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ON THE SABBATH, OR LORD'S DAY

A

SERMON

By the Rev. GEORGE BURDER

on

EXODUS xx. 8

*Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy*

THIS is the commandment of the Great God. It is one of the "ten words," spoken with divine majesty on Mount Sinai, and also written by the finger of God in tables of stone. There is no commandment of the ten, of greater importance; yet scarcely any one is so much disregarded. Well, therefore, may it begin with the word — *Remember*; seeing that thoughtless mortals are so prone to forget it.

We are by no means to suppose that this law was given to the *Jews* only. It is not of a *ceremonial* nature, but *moral*; as all the ten are. The Sabbath was not first instituted when the law was given to Moses; it was only renewed. We read of the Sabbath in the second chapter of Genesis. It began as soon as the world began; for, "on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it." There can be no doubt that Adam, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and all the good men of old, observed the Sabbath; but when the descendants of Abraham became slaves in Egypt, it is probable that they could not observe it as they ought: but now being delivered from bondage, the law was revived, and they are commanded to *remember* the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

This law, then, is of perpetual obligation. And if God saw it needful for Adam to keep it, even in Paradise, and before he sinned, how much more necessary is it for us to keep it. He had no hard work to do, from which he required rest; his heart was full of the love of God and every day was like a Sabbath: but as for us, the labours of our bodies, and the cares of our minds are such, as to make a weekly rest absolutely necessary. Besides, we are so full of sin, so surrounded by temptation, and so apt to forget God and our souls, that we greatly need a weekly Sabbath to call away our affections from the world, and direct them to things above.

It is true that we do not keep the self-same day as the *Jews* did. They kept the *seventh* day of the week, but we, the *first*. But the morality of the Sabbath does not consist in its being the *seventh day* of the week, but in its being the *seventh part* of our time. Besides, we have the same authority for keeping the *first* day, as they had for keeping the *seventh*; for Jesus Christ is "Lord of the Sabbath"; and his apostles, who acted

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by his direction; and under the influence of his Spirit, constantly met for divine worship on the first day of the week, which was called "The Lord's day," Acts xx. 7. Rev. i. 10. This was kept because it was the day of his resurrection; and as the Sabbath was first of all kept because the work of creation was finished; and renewed when God had finished the great work of redeeming his people from bondage; so the Christian Sabbath is kept on the day when the Lord arose from the dead, having finished the great work of redeeming souls from sin, and death, and hell. There is also great reason to think that the creation Sabbath was changed when the Jews came out of Egypt, so that they kept their first Sabbath in the wilderness on the sixth day of the week, accounting it the seventh from their coming out of Egypt; and that this continued to be the Jewish Sabbath, typical, as all their ordinances were, and that upon the resurrection of Christ the Sabbath reverted to its original seventh day. Many learned men have been of this opinion, and, if they have not fully proved it, they have made it very probable. And this opinion seems to be countenanced by what St. Paul says in his epistle to the Hebrews, chap. iv. where, speaking of the Jews, he says, "they entered not into the promised rest on account of their unbelief"; and that David, long after, speaks of "another rest," and of "another day," or season, in which it might be sought; he concludes that "there remained a rest, or sabbatism, for the people of God"; that is a "New Testament Sabbath, a Christian Sabbath, in which believers rest in the finished work of Christ, and enjoy a foretaste of the heavenly rest."

The word *Remember* seems to intimate the necessity of preparing for it. We should remember on the Saturday, that the Lord's day is at hand. People in trade prepare for the *market day*; and why should not Christians get ready for the Sabbath, which is the market day for their souls. It is a great sin that wages are paid, provisions bought, houses cleaned, perhaps linen washed, on the Sunday morning. By these, and other worldly employments, the best part of the day is lost, and perhaps only some of the last hours of it, if any at all, are devoted to God. We must *remember* the Sabbath day, and so prepare for it, as to be ready for the service of God, and devote the whole of the day to it.

In the further consideration of this text we shall,

- I. Show *how* the Sabbath is to be kept holy; and,
- II. Give some reasons *why* it should be kept holy.

In keeping the Sabbath holy we are to consider, what *ought not* to be done, and what *ought* to be done.

What *ought not* to be done is expressed in these words, "Thou shalt not do any work — thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man servant, nor thy maid servant, nor thy cattle, nor the stranger that is within thy gates." Six days are allowed for labour, but the seventh is a day of rest. Our worldly business, whatever it be, must be laid aside. The *whole* family, as well

as the master of it, must cease from worldly employments; and this commandment is directed particularly to masters of families; who are to take care that all persons under their roof keep the Sabbath.

