

# The Christian Sabbath Examined, Proved, Applied

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## Introduction

God's Word declares, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it" (Ex. 20:8-11).<sup>1</sup>

This Scripture, known as the fourth commandment, has received very little respect among professing Christians during the twentieth century. It has been misunderstood, disregarded and even maligned in many pulpits throughout the land. Dispensationalists teach that the fourth commandment (with the whole Old Testament law) has been set aside by Christ. Many others accept nine of the commandments as binding, yet reject the fourth as ceremonial in nature. They regard the Sabbath as a purely Jewish institution which is no longer binding on the New Testament church. There are others who accept the binding nature of the Sabbath yet fail to recognize Christ's authority as Lord of the Sabbath (Mt. 12:8) to change sabbath observance from the seventh day to the first day of the week (e.g., Seventh-day Adventists). The orthodox Christian position regarding what is required in the fourth commandment is best set forth by the *Westminster Larger Catechism*: "The fourth commandment requireth of all men the sanctifying or keeping holy to God such set times as he hath appointed in his word, expressly one whole day in seven; which was the seventh from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, and the first day of the week ever since, and so to continue to the end of the world; which is the Christian sabbath, and in the New Testament called The Lord's day."<sup>2</sup>

Since the fourth commandment has been assaulted by modern evangelicalism to such a degree, the one seeking to restore the biblical teaching must first answer a number of questions regarding the binding nature or morality of this particular command. First, is the commandment universal or binding on all men, without regard to national distinction? Second, is the moral principle of one day of rest in seven perpetual from creation to consummation? Third, if the Sabbath is perpetual, is there scriptural warrant for changing the day from the seventh to the first day of the week? After these questions are answered, there will follow a consideration of how the Sabbath is to be observed, the time of the Sabbath, the application of the Sabbath, and the meaning of the six days of labor.

## 1. The Sabbath as Creation Ordinance

There are a number of reasons why the sabbath pattern of six days of labor and one day of rest must be considered universal and perpetually binding upon mankind. The first is that the

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<sup>1</sup> All Scriptures NKJV, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Answer to question 116.

Sabbath is a creation ordinance. Creation ordinances are ethical norms which are based upon the work of God in creation. They “depict ‘the constitution of things’ as they were intended to be from the Creator’s hand. They cover and regulate the whole gamut of life: bearing children, superintending the earth as a responsible steward before and under God, responsibly ruling the creatures of all creation, finding fulfillment and satisfaction in work, labor, resting on the Sabbath, and enjoying marriage as a gift from above.”<sup>3</sup> That creation ordinances have a universal ethical obligation inherent in them is clear from Jesus’ teaching on divorce (Mt. 19:4 ff.), and the reason given in the fourth commandment in Exodus for obeying the Sabbath: “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (20:11).

Genesis 2:2-3 says, “And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.” The fact that the Holy Spirit records that God rested from His creative labors on the seventh day, blessed it and sanctified it (i.e., set it apart from the other six days) is significant. “What could be the meaning of God’s resting the seventh day, and hallowing and blessing it, which he did, before the giving of the fourth commandment, unless he hallowed and blessed it with respect to mankind? For he did not bless and sanctify it with respect to himself, or that he within himself might observe it: as that is most absurd. And it is unreasonable to suppose that he hallowed it only with respect to the Jews, a particular nation, which rose up above two thousand years after.”<sup>4</sup> “God’s mode of operation is the exemplar on the basis of which the sequence for man is patterned. There can be little doubt, therefore, that in Genesis 2:3 there is at least an allusion to the blessing of the seventh day in man’s week: and, when we compare it more closely with Exodus 20:11, there is strong presumption in favor of the view that it refers specifically and directly to the sabbath instituted for man.”<sup>5</sup>

“In Scripture the number seven implies perfection. It is, therefore, apt for denoting perpetuity.”<sup>6</sup> The weekly sabbath and the seven-day week are a God-created aspect of our existence on earth. “The week is not of astronomical, astrological, numerical, historical or logical, but of divine origin, as is its sabbath demarcator, which originated not after the exile nor even at Sinai, but in Eden, when God finished and rested from His creation works and blessed and sanctified the sabbath pre-eminently to God Himself, to the land, to the animals, and possibly also to the angels.”<sup>7</sup> God speaking in special revelation reveals to man the particular day in which he is to rest and worship.

The fact that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance proves that it applies to all mankind and not just to the Jews, for Adam was the covenant representative of the whole human race. Furthermore, every human being (except Jesus Christ) descended from Adam by natural

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<sup>3</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Academic Books, 1983), p. 31. “Verse 11a provides the motivation clause (*ki*) for the command in terms of Yahweh’s six days of work and his resting on the seventh. Verse 11b is an independent sentence, joined by a connective result particle, which draws the implications of Yahweh’s action: ‘he blessed it and hallowed it’” (Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* [Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 1974], p. 414).

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “The Perpetuity and Change of the Sabbath” in *Works* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1974 [1834]), 2:95.

<sup>5</sup> John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 32.

<sup>6</sup> John Calvin, *Tracts and Treatises* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 2:62.

<sup>7</sup> Francis Nigel Lee, *The Covenantal Sabbath: The Weekly Sabbath Scripturally and Historically Considered* (London: Lord’s Day Observance Society, 1966) p. 312.

generation. The separation of humanity into distinct language groups did not occur until long after the fall at Babel (Gen. 11). If Adam had not fallen, the sabbath ordinance would still have regulated the activities of himself and his posterity. The seventh day in which God rested was man's first full day of existence, the first full day of unfallen communion and fellowship with God. Thus, not only was Adam to pattern himself after the divine example, but Adam's rest was spent in celebration of God the Creator. The sabbath rest was not just the cessation of labor but a time of worship, fellowship and the celebration of God. God fully intended that unfallen man in his task of godly dominion would "need to suspend his weekly labours in order to refresh himself with the exercises of concentrated worship."<sup>8</sup> This fact is often overlooked because as fallen creatures we tend to view rest as an autonomous time of self-centered relaxation. Yet rest for the people of God is not just the cessation of work; it is also leaning upon the breast of Christ in worship and communion.

The fact that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance dispels another misconception: the idea that the weekly sabbath is part of the ceremonial law and thus has been abrogated by the death of Christ.<sup>9</sup> This assertion cannot be true because the sabbath was instituted *before* the fall of Adam into sin. Through types the ceremonial laws taught the people of God certain things regarding the Messiah to come, and their separation from the pagan nations around them. When God instituted the weekly sabbath, there was no sin in the world, and consequently no need of a savior. Therefore, the weekly sabbath is not, and cannot be, ceremonial.<sup>10</sup> The idea that the weekly sabbath was ceremonial comes from a confusing of the various Judaical ceremonial sabbaths with the weekly sabbath. The weekly sabbath is a creation ordinance which was in effect before the fall, but the various ceremonial sabbaths were instituted under Moses for the distinct purpose of pointing to Jesus Christ. Thus they are called by Paul "beggarly elements" and "shadows of things to come."<sup>11</sup>

The three New Testament passages which have repeatedly been used by anti-sabbatarians as proof texts against the weekly Christian sabbath (Gal. 4:10, Col. 2:16, Rom. 14:5-6) actually

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<sup>8</sup> Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, p. 34.

<sup>9</sup> "Q. 27. How do you prove the observation of [one whole day in seven] for a holy Sabbath to the Lord, to be of a moral and perpetual obligation? A. From the time of the first institution of the Sabbath; from its being placed in the Decalogue, a summary of moral precepts; and from there being nothing originally ceremonial, or typical, in the scope or substance thereof.... Q. 29. How is the morality of the Sabbath evidenced from the first institution of it? A. Being instituted while Adam was in innocency, and consequently before all types and ceremonies respecting an Atonement for sin; and being appointed him upon a moral ground, without any particular reference to an innocent state, more than any other, it must therefore be of perpetual obligation" (James Fisher, ed., *The Westminster Assembly's Shorter Catechism Explained by Way of Questions and Answers [Fisher's Catechism]* [Philadelphia: A. Walker, 1765], 2:60).

<sup>10</sup> "We are but using logic parallel to that which the apostle Paul employs in a similar case. He is proving that the gospel promise made to the Hebrews in Abraham could not have been retracted when the law was published on Sinai. His argument is (Gal. iii:17): 'The covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul.' So reason we: if the Sabbath was instituted long before, it did not come with Judaism, and does not go with it" (Robert Lewis Dabney, "The Christian Sabbath: Its Nature, Design, and Proper Observance" in *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1967], 1:500).

<sup>11</sup> If the weekly sabbath ordinance was ceremonial and was abrogated by Christ, then it would be *immoral* for Christians to observe the Lord's-day sabbath rest, because Christians are told repeatedly not to return to "the beggarly elements." Such a notion is most absurd, especially when one considers that if Christians were required to work on the Lord's day, there would be no opportunity for rested, focused worship. Beside the reasons already given to dispel such falsehoods is the obvious fact that if one day of rest and worship were not a part of the new covenant administration, then at this one point the new covenant day of worship would be inferior to the old covenant day. This simply cannot be.

refer to the ceremonial sabbaths of the Mosaic economy. This is clearly established in the context of each passage. “But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the *weak and beggarly elements*, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain” (Gal. 4:9-11). Note that Paul refers to the keeping of these days as a return to “the weak and beggarly elements.” He was refuting the error of the Judaizers, who believed that it was necessary for Gentile believers to keep the ceremonial laws in order to be saved. They taught that a person must first become a Jew in order to become a Christian. They also believed that law-keeping contributed to one’s salvation. Paul condemned the keeping of Mosaic ceremonial sabbath days, new moons, festival seasons and jubilee years, because they were *shadows* which were *replaced* by the reality, Jesus Christ.

Paul reiterates this same thought in Colossians 2:16: “So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.” Again Paul uses language that identifies these sabbaths as a shadow; therefore he is speaking of the ceremonial sabbaths.<sup>12</sup> “Moreover, that he intends no more than the ceremonial sabbaths, or Jewish festivals, is evident from what follows, ‘Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink,’ as well as ‘in respect of an holy day’...forbidden by the ceremonial law; and he thus intimates that the distinction of meats is removed under the gospel-dispensation.”<sup>13</sup>

So once again the question must be answered: How can the creation-ordinance pattern of six days of work and one day of rest be considered ceremonial, when there was no sin and thus no need of the ceremonial types? The divine exemplar simply cannot be considered ceremonial in any way. “The etiology [of Ex. 20:11] grounds the sanctity of the sabbath in the creative act of God.... The sabbath commandment is not given to Israel for the first time at Sinai (cf. Ex 16:22 ff.), but at Sinai Israel is only exhorted to remember what had been an obligation from the beginning.”<sup>14</sup> While it is true that certain ceremonial rituals occurred on the weekly sabbath, they were added under the Mosaic administration. The fact that sacrifices occurred on the Sabbath does not make the Sabbath itself ceremonial. The manner in which the Jews under the old covenant sanctified the day involved types and symbols that pointed to the coming Redeemer. Once Christ came, the shadow (Heb. 10:1; 8:4-5), the inferior (Heb. 9:11-15), the obsolete (Heb. 8:13), the symbolic (Heb. 9:9), and the ineffectual (Heb. 10:4) were put away.<sup>15</sup> But the keeping

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<sup>12</sup> In his monumental work on the Sabbath, Francis Nigel Lee makes the case that Col. 2:16 does include the weekly Jewish sabbath, but only refers to the Mosaic ceremonial appendages to that day. “In other words, one must distinguish in point of permanence between the Pre-Sinaitic moral weekly sabbath on the one hand, and the Sinaitic *ceremonial* weekly *form* of that permanent and purely moral weekly sabbath on the other.... [Paul] means that the Sinaitic weekly sabbath, that temporary ceremonial weekly form of the permanent moral weekly sabbath (like the non-weekly other ceremonial sabbatical feasts or ‘holy days’), was a shadow of Christ, and was nailed to His cross.... But not so the permanent moral weekly sabbath itself, of which the Sinaitic weekly sabbath was only the temporary form.... The (Saturday) sabbath of the Jews having been abolished in the New Testament, Sunday or the Lord’s day must now be solemnly hallowed by all Christians” (*op. cit.*, p. 31). If Lee is correct, then Col. 2:16 is an excellent proof text against the Seventh-day Adventist heresy requiring keeping Saturday instead of the Lord’s day. In any case, there is such abundant evidence in the New Testament that God has changed the day from the seventh to the first day of the week that Lee’s interpretation of Col. 2:16 is not necessary to prove first-day observance.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Ridgeley, *Commentary on the Larger Catechism* (Edmonton: Still Waters Revival Books, 1993 [1731]), 2:344.

<sup>14</sup> Childs, p. 416.

<sup>15</sup> “The weekly sabbath dates from Eden, but the ceremonial non-weekly sabbaths only from Sinai. The relationship between the ‘moral’ sabbath and the ceremonial sabbaths is analogous to that between the moral law and the

of one day in seven, being a pre-fall creation ordinance, was not put away (the change of the day from the seventh to the first day will be considered later).

The other passage used against the perpetuity of the Sabbath is Romans 14:5-6: "One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it." Is Paul saying that the keeping of one day in seven holy to the Lord is optional for Christians? Is he telling the Roman believers that Christ's death has made the creation ordinances optional? No, not at all. Paul is dealing with a situation unique to the early church. There were Jewish believers who "regarded the holy days of the *ceremonial economy* as having abiding sanctity."<sup>16</sup> Virtually all commentators concur that the days spoken of in this passage refer specifically to the ceremonial holy days of the Levitical institution and *not* the Christian sabbath. Paul allows for diversity in the church over the issue of Jewish holy days (i.e., the ceremonial sabbaths) because of the unique historical circumstances. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, the ceremonial aspects of the law (e.g., animal sacrifices, Jewish holy days, circumcision) were rendered obsolete and were abrogated. Yet, prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70, the apostles allowed certain practices by Jewish Christians as long as no works-righteousness was attributed to these practices. In Acts 21:26 the Apostle Paul even goes to the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification. Jewish believers who were already accustomed to keeping certain holy days of the Mosaic economy were allowed to continue doing so for a time. But once the temple was destroyed, the canon of Scripture was completed, and the church had existed for a whole generation, these unique historical circumstances ceased.

