APPENDIX.

Concerning Hallowing the Sabbath.

THROUGHOUT this Discourse, it hath been supposed, that there is in force a divine mandate of hallowing the Sabbath, which all are bound to obey, and contract guilt by neglecting. But the change in the dispensation, since the fourth commandment was given; the alteration of the day, from the seventh to the first of the week: and the manner in which that alteration was in­troduced, have afforded some persons an occasion of arguing against the ob­ligation: the judgments of others seem unsettled, and perplexed about it: and those who profane the Sabbath, are by these things furnished with some plausible excuse, and preserved from remorse of conscience on that account. For these reasons, I judged it might be useful to subjoin a few brief hints upon the subject.

I. It should be noticed, that the Sabbath was appointed long before the ceremonial law, even from the creation of the world; and therefore cannot, in its own nature, be ceremonial. Gen. ii. 1-3. That the words of Moses should thus be understood, may be confirmed by the prohibition of gathering manna on the seventh day, Exod. xvi. 22-30. previous to giving any part of the law. The very language of the fourth commandment, “*Remember* the Sabbath-day to keep it holy,” as well as the reason assigned in the close, evinces the same. And this is corroborated and illustrated by the general custom in many nations, through revolving ages, of computing time by weeks, or periodical returns of the seventh day. Of this fact, no reason can be as­signed so satisfactory, as supposing it to be the effect of an original institu­tion, handed down by tradition, amongst all the descendants of Adam and Noah; which continued even after the appointment that gave rise to it was forgotten.**[[1]](#footnote-1)**

II. The observation of the Sabbath, being made a part of the Mosaic dis­pensation, is interwoven with the whole system. It is enforced in the moral law of ten commandments, as delivered from Mount Sinai; introduced in the midst of the positive institutions; and enforced by temporal punishments to be executed by civil authority. This shows its importance; and evinces, that it partakes of the excellency of the moral law; forms an eminent part, and is fundamental to the maintenance of, all instituted worship: is typical of, and preparatory for, the heavenly Sabbath: and on every account is pro­per to be enforced by the authority of the magistrate, who may not draw his sword to propagate systems of doctrine or formulas of worship, but who may and ought to use his authority to repress immorality and profaneness, and to promote the public worship of God in the land. The substance of this com­mandment is of a moral nature. To separate some known, stated, and perio­dical portion of our time to religious purposes, when, all other engagements being postponed, men should assemble to worship God, and learn his will; is evidently an appointment resulting from the reason and nature of things. The glorious perfections of God; the rational nature of man; our relations and obligations to our Creator, Benefactor, Governor, and Judge; the ho­nour which he requires, and which we owe him; our relations to each other, as social creatures, who can instruct, assist, affect, and animate one another by joining together in one common exercise; and our situation, in such a world as this,—all render such an ordinance indispensable. Repeal this com­mandment, prohibit this practice; you render public religion a matter of in­difference, or you destroy it. Such a repeal or prohibition implies an ab­surdity; which cannot be said of the repeal or prohibition of any ceremonial precept. The honour and worship of God, the interests of religion and mo­rality, and the best happiness of mankind, would be inadequately provided for, without such an observance.

III. We cannot, indeed, from the reason and nature of things, demon­strate, that exactly one day in seven, and neither more or less, is required for this moral duty. But the plain matter of fact, that God hath under every dispensation allotted that proportion invariably, amounts to the fullest de­monstration, that infinite Wisdom judged it the best possible. And experi­ence proves, that the conscientious observance of this proportion does not interfere with the advantageous management of either agriculture, manufac­tures, or commerce; is exceedingly favourable to the cause of liberty and humanity; tends greatly to civilize mankind as social creatures; and fully suffices for maintaining and advancing religion in the world, as far as it is generally and strictly observed.

IV. But whether the day to be observed be the first, or the last, or any other of the seven, is evidently in itself indifferent. Only some one day must be pitched upon, either by him that gives, or him that receives, the law. Nothing can be more reasonable, than that the Lawgiver should determine this matter, and all his subjects acquiesce. Nothing more desirable than to be, by his determination, delivered from uncertainty and disputation about it. But if he who first instituted one day, afterwards changed it for another, his authority demands our submission. He, who from the creation appointed the seventh day, in remembrance of its completion, appears to have changed that day for the first, when an event had taken place of still greater conse­quence to fallen sinners. We now every week commemorate the triumphant resurrection of our divine Redeemer. To avoid needlessly shocking Jewish prejudices, this, (as some other changes,) in the wisdom of God, was effected silently and gradually, by example, not by express precept. As Christians, all seem to have observed the first day of the week; the Jewish converts were connived at in observing the seventh also, together with circumcision, and their other ceremonies. Our risen Lord repeatedly met, and spake peace to his disciples, who on the first day of the week were assembled, if not the first time, yet, probably, afterwards by some intimation from him. It appears to have been on the first day of the week, when the disciples being of one ac­cord in one place, the Holy Ghost came visibly and audibly among them. “On the first day of the week,” they met to break bread, as well as to hear the word preached. On the first day of the week, they were directed to lay by for the poor, as God had prospered them in the preceding week. St John dignifies this day with the title of “the Lord’s Day,” which name alone shows in what manner and to what purposes it should be observed.**[[2]](#footnote-2)** The *first* is the only day of the seven mentioned afterwards in the Scripture by way of favourable distinction; Sabbaths being spoken of as abrogated cere­monies. And as both ecclesiastical and civil history, with concurring evi­dence, represent it as the distinguishing practice of Christians, in all ages and nations ever since, to observe this day as sacred to religion.

