

Lesson 27: 2LCF Chapter 22: Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day (Part 2)

-“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. 11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Exodus 20:8-11

It is scarcely an exaggeration to assert that the concept of Sabbath has fallen into substantial neglect by many professing Christians and local churches in recent years. Whether it is the result of ignorance and biblical illiteracy, confusion arising from novel theological frameworks, such as dispensationalism and New Covenant Theology, or simple disobedience, the church’s effectiveness and witness have been greatly hindered by its failure to “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8).

Many have sought to discern the detrimental effects of this failure to obey God’s fourth commandment, but perhaps few are as sobering as the observation of Joseph A. Pipa. In his important book on the subject, he writes:

Is it not possible that one reason for the spiritual weakness of the church is her failure to honour God on the Lord’s day? Is it not possible that one reason our churches are not more effective in reaching the lost is because we are not practising the Sabbath-keeping that brings us victory? Could this be true of us as individuals as well? Is it not possible that you continue to fall under the dominion of some particular sin because you have refused to sanctify God’s day in your heart? We lack victory because we have failed to recognize and utilize one of the God-given means of victory, while those who keep the Sabbath have victory.

A Brief History

As we consider this important theme, it may first be helpful to consider how it was that we arrived at our current situation.

Early Church

From the earliest days in the history of the church, there have been extensive discussions about the Christian’s relationship to the Sabbath.

In the first centuries after Christ, many of the Apostolic and Early Church Fathers were forced to defend the doctrine and practice of the Christian Sabbath (or “The Lord’s Day”) in the face of those who contended for the continued observance of the Jewish Sabbath on the seventh day. With Holy Scripture as their guide, they sought to preserve the vital importance of the Lord’s day as a matter of Christian faithfulness and obedience. R.L. Dabney observes that it was men like Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Eusebius who were among the first to affirm that the first day of the week, known as the Lord’s day, was to be “the queen and chief of all the days.”²⁹²

²⁹² Robert Lewis Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Richmond, VA: Union Theological Seminary, 1878) 652-53. <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/dabney/Systematic%20Theology%20-%20RL%20Dabney.pdf>.

Justin Martyr

“And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen... But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead.”²⁹³

The Didache

“But every Lord’s day gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure.”²⁹⁴

Epistle of Barnabas

“Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead.”²⁹⁵

In their writings, these men recounted how the Lord’s day was the appointed day when every obedient Christian, according to the commandments of God, observed the day of Christ’s resurrection by directing their thoughts Godward, joyfully singing Psalms and hymns, reading the scriptures, exhorting from the Word of God, and enjoying communion with one another.

The Reformation

Following the advent of the Protestant Reformation, the doctrine of the Christian Sabbath again came under increased scrutiny by various groups. Whereas the Reformers and English Puritans were eager to observe the Christian Sabbath, Joel Beeke notes that men like Peter Heylyn (1599-1662), the Anglican chaplain to King Charles, mounted an attack against the Puritan observance of the Lord’s day.²⁹⁶

It was during this time, in the middle of the 1600s, that the Puritans began to be noticed for their strong convictions about observing the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day, as a continuation of God’s Sabbath day. Convinced of this “evangelical Sabbath,” as John Owen coined it, the Puritan would typically arise on Sunday mornings, spend time in private and family devotions and then they would head off to church. And what a day it was!

Beginning in mid-morning, they would spend three hours in joyous corporate worship—with singing, and praying, and preaching, and the ordinances. Then, after a hearty meal and some rest, they would follow this up with another three hours of corporate worship with their dear church in the afternoon.

According to their convictions, Sunday was to be given fully to ceasing from their work, resting from responsibilities at their vocations and at home, and rejoicing all the day in God their Saviour

²⁹³ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, ch. 67.

²⁹⁴ *The Didache* (The Teaching), ch. 14.

²⁹⁵ *Epistle of Barnabas*, ch. 15.

²⁹⁶ Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 660-61.

through Jesus Christ. They considered the Lord's Day to be the very best day of the week, when they would be fully freed up from worldly obligations to seek the God whom their souls loved.

For the Puritans, this was an earnest conviction that set them apart from their contemporaries. In many ways, they were a peculiar people, but few things set them apart like their convictions about the Lord's Day.

