

William Erbery

Christ our Sabbath Rest

It is too long at present to show how the churches do err in every work of their hand; erring in all their ordinances, duties, holy days, feasts of Thanksgiving, conforming in all to the national churches, but especially and sanctifying the Lord's day. "The LORD hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof; and they have caused Egypt to err in every work thereof, as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit." {Is.19:14} There is nothing, that they are more dark in than this; whereas the Lord's day is no more than the day of the Lord, the day of God, when God shall reveal himself to man, and in them clearly, as John saith of himself; "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day;" {Rev.1:10;} that is, the manifestation of God; when God did fully reveal himself in Christ, John was all in the Spirit, his flesh fell down as dead; "and when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead;" {vs.17;} as Isaiah and Daniel were both undone, when they saw the Lord in glory appearing to them. "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." {Is.6:5} "Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me; for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength." {Dan.10:8} But how comes the Lord's day to be the first day of the week; or the Fourth Commandment, speaking of the seventh day, prove the sanctifying of the first day? Who can prove the change of the day by Christ; or that the apostolic churches kept Holy the first day as God sanctified the seventh? Especially, seeing the next succeeding ages, even the primitive churches of the first 300 years, kept the seventh day as the Sabbath; yea, celebrated the Lord's day and Sabbath together for a long time; or the apostasy presently succeeded the apostolic departure. The celebrating of the Lord's Day alone was first instituted by Constantine the Great; afterwards it was established by the Laodicean counsel in 364 A.D., commanding Christians not to Judaize in keeping the Sabbath, but to work on that day, and keep holy the Lord's Day. I am the more large in this, that the independent churches may see their Judaism in their strict observance of an outward Sabbath. Their ignorance or connivance, not clearing those things which are so certain; their conformity with popish churches, their carnal complying with the Protestant state religion, their Laodicean condition, thinking they are rich, and have need of nothing, that they need no order, nor ordinance, nor officer; whereas they are so poor, blind and naked, that they have no true Gospel ordinances, nor a day it all; but walking in the dark, deceive themselves and others. The observation of the Lord's day therefore depends much on popish churches, and the command of Christian princes, to which the independent churches are as conformable as prelates were. What I conceive of the Sabbath, I shall in a few words declare. That the Fourth Commandment is mystical as well as moral; for there is a mystery in the four first Commandments, even the mystery of God is there manifest. In the first Commandment God, the One only true God, even the Father is acknowledged. "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." {Eph.4:6} In the Second, the same God and Father is known in the Son, the express Image of his substance; and no other image is to be made of God, but the Man Christ. "Who is the image of the invisible God." {Col.1:15} "Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his Person." {Heb.1:3} In the third, God, even the Father, so known in the Son, cannot be acknowledged, nor worshipped in Spirit and Truth, but by the Spirit; without this, whenever men think of God and Christ, they take his name in vain. "For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." {Eph.2:18} The Fourth Commandment holds forth man's spiritual rest in God alone, so known in the Son by the Spirit; and this indeed is the morality of the fourth

