generation of ministers whose first ambition is to go into every room in their parish, and tell the story of the cross of Christ. Unless our large towns are more thoroughly evangelized, we shall never be without a struggle TO KEEP THE SABBATH HOLY.

NOTES

1. The learned Bishop Andrewes wisely remarks that it is a dangerous thing to make the Fourth Commandment ceremonial, and of mere temporary obligation: "The Papists will then have the Second Commandment also to be ceremonial; and there is no reason why there may not be as well three as two, and so four and five, and so all." -- "We hold that all ceremonies are ended and abrogated by Christ's death: but the Sabbath is not." -- Bishop Andrewes on the Moral Law, 1642.

2. The following quotations from notable ministers are appended. In a day like the present when we are so often told that learned divines deny the Divine authority of the Lord's Day, it may be well to show the reader that there are other divines, and some eminently learned, who take an entirely different view.

LET US HEAR WHAT BAXTER SAYS: "It hath been the constant practice of all Christ's Churches in the whole world ever since the days of the Apostles to this day, to assemble for public worship on the Lord's Day, as a day set apart thereto by the Apostles. Yea, so

universal was this judgment and practice, that there is no one Church, no one writer, or one heretic that I remember to have read of, that can be proved even to have dissented or gainsaid it till of late times." Baxter on the Divine Appointment of the Lord's Day, 1680.

LET US NEXT HEAR LIGHTFOOT: "The first day of the week was everywhere celebrated for the Christian Sabbath, and which is not to be passed over without observing, as far as appears from Scripture, there is nowhere any dispute about the matter. There was controversy concerning circumcision, and other points of the Jewish religion. Whether they were to be retained or not, but nowhere do we read concerning the changing of the Sabbath. There were indeed, some Jews converted to the Gospel, who as in some other things they retained a smack of their old Judaism, so they did in the observance of days (Rom. 14:5; Gal. 4:10), but yet not rejecting or neglecting the Lord's Day. They celebrated it and made no manner of scruple, it appears, concerning it; but they would have their old festival days too: and they disputed not at all, whether the Lord's Day were to be celebrated, but whether the Jewish Sabbath ought not to be celebrated also." -- Lightfoot's Works, vol. xii., 556. 1670.

The whole subject of the change from the seventh-day Sabbath to the Lord's Day is one which the reader will find admirably handled in the Sermons of Bishop Daniel Wilson, On the Lord's Day.

3. "We are not poorer in England, but richer, because we have, through many ages, rested from our labour one day in seven. That day is not lost. While industry is suspended, while the plough lies in the furrow, while the Exchange is silent, while no smoke ascends from the factory, a process is going on quite as important to the wealth of nations as any process which is performed on more busy days. Man, the machine of machinery, the machine compared with which all the contrivances of the Watts and Arkwrights are worthless, is repairing and winding up, so that he returns to his labour on the Monday with clearer intellect, with livelier spirits, with renewed corporal vigour." -- Macaulay's Speech on the Ten Hours Bill. Speeches, pp. 450, 453, 454.

The famous Blackstone says, "The keeping one day in seven holy, as a time of relaxation and refreshment, as well as for public worship, is of admirable service to a State, considered merely as a civil institution." -- Blackstone's Commentaries, vol. 4, p. 63.