The idea that Paul was teaching that obedience to the creation ordinance of six days of work and one day of rest was optional for believers cannot be true, because it would involve Paul in blatant contradiction with his own teachings. When Paul taught on the subject of the relationship between men and women in the home and in the church, he repeatedly pointed to the creation of Eve and the creation ordinance of marriage (1 Cor. 11:8-9; Eph. 5:31; 1 Tim. 2:13). Furthermore (as noted in detail below), there is abundant evidence in the New Testament that after Christ's resurrection the church always met for public worship on the first day of the week (Ac. 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10). Thus, although the day was changed, the creation-ordinance pattern of six days of work and one day of rest was not changed. The day of rest and the day of concentrated worship have always been one and the same. Therefore, Paul could not have been arguing that some believers, *if they so desire*, can attend to the means of grace and sanctify the Lord's day, while others, *if they so desire*, can sleep in or go to the beach. "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:24-25).

A portion of Scripture which clearly disproves the notion that the weekly sabbath was new to the Mosaic administration—and therefore Jewish and ceremonial—is found in Exodus 16:

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ceremonial law or 'Law of ordinances.' The distinction between these two kinds of law has been questioned by some, but the distinction is Scriptural (cf. Belgic Confession Art. 25)...and, as Thomas Boston writes of the weekly sabbath, 'It was appointed and given of God to Adam in innocency, before there was any ceremony to be taken away by the coming of Christ, Gen. 2:3'" (Lee, p. 28).

<sup>16</sup> John Murray, *Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), pp. 177-78.

“And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.”... And so it was, on the sixth day, that they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. And all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. Then he said to them, “This is what the LORD has said: ‘Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake today, and boil what you will boil; and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning.’”... Then Moses said, “Eat that today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, there will be none.” Now it happened that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none. And the LORD said to Moses, “How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws? See! For the LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.” So the people rested on the seventh day (Ex. 16:5, 22, 23, 25-30).

The noteworthy matter in this portion of Scripture is that the weekly sabbath institution is discussed as a binding institution *before* the giving of the law at Sinai. Furthermore, in this passage God was not now instituting a new ordinance. “If the sabbath had now been first instituted, how could Moses have understood what God said to him (v. 5), concerning a double portion to be gathered on the sixth day, without making any express mention of the sabbath? And how could the people so readily take the hint (v. 22), even to the surprise of the rulers, before Moses had declared that it was done with a regard to the sabbath, if they had not had some knowledge of the sabbath before?”<sup>17</sup> The fact that a double portion of manna was given on the sixth day (but no manna was given on the seventh day) proves that the weekly sabbath rest was already built into the created order. Thus, at this point the sabbath ordinance looks back toward Genesis 2:1-3. The Sabbath is a creational reality for all peoples and all times. If, as some assert, Exodus 16 refers to the institution of the Sabbath for the first time (and for Israel alone), then why, in the fourth commandment (Ex. 20:11), does God point Israel back to the creation week and not to the giving of the manna? Would not the explanation of the commandment read, “For in six days the Lord gave you manna in the wilderness but withheld it on the seventh day...”? “The setting apart of one day in seven for holy work, and, in order to that, for holy rest, was a divine appointment ever since God created man upon the earth, and the most ancient of positive laws. The way of sabbath-sanctification is the good old way.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McLean, Virginia: MacDonald), 1:343. “This passage shows that the sabbath was certainly made known to Israel before the giving of the law at Sinai. The Israelites did not arrive at Sinai until the following month (16:1; 19:1). This passage also shows that this was not the first institution of the sabbath. The incidental manner in which the matter is introduced and the remonstrance of the Lord for the disobedience of the people both imply that the sabbath had previously been known. The Lord’s inquiry, ‘How long do you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?’ sounds as if it had long been in existence. In fact, the equation of the sabbath with the seventh day, the statement that the Lord gave the Israelites the sabbath, and the record that the people, at God’s command, rested on the seventh day, all point unmistakably to the primeval institution of the sabbath” (*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976], 5:184).

<sup>18</sup> Henry, *Commentary*, 1:343. “Q. 35. How can the observation of the Sabbath be said to take place immediately after the creation, when the scripture is wholly silent about the observation of it till the time of Moses? A. It might as well be argued, that the Sabbath was not observed after Moses’ time, during the government of the Judges, which, according to Acts xiii. 20. was about the space of four hundred and fifty years, there being no mention of the church’s observing a Sabbath during the whole of that long period: and yet it cannot be supposed, that so many godly men, as the Judges were, would suffer the observation of the Sabbath to go into entire desuetude [disuse]” (*Fisher’s Catechism*, p. 61).

## 2. The Sabbath is Part of the Ten Commandments

The morality, universality and perpetual nature of the weekly sabbath are also demonstrated by its location in the decalogue, or ten commandments. Did God place a temporary, purely Jewish ceremonial law in the midst of the summary of His moral precepts? Absolutely not! The number ten in the holy Scriptures signifies completeness and perfection. The idea that God has really only given His people nine commandments is absurd. The fact that the fourth commandment is part of the decalogue proves that it is of the same *kind* or *nature* as the other nine precepts; that is, it is *moral*. As part of the ten commandments, the Sabbath received the *same* special, awesome introduction (Ex. 19:16 ff.), dignity and honor as the other nine commandments.

The ten commandments were spoken directly to the people by Jehovah Himself from the mount (Ex. 20:1, 19). They were written on tablets of stone by God Himself to signify their importance and perpetual nature (Ex. 24:12; 32:16). They were taken and placed within the ark of the covenant (Ex. 25:16). None of these “privileges were conferred upon the *ceremonial law*.”<sup>19</sup> “And if these and other prerogatives did put a difference, and show a difference to be put between the other nine commands, and all other judicial or ceremonial laws, why not between them, and this also?”<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the wording of the fourth commandment reveals its universal nature, because the heathen and even the animals were required to rest. “The sabbath was not only enjoined to be observed by the Israelites, who were in covenant with God, together with their servants, who were made proselytes to their religion, and were obliged to observe the ceremonial and other positive laws; but it was also to be observed by the stranger within their gates, namely, the heathen, who dwelt among them, who were not in covenant with God, and *did not observe the ceremonial law*.”<sup>21</sup> “To see the convincing force of this fact the reader must contrast the jealous care with which the ‘stranger,’ the pagan foreigner sojourning in Jewry, was excluded from all share in the Levitical worship. No foreigner could partake of the passover; it was sacrilege. It was at the peril of his life that he presumed to enter the inner courtyard of the temple, where the bloody sacrifice was offered. Now, when this foreigner is required to keep the Sabbath along with the families of Israel, does not this prove that rest to be no ceremonial, no type like the passover and the altar, but a universal moral institution designed for all nations and times?”<sup>22</sup>

Some have suggested that the introduction of the law (“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage”), as well as the restatement of the fourth commandment in Deuteronomy (which discusses the Jews’ deliverance from Egypt instead of God’s creation of the world), is evidence that the Sabbath was an ordinance for the Jewish nation and not New Testament believers. Such an argument falls to the ground when one considers that the preface concerns *all* the commandments, not just the fourth. No one would hold that lying, adultery, theft and murder were permissible outside the Jewish nation. Furthermore, the salvation of Israel from Egypt *typified* the salvation of believers from their slavery to sin and the world. “In Exodus, reference is made to the creative work of God undertaken in six days, after which God rested on the seventh day. The two reasons [Ex. 20:11;

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<sup>19</sup> *Fisher’s Catechism*, 2:61.

<sup>20</sup> James Durham, “The Fourth Commandment,” in Christopher Coldwell, ed., *Anthology of Presbyterian and Reformed Literature* (Dallas: Naphtali Press, winter, 1989), p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> Ridgeley, 2:343.

<sup>22</sup> Dabney, 1:507.

Dt. 5:15] complement each other and both emphasize man's dependence on God. To rest on the sabbath day was to remember that man, as a part of God's created order, was totally dependent on the Creator; man's divinely appointed task to have dominion over the created order (Gen. 1:26) carried with it also the privilege of sharing in God's rest. The Exodus, too, was a type of *creation* and thus forms an analogy to the creation account in Genesis. The Exodus from Egypt marks in effect the creation of God's people as a nation, and the memory of that event was also a reminder to the Israelites of their total dependence upon God."<sup>23</sup>

The confusion among scholars regarding the morality of the weekly sabbath is to a degree understandable, in that the moral sabbath was incorporated into the Mosaic administration in a unique way. The ceremonial sabbaths and ceremonial temple system were imposed upon the ancient moral sabbath as clothes are placed upon the body. The Sabbath was also incorporated into the judicial laws of Israel. Furthermore, the Sabbath was made a perpetual covenant and sign between Jehovah and the Jewish nation. These elements are brought out in Exodus 31:12-18:

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: 'Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.'" And when He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.

An attempt must be made to distinguish between the permanent moral sabbath and the temporary Mosaic additions to it. The ceremonial sabbaths, the ceremonies of the central sanctuary, the Sabbath as a covenant sign, and the civil death penalty provisions are additions to the moral sabbath. The priests carried on their duties about the tabernacle. The bread of the presence was to be set on the table in the holy place on the sabbath day (Lev. 24:8). A special sacrifice, in addition to the ordinary daily sacrifice, was to be offered on the sabbath day (Num. 28:9-10). The rite of circumcision was performed on the Sabbath, if it was the eighth day after the child's birth (Lev. 12:3; Jn. 7:22). The Sabbath is listed among the sacred festivals, "the appointed feasts of the LORD" (23:1-3). It, like them, was proclaimed to be "a holy convocation" (23:3).<sup>24</sup> The restatement of the sabbath law at the conclusion of a whole series of laws dealing with the temple cultus, taken together with the death penalty provision and the Sabbath as a perpetual covenant, points to Israel's close personal relationship to Jehovah, its separateness from the pagan nations, and the ceremonial cultus (the shedding of blood) which makes this covenantal relationship and separateness from the heathen possible. Jehovah is

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<sup>23</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 157. "In Exodus xx. 11 a worldwide and permanent ground for the Sabbath command is assigned: 'For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth,' etc., while nothing is said about the exodus. The explanation is clear. The Hebrews had all the reason to keep the Sabbath which the whole human race has—God's sanctifying it at the creation of the race and commanding it to all the race. *But they had this additional reason:* that God had now blessed them above all other tribes. Hence they were bound by gratitude also to keep the Sabbath" (Dabney, 1:509; emphasis added).

<sup>24</sup> *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 5:184.



honored corporately in worship every sabbath day, yet He is approached and worshiped through propitiatory sacrifice. Since in the old covenant Christ is represented in the tabernacle with its sacrifices, the Sabbath had to be intimately connected to the ceremonies. “The law of the sabbath had been given them before any other law, by way of preparation [Ex. 16:23]; it had been inserted in the body of the moral law, in the fourth commandment; it had been annexed to the judicial law [Ex. 23:12]; and here [Ex. 31:13-17] it is added to the first part of the ceremonial law....”<sup>25</sup>

Some have argued that the Sabbath could not be a special sign between God and Israel if it had been morally binding on all nations, because then it would have held no special significance for Israel. This argument fails to take into account that the other nations of the world did not observe the Sabbath because they were not the recipients of divine revelation; they had not been set apart, as the people of Israel had, through miraculous redemptive acts; they did not have the ceremonial system in which to approach God; and they were not a called-out theocratic nation. The Sabbath was a sign between Israel and Jehovah only because of God’s grace. While the moral foundation for the Sabbath is the creation ordinance, the knowledge of the day and the manner of keeping the day are both revealed by special revelation and special grace. “God, by sanctifying this day among them, let them know that he sanctified them, and set them apart for himself and his service; otherwise he would not have revealed to them his holy sabbaths, to be the support of religion among them.... If we sanctify God’s day, it is a sign between him and us that he has sanctified our hearts.”<sup>26</sup> When the Jews kept the sabbath day holy, they were declaring to the world that they worshiped the true God who created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. “The general apostasy of the nations made this duty of visible Sabbath-keeping, which God enjoins on all men of all ages, a badge and mark of those who still fear him.”<sup>27</sup>

### 3. The Sabbath and the Prophets

The prophets treated the Sabbath as a moral ordinance that was also binding on the Gentiles. In Isaiah 56 Jehovah speaks not just to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles, concerning the duties which all men owe to one another and to God: “Keep justice, and do righteousness, for my salvation is about to come, and my righteousness to be revealed. Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who lays hold on it; who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and keeps his hand from doing any evil” (vs. 1-2). Note that keeping the Sabbath is as much a duty to the Gentiles as keeping justice and not doing evil.

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<sup>25</sup> Henry, *Commentary*, 1:405.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 405.

<sup>27</sup> Dabney, 1:510. “It is objected that God made the Sabbath ‘a sign’ between him and the Hebrews (Exod. xxxi. 13-17; Ezek. xx. 12, 20). The attempt is made to infer hence that the Sabbath was a mere type to the Hebrews, and thus has passed away like all the other types, since the antitype, Christ, came. Again I reply: if its being ‘a sign’ between God and Israel proves it a type, then the same argument proves that the great first law of love itself was a type, and has been abrogated; for in Deut. vi.6 Israel is commanded to make this ‘a sign.’ Such is the absurdity of this argument” (*Ibid*, 1:509). Furthermore, is it not true that the Lord’s day (the Christian sabbath) *still* functions as a sign distinguishing between obedient Christians and the heathen? For the biblical Christian is found worshiping with God’s people on the Lord’s day, while the heathen watch football, play golf, go to the beach, etc., and thus serve their own interests.

