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HOW TO SPEND THE LORD'S DAY.

MY DEAR SIR—Placed as you are, at the head of a household, it becomes your duty, in the arrangement of your domestic affairs, to adopt such principles and regulations as will secure to those you tenderly love the blessing of Him who “taketh the desolate and setteth him in families.” Especially am I solicitous that you should so order your affairs as to enable every member of your family to keep holy the LORD'S DAY. I know that you acknowledge its divine origin and authority; yet I fear lest you should insensibly form habits and adopt customs which will lead to its desecration.

That some *preparation* for this holy day is a duty, is obvious from the very words of the fourth commandment, “REMEMBER the Sabbath-day to keep it holy.” He cannot possibly be in a state rightly to observe it, who remembers it not until its joyful light falls on his eyes. The example of holy men in every age is in accordance with this view of the subject. Thus the Israelites in the wilderness remembered the Sabbath-day, and gathered manna for it on the day previous. Exodus 16 : 23. Nehemiah, early the evening previous, caused the gates of the city to be shut. Neh. 13 : 19. So also in the time of our Saviour, the sixth day in the week was observed as a season for making ready for the Sabbath, because “that day was the preparation, and the Sabbath drew on.” And so conscientious were the holy women who followed Christ, that they employed the day before the Sabbath in “preparing spices and ointments” for embalming the body of our blessed Lord, and “rested the Sabbath-day, according to the commandment.” Luke 23 : 54–56. I therefore submit it to your conscience whether he

does not sin who fails to make all possible arrangements for properly disposing of his worldly business before the Sabbath arrives.

Another manifest duty is, to give the body *sufficient rest in sleep*, so that when this holy day shall come, you may not be dull and drowsy, but refreshed and invigorated for its solemn services. How many persons keep their shops open, write letters, or read novels, newspapers, or secular books, or do something even less becoming, until a late hour on Saturday night, sleep till a late hour on Sabbath morning, and then go to the sanctuary in a frame ill-suited to the worship of God. Who dare say that such "remember the Sabbath?" He who would properly prepare for the Sabbath-day, must also mould his heart into a becoming state by suitable meditation, conversation, and prayer.

I have lately visited an old friend. Few men have had more worldly business, or greater success. On Saturday afternoon, I noticed a large pile of wood made ready for the fire. In the farmyard every thing was in the neatest order, and all such work was done as could be done before the Sabbath. His miller was directed to stop grinding before the usual bedtime. Every laborer had received his week's allowance of food or wages, so as to be at home with his family before a late hour.

Early in the evening the whole family assembled for the worship of God. The venerable man began the exercises by noticing, in a solemn yet familiar manner, the mercies of the past week, some of which had been special and striking. He and his family then sung a hymn, the first line of which is,

"Begone, my worldly cares, away."

He then read a chapter in one of the gospels, and afterwards offered an appropriate prayer. Worship being ended, part of the family left the room; but some remained for a while longer. The whole conversation that now took place was consistent with what had before occurred. Manifestly

each one was looking forward to the next day with real pleasure.

At an early hour we all retired, with the prospect of refreshment from rest. I could not but reflect, when alone, on the difference between a Saturday evening here, and one in some other families with which we are both acquainted.

Sabbath morning came ; but with it appeared no bright sun rejoicing like a strong man to run a race, yet all seemed cheerful. After morning devotions and breakfast, I went to the *Sabbath-school*, and found more than fifty scholars and all the teachers in their places. The school was closed at the regular time, and a *social meeting* was soon afterwards commenced. The exercises consisted of prayer, singing, and reading a discourse. It was founded on Isaiah 58 : 13, 14, "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day ; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable ; and shalt honor him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words : then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord, and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob." I know you will concur with me that the *text* was excellent. The *discourse* was itself also very good. Permit me to give an extract from it. The author says,

