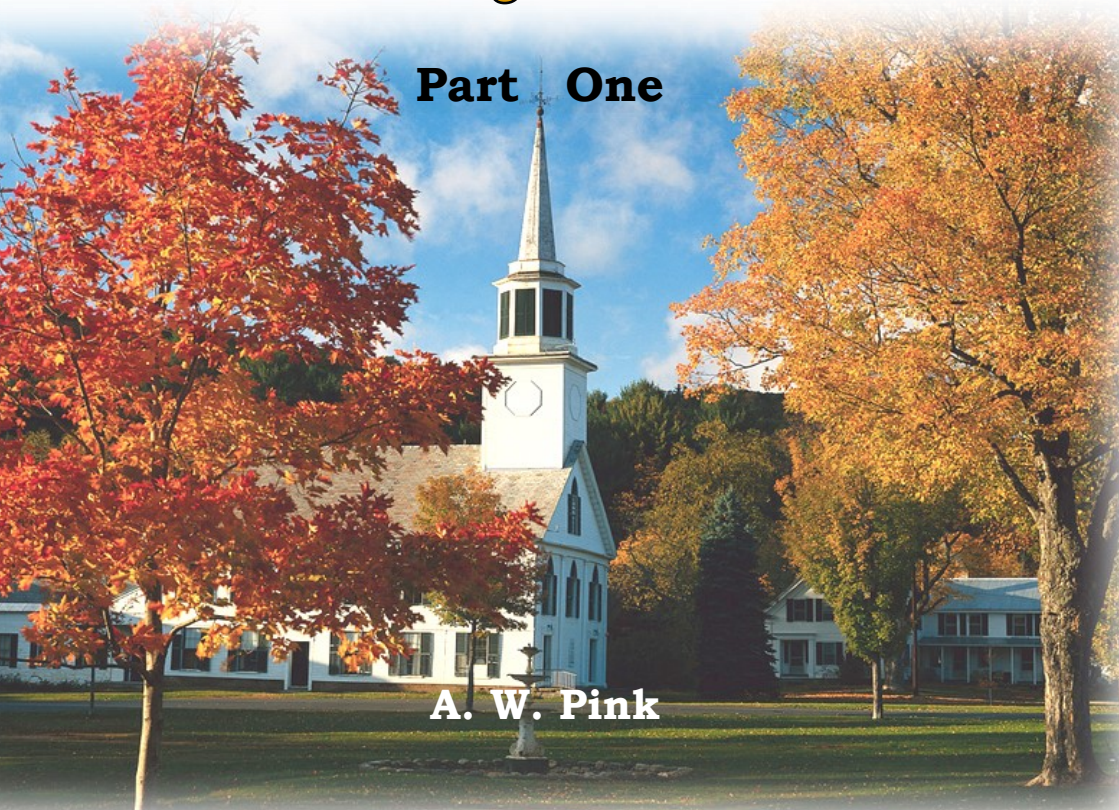




The Holy Sabbath

Part One



A. W. Pink

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1. Introduction

2. Its Institution

3. Its History

4. Its Renewal

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1. Introduction

Two things are absolutely essential for the maintenance of vital godliness: the profession of its truth and the practice or exercise of its power, for they mutually assist each other. Where there is no profession of faith in its truth, none will express its power in obedience; and without obedience, profession is worthless. Clearly is this exemplified in connection with the Holy Sabbath. In proportion as the pulpit has failed to insist on and press the claims of the Sacred Day, vital godliness has been weakened and all but destroyed, and commensurate with the growth of an empty profession has been the decay of genuine piety. Things have now come to such a deplorable pass that we may well exclaim, "Truth is fallen in the street" (Isa. 59:14), yea, is being ruthlessly trampled under foot, not only by the masses in general but also by the great majority of those in high places. It is therefore incumbent upon all who fear and love God to do whatever lies within their power to rescue the Sabbath from its present profanation.

Whatever furnishes help, according to the revealed will of God, in the promotion of good works, is greatly to be valued, especially so in a time when the profession of the Truth is being so widely called into question, and its practice not only neglected but despised. Now nothing is so well calculated to accomplish this end than the solemn observance of a weekly day of rest, hallowed unto God, for that lies at the very foundation of all true piety. Rightly did John Owen affirm, "Amongst all the outward means of conveying to the present generation that rule which was at first

taught and delivered by Jesus Christ and His Apostles, there hath been none more effectual than the universal uninterrupted observance of such a day for the celebration of the religious worship appointed in the Gospel. The profession of our Christian religion in the world at this day doth depend upon it. How much it tends to the exercise and expression of the power of religion cannot but be evident to all, unless they be such as hate it.”

The Lord’s Day has ever been a precious boon to all genuine Christians. Occupied as most of them are with worldly concerns during the remainder of the week, they feel that but for this merciful restraint of one day in seven devoted to the worship and service of God, they would soon become wholly absorbed in the things of time and sense. But the Sabbath and its holy exercises restores the claims of God to an ascendancy over their minds. On this day they are led to examine their spiritual progress, reflect upon their duties, meditate on the grand truths of Divine revelation, and prepare for eternity. By faithfully discharging the obligations of this Sacred Day their souls are cleansed from the defilement contracted during the week, their affections raised unto things above, and new strength is obtained for the engagements which lie before them. Christians generally know full well that they owe much of their growth in grace to the blessings of the Sabbath.

Again—attention should be called to the vast amount of benevolent Christian effort which has resulted from the instrumentality of the Sabbath. It has been pertinently pointed out, “If all those who have to secure their livelihood by bodily or mental exertion were obliged to labour through seven days of the week as they now labour through six of them, how few would have time or strength to visit the poor, to teach the young, or to speak of Christ to the ungodly! But through this ordinance of the Sabbath hundreds of thousands of persons in this country, who devote six days to hard labour, bodily or mental, give a part of their Sabbath to the religious instruction of the young and ignorant. Without the Sabbath, nearly all the inappreciable good which is now done by Sabbath Schools, and much of that which

attends the visiting of the sick and distressed in cities, would vanish from the land” (W. B. Noel).

