

The Perpetuity and Change of the Sabbath

Part III

Jonathan Edwards

I Cor. xvi. 1, 2.

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.

It is the mind and will of God, that the first day of the week should be especially set apart among Christians for religious exercises and duties.

On this *doctrine* I have already discoursed, under two propositions, showing, *first*, That it is the will of God, that one day of the week be, in all ages, set apart for religious duties; and *secondly*, That under the gospel, this day ought to be the *first* day of the week. I now proceed to the:

APPLICATION

This shall be in a use of *exhortation*.

1. Let us be *thankful* for the institution or the Christian sabbath. It is a thing wherein God hath shown his mercy to us, and his care for our souls. He shows, that he, by his infinite wisdom, is contriving for our good, as Christ teaches us, that the sabbath was made for man; Mark ii. 27. "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." It was made for the profit and for the comfort of our souls.

The sabbath is a day of *rest*: God hath appointed that we should, every seventh day, rest from all our worldly labours. Instead of that, he might have appointed the hardest labours for us to go through, some severe hardships for us to endure. It is a day of outward, but especially of spiritual rest. It is a day appointed of God, that his people thereon may find rest unto their souls; that the souls of believers may rest and be refreshed in their Saviour. It is a day of *rejoicing*: God made it to be a joyful day to the church; Ps. cxviii. 24.—"This is the day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it." They that aright receive and improve the sabbath, call it a *delight* and *honourable*: it is a pleasant and a joyful day to them; it is an image of the future heavenly rest of the church. Heb. iv. 9, 10, 11. "There remaineth therefore a rest" (or

sabbatism, as it is in the original) “to the people of God. For he that hath entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest.”

The Christian sabbath is one of the most precious enjoyments of the visible church. Christ showed his love to his church in instituting it; and it becomes the Christian church to be thankful to her Lord for it. The very name of this day, *the Lord’s day*, or *Jesus’s day*, should endear it to Christians, as it intimates the special relation it has to Christ, and also the design of it, which is the commemoration of our dear Saviour, and his love to his church in redeeming it.

2. Be exhorted to *keep* this day holy.—God hath given such evidences that this is his mind, that he will surely require it of you, if you do not strictly and conscientiously observe it. And if you do thus observe it, you may have this comfort in the reflection upon your conduct, that you have not been superstitious in it, but have done as God hath revealed it to be his mind and will in his word, that you should do; and that in so doing you are in the way of God’s acceptance and reward.

Here let me lay before you the following *motives* to excite you to this duty.

(1.) By a strict observation of the sabbath, the name of God is honoured, and that in such a way as is very acceptable to him. Isa. lviii. 13. “If thou call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, and *shalt honour him*.” God is honoured by it, as it is a visible manifestation of respect to God’s holy law, and a reverencing of that which has a peculiar relation to God himself, and that more in some respects than the observance of many other commands. And man may be just, and generous, and yet not so plainly show respect to the revealed mind and will of God, for many of the heathen have been so. But if a person, with evident strictness and care, observe the sabbath, it is a visible manifestation of a conscientious reward to God’s declaration of his mind, and so is a visible honour done to his authority.

By a strict observance of the sabbath, the face of religion is kept up in the world. If it were not for the sabbath, there would be but little public and visible appearance of serving, worshipping, and reverencing the supreme and invisible Being. The sabbath seems to have been appointed very much for this end, *viz*, to uphold the visibility of religion in public, or among professing societies of men; and by how much greater the strictness is with which the sabbath is observed, and with how much more solemnity the duties of it are observed among a people; by so much the greater is the manifestation among them of respect to the Divine Being.

This should be a powerful motive with us to the observation of the sabbath. It should be our study above all things to honour and glorify God. It should be the great thing with all that bear the name of Christians, to honour their great God and King, and I hope is a great thing with many that hear me at this time. If it be your inquiry, if it be your desire, to honour God; by this subject you are directed to one way whereby you may do much

in that way, *viz*, by honouring the sabbath, and by avowing a careful and strict observance of it.