Commandment, the ceremonial part thereof being the sanctifying of the seventh day, which was so commanded to the Jewish Church; {not as a Law natural to all nations, as other Commandments are written in every man's heart; but as a positive Law to that particular people;} now not a Sabbath or a seventh day, but the Sabbath, and the seventh day from the creation is that which the command speaks; contrary to all our Protestant Interpreters, who teach, that the Christian Sabbath, or Lord's Day, is grounded on the Fourth Commandment. Now this Sabbath, or the seventh day was merely ceremonial, as it is called a sign between God and his people the Jews; that it was the Lord that did sanctify them; a people sanctified and set apart only for God. "Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep; for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you." {Ex.31:13} Therefore that God is all in all to us, and that we are to rest in God only and alone in the true mystery and morality of the Sabbath. To this the all the Prophets and Apostles bear witness. The prophet Isaiah speaking of the Sabbath, saith thus; "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, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words; then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD." {Is.58:13,14} Observe that the Sabbath indeed is nothing else but the Lord God rested on, and rejoiced in by us, when we turn away our foot from the Sabbath, and turn to God only; else he had said rather, "if thou turn thy foot to the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day;" but this last is not so read as we do, "from doing ,&c.," as if we were forbidden to do our pleasure on his holy day, on the Sabbath. Nay, we are there commanded to "do our pleasure," as the words read; for the Sabbath should be our delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable, and we shall honor Him; for he Himself is the Sabbath that is so honorable; the holy day of the Lord is the Holy One, the Lord Himself only, whom alone we are to honor in all our ways, works, and words; for if God be all in all to us in Christ, it is not our words that are spoken, nor our works that are done; but, as Christ saith, "the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works;" "I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things." {Jn.14:10, 8:28} This indeed is the sanctifying of the Sabbath, not to abstain from worldly thoughts and words, and from working on the seventh day of the week, but to sanctify the Lord alone, when he only is our all, then we are nothing. When we thus find not our own ways, nor speak our own words. Man neither speaks nor does anything indeed, but God does all, and is all to us in Christ. This the Apostle holds forth to be the Rest, or Sabbath keeping of the people of God. "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." {Heb.4:9} Not as if this were a rest after death, as most conceive and comment; but it is a rest to be entered into this life, "for we which have believed do enter into rest;" {vs.3;} and what is this rest? When do we enter into this rest? When we cease from our own works, as God did from his. "For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his." {vs.10} Therefore it's plain, that the seventh day or Sabbath of the Lord, was a figure or type of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, being our rest or Sabbath in truth. Yea, as the rest which Joshua gave to the people in the land of Canaan, was another type of this rest or Sabbath; {vs.8;} so surely the rest which Jesus Christ in truth did take in the Father, in the Father's dwelling in him, and doing all in him, was but a type of the same to us, that we should be and abide in God, and God in us all in all, as in him. "Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me; because I live, ye shall live also; at that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." {Jn.14:19,20} "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God." {I Jn.4:15} But as churches know not the mystery of Christ, of Christ in us, of the Son revealed to us, &c, so they know not the mystery and morality of the Sabbath; for how simple is it, what they say of the Lord's day; as if the eighth or first day of the week were the morality of the seventh or Jewish Sabbath? As if Christ's appearing so often after his resurrection on the

eighth day, were a proof of his changing the Sabbath so that that day were now to be holy, when as Peter with the apostles went out fishing on that day. John 21:1-3. His appearing so often on the eighth, or the first day of the week, was rather to show, that the observation of the seventh was gone, as the apostles also meeting that day was no more. For as their assembling in their Synagogues on the Sabbath day was only to preach unto the Jews, meeting in most multitudes on that day; so the apostles usual meeting on the first day of the week {I Cor.16:2} was merely for order only to set in order something in the churches and to perform some ordinances among them in the Spirit, as breaking of bread, &c. Truly for love and peace sake, I can rest and refrain from labor on that day, not in conscience, but in a civil respect, that men might show some kindness to the poor creature, that in mercy the beast might have some rest, and that laboring servants might have a day to rejoice in; therefore I will not trouble the State in this, but entreat them to consider their own liberty and ours, not to the flesh, but in Christ alone. If men knew the liberty of the Gospel and their Christian liberty and the true nature of the Sabbath day indeed, they would be truly blessed; but, as men do they know not what, and willfully offend, they obey neither Law nor Gospel, but are cursed in both. William Erbery {Call to the Churches - Collection of Letters - 1653}