Not only does Isaiah apply the Sabbath to the Gentiles and place it within the category of the moral law, he also applies it prophetically to the Gentiles in the gospel dispensation. Lee writes,

As Bickersteth points out, Is. 56:2 “must refer to the moral duties specified in the preceding verse; so that, as the passage refers to the future times of the Christian Church, it is deserving of particular notice that the Sabbath is not only spoken of as an institution still existing in that more enlarged and spiritual condition of society, but as partaking of a moral character, which, indeed, from its place in the midst of the Decalogue, it possessed from the first, and demanding a sacred observance.... This prophecy pointing to a period when the house of God was to be called an house of prayer for all people; and at that period the man who should keep the Sabbath from polluting it should inherit the blessing of God.’ And commenting on Is. 56:6, Bickersteth states: ‘This is a particular phase of the same prophecy containing a distinct promise of the Divine favour and acceptance being extended to Gentile converts, and in this part of it a repetition of the Sabbath, in a manner so explicit that it is scarcely possible to imagine a stronger testimony could be given to the continued observance of the Sabbath in the Christian Church.’<sup>28</sup>

The obvious objection of non-sabbatarians to Isaiah’s prophecy is the mention also of sacrifices, burnt offerings, the altar and the temple (i.e., “My house”) in verse 7. But if the New Testament is allowed to interpret the Old, it will be evident that all these terms are symbolic of the pure New Testament worship of God. Since the New Testament clearly teaches that God’s holy sabbath continues into the gospel dispensation on the first day of the week (the Lord’s day), we know as a fact of history that this prophecy has indeed been fulfilled.

A chapter that very clearly places the Sabbath within the moral law is Isaiah 58. This chapter deals with the hypocritical worship of the house of Jacob. The Jews were trying to impress God by their fasting; yet while they did so, they were continually breaking God’s moral law. The biblical method of fasting includes true repentance, which for the Jews involved letting the oppressed go free (v. 6), sharing one’s bread with the hungry, sheltering the poor, covering the naked (v. 7), stopping wicked speech, and helping the afflicted soul (v. 10). This chapter obviously is not dealing with ceremonial infractions but ethical lapses among the people. It is in this context that Jehovah says, “If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken” (vs. 13-14). The Jews in Isaiah’s day trusted in the ceremonies or rituals, yet

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<sup>28</sup> *Bickersteth’s Bible Commentary* on Isa. 56:2, 6, cited in Legerton, *The Sabbath Day Only a Shadow?* p. 28, as quoted in Lee, p. 167. James Durham (1622-1659) argues that Isa. 66:23 and Ezek. 43-46 also prophesy of sabbath observance in the New Testament era: “It is clear that these places relate to the days of the gospel, as none can deny but they do so eminently. It is clear that though they prophesy of the services of the gospel under the names of sacrifices, etc., proper to the Old Testament administration, and of the sanctified and set-apart time of the gospel, under the name of Sabbath which then was determined, and whereto men were then bound by the fourth command as they were to sacrifices by the second. Yet these prophecies infer not by virtue of the fourth command the very same day to be under the gospel, which was under the law, more than the same services by virtue of the second, which none will deny to be in force, notwithstanding of the change of services. And there is as little reason to deny the fourth to be still in force as to its substance, notwithstanding of the change of the particular day” (Durham in Coldwell, p. 5).

flagrantly disregarded the duties of the moral law. Thus, “the main scope of this fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah is to dissuade the Jews from a ceremonial righteousness by showing its worthlessness when unaccompanied by spiritual holiness. They are ardently urged to offer God, instead of ritual service, the duties of inward righteousness, and especially of charity. To these the blessing is promised. Now, it is in this connection that the prophet also urges a spiritual Sabbath observance, and to it he repeats the same promises. He also connects this right kind of Sabbath observance immediately with the glorious Messianic triumphs of Zion, which we know from all subsequent history, occur only under the new dispensation.... It is simply impossible for the candid reader to take in the anti-ceremonial aim of the whole passage, and to believe that Isaiah here thought of Sabbath observance as only a typical duty.”<sup>29</sup>

## Chapter 1: The Sabbath Is Binding in the New Covenant Era

Although the New Testament clearly teaches that the Sabbath is of perpetual obligation, there are certain things that must be discussed when setting out the biblical case for the Christian sabbath. The first is that in the new covenant dispensation the observance of the weekly sabbath has been changed by Jesus Christ to the first day of the week. Therefore, proving that there is biblical warrant for the change of the day from the seventh to the first day of the week is necessary and interrelated to proving the perpetuity of the weekly sabbath itself. Second, the argument for the change of the day from the seventh to the first day of the week is not based on a *direct* divine command but is deduced from biblical theology, analogy and historical example. Those who reject the Christian sabbath have used the fact that there is no *direct* command to deceive those who are untrained in theology.<sup>30</sup> Although there is no direct command or statement regarding the change of the day, that does not mean that there is not sufficient biblical warrant to observe the first day of the week; there is abundant evidence. Note that there are several crucial Christian doctrines that are based not on one direct statement but on a careful study of Scripture and deduction<sup>31</sup>: the trinity, the hypostatic union of the two natures of Christ, infant baptism, etc. Therefore, a doctrine that is “deduced by good and necessary consequence” from Scripture is no less true or important than a direct statement from Scripture.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Dabney, 1:501.

<sup>30</sup> For example, a Seventh-day Adventist tract entitled *Duped* says, “No biblical reference to the first day of the week ever talks about changing the Sabbath to Sunday. James Westbury, president of the Lord’s Day Alliance, an organization devoted to Sunday worship, is forced to admit: ‘There is no record of a statement on the part of Jesus authorizing such a change, nor is there recorded such a statement on the part of the apostles.’”

<sup>31</sup> The legitimacy of using logical inference from Scripture to formulate doctrine (formally known as deduction “by good and necessary consequence,” Westminster Confession of Faith, 1:6) can be seen in the following passages: Mt. 19:4-6, 22:31 ff.; Mk. 12:26; Lk. 20:37 ff.; 1 Cor. 11:8-10; etc.

<sup>32</sup> “If this [first-day sabbath observance] be the mind and will of God, he hath not left the matter to human tradition; but hath so revealed his mind about it, in his word, that there is to be found good and substantial evidence that it is his mind: and doubtless, the revelation is plain enough for them that have ears to hear; that is, for them that will justly exercise their understandings about what God says to them. No Christian, therefore, should rest till he has satisfactorily discovered the mind of God in this matter. If the Christian sabbath be of divine institution, it is doubtless of great importance to religion that it be well kept; and therefore, that every Christian be well acquainted with the institution” (Edwards, 2:94).

## 1. The Day of Christ's Resurrection Victory

The central reason that Christians observe the first day of the week is the historical fact that Christ rose from the dead on that day (Mt. 28:1; Mk. 16:2, 9; Lk. 24:1; Jn. 20:1). While it is true that we do not find a specific command given to the disciples to meet for public worship on that day, such a command is clearly implied in several ways. First, Christ chose to appear repeatedly to His disciples on the first day of the week (Mt. 28:9; Lk. 24:15-31, 36; Jn. 20:19, 26). This pattern of appearance is carefully noted in the Scriptures and is obviously not arbitrary. Jesus chose the first day of the week to strengthen the apostles' faith, instruct them in doctrine, issue commands, engage in fellowship, and partake in the breaking of bread.

## 2. The Universal Practice of the New Testament Church

Second, the universal practice of the apostolic church was to observe the first day of the week. The apostles met together on the first two Sundays after the resurrection (Jn. 20:19-26). The disciples also met together for public worship on Pentecost Sunday: "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place" (Ac. 2:1). "Just as the disciples had been 'gathered together' (probably in the upper room) on the first Resurrection Sunday, the next or second Sunday (John 20:26), and very probably every following Sunday as well, so too were they 'with one accord in one place'—probably also in the same 'place,' the upper room—on the eighth Sunday of Pentecost...that eighth Sunday, the Lord's day, when the Lord's Spirit suddenly came to His temple (His church in the upper room) and burned like an oven with tongues of fire—that too was the new Day which God would create, the Day of the Lord, the Day of the Lord God the Holy Spirit."<sup>33</sup> It is clear that the apostles and the very first churches founded by them sanctified the first day of the week.

The abiding nature of the new covenant first-day observance is demonstrated by Acts 20:7: "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight." Note that several years after the resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost the practice of the New Testament church was still public worship on the first day of the week, the Lord's day (Rev. 1:10). The disciples came together to hear the preaching of the Apostle Paul and to celebrate the sacrament of the Lord's supper, which in the early church was taken together with a meal. They broke bread as a memorial to Christ's death on the cross, and they met on the first day of the week to study, celebrate and remember Christ's work of redemption and His glorious resurrection victory. Francis Nigel Lee writes,

It should be observed that the disciples did not come together on the first day of the week simply so that Paul could preach to them before his departure, as some claim. If the sole purpose of the gathering was to hear the Apostle preach his farewell sermon to the congregation, this was something that could have been done at any time during his previous week's sojourn there. From the Seventh-day Adventist point of view, one would expect such a sermon to have been preached to the congregation on the previous day, Saturday, and for the hastening Paul to have sailed from Troas at sunset on Saturday or dawn on Sunday. Yet there is no trace of this, nor indeed of any Saturday meeting whatsoever. Rather does the whole context teach that Paul simply and incidentally availed himself of the opportunity to preach to the

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<sup>33</sup> Lee, p. 209.

congregation ‘upon the first day of the week when the disciples (as usual) came together to break bread’—and not specially to hear Paul.<sup>34</sup>

Another passage which proves that the apostolic church held public worship on the first day of the week is 1 Corinthians 16:1-2: “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.” The first thing to note regarding this passage is that Paul, speaking by the Holy Spirit, insists that the charitable donations for the poor brethren in Jerusalem be collected on the *first day* and no other.<sup>35</sup> The fact that the Holy Spirit chose the first day of the week and no other day presupposes that for the Christian church there was something unique—of abiding religious significance—regarding that day. Otherwise, why would the Holy Spirit insist upon only the first day and not the seventh, or third, or fourth, etc.? Second, note that this was not just the practice of the church at Corinth but of *all* the churches in Galatia: “as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also.” Collecting tithes for the poor on Sunday was the *universal* practice of the Christian church in the days of the apostles. “The only explanation for this ‘catholic’ [i.e., universal] injunction to all Christians everywhere to lay by for the poor saints in Jerusalem specifically on Sunday, is that all Christians everywhere were in the habit of laying by for their own local poor brethren too.”<sup>36</sup>

It is not an accident that Paul’s injunction to give to the poor brethren on the Lord’s day immediately follows chapter 15, which focuses on the significance of Christ’s resurrection. Giving is an aspect of Lord’s-day public worship. We give unto God because He first gave Himself for us. “Elsewhere Paul speaks of this collection in terms that are full of theological content: ‘fellowship,’ ‘service,’ ‘grace,’ ‘blessing,’ and ‘divine service.’ All this together suggests that the ‘collection’ was not some mere matter of money, but was for Paul an active response to the grace of God that not only ministered to the needs of God’s people but also became a kind of ministry to God Himself.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, this passage not only proves that the apostolic churches conducted their public worship services on the first day of the week, but also shows that giving to God is part of Christian worship. This is to be expected, for it was also the universal practice in the Jewish synagogues to receive tithes and offerings during their public worship services on Saturday. The New Testament church was patterned to a large extent after the Jewish synagogue.

Seventh-day Adventist apologists have attempted to circumvent the obvious implication of this passage by arguing that collections were made on Sunday, rather than on Saturday, because it would have been a violation of the Saturday sabbath to do bookkeeping, etc., on that day. Such reasoning is fallacious for three reasons: First, as already noted, the Jews collected tithes on Saturday and engaged in “bookkeeping” procedures related to charity on the Sabbath

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 221.

<sup>35</sup> “The first day of the week is Sunday, and *kata* is distributive so that we may translate: ‘Sunday by Sunday let each of you lay by,’ etc. It is a fair inference that Sunday was the day which was set aside for the public worship of the Corinthian congregation, and that this custom was also followed in Galatia and in the other churches that had been founded by Paul” (R. C. H. Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1937], p. 759). “It was the fact that this day [Sunday] marked for them the specifically Christian day in their week that probably made it convenient for Paul to note it as the time for them to remember the poor among the brethren and sisters in Jerusalem” (Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], p. 814).

<sup>36</sup> Lee, p. 217.

<sup>37</sup> Fee, p. 812.

for centuries without divine disapproval. Second, Jesus Christ clearly taught that works of mercy were permissible—yes, even required—on the Sabbath (Mt. 12:12; Mk. 3:4). Third, works of mercy on the Sabbath are permitted and commended in the Old Testament as well (1 Sam. 21:6; 2 Kgs. 4:23). “If, as Seventh-day Adventists maintain, the post-resurrectional Christian Church held its weekly meetings and its sabbath on Saturday, it is more than probable that the entire collection would have been handed over to Paul on such an occasion, rather than ‘on the first day of the week.’”<sup>38</sup>

### 3. The Lord’s Day

The sanctification of the Lord’s day (or the first day of the week) is also implied in Revelation 1:10 where the Apostle John says, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.” John speaks of a day which is distinct from all other days. “Some say, how do we know that this was the first day of the week? Every day is the Lord’s day. But it is the design of John to tell us *when* he had those visions. And if by the Lord’s day is meant any day, how doth that inform us *when* that event took place?”<sup>39</sup> John uses an expression that Christians in his day would instantly recognize as the day of Christ’s resurrection: the first day of the week. Seventh-day Adventists argue that this refers to the Saturday, Jewish sabbath. But this assertion is clearly unscriptural. “Nowhere in God’s Word is the Saturday sabbath ever called the ‘Lord’s day.’... The adjective in the expression—‘*kuriake* (-os, -on)’ [i.e., the Lord’s]—occurs in only one other verse of scripture: in 1 Cor. 11:20 in the expression ‘the Lord’s Supper’ (*kuriakon deipnon*), which supper was usually held on the first day of the week. This very fact surely implies that the Lord’s day (*he kuriake hemera*) was also then held on the first day of the week.”<sup>40</sup> A passage of Scripture which clearly identifies the Lord’s day as the day of Christ’s resurrection is Psalm 118:22-24: “The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the LORD has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.”