"We may as easily and grossly profane the Sabbath, so far as ourselves only are concerned, by *thoughts* which are unsuited to its nature, as we can by any actions whatever. If our minds are intent on our business or our pleasures ; if our affections wander after them ; if we are cold or lukewarm with respect to our religious duties ; if we are negligent of a serious and cordial attention to them ; if we regard with impatience the interruption occasioned to our secular concerns ; if we wish the institution had not been appointed, or that the time in which it is to be kept were lessened, then plainly we do not esteem 'the Sabbath a delight,' nor abstain from *finding our own pleasure*. Every oblation from such a mind will be vain, and all its incense an abomi-

nation. The Sabbaths and the calling of assemblies among persons who act thus, will be such as God cannot away with; and their solemn *meeting* will be *iniquity*.

“The heart gives birth to all the movements of *the tongue*. We profane the Sabbath whenever we employ the time in worldly conversation. Such conversation is, in the text, denoted by the phrase ‘speaking thine own words.’ There is no way in which the Sabbath is more easily, more insensibly, more frequently, and more fatally violated, than this. Temptations to it are always at hand. The transgression always seems a small one; usually a doubtful one at the worst; and often no transgression at all.

“Multitudes of persons, beginning with religious subjects, slide imperceptibly towards those which are considered moral in such a degree as scarcely to differ from religious ones; thence to secular themes bordering on these; and thence to mere matters of business or amusement. Such persons, before they are aware, find themselves conversing about the affairs of the neighborhood, the strangers who were at church, the new dresses, fashions, business, diversions, news, and politics. To these they are led by mere *worldly conversation* concerning the prayers, the psalmody, or the sermon, as having been well or ill-devised, written, spoken, or performed; by a history, merely secular, of the sickness and deaths in the neighborhood or elsewhere, or of the dangerous or fatal accidents which have lately happened; the weather, the seasons, the crops, the prospects, the affairs of the family, and by innumerable other things of a similar nature.

“The next step is, ordinarily, an habitual employment of this holy day in open, cool, and self-satisfied conversations about business, schemes of worldly pursuits, bargains, gains, and losses. It is not to be understood that *Christians* go all these lengths. It is greatly to be feared, however, that they often go much farther than they can justify, and thus fail of their duty, and of the improvement, the usefulness, the hope, the joy, and the peace which they would otherwise attain.

“The profanation of the Sabbath by *actions* is seen and conceded by all decent men who acknowledge it as a day consecrated by God to himself. The common and favorite modes of profaning the Sabbath in this way, are spending our time in dress, in ministering to a luxurious appetite, in walking or riding for amusement, in writing letters of friendship, in secular visits, and in reading books which are not of a decidedly religious character.

“The end of this progress is the devotion of this sacred day to downright business, such as writing letters of business, posting accounts, visiting post-offices, making bargains, transmitting money to correspondents, going or sending to markets, making journeys, at first with, and afterwards without pretences of necessity, and ultimately laboring openly in the ordinary employments of life. This is what is called in the text *doing our own ways.*”

I scarcely need add, that I heartily concur in all the foregoing sentiments, or that the dear family of whom I now must take leave, seemed to practise during the rest of the day what they had heard in the social meeting.

But the Lord's day has its POSITIVE DUTIES. A portion of it is to be spent in works of necessity and mercy. Such are preparation for a decent and comfortable appearance at the house of God, the use of necessary food, attention to the wants of animals, visiting the sick and afflicted with the intention of being useful and serviceable, and similar acts of benevolence. All such labors become the day of that blessed Lord who “will have mercy and not sacrifice,” and who made the Sabbath for man, and not man for the Sabbath.

We must guard, however, against the abuse of the divine law, as in any wise giving us permission to *defer* acts of necessity or mercy from secular portions of the week until the Sabbath, that we may save time, or have an expedient for misspending the day of God. He who visits his sick neighbors on the Lord's day *only*, or who spends all his Sab-

baths in such service, is a profane man, and the Lord will not hold him guiltless. Besides, whenever we regard these works of necessity and mercy as indulgences *granted*, and not as duties *required*, we do err exceedingly respecting them.

