

# Unscriptural Holydays Examined: Sabbath Afternoon Study.

## Summary of Arguments Against Holydays Appointed by Men.

Most of the reasons against religious holydays of human institution may be reduced to four or five categories:

1. From the Association with Superstitious and Idolatrous customs of the Heathen:  
Deut. 12.30; Jer. 10.2-4; 2 Cor. 6.15-16.
2. From the Association with Worldliness, Vanity, and Vice we should Renounce:  
Romans 12.2; 1 John 2.15-16.
3. From the Liberty Granted in the Gospel, against the Bondage of man's Institutions:  
Gal. 4.9-10; Exod. 20.8-11; Gal. 5.1.
4. From the Prohibition of All Worship not Instituted by the Lord:  
Deut. 12.32; Col. 2.18,23.
5. From our Savior's Assessment of the Traditions of Men as Vain Worship:  
Matth. 15.3,9; Isa. 29.13; Isa. 1.12

Excerpts from

A Re-Examination of the Five Articles at Perth anno 1618.  
By David Calderwood, 1636.

## REASONS AGAINST THE FESTIVAL DAYS.

WE shall consider these days, first as they are called holy, next as they are called festival.

*Our first reason.*

**G**Od only hath power to sanctify a day, and make it holy, that is, to separate it from a common use to holy exercises. [Zanchius](#) affirmeth, [tom. 4. col 655,] that it is proper to God to choose any person, or any thing to consecrate and sanctify it to himself. *Willet*, that it belongeth only to the Creator, to sanctify the creature. [Synop. p. 501.] *Perkins*, *Kuchlinus*, and others, say the like. [Kuchlinus in Catechismo. Perkins Galat. 4.] Master *Cowper*, pretended bishop of Galloway, confessed no King, no church could make an holy day. The like was acknowledged by Master *Galloway*, in one of his Christmas sermons. But so it is, that God hath permitted six days to man for the work of his calling, and selected the seventh to himself, to be spent in his service. Seeing therefore God hath given liberty to man to work six days, and counteth them common and profane, no man ought to be compelled to keep them holy, but when God himself maketh exception, as he did by the yoke of some anniversary days under the

law; or calleth us to a present humiliation or thanksgiving. The civil magistrate may command cessation from work for a politick end, as weapon-showing, exercise of arms, defence of a city or fort of the country, but that is not to enjoin a holy day, nor yet a mere idle day, but that œconomical and private work give place to publick and politick. *Paræus in epist ad Romano, cap. 14. dub. 4., &c.*

*Subtle Counter-Arguments of the Episcopalians Described and Answered:*

The Doctor saith, some days were made holy, not only because they were dedicated to the worship of God, but because a special worship was appointed by God, and appropriated to them, as the feast of the passover, or whitsunday, [*pentecost.*] Other times were holy only by reason of the use or divine worship performed on them, and not for mystery or solemn worship appropriated to them. He saith, “our divines mean only, that it is only proper to God, to make days holy after the first manner, but not after the second”; which is false, as may appear by their description of sanctifying a day, which is generally to set it apart to an holy use, and not to a mystical only. Next, by such an answer men make holydays like the Lord’s day.

His comparison with the temple of Jerusalem, and the synagogues and Christian churches will not help him, unless the synagogues and Christian churches answer in holiness to the sabbath and the Lord’s day, as he saith, the temple did to the anniversary feasts, which, I trust, he will not maintain. And this same comparison of time and place shall clear and confirm our argument. For as no man can sanctify a place, or make it holy, but God, that is, set it so apart from all worldly uses, that it shall be a profaning of it to entertain any worldly purpose or triste [*appointment, meeting*] in it, or carry a vessel through it, and to be bound to holy exercises in it, otherwise it cannot be said to be sanctified, and set apart to God, if it stand up like an idol, so no man can sanctify a day, that is, set it so apart to God, that when it recurrerth weekly, monthly, or yearly, we must not use worldly, but must use holy exercises. But the first is true, none but God can appoint such a place, and under the New Testament he hath appointed no such place.