(2.) That which is the business of the sabbath is the greatest business of our lives, *viz*, that of religion. To serve and worship God is that for which we were made, and for which we had our being given us. Other business, which is of a secular nature, and on which we are wont to attend on week days, is but subordinate, and ought to be subservient to the higher purposes and ends of religion. Therefore surely we should not think much of devoting one seventh part of our time, to be *wholly* spent in this business, and to be set apart to exercise ourselves in the immediate duties of religion.

(3.) Let it be considered, that all our time is God's, and therefore when he challenges of us one day in seven, he challenges his *own*. He doth not exceed his right; he would not have exceeded it, if he had challenged a far greater proportion of our time to be spent in his immediate service, But he hath mercifully considered our state, and our necessities here; and, as he hath consulted the good of our souls in appointing a seventh day for the immediate duties of religion, so he hath considered our outward necessities, and hath allowed us six days for attendance on our outward affairs.—What unworthy treatment therefore will it be of God, if we refuse to allow him even the seventh day!

(4.) As the sabbath is a day which is especially set apart for religious exercises, so it is a day wherein God especially confers his grace and blessing.—As God hath commanded us to set it apart to have converse with him, so hath he set it apart for himself to have converse with us. As God hath commanded us to observe the sabbath, so God observes the sabbath too. It is with respect to the sabbath, as Solomon prayed that it might be with respect to the temple, 2 Chron. vi. 20. His eyes are open upon it: he stands ready then especially to hear prayers, to accept of religious services, to meet his people, to manifest himself to them, to give his Holy Spirit and blessing to those who diligently and conscientiously sanctify it.

That we should sanctify the sabbath, as we have observed, is according to God's institution. God in a sense observes his own institutions; *i.e.* is wont to cause them to be attended with a blessing. The institutions of God are his appointed means of grace, and with his institutions he hath promised his blessing; Exod. xx. 24. "In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." For the same reason we may conclude, that God will meet his people and bless them, waiting upon him not only in appointed *places*, but at appointed times and in all appointed ways. Christ hath promised, that where two or three are gathered together in his name, he will be in the midst of them, Matt. xviii. 20. One thing included in the expression, *in his name* is, that it is by his appointment, and according to his institution.

God hath made it our duty, by his institution, to set apart this day for a special seeking of his grace and blessing. From which we may argue, that he will be especially ready to confer his grace on those who thus seek it. If it be the day on which God requires us especially to seek him, we may argue, that it is a day on which especially he will be found. That God is ready on this day especially to bestow his blessing on them that

keep it aright, is implied in that expression of *God's blessing the sabbath-day*. God hath not only hallowed the sabbath-day, but blessed it; he hath given his blessing to it, and will confer his blessing upon all the due observers of it. He hath hallowed it, or appointed that it be kept holy by us, and hath blessed it; he hath determined to give his blessing upon it.

So that here is great encouragement for us to keep holy the sabbath, as we would seek God's grace and our own spiritual good. The sabbath-day is an accepted time, a day of salvation, a time wherein God especially loves to be sought, and loves to be found. The Lord Jesus Christ takes delight in his own day; he delights to honour it; he delights to meet with and manifest himself to his disciples on it, as he showed before his ascension, by appearing to them from time to time on this day. On this day he delights to give his Holy Spirit, as he intimated, by choosing it as the day on which to pour out the Spirit in so remarkable a manner on the primitive church, and on which to give his Spirit to the apostle John.

Of old God blessed the seventh day, or appointed it to be a day whereon especially he would bestow blessings on his people, as an expression of his own joyful remembrance of that day, and of the rest and refreshment which he had on it. *Exod. Xxxi. 16, 17.* "Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath-day.—For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed." As princes give gifts on their birth-days, on their marriage-days, and the like; so God was wont to dispense spiritual gifts on the seventh day.

But how much more reason has Christ to bless the day of his resurrection, and to delight to honour it, and to confer his grace and blessed gifts on his people on this day. It was a day whereon Christ rested and was refreshed in a literal sense. It was a day of deliverance from the chains of death, the day of his finishing that great and difficult work of redemption, which had been upon his heart from all eternity; the day of his justification by the Father; the day of the beginning of his exaltation, and of the fulfilment of the promises of the Father; the day when he had eternal life, which he had purchased, put into his hands.—On this day Christ doth indeed delight to distribute gifts, and blessings, and joy, and happiness, and will delight to do the same to the end of the world.

