

# The Puritan Sabbath for "Physical Rest" [1894]

IN the agitation in behalf of Sunday laws that is now being carried on all over the land, the religious character of Sunday and of the legislation is sought to be covered up by the plea that "one seventh part of time - that is, one whole day in seven, which must be Sunday - is necessary *for physical rest*" in order that men may "recuperate their wasted energies" and be better prepared to successfully to prosecute the vocations of life. This is the ground also upon which courts attempt to sustain the rightfulness of Sunday laws. It is well to examine this plea and see what is its basis, and what its origin, that we may know what it is worth.

The origin of the theory of "one-seventh part of time" for rest was in the controversy between the Puritans and the Episcopalians in the latter part of the sixteenth century, and the authority for the theory was the Rev. Nicolas Bownde, or Bound, D.D., "of Norton, in the county of Suffolk," England. Dr. Bownde was a Puritan and promulgated this theory for the first time in a book which he published in 1594, entitled "The Doctrine of the Sabbath."

The way it came about was this: It was in the height of the controversy about "habits and ceremonies, and church discipline." The Church of England maintained, -

"That though the holy Scriptures are a perfect standard of doctrine, they are not a rule of discipline and government: nor is the practice of the

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apostles an invariable rule or law to the church in succeeding ages, because they acted according to the circumstances of the church in its infant and persecuted state; neither are the Scriptures a rule of human actions, so far as that whatsoever we do in matters of religion without their express direction or warrant is sin, but many things are left indifferent. The church is a society like others, invested with powers to make what laws she apprehends reasonable, decent, or necessary for her well-being and government, provided they do not interfere with or contradict the laws and commandments of holy Scripture: Where the Scripture is silent, human authority may interpose; we must then have recourse to the reason of things and the rights of society. It follows from thence that the church is at liberty to appoint ceremonies, and establish order within the limits above mentioned; and her authority ought to determine what is fit and convenient." - *Neal's "History of the Puritans," Part I, chap. chap. viii, par. 112.*

All this the Puritans denied, and asserted that the Scriptures are a rule of discipline and government as well as a perfect standard of doctrine. The position of the Church of England, summarily stated, was, that, whatever the Scriptures

do not forbid, in matters of church discipline and church government, may be done without sin. While the Puritan position was, that, whatever is not commanded in the Scriptures, in these things, cannot be done without sin. The Puritans therefore dropped all church festivals and feast days, surplices, habits, and ceremonies, and charged the Episcopalians with "popish leaven and superstition, and subjection to the ordinances of men" because they retained these. As proof that ought to convince the Puritans that the church had liberty in such things as these, the Episcopalians produced the fact that the observance of Sunday is only an ordinance of the church and rests only upon the authority of the church; and that the Puritans therefore contradicted themselves in observing Sunday while denouncing the authority of the church, the only authority upon which that observance rests.

This put the Puritans in a box; and they had to cast about for some way to get themselves out. They would not admit the authority of the church; because if they did, that

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would involve the obligation to observe all the other festivals. Directions of Scripture to observe Sunday they found none; because the only authority for a day of weekly rest is the fourth commandment, which commands the observance of the seventh day, not the first day of the week. The Puritans therefore found themselves keeping a day for which there was no authority but church authority; church authority they would not recognize; and yet they would not give up Sunday observance. But to observe it without any authority, while insisting against the Episcopalians that there must be a commandment of God for everything that was to be done, was to condemn themselves in the eyes of all.

There was great perplexity. What could be done? Then it was that the inventive genius of Dr. Bownde found play. He committed a deliberate fraud upon the commandment of God, and came to the rescue with the theory that, It is not the definite seventh day, but "a seventh part of time" that is required by the fourth commandment to be kept for the Sabbath: that it is "not the seventh day from creation; but the day of Christ's resurrection, and the seventh day from that:" that "the seventh day is *genus*" in the fourth commandment, so that "the seventh day from creation, and the day of Christ's resurrection and the seventh from that" are "both of them at several times comprehended in the commandment, even as genus comprehendeth both his species." Thus the fourth commandment was made to enforce the seventh day from creation until the resurrection of Christ and then the first day from that time onward!

This brought joy to the Puritans, for it relieved them from the dilemma into which the answer of the Episcopalians had cast them. "This book had a wonderful spread among the people." "All the Puritans fell in with this doctrine, and distinguished themselves by spending that part of sacred time in public, family, and private acts of devotion." Says Heylin: -

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"This doctrine, carrying such a fair show of piety, at least in the opinion of the common people, and such as did not examine the true grounds of it, induced many to embrace and defend it; and in a

very little time it became the most bewitching error and the most popular infatuation that ever was embraced by the people of England."

But for what purpose was this "seventh part of time" appointed? for what was it to be used when it had been discovered?

"This year [1594] Dr. Bownde published his treatise on the Sabbath, wherein he maintains the morality of the seventh part of time *for the worship of God.*" - Neal, *Id.*, par. 120.

Doctor Bownde's own statement of the matter is this: -

"Wherefore being bound by his calling (Gen. 2:15) to dress and keep the garden, and yet charged (verse 3) to keep holy the seventh day, meditating upon the wisdom and mercy of God appearing, as in all the creatures, so especially in himself, and thus (Rom. 1:20) beholding the invisible things of God in them, giving thanks to God for them, praying for the continuance of them, teaching them to his posterity, etc., it was needful that the seventh day should be unto him (as it was indeed) a Sabbath day, that is, a day of rest, resting from all his other necessary business *that so he might with his whole heart and mind attend upon these, as the worship of God requireth.*" - Book I, under 4.