“The Sabbath was made for man:” God has graciously sanctified it for the good of the whole world. It is highly probable that more persons are converted to the Lord on that day than all the other six together. When anyone is awakened to a concern about his soul, he naturally looks forward to the return of that time when he can most successfully seek his spiritual good. Moreover, how many there are who, though not earnestly inquiring after God, yet attend public worship, and there learn much of the letter of Scripture and acquire some respect for its authority, who otherwise would grow up as heathens. Furthermore, since the Sabbath alone releases hundreds of the disciples of Christ from secular labours to employ a part of their energies in the instructing of the ignorant, who can say how much of the religious knowledge and moral principle which still exists in our nation, is instrumentally due to the institution of this Sacred Rest?

Godliness has never flourished in the world from its foundation till now, nor will it ever do so, without a due attendance upon this Divine ordinance, and it requires very little perspicuity to foresee what increasing disorder and disaster will yet ensue if it be totally disregarded. It is an incontestable fact that the times when the Sabbath’s sanctity was most faithfully proclaimed and maintained in the British Isles—and we may add, in the U.S.A.—were those in which true spirituality was healthiest and vital godliness was in its most flourishing state. The men to whom, under God, we owe this, are the ones whose writings are still among the most precious treasures of English religious literature. A right observance of the Lord’s Day lies at the foundation of national happiness and prosperity. So prolific of good is this blessed day that its powerful influences on the well-being of our kingdom vitally affects its spiritual intelligence, the morality of its social order, and the liberties of its people.

So far, then, from the Sabbath law being a heavy burden which God has laid on His creatures, it is a noble boon and an inestimable blessing. So far from its being an unkind deprivation

of our liberty, its right observance makes for an entrance into real spiritual freedom. “God blessed the seventh day” (Gen. 2:3). The Sabbath was Divinely designed, from its original institution, to be a day of blessing to all who duly observed it. Therefore has the Lord declared, “*Blessed is the man that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it*” (Isa. 56:2): it is not a day of irksome restraint, but one of peace and good. It is a gracious gift whereby, in the midst of our toils, we are granted a deliverance even from that curse, “in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground” (Gen. 3:19). Man’s Maker has mercifully secured to him one seventh portion of his whole life wherein he may rest his wearied body and refresh his needy soul, by separating himself from the toil of this life and fixing his contemplation on the life to come.

The great excellence of this Divine grant lies not, as many seem to suppose, in a mere bodily blessing, appointed for the recuperation of our physical frame—that is but a secondary object; no, the abstention from mental and manual labours is not its primary use and purpose but is only preparatory to its great and chief design. The high and prime value of it lies in the salvation and sanctification of God’s people, who experience growth in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord by obeying His Law and keeping faithfully His Sabbaths. As a means of grace towards our sanctification, none, under the blessing of God, is more effectual than the Sabbath. Our right observance thereof has the fullest assurance of that promise, “them that honour Me, I will honour.” Our happiness lies in the favour and service of God; that favour is “life” and that service is “perfect freedom.” Then let us do all that lies within our power—by precept, example, and encouragement—to maintain the claims of God’s own day.

It lies not within the capacity of any mortal to adequately set forth the tremendous value and supreme moment of a Scriptural observance of the Holy Sabbath. Let us briefly call attention to a few features wherein and whereby the Holy Spirit has emphasized the fundamental importance of this Divine institution. It is placed on virtually the frontispiece of Divine revelation, for immediately

after the account of creation we are informed that God Himself rested on that day and hallowed it. It was the very first lesson taught the children of Israel in the wilderness, impressed upon them by the Lord's withholding a supply of manna on that day (Exod. 16). It was made the outstanding "sign" between Jehovah and His people (Exod. 31:13). The most fearful judgments were sent upon them for their violation of the Fourth Commandment. The Lord Jesus set His imprimatur upon it in an unmistakable manner (Luke 4:16). Finally, the Spirit Himself placed special stress upon this holy ordinance by communicating the last book of Scripture to John on that day (Rev. 1:10).

To be guilty of desecrating the Holy Sabbath is therefore no light matter, my reader. The violation of the Fourth Commandment is a sin of the gravest and blackest kind; yet, sad to say, the profanation of the Lord's Day has become one of the most common crimes of our perverse generation; yea, so general is its pollution that few have any conscience on the matter, but placidly take it as a matter of course. The world has turned the Holy Day into a holiday, and even the majority of professing Christians join hands with them therein. No wonder God is displeased with us as a people, and is more and more evidencing His displeasure against us. Britain has disturbed God's rest, and He is now disturbing Britain's rest; and unless we repent of and forsake this sin as a Nation, then we are most certainly treasuring up to ourselves wrath against the day of wrath.

Fully assured that the sanctification of the Sabbath is indispensable for the promotion of the manifestative glory of God, the health and prosperity of His people, the salvation of sinners, and the national well-being; firmly convinced that the desecration of this Blessed Day is our greatest and most grievous national sin, on account of which the Lord is visiting us with judgment, which ominously threatens to become far more severe unless we mend our ways—this writer dares not remain silent thereon, but determines to use whatever influence he possesses in pressing the claims of this sacred and grand institution. Then let all who fear the Lord, who dread His displeasure, who desire to see a revival of

vital godliness in the churches, and who love their country and wish to save it from being completely paganized, resolve and determine, “as for me and my house,” we will “remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.”

If the Sabbath were of little or no value, there would be some excuse for standing by and leaving it to its assailants. But since it *is* of Divine appointment, since its weighty and venerable claims are as binding on us today as they were upon God’s people in Old Testament times, since the Lord is very jealous of its sanctity (honouring the nation which respects it and visiting His indignation upon those who pollute it), since its proper observance is fraught with such spiritual blessing to the churches and moral and temporal good to the country, then we should do no less than evidence an uncompromising firmness, yet reasonable and enlightened zeal, in doing all we can to preserve this imperilled treasure, and thus secure for future generations a boon won for ourselves by the efforts, sacrifices, and prayers of godly progenitors. Thus did our forefathers, and woe be unto us if we now squander our birthright.

In view of all that has been pointed out above, is it not tragic beyond words to witness not only the general indifference of the vast majority of professing Christians unto the claims of the Holy Sabbath and to the world’s awful profanation of it, but also to find that many influential men among the reputedly orthodox sections of Christendom—the “leaders of Christian thought”—should oppose those who are striving for the preservation of this spiritual heritage? These men are seeking to destroy its very foundations by teaching that the Sabbath is only a Jewish institution, and therefore is not binding upon us today. Unspeakably sad is it to find some whom we must regard as brethren in Christ, and who are standing firmly for the Divine inspiration and authority of the Scriptures, yet in this vital matter making common cause with the Lord’s enemies.