► Christian churches or houses are builded for the commodity of God’s people to defend them from the injury of the weather, to serve them to sit in commodiously, when they are convened to serve God, which use is civil, and is common to houses builded for civil meetings. The congregation may permit the use of their church to a civil meeting, without prejudice to their own liberty to meet when they have occasion. Next, the congregation is not bound to meet in that house, but may forsake it, and take them to another. But if it were sanctified and set apart to God, they should be bound to use it. Our churches then are dedicate to the communalty of the faithful, within such a precinct for the uses foresaid, as a statehouse or judgment hall may be dedicated to a city, but they are not sanctified and made holy to God. Our prayers are not more holy or better heard in this or that temple, than at home, saith *Whittaker* in his answer to *Duræus*, [*Opera. pag. 232,*] but that God is more moved, when the faithful meet together to pray. Impertinently doth the Doctor allege the hours appointed for preaching in the week, or prayers morning and evening. For these are not hours sanctified, or consecrated to God’s service, but the most convenient times men find in their wisdom, when most may resort to hearing of sermons and prayers, which may and ought to be changed, when occasions offer a more convenient time. So time is designed occasionally, not dedicated or sanctified. Time is made to serve God’s people, and not God’s people made to serve the time, or to serve God, because it is a holy time.

## THE DEFINITION OF A FESTIVAL DAY.

**J**udicious Piscator defineth thus a festival day, *Festum proprie loquendo*, etc.; that is, *A feast or festival day is a public or solemn ceremony, commanded by God to be executed at a certain time of the year, with singular gladness, to give God thanks for some certain benefit bestowed on his people.* Hooker the master of ceremonies, maketh festival solemnity to be nothing else, but the divine mixture, as it were, of these three elements, praises set forth with cheerful alacrity of mind, delight expressed by charitable largeness more than common bounty, and sequestration from ordinary works. [Policy 5 book, sect. 72.]

The sabbath under the law was never called (in the original) *jom tob*, a good, that is, a merry day, as were the solemn anniversary feasts. Other days also, which were not solemn feasts, were so called, as days of banqueting and feasting. *Drusius* in his annotations upon *Esther* 9, citeth *Elias Thesbite* to this purpose. Master *Ainsworth* in his annotations upon Exodus 16, citeth the Chaldee paraphrase, speaking of the sabbaths and good days, that is, the solemn feasts as distinct things. *Buxtorsius* also in *abbreviaturis*. So the Lord's day succeeding to the old sabbath, should not be ranked among the festival days or feasts, as the word is taken in our common language. The definitions agree not to the Lord's day. It is not an anniversary, but a weekly day. It is not instituted for the commemoration of a particular benefit, but for the worship of God at large, as the moral law requireth, and as the old sabbath did.

## THE II. REASON.

**N**One appointed holy festivities under the law, when the times were more ceremonious, but God himself.

The days of *Purim* were called simply the days of *Purim*, not the holy days of *Purim*. They were not called *Chaggim*. [חגים] No peculiar sacrifice was appointed, nor any holy convocation of the people enjoined. The ordinance required but feasting and joy, and sending of portions to other. The rest mentioned *Esther* 9, was only from their enemies. So much work as might stand with a feasting day was not forbidden. Suppose they had rested altogether from work, that would only prove an idle day, but not an holy day. Our Doctor therefore hath no warrant to say, that they were made holy days by *Mordecai*. Afterward, it is true, when the Jews [had] become more superstitious, they read the book of *Esther*, after the reading whereof they spent the rest of the day in reveling and riotousness.

## THE III. REASON.

**N**either Christ nor his Apostles appointed festival days to be observed by Christians, but rather inhibited the observation of them, and changed only the old sabbath to the first day of the week. The anniversary solemnities were not changed but abrogated, because ceremonial.

We find not the Apostles or Christian Churches in their time observed any festival or anniversary days. That pentecost mentioned 1 *Corin.* 16, and *Acts* 20, was the Jews' Pentecost. *Bellarmino* himself dare not affirme, that it was the Christians'. The Apostle having occasion

to treat upon this subject, condemneth observation of days, *Gal. 4, Coloss. 2*. Suppose, which is more likely, that the Galatians embraced the observation of the Jewish days, *Galate potius Judaizabant quam astrologicas regulas servabant*. [Whitak. cont. 1 quest. 6. cap. 12.] Yet the Apostle reasoneth against all observation of such like days as judaizing. As if he had said, the observation of ceremonial days, months, and years, was convenient for God's people under the law for their instruction, and to shaddow things to come, because of their non-age, and was a pedagogical and rudimentary instruction, which beseemeth not the state of a Christian Church, and clear light of the Gospel. These days were all ceremonial, yea, the very days of *Purim*, and the days of dedication.