V. Having determined its obligation, let us briefly consider how it should be hallowed. The Lord of the Sabbath hath himself repeatedly allowed of works of necessity and mercy; and in thus relaxing the rigour of the cere­monial part of the commandment, hath enforced the moral part, and impli­citly prohibited all other works. But works of necessity must be so in rea­lity, not in pretence. Settling accounts, writing letters of business or on common subjects, paying labourers, making provision for the indulgence of pride and luxury, with many more things of this kind, which create so much “*necessary”* work for the Lord’s Day, are as bad as keeping open shop, and working at a trade, nay, worse, though less scandalous. No works which are done out of covetousness, pride, or luxury, can consist with hallowing a day to the Lord. Committing known sin is serving Satan, and to employ the Lord’s Day in Satan’s service, proves a man his faithful, willing, and in­defatigable servant. Diversions and trifling visits, (and indeed all visits the direct object and tendency of which is not to glorify God, and edify one another,) are inconsistent with hallowing the Sabbath. But men have no leisure on other days! that is to say, they have so much to do in the world, and for their bodies, that six days are too little; and so little to do about their souls, and for God, that one day is too much; and therefore they must borrow time from the latter to eke out the former. Idleness is as bad, or worse: for it implies, that we have nothing to do with spiritual things or with and for God; or nothing worth doing. But indeed we have enough important, profitable, and pleasant work to do on that day. “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, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words; then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD.” Extraordinary diligence and earnestness in searching the Scriptures; ex­amining our hearts and lives, our state and conduct; meditation and secret devotion; if we have families, instructing and praying for and with them; and repeatedly attending on public ordinances, will, even with early rising, require much of this holy day. Edifying conversation, joined with social worship, and acts of charity to the bodies and souls of men, demand all the remainder that can be spared from unavoidable avocations. He who values his immortal soul, or has any love to God, desire of his favour, delight in his service, or zeal for his glory, will not complain of being required thus to hallow one day in seven, as if it were a galling yoke; but will complain of himself, if depraved nature seem weary: and he will deem it the best and most pleasant day in the week.

The general profanation of the Lord’s day proves the dislike men have for religion, and the contempt which they have for the authority and command­ment of the Lord. Of those who pay decent respect to the day, multitudes, we allow, are formal hypocrites; and Christians, indeed, serve God every day: but shall we, on such pretences, undervalue this divine appointment? God forbid!—That degree of reverence, small as it is, which is now paid to the Christian Sabbath, is so far a public protestation against Atheism, infi­delity, and profaneness, and a profession of Christ’s religion, which puts public honour upon God and his worship. All business being by appoint­ment suspended, servants, labourers, mechanics, and tradesmen, that is, the bulk of mankind, have leisure and opportunity to assemble and hear the word of God; and faith comes by hearing. Multitudes crowd the places where the word of God is preached, and many are converted. True Christians, being sanctified but in part, lose much of the vigour of their affections, by their unavoidable intercourse with the world; which decays are repaired, together with an increase of knowledge and grace, by statedly and seriously hallowing the Sabbath. Could we but witness the universal hallowing of the Sabbath, we might reasonably hope for a proportionable increase of real religion.—Were it totally neglected, profaneness, ignorance, and infidelity, we may confidently foretell, *would,* barbarity, tyranny, and slavery, probably *might,* deluge the world. Let impartial judges then determine, from this imperfect sketch, who are the best friends of mankind; they who would tolerate and vindicate its profanation, or they who would enforce its strict observance.

With great satisfaction I would add, in closing this subject, the words of a celebrated writer, who has, with great effect, employed his talents in the cause of practical Christianity;**[[3]](#footnote-3)**