John Owen commenced his exercitations on the Day of Sacred Rest by citing, “God hath made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions” (Eccl. 7:29), adding, “The truth hereof we

also find by woeful experience, not only in sundry particular instances, but in the whole course of men in this world, and in all their concerns with respect to God. There is not anything wherein and whereabouts they have not found out many inventions, to the disturbance and perverting of that state of peace and quietness wherein all things were made of God . . . An evident instance we have hereof in the business of a day of sacred rest and the worship of God therein required.”

If this justly renowned Puritan had cause to complain in his time at the many controversies which had been raised about this Divine institution, “agitating among men of all sorts,” and who grieved over their inventions, “to our own disturbance and to the perverting of the right ways of God,” we wonder how he would feel could he take a survey of the present situation. O what “inventions” have professing Christians resorted to in their efforts to set aside the Holy Sabbath, inventions which have greatly influenced the minds of multitudes and enervated them in the practice of that piety which the Lord’s Day inculcates and stimulates. How happy Satan must be when he succeeds in moving “Bible teachers” to affirm that the Sabbath is not for us. It is Christ being again wounded in the house of His friends.

Such opposition to the Sabbath is a challenge to all who prize and revere it. The more it be opposed by assailants, the more firmly and unitedly must its lovers rise up in its defence. When some would set aside the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship on the ground of our being under a more spiritual dispensation, we must show the utter fallacy of such an absurd conclusion. Is the secularization of the Sabbath more befitting a spiritual dispensation than the religious observance of it!—more calculated to promote vital godliness, than the dedication of it to holy exercises and attendance on the means of grace? The question answers itself. Then if you, my reader, love the Sabbath because you have found that its devout and dutiful employment has brought you many blessings, it is your bounden duty to spread the knowledge of its claims throughout the land. Pray that it may please the Lord to bless this humble effort to such an end.

2. Its Institution

“And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made” (Gen. 2:2, 3). Before commenting upon these verses perhaps it is well to make a few preliminary remarks thereon. First, let us point out how emphatically they repudiate the error of those who declare that the Sabbath was an institution peculiar to the Jews. More than two thousand years before the Lord entered into covenant with them at Sinai, the weekly day of sacred rest was appointed and consecrated by the Creator. Instead of its origin dating only from the time when the Ten Commandments were written on the tables of stone, its inception carries us right back to the very beginning of history. As we shall see when we come to examine Exodus 20, the Lord Himself there declared the Sabbath was as old as the world itself.

Not only is it a glaring mistake to suppose the Sabbath was first instituted at Sinai, but it is equally wrong to insist that it is binding on Jews only. The reasons which Jehovah gave in Exodus 20:8-11 why the Sacred Day must be observed are just as pertinent to and incontestable for the Gentiles as they are for the Jews: the original occasion of its appointment and the design thereof hold good with equal respect for the entire human race. Nor is this any arbitrary assertion of ours. Nothing could be plainer than the words of our Redeemer: “the Sabbath was made for *man*” (Mark 2:27) and not merely for one small fraction of mankind. “The weekly day of rest is one of two things that were ordained in and have come from a sinless Eden. The Sabbath was before Moses, before Abraham—the only other relic of the primitive Paradise is marriage—ideal marriage. As well make marriage a matter of Mosaic legislation as the Sabbath law, since both of them were instituted and ordained for man in Eden” (A. T. Pierson).

But plain though the above considerations be to any unprejudiced and simple reader of the Scriptures, there are those

who raise cavils against them. Unwilling, at any price, to admit the Sabbath is binding on us today, various subterfuges have been resorted to in an endeavour to set aside the obvious meaning of Genesis 2:2, 3. Some have argued, “it only *seems* to import that the Sabbath was then instituted,” making out that this passage is to be understood only as giving “the reason of that particular day being chosen, not that it was then actually appointed and set apart.” To say that these verses contain merely an anticipation of the Fourth Commandment is handling the Word of God deceitfully. Those verses are the continuation of a plain historical narrative. Having finished the account of the creation of the world in the first chapter of Genesis, and given a recapitulation of it in 2:1, Moses declared what immediately followed thereon, namely, the rest of God on the seventh day and His blessing and sanctifying of that day.

For the special benefit of those who have sadly misrepresented the teaching of Calvin on this subject, we give a brief quotation from the remarks of that renowned Reformer and expositor on this passage: “That blessing of the seventh day is nothing else than the solemn consecration of it; by virtue of which, God claims for Himself on that day the labours and occupations of men. It is, indeed, the proper study of their whole life to be exercised in considering the infinite goodness, justice, power, and wisdom of God, as displayed on the vast theatre of Heaven and earth; but, lest men should apply less diligently to this than they ought, every seventh day was peculiarly set apart. God, therefore, first rested; then He blessed that rest, that it might be sacred among men through all coming ages; He consecrated each seventh day to rest, that His own example might furnish the perpetual rule. Not that God simply enjoined men to take their leisure every seventh day, as if He delighted in idleness; but that, being released from all business, they might with more freedom employ their minds on the Creator of the world—His own example stimulating them to the duty, and engaging them to its performance.”

Others have sought to base an argument on the fact that the actual word “Sabbath” is not found in Genesis 2, 3, but how futile

is such a cavil may at once be seen by a reference to Exodus 20. When it pleased the Lord God to assume the immediate government over the people of Israel at Sinai, He not only restored the Sabbath to its original place of honour, but did so by recognizing it as an existing ordinance, re-enforcing a creation-institution. In referring back to Genesis 2, Jehovah expressly termed that first seventh day the Sabbath: "For in six days the Lord made Heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the *seventh* day, wherefore the Lord blessed the *Sabbath* day and hallowed it." We will not waste any further time and space by considering other objections which the perversity and unbelief of man have brought against this simple passage.

The 2nd chapter of Genesis opens with the words, "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them." And then the very next thing we read of is the institution of the Sabbath rest. Thus, to appoint and sanctify the Sabbath was God's *first* act after the earth had been made fit for human habitation. Nothing could more emphatically press upon us the fundamental importance of this Divine ordinance, and the priority of its claims upon us—claims to which every consideration of selfish interests must be strictly subordinated. "The weekly Sabbath, therefore, is the first institution of God, and bears on its very origin the stamp of a *universal* and *perpetual* appointment: good for man even when surrounded by the glories of Paradise that is lost—and much more so now, when called to struggle and prepare for the higher glories of the Paradise that is to be won" (P. Fairbairn).