For this reason, the Puritans were often mocked and derided. They were despised by some as being too rigid and legalistic. And, though their observance of the Lord's Day was a day of happy meditation upon God and the Gospel, it was this practice that first earned them that scornful title: "The Puritans". During this era, Puritan Christians often referred to the Lord's Day as the "market day of the soul." To the Puritans, the Sabbath was "a glorious privilege with great promises attached... this day above all other days to conduct spiritual commerce."²⁹⁷

To combat the Puritan's fervour, the Church of England began formally sponsoring activities on Sundays to steer the surrounding culture and even Puritan Christians away from such intense devotion on the Lord's Day. The Church of England formally endorsed Sunday archery competitions, public dancing events, and other activities that put many people back to work and sought to distract many others from spending their days in public and private worship. Even the Anglican chaplain of King Charles fiercely criticized the Puritans for what he labelled their "overzealous" worship of God.

Thomas Watson

"The hand cannot be busied on the Lord's-day but the heart will be defiled... To do servile work on the Sabbath shows an irreligious heart, and greatly offends God."²⁹⁸

John Owen

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ... This therefore contains the whole... the holy rest is to be spent about the Ordinances of God, the hearing of the Word and prayer."²⁹⁹

Richard Baxter

"As I have told you the Lord's-day is not a Sabbath in the Jewish sense, or a day of ceremonial rest, but a day of worshipping our Creator and Redeemer with thankful commemorations and with holy joy..."³⁰⁰

The Modern Era

Following the Enlightenment, the popular view of Sunday began to evolve from a day of worship and rest, to a day of recreation and leisure. With expanding industrialization and technological advances (ie. transportation and communication), the Puritan's view of the Lord's Day further eroded. Eventually the effects of Dispensationalism, theological liberalism, and secularization undermined the foundations of the Lord's Day observance to such a great degree that any mention

²⁹⁷ Joseph A. Pipa, *The Lord's Day* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 1997), 41-42.

²⁹⁸ Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments* (in *Works*), (London: c. 17th c.), see "The Fourth Commandment," para. beginning "The hand cannot be busied..."; online text, CCEL.

²⁹⁹ John Owen, *A Treatise on the Sabbath (Exercitations on the Sabbath and the Lord's Day)* (London: 17th c.). Retrieved from: https://www.thecalvinist.net/files/John%20Owen%20-%20Exercitations%20On%20The%20Sabbath%20and%20the%20Lord%27s%20Day.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

³⁰⁰ Richard Baxter, *The Divine Appointment of the Lord's-Day, Proved as a Separated Day for Holy Worship* (London: Nevil Simmons, 1671), 89,

of the Christian Sabbath or the observance of the Lord's Day attracted ire of the average Christian who was more than happy to label such an observance legalistic.

This represents brief summary of the history of the issue.

But, what does Scripture have to say on the subject?

Today we will interact with the teaching of Scripture while simultaneously interacting with the assertions of the Confession.

Outline

Paragraphs 7-8

V. Its appointed day

A. Its institution (Paragraph 7)

B. Its sanctification (Paragraph 8)

Paragraph 7.

As it is the law of nature, that in general a proportion of time, by God's appointment, be set apart for the worship of God, so by his Word, in a positive moral, and perpetual commandment, binding all men, in all ages, he has particularly appointed one day in seven for a sabbath to be kept holy unto him, which from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ was the last day of the week, and from the resurrection of Christ was changed into the first day of the week, which is called the Lord's Day: and is to be continued to the end of the world as the Christian Sabbath, the observation of the last day of the week being abolished.

Exod. 20:8; 1 Cor. 16:1,2; Acts 20:7; Rev. 1:10

Exposition

Paragraph seven of the Confession asserts the observance of the Christian Sabbath, or the Lord's Day, remains morally binding upon all Christians today. Sam Waldron summarizes this: "Just as every other major element of worship is appointed by God and not by ecclesiastical authority, even so the day of public worship is not left for man to decide. By a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment, God appoints the day."³⁰¹ But, does this align with Scripture?

