

## **1. The General Importance of the Sabbath**

For much of the twentieth century, many people smoked cigarettes on a regular basis.

Hardly anyone thought about the harmful effects that might result from the practice.

Today, however, things have changed to the degree that society has swung to the opposite extreme. In most places, the use of all tobacco products is virtually forbidden in public, and many scorn even a legitimate and moderate use of them. It is often the case that harmful practices are taken for granted by the masses with no suspicion that these practices are threatening to kill an entire generation. “Is Sabbath breaking a very horrible crime? – A. Yes; it is a sin against great love, and the source of many other sins; God commanded a man to be stoned to death for gathering sticks on the Sabbath; and hath threatened and destroyed nations for the breach of it.”

We live in a time of crisis with respect to Sabbath-keeping. Even considering the barest minimum application of Sabbath-keeping (that we should refrain from our regular employment on the day), most professing Christians will readily agree to work on the Sabbath if requested. Some do so with a sense of uneasiness, but they are nevertheless willing to sacrifice conscience to the pressures of employers. They often receive encouragement from their churches to do so. Many do not self-consciously make Sabbath-keeping a matter of worship and obedience to the Lord, even though they take it for granted that the fourth commandment is still binding upon believers. These symptoms reveal that most Christians underestimate the importance Scripture attaches to Sabbath-keeping. They are also symptoms of more fundamental problems, which will be addressed later in this book. For this reason, I have not begun this book with the profit of Sabbath-keeping. In Scripture, Sabbath-breaking is presented as one of the greatest

causes of the weakness of the church and serves as a lighting rod that attracts the judgment of God to churches and nations. When the church has largely neglected a practice that fosters such devastating consequences, she incurs the loss of great blessings. The return of these blessing, however, often begins by sounding an alarm.

My purpose in this chapter is earnestly to plead with you to study the matter of Sabbath-keeping in light of the importance attached to it in the Scriptures. The Sabbath is not a peripheral issue, but rather a matter of great importance to the well-being and prosperity of the church. The importance of the Sabbath is demonstrated by its place among creation ordinances, because it is sign of the covenant of grace, because of its frequent mention in Scripture (particularly the prophets), because of its relation to Israel's exile, and because of its purpose as a day of worship.