

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT.

FALSE EXPOSITION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

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THE Fourth Commandment has been variously expounded by its professed friends. Among these expositions, none has been more injurious than that which represents it as requiring the observance, not of *the* Sabbath, and *the* seventh day, but of a Sabbath, and a seventh day—not of a certain and well-known time, but of an uncertain and varying time. Yet this is the exposition of it which is given both by commentators and writers on the subject of the Sabbath. It will be found, however, that this view is generally presented in order to prepare the way to introduce the first day of the week, under the specious name of Lord's Day, into the place of the Sabbath. Thus some are made to think, that the name Sabbath may as well be applied to the first day of the week as to the seventh. But to such an exposition there are several serious objections:—

1. It is a perversion of the original text itself. - In every place where the weekly Sabbath and the seventh day are spoken of, the Hebrew article is uniformly used. This article is often used like our demonstrative *this*—but more commonly like our definite article *the*—never as our indefinite article *a* or *an*; and *Gesenius*, in answer to the question whether it may be used *indefinitely*, says, "The definite article cannot be rightly said to stand indefinitely." To this opinion agree all our translators, both ancient and modern, who have rendered the terms, both in the fourth commandment and all other places of the Scripture, by *the* Sabbath and *the* seventh day.

2. It makes the Fourth Commandment to be indefinite and absurd. If that commandment only requires the observance of a Sabbath or *rest*, and that on *a* seventh day, then one man might keep the seventh day, another the third day, and another the fifth day, yet all obey the commandment. What confusion would thus result from carrying out this exposition to its legitimate results! But God's commandment is not yea and nay after this manner. It says, "*the* seventh day is *the* Sabbath of the Lord thy God." That man will not be held guiltless who misinterprets and misrepresents it, for however pious a purpose he may do so.

3. It is contrary to the teachings of the very men who give this exposition; for they affirm, that the fourth commandment required the keeping of *the* seventh day until Christ came. Now, if the Jews before Christ, were bound to keep a certain and definite day, and that *the* seventh day, then the commandment required a certain and definite *day*, and that *the* seventh day.

From these considerations it is evident, that those who represent the fourth commandment as requiring the observance of only *a* Sabbath, and that upon *some one* day of the seven indefinitely, are guilty of a false exposition of the commandment, and of handling the word of God deceitfully. They make a plain passage of Scripture to signify one thing for some thousands of years, and then ever afterwards to signify another thing. Thus do they make void the commandment of God, that they may keep their own traditions.

Now let us turn to a consideration of some of the *consequences* of this kind of exposition. Among these we will mention only three.

It overturns all certainty in explaining the Scriptures. If a man, in translating from a Latin or Greek author, should pervert his author's meaning in this manner, by using words in a different sense from that in which they were intended, he would be cast out and despised. But yet when a preacher represents the term *the Sabbath* as meaning simply *a rest*, that so he may call the first day of the week *a rest*, and therefore *the Sabbath*, he deals worse with the Scriptures than the translator just mentioned does with his profane author. Instead, however, of being cast out and despised, his speculations are allowed to go for truth. Thus unbelievers are encouraged in their infidelity; and occasion given is for them to say, that the Bible is interpreted by its friends to mean just what they please to have it. It is dangerous for men to use their wits thus to blind the eyes of their fellows.

It abolishes the Lord's Sabbath and makes the Fourth Commandment to be a mere cipher. First, it abolishes the Lord's Sabbath, because it teaches that the observance of the seventh day, on which God rested and which he introduced into the commandment as one with the Sabbath, is not at all binding, but the day may be spent in any kind of labor. Is not this to abolish *the Lord's Sabbath*? Second, it makes the fourth commandment a cipher, because it takes away the *time*, which is the seventh day, and the *event commemorated*, which is God's resting from his creative work. Now read the commandment, as these expounders would have it, bereft of the *time* and the *event commemorated*. It then commands only *a rest*, without any precept or example as to its length or frequency. One person, therefore, may rest one hour in each day; another one day in a month; and a third one month in a year; and each may call this keeping the Sabbath. Does not this make the fourth commandment *a mere cipher*?

It abuses God's Word and misleads his people. It abuses his word by representing that the Word teaches what it does not teach, and that it fails to teach what it attempts to teach. It misleads his people, on one side, by pressing the fourth commandment to sustain the first day of the week, which it says nothing about, thus laying a yoke upon the people, requiring them to observe a day, in regard to which they will finally be asked, Who hath required this at your hands? On the other side, it misleads the people, by encouraging them to neglect a day which God hath sanctified and commanded them to keep holy.

Such are some of the consequences of this false exposition of the fourth commandment. They affect both the sabbatical institution itself, and those whose duty is to remember it. It is true that the persons who countenance such expositions are called very zealous and godly men; but this, instead of bettering the case, makes it worse. If they were enemies to the commandment, such things might be expected, and would be comparatively unimportant; but that the wound should be inflicted by its friends, aggravates the evil. There is occasion to tremble for some religious teachers, who profess great interest in the Sabbath, but who yet refuse to hear the truth in regard to it. Some such there are, who, if the truth be presented to them, instead of inquiring if these things are so, imitate the Jews of old who, when they were cut to the heart, gnashed on their reprover with their teeth; and when they could endure it no longer, "stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord." Such would do well to inquire if they are not in this thing teaching error for truth, and their own traditions for the commandments of God.

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