The Sabbath as a Creation Ordinance

Genesis 2:1-3

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. 2 And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. 3 So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

The Sabbath Modelled and Sanctified

In Scripture we find the Sabbath modelled by the Lord at creation.

It has been rightly pointed out that the Lord did not rest because he was tired, but in order to establish a weekly pattern of rest. Matthew Henry has written on this point: "God did not rest as one

³⁰¹ Samuel E. Waldron, "Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day," in *A New Exposition of the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, ed. Rob Ventura (Ross-shire: Mentor, 2022), 399.

weary, but as one well pleased.”³⁰² John MacArthur similarly adds: “God certainly did not rest due to weariness; rather, establishing the pattern for man’s work cycle, He only modelled the need for rest. Later, the Sabbath ordinance of Moses found its basis in the creation week (cf. Ex. 20:8–11). The Sabbath was God’s sacred ordained day in the weekly cycle.”³⁰³ Furthermore, Beeke, Barrett, and Wilkes summarize: “Set apart the entire day as holy. By His own example in the creation week, God instituted a pattern of six days of work and the seventh day for rest from ordinary labor and for holy assembly for worship” (Gen. 2:1–3; Lev. 23:3).³⁰⁴

How can it be asserted that this was given to man as a model. This can be argued from the repetition of the word “work” in passage.

In vv. 2-3, is this word “work” is repeated three separate times. Here we read that God finished his work in v. 2a. God rested from his work in v. 2b, and again God rested from his work in v. 3. In each instance, the ordinary word for God’s work is not utilized (ie. 1 Chronicles 16:9). Instead the ordinary word for man’s work is utilized. Some commentators have pointed out that this word has been deliberately chosen to hint that man should stop his daily work on the seventh day.

This is further confirmed by the observance of the Sabbath prior to the giving of the 10 Commandments:

Exodus 16:27-30

27 On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. 28 And the LORD said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws? 29 See! The LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day.” 30 So the people rested on the seventh day.

John Calvin:

“God rested; then he blessed this rest, that in all ages it might be held sacred among men: or he dedicated every seventh day to rest, that his own example might be a perpetual rule. The design of the institution must be always kept in memory: for God did not command men simply to keep holiday every seventh day, as if he delighted in their indolence [or idleness]; but rather that they, being released from all other business, might the more readily apply their minds to the Creator of the world. Lastly, that is a sacred rest which withdraws men from the impediments of the world, that it may dedicate them entirely to God.”

The Sabbath Morally Commanded

Exodus 20:8-10

8 “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates.

³⁰² Matthew Henry and Thomas Scott, *Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), Ge 2:1.

³⁰³ John MacArthur Jr., ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 18.”

³⁰⁴ Joel R. Beeke, Michael P. V. Barrett, and Gerald M. Bilkes, eds., *The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 118.

Here we see that God also commanded the keeping of the Sabbath through the giving of His moral law, specifically in the Decalogue.

In Exodus 20, when the Lord met with Moses on Mount Sinai, he included an explicit command regarding the Sabbath as one of the 10 commandments that were to have special significance for the people of God. This list of commands addressed the most important vertical and horizontal aspects of human conduct. Included in the first table of the law was the explicit command to “remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.” Just as God had blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy at the end of the creation week, the people of God were commanded to perpetually sanctify that day in their hearts.

At this point, some might contend that this moral law has been rendered obsolete by the inauguration of the New Covenant. However, a careful examination of Scripture shows that the 10 commandments that were given to Moses on Mount Sinai continue to be binding upon “all men, in all ages”, including Christians in the 21st Century. Samuel Waldron notes that the 10 commandments are altogether unique and transcend the civil and ceremonial laws; he argues that this is demonstrated by the fact that the 10 commandments were verbally spoken by the mouth of God, they were written in stone by the finger of God, they were stored for the future in the Ark of God, and, most compelling of all, it was promised in Jeremiah 31:33 that they would be written anew on the hearts of the New Covenant people of God. The Decalogue was given as a list of perpetual moral laws, because they reflect the perpetual moral nature of God.³⁰⁵

The Sabbath in the New Testament

It has frequently been argued by those who oppose the Christian Sabbath that Jesus did very little to commend the observance of the Sabbath. Furthermore, some have even suggested that Christ sought to minimize the importance of the Sabbath during his earthly ministry. What we find in the gospels, however, is the polar opposite. In the face of many perversions of the Sabbath day in first-century Israel, Christ taught and modelled faithful observance of the Sabbath. In fact, it has been correctly pointed out that Christ spent significantly more time teaching on the observance of the Sabbath than many of the other laws included in the Decalogue. Pipa observes,

In the three years of Christ’s ministry recorded in the Gospels, on six different occasions, He crossed swords with the Jews over the proper observance of the Sabbath... Christ himself taught six times about the Sabbath, whereas he taught on only one occasion about murder and three times on marriage. If this commandment were destined for the dustbin of ceremonial law, why did the gospel writers devote so much attention to it? Can you think of any ceremonial law regarding which Jesus spent so much time trying to correct people’s practice? No.³⁰⁶

When we search the gospels, rather than finding a Christ who is ambivalent towards the Sabbath, we find that Jesus Christ loved and observed the Sabbath. When the Lord Jesus was confronted by a Pharisaical perversion of the Sabbath in Matthew’s gospel, he not only taught on the Sabbath, but declared Himself to be the “Lord of the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:8).

Matthew 12:8

For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.”

³⁰⁵ Samuel E. Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, 5th ed. (Welwyn Garden City, UK: EP Books, 2016), 322-23.

³⁰⁶ Joseph A. Pipa, *The Lord’s Day* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 1997), 73.

Similarly, in Mark's account of the same interaction, Christ did not use this exchange as an opportunity to denounce the Sabbath, but instead commended the Sabbath with these words:

Mark 2:27-28

27 And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. 28 So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

Interestingly, we also find that Christ made a point of healing the afflicted on the Sabbath day (Luke 13:10-17; Mark 3:4; Matthew 12:12). This demonstrates that Christ saw the Sabbath day as a special opportunity, not only for rest, worship, and the reading and teaching of God's Word, but also as a day for compassion; this is consistent with multiple passages in the Old Testament that speak of the Sabbath and acts mercy in the same context (Isaiah 58:6-14; Ezekiel 22:26-29). When we consider the life and ministry of Jesus, we find only repeated and consistent affirmations that the Sabbath remains a day of special blessing for the people of God.

Hebrews 4:9

8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. 9 So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, 10 for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

The Reformation Heritage Study Bible provides the following commentary this passage:

The original Greek uses two words in this chapter that are both translated as rest. The most frequent word refers to "a place of rest" (katapausis). The other word for rest (v. 9) is literally, "Sabbatism" (sabbatismos), which is understood by some as a "state of rest," or by others, as "the keeping of Sabbath." works were finished from the foundation of the world. God's rest stretches back to creation (Gen. 2:2).³⁰⁷

Here Hebrews 4:9 makes reference to a Sabbath rest that was experienced in the past, that is currently experienced in Christ in the present, and will be experienced in the future at Christ's second coming.

The Sabbath Changed to the First Day of the Week

The confession states that the Sabbath is a "positive" commandment, that *"from the resurrection of Christ was changed into the first day of the week which is called the Lord's Day: and is to be continued to the end of the world as the Christian Sabbath, the observation of the last day of the week being abolished."*

Not only is the Christian Sabbath natural, creational, and moral, but the Confession, in harmony with the New Testament, teaches that the Sabbath is a positive-moral enactment. If the New Testament epistles were silent on the matter of the Sabbath or the weekly pattern of rest and worship, one might justifiably ask what became of the Sabbath after Christ. However, in the New Testament epistles, we instead find the continuation of the Sabbath principle observed on the first day of the week. Three texts may be cited to demonstrate the continued practice of weekly rest and worship by New Testament Christians.

- Firstly, Acts 20:7 clearly shows that the church met on the first day of the week for corporate worship.
- Secondly, in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 we read that the church in Corinth was to take up an offering on the first day of the week for the impoverished saints in Jerusalem. Implicit in the Apostle

³⁰⁷ Joel R. Beeke, Michael P. V. Barrett, and Gerald M. Bilkes, eds., The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 1787.

Paul's directive is the church's established practice of assembling for public worship on the first day of the week.

- Thirdly, in Revelation 1:10, we see that this first day of the week had already been recognized with its own distinct title. In commemoration of Christ's triumphant resurrection, this day of Christian Sabbath was commonly known as the "Lord's day."

Despite the alteration from the seventh day to the first day, the substance and practice of observing one day in seven went altogether unchanged. However, it is here that one might conceivably ask how this change took place.

If the Sabbath is a moral and perpetual law, how can the day of its observance be altered?

This is possible because, while the law of nature insists that an appointed day of worship is binding upon all men, this natural law is not able to specify which day that should be. The specification of a day is given only by positive enactment through special revelation. Pipa writes, "A positive law is a commandment of God that is not morally necessary... Such laws are only binding on the person or nation to whom they were given."³⁰⁸ This means that while an appointed day of worship is necessary under the moral law, God may alter the day on which it is observed. Renihan affirms, "Since the positive aspect of the command could be changed, from the resurrection of Christ the obligation to observe the seventh day Sabbath has ended, and the first day of the week, which is called the Lord's day, has become a day of rest in the new creation."³⁰⁹ While the day of its observance has been altered through positive enactment, it remains the duty and privilege of every Christian to obey the Sabbath as a special day of blessed worship and rest.

An observant student of Scripture will note that there are numerous other positive enactments that have been altered throughout the canon of Scripture; this includes the cessation of circumcision and the Passover meal, and the addition of the related ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. One must therefore conclude that the affirmation of the moral and perpetual nature of the Christian Sabbath is not only found throughout all of church history, but throughout all of Scripture as well.

Paragraph 8.

The sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering their common affairs aforehand, do not only observe a holy rest all day, from their own works, words and thoughts, about their worldly employment and recreations, but are also taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of his worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.

Isa. 58:13; Neh. 13:15-22; Matt. 12:1-13

Exposition

Because the Christian Sabbath is binding on all Christians in all ages, it is incumbent upon the New Covenant people of God to zealously, judiciously, and joyfully remember and obey the fourth commandment. Michael Borg reminds Christians that they are commanded to "remember" the

³⁰⁸ Joseph A. Pipa, *The Lord's Day* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 1997), 26.

³⁰⁹ James M. Renihan, *To the Judicious and Impartial Reader: A Contextual-Historical Exposition of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith, Baptist Symbolics 2* (Cape Coral: Founders Press, 2022), 432.

Sabbath day, to keep it holy. This is necessary because of our “aptness to forget to the keep the Sabbath.”³¹⁰ Christians in our busy age must be careful to remember the Christian Sabbath, to make preparations in advance, and not neglect this precious command of God. Additionally, Christians must remember: The Lord’s day was made for man. Therefore, every saint of God ought to take hold of the blessings of this day in a manner consistent with Scripture. Guy Prentiss Waters notes that the Sabbath is first to be set apart as a whole day of sustained worship to God. Secondly, it is an ideal opportunity for substantive fellowship and acts of compassion. Thirdly, it is a day reserved for spiritual refreshment through fellowship with our God and Savior.³¹¹

The Christian Sabbath comes to God’s people as a foretaste of the eternal rest that we will enjoy at the consummation of Christ’s kingdom. Furthermore, it is a weekly reminder of the rest that is already ours in Jesus Christ.

How might Christ’s church be strengthened if this was practiced by every Christian, every week, until Christ returns?

Hymn: Come Let us Join with One Accord

Charles Wesley

1 Come, let us join with one accord
In hymns around the throne!
This is the day our rising Lord
Hath made and called His own.

2 This is the day that God hath blessed,
The brightest of the seven,
Type of that everlasting rest
The saints enjoy in heaven.

3 Then let us in His name sing on,
And hasten to that day
When our Redeemer shall come down,
And shadows pass away.

4 Not one, but all our days below,
Let us in hymns employ;
And in our Lord rejoicing go
To His eternal joy.
Amen.

³¹⁰ Michael Borg, “The Morality of the Sabbath,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 6, no. 1 (2014): 219.

³¹¹ Guy Prentiss Waters, *The Sabbath as Rest and Hope for the People of God*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2022), 140–41.