

## Questions About the Sabbath, Part 1

*Questions About the Nature and Perpetuity of the Sabbath*

*by John Bunyan*

### QUESTION I

Whether the seventh day Sabbath is of, or made known to, man by the law and light of nature?

Something must be here premised before I show the grounds of this question. First then, by the law or light of nature, I mean that law which was concrete with man; that which is natural to him, being original with, and essential to, himself; consequently, that which is invariable and unalterable, as is that nature. Secondly, I grant that by this law of nature, man understands that there is one eternal God; that this God is to be worshipped according to his own will; consequently, that time must be allowed to do it in: but whether the law or light of nature teacheth, and that of itself, without the help of revelation, that the seventh day of the week is that time sanctified of God, and set apart for his worship, that is the question; and the grounds of it are these:

First, Because the law of nature is antecedent to this day, yea completed as a law before it was known or revealed to man, that God either did or would sanctify the seventh day of the week at all.

Now this law, as was said, being natural to a man, for man is a law unto himself, Rom.2, could only teach the things of a man, and there Apostle stints it, ICor.2:11. But to be able to determine, and that about things that were yet without being, either in nature or by revelation, is that which belongs not to a man as a man; and the seventh day Sabbath, as yet, was such. For Adam was completely made the day before; and God did not sanctify the seventh day before it was, none otherwise than by his secret decree. Therefore, by the law of nature, Adam understood it not, it was not made known to him thereby.

Second, To affirm the contrary, is to make the law of nature supernatural, which is an impossibility. Yea, they that do so make it a predictor, a prophet; a prophet about divine things to come; yea, a prophet able to foretell what shall be, and that without a revelation; which is a strain that never yet prophet pretended to.

Besides, to grant this, is to run into a grievous error; for this doth not only make the law of nature the first of prophets, contrary to Gen.3:10 compared with Jn.1:1 but it seems to make the will of God, made known by revelation, a needless thing. For if the law of nature, as such, can predict or foretell God's secrets and that before he reveals them, and this law of nature is universal in every individual man in the world, what need is there of particular prophets or of their holy writings? And indeed here the Quakers and others split themselves. For if the law of nature can of itself reveal unto me one thing pertaining to instituted worship, for that we are treating of now, and the exact time which God has not yet sanctified and set apart for the performance thereof, why may it not reveal unto me more, and so still more; and at last all that is requisite for me to know, both as to my salvation, and how God is to be worshipped in the church on earth.

Third, If it be of the law of nature, then all men by nature are convinced of the necessity of keeping it, and that though they never read or heard of the revealed will of God about it; but this we find not in the world.

For though it is true that the law of nature is common to all, and that all men are to this day under the power and command thereof; yet we find not that they are by nature under the conviction of the necessity of keeping of a seventh day Sabbath. Yea, the Gentiles, though we read not that they ever despised the law of nature, yet never had, as such, a reverence of a seventh day Sabbath, but rather the contrary.

Fourth, If therefore the seventh day Sabbath is not of the law of nature, then it should seem not to be obligatory to all. For instituted worship and the necessary circumstances thereunto belonging is obligatory but to some. The tree that Adam was forbid to eat of, we read not but that his children might have eat the fruit thereof: and circumcision, the Passover and other parts of instituted worship were enjoined but to some.

Fifth, I doubt the seventh day Sabbath is not of the law of nature, and so not moral; because though we read that the law of nature, and that before Moses, was charged upon the world; yet I find not till then, that the profanation of a seventh day Sabbath was charged upon the world: and indeed to me this very thing makes a great scruple in the case.

A law, as I said, we read of and that from Adam to Moses. Rom.5:13,14. The transgressions also of that law, we read of them, and that particularly, as in Gen.4:8 & 6:5; 9:21,22; 12:13; 18:12-15; 19:5; (Ez.16:49, 50) Gen.31:30; 35:2; 40:15; 44:8-10. De.8:19,20; 12:2. Ps.106:35-37. and Romans the first and second chapters.