Four things call for special consideration in the passage now before us. 1. The primal Sabbath *was a rest day*. Emphasis is laid upon this feature by the repetition in thought which is found in the two parts of Genesis 2:2. First, on the seventh day, "God *ended His work* which He had made." Second, "and He *rested* on the seventh day from all His work He had made." Therefore the prime element and basic truth connected with the Sabbath is *rest*. Before raising the question as to why God "rested," let us offer a few remarks on the *nature* of His rest.

It has been said repeatedly by a certain class of expositors that

this rest of God consisted of His *satisfaction* in the work of His hands, that it was God looking out in complacency over His fair creation. But, we are told, that this “rest” of God did not last for long: it was rudely broken by the entrance of sin, and ever since man fell God has been “working”—John 5:17 being appealed to in proof. That such a definition of the “rest” of God in Genesis 2:2 should have been received by a large number of the Lord’s people, only goes to show how few of them ever do much thinking or studying for themselves. It also proves how the most puerile interpretations of Scripture are likely to be accepted, if they are made by reputable teachers, who on other matters are worthy of respect. Finally, it demonstrates what a real need there is for everyone of us to humbly, prayerfully, and diligently bring everything we read and hear to a rigid examination in the light of Holy Scripture.

That God’s “rest” in Genesis 2:2 was *not* the complacency of the Creator prior to the entrance of sin, is unequivocally evidenced by the fact that Satan had fallen *before* the time contemplated in that verse. How could God look abroad upon creation with Divine contentment when the highest creature of all had become the blackest and basest of sinners? How could God find satisfaction in all the works of His hands when the anointed cherub had apostatised, and in his rebellion had dragged down with him “the third part” of the angels (Rev. 12:4)? No, this is manifestly untenable. Some other definition of God’s “rest” must therefore be sought.

Now we need to pay very close attention to the exact wording here, as everywhere. Genesis 2:2 does not say (nor does Exod. 20:10) that God rested from *all* work, for that was not true. Genesis 2:2 is careful to say, “on the seventh day God ended His work which *He had made*,” and, “He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He *had* made.” And this brings out and calls attention to the basic feature and primal element in the Sabbath: it is a resting from the activities commonly pursued during the six working days. But the Sabbath day is not appointed as a day for the cessation of *all* activities—to remain in bed and

sleep through that day would not be spending the Sabbath as God requires it to be spent. What particular works are required and are permissible, we shall show later; but what we would now press upon the reader is the fact that, according to Genesis 2:2 the Sabbath rest consists of ceasing from the labours of the working week.

Genesis 2:2 does not state that on the seventh day God did no work, for, as we have seen, that would not have been true. God *did* work on the seventh day, though His activities on that day were of a *different nature* from the ones in which He had been engaged during the preceding days. And herein we see not only the marvellous accuracy of Scripture, but the perfect *example* God set before His people, for as we shall yet show, there *are* works suited to the Sabbath. For God to have ceased from all works on that first seventh day in human history, would have meant the total destruction of all creation. God's *providential* workings could not cease, or no provision would be made for the supply of His creatures' wants. "All things" needed to be "upheld" or they would have passed into non-entity.

Let us fix it firmly in our minds that rest is not inertia. The Lord Jesus has entered into "rest" (Heb. 4:10), yet is He not inactive, for He ever lives to make intercession. And when the saints shall enter their eternal rest, they shall not be inactive, for it is written, "And His servants shall *serve* Him" (Rev. 22:3). So here with God. His rest on that first Sabbath day was not a rest of total inactivity. He rested from the work of creation and restoration, but He then began (and has never ceased) the work of Providence—the providing of supplies for His myriad creatures.

But now the question arises, *why* did God rest on the seventh day? Why did He so order it that all the works recorded in Genesis 1 were completed in six days, and that then He rested? Certainly it was not because the Creator needed rest, for, "the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary" (Isa. 40:28). Why, then, did He "rest," and why is it so recorded on the top of the second page of Holy Writ? Surely there can be only one answer: *as an example* for man! Nor is this answer merely a logical or

plausible inference of ours. It rests on Divine authority. It is based directly upon the words of none other than the Son of God, for He expressly declared, “The Sabbath was made *for man*” (Mark 2:27): made not for God, but for man. Nothing could be plainer, nothing simpler, nothing more unequivocal.

2. The next thing that we would carefully note in this initial reference to the Sabbath is that Genesis 2:3 tells us this day was blessed by God: “and God *blessed* the seventh day.” The reason why God blessed the seventh day was not because it was the seventh, but because, “in it He had rested.” Hence, when the Sabbath law was written upon the tables of stone, God did not say, “Remember the seventh to keep it holy,” but “Remember the *Sabbath* day to keep it holy.” And again, He did not say, “He blessed the seventh day and hallowed it,” but, “He blessed the *Sabbath* day and hallowed it.”

But why should He do so? Why single out the seventh day thus? Young’s Concordance defines the Hebrew word for “blessed” here as “to declare blessed.” But why should God have “declared” the seventh day blessed? for there is no hint that He pronounced any of the other days blessed. Surely it was not for the mere day’s sake. Only one other alternative remains: God declared the seventh day blessed because it was the Sabbath day, and because He would have every reader of His Word know, right at the beginning, that special *Divine blessing* marks its observance. This at once refutes a modern heresy and removes an aspersion which many cast upon God. The Sabbath was not appointed to bring man into bondage. It was not designed to be a burden, but a blessing! And if history demonstrates anything, it demonstrates beyond all room for doubt that the family or nation which has kept the Sabbath day holy, has been markedly *blessed* of God; and contrariwise, that the family or nation which has desecrated the Sabbath, has been *cursed* of God. Explain it as we may, the fact remains.