#### THE IV. REASON.

**I**F it had been the will of God, that the several acts of Christ should have been celebrated with several solemnities, the Holy Ghost would have made known the day of his nativity, circumcision, presentation to the temple, baptism, transfiguration, and the like. For it is kindly, say they, to remember "the notable work of a day in the own day," [or, *in its own day*.] *Bellarmino* saith, that Christ's acts did consecrate the days and times wherein they were wrought. *Hooker* saith, that the wonderous works of God did advance the days and times wherein they were wrought. There is not a day in the year, wherein some wonderous work of God hath not been wrought. All the days of the year, saith *Leo*, are full of Christ's miracles. If Christ's actions advance and consecrate the days whereon they were wrought, they ought to have been made known, lest we keep holy such days as were never consecrated or advanced. But it is confessed, that the day of Christ's nativity, and consequently of the rest depending thereupon, as of his circumcision, presentation, baptism, have been hid from mortal men. And therefore the day of Christ's nativity was observed diversely of old, by some in one month, by some in another.

#### THE V. REASON.

**S**uppose the observing of holy days had at the first been a matter indifferent, yet seeing they have been abused and polluted with superstition, they ought to be abolished. Upon this ground *Zanchius* inferreth, *Non male igitur, &c, They have therefore not done amiss, who have abolished all other holy days but the Lord's day*. [Tom. 4. col. 678.] If Hezekiah's fact in breaking the brazen serpent be laudable, by which he confirmeth that rule, then their fact is laudable also. But sure it is, that in former ages holy days have not only been abused with profane and licentious reveling and surfeiting, but also polluted with the opinion of worship, merit, necessity, and a Judaical conceit, that the devil is not so bold to tempt men on these days as at other times. And therefore, saith *Zanchius*, Magicians observe holy days to exercise their magical feats with the greater efficacy. The Lord's day itself may bee abused, but because the observation is necessary in respect of divine institution, it cannot be removed for the abuses of men. But the festival days were not appointed by God. *The number, the abuses, the will-worships of feasts so increased, that there is nothing so unsavoury to God, so pernicious to men, as to sanctify such and so many days*, saith the same *Zanchius*.

## OF FESTIVAL DAYS — Their History in Protestant Scotland.

IN the explication of the first head of the [First Book of Discipline, penned anno 1560](#), the first year of universal reformation, it was thought good, that the feasts of *Christmas*, *Circumcision*, *Epiphany*, with the feasts of *Apostles*, *Martyrs*, and *Virgin Mary*, be utterly abolished, because they are neither commanded nor warranted by the Scripture, and that the obstinate maintainers of those and the like abominations be punished by the civil magistrate. Here utter abolition is craved, and not a reformation of abuses only, and that because observation of such feasts have no warrant from the word. In the general assembly holden at *Edinburgh*, anno 1566, the later confession of Helvetia was approved, but with special exception against the same five days, which are now urged upon us. It was not then the popish observation only, with the popish opinion of worship and merit, but *simpliciter* all observation, that was disallowed by them. ► In the assembly holden anno 1575, complaint was made against the ministers and readers beside Aberdeen, because they assembled the people to prayer and preaching upon certain festival days. Ye see not only profanity, but preaching and prayer of purpose upon festival days were judged rebukable. It was ordained likewise, that complaint be made to the Regent, upon the town of Dunfreis, for urging and convoying a reader to the Church with tabret and whistle, to read prayers all the holy days of Christmas, upon the refusal of their own reader. Item, an article was formed to be presented to the Regent, craving that all days heretofore kept holy in time of papistry beside the Lords Day, be abolished, and that a civil penalty be inflicted upon the observers. In the assembly holden in April, anno 1577, it was ordained, that the visitor, with the advice of the synodal assembly, shall admonish ministers, preaching or ministering the communion at *Easter* or *Christmas*, or other like superstitious times, or readers reading, to desist, under the pain of deprivation. Ye see reading, preaching, and ministering the communion at those times was forbidden, and not only cessation from work, and excess of banqueting, playing, etc. ► In the ninth head of the First Book of Discipline, we have this reason set down against Easter communion, *Your honours are not ignorant how superstitiously the people run to that action at Pasche, even as if the time gave virtue to the sacrament, and how the rest of the whole year, they are careless and negligent as if it appertained not to them, but at that time only.* And for this reason other times were appointed by that book for that holy action. In the general assembly holden anno 1590, King James praised God, that he was born to be a king in the sincerest Church of the world, sincerer than the Church of England, for their service was an ill-said mass in English; sincerer than Geneva itself, for they observed *Pasch* and *Yule*, and what warrant, said he, have they for that? In the assembly holden anno 1596, when the covenant was renewed, superstition and idolatry breaking forth in keeping of festival days, setting out of bonfires, and singing of carols, are reckoned among the corruptions, which were to be amended. ► In the parliament holden anno 1592, we have acts to this purpose. The pulpits have sounded from time to time against all show of observing these days. But in the pretended and null-assembly holden at Perth, anno 1618, it was concluded by a number, not having power of voice, or broken with threats or allurements, that every minister shall make commemoration of the birth, passion, resurrection, ascension of Christ, and sending down of the holy Ghost, upon the days appointed for that use, that they make choice of several and pertinent texts of scriptures, and frame their doctrine and exhortations accordingly. This their conclusion was ratified by act of council, and proclamation was made thereupon, upon the 26th of October following, commanding cessation from all kind of labour or handy-work upon these