But in all the scriptures we do not read that the breach of a seventh day Sabbath was charged upon men as men all that time. Whence I gather, that either a seventh day Sabbath was not discerned by the light of nature, and so not by that law imposed; or else, that men by the help and assistance of that, for we speak of men as men, in old time kept it better than in after ages did the church of God with better assistance by far. For they are there yet found fault with as breakers of the Sabbath. Ez.20:13.

It follows therefore, that if the law of nature doth not of itself reveal to us, as men, that the seventh day is the holy Sabbath of God. That that day, as to the sanction of it, is not moral but rather arbitrary, to with, imposed by the will of God upon his people until the time he thought fit to change it for another day.

And if so, it is hence to be concluded that though by the light of nature men might see that time must be allowed and set apart for the performance of that worship that God would set up in his house; yet, as such, it could not see what time the Lord would to that end choose. Nature therefore saw that, by a positive precept or a word revealing it and by no other means.

Nor doth this at all take away a whit of that sanction which God once put upon the seventh day Sabbath; unless any will say, and by sufficient argument prove, that an ordinance for divine worship receiveth greater sanction from the law of nature than from a divine precept: or standeth for such is the law of nature than when imposed by revelation of God.

But the text will put this controversy to an end. The sanction of the seventh day Sabbath, even as it was the rest of God, was not till after the law of nature was completed; God rested the seventh day and sanctified it. Gen.2:3. Sanctified it; that is, set it apart to the end there mentioned, to wit, to rest thereon.

Other grounds of this question I might produce, but at present I will stop here, and conclude: That if a seventh day Sabbath was an essential necessary to the instituted worship of God, then

itself also as to its sanction for that work, was not founded but by a positive precept; consequently not known of man at first, but by revelation of God.

## QUESTION II

Whether the seventh day Sabbath, as to man's keeping of it holy, was ever made known to, or imposed by, a positive precept upon him until the time of Moses? which from Adam was about two thousand years.

Something must also be here premised, in order to my propounding of my grounds for this question; and that is, That the seventh day was sanctified so soon as it had being in the world, unto the rest of God, as it is Gen.2:2,3 and he did rest, from all his works which he had made therein. But the question is, Whether when God did thus sanctify this day to his own rest, he did also by the space of time above-mentioned, impose it as a holy Sabbath of rest upon men; to the end they might solemnize worship to him in special manner thereon? And I question this,

First, Because we read not that it was. And reading, I mean, of the divine testimony is ordained of God for us to find out the mind of God both as to faith and our performance of acceptable service to him.

In reading also, we are to have regard to two things.

I. To see if we can find a precept: or,

II. A countenanced practice for what we do.

For both these ways we are to search, that we may find out what is that good, that acceptable will of God.

For the first of these we have Gen.2:16,17 and for the second, Gen.8:20,21. [as to public worship but not on a stated day.]

Now as to the imposing of a seventh day Sabbath upon men from Adam to Moses, of that we find nothing in holy writ either from precept or example. True, we find that solemn worship was performed by the saints that then lived: for both Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, sacrificed unto God, Gen.4:4; 8:20,21; 12:7; 13:4; 35:1, but we read not that the seventh day was the time prefixed of God for their so worshipping or that they took any notice of it. Some say, that Adam in eating the forbidden fruit, brake also the seventh day Sabbath, because he fell on that day; but we read not that the breach of a Sabbath was charged upon him. That which we read is this: 'Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?' Gen.3:11. some say also that Cain killed Abel on a Sabbath day; but we read not that in his charge God laid any such thing at his door. This was it of which he stood guilty before God: namely, That his brother's blood cried unto God against him from the ground. Gen.4:10.