Another method of sanctifying this holy day, consists in a proper attention to the *private duties* of religion, such as secret and family prayer, reading the word of God and other pious and edifying books, and speaking one to another of the things of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Nor may we neglect the important duties of self-examination, and devout meditation on the word and works of God, and especially on the wonders of redemption.

This season should also be specially employed in *giving proper religious instruction* to children and others under our care, taking due pains to render the lessons we would teach *interesting* and *profitable*, by choosing out acceptable words, by employing suitable helps furnished us in catechisms and other good books, and by a solemn yet cheerful engagedness in the work on our part.

It is also in most cases our duty, and that of our families, to unite in some way in maintaining those nurseries of piety, *Sabbath-schools*. If we are not fit to be teachers, let us not be too proud to become learners at first; and afterwards we may at least be teachers of babes, instructors of the foolish.

It is also our obvious duty to go with the multitude *to the house of God*, "with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that keep holy day." Religion and its public ordinances are the glory, and beauty, and defence of the land. Without our churches, our country would soon be filled with lewdness, and robbery, and blasphemy, and blood, and atheism.

And if there be a general "forsaking of the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is," our churches will soon be but a name for what once existed. Besides, every man needs for himself the instruction and the aids to

devotion which the public ministrations of God's house afford. Even the man whose knowledge surpasses that of the plain but pious and sensible man of God on whose ministry he attends, will find his "pure mind stirred up by way of remembrance" in a manner highly useful. All who can, are under strong obligations to "appear in Zion before God," to obey the exhortation given us by inspiration: "O come, let us sing unto the Lord, let us make a joyful noise unto the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. O come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker." Then let us go in company to the house of God. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem; and on thy heights, O Zion.

The words of the decalogue show the *extent* of the command to keep holy one day in seven. According to that divine law it is not enough that you yourself respect the Sabbath; it requires of you to see that the precept is not infringed by your "son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maid-servant, nor your cattle, nor by the stranger that is within your gates." Should you and your family disregard this law, you may expect soon to hear a message which will make both your ears to tingle.

In closing this letter I would observe, that the Lord's day being ended, we ought to endeavor to *retain* a savor of the spirit becoming it during the subsequent week. This seems proper, because one object in observing the Sabbath is to enable us to spend the week aright; and if you are truly pious, you will not be afraid of being too devout or too spiritually-minded.

I would further remark, that the faithful and strict observance of holy time is *imperiously demanded at the present time*. Steamboats, stages, railroads, and similar facilities are so increased, and our country is so filled as with a nation of travellers, and the general tendency to profane the Sabbath is so great, that if the friends of religion shall remit

proper exertions in behalf of sacred institutions, a speedy and dreadful overthrow must await us. The enemy has come in like a flood. The good example and scriptural remonstrances of the pious must be, under God, lifted up as a standard. Just as wickedness increases, must the righteous be vigilant. It was in times of dreadful apostacy that those old saints secured so rich a blessing. See Malachi 3 : 16, 17.

Finally, if you will sanctify the Lord's day, you shall know that in keeping this command there is *great reward*. The refreshing rest from worldly occupations, the solemn stillness, the elevating devotions, and the pure and sacred character of the whole institution of the Lord's day are felt, and seen, and confessed by all who are not so profane as to sell this birthright of creation for a paltry consideration. Rest assured, it is not a vain thing to keep the Sabbath holy, even to the end of it.

Be not moved, except to pity, by those who make a mock at the sin of misspending holy time. Their folly surpasses all names of madness. Two things will probably have a keener edge in wounding the lost soul than all others. One will be, the recollection of *Christ rejected*. The other will be, the remembrance of *time, especially holy time, misspent*. "Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy." Let this law be written on your whole domestic economy, and your enemies themselves being judges, you shall be blessed in your deed.