

From these considerations, and some others of a similar nature, which I do not think necessary to specify, we conclude, that the fourth commandment ought, beyond a question, to be regarded as a part of the moral law—equally obligatory, and as perpetual in its nature and design, as any other precept of the decalogue.

We are aware that those who represent the Jewish Sabbath as a ceremonial institution, endeavor to support their hypothesis by what the apostle says, Coloss. ii. 16, 17. "Let no man, therefore, judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days; which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." But when we consider that the writer of these words was in the practice of observing a particular day of the week, for special religious exercises, as is apparent from his epistles, as well as from the Acts of the Apostles, we cannot believe that he meant to condemn this practice. He would, by so doing, have condemned himself. By the *Sabbath days*, which are a shadow of things to come, he plainly means the Jewish festivals, in which holy convocations were held; and which are often in the Old Testament denominated *Sabbaths*. Indeed, it seems evident at once, by the enumeration in this passage of rites confessedly ceremonial, that the apostle is speaking exclusively of them. And accordingly this prohibition is directed to *Sabbath days*, in the plural number, and not to the weekly Sabbath, which would have been mentioned in the singular, if that had been his object.

On the whole, my young friends, the evidence that the command we are considering is moral in its very nature, and of perpetual obligation, appears to be clear and conclusive; and if so, it establishes, as an unchanging law of God, the setting apart of one whole day in seven, as a holy Sabbath to himself; or in other words, that immediately after the lapse of six days of secular time, one day is always to be kept holy, by appropriating it exclusively to the service and worship of God. Which particular day of the seven ought to be thus regarded, under the Christian dispensation, is made the subject of a subsequent answer of our Catechism.

In the mean time, as the answer before us speaks of "such set times," in the plural number, as "God hath appointed in his word," let us consider what we are to understand by this part of the answer. It is plain that the authors of our Catechism meant to intimate, that as the command was first delivered to the Jews, they were bound, while their ancient dispensation continued, to pay a sacred regard to the numerous specified seasons, which in the Mosiac ritual, were appropriated to the immediate worship of Jehovah. They doubtless also intended to intimate, that all the times on which the day of sacred rest should return, however numerous

those times might be, were always to be kept holy to God. It was likewise, we believe, their intention to suggest by this expression, that no other set seasons than those which God hath appointed in his word, ought to be appointed by men. But here we must take distinctly into view, the difference between *set times* and *occasional seasons*, for the special worship and service of our Maker. It is plain from the New Testament, that there are occasions in which it is the duty of Christians to observe, occasionally, special seasons for fasting and prayer, and other seasons of the same kind, for thanksgiving to God. Individuals, families, churches, and nations, may and ought, when the providence of God manifestly calls to the duty of fasting and prayer, or to that of special thanksgiving for mercies received, to set apart seasons for these purposes severally, and to observe them devoutly. But none of these ought to be *set seasons*; because none such are appointed by Christ, the sole lawgiver of his church; and because set seasons, of this description, may interfere with the plain indications of divine providence, at the time of their occurrence—may call men to rejoice, when they ought to mourn, and to fast and lament, when they ought to rejoice and give thanks. Nor is the observance of these occasional seasons for special devotion obligatory on others, than those by whom they are set apart. One individual Christian, or one community, may, at a certain time, find them proper, when with another they may, at that time, be highly improper. In this, these occasional seasons differ from the Sabbath, which is at all times obligatory on all Christians, after the lapse of six secular days. In a word, the only set time which God has required to be kept holy, is the Sabbath; and to appoint other set times, is an impeachment of the Divine wisdom, as implying a defect in his prescriptions; and it is also to contravene the indications of his holy providence, by calling men to act differently at certain times, from what that providence intimates to be their present duty.

It follows from what has just been stated, that those churches that appoint fasts and festivals, to be observed regularly, or at set times, need, in this particular, to be reformed. In the Roman Catholic church, the number of saints' days, and of seasons of religious solemnity and observance, is so great as to trench, very materially, on the time which ought to be devoted to secular employments. It should never be forgotten, that the command we consider, as really and explicitly requires that six days should be spent in labor—that all our work of a worldly kind may be industriously and faithfully done—as that on the seventh we should do no work, but devote the whole time to the immediate service of God. But the corrupt Romish church completely contravenes this whole order. It first takes away a part of the secu-