I therefore take little notice of what a man saith, though he flourisheth his matter with may brave words, if he bring not with him, 'Thus saith the Lord.' For that, and that only, ought to be my ground of faith as to how my God would be worshipped by me. For in the matters material to the worship of God it is safest that thus I be guided in my judgment: for here only I perceive 'the footsteps of the flock,' Ca.1:8, Ez. 3:11. They say further, that for God to sanctify a thing is to set it apart. This being true; then it follows that the seventh day Sabbath was sanctified, that is, set apart for Adam in paradise; and so, that it was ordained a Sabbath of rest to the saints from the beginning.

But I answer, as I hinted before, that God did sanctify it to his own rest. 'The LORD (also) hath set apart him that is godly for himself.' But again, it is one thing for God to sanctify this or that thing to an use, and another thing to command that that thing be forthwith in being to us. As, for instance: the land of Canaan was set apart many years for the children of Israel before they possessed that land. Christ Jesus was long sanctified, that is set apart to be our redeemer, before he sent him into the world. De.32:8, Jn.10:36.

If then, by God's sanctifying of the seventh day for a Sabbath, you understand it for a Sabbath for man, (but the text saith not so) yet it might be so set apart for man, long before it should be, as such, made known unto him. And that the seventh day Sabbath was not as yet made known to men.

Second, Consider secondly, Moses himself seems to have the knowledge of it at first, not by tradition, but by revelation; as it is. Ex.16:23. 'This is that (saith he) which the Lord hath said, (namely to me; for we read not, as yet, that he said it to anybody else), Tomorrow is the Sabbath of the holy rest unto the Lord.'

Also, holy Nehemiah suggests this, when he saith of Israel to God, Thou 'madest known unto them they holy Sabbath [by the hand of Moses thy servant]' Neh.9:14. The first of these texts shows us, that tidings of a seventh day Sabbath for men, came first to Moses from heaven: and the second, that it was to Israel before unknown.

But how could be either the one or the other? If the seventh day Sabbath was taught to men by the light of nature, which is the moral law? Or if from the beginning it was given to men by a positive precept for to be kept.

This therefore strengthens my doubt about the affirmative of the first question, and also prepares an argument for what I plead as to this we have now under consideration.

Third, This yet seems to me more scrupulous, because that the punishment due to the breach of the seventh day Sabbath was hid from men to the time of Moses; as is clear, for that it is said of the breaker of the Sabbath, 'They put him in ward, because it was not [as yet] declared what should be done to him.' Num.15:32-36.

But I think, had this seventh day Sabbath been imposed upon men from the beginning, the penalty or punishment due to the breach thereof had certainly been known before now.

When Adam was forbidden to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil the penalty was then, if he disobeyed, annexed to the prohibition. So also it was as to circumcision, the passover and other ordinances for worship. How then can it be thought that the seventh day Sabbath should be imposed upon men from the beginning; and that the punishment for the breach thereof should be hidden with God for the space of two thousand years! Gen.2:16,17; 17:13,14.

Ex.12:19,43-48.

Fourth, God's giving of the seventh day Sabbath was with respect to stated and stinted worship in his church; the which, until the time of Moses, was not set up among his people. Things till then were adding or growing: now a sacrifice, then circumcision, then again long after that the Passover, etc.

But when Israel was come into the wilderness, there to receive as God's congregation, as stated, the stinted, limited way of worship, then he appoints them a time, and times, to perform this worship in; but as I said afore, before that it was not so, as the whole five books of Moses plainly

show; wherefore the seventh day Sabbath, as such a limited day cannot be moral, or of the law of nature, or imposed till then.

And I think Christ Jesus and his apostles do plainly enough declare this very thing. For that when they repeat unto the people or expound before them the moral law, they quite exclude the seventh day Sabbath. Yea, Paul makes that law to us complete without it.

We will first touch upon what Christ does in this case.

As in his sermon upon the mount, Mat.5-7. In all that large and heavenly discourse upon this law, you have not one syllable about the seventh day Sabbath.

So when the young man came running, and kneeling, and asking what good thing he should do to inherit eternal life, Christ bids him keep the commandments; but when the young man asked which, Christ quite leaves out the seventh day and puts him on the other. As in Mat.19:16-19. As in Mk.10:17-20. As in Lk.18:18-20.