We cannot suppose that only *work*, or manual labour, or trade, is here forbidden. Every thing is forbidden that is inconsistent with the design of the day, which is, to serve God, and edify our souls. Travelling, walking, or riding, for mere pleasure, trifling visits, paying or receiving wages, frequenting public houses, writing letters, settling accounts, reading books on ordinary subjects, yea, conversation of a worldly kind, are here forbidden. Many who will not *work* on the Lord's day, will *play*, and take their pleasure: but this is worse than working. St. Austin, long ago, observed, that "it is better to *plough* on the Sabbath than to *dance*."

The Sabbath is as much profaned by *idleness* as by business. Mere rest of body is the Sabbath of a beast, not of a man. We have immortal souls, and this is the day in which their eternal welfare is to be sought. We have the authority of God for these assertions, Is. lviii. 13. "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath" — from trampling upon it, or from travelling on it, or from walking at large, as if under no restraint — "from doing thy pleasure on my holy day," that is, from carnal pleasure — doing that which is agreeable to thy corrupt inclinations; "and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, and honourable," esteeming it above all other days, taking holy pleasure in the ways of God; "and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words"; not gratifying the flesh nor indulging in trifling and impertinent conversation; *then* saith the Lord, "thou shalt delight thyself in the Lord," &c. — thou shalt have the honour, profit, and pleasure of it; for God hath blessed this day.

But some will say — What, is nothing at all to be done on the Sabbath? I answer, *Works of NECESSITY and MERCY are allowed*; they were so by the Jewish law. Our Saviour healed the sick on that day and reproved the Pharisees for their severity and rigour in their observance of it; shewing, that if it was lawful to feed or water a beast, it was certainly lawful to do good to men on that day; observing also, that *the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath*; — it was made for the good of man, both in body and soul; and therefore he is not to be prevented from that which is necessary to his comfortable support. Doubtless, the getting of food, clothing ourselves decently, visiting the sick, bestowing alms, taking care of children, and many other things, are lawful on the Sabbath. But great care must be taken that this indulgence is not carried too far. That cannot be accounted a work of necessity or mercy which may be done on *Saturday* or deferred till *Monday*. Many abuse the Sabbath by *journeys* to see their relations and friends, which might be done on other days. Others *begin* or *finish*

journeys on that day, to save their own time on the week days. *Marriages and Funerals* are often celebrated on the Lord's day, which might as well be on another day; for hereby many persons are hindered from the proper duties of the Sabbath. Far the greater part of *visits* made on this day are unlawful, as they occupy the time that ought to be spent either in public or private worship, and divert the mind from religious thoughts. Many vainly attempt to sanctify their journeys and visits by going to a place of worship, though they spend most of the day in travelling, feasting, or idle conversation; but this is, in many cases, only a refined hypocrisy. Nor is it much better for persons to wander miles from home to hear different preachers, if they can hear the true gospel at home. Even the beasts are not to be employed *unnecessarily*, though they may doubtless be used, if they are conscientiously employed to contribute to our serving God the better, *Feasting* our friends on the Lord's Day is a grievous sin, as it employs too much time and care, and tends to make persons less fit for devotion. It is also very blameable to take up much time in *dress*, and, still more so, to employ others in it. How sad a reflection is it that 10,000 hair dressers are perhaps employed every Sunday! Not to mention the vast number of coachmen, chaise drivers, hostlers, publicans, and servants of all descriptions; thousands of whom are constantly debarred from the means of grace, and live and die — like heathens.

There are also very many who deceive themselves by attempting to compound matters with the blessed God; they will give him, *formally*, an hour or two of the day, and employ all the rest in a worldly manner. Where do we read in Scripture of *Canonical hours*, or find a distinction between *church hours* and others? Does not the text say, "Remember the Sabbath DAY, to keep it holy?" And by what arguments can it be proved that a Sabbath Day is shorter than another? Do other days consist of 12 or 24 hours, and this of 4, or three, or 2? If you employ a labourer, and pay him for a day, will you be satisfied if he goes to work at 11 in the morning and leaves off at 1, and does no more all the day? Is not this the true cause of a man's being satisfied with serving God so short a time, that he dislikes the service? And is not that an evidence of his being in a carnal state, and under the wrath of God? Let conscience answer it.

But this commandment not only forbids worldly employments on the Sabbath, it requires that the whole day be spent in a religious manner, especially in *the public or private exercises of God's worship*.