The Apostle Peter, in addressing the Sanhedrin (Ac. 4:8-12), applies Psalm 118:22 directly to the exaltation of Jesus Christ, which began at His resurrection (cf. Mt. 28:18, Rom. 4:3-4).<sup>41</sup> Psalm 118 identifies the day of Christ’s exaltation as a day of rejoicing and gladness. Were the disciples of Jesus rejoicing on the seventh day (Saturday)? Were they glad and happy on that day? No, absolutely not. On Saturday Jesus was dead and still laid up in a tomb. On Saturday the disciples were in mourning. Their leader had been put to death as a common

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<sup>38</sup> Lee, p. 281. In 1 Cor. Paul answered many questions that had been put to him by the congregation (e.g., eating meat offered to idols, marriage and divorce, spiritual gifts). The final question that Paul deals with is what to do regarding the poor saints in Jerusalem. The way Paul answers this last question indicates that “Sunday collections for the local poor saints [were] the well-known rule, and for that very reason Paul now enjoined that the contributions towards the collection for the Jerusalem saints [were] to be made on the same day as the local contributions, namely ‘on the first day of the week’” (Ibid.).

<sup>39</sup> Edwards, 2:99.

<sup>40</sup> Lee, pp. 237-38.

<sup>41</sup> The Bible views Christ’s exaltation organically. It begins at His resurrection and concludes with His ascension and enthronement at the Father’s right hand. Lange writes, “The ascension is essentially implied in the resurrection. Both events are combined in the one fact of Christ’s exaltation. The resurrection is the root and the beginning of the ascension; the ascension is the blossom and crown of the resurrection.... The resurrection marks the entrance into the heavenly *state*; the ascension into the heavenly *sphere*” (John Peter Lange, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal and Homiletical*, ed. and trans. by Philip Schaff [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980]), 15:556.

criminal. They were living in fear, doubt, sorrow and apparent defeat; but on Sunday, the first day of the week, Christ rose from the dead; and their tears turned to joy, their sorrow to gladness, their doubt to hope, and their defeat to victory. “This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it” (Ps. 118:24). This is the origin of the term “the Lord’s day.” It is the day on which the Christian church celebrates the victory of the Son of David. “We observe the Lord’s day as henceforth our true Sabbath, a day made and ordained of God, for the perpetual remembrance of the achievements of our Redeemer.... Entering into the midst of the church of God, and beholding the Lord Jesus as all in all in the assemblies of his people, we are bound to overflow with joy. Is it not written, ‘then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord’?”<sup>42</sup>

The historical evidence presented thus far is sufficient to prove that Jesus Christ has changed the sabbath day from the seventh to the first day of the week. Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week. He appeared to His disciples on the first day on more than one occasion. The disciples gathered together on resurrection Sunday, and then again at Pentecost, in order to meet with the risen Christ. The apostolic church engaged in public worship on the first day of the week.<sup>43</sup> This involved preaching, the sacraments and tithing. The Apostle Paul indicated that first-day public worship was universal in the churches of Galatia. The Apostle John used the phrase “the Lord’s day” as a time reference that all the churches of Asia Minor would instantly recognize: the day of Christ’s resurrection (Ps. 118:22-24), the day of joy and worship. “Must we not conclude that these inspired men regarded the authority of God as now attaching to this Lord’s day?”<sup>44</sup> Yes, we must. Yet the evidence thus far presented is only *half* the argument; God has provided theological proofs as well.

## Chapter 2: Theological Reasons for First Day Observance

### 1. Re-creation

A primary reason for the observance of the first day instead of the seventh is that Christ’s redemptive work is presented in Scripture (in a spiritual sense) as the creation of a new world. By His redemptive work, Jesus Christ (who is the second Adam, Rom. 5:12-21) created a new order, a new covenant, a new dispensation. His sinless life, atonement and victorious resurrection are the foundation of the regeneration of all things (Rom. 8:18-23). Christ’s work is presented in such dramatic cosmic terms because the Bible teaches that sin and the curse have permeated the old creation, reducing it to chaos. In poetic language Jeremiah describes the old creation as rendered dark and chaotic because of sin: “I beheld the earth, and indeed it was without form,

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<sup>42</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983 [1882]), 5:332.

<sup>43</sup> Seventh-day Adventists make much of the fact that throughout the book of Acts the Apostle Paul is observed going into the Jewish synagogue on the Jewish sabbath (i.e., Saturday). But upon careful examination of these passages it is quite clear that Paul’s *sole* purpose for going to the synagogue on the Jewish sabbath was to preach the gospel to unbelieving Jews. There is not a shred of evidence in the New Testament that the post-resurrection church met for public worship on Saturday. In fact, all the evidence points to a first-day observance. The idea that Paul went in to the Jewish synagogues on Saturday to worship because he believed in a seventh-day sabbath is absurd. Why would Paul worship with non-Christians, with unbelievers? The truth is that Paul’s practice was to first preach to all the Jews (synagogues in Paul’s day were virgin territory), and then to the Gentiles. When Paul felt that preaching the gospel was no longer profitable, his practice was to take the believers and depart and set up a Christian assembly. “But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus” (Ac. 19:9).

<sup>44</sup> Dabney, 1:531.

and void; and the heavens, they had no light” (4:23). Looking to the future, the prophets described Christ’s redemptive work of restoration as a creation of a new heaven and a new earth: “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind” (Isa. 65:17). “I have put My words in your mouth; I have covered you with the shadow of My hand, that I may plant the heavens, lay the foundations of the earth, and say to Zion, ‘You are My people’” (Isa. 51:16).

The re-creation was typified in Noah and the ark. Noah and his family (eight persons in all) were saved from the flood and the destruction of the whole world and brought into newness of life by entering the ark. The flood of judgment destroyed the old order, and out of the ark came the new humanity: a redeemed race. It is significant that God redeemed only eight persons out of the race of prediluvian mankind, for the number eight “has the same meaning of *newness, redemption, sanctification, and rest* which is characteristic of the number one, and to which the number eight itself is indeed equivalent as the first day in the second cycle of seven days.”<sup>45</sup>

The change of the weekly sabbath from the seventh day to the first day or eighth day was anticipated throughout the Old Testament.<sup>46</sup> Note that circumcision, which was instituted under the Abrahamic covenant, and which represented the new birth or regeneration (re-creation), took place on the eighth day (or the first day of the second week of the newborn baby’s life). The resurrection of Christ (which is the beginning of the new creation or regeneration of the world) also takes place on the eighth day. The eighth day was the day of dedication of the firstborn son. Jesus Christ is the firstborn or firstfruits of all who believe. “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the *firstfruits* of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20). Paul calls Christ “the *firstborn* among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29). The author of Hebrews calls the people of God “the general assembly and church of the *firstborn* who are registered in heaven” (Heb. 12:23). The eighth day was the day of cleansing from defilement (Lev. 14:10; 15:14, 29). The Apostle Paul points to the believer’s union with Christ in His resurrection (which took place on the eighth day) as a major reason that Christians are no longer under the power of sin (Rom. 6:4-5). There are simply too many parallels between the Old Testament types and Christ’s resurrection on the eighth day, or first day of the week, to ignore. The numbers eight and one in Scripture point to a new beginning: Christ’s redemptive re-creation. “The number ‘one’ is always the beginning of something, just as the number ‘seven’ continually terminates a period. For this reason, the number ‘eight’ as well as the number ‘one’ both occupy the place of a new beginning in the Scriptures. For ‘eight’ is, after all, also ‘one’ after ‘seven’ again and consequently the beginning of a new period.”<sup>47</sup>

That Christ has accomplished a re-creation is even more clearly taught in the New Testament. Christ reveals Himself to the Apostle John as “the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God” (Rev. 3:14). The Apostle Paul clearly parallels the first creation (of which the preincarnate Son was the Mediator) and the second creation

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<sup>45</sup> Lee, p. 14.

<sup>46</sup> Some Bible scholars argue that the focus of the fourth commandment is on the *pattern* of six days of labor and one day of rest and *not* the particular day, which must be established by extra-decalogical revelation. Lee writes, “But *the seventh day* is the sabbath...not, as the Seventh Day Adventists insist, ‘the seventh day *of the week*,’ but simply, the seventh day, that is, the seventh day in relation to the six days of labor just described in the previous verse. Hence, the hebdomodal cycle of work and rest is clearly taught by the commandment; but the precise day of the week which is the sabbath in each particular dispensation must be established by the extra-Decalogical data of the dispensation concerned. It is, however, always ‘the sabbath of the Lord thy God’—the day of man’s personal re-creating Creator” (*op. cit.*, p. 147).

<sup>47</sup> Lee, p. 13.



(accomplished by the divine-human Mediator). “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence” (Col. 1:15-18). Calvin writes, “He is the beginning, because he is the first-born from the dead; for in the resurrection there is a restoration of all things, and in this manner the commencement of the second and new creation, for the former had fallen to pieces in the ruin of the first man.”<sup>48</sup> “God instituted both the Edenic sabbath and the New Testament sabbath for man at the time of creation and re-creation respectively, by His own specific example.”<sup>49</sup>

The resurrection of Jesus Christ ushered in a new creation “wherein old things are passed away, and all things become new: we are said to be created unto Christ Jesus unto good works: all things are restored and reconciled whether in heaven or in earth, and God hath caused light to shine out of darkness, as he did at the beginning; and the dissolution of the Jewish state was often spoken of in the Old Testament as the end of the world. But we who belong to the gospel-church belong to the new creation; and therefore there seems to be at least as much reason, that we should commemorate the work of this creation, as that the members of the ancient Jewish church should commemorate the work of the old creation.”<sup>50</sup>

Now that it has been established beyond doubt that the inspired apostles taught that Christ’s redemptive work was a re-creation every bit as significant and important as the first creation, a question must be answered: When did Christ, the creator of a new heavens and earth, rest from His work of re-creation? Did He rest on Saturday? No, for His body was still in the tomb under the power of death, subject to a state of degradation and humiliation.<sup>51</sup> Christ entered His rest on Sunday, the first day of the week. Thus, the day of rest and worship is no longer the

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<sup>48</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), p. 153.

<sup>49</sup> Lee, p. 27. The Seventh-day Adventist contention that the Sabbath always has and always will be Saturday does not hold up under scrutiny. “There is no evidence that the Sabbath held from Adam to Joseph, fell on a Saturday; and still less that it fell on a Saturday *before* the fall.... Moreover, it is quite possible that the sevenfold cycle was disrupted at least once more during the Jews’ slavery in Egypt between the time of Joseph and the reinstatement of the sabbath in the time of Moses (Ex. 1-16). But even from the time of Moses onward, although the days have thenceforth (as previously) devolved in unbroken succession, they have not all been uniformly twenty-four hours each in duration. At least two such days were very considerably longer, namely Joshua’s long day (Josh. 10:13) and the day when Hezekiah’s sundial moved back fifteen degrees (Is. 38:8). It is, however, unquestionable that the sabbath fell on Saturday in the days of Christ’s earthly life” (Lee, p. 343). Cf. R.J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 134-36.

<sup>50</sup> Edwards, 2:97.

<sup>51</sup> Those who attempt to find a sabbath rest for Christ in His lying in the tomb under the power of death fail to note the following points: (1) that death is an aspect of the curse; thus, death for Christ was an aspect of His humiliation and not His victory; (2) that sabbath rest in Scripture is a rest from creative work and re-creative work, and Christ’s re-creative work was not complete or accomplished until He walked out of the tomb; (3) that biblical sabbath rest is not a cessation of all activity or the resting of a corpse but is an active celebratory rest, a rest involving conscious worshipful reflection; (4) that the sabbath rest and entering into salvation are compared in Scripture; therefore, the sabbath rest could not begin until the achievement of salvation was completed by Christ (this occurred when He rose from the dead). “The abolition of the Jewish sabbath seems to be intimated by this, that Christ, the Lord of the sabbath, lay buried on that day. Christ, the author of the world, was the author of that work of creation of which the Jewish sabbath was the memorial. It was he that worked six days and rested the seventh day from all his works, and was refreshed. Yet he was holden in the chains of death on that day. God, who created the world, now in his second work of creation, did not follow his own example, if I may so speak; he remained imprisoned in the grave on that day, and took another day to rest in” (Edwards, 2:99).

seventh day which looked back to the rest of the first creation, but it is the first day which looks back to the rest of the new creation in Christ. This makes sense in light of the fact that the first day is the day of victory over the world, sin and the devil. It is the day that Christ's kingdom was established with power. It is the day of Jesus' enthronement at the right hand of God, and the day that our Lord chose to baptize His church (Pentecost Sunday).

## 2. Deuteronomy 5:15 and the New Covenant Lord's Day

The change of the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week is also clearly seen in comparing the old covenant sabbath and its relation to redemption from bondage in Egypt to the new covenant Lord's day and redemption in Christ. God commanded, "Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day" (Dt. 5:15). Every Sabbath, the Jews were to remember God's grace, mercy and glorious work of redemption in bringing them out of Egypt, in *addition* to His work in creation.

The deliverance from Egypt was the great redemptive act of the Old Testament; it serves as the great type of the perfect redemption accomplished by Christ. Since the command to remember His redemption is not to Israel alone, but also applies to Christ's church, Christians have the same responsibility to remember the Lord's day. "The redemption from Egypt cannot be properly viewed except as the anticipation of the greater redemption wrought in the fullness of the time. Hence, if redemption from Egypt accorded sanction to the sabbath institution and provided reason for its observance, the same must apply to the greater redemption and apply in a way commensurate with the greater fullness and dimensions of redemption secured by the death and resurrection of Christ. In other words, it is the fullness and richness of the new covenant that so accord to the sabbath ordinance increased relevance, sanction, and blessing."<sup>52</sup> If the type or shadow is significant enough in God's eyes to warrant a special remembrance under the old covenant, then certainly the anti-type (the substance and the perfect redemption wrought by Christ, which encompasses the whole earth instead of one small nation) warrants the same special remembrance. Comparing the redemption from Egypt to redemption in Christ, Jonathan Edwards writes, "And it was but a shadow, the work in itself was nothing in comparison with the work of [Christ's] redemption. What is a petty redemption of one nation from a temporal bondage, to the eternal salvation of the whole church, of the elect in all ages and nations, from eternal damnation, and the introduction of them, not into a temporal Canaan, but into heaven, into eternal glory and blessedness."<sup>53</sup> Thus is it not fitting for the new covenant church to sanctify the first day, the day of total victory and perfect redemption for the elect of all nations and all times? "This is the rationale for regarding the Lord's day as the Christian Sabbath. It follows the line of thought which the Old Testament itself prescribes for us when it appeals to redemption as the reason for sabbath observance. The principle enunciated in Deuteronomy 5:15 receives its verification and application in the new covenant in the memorial of finalized redemption, the Lord's day."<sup>54</sup> Those who cling to the old seventh-day sabbath fail to understand

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<sup>52</sup> John Murray, *Collected Writings* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1976), 1:220-21.