There was not in it the remotest idea that this time was for physical rest. It was solely for worship and religious exercises. The suggestion of such a thought as that this time was intended or might be devoted to physical rest would have been spurned by the founder of the theory and by every other Puritan that ever lived in Puritan times, as only the suggestion of the arch enemy of righteousness. The theory therefore that a seventh part of time is necessary *for physical rest* is a positive fraud upon the original.

And that the original invention that a seventh part of time is what is commanded and required, by the fourth commandment, is a positive fraud, is clearly proved not only by

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the circumstances of its invention but also by every test of scripture and every rule of law.

But this theory of a seventh part of time for *physical* rest is not only a fraud upon the original Puritan theory of a seventh part of time for the worship of God, it is also a fraud upon the commandment of God which enjoins the day of rest. That commandment says: "Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it."

Here are the reasons: First, he rested on the seventh day; second, he blessed it and made it holy. That you may become tired is not given as a reason for doing no work on the seventh day. God does not say that on the seventh day

you shall do no work because if you should you would overdo or break down your physical system. Nothing of the kind. Man's physical wants are not referred to in the commandment.<sup>15</sup> It says, Work six days because *the Lord* worked six days; rest on the seventh because *the Lord* rested on the seventh day; keep that day holy, because the Lord blessed it and made it holy. It is the Lord who is to be held in view. It is the Lord who is to be exalted. Therefore the fourth commandment and its obligations have solely to do with man's relationship to God. It is not man's *physical* but his *spiritual* needs that are held in view in the Sabbath commandment.

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This is further proved by referring again to the reason given in the commandment for the resting. It is to rest the seventh day because *the Lord rested* that day. Now did the Lord rest because he was weary from what he had done on the six days? Did he rest because if he should work longer there was danger of overdoing or breaking down his physical system? Did he rest in order to "recuperate his wasted energies?" - Not at all. "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?" Isa. 40:28. This is what the Scripture says of it; and what one of the chief Sunday-law workers says of it is this: -

"If he is never weary, how can we say of him that he rests? . . .

God is a spirit, and the only rest which he can know is the supreme repose which only the Spirit can know - in the fulfillment of his purpose and the completeness as well as the completion of his work. Just as in the solemn pauses between the creative days, he pronounced his creatures, 'good,' so did he rejoice over the finishing of his work, resting in perfect satisfaction of an accomplished plan; not to restore his wasted energy." - *Rev. Geo. Elliott, "Abiding Sabbath," chap. i.*

The rest with which the Lord rested was spiritual rest, spiritual refreshing, and delight in the accomplished work of the creation. As the Lord's Sabbath rest was spiritual; and as his so resting is the reason for man's Sabbath rest, so man's Sabbath is likewise to be one of spiritual rest, spiritual refreshing, and delight in the works and ways of God. This is proved by that psalm for the Sabbath day, "Thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy work; I will triumph in the works of thy hands." Ps. 92:4. And by another scripture, "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, honorable; and shalt honor him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words; then shall thou delight thyself in the Lord." Isa. 58:13, 14.

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This is yet further shown by the fact that the Sabbath was instituted and given to man while he was yet in the garden of Eden; before he had sinned; before the word had been spoken, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread;" - before toil had become a part of man's lot; and while as yet there was no possible necessity or opportunity for an waste of energy and therefore no place for physical rest to recuperate wasted energy.

It is likewise shown in the additional fact that after men are redeemed, the earth made new, and Eden restored, the redeemed will keep the Sabbath. For it is written: "As the new heavens and the new earth which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass that, from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come *to worship before me*, saith the Lord." Isa. 66:12, 23.

A day of weekly rest is *in itself* an institution of God. Its basis is the rest of God, which was wholly spiritual. Its purpose is to cultivate the spiritual in man. Its authority is the commandment of God which is spiritual and religious, and which must be religiously and spiritually observed to be observed at all. As says the seer of Patmos, "I was *in the Spirit* on the Lord's day." The whole subject, therefore, in all its bearings, is entirely beyond the jurisdiction and even the reach of the power of civil government or of man. It rests wholly in the power and jurisdiction of God, and remains solely between the individual and God.

Thus, we repeat, it is not man's physical, but his spiritual needs that are to be held in view in the Sabbath commandment. The Sabbath is intended to be a day in which to worship God - a day of holy remembrance of him and of meditation upon his works. The day is to be kept *holy*, not civilly nor physically. If it is not kept holy, it is not kept at

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all in the purview of the commandment and the intention of the Author of the day of the weekly rest.

The evidences which we have here presented positively demonstrate, to the utter exclusion of every other theory, that the object of the Sabbath, the object of the weekly rest, is THE WORSHIP OF GOD.

The sum of this whole matter therefore is this: -

1. The Puritan theory of one seventh part of time for the Sabbath is, and in its inception was a fraud upon the commandment of God.

2. The theory of one seventh part of time *for physical rest* is a fraud upon the original Puritan theory.

3. The seventh part of time for physical rest is therefore *a fraud upon a fraud*.

4. In addition to its being a fraud upon the Puritan theory, the seventh part of time for physical rest is also a fraud upon the commandment of God.

5. And the Puritan theory of a seventh part of time for the Sabbath is itself a fraud upon the commandment of God.

6. The two together therefore - the Puritan Sabbath and the weekly physical rest day - interlocked as they are, form a HEAPED UP FRAUD.

That is just what the theory of one seventh part of time for physical rest is: and all the sophistry of all the preachers, and all the decisions of all the courts on earth, can never make it anything else.

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<sup>1</sup> It is not denied that physical rest is *obtained*, in the observance of the commandment; but it comes as the *consequence* of the spiritual rest which is the real meaning and object of the commandment. The observance of the Sabbath in spiritual rest is true Sabbath observance. While to attempt to observe it for physical rest is to miss it wholly and not to observe it at all.