five days, appointed to be dedicate to God's service, to the effect the subjects may the better attend the exercises, which are to be kept in the Churches at these times.

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Historical Notes: The Reasons above are each developed at greater length in the full publication from David Calderwood in 1636. His original examination of the articles of Perth was issued in 1619 in direct response to the Assembly at Perth, and is titled "Perth Assembly," etc. On the title page he quoted Exodus 20.7 & Colos. 2.8, "Beware lest there be any that spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, through the [traditions of men](#), according to the rudiments of the World, and not of Christ." In it he presented eight reasons against Festival Days. The re-examination of 1636 offers much of the same material, and the section recounting the history of previous acts of assembly was later incorporated into the Act of the 1638 General Assembly abjuring the Articles of Perth. In the year 1637 the Episcopalian party attempted to impose its new ritualistic "Book of Common Prayer" on the Church of Scotland, along with a Book of Canons. The same year, [George Gillespie](#) published his "Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies Obtruded on the Church of Scotland." In the first part, he discusses the necessity of the various ceremonies imposed by the Episcopal party, and whether festival days in particular take away our Christian Liberty. For example...

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First Argument: I will now instance of festival days in particular, and prove, both out of the law and gospel, that they take away our liberty which God hath given us, and which no human power can take from us. Out of the law we frame this argument: If the law of God permit us to work all the six days of the week, the law of man cannot inhibit us. But the law of God doth permit us to work all the six days of the week, therefore, etc.

My second argument whereby I prove that the imposing of the observation of holidays doth bereave us of our liberty, I take out of two places of the Apostle, the one, Gal. 4.10, where he finds fault with the Galatians for observing of days, and giveth them two reasons against them; the one, ver. 3, They were a yoke of bondage which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear; another, ver, 8, They were weak and beggarly rudiments, not beseeming the Christian church, which is liberate from the pedagogical instruction of the ceremonial law. The other place is Col. 2.16, where the Apostle will have the Colossians not to suffer themselves to be judged by any man in respect of an holiday, i.e. to be condemned for not observing a holiday.

... They will tell us that they urge not the ceremonies as necessary in themselves, but only as necessary in respect of the church's determination, and because of the necessity of obeying those who are set over us. But, I pray, is not this as much as the *Rhemists* say, who place the necessity of their rites and observances, not in the nature of the things themselves, but in the church's precept?

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*Gillespie also discusses the lawfulness of these Ceremonies & Holidays, developing an argument to show their unlawfulness from the Superstition of them. In another chapter he shows they are unlawful because they "sort us with idolaters, being the badges of present idolatry among the Papists."*

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Q. Which arguments against holydays are most likely to depend on resolution of facts and debates of history, previous usage, and definitions of terms?

A. Arguments which appeal to association with pagan practices, or the general tendency of holydays.

Q. Which arguments against holydays are most hopeful for keeping the discussion closed to accessory debates and focused on God's word?

A. Arguments which appeal to the Bible's doctrine of worship and Jesus' rejection of human traditions.