<sup>53</sup> Edwards, 2:98.

<sup>54</sup> John Murray, *Collected Writings*, 1:221-22. Jonathan Edwards applies the fourth commandment as stated in Dt. 5:15 to Christians as follows: "The Egypt from which we under the gospel are redeemed, is the spiritual Egypt; the house of bondage from which we are redeemed, is a state of spiritual bondage. Therefore the words, as spoken to us,

the principle set forth in Deuteronomy 5:15 as it applies to new covenant believers, and thus dishonor the Lord's day.

### 3. Hebrews 4:9-10 and the Sabbath

A passage of Scripture that is important in the debate regarding the perpetuity of the weekly sabbath is Hebrews 4:9-10: "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His." This passage has been interpreted three different ways. Some interpreters use this passage as a proof text against the perpetuity of the Sabbath. They argue that when a person believes in Christ, he then ceases from his evil works, and his whole life as a Christian is one long sabbath rest. Thus they argue that the weekly sabbath was but a type of the Christian's rest in Christ and is no longer binding on the church. Gary North writes, "Calvin followed the tradition laid by Irenaeus and Augustine, interpreting the sabbath as an allegory of the believer's rest in Christ from the bondage of sin, a rest to be made perfect in eternity. This, of course, was simply the teaching of Hebrews 4, and Calvin was unwilling to break from its perspective. He went lawn bowling after church on Sunday, a fact which later sabbatarians have chosen to ignore."<sup>55</sup> This interpretation, as shall be shown, is not correct. An examination of the context (3:7-4:11; cf. 9:11) proves that the sabbath rest spoken of throughout chapters 3 and 4 is the unending rest in the consummate new heavens and new earth. Therefore, this passage cannot be used as a proof text against the weekly sabbath, because the looking toward the great eschatological sabbath when believers

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are to be thus interpreted, remember, thou wast a servant to sin and Satan, and the Lord thy God delivered thee from this bondage, with a mighty hand and outstretched arm; therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath-day [the Lord's day]" (*op. cit.*, 2:98).

<sup>55</sup> Gary North, "The Economics of Sabbath Keeping," in Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 825. Calvin's view regarding the Sabbath is most clearly set forth in his sermon on Dt. 5:12-14, preached on June 20, 1555: "Now must we come to the second point: which is that (as I have said already) the sabbath day was a policy or order whereby to exercise the faithful in the service of God. For that day was ordained for men to assemble in, to hear the doctrine of the law preached, to communicate together with sacrifices, and to call upon the name of God. As touching these points, it belongs as well to us as to the people of old time. For although the figure be ceased (I mean the same that St. Paul speaks of in the epistle to the Colossians), yet notwithstanding, so much as concerns the order continues still and has his use. And to what end serves this order? To assemble ourselves in the name of God. True it is that this ought to be done continually: howbeit for our infirmities' sake, or rather by reason of our slothfulness, it is requisite that some one day should be chosen out. If we were as earnest in serving of God as we ought to be, we should not appoint one day in a week only, but every man ought to meet both morning and evening without law written, to be edified more and more by God's word. And truly this exercise is more than needful for us, considering that we be so inclined to evil, as there needs not anything to thrust us out of the way: and therefore it were expedient for us to come together daily in the name of God. But what? We see that men will scarcely meet upon the [Lord's] day, and that most of them must be held to it as it were by force. Considering then that there is such infirmity in us, let us understand that this order was not made all only for the Jews, that they might have some day wherein to come together, but also for us, so as it belongs to us as well as to them... What then? We must apply this not to a higher purpose: we must refrain from our own business which might hinder us from the minding of God's works, and we must call upon His name and exercise ourselves in His Word. *If we spend the Lord's day in making good cheer, and in playing and gaming, is that a good honoring of God? No, is it not a mockery, yes and a very unhallowing of his name? Yes.* But when the shopwindows are shut in on the Lord's day, and men travel not as they do on other days: it is to the end we should have the more leisure and liberty to [attend] to the things that God commands... Behold, a great number think to have the Lord's day most free to follow their own business... But the world sees how all things are unhallowed, insomuch that most folk have no regard at all of the using of that day which was ordained to withdraw us from all earthly cares and affairs, that we might give ourselves wholly unto God" (*Sermons on Deuteronomy* [Carlisle, PA, Banner of Truth, 1987], pp. 203-04; spelling modernized, emphasis added).

enter their perfect rest with God applied to Adam, Moses, David, and believers of every age. If the Sabbath as the perfect future rest did not abrogate the keeping of one day under the old covenant, there is no reason for it to abrogate the new covenant Lord's day, for the eschatological meaning is the same in both dispensations.<sup>56</sup>

A second interpretation common among strict sabbatarians is that Hebrews 4:9 is actually a statement regarding the weekly sabbath and not the future eternal sabbath. The author of Hebrews discusses the eternal future rest in chapters three and four, but in 4:9 he argues for a remaining weekly sabbath. Since new covenant believers have the same hope of eternal rest as old covenant believers, the weekly sabbath remains to foreshadow that future rest. In his examination of chapter 4, R.L. Dabney argues: "That God has an eternal spiritual rest; that he invited Old Testament believers to share it; that it is something higher than Israel's home in Canaan, because after Joshua had fully installed Israel in that rest, God's rest is still held up as something future. The seventh day (verse 4) was the memorial of God's rest, and was thus connected with it. It was under the old dispensation, as under the new, a spiritual *faith* which introduced into God's rest, and it was unbelief which excluded from it. But as God's rest was something higher than a home in Canaan, and was still offered in the ninety-fifth Psalm long after Joshua settled Israel in that rest, it follows (verse 9) that there still remains a sabbatism, or Sabbath-keeping, for God's people under the new dispensation; and hence (verse 11) we ought to seek to enter into that spiritual rest of God, which is by faith."<sup>57</sup>

A strong support for this interpretation is the fact that the word used to describe God's rest throughout both chapters (3-4) is a different word than the one used in verse 9. In 3:11, 18, and 4:1, 3, 5, 10, and 11, the Greek word *katapausis* is used. But in 4:9 *sabbatismos* is used.<sup>58</sup> Although it is true that both words can be translated as rest, why use a different word only once, a word usually translated as sabbath? Lee writes, "'*Katapausis*' and '*katapauo*' in the LXX are used in respect of the (uninterrupted and therefore unrepeatable) rest of God in Gen. 2:2-3 and Ps. 95:11, but '*sabbatizo*' and '*sabbatismos*' are used in Ex. 16:30 and II Chr. 36:21 to indicate the (intermittent and therefore repeatable) keeping of a sabbath at regular intervals. Conclusion: the '*sabbatismos*' of Heb. 4:9, *which the (saved) people of God must keep*, is the intermittent and repeatable Sabbath at regular (weekly) intervals."<sup>59</sup> According to this interpretation the passage should be translated: "There remains therefore a sabbath for the people of God" (v. 9).

This interpretation is supported by other aspects of the book of Hebrews. The book was written to Jews who no doubt needed reassurance, given the fact that they had (from an unconverted Jewish standpoint) turned their backs on their nation when they followed Christ. They also needed to be warned that the only way really to remain the people of God and enter God's eternal rest was by faith. Since Christ's work of redemption and first-day resurrection

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<sup>56</sup> "There were two 'rests' frequently mentioned in the O.T. as special pledges of God's favour: the sabbath and the land of Canaan: the former being styled 'the sabbath of rest to the Lord' (Ex. 35:2), and 'the sabbath of the Lord' (Ex. 20:10); the latter, 'the rest which the Lord gave them' (Deut. 12:9; Josh. 1:15). In view of these the Hebrews might well say, 'We have always enjoyed the Lord's sabbath, and our fathers have long occupied Canaan, why then do you speak so much about entering into God's rest?' The verses which follow meet this objection, showing that neither of those 'rests' was meant by David in Ps. 95, nor by himself here in Heb. 4" (Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of Hebrews* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954], p. 204).

<sup>57</sup> Dabney, 1:535.

<sup>58</sup> "*Sabbatismos*—the verb *sabbatizo* (I keep the Sabbath) is the basis of the noun *sabbatismos*, which occurs only once in the New Testament. The ending *-mos* signifies the progressive act of keeping the Sabbath" (Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984], p. 115).

<sup>59</sup> Lee, p. 235.

gave the new covenant people a new day of rest and worship (a day obviously not recognized by their unbelieving brethren), they also needed reassurance regarding sabbath-keeping on the new day. The reasons for keeping a sabbath were no less relevant for Christians as for old covenant saints. Both looked back to the creation and redemption and both looked forward to the eternal sabbath. Pink concurs: “‘There *remaineth* therefore a sabbath-keeping for the people of God.’ The reference is not to something future, but to what is present.<sup>60</sup> The Greek verb (in its passive form) is never rendered by any other English equivalent than ‘remaineth.’ It occurs again in Heb. 10:26. The word ‘remain’ signifies ‘to be left after others have withdrawn, to continue unchanged.’ Here then is a plain, positive, unequivocal declaration by the Spirit of God: ‘There remaineth therefore a sabbath-keeping.’ Nothing could be simpler, nothing less ambiguous. The striking thing is that this statement occurs in the very epistle whose theme is the superiority of *Christianity* over Judaism; written to those addressed as ‘holy brethren, partakers of the *heavenly* calling.’ Therefore, it cannot be gainsaid [i.e., denied] that Heb. 4:9 refers directly to *the Christian Sabbath*. Hence we solemnly and emphatically declare that any man who says there is no Christian Sabbath takes direct issue with the *N.T.* scriptures.”<sup>61</sup>

The third view (the majority view) holds that verse 9 refers to the believer’s future everlasting sabbath in heaven. Thus, the verse does not teach an explicit sabbatarianism but an implicit. “This verse indirectly establishes the obligation of the Sabbath still; for the type continues until the antitype supersedes it: so legal sacrifices continued till the great antitypical Sacrifice superseded it. As then the antitypical heavenly Sabbath rest will not be till Christ comes, our Gospel Joshua, to usher us into it, the typical earthly Sabbath must continue till then.”<sup>62</sup> The Christian Sabbath should focus the believer’s attention on the past, the present, and the future. The worshiper must look at God’s rest from His creative labors and remember that, had Adam obeyed the covenant of works, he would have participated in God’s rest. In the present, Christians celebrate an accomplished redemption and resurrection joy. Believers are to look to the future and the eternal sabbath rest in the presence of Christ. “The purpose of the Sabbath from the first was eschatological; it was a sign of the end, not only of creation but re-creation. The Sabbath in history took its pattern from the creation week of Genesis, but its time and date on the calendar from the day of salvation. Thus, in the Old Testament, the Sabbath celebrated and commemorated the passover, Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. Since Christ, the Sabbath is dated from the day of resurrection. In both cases, it is future-oriented, looking forward

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<sup>60</sup> The verb *eiserchomai* and participle *katēpausen* in v. 10 are both aorist and indicate that entrance into God’s eternal rest occurs only once. In v. 9, however, the verb *apoleipetai* (there remains) is in the present tense. If the author of Hebrews is *not* saying that a weekly sabbath continually remains for the people of God, then he must be speaking of the continuous hope (or ever present hope) of the eternal sabbath set before the people of God. Thus, the eternal sabbath continuously remains before God’s people and should motivate them to faithful obedience.

<sup>61</sup> Pink, pp. 209-10.

<sup>62</sup> A. R. Fausset, Robert Jamison and David Brown, *A Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), 2:449. “The day of rest is indeed an *emblem* of eternal rest! During our lifespan on earth, we celebrate the Sabbath and realize only partially what Sabbath-rest entails. In the life to come, we shall fully experience God’s rest, for then we will have entered a rest that is eternal. ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them”’ (Rev. 14:13)... However, the text indicates that whoever enters God’s rest does so only once. He enters that rest fully when his labors are ended. He then enjoys uninterrupted heavenly rest from which death, mourning, crying, and pain have been removed; at that time God’s dwelling will be with men; he will live with them and be their God, for they are his people (Rev. 21:4)” (Kistemaker, p. 112).

to the great restoration of all things.”<sup>63</sup> The second and third views are acceptable interpretations compatible with the thesis of this book.

## Chapter 3: Christ’s Teaching on the Sabbath

Those who reject the binding nature of the sabbath ordinance for New Testament believers also appeal to the teachings of Jesus on the subject in support of their thesis. They argue that Christ relaxed or repealed the sabbath law because He regarded it as merely a ceremonial ordinance. But an examination of the relevant Scripture will prove that the anti-sabbatarian interpretation of Christ’s teaching is misguided and unscriptural. The most important passage in the debate over the perpetuity of the Sabbath is recorded in Matthew 12:1-8.