You will say, he left out the first, and second, and third likewise. To which I say, that was because the young man by his question did presuppose that he had been a doer of them: for he professed in his supplication, that he was a lover of that which is naturally good, which is God, in that his petition was so universal for every thing which he had commanded.

Paul also when he makes mention of the moral law, quite leaves out of that the very name of the seventh day Sabbath, and professes, that to us Christians the law of nature is complete without it. As in Rom.3:7-19. As in Rom.13:7-10. As in 1Tim.1:8-11.

'He that loveth another, saith he, hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love works no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.'

I make not an argument of this, but take an occasion to mention it as I go. But certainly, had the seventh day Sabbath been moral, or of the law of nature, as some would fain persuade themselves, it would not so slenderly have been passed over in all these repetitions of this law, but would by Christ or his apostles have been pressed upon the people, when so fair an opportunity as at these times offered itself unto them. But they knew what they did, and wherefore they were so silent as to the mention of a seventh day Sabbath when they so well talked of the law as moral.

Fifth, Moses and the prophet Ezekiel both do fully confirm what has been insinuated by us; to wit, that the seventh day, as a Sabbath, was not imposed upon men until Israel was brought into the wilderness.

1. Moses saith to Israel, 'Remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: THEREFORE the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day.' Yea, he tells us, that the covenant which God made with them in Horeb, that written in stones, was not made with their forefathers, to wit, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but with them. De.5:1-15.

2. Ezekiel also is punctual as to this: I caused them, saith God by that prophet, 'to go forth out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them my statutes, and shewed them my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them. Moreover also I gave

them my Sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them.' Ez.20:10-12. Ex.20:8; 31:13; 35:2.

What can be more plain? And these to be sure, are two notable witnesses of God, who, as you see, do jointly concur in this; to wit, That it was not from paradise, nor from the fathers, but from the wilderness and from Sinai, that men received the seventh day Sabbath to keep it holy.

True, it was God's Sabbath before: for on the first seventh day we read, that God rested thereon and sanctified it. Hence he calls it in the first place, MY Sabbath. I gave them my Sabbath: But it seems it was not given to the church till he had brought them into the wilderness.

But I say, if it had been moral, it would have been natural to man; and by the light of nature men would have understood it, even both before it was and otherwise. But of this you see we read nothing, either by positive law, or countenanced example, or any other way, but rather the flat contrary; to wit, that Moses had the knowledge of it first from heaven, not by tradition. That Israel had it, not of or from their fathers, but in the wilderness, from him to wit. Moses, after he had that whole law in which this seventh day Sabbath is placed, was given for the bounding and better ordering of them in their church state for their time, till the Messiah should come and put, by a better ministration, this out of his church, as we shall further show.

The seventh day Sabbath therefore was not from paradise, nor from nature, nor from the fathers, but from the wilderness and from Sinai.

### **QUESTION III**

Whether when the seventh day Sabbath was given to Israel in the wilderness the Gentiles, as such, was concerned therein.

Before I show my ground for this question, I must also first premise, That the Gentiles, as such, were then without the church of God and pale thereof; consequently had nothing to do with the essentials or necessary circumstances of that worship which God had set up for himself now among the children of Israel.

Now then for the ground of the question.

First, we read not that God gave it to any but to the seed of Jacob. Hence it is said to Israel, and to Israel only, 'The Lord hath given YOU the Sabbath.' Ex.16:29. And again, 'also I gave THEM my Sabbath.' Ez.20:5,12.

Now, if the gift of the seventh day Sabbath was only to Israel, as these texts do more than seem to say; then to the Gentiles, as such, it was not given. Unless any shall conclude, that God by thus doing preferred the Jew to a state of gentileism; or that he bestowed on them, by thus doing, some high Gentile privilege. But this would be very fictitious. For, to lay aside reason, the text always, as to preference, did set the Jew in the first of places. Rom.2:10. Nor was his giving the seventh day Sabbath to them but a sign and token thereof.