We should begin the day with *private prayer*. This is necessary to prepare our minds for public worship. We ought to *rise early*, in order that ourselves and families may be in time at the house of God. *Early*, said the Psalmist, *will I seek thee*. Those who are alive to God would be ashamed of rising later on a Sabbath than on another day. Surely the care of our souls

demands as early attention as the affairs of the body. The *whole* family, if possible, should attend the *morning* service. In some cases perhaps, this cannot be: but the mere preparation of a hot dinner, is a poor excuse for detaining even one servant at home. Those who fear God need not be told, that *family* as well as *private prayer*, should be offered up before we go to the public worship.

PUBLIC WORSHIP is most evidently an ordinance of God, of the greatest possible importance. From the beginning of the world, the true worshippers of God have assembled together on his day, for prayer, praise, and instruction. They were always "glad, when invited to go up to the house of the Lord." They accounted "a day in his courts better than a thousand." Our Saviour countenanced public worship by his own presence and example. "The zeal of his Father's house ate him up." He has commanded his gospel to be "preached to all the world," and has promised, "that when two or three gather together in his name, he will be with them."

To assemble ourselves with our fellow Christians on the Lord's day, is therefore, the bounden duty of all; unless they mean to relinquish Christianity. And yet, it is deplorable to consider, that, perhaps, *three-fourths* of the people of England totally desert the house of God. We justly lament the avowed infidelity of a neighbouring country; but what shall we say of Britons, who call themselves Christians, and yet never profess their faith by public acts of homage to their God and Saviour? We know what excuses are made both by rich and poor; but we know also that these excuses will not be admitted by the great Judge of quick and dead. Some will say, "We need not go to church, for we know as much as the minister can teach us." If so, you are either very wise, or he is very ignorant. If you are so wise, much may be expected from you; but it is no part of your wisdom, to neglect one of the main branches of your duty, in which you ought to seek the glory of God, the welfare of your soul, and the good of your neighbour. Jesus Christ has appointed that his ministers should preach his gospel; and if it is their duty to *preach* it is certainly the people's duty to *hear*; and if *you* may choose to absent yourself, why may not another? Why may not all? What then becomes of Christ's ordinance; or, where is your obedience to him as king in Zion! O remember what he has said concerning this very thing, Luke x. 16. "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me." Yes, whatever pretences may be made, the person who neglects the worship of God in public, will be held guilty of despising Christ.

But it is not enough merely to attend. We should go with a serious mind, desirous of humbling ourselves before God for our sins in the confession of the Church; earnestly seeking pardon and grace in the petitions offered up; and cheerfully joining the praises and thanksgivings. Our attendance at a place of worship should not be to see and be seen; to be

observed by others, and to make our observations on them; as appears often to be the case by the conversation of persons when the service is over. Neither should we sit as critics and judges of the minister, merely to praise or blame; for it is plain, that many either know nothing at all of the sermon when they come away, or only pronounce it a good or bad one. Our business is to seek the teaching of Christ by his Spirit, through the minister. "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth!" should be the language of every soul.

There are some who excuse themselves from public worship on account of their *mean clothing*. But is a man so poor that he cannot get better? still let him wait upon God. "Godliness hath the promise of this life, as well as of that to come." Had the poor man served God better, perhaps he had not been so poor; certainly this is true, if idleness and extravagance occasioned his poverty. But it may be, it is the hand of God which has brought him so low; his poverty is not his fault but his affliction. Still let him seek and serve the Lord; wait upon God, who knows what things thou hast need of, and knows how to supply all thy wants. Yea, it is probable, that some of thy fellow worshippers will pity thy case, and assist thee in getting employment or raiment. And as to the contempt of the proud, fear it not. Good men will pity thee. They must be bad indeed who will despise thee; regard them not.

There are others who excuse themselves from public worship by saying — "We do not see that people who attend are better than others. We are as good as they." What have you to do with others? To their own master they stand or fall. Perhaps they would do worse if they did not so; perhaps you would do better if you did. If they *abuse* the means of grace, will that excuse your *neglecting* them? But your business is with yourselves. Worship God.

But the worship of God in *public* is not the whole duty of the Sabbath; *reading the Scriptures* at home is equally a necessary part of it. Indeed they ought to be read daily; but as most persons have more time on the Lord's day, they should then be particularly studied. *Meditation*, or fixed, affectionate thinking upon the things of God, with *examination* of our heart and ways, is another branch of duty. Those who have families, should take care that they all improve the day, both in public and private. The neglect of this is the sad cause of so much Sabbath-breaking. But heads of families may tremble to think, that they partake of the sins of children and servants, if they do not endeavour to restrain them. Parents should *catechize* their children; and enquire what they remember and understand of the *sermons* they hear. Above all, earnest *prayer* should be offered up, and with the whole family; and that, not only on the Sabbath evening, but on the morning also; and, indeed, on the morning and evening of every day in the week.