3. Genesis 2:3 teaches us that the Sabbath was a day set apart *for sacred use*. This comes out plainly in the words, “And God blessed the seventh day and *sanctified* it,” or as the Revised

Version has it, “God blessed the seventh day and *hallowed* it.” The prime meaning (according to its Scriptural usage) of the Hebrew word rendered “sanctified” or “hallowed” is to set apart for sacred use. This shows plainly that here in Genesis 2:3 we have something more than an historical reference to the rest of God on the seventh day, and even something more than God setting an example before His creatures. The fact that we are told God “sanctified” it, proves conclusively that here we have the original *institution* of the Sabbath, the Divine appointment of it for man’s use and observance. As exemplified by the Creator Himself, the Sabbath day is separated from the six preceding days of manual labour.

4. Let us call attention to a notable *omission* in Genesis 2:3. If the reader will turn to Genesis 1 he will find that at the close of each of the six working days the Holy Spirit says, “and the evening and the morning were,” etc.: see Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31. But here in Genesis 2:2, 3 we do *not* read, “and the evening and the morning were the seventh day;” nor are we told what took place on the eighth day. In other words, the Holy Spirit has not mentioned the *ending* of the “seventh day.” Why is this? There is a reason for every omission in Scripture, a Divine reason; and there is a reason why the Holy Spirit omitted the usual formula at the close of the seventh day. We suggest that this omission is a silent but most significant intimation that the observance of the Sabbath *never would end*—it was to be perpetuated as long as time should last!

In conclusion it should be pointed out that Genesis 2 contains nothing whatever which enables us to determine *which day* of our week this primal “seventh day” was. We have absolutely no means of knowing whether that original seventh day fell on a Saturday, a Sunday, or any other day of the week—for the simple reason that we are quite unable to ascertain on which day that first week *began*. All we do know, and all which it is necessary for us to know is, that the seventh day was the day which followed six days of manual work. As to which day of the week is the Christian Sabbath we shall consider later.

3. Its History.

In our examination of the original institution of the Holy Sabbath we pondered the three acts of the Creator as recorded in Genesis 2:3, each of which had distinct and special reference to man. First, God “*rested* on the seventh day,” thereby giving an example for us to follow. But this was not left to be vaguely inferred, for second, “God *blessed* the seventh day,” setting on it a special dowry for all who should give due heed to its proper end and object. “What men may lose for the moment in productive employment, shall be amply compensated by the refreshment it will bring to his frame—by the enlargement and elevation of his soul—above all, by the spiritual fellowship and interest in God which becomes the abiding portion of those who follow Him in their ways, and perpetually return to Him as the supreme rest of their souls” (P. Fairbairn). Third, God “*sanctified* it,” setting it sacredly apart from the other six days, thus conferring on it a distinctive character.

But in their efforts to evade the obvious force of Genesis 2:3 some have raised the objection that Genesis 2 records no express *command* for man to keep the Sabbath. Really, such a cavil is undeserving of notice, yet as a few readers are disturbed by it, we will briefly answer the objection. First, it is plainly required of us in and by the law of nature that some part of our time (Divinely given to us) should be set apart and devoted to God, for the solemn observance of His worship in the world. And where but in Genesis 2:3 could primitive man learn *which part* of that time was to be thus employed? That natural dictate is met by the Sabbath law requiring us to sanctify one day in seven. Second, this pretence of any obscurity that is in the command of Genesis 2:3 is easily removed by another instance of like antiquity. It has been universally acknowledged that a promise of Christ was given in Genesis 3:15 for the faith of the ancients, yet that very verse was addressed to the Serpent in the form of a curse! With equal propriety, then, could we deny any *promise* in Genesis 3:15 and declare there is no *command* in Genesis 2:3—each is self-

evidently implied.

Third, a yet more decisive consideration is found in our Lord's words, "the Sabbath was made for man" (Mark 2:27). This cannot mean less than that the Sabbath was made for man's observance and for his benefit. God's glory and our good are always inseparably connected: whatever He has appointed us to heed and do in order for His honour, it is equally our wisdom and gain to comply with. If, then, the Sabbath was made for man's observance, it is self-evident that he is under Divine authority to submit thereto. Ere passing from this verse, let it also be pointed out that since the Sabbath was necessary and profitable for man in his first estate, when free from sin—remember that man was not exempt from labour in Eden, as the words "to dress it and to keep it" (Gen. 2:15) prove!—then how much more so now in order to recover him from his corrupt condition!

In the following we shall devote our attention to the primitive observance of the Holy Sabbath, confining ourselves to its history in the earliest ages, namely, to the recognition thereof before its formal renewal in Exodus 20. It is frequently asserted that the Sabbath law originated at the time when Jehovah wrote the Ten Commandments on the tables of stone. But as we have shown, that is an error. The Sabbath was instituted before man fell. We would now inquire what evidence is there of men's *keeping* the Sabbath prior to Israel's reaching Sinai. Before answering this question, let it be pointed out that if there were none at all this would by no means convince us that the Sabbath was unknown before Exodus 20. An argument drawn from *silence* is always inconclusive. No mention is made of circumcision from the time of Joshua until the Babylonian captivity, yet how fallacious would be the inference that the rite had ceased to be practiced! Even though the Sabbath occupies so prominent a place in the institutions of Moses, yet it is never mentioned again till the days of Elijah (nearly seven hundred years later), and then only an incidental allusion is made to it (2 Kings 4:23).

There would be no need to wonder, then, in such particularly brief compendiums of history as are given of antediluvian and

Patriarchal times, if there should be a similar silence to those mentioned above. But is there a complete silence? Is there nothing in Scripture to indicate whether or not men kept the Sabbath before Israel reached Sinai? In seeking an answer we have to turn back to the book of Genesis and the first 18 chapters of Exodus, and ere we consult them it is well to remember their general character. No less than 25 centuries of human history are covered by those first 68 chapters of the Bible. Thus it is evident at once that the Holy Spirit has seen fit to give us little more than a bare outline of what transpired during the infancy of our race. Hence, we must not expect to find here anything more than a few references to the Sabbath, and these of the briefest nature. The same pertains to almost any other theme. There *are* unmistakable references to the Sabbath, but they are only *incidental* in character.

“And in the process of time (*at the end of days*) it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD; and Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock” (Gen. 4:3, 4). The very fact of Cain and Abel coming together, and this for the purpose of presenting an offering to the Lord, intimates that the time when they were thus engaged was a *stated* one, known to and recognized by them both—otherwise, what had induced the jealous Cain to unite with the pious Abel in this action? The bringing of offerings by Cain and Abel was the formal recognition of God: it was an act of devotion. Moreover, it is expressly stated that they worshipped God “at the end of days,” the Divinely appointed season. And *when* was that? Exactly what is signified by “the end of days?” Surely the unprejudiced reader who comes to the Scriptures in childlike simplicity, desiring to learn the mind of God, will form only one concept here. He will naturally say, Why, the end of days must be the end *of the week*, and that, of course, is the Sabbath.