But the great objection is because the seventh day Sabbath is found amongst the rest of those precepts which is so commonly called the moral law; for thence it is concluded to be of a perpetual duration.

But I answer: That neither that as given on Sinai is moral; I mean as to the manner and ends of its ministration of which, God permitting, we shall say more in our answer to the fourth question, whither I direct you for satisfaction. But,

Second, The Gentiles could not be concerned, as such, with God's giving of a seventh day Sabbath to Israel, because, as I have showed before, it was given to Israel considered as a church of God. Acts 7:32. Nor was it given to them, as such, but with rites and ceremonies thereto belonging, so Le.24:5-9. Num.28:9,10. Ne.13:22. Ez.46:4.

Now, I say, if this Sabbath hath ceremonies thereto belonging, and if these ceremonies were essential to the right keeping of the Sabbath, and again, if these ceremonies were given to Israel only, excluding all but such as were their proselytes, then this Sabbath was given to them as excluding the Gentiles as such. But if it had been moral, the Gentiles could as soon have been deprived of their nature as of a seventh day Sabbath, though the Jews should have appropriated it unto themselves only.

Again, to say that God gave this seventh day Sabbath to the Gentiles, as such, (and yet so he must, if it be of the moral law) is as much as to say that God hath ordained that that Sabbath should be kept by the Gentiles without; but by the Jews, not without her ceremonies. And what conclusion will follow from hence, but that God did at one and the same time set up two sorts of acceptable worships in the world: one among the Jews, another among the Gentiles! But how ridiculous such a thought would be, and how repugnant to the wisdom of God, you may easily perceive.

Yea, what a diminution would this be to God's church that then was, for one to say, the Gentiles were to serve God with more liberty than the Jew! For the law was a yoke, and yet the Gentile is called the dog, and said to be without God in the world. De.7:7. Ps. 147:19,20. Mat.15:26. Eph.2:11,12.

Third, When the Gentiles, at the Jews' return from Babylon, came and offered their wares to sell to the children of Israel at Jerusalem on this Sabbath; yea, and sold them to them too: yet not they, but the Jews were rebuked as the only breakers of that Sabbath. Nay, there dwelt then at Jerusalem men of Tyre, that on this Sabbath sold their commodities to the Jews, and men of Judah: yet not they but the men of Judah were contended with as the breakers of this Sabbath.

True, good Nehemiah did threaten the Gentiles that were merchants for lying about the walls of the city, for that by that means they were a temptation to the Jews to break their Sabbaths; but still he charged the breach thereof only upon his own people. Ne.13:15-20.

But can it be imagined, had the Gentiles now been concerned with this Sabbath by law divine, that so holy a man as Nehemiah would have let them escape without a rebuke for so notorious a transgression thereof; especially considering, that now also they were upon God's ground, to wit, within and without the walls of Jerusalem.

Fourth, Wherefore he saith to Israel again, 'Verily my Sabbaths YE shall keep.' And again, 'YE shall keep the Sabbath.' And again, 'The children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout THEIR generations.' Ex.31:14-16; and 16:29\*.

What can be more plain, these things that standing in the testament of God, than that the seventh day Sabbath, as such, was given to Israel, to Israel ONLY; and that the Gentiles, as such, were not concerned therein!

Fifth, The very reason also of God's giving of the seventh day Sabbath to the Jews, doth exclude the Gentiles, as such, from having any concern therein. For it was given to the Jews, as was said before, as they were considered God's church and for a sign and token by which they should

know that he had chosen and sanctified them to himself for a peculiar people. Ex.31:13-17.  
EZ.20:12,13.

And a great token and sign it was that he had so chosen them: for in that he had given to them this Sabbath, he had given to them (his own rest) a figure and pledge of his sending his Son into the world to redeem them from the bondage and slavery of the devil: of which indeed this Sabbath was a shadow or type. Col.2:16,17\*

Part 1 of 2