Unity of the Spirit in Christ

What some Saints scoff at others, and other say of themselves, that they are above Ordinances, I cannot judge nor condemn; but for my own part, I do not profess myself above Ordinances, but far below them in mine own estimation; yet as far as I know, I am below any Gospel Ordinance, having not that manifestation of the Spirit that always accompanied them in the early churches, nor that presence and power of the Spirit appearing in me {as was in them} to carry me up from living in Ordinances, to live in Christ alone; nor yet that testimony of the Spirit to tell me, that in the use of Ordinances as they are, I may be preserved pure from that uncleanness which sticks upon them through the apostasy; for if everything in the churches is counted unclean by God, which is not wholly according to his Word, the Independent purest churches are not even clean, not being conformed to the first churches of Christ in any Gospel Ordinance or Order, but mere forms and confusion in all; therefore it is that I am thus a Non-conformist still, and separate myself from the churches and their ordinances as unclean. Common prayers, and the prayers of churches are both alike to me; the Prelates weekly Friday fasts, and the Presbyters monthly Wednesday fasts; yea the Independent feastings and days of Thanksgiving, are but as the holy days of bishops; so is their order, ordination, and every ordinance or work of their hands, saith the Prophet, it is unclean. "Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the LORD; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean." {Hag.2:14} Truly it was this that called upon me, "depart, depart, touch no unclean thing;" for that life and peace which I once found in Ordinances was departed from me, and myself dead unto them, as I believe many others are; though some Saints have still satisfaction and sweetness therein, and God seems to accept their prayers; yet this is no more than was before, when in our ignorance we used common prayers and mixed communions, &c. How sweet and satisfactory was God then unto us, though the use of those carnal ordinances was as unclean as the high places were of old to the people of God. God appeared to Solomon in Gibeon, though that great high place was never appointed by God for his people to worship in, but was contrary to his revealed will, yet he appeared to Solomon as well in Gibeon, as in the house of the Lord. {I Kg.9:2} Thus the Lord God and Father of mercies, who is free in his grace, abundant in goodness and truth, being not bound up to means, might appear for a time even comfortably to his people even in Gibeon, in corrupt forms and fellowships; not that he approves them, but that in his good pleasure he may manifest his everlasting love the more to his people, whose life is in their blood, as well as when they are washed, and

who look as beautiful before God when they are black, as when white and ruddy; yea, the love of God is the same to the Saints however they are, for it is not their best performances that please him, but he is well pleased and rests in the Son of his love; yea, that this love may appear more to his people in lowest performances, than in highest attainments. - When that holy anointing was found wanting in the Church, all her flesh, all her Forms and Ordinances did stink, and became defiled, as those that touched an unclean thing, or dead body; for the manifestation of the Spirit being departed from the Church, the Church must needs be a dead body, as those dry bones in Babylon signified the state of the Church in the apostasy, in spiritual Babylon; where the Church is not in the unity of the Spirit and bond of peace; but as those divided sticks in the Prophet's hand, the one for Judah and his companions, the other stick for Joseph and his companions. This is the dead divided state of the Church in Babylon, which is a city not in unity with itself as Jerusalem, but divided into three parts; so Babylon is, and so the churches in Babylon are Presbyterian, Independent, or Baptized; for though in the apostolic times, there were divisions between brother and brother in the churches; yet never was there a division between Church and Church, as at this day. All the brethren walked in one Church way, worshiping God with one consent, one Church Order, Ordinances, and Officers were all by the same Spirit alike in all the churches, who in this sense at least, kept the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; for as there was one body among all, so but one baptism; but as the churches are now divided bodies, so their baptisms are diverse, one Church baptizing the whole nation, another Church baptizing only the children of believers, and the third baptizing only believers themselves. - As there is not one Spirit, one baptism; so neither one body; and the body being divided, how can there be a communion, where there is no union; as in the churches appears, where there is not only division between brother and brother, {as in the apostolic churches,} but the division this day is between Church and Church, between body and body, which was never in the churches of Christ, when all the Saints were in Church Fellowship, and all walked in one Gospel way, had one way of worship; one baptism, one Spirit, one body. The churches this day do not discern the Lord's body, they discern not the Lord's body now in Babylon, nor themselves as those dry bones and divided sticks, {not branches, but sticks,} without sap or spirit of life appearing in them. {Ez.37:15-17} - Therefore I called the present churches, harlots and whores; and why should any take offense at my words; seeing that each Church calls the other a whore. For though Rome be the Mother of harlots, {Rev.17:5,} yet reformed and most refined churches may be her daughters. William Erbery {Honest Heretic, or Orthodox Blasphemer, 1652}

Note: William Erbury {1604-1654} was heretical in much that he taught, and denied the Glory of Christ as set forth in the Gospel; nevertheless we feel his remarks here {concerning the Sabbath & Unity of the Spirit} worthy of insertion.