But can we prove what has just been advanced? Yes, by an appeal to the context. If the first three chapters of Genesis be read through, it will be found they mention one “end” and one only, and that is in Genesis 2:3: “On the seventh day God *ended His work* which He had made.” Now as Scripture ever interprets

Scripture, as its terms are defined by the way in which they are used in other passages, and as the law of the context is whatever fixes the meaning of any given clause, so here in Genesis 4:3, the “end of days” can only mean the end of the working week—the Sabbath. Thus this passage teaches us four things. First, that previous to the days of Cain and Abel a Sabbath had been instituted. Second, that this Sabbath came at the end of a week of work. Third, that it was recognized and owned by the sons of Adam and Eve. Fourth, that it was set apart for sacred use, namely, the worship of God.

We next turn to, “and he called his son Noah, saying, This same shall comfort us concerning our *work* and *toil* of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD hath cursed” (Gen. 5:29). Here we are told why Lamech named his son “Noah.” The very fact that the Holy Spirit has recorded this detail must be because some important truth is illustrated thereby. Names were not given in those early days at the idle caprice of the parents. They were pregnant with meaning, frequently given under Divine guidance, often memorializing some event of importance. Plainly was this the case in our present instance. Lamech belonged to the godly line, being the son of Methuselah (whose name was certainly given under Divine impulse), the grandson of Enoch. Lamech called his son Noah, which means *rest*, giving as his reason, “this same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands.” In the light of Genesis 2:3, 4, is not this profoundly suggestive? Did not Lamech, in the name given his son, express his gratitude to the great Creator for providing a weekly Sabbath as a rest from “work” and “toil?” It was a pious heart looking forward to *the Rest* of which the weekly Sabbath was both the type and pledge.

“And it came to pass on *the seventh day* that the waters of the flood were upon the earth” (Gen. 7:10, margin). This verse records the beginning of the great Deluge and its terms are the more noteworthy because in the next verse we read, “In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, in the *seventeenth day* of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up and the windows of Heaven were

opened.” Surely the Spirit had some good reason for giving us *both* of these time-marks. The second of them is obviously the *historical* reference: why, then, are we first told that the Flood began “on the seventh day?” Clearly because the reference here is a *moral* one, a word of explanation. It makes known to us one of the reasons, perhaps the chief one, why God visited the earth with such sore judgment. It conveys a solemn message to us: the flood began on the Sabbath Day! Is not the inference inescapable? Was it not an act of, what men term, poetic justice? Doubtless the antediluvians had flouted the Sabbath institution as they had every other Law of God. They had desecrated His Holy Day: therefore, when the Lord visited His wrath upon them it was on the Sabbath that the Flood commenced!

“And he stayed yet other *seven days* . . . and he stayed yet other *seven days*” (Gen. 8:10, 12). These references make it clear that way back in Noah’s day the division of time into weeks was a recognized custom, for the repetition here makes it evident this was no casual or arbitrary act on his part. This fact has not received the attention it deserves.

How was it, why was it, and when originated this division of time? We submit that this hebdomadal revolution of time furnishes another striking testimony to the primitive Sabbath. We quote now from the late B. H. Carroll, President of the S. W. Baptist Seminary:

“I ask you to notice this strange historical fact, that for all other divisions of time we have a reason in the motions of the heavenly bodies. The revolution of the earth around the sun marks the division of time into years. The moon’s revolution around the earth gives us the month. The day comes from the revolution of the earth upon its axis. But from what suggestion of nature do you get the division of time into *weeks*? It is a positive and arbitrary division. It is based on authority. The chronicles of the ages record its recognition. But how did it originate? Here in the oldest book, in the first account of man, you will find its origin and purpose. Noah twice recognized it in the ark, when he waited seven days each time to send out his dove. Jacob in the days of his courtship

found it prevalent when he looked for satisfaction in the laughing eyes of Rachel, and the stern father said, “fulfil her week” (Gen. 29:27). Why a week? How did he get it? It was God’s division of time.

Yes, it was *God’s* division of time. Why should our week have seven rather than six or ten days? and why have men everywhere adopted this measure? A primeval Sabbath explains it: it is the key to an otherwise insoluble enigma. Since there is no prominent natural phenomenon visible to every eye which can account for it, we are obliged to deduce some ancient institution coeval with our race, from which it spontaneously originated. That institution was the Sabbath, in which the Creator set apart one seventh of man’s days for the worship of Himself. Thus did the Architect of the universe write His signature across time itself, and never shall it be erased.”

In his masterly dissertations on the Sabbath, John Owen showed that no impartial and pious mind can entertain any doubt that there was a free observance of the Sacred Day by the Patriarchs: we give a very brief digest of his argument. The creation of the world was one of their principal articles of faith, as the Apostle asserts in Hebrews 11:3—then how vain to imagine they had utterly lost the tradition of the rest of God upon the finishing of His works. That the Patriarchs did observe the solemn worship of God in and with their families is clear from Genesis 18:19 and other passages, and for *that* some stated time was indispensably necessary; and what ground have we to suppose they were left without Divine direction in this important matter? The testimony which is given to them, that they walked with God and obtained a good report, the fact that they are said to have kept “the way of the Lord” and “His charge” (Gen. 26:5), all point to the same conclusion.

“And Abraham set *seven* ewe lambs of the flock by themselves” (Gen. 21:28). In this connection it is striking to note how that the ancients, universally, regarded the number seven as having a mystical significance. Seven times did Jacob bow before Esau in proof of his submission to him; seven years did he serve

Laban for Rachel, and seven more for Leah. The number seven had, for some reason or other, obtained special favour in the families of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The same obtained also among other branches of the race of Shem. The history of Job, for example, who lived in the early times of the postdiluvian age, relates that when his friends came to comfort him they, “sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights” (2:13)—and when (later) the Lord bade him offer sacrifice on their behalf, He said, “take unto you now *seven* bullocks and *seven* rams, and go to My servant Job,” etc., (42:8). Balaam evidenced the same mystical reverence for this number (Num. 23:1). This writer is firmly convinced that the sacredness which from earliest times attached to the mystical “seven” has its roots in the primeval Sabbath.