O therefore, how well is it worth our while to improve this day, to call upon God and seek Jesus Christ! Let awakened sinners be stirred up by these things to improve the sabbath-day, as they would lay themselves most in the way of the Spirit of God. Improve this day to call upon God; for then he is near. Improve it for reading the Holy Scriptures, and diligently attending his word preached; for then is the likeliest time to have the Spirit accompanying it. Let the saints who are desirous of growing in grace, and enjoying communion with Christ, improve the sabbath in order to it.

(5.) The last motive which I shall mention, is the experience of the influence which a strict observance of the sabbath has upon the whole of religion. It may be observed, that in those places where the sabbath is well kept, religion in general will be most

flourishing; and that in those places where the sabbath is not much noticed, and much is not made of it, there is no great matter of religion any way.—But,

INQ. How ought we to keep the sabbath?

ANS. 1. We ought to be exceedingly careful on this day to abstain from sin. Indeed, all breaches of the sabbath are sinful; but we speak now of those things which are in themselves sinful, or sinful upon other accounts, besides that they are done upon the sabbath. The sabbath being holy time, it is especially defiled by the commission of sin. Sin by being committed on this day becomes the more exceeding sinful. We are required to abstain from sin at all times, but especially on holy time. The commission of immoralities on the sabbath is the worst way of profaning it, that which most provokes God, and brings most guilt upon the souls of men.

How provoking must it be to God, when men do those things on that day—which he has sanctified, and set apart to be spent in the immediate exercises of religion—which are not fit to be done on common days, which are impure and wicked whenever they are done!

Therefore if any persons be guilty of any such wickedness, as intemperance or any unclean actions, they do in a very horrid manner profane the sabbath. Or if they be guilty of wickedness in speech, of talking profanely, or in an unclean and lascivious manner, or of talking against their neighbours, they do in a dreadful manner profane the sabbath. Yet very commonly those who are used to such things on week-days, have not a conscience to restrain them on the sabbath. It is well if those that live in the indulgence of the lust of uncleanness on week-days, be not some way or other unclean on the sabbath. They will be indulging the same lusts then; they will be indulging their impure flames in their imaginations at least: and it is well if they keep clear while in the house of God, and while they pretend to be worshipping God. The unclean young man gives this account of himself, Prov. v. 14. “ I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and the assembly.” So those who are addicted to an impure way of talking in the week-time, have nothing to keep them from the same upon the sabbath, when they meet together. But dreadfully is God provoked by such things.

We ought carefully to watch over our own hearts, and to avoid all sinful thoughts on the sabbath. We ought to maintain such a reverence for the sabbath, as to have a peculiar dread of sin, such as shall awe us to a very careful watch over ourselves.

2. We ought to be careful to abstain from all worldly concerns. The reason, as we have showed, why it is needful and proper, that certain stated parts of time should be set apart to be devoted to religious exercises is because the state of mankind is such in this world, that they are necessitated to exercise their minds, and employ their thoughts, about secular matters. It is therefore convenient that there should be stated times, wherein all should be obliged to throw by all other concerns, that their minds may the more freely, and with less entanglement, be engaged in religious and spiritual exercises.

We are therefore to do thus, or else we frustrate the very design of the institution of a sabbath. We are strictly to abstain from being outwardly engaged in any worldly thing, either worldly business or recreations. We are to rest in remembrance of God's rest from the work of creation, and of Christ's rest from the work of redemption. We should be careful that we do not encroach upon the sabbath at its beginning, by busying ourselves about the world after the sabbath is begun. We should avoid talking about worldly matters, and even thinking about them; for whether we outwardly concern ourselves with the world or not, yet if our minds be upon it, we frustrate the end of the sabbath. The end of its separation from other days is, that our minds may be disengaged from worldly things: and we are to avoid being outwardly concerned with the world, only for this reason, that cannot be without taking up our minds.—We ought therefore to give the world no place in our thoughts on the sabbath, but to abstract ourselves from all worldly concerns and maintain a watch over ourselves, that the world do not encroach, as it is very apt to do. Isa. lviii. 13,14.

3. We ought to spend the time in religious exercises. This is the more ultimate end of the sabbath.

We are to keep our minds separate from the world, principally for this end, that we may be the more free for religious exercises.—Though it be a day of rest, yet it was not designed to be a day of idleness. To rest from worldly employments, without employing ourselves about any thing, is but to lay ourselves so much more in the devil's way. The mind will be employed some way or other; and therefore doubtless the end for which we are to call off our minds from worldly things on the sabbath is, that we may employ them about things that are better.

We are to attend on spiritual exercises with the greatest diligence. That it is a day of rest, doth not hinder us in so doing; for we are to look on spiritual exercises but as the rest and refreshment of the soul. In heaven, where the people of God have the most perfect rest, they are not idle, but are employed in spiritual and heavenly exercises.—We should take care therefore to employ our minds on a sabbath-day on spiritual objects by holy meditation; improving for our help therein the Holy Scriptures, and other books that are according to the word of God. We should also employ ourselves outwardly on this day in the duties of divine worship, in public and private. It is proper to be more frequent and abundant in secret duties on this day, than on other days, as we have time and opportunity, as well as to attend on public ordinances.

It is proper on this day, not only especially to promote the exercise of religion in ourselves, but also in others; to be assisting them, and endeavouring to promote their spiritual good, by religious conference. —Especially those who have the care of others ought, on this day, to endeavour to promote their spiritual good: heads of families should be instructing and counselling their children, and quickening them in the ways of religion, and should see to it that the sabbath be strictly kept in their houses. A peculiar blessing may be expected upon those families where there is due care taken that the sabbath be strictly and devoutly observed.

4. We are on this day especially to meditate upon and celebrate the work of redemption. We are with special joy to remember the resurrection of Christ; because that was the finishing of that work. And this is the day whereon Christ rested and was refreshed, after he had endured those extreme labours which he endured for our perishing souls. This was the day of the gladness of Christ a heart; it was the day of his deliverance from the chains of death, and also of our deliverance; for we are delivered in him who is our head. He, as it were, rose with his elect. He is the first—fruits; those that are Christ's will follow. Christ, when he rose, was justified as a public person, and we are justified in him. This is the day of our deliverance out of Egypt.

We should therefore meditate on this with joy; we should have a sympathy with Christ in his joy. As he was refreshed on this day, so we should be refreshed, as those whose hearts are united with his. When Christ rejoices, it becomes all his church every where to rejoice. —We are to say of this day, “This is the day that the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.”

But we are not only to commemorate the resurrection of Christ, but the whole work of redemption, of which this was the finishing. We keep the day on which the work was finished, because it is in remembrance of the whole work.—We should on this day contemplate the wonderful love of God and of Christ, as expressed in the work of redemption; and our remembrance of these things should be accompanied with suitable exercises of soul with respect to them. When we call to mind the love of Christ, it should be with a return of love on our part. When we commemorate this work, it should be with faith in the Saviour. And we should praise God and the Lamb for this work, for the divine glory and love manifested in it, in our private and public prayers, in talking of the wonderful works of God, and in singing divine songs.

Hence it is proper that Christ's disciples should choose this day to come together to break bread, or to celebrate the ordinance of the Lord's supper, Acts xx. 7. because it is an ordinance instituted in remembrance of the work of redemption.

5. Works of mercy and charity are very proper and acceptable to Christ on this day. They were proper on the ancient sabbath. Christ was wont to do such works on the sabbath-day. But they especially become the Christian sabbath, because it is a day kept in commemoration of the greatest work of mercy and love towards us that ever was wrought. What can be more proper than that on such a day we should be expressing our love and mercy towards our fellow-creatures, and especially our fellow-Christians. Christ loves to see us show our thankfulness to him in such ways as these. Therefore we find that the Holy Ghost was especially careful, that such works should be performed on the first day of the week in the primitive church, as we learn by our text.

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