At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, “Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!” But He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple. But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

This encounter with the Pharisees is also recorded by Mark (2:23-28) and Luke (6:1-5). The only significant statement omitted from Matthew’s account is Christ’s statement that “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mk. 2:27). Those who believe that Christ is here relaxing the sabbath law for new covenant believers completely miss the point of this passage. Christ is not discussing how the sabbath ordinance is changed for the new dispensation; He is expounding how the Sabbath is to be observed by the Jews under the Mosaic law. The Mosaic administration (including the observance of the ceremonial laws) was in full force until the death of Christ; Jesus obeyed the Mosaic laws perfectly from His birth to His death. The idea that He permitted His disciples to violate the law of Moses *before* the types were fulfilled in His death is absurd. Christ was not relaxing the Sabbath but explaining its proper observance to the Pharisees who had perverted it with their legalistic additions. “The Jewish teachers had corrupted many of the commandments, by interpreting them more loosely than they were intended; a mistake which Christ discovered and rectified...in his sermon on the mount: but concerning the fourth commandment, they had erred in the other extreme, and interpreted it too strictly. Note, it is common for men of corrupt minds, by their zeal in rituals, and the external services of religion, to think to atone for the looseness of their morals.”<sup>64</sup>

How do we know that Christ was explaining the proper observance of the Sabbath, rather than relaxing the sabbath law? First, if Christ was relaxing the old covenant sabbath ordinance, as some suppose, one would expect Christ to admit that His disciples had in fact transgressed the Sabbath. Then He would explain why it was now permissible to ignore its demands. But when confronted by the Pharisees, Christ argued that His disciples were completely innocent of any wrongdoing. Our Lord could argue that His disciples were innocent if they were only guilty of

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<sup>63</sup> R. J. Rushdoony, *Salvation and Godly Rule* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1983), p. 96.

<sup>64</sup> Henry, *Commentary*, 5:163.

breaking the man-made additions, and not God's law itself. Second, if Christ was instituting *new*, more lax sabbath regulations, then the illustrations that He used to argue for His disciples' innocence would be of absolutely no use at all. Why? Because David and the Levitical priest were without question under the full authority of the fourth commandment as enunciated in the law of Moses. Christ's historical examples are only of use if He is explicating the fourth commandment of the decalogue and not some supposedly more lax new covenant version of it. Would anyone argue that King David and the Levitical priests were new covenant Christians ten centuries before the birth of Christ? If the Savior was arguing for the annulment of the fourth commandment, He would have been teaching that the fourth commandment did not even apply to the Old Testament believers. Such a notion is ludicrous.

In order to prove further that Christ was not modifying or lessening the existing sabbath law, a brief exposition of the passage is in order. The Pharisees were the enemies of Christ; thus they were continually looking for a reason to accuse, condemn, and destroy Him. They seized the opportunity when they observed His disciples walking through a grain field, plucking the heads of grain and rubbing off the chaff between their palms to eat. Suddenly they confronted Christ, accusing Him of allowing His disciples to break the Sabbath. How were they breaking it? According to rabbinical tradition, their innocent activity was defined as reaping and threshing grain! "According to the Mishna that man is guilty of sabbath desecration who on that day 'takes ears of grain equal to a lamb's mouthful.'"<sup>65</sup> "They based their whole case against the Lord and His disciples on the fact that He was allowing His disciples to transgress some of the merely traditional and anti-Scriptural thirty-nine 'Azoth' by 'reaping' (plucking the ears) and 'threshing' (rubbing them in their hands) on the sabbath day."<sup>66</sup> In the face of this false accusation based on the false legalism of the Pharisaical oral *traditions*, Christ set forth the true meaning of the Sabbath. His explanation of the Sabbath is an implicit condemnation of the Pharisees' interpretation of the fourth commandment and an explicit justification of His disciples' behavior. "Over against their restrictive traditions, He posited the perfect freedom of the authoritative Word of God."<sup>67</sup>

## 1. Acts of Necessity

If one includes a statement made by Christ which is not recorded by Matthew but by Mark (2:27), then Christ gives four reasons why He and His disciples were innocent. First, Christ argues that acts of necessity do not violate the sabbath law. The disciples were hungry and needed to eat. "Works necessary either for the upholding of our lives, or fitting us for sabbath

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<sup>65</sup> William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), p. 511.

<sup>66</sup> Lee, p. 194. "How blind is superstition, that they could think that it was contrary to the will of God, that his people should fit themselves for the service of the sabbath by a moderate refreshment!... What a little thing do they carp at! Wherein was the sin? the plucking of a few ears of corn, and rubbing them, could hardly be called servile labour, especially not in the sense of commandment, which restrained not necessary labor, but such labor as took them off from the duties of the sabbath.... Hypocrites and formalists are always most zealous for little things in the law, or for their own additaments [additions] to it" (Matthew Poole, *Commentary on the Holy Bible* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1963], 3:53). The very fact that the Pharisees' accusation was not based on the Word of God but on human tradition refutes the notion that Christ was altering the fourth commandment. If the accusation is based upon unscriptural human tradition, then the response to it (as in the Sermon on the Mount) is a refutation of unscriptural human tradition.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

services, are lawful upon the sabbath day.”<sup>68</sup> He appeals to the historical example of David, who when fleeing for his life from Saul, ate the showbread which was not lawful to eat (12:4). In so doing they violated the ceremonial law which stated that the showbread was only for “Aaron and his sons” (Lev. 29:9). Christ refutes the Pharisees by a direct appeal to Scripture, by setting a parallel between David and his followers and Himself and His disciples. If David’s situation permitted him to violate a ceremonial provision without sin, then certainly Christ (David’s anti-type) and His disciples could violate the regulatory traditions of finite, sinful men without guilt. “When the mind of the law-giver and the intent and the end of the command is not contravened, the precept is not broken: for this is the ground of Christ’s defense. Not reading nor considering the Scripture, whereby the meaning of the law may be understood, is the cause of error and mistaking of duties. This is it he says [*sic*], *Have ye not read?*”<sup>69</sup>

Unfortunately, certain anti-sabbatarians have wrongly inferred from the example of the showbread that Christ was teaching that the Sabbath was ceremonial, and that for this reason it could be violated for necessity without incurring guilt. This interpretation has several problems and must be rejected. As noted, the parallel was not between the ceremonial law and the biblical sabbath law, but between the ceremonial law and the man-made traditions of the Pharisees. If the necessity of sustaining life allowed David’s men to eat the showbread, then certainly necessity permitted Christ’s disciples to ignore the rabbinic law. Furthermore (as noted above), the moral and perpetual nature of the Sabbath is taught throughout the Old Testament. An interpretation of Scripture which contradicts the clear and repeated teaching of other parts of God’s Word must be rejected. Christ was not teaching that under certain circumstances people can *actually* violate the Sabbath with impunity. His whole point was that certain activities that the Pharisees considered to be a violation were *not* a violation at all, but thoroughly lawful. Consequently, this passage does not teach that the Sabbath is ceremonial.

## 2. Religious Works

Christ’s second argument is that some types of work are permissible on the Sabbath. Using an example from the law, He argues that religious work is not a violation of the Sabbath. “The priests in the temple did a great deal of servile work on the sabbath day; killing, flaying, burning the sacrificed beasts, which in a common case would have been profaning the sabbath; and yet it was never reckoned any transgression of the fourth commandment, because the temple service required and justified it.”<sup>70</sup> “If all work on the sabbath profaned the sabbath, as the Pharisees maintained, the priests were guilty of continual profanation. The Saviour takes hold of the Pharisees’ own word, when He uses the term *profaned*. He lays hold of it for the purpose of showing them that they should be somewhat more cautious in throwing out charges of profanation.”<sup>71</sup> Some object and ask how plucking grain compares to the service of the temple. The answer lies in the fact that Christ and His disciples were spending the sabbath day preaching the gospel and healing the sick. The plucking of grain was necessitated by their pious activities and not by servile work or leisure. Thus, “Whatsoever bodily work is necessary for the

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<sup>68</sup> Poole, 3:53.

<sup>69</sup> David Dickson, *A Brief Exposition of the Evangel of Jesus Christ According to Matthew* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1981 [1647]), p. 159.

<sup>70</sup> Henry, *Commentary*, 5:164.

<sup>71</sup> James Morrison, *Practical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1981 [1884]), p. 198.



promoving [i.e., promoting] of the service and worship of God upon the Sabbath is not a breaking of the Sabbath.”<sup>72</sup> Christ strengthens His argument when He says, “Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple” (12:6). If the priests could serve in the temple without guilt, then surely Christ’s disciples could serve the greater Temple—the Son of God—without guilt. God’s Son is infinitely greater than God’s house which is but a type and shadow.

### 3. Works of Mercy

Christ’s third argument is that “God prefers compliance with the spirit of his law, calling for humility, love and mercy, to mere observance of its outer form.”<sup>73</sup> Jesus quotes from Hosea 6:6, which teaches that God prefers mercy, kindness and love to our brethren before sacrifice—before the religious rituals that were part of Old Testament worship. If a man is on his way to the temple to sacrifice a goat and sees his brother drowning in a river, he must delay the sacrifice and save his brother. Christ teaches that the caring for and saving of human life are permissible—yes, even required—on the Sabbath. “What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (Mt. 12:11-12). The Pharisees’ problem was that they ignored the spirit of the law and focused their attention on the external: they loved ritual but lacked compassion. “Therefore the hunger which plagued the disciples of Jesus failed to kindle within the hearts of their critics any feeling of tenderness or eagerness to help.”<sup>74</sup> Instead of offering the disciples something to eat to enable them to serve and worship God more effectively on the Sabbath, the Pharisees merely condemned them. What hypocrites!

Anti-sabbatarians seize upon Christ’s reference to Hosea 6:6 as proof that the Sabbath is ceremonial, because they say that acts of mercy take precedence over strict observance. But it must once again be pointed out that the disciples did not actually break the Sabbath, for Christ’s disciples were *guiltless* (12:7). Christ was not making the point that the Sabbath is ceremonial and thus can be violated, but that the Pharisees did not understand the true meaning of the Scriptures. This point is brought out more clearly when a statement of Christ’s omitted from Matthew’s account but included in Mark’s is considered: “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mk. 2:27). “The sabbath was instituted to be a blessing for man: to keep him healthy, to make him happy, and to render him holy. Man was not created to be the sabbath’s slave.”<sup>75</sup> The Pharisees had taken a law given for man’s benefit and turned it upside down. They made the Sabbath a legalistic burden, a maze of man-made regulations. They had become so obsessed with their own regulations that the true meaning of the Sabbath was lost. God ordained the Sabbath to be a day of true freedom, a day of rejoicing, a day of reflection upon God, a day of worship, and a day to serve and help one’s neighbor. The Sabbath was not

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<sup>72</sup> Dickson, p. 160. Alfred Edersheim argues that Christ’s first two reasons are both the same: *the service of God*. “The Sabbath-Law was not one merely of rest, but of rest for worship. The service of the Lord was the object in view. The priests worked on the Sabbath, because this service was the object of the Sabbath; and David was allowed to eat of the shewbread, not because there was danger to life from starvation, but because he pleaded that he was on the service of the Lord and needed this provision. The disciples, when following the Lord, were similarly on the service of the Lord; ministering to Him was more than ministering in the Temple, for He was greater than the Temple” (*Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981] 2:58).

<sup>73</sup> Dabney, 1:513.

<sup>74</sup> Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 514.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 514-15.

made to be a day of slavery to the arbitrary laws and regulations of man. “God did not require the Hebrews, nor anyone else, to keep it as a means of ascetic self-punishment, like the papist’s hair shirt, but he required them to keep it intelligently and from the heart, as an appointed and blessed means of grace.”<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, Jesus did not say that the Sabbath was made for the *Jews*, but that the Sabbath was made for *man*. “God made it for Adam in paradise, and renewed it to Israel on Mount Sinai. It was made for all mankind, not for the Jew only, but for the whole family of Adam.”<sup>77</sup> “The word ‘man’ is used in its generic sense—the race.”<sup>78</sup> Therefore, this passage, which is often quoted as a proof text against sabbatarianism, is actually sabbatarian to the core.

#### 4. Lord of the Sabbath

The conclusion and climax of Christ’s argument is His lordship over the Sabbath (Mt. 12:8). “The entire exposition regarding the Sabbath is given by Jesus as the Lord who has instituted the Sabbath, who *thus* knows what the Sabbath law involves. The emphasis is on *kurios* [Lord], but this does not imply that as Lord of the Sabbath Jesus can disregard the Sabbath, set it aside, do what he may please with it. As Lord of the Sabbath, who instituted it, he upholds it, he will tolerate no Pharisaical interference with its true purpose. It is thus that Jesus protects his disciples against the charge (*aitia*) that they are violating the Sabbath. As Lord of the Sabbath, he would be the first to condemn every violation. As Lord of the Sabbath, he is now condemning the Pharisees’ perversion of the Sabbath.”<sup>79</sup> It was the Pharisees, not Christ’s disciples, who were guilty of dishonoring the Sabbath. “For in rejecting the Word of the Lord of the Sabbath—both the written Word of the Old Testament which He had just quoted, and the incarnate Word of the New Testament Who had just quoted them—they themselves were desecrating the sabbath.”<sup>80</sup>

Some theologians and expositors, in keeping with their anti-sabbatarian presuppositions, have an altogether different interpretation of Christ’s words. They argue that Christ is telling the Pharisees that because of His supreme authority as Lord and Sovereign He had relaxed and discontinued the sabbath law for His disciples. The anti-sabbatarian interpretation suffers from a number of insurmountable exegetical difficulties.

First, it would be quite inconsistent on Christ’s part to tell the Jews that He had not come to destroy the law (Mt. 5:17) and then turn around and eliminate one of the ten commandments.

Second, if Christ had actually abrogated the sabbath law and allowed His disciples to break it at will, then why was the sabbath issue not brought up in His trial before the Sanhedrin? Why then was there no response when Jesus said to the Jews, “Which of you convicts Me of sin?” (Jn. 8:46).

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<sup>76</sup> Dabney, 1:516. Some have argued that the statement “the Sabbath was made for man” means that man can do whatever he pleases on that day. Such an argument contradicts the biblical teaching on the Sabbath and is totally absurd. God created the woman (Eve) for the man (Adam). Does this mean that a man can do with a woman as he pleases (such as commit murder, adultery, fornication, etc.)? Of course not. God created the earth for mankind. Does this mean that man can destroy and pillage the earth at will? No, not at all. In like manner God created the Sabbath for man, for his benefit. Yet man is still required to obey God’s revealed will regarding that day.