There is yet another trace of the Sabbath in the early ages of the world to be found in Exodus: a most striking one it is, though it seems to have quite escaped the notice of those who have written on this subject. One reason for the deliverance of Israel from Egypt was that they might be free to keep the Sabbath and to offer those sacrifices and observe those ordinances which were connected with it. “Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let My people go, that they may *hold a feast unto Me* in the wilderness” (5:1), “Let My people go, that they may *serve Me*” (9:1). Do not these words clearly imply that while sojourning in Egypt the Israelites had been prevented from observing their religious ordinances? Their merciless taskmasters had blotted out their Sabbath and made their life one ceaseless round of toil and misery. This is clearly confirmed by the words of Pharaoh to Moses and Aaron: “And the king of Egypt said unto them, Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let (hinder) the people from their works? get you unto your burdens. And Pharaoh said, Behold, the people of the land now are many, and ye make them (not “cease” but) REST from their burdens” (Exod. 5:4, 5). Evidently one of the first things the intrepid Moses did when he returned to Egypt was to insist that his brethren keep the Sabbath, and hence Pharaoh’s objection.

4. Its Renewal.

In order to bridge the small gap between this chapter and the previous one, we must ponder a very striking passage in Exodus 16, from which we may learn some facts of deep importance concerning the existence and observance of the Holy Sabbath prior to Israel's reaching Sinai. That chapter records God's giving of the manna as Israel's daily food while they were in the wilderness. First, "Behold, I will rain bread from Heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in My Law or no. And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily" (verses 4, 5). From these verses it is unmistakably clear that a Divine *Law* was in existence *before* the Ten Commandments were inscribed on the tables of stone, and from what follows it is equally evident that the observance of the Sabbath was part of this self-same Law: in no other way can these words of God to Moses be explained.

The Lord was about to give His people a daily supply of manna, and made it known to Moses that a double supply should be furnished them on the sixth day—to make up for none being given them on the seventh. In this respect Exodus 16 is parallel with Genesis 2:2, 3, inasmuch as once more we see the Creator condescending to be the Exemplar of His creatures: Jehovah manifested His regard for the Sabbath by withholding manna on that day. "We may here observe three miracles in honour of the Sabbath, and to secure it against desecration were wrought every week before the promulgation of the Law at Sinai. Double the quantity of manna fell on the sixth day. None fell on the Sabbath. The manna preserved for that day did not corrupt" (Robert Haldane).

Next we are told, "And it came to pass on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one man: and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses" (verse 22). Now note very particularly the definite language of Moses in reply,

“This is that which the LORD hath said, Tomorrow is the Rest of the Holy Sabbath unto the Lord” (verse 23). This is the *first express mention* of the “Sabbath” in the history of Israel, and the terms in which it is here introduced utterly precludes the absurd idea that the Sabbath was then, for the first time formally and legally instituted. No candid mind reading this chapter for the first time would ever conclude that here was a most important religious ordinance, quite unknown before, now given to the people. Rather is it not obvious to any careful reader that throughout the whole of this narrative two facts (unnamed) were in the mind of the writer, without regard to which the account is unintelligible: that a Divine Law was binding on the people (by which they were to be proved afresh), and that they had a sufficient knowledge thereof as to be expected to keep the Sabbath.

The words of Moses in verse 23 are brought in only incidentally, in answer to a question put to him by the elders: the substance of which is, the people have done quite right in gathering a double supply of manna on the sixth day. Moses was far from speaking in the style of one promulgating a new law, nor do we find him giving any detailed instructions as to the manner in which the seventh day was to be kept. The Wilderness of Sin was far from being the birthplace of this blessed ordinance: these scenes described in Exodus 16 obviously point us back to an earlier and primeval appointment. But ere passing on let us duly note that the words of Moses in verse 23 affirmed the three principal features of the Sabbath: first, it is designed for “rest;” second, it is “holy”—set apart from the six working days; third, it is to be kept “to the Lord:” that is, it is a day for Divine worship and service.

“And it came to pass, that there went out some of the people on the seventh day for to gather, and they found none. And the Lord said unto Moses, How long refuse ye to keep My commandments and My laws?” (verses 27, 28). Here we have illustrated the universal rebellion of the human heart. Here we have exemplified the common tendency to desecrate God’s holy day. Even after the most explicit instructions to rest on the seventh day (verse 23),

some of the people went out “for to gather.” And mark God’s response: “*How long* refuse ye to keep My commandments and My laws.” This was not the first time that Israel had profaned the Sabbath: the words “how long” prove this.

They also confirm what we said above on verse 4: long before Sinai was reached, Israel had God’s commandments and laws. Jehovah Himself says so, and the man who denies it, no matter what his standing or reputation, is guilty of the awful sin of making God a liar. “How long refuse ye” looks back to the wicked conduct of Israel while in Egypt.

Finally, observe how verse 29 supplies one more proof that Sabbath observance was no new thing at this time: “See, for that the LORD hath given you the Sabbath, therefore He giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.” Mark the careful distinction in the verbs used here: “the LORD *hath given* you the Sabbath, therefore He *giveth* you on the sixth day the bread of two days.” What excuseless ignorance, then, is betrayed by those who affirm that the Sabbath was first instituted at Sinai. It is either ignorance or wilful perversion of the Scriptures, and charity requires us to conclude that it must surely be the former.

We are now to consider the renewing or reinforcing of the Holy Sabbath at Sinai. “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the LORD made Heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day, wherefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath Day and hallowed it” (Exod. 20:8-11). The Ten Commandments were uttered immediately by the voice of God Himself in the hearing of all the people (Exod. 19), whereas all the other laws (whether ceremonial or judicial) were given through Moses. Those Ten Commandments, and they alone, were twice written by the finger of God on tables of stone, to denote their durability and permanence. The Ten Commandments

were put *inside* the sacred ark itself, whereas the other laws (written in a book by Moses) were only placed in its side.