“Let us appeal” (says he) “to that Day which is especially devoted to the offices of Religion; do they” (the bulk of nominal Christians) “joyfully avail themselves of this blessed opportunity of withdrawing from the business and cares of life, when without being disquieted by any doubt, whether they are not neglecting the duties of their proper callings, they may be allowed to detach their minds from earthly things, that by a fuller knowledge of heavenly objects, and a more habitual acquaintance with them their hope may grow more “full of immortality?” Is the day cheerfully devoted to those holy exercises for which it was appointed? Do they indeed “come into the courts of God with gladness?” and how are they employed when not engaged in the public services of the day? Are they busied in studying the word of God, in meditating on his perfections, in tracing his providential dispensa­tions, in admiring his works, in revolving his mercies, (above all, the tran­scendent mercies of redeeming love,) in singing his praises “and speaking good of his name?” Do their secret retirements witness the earnestness of their prayers and the warmth of their thanksgivings, their diligence and im­partiality in the necessary work of self-examination, their mindfulness of the benevolent duty of intercession? Is the kind purpose of the institution of a Sabbath answered by them, in its being made to their servants and depen­dents a season of rest and comfort? Does the instruction of their families, or of the more poor and ignorant of their neighbours, possess its due share of their time? If blessed with talents or affluence, are they sedulously em­ploying a part of this interval of leisure, in relieving the indigent, and visit­ing the sick, and comforting the sorrowful; in forming plans for the good of their fellow-creatures, in considering how they may promote the tem­poral and spiritual benefits of their friends and acquaintance; or, if theirs be a larger sphere, devising measures whereby, through the divine blessing, they may become the honoured instruments of the more extended diffusion of religious truth? In the hours of domestic or social intercourse, does their conversation manifest the subject of which their hearts are full? Do their language and demeanour show them to be more than commonly gentle, and kind, and friendly, free from rough and irritating passions.

“Surely an entire day should not seem long amidst these various employ­ments. It might well be deemed a privilege thus to spend it in the more immediate presence of our heavenly Father, in the exercises of humble ad­miration and grateful homage; of the benevolent, and domestic, and social feelings, and of all the best affections of our nature, prompted by their true motives, conversant about their proper objects, and directed to their noblest end; all sorrow mitigated, all cares suspended, all fears repressed, every angry emotion softened, every envious or revengeful or malignant passion expelled; and the bosom thus quieted, purified, enlarged, ennobled, par­taking almost of a measure of the heavenly happiness, and become for a while the seat of love, and joy, and confidence, and harmony.

“The nature and uses, and proper employments of a Christian Sabbath, have been pointed out more particularly, not only because the day will be found, when thus employed, eminently conducive, through the divine bless­ing, to the maintenance of the religious principle in activity and vigour; but also because we must all have had occasion often to remark, that many per­sons, of the graver and more decent sort, seem not seldom to be nearly des­titute of religious resources. The Sunday is with them, to say the best of it, a *heavy* day: and that larger part of it, which is not claimed by the pub­lic offices of the church, dully drawls on in comfortless vacuity; or without improvement is trifled away in vain and unprofitable discourse. Not to speak of those who, by their more daring profanation of this sacred season, openly violate the laws and insult the religion of their country, how little do many seem to enter into the *spirit* of the institution, who are not wholly inattentive to its exterior decorums! How glad are they to qualify the rigour of their religious labours! How hardly do they plead against being compelled to de­vote the *whole* of the day to religion, claiming to themselves no small merit for giving up to it a part, and purchasing therefore, as they hope, a right to spend the remainder more agreeably! How dextrously do they avail them­selves of any plausible plea for introducing some week-day employment into the Sunday, whilst they have not the same propensity to introduce any of the Sunday’s peculiar employment into the rest of the week! How often do they find excuses for taking journeys, writing letters, balancing accounts, or in short doing something, which by a little management might probably have been anticipated, or which, without any material inconvenience, might be postponed! Even business itself is recreation, compared with religion, and from the drudgery of this day of Sacred Rest, they fly for refuge to their ordinary occupations.

“Others again who would consider business as a profanation, and who still hold out against the encroachments of the card-table, get over much of the day, and gladly seek for an innocent resource in the social circle, or in family visits, where it is not even pretended that the conversation turns on such topics as might render it in any way conducive to religious instruction or improvement. Their families meanwhile are neglected, their servants robbed of Christian privileges, and their example quoted by others who cannot see that they are themselves less religiously employed, while playing an innocent game at cards, or relaxing in the concert-room.

“But all these several artifices, *whatever they may be, to unhallow* the Sun­day and to change its character, (it might be almost said to ‘relax its hor­rors,’) prove but too plainly, however we may be glad to take refuge in re­ligion, when driven to it by the loss of every other comfort, and to retain, as it were, a reversionary interest in an asylum which may receive us when we are forced from the transitory enjoyments of our present state, that *in itself* it wears to us a gloomy and forbidding aspect, and not a face of consolation and joy; that the worship of God is with us a *constrained,* and not a *willing* service, which we are glad therefore to abridge, though we dare not omit it.”

1. The pains taken, by express edicts and by a new division of time, in a neighbouring nation, to form an exception to this rule, by men who are avowed enemies to Christianity, may help to show the force of this argument. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Τη Κυριακη ημερα, “The Lord’s Day.” Rev. i. 10. *Gr. Com.* Κυριακον δειπνον, *“*The Lord’s Supper.” 1 Cor. xi. 20. The one in remembrance of the Lord’s death,—the other his resurrection. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See a Practical View of Christianity, by William Wilberforce, Esq. M. P. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)