<sup>77</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: Mark* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993), p. 29.

<sup>78</sup> Dabney, 1:516.

<sup>79</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Minneapolis, Augsburg, 1943), p. 466.

<sup>80</sup> Lee, p. 195.

Third, if Jesus had altered the Sabbath for His disciples, why did He spend so much time explaining the meaning of the Sabbath, and justifying His disciples' behavior, using *Old Testament* examples?

Fourth, the New Testament teaches that the ceremonial types were rendered null by Christ's *death*; thus, to argue that Christ was here—before His death—repealing the Sabbath is premature. Fifth, Christ came to “fulfill all righteousness”; as the second Adam He submitted perfectly to the whole Mosaic law, including circumcision. One does not fulfill a law by breaking it! Sixth, Christ says that His disciples were innocent of breaking the Sabbath. If the disciples were innocent, then why would Christ need to make an excuse, saying He altered or relaxed the day? The fact that Christ declared His disciples innocent renders the anti-sabbatarian interpretation impossible, for it would have Christ contradicting Himself in the same sentence. “This explanation would represent the Saviour as stultifying himself by his own words, as we sometimes hear foolish and false children and servants do, when, being charged with an offense, they first deny it and then make an excuse for it. Were such an explanation wilfully urged for Christ's words, it would be profane.”<sup>81</sup> “In what sense now is the son of man Lord of the Sabbath day? Not surely to abolish it—that surely were a strange Lordship, especially just after saying that it was made or instituted [*egeneto*] for MAN—but to *own* it, to *interpret* it, to *preside over* it, and to *ennoble* it, by merging it in ‘the Lord's Day’ (Rev. 1:10).”<sup>82</sup> The disciples were guiltless *not* because Jesus abrogated the Sabbath, but because they rendered *obedience* to Christ, who instituted the Sabbath, and not to the Pharisees who perverted its true meaning.<sup>83</sup>

## Chapter 4: The Different Grounds of the Law and the Sabbath

Much of the confusion surrounding the Sabbath is based on a poor understanding of the moral principle which underlies the Sabbath, and the different foundations of the ordinance. In the Bible there are basically four different grounds or reasons that undergird God's laws. (1) Some laws are based directly upon God's nature and character. An example is the command, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Ex. 20:16). This command is founded upon the fact that God is truth (Jn. 14:6) and cannot lie (Num. 23:19). Laws that are based on God's nature *cannot* change, for God never changes. (2) Other laws have their ground in God's created order before the fall. These laws have abiding validity prior to the second coming and final state. This category includes all creation ordinances (e.g., monogamous heterosexual marriage, the covenant headship of the husband and submission of the wife, the dominion mandate, labor, and the weekly sabbath). These laws are permanent and universal until the end of the world,<sup>84</sup> after which time they will no longer apply (Mt. 22:30; Heb. 4:3-11). (3) Another

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<sup>81</sup> Dabney, 1:518.

<sup>82</sup> David Brown, *The Four Gospels: A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1976 [1864]), p. 70.

<sup>83</sup> “The Saviour's reasoning is in substance this: ‘These men, blamed by you Pharisees, are innocent. I saw them pluck and eat the grain. It is enough that I do not forbid them; for I am the Lord of this Sabbath day. This law is my day. I was the person who published it from the top of Mount Sinai, as the divine Angel of the covenant. It is my authority which sustains it. Hence, if I am satisfied with this act of these men, that is proof enough of their innocence’ (Dabney, 1:517). Other reasons to reject this anti-sabbatarian argument are that the pattern of six days of work and one day of rest is a creation ordinance and thus continues until the consummation. The Sabbath is part of the ten commandments and clearly has a moral-perpetual aspect.

<sup>84</sup> “We might expect that the radical change in the human situation caused by the entrance of sin and its resulting miseries would have had the effect of abrogating, or at least modifying, the basic creation ordinances which had

category is that of positive law. These are commands of God which are grounded solely on the fact that God says that man must obey them. An example is the command to Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17). There was nothing intrinsically evil regarding the forbidden fruit; it was wrong to eat it *solely* because God said it was wrong. (4) Some laws are based on unique and temporary circumstances and thus automatically expire when those circumstances no longer exist. This category would apply to the ceremonial law and laws specifically tied to the Old Testament land of Israel (e.g., jubilee, cities of refuge, levirate marriage). Although these categories are not mutually exclusive (e.g., ceremonial laws are positive laws with a distinct typological purpose), they are helpful in understanding Jesus' teaching on the Sabbath and the change from the seventh day to the first day of the week.<sup>85</sup>

The Sabbath has a moral aspect and a positive aspect, and is a creation ordinance. It is moral in the sense that all men have a natural and perpetual obligation to worship God. Men must worship God, not just because God says so, but also because He is worthy of worship. The reason that man is only to worship the one true God and nothing else is because only God is infinite in perfection; His nature requires it. The Sabbath is also a creation ordinance; therefore, it is a creational imperative. Although wicked men deny it, man was created with a need to rest one day in seven, to recuperate from the week's toil, to reflect on the creative and re-creative work of God in Christ; to receive religious instruction, and to worship God both in public and in private. The institution of the Sabbath has its ground in the very fabric of creation, including man's nature.

The Sabbath also has a positive element. The day of the week in which man is to rest and worship God is grounded upon His revealed will. God could have chosen any day He desired, yet before Christ's resurrection He chose the seventh day, Saturday; and after the resurrection He chose the first day, Sunday. While it is true that both days follow the creative and re-creative work of God, God, if He desired, could have created the world in a millisecond or in seven years. "That a certain portion of time should be set apart for rest from labour is by experience found to be, on physiological and moral grounds, highly desirable. That some movement of the creation of the world and of the resurrection of Christ, and that some permanent and frequently-recurring type of the rest of heaven, should be instituted, is eminently desirable for man, considered as a religious being. But that all these ends should be combined and secured by one institution, and that precisely one whole day in seven should be allotted to that purpose, and that this one day in seven should be at one time the seventh and afterward the first day of the week, is evidently a matter of positive enactment, and binds us as long as the indications of the divine will in the matter remain unchanged."<sup>86</sup>

Understanding the positive aspect of the Sabbath is important for two reasons. First, it explains how God could change the day from the seventh to the first day of the week while retaining the true meaning and moral-perpetual aspect of it. Certain heretical groups (such as the Seventh-day Adventists) do not understand this positive element and thus mistakenly believe that

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been given to man in his state of integrity. This, however, is precisely what we do not find...the fall did bring revolutionary changes into man's life; yet these ordinances are still in effect and they indicate that the interests and occupations which lay closest to man's heart in original integrity must still lie close to his heart in his fallen state. Conditions and circumstances have been revolutionized by sin, but the basic structure of this earth, and of man's life in it, has not been destroyed. There is identity and continuity" (John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957], pp. 42, 44).

<sup>85</sup> For an excellent discussion of the different types of law and the Sabbath, see A.A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith*, p. 281 ff.

<sup>86</sup> Hodge, pp. 282-83.

there was something intrinsically moral about the seventh day itself. Thus, they foolishly argue that not even Christ Himself could change the day. James Durham understood this distinction: “Consider in this question, that there is a great difference between these two, to say the seventh day sabbath which the Jews kept, is moral, and to say the fourth command is moral. The one may be, and is abolished, because another is brought in its room. The other, to wit the command, may stand, and does stand, because it ties morally to a seventh day, but such a seventh day as the Lord should successively discover to be chosen by him; and *though the seventh is changed, yet one of seven is still reserved.*”<sup>87</sup> Second, it explains why acts of necessity and works of mercy are permitted on the Sabbath. God has chosen one day of every seven for the human race to rest and worship Him. If the worshiping of God is moral and the particular day is positive, then in a *serious* emergency such as a flood, warfare, forest fire or major earthquake, the day of public worship and rest could even be postponed until a more appropriate time (e.g., Monday or Tuesday) without guilt.<sup>88</sup> This point is important, for if the day itself was moral and not positive, then the postponing of rest and worship for an emergency or necessity could logically be considered the violation of a lesser moral command in order to obey a greater moral command (such as saving life). But the Bible does not approve of ethical relativism or situation ethics in any form. Thus, when Christ says to the Pharisees, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice” (Mt. 12:7), He was rebuking them for elevating a positive command (the observing of a certain day) over a moral command (to preserve human life). They clung to the outward form yet completely missed the essential meaning.

## Chapter 5: The Meaning of the Sabbath

Having observed that the Scriptures teach that the Sabbath is moral and perpetual, the important question that must now be answered is: How is the sabbath ordinance to be obeyed? The commandment says, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Ex. 20:8). “The precept is, *sanctify it, or keep it holy*. Sanctifying of it is twice mentioned in this command. 1. In this end, it’s said God *hallowed* or *sanctified* it, that is by separation, destination, and appointment for holy uses, and as part of worship. So he sanctified the temple, altar, etc., not by infusing any holiness in them, but by appointing them for holy uses. Thus only God can sanctify a day, or any other thing, so as to make it a part of worship, and no man or power on earth whatsoever can do that. 2. In the precept itself we are commanded to sanctify it, that is, by the application of it unto the uses wherefore he has set it apart; thus we sanctify what he has sanctified when we use it and employ it according to his appointment.”<sup>89</sup> The Sabbath is to be sanctified or set apart unto God in two ways: First, it is a day of rest from work, a day of cessation from the normal daily routine (the Hebrew word for sabbath is clearly related to the Hebrew verb *shabeth*, which means to rest or cease). Second, the day is set apart unto the service and worship of God.

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<sup>87</sup> Durham in Coldwell, p. 4; emphasis added.

<sup>88</sup> The author is *not* saying that the public worship of God and the sanctifying of the Lord’s day (the first day of the week) are optional. The point is that if one is required to work extremely hard on that day because of a foreign invasion, that working is *not* a violation of a moral law, for God does not give people the option of violating His moral law for any reason. Moral laws are based on God’s nature and character and thus can never be violated without insult to God. But God can allow the violation of a positive law, for a positive law is only based on His spoken word and not His nature. God can revoke positive law at any time and make any exceptions that He pleases, for His nature is not contradicted in the process.

<sup>89</sup> Durham in Coldwell, p. 29.

## 1. The Sabbath Rest

A study of the Scriptures reveals that the sabbath rest is a rest from one's normal worldly employments (except works of necessity and mercy) and from recreations.<sup>90</sup> The Lord has given man six days in which to work and take care of his business, house, factory or farm; therefore, there is no excuse to engage in servile labor on the Lord's day. Not only should people refrain from working on the Sabbath, but they should not engage in activities that encourage and cause others to break the Sabbath. Christians should not ordinarily go out to eat, buy gasoline, go grocery shopping, go to the shopping mall, etc., on the Lord's day. Our attitude should be that of righteous Nehemiah who labored to stop such profanation:

In those days I saw people in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them about the day on which they were selling provisions. Men of Tyre dwelt there also, who brought in fish and all kinds of goods, and sold them on the Sabbath to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said to them, "What evil thing is this that you do, by which you profane the Sabbath day?" (13:15-17).

"Unlike many modern public figures, Nehemiah was determined to put a stop to this flagrant sin. First of all, he testified against the merchants on the very day on which they sold their merchandise; he protested on the Sabbath as soon as he caught them red-handed, not even waiting for the morrow and the working days which were to follow, on which to voice his complaints (Neh. 13:15). Next, he approached the local politicians, the civil authorities. Contending with the nobles of Judah, he roundly accused them of themselves doing evil and themselves profaning the sabbath, by virtue of their own permissive connivance regarding the public desecration; and he went on to threaten them that God would bring even more wrath upon Israel than the previous sabbath curse of the captivity, if they did not act against that evil (Neh. 13:17-18)."<sup>91</sup> This is in stark contrast to today's fundamentalist pastors who have Super Bowl parties on the sabbath evening in place of public worship, or Reformed pastors who discuss the

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<sup>90</sup> The fourth commandment uses a very broad term when discussing what is forbidden. "*Mela'cah* work (cf. Gen. ii, 2), as distinguished from '*abodah* labour, is not so much a term denoting a lighter kind of labour, as a *general and comprehensive term* applied to the performance of any task, whether easy or severe" (C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981], 2:119; emphasis added).

<sup>91</sup> Lee, p. 175. Nehemiah echoes the warning given by God through Jeremiah to rebellious Judah before the captivity: "Thus said the Lord unto me; Go and stand in the gate of the children of the people, whereby the kings of Judah come in, and by the which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem; and say unto them, Hear ye the word of the Lord, ye kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that enter in by these gates: Thus saith the Lord; Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem; neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the sabbath day, neither do ye any work, but hallow ye the sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers. But they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear, nor receive instruction. And it shall come to pass, if ye diligently hearken unto me, saith the Lord, to bring in no burden through the gates of this city on the sabbath day, but hallow the sabbath day, to do no work therein; then shall there enter into the gates of this city kings and princes sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their princes, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: and this city shall remain for ever.... But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched" (Jer. 17:19-25, 27 KJV).

need for Christian reconstruction on Sunday afternoon at the International House of Pancakes. “It may be observed, that in those places where the sabbath is well kept, religion in general will be most flourishing; and that in those places where the sabbath is not much noticed, and much is not made of it, there is no great matter of religion [i.e., Christianity] in any way.”<sup>92</sup>

The cessation of one’s normal employments should also extend to one’s thoughts and conversation. The business person who takes Sunday off, yet spends the day meditating on how to conduct business in the next week and discussing company strategy, certainly has not kept the Sabbath. Schools do not hold classes on Sundays, yet many students spend the day studying science, mathematics and the liberal arts. “The Sabbath is not a day for such exercises as the reading of history, the studying of sciences.... People should not give their orders for the week’s work on the Lord’s day, nor converse about their worldly business.”<sup>93</sup> “These texts may tend to reprove those tradesmen, who, on the sabbath, post their books, state their accounts, or prepare their goods which are to be exposed to sale on the following day. And if we do not run these lengths in profaning the sabbath, yet we are highly guilty when our thoughts and discourse run after our covetousness, which is, in effect, a saying as they did who complained, ‘When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat?’ [Am. 8:5].”<sup>94</sup> Is it a hard thing to set aside one’s worldly employments, cares, thoughts and preparations for one day out of seven, for God who created all life and Jesus Christ who gives life eternal?