II. Let us briefly consider the reasons *why* we should sanctify the Sabbath.

*The authority of God* is of itself a sufficient reason. God commands; let man obey. It is at his peril if he refuses. Surely we owe this obedience to him who made us, and in whom "we live, and move, and have our being." We are indebted to him for every breath we draw; and is it too much for us, in return for all his kindness, to separate one day in seven to his blessed service, that we may know him, love him, please him, and glorify him? Surely this is "our *reasonable service*."

*The goodness of God*, calls us to it. If God had not appointed a Sabbath, some cruel masters would have allowed their servants no rest from their toil; yea covetous men would perhaps have destroyed themselves by their labour. But, by the goodness of God in this merciful appointment, the wearied body of the labourer is refreshed, and in the cheerful service of his God his mind is enlivened; and thus is he fitted for the duties of another week; while his immortal soul is prepared by divine grace for a happier world hereafter.

*The example of God* is another argument. "In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and rested the seventh day." The whole work of creation was finished in six days; after which nothing new was made. God then rested, "not as one weary, but as one well pleased with the instances of his own goodness, and the manifestations of his own glory"; and this he did as an example to man. The patriarchs rested in the contemplation of God's works of creation. The Jews rested in the thankful remembrance of their redemption from Egypt. And Christian believers now rest in the finished work of Christ's redeeming love.

*God's blessing this day* is another reason why we should keep it holy. The Sabbath is a blessed day, for God hath blessed it. He expects us to bless him on it, and we may expect him to bless us. He does bless it. From the beginning of the world until now, his people have found it good for them to wait upon God. His service is perfect freedom. His ways are full of pleasure. "This is the day which the Lord hath made, we will be glad and rejoice therein."

#### APPLICATION

How awfully is the day of God profaned! It is a great sin. It is a national sin; for though the laws of England require us to obey this law of God, yet it is despised by all sorts of people. The great and rich set the example. They generally travel on the Lord's day. Others of them have feasts, and some, music and card parties; while others ride abroad to show their fine horses, and carriages. Tradesmen, casting off all regard to religion, form parties of pleasure, and resort to the country for carnal amusement. Inferior persons spend the day in idleness, drinking, and sin. Thus, all sorts of people conspire to cast contempt on the authority of God, to ruin their own souls and bring down judgments on a wicked land. In some parts of this kingdom,

the Sabbath seems almost forgotten; and though the church bell rings, and the shops are shut, yet people buy and sell, drink and swear, proclaiming to all men, that the fear of God is not before their eyes. Magistrates and churchwardens take little or no care to prevent these evils, and so become partakers of other men's sins.

But stop and consider, What will be the end of these things? Will not God require it? He certainly will. Yea, he often shews his anger now against Sabbath-breaking. It is dreadful to consider, how many persons are drowned, or otherwise destroyed, while committing this sin. There are ten times more accidents of this kind on the Lord's day than on other days. Sabbath breaking is the inlet of all other evils, and the certain road to ruin. Habits of vice, contracted by evil company on this day, are often their own punishment in this world. The drunkard beggars his family, destroys his constitution, and hurts his soul; and the thief commonly ends his days at the gallows. How many dying malefactors have warned others to avoid this sin, confessing that it was by breaking the Sabbath they were brought to such a dreadful end. O, if you have the reason of men, if you have any fear of God, if you have any regard for your family or country, if you have any love to your precious souls — "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."

And O, be thankful for this privilege, you who enjoy it. Blessed be God, the Sabbath is not abolished in England, as it is in France. May God ever preserve to us the blessing of a Christian Sabbath, and enable us to employ it diligently. Let it be remembered, that "bodily service profiteth little"; God says, "My son, give me thine heart." Let him be worshipped in spirit and in truth. Attendance on the means of grace will answer little purpose, unless we are brought by the influence of his Holy Spirit, to know and feel our lost and ruined state as sinners, and are led to know Christ as revealed in the gospel, and to believe on him to the saving of our souls. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Let us therefore "take heed what we hear," that it is the Gospel of the free grace of God, and not a system of mere morality; which never converted a soul yet, nor ever will: and "let us take heed how we hear," that it be seriously, and with a desire "to be taught of God." Let us "mix faith with the word, that it may profit our souls." Let us lay it up in our hearts, and practise it in our lives. Thus shall our Sabbaths on earth prepare our souls for the perfect knowledge, love, likeness, and enjoyment of God our Saviour, in the realms of everlasting happiness above. To which, may God, of his infinite mercy in Christ, bring us all! Amen and Amen.

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