But if God in those ways emphasized the supreme momentousness of the Ten Words, giving them a place superior to all other laws, He also signalized in a peculiar way the outstanding importance and value of the Fourth Commandment. First, it is marked with a particular memento above the other commands: “remember”—partly because of our proneness to neglect, and partly because of its vast importance. Second, it is noticeable that the other nine are expressed simply, either negatively or positively, but this one *both* ways: “keep it holy . . . in it thou shalt not do any work” as if God put particular care to fence it on all sides. Third, its striking position in the Decalogue: it is put at the close of the first table and before the beginning of the second, to signify the observance of both tables depends radically upon our obedience to this particular precept.

It is indeed instructive to observe—O that we may have ears to hear—how the Lord God has fenced this particular commandment with more hedges than any of the other nine, to prevent our violation thereof and to render excuseless any trifling therewith. In addition to what has been pointed out above, we note, fourth, this commandment has more reasons to enforce it than has any of the others. God has therein condescended to give three cogent arguments to press the observance of this law upon us. The first is taken from His own example, which certainly it is both our glory and our duty to imitate in all things in which He has proposed Himself to be our pattern: God rested on the seventh day, and so must we. The second reason is taken from the bountiful portion of time which God has allowed us for the affairs of this life, namely, six-sevenths of our days, and therefore it is but fitting and equitable that the seventh should be devoted to God. Third, from the dedication of the seventh day to God’s immediate worship and service: “the Lord blessed the seventh day and hallowed it.”

Let us observe that the character of those reasons wherewith God enforces the Fourth Commandment contain in them a most forcible argument to show that the Sabbath is *perpetually binding*.

Negatively, we note there is nothing whatever in those reasons which suggest that the Sabbath ordinance was a ceremonial institution, or that it was to be regarded as being among those things which were typical of Christ to come in the flesh, which things were therefore to be abolished at His coming. Positively, there lies upon us today an obligation just as strong and binding as rested upon the Jews of old, for we equally with them are duty-bound to heed the example which the Creator set His creatures at the beginning. We are clearly required to own God as the Lord of our time by devoting one seventh thereof to His worship, and we certainly need the blessings attendant on a due observance of the Sabbath as much as ever did the Israelites in Old Testament times.

It is often asserted that Sabbath observance was made binding on the Hebrews only. But this is a most serious error. Not only is the Fourth Commandment of perpetual force, but it is *universally binding*: the arguments made above for the former, apply with equal force to the latter. The tribute which the Fourth Commandment demands for God is unquestionably due Him from all His creatures alike. This Commandment is “holy and just” (Rom. 7:12), and as the Apostle shows in that chapter, is also “good,” for Gentiles as much so as for Jews. We could imagine some reason for saying that the Fifth Commandment has an exclusive Jewish cast, because the promise subjoined to it refers to long life “in the land.” This it might be supposed was something spoken to the Jews alone. But such a supposition is immediately ruled out of court by Ephesians 6:1, 2—note “this IS (not “was”) the first commandment with promise.”

“The ground on which the obligation to keep the Sabbath is based in the Commandment is the most universal in its bearing that could possibly be conceived: ‘Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy . . . for in six days the Lord made Heaven and earth.’ There is manifestly nothing Jewish here, nothing connected with individual interests or even national history. The grand fact out of which the precept is made to grow is of equal significance to the whole world, and why should not the precept be the same? It seems, indeed, as if God, in the appointment of this law, had taken

especial precautions against the attempts which He foresaw would be made to get rid of the institution, and that on this account He based its foundations first in the original framework and constitution of nature” (P. Fairbairn). What spiritual mind can doubt that this was what regulated Him who knew the end from the beginning.

How utterly futile are all these quibblings of men. How baseless their contentions. How strikingly were they anticipated and refuted by the Lord from the start. Why the very terms of the Fourth Commandment itself bring its obligation to bear upon the Gentiles! So far from obedience to this precept being limited to the Jews, it legislated also for “the *stranger* that is within thy gates!” Observe how godly Nehemiah enforced the observance of it upon the Gentiles as well as the Jew: “There dwelt men of *Tyre* also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the Sabbath unto the children of Judah and in Jerusalem. Then I contended with the nobles of Judah . . . I commanded that the gate should be shut and charged that they should not be opened till after the Sabbath” (Neh. 13:16-19). It was the observance of it and not the obligation of it which was peculiar to the Jews. It was placed in their custody for the good of all mankind.

The Fourth Commandment *in the Decalogue* was not the original institution of the Sabbath, but rather its formal *renewal* and re-enforcement. As we have shown previously, the actual sanctification and appointment of the Sacred Day of rest in worship takes us back to Eden itself, synchronizing with the very creation of man. It has also been shown that there are quite a number of unmistakable traces of the Sabbath being actually observed by God’s people in the very earliest days of human history. But after the family of Jacob settled down in Egypt, they soon learned the ways of the heathen and, to a considerable extent at least, abandoned the instituted worship (Gen. 26:5) of Jehovah. Ezekiel 20:4-8 leaves us in no doubt that it was because of their idolatry the Lord employed the Egyptians in so severely chastising them.

“And they shall no more offer their sacrifices unto demons, after

whom they have gone a-whoring” (Lev. 17:7). The reference here is to Israel’s wickedness while sojourning in the land of Pharaoh: as Joshua 24:14 tells us, “Put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood (see verses 2, 3) and in *Egypt*,” and as Ezekiel 23:3 declares, “They committed whoredom in *Egypt*.” It was pure grace which moved the Lord to deliver His wayward people from the house of bondage, and enter into a covenant with them. But grace ever reigns through righteousness, and never at the expense of the requirements of holiness. Accordingly Jehovah, in a most awe-inspiring manner, renewed His Law at Sinai, and intimated its lasting character by inscribing it on stones by His own finger; in the very centre of which He placed the Sabbath statute. God has given us liberty to follow our lawful callings throughout the six working days, and therefore it is but little for us to devote the seventh to Him.

“Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” “Remember:” call to mind its original institution; cherish it in your affections; duly meet its just requirement, “The Sabbath:” the sacred rest: its merciful freedom from temporal toil, its opportunities for obtaining deliverance from bondage of sin, its foreshadowment of the Eternal Rest awaiting those who now walk obediently to the Divine statutes. “To keep it holy:” sever it from common use and consecrate the same to the service of God. It is no less a sin than a sacrilegious stealing of that which is holy to purloin any part of that time which God has consecrated to Himself and to employ in it either sinful or secular activities. How the Sabbath is to be observed, what works are permissible and what are not, will be considered by us in the future.

The first of four booklets.