The Sabbath is also a day of resting from all worldly recreations. This is taught implicitly in the command itself, which teaches that the day is separated unto God and not our own pleasures. It is taught explicitly in Isaiah: “If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken” (58:13-14). Sabbath sanctification involves more than leaving the plow in the barn. The Jews had turned from true sabbath observance to doing their own pleasure; that is, they did not delight in the day and in Jehovah, but spent their time serving their own interests.

Isaiah is *not* saying that the Sabbath is to be unpleasurable, or a day of gloom and sadness, but that the day is to be focused on God (His person and works), not focused on

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<sup>92</sup> Edwards, 2:102. “The keeping of the sabbath is a high spiritual act, the expression of hope and faith on the part of the Christian sojourner in the midst of this present world. It is for this reason a very evil omen, a sign of apostasy, of a lack of spiritual life, of a sick faith and a waning hope, when they that call themselves Christians, that outwardly join the band of Christian pilgrims in the world, evince no longing to keep the sabbath properly, desecrate it, and more and more join the world, to follow after their own desires, speak their own words, and do their own evil works” (Herman Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism* [Grand Rapids: Reformed Free, 1972], 3:269). We live in a time when the vast majority of professing Christians take pride in sabbath desecration. That is because most churches *reject* the fourth commandment. Furthermore, those who believe in the moral and perpetual nature of the Sabbath are accused of being legalists and Judaizers. Is it any wonder that evangelical and even Reformed churches are more and more adding gimmicks and entertainment to public worship, to compete with Hollywood and the NFL?

<sup>93</sup> Thomas Boston, *Commentary on the Shorter Catechism* (Edmonton: Still Waters Revival Books, 1993), 2:194.

<sup>94</sup> Ridgely, 2:355. “Q. 4. What is it that makes a work servile? A. If it is done for our worldly gain, profit, and livelihood; or, if by prudent management, it might have been done the week before; or, if it be of such a kind, as may be delayed till after the Sabbath, Exod. xxxiv. 21. Six days thou shalt work, but on the seventh thou shalt rest: in earing time and in harvest thou shalt rest” (*Fisher’s Catechism*, p. 66).

pleasing ourselves. Isaiah focuses on three areas in which the Jews needed repentance. “The first of these, *not doing thy ways*, is parallel in thought to the earlier *doing thy pleasure*. There is no need to restrict these phrases to matters of business. The ‘way’ is a course of conduct and refers to all courses and actions that men choose in preference to the commands of God. These courses and actions may be right and legitimate on other days, but when they obtrude in the place of that delight, which is to find expression in the observance of the sabbath, they are to be refrained from. Secondly, *not finding thy pleasure* also refers to one’s own pleasure in distinction from what pleases God; and the third expression, *speaking words* (the noun is best understood as collective), probably refers to idle and vain talk, in which God is forgotten or ignored. What is mentioned tends to draw the heart away from God to the consideration of one’s own occupations. This is wrong conduct on the holy sabbath.”<sup>95</sup>

If one is to abstain from doing one’s own pleasure and even engaging in idle talk<sup>96</sup> on the Sabbath in order to delight in the Lord, then obviously recreations are forbidden. They are not to be practiced, watched on television, or even discussed on the Lord’s day.<sup>97</sup> God did not set the day apart from other days in order for man to play football, soccer, tennis, racquetball, baseball, swim laps, go bike riding, jogging, golfing, weight-lifting, hiking, and so on. The day was not sanctified for the NFL, NBA, NHL, professional baseball or tennis, concerts, theater attendance, movies, television, etc. The whole day is set apart for the public, family, and private worship of God. The day is for a holy resting where God and His works are meditated upon, discussed and celebrated by God’s people. This view, which is taught in the Westminster Standards and was practiced by Puritans and Presbyterians for centuries, may now be considered overly strict, unrealistic, and even legalistic, but it is clearly taught in God’s Word.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 3:427. Matthew Henry writes, “On sabbath days we must not walk in our own ways (that is, not follow our callings), not find our own pleasure (that is, not follow our sports and recreations); nay, we must not speak our own words, words that concern either our callings or pleasures; we must not allow ourselves a liberty of speech on that day as on other days, for we must then mind God’s ways, make religion the business of the day; we must choose the things that please him; and speak his words, speak of divine things as we sit in the house and walk by the way. In all we say and do we must put a difference between this day and other days” (*Commentary*, 4:341).

<sup>96</sup> “We may add, that it is not lawful, on the Sabbath Day, for persons to divert themselves by talking of news or common affairs. Such unseasonable discourse often gives a check to those lively frames of spirit we have had under the word preached; and by indulging it, we not only break the Sabbath ourselves, but, by our example, induce others to do the same. I do not deny that it may be seasonable to meditate on the providence of God towards the church and the world, on the Lord’s Day, as well as at other times; but then we must take heed that his glory, and not merely our own diversion, is the great inducement to such meditation” (Ridgeley, 2:356).

<sup>97</sup> The watching of TV on the Sabbath (other than videotapes of sermons, religious lectures, church history, etc.) is sinful in at least two ways. First, one is guilty of desecrating the Sabbath by ignoring God and doing one’s own pleasure. Second, one is guilty of *participating* in the blatant sabbath desecration of others. This is particularly true of Sunday sporting events. Paul says that people who practice certain sins (e.g., murder, homosexuality) are worthy of death. But not only are those who practice such things guilty; so are the people who “*approve* of those who practice them” (Rom. 1:32). Thus, Christians who delight in watching baseball, basketball and football players break the fourth commandment are guilty themselves also, for they are approving of their behavior. There is simply no biblical way to justify the watching of sporting events on the Lord’s day without resorting to dispensational and antinomian arguments. If someone from a distant time visited twentieth century America on the Lord’s day and observed the behavior of professing Christian men, he would likely conclude that football was some type of religious ordinance. If the professing Christian men of America were as enthusiastic about God, worship, the Bible and theology as they were about football, America would probably be a Christian nation.

<sup>98</sup> When someone suggests a return to the strict sabbatarianism of the past, or attempts to be specific regarding the requirements of the fourth commandment, he is often met with charges of pharisaical harshness, legalism and lack of Christian liberty, even by those who belong to conservative Presbyterian denominations. There also seems to be a



## 2. Works of Necessity and Mercy Permitted

The Bible teaches that certain works are permissible on the Sabbath: works of necessity and mercy. In the section above regarding Christ's teaching on the Sabbath, it was noted that works necessary to the proper observance of the public worship of God are permitted on the Lord's day (Mt. 12:5): preaching, teaching, collecting tithes, the singing of psalms, travel to and from worship, etc. If the priests could do religious work in the service of the temple without breaking the Sabbath, then certainly religious work done for the greater Temple, Jesus Christ, is permissible. Another necessity is the refreshment of the body with food and drink (Mt. 12:3-4). One cannot properly worship and meditate upon Christ and His works when one is famished or dying of thirst. The Lord's day is a day of joy, celebration and victory (Ps. 118:22-24), and thus under normal conditions is not a day of fasting, sackcloth and ashes. One must care for one's animals on the Sabbath by feeding and watering them. Works of necessity also involve taking care of emergencies: invading armies, fighting fires, floods, earthquakes, car accidents. If it is permissible to save the life of a beast on the Sabbath (Mt. 12:11-12), then it is permissible to save human life also. "But in all these things it should be regarded, that the necessity be real, and not pretended: for it is not enough that the work can be done to such advantage on another day; for that might let out people on the Sabbath, if it be a windy day or so, to cut down their corn, whom yet God has in a special manner provided against, Exod. xxxiv. 21."<sup>99</sup>

Christians must never confuse an inconvenience with a genuine necessity or emergency. If worship is to be missed, it should be because of a real sickness or hazard. Some treat a slight fatigue as a serious flu or a half inch of snow as a blizzard simply because they are lazy and do not really want to attend to the means of grace. Others break the Sabbath who turn ordinary providence into a crisis. These are motivated out of greed rather than laziness. "Hence though the weather and season is rainy, yet it is not lawful to cut down or gather in corn on the sabbath, their hazard in this case being common and from an ordinary immediate providence. Yet suppose that a river were carrying away corn, or that winds were like to blow them into the seas, it were

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general unwillingness to discipline sabbath violators by church courts. It appears that certain unwritten traditions regarding the Sabbath have developed among many modern Presbyterians. One seems to be that the Sabbath is best left vague and undefined. Many churches basically let individuals define the requirements of Lord's-day observance for themselves, as if the Westminster Standards did not exist and the Scriptures were unclear on the matter. Another seems to be that breaking the Sabbath is not a serious sin, and thus Sabbath violators should be ignored. There has been a subtle shift away from the Westminster Standards in many conservative Presbyterian bodies throughout the twentieth century. Presbyteries routinely license men to the ministry who have a lax view regarding recreation and entertainment on the sabbath day. Presbyterian denominations should be open and honest and either alter the Westminster Standards to reflect current practice or return to the rigor of their spiritual forefathers. The teaching on the Sabbath by the Puritans and early Presbyterians was based on the careful exegesis of God's Word by many of the best Christian scholars the world has ever seen. If they are wrong, then let's see the exegetical evidence! But if the Westminster Standards are correct (which they are), then Presbyterians should be consistent and biblical in their teaching and in their courts. How are the purposeful ignorance and vague blather currently advanced by many supposed to help God's people obey the Sabbath? Do not confuse a love of God's law and the Lord's day with legalism and harshness. If strict sabbatarians are guilty of adding their own requirements to the fourth commandment, then point out the additions. "How well is it worth our while to improve this day, to call upon God and seek Jesus Christ! Let awakened sinners be stirred up by these things to improve the Sabbath Day, as they would lay themselves most in the way of the Spirit of God. Improve this day to call upon God; for then he is near. Improve it for reading the Holy Scriptures, and diligently attending his word preached; for then is the likeliest time to have the Spirit accompanying it. Let the saints who are desirous of growing in grace, enjoying communion with Christ, improve the Sabbath in order to it" (Edwards, 2:102).

<sup>99</sup> Boston, 2:195.

lawful in such a case to endeavour to prevent that, and preserve them. Because (a.) that comes by some more than ordinary dispensation of providence in the weather, and affects and puts in hazard this corn more than others. (b.) Because there is no probability of recovering these in an ordinary way, though the weather should alter, but there is hope of gathering in of such as are in the fields [outside] that reach of hazard, if the Lord alters the season.”<sup>100</sup> Those who turn necessity into a loophole to mow lawns, chop wood, harvest crops or pull weeds are perverting the commandment to their own detriment and destruction.<sup>101</sup>

Works of mercy are also permitted. Jesus said that “it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (Mt. 12:12). If it is appropriate to have mercy upon an *animal* in distress on the Sabbath, then it is even more appropriate to help a *person* in distress (Mt. 12:11-12). Thus, caring for the sick and relieving the poor are good and lawful on the Sabbath. The church has always acknowledged that necessary hospital and nursing-home work are permissible on the Lord’s day. If it is lawful and good to minister to man’s temporal needs on the Sabbath, then it is also good to minister to man’s spiritual needs (preaching the gospel, witnessing, ministering in retirement communities or prisons, counseling, passing out tracts, etc.). “Works of mercy and charity are very proper and acceptable to Christ on this day. They were proper on the ancient sabbath. Christ was wont to do such works on the Sabbath-day. But they especially become the Christian sabbath, because it is a day kept in commemoration of the greatest work of mercy and love toward us that ever was wrought. What can be more proper than that on such a day we should be expressing our love and mercy towards our fellow-creatures, and especially our fellow-Christians? Christ loves to see us show our thankfulness to him in such a way as these. Therefore, we find that the Holy Ghost was especially careful, that such works should be performed on the first day of the week in the primitive church,”<sup>102</sup> as we learn from Paul’s exhortation to collect tithes for the poor saints in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

It is important that civil governments and employers acknowledge the Lord’s day and accommodate those who are involved in works of necessity (e.g., police, firemen, the military) and mercy (e.g., doctors, nurses, ambulance drivers, hospital workers) in such a way that they can attend public worship as often as possible. Thus in a society that honors God’s law, a rotation system should be used so that people could have at least two or three Sundays off each month in order to worship God publicly and partake of the Lord’s supper. On the weeks in which Sunday employment is required, a day of rest must be given in place of Sunday, to follow the

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<sup>100</sup> Durham in Coldwell, p. 31.

<sup>101</sup> An incident commonly cited by those who argue that the Sabbath was meant to be kept more strictly under the Mosaic administration than today under the gospel administration is the case of the man stoned to death for gathering sticks on the Sabbath (Num. 15:32-36). Many argue that the sabbath law was harsh and unreasonable and that the horrible sabbath yoke or burden thus needed to be lifted by Christ. This type of thinking reveals a poor understanding of the case of the man gathering sticks. First, Christ declared that “the Sabbath was made for man” (Mk. 2:27); that is, for man’s good and benefit, while the church was still under the Mosaic administration. Second, for Christians, the Sabbath is not a burden but a privilege and a blessing. Third, one should not assume that the man was an innocent poor soul who just needed a few sticks to help his family; he may well have been a seller of firewood. “Moreover, it is reasonable to suppose that he persisted in this practice presumptuously, publicly, and in defiance of the divine command, after having been reprovved for it; and he might obstinately vindicate it, and resolve, for the future, to persist in it; for to do so is the nature of a presumptuous sin. It is plain, indeed, that he sinned presumptuously. For, in the verses immediately forgoing, God had threatened that ‘the soul that doth ought presumptuously,’ or, as it is in the margin, ‘with a high hand’ who ‘reproached the Lord’ herein, ‘should be cut off’; and then the account of the man’s being stoned for gathering sticks on the Sabbath Day, is brought in as an instance of a just punishment of a presumptuous sinner” (Ridