

To the READER.

There is not one controversial point in and about religion that I less thought to have been concerned with in this way, than that contained in these sermons presented here for your view, until I was alarmed suddenly, and provoked (a few months ago), to undertake it. There was one person especially under my charge (who for some time, by his unsettled and wavering spirit and aspiring temper, I feared would be troublesome), who had for some considerable time, unknown to me, drank in the notion¹ of the Jewish sabbath, and he labored to corrupt many others of the younger sort, some of which, with himself, fell into the practice of keeping that day and cast off the Lord's Day as not being of divine appointment. Some of them, being apprentices, declared they would and could do any business or work for their masters upon the first day of the week. And they received this principle without acquainting me or the church with it, or ever coming to me to hear what I had to say against it; insomuch that when it was publicly known, it had almost put the whole congregation into a flame. But to prevent this, I was asked by various members to endeavor to convince them by Scripture and solid arguments, which I labored to do, but found all was in vain for several of them.

Just as the brethren felt it was necessary for me to preach upon this subject, so I myself perceived an absolute necessity to do so. And praised be the Lord who has blessed my undertaking herein, and answered my hopes, which was not so much to regain those hot-headed and conceited young men as to establish, confirm, and strengthen all others. Many were much startled and doubting which day they ought to observe, which the ringleaders, I perceived, much gloried at, some of them showing that they hoped to bring over a great part of the congregation to their opinion. But these seasonable and timely endeavors, through the blessing of God, have, I hope, finally prevented their design, all generally (except those who were at first corrupted) being thoroughly established in the observation of the Lord's Day in opposition to the old seventh-day sabbath. And several that were wavering told me how fully all their doubts were resolved by hearing some of these sermons preached.

These things first mentioned being the occasion of my insisting upon this controversy, I hope all will say my call was just; and none will or can blame me, who are not prejudiced against me. And now also at the request and desire of many (some of whom are not members with us) the sermons are published, hoping they may be of some use to the church of God in general.

As to the work itself, all may perceive that I have taken no small pains according to my small ability, in searching not only into God's Word, but also into the works and labors of many pious and learned authors. I have cited—to confirm my own arguments—many passages out of their writings: 1.) thinking their words might do more with some people than anything I myself might say, whose learning and abilities far exceed mine, and 2.)

¹“Notions” throughout this work refers to the false doctrine he is challenging. He often capitalizes and italicizes the word, but I have made the formatting normal for the sake of consistency.

because few maybe ever saw some of these books. I have, it's true, repeated some things two or three times which I look upon emphatically, that they might make a greater impression on such readers, for whose sake these sermons are published, viz. who are not learned; for others do not need my help.

Reader, I did not (for some reasons) deliver from the pulpit a great part of what is here published; and also some things I might say that are here omitted, which being not in my notes, I could not remember.

Dr. Owen, Dr. Wallis, Mr. Warren, &c. in particular, with several other reverend ministers, have said enough to satisfy any on this subject, whose books have not ever been answered. In my citations of diverse authors, I have transcribed both the Greek and Latin that all may know the original words of which our opponents would make some earnings; and I can solemnly say I have not willfully missed in any quotation. And if any of these Sabbatarians make reply to me, let them rather answer them—especially those three I have now mentioned—than me; it will be more for their honor. And this I will say, if they do think to reply, unless they answer what these and other learned men have said which I have here recited, I shall take it for no answer at all. Let them therefore attempt to do it effectually or not meddle with it.

It's true, I differ from diverse learned men in one or two things I have cited, and from Reverend Dr. Owen particularly, i. e. about Adam in innocency and the Patriarchs keeping the seventh day. Yet what the doctor says on Heb. 4. comports well with my principle; but, though as soon as God finished his work, he rested, and that day of rest ensued thereon, to answer the end of creation, and the covenant of works, yet I can't see any ground to believe it was given to any to observe until Moses's time (Ex. 16) for reasons I and others have given. Moreover, Dr. Wallis has shown in his "Rejoinder to Mr. Bamfield" (p. 123) that that very day before it rained manna could not be a Sabbath because on that day quails covered the camp, and they were not forbidden from gathering them (Ex. 16:8, 13). But no more of that here. I expect better usage or treatment from these opponents than I met formerly with from some others about another controversy, who left the argument to abuse my person; yet I may say (with a late* writer on this subject) "as for the leaders" (he says "deceivers") "I despair of doing good to them, but shall be glad if I may be an instrument to recover any that are misled, or deceived: self-denial is a hard lesson." You will find many new arguments I think are not found in former authors. I shall conclude with advice to unsettled persons who are ready to receive novelties. But first, take a note or two how you may know such: they that are firmly rooted in the truth will not be soon shaken or removed.

Erroneous Persons, 1. Are subject to cavil with truth doubtfully uttered, which by an honest hearer will be well taken.

2. They are subject to contradict plain, evident truth with a delight to contradict it, because they would not have it to be otherwise than they believe.

3. They have a vehement desire to infect others or to draw many to be of their opinion.

4. A desire of conference under pretense of taking satisfaction, but on purpose to vent their notions more freely, and get the good opinion of others, and occasion of insulting.²
5. Commend themselves through pride and diminish the credit and honor of others, and they do not care about which pious congregations they divide and trouble to augment their own company.
6. Make a profession of new light that hardly any before them ever attained, and that all are in darkness but themselves.
7. Pretend to conscience and that they would embrace the truth when they see it. Yet after clear demonstration of truth they remain stubborn and persevere in their errors.
8. They do not observe proper church practices, nor any just and righteous censure, nor regard their own most solemn church-engagements, so that they can but please their own fancy, and feed on their new notions the more greedily. And hardly can a man receive an error, before he quickly proves to be a seducer of others.
9. They show great zeal and concernedness of mind if they find any oppose their errors, as if their all lay at stake.
10. And if they receive one error, they are ready to receive more.
11. They commonly seem uneasy under the Word where they are members, and look for anything to blemish their minister, and will wander abroad to hear as their fancies lead them, as if under no government, though they grieve and afflict the church and members to whom they belong, breaking Christ's bands and casting his cords from them.

To close, (1.) Take heed of erroneous books, and if you doubt, do not quickly turn your doubts into practice. (2.) Beware of your own private interpretation of Scripture, and confer with such as have better judgments than yourselves. (3.) Suspect all private opinions which differ and dissent from the general doctrine, as taught by Christ and his Apostles, and owned in the two next ages after them, or that dissent from the general doctrine and practice of such whom you believe in this age have obtained the clearest light. Remember, the way of truth is no by-path, but trodden by the primitive flock of gospel churches. (4.) Be sure to hear what can be said against your notion, as well as what you hear for it. There is one thing I should have noted touching the error of these Sabbatarians, viz. their notion brings in an external force upon the conscience in matters of religion; for they must force their children and servants not only to rest, but to worship God on the seventh day though against their light, or they are guilty of Sabbath breaking. But I will add no more.

O that God would put a rebuke on and stop all the errors of these evil days, and increase love among his people! Let us all cry for more of the anointing, or for the latter rain, and

²“A desire to have an open conversation under the pretense of trying to reach a conclusion, but their purpose is simply to air their notions more freely and get the good opinion of others, and to have an opportunity to insult.”

the glorious kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, that is now just at the door. And, reader, if you receive any profit by what is written here, give the glory to God, and let me have your prayers, who am your soul's friend and servant in the gospel,

Horsly-down, Southwark, this 12th of Jan. 1699–1700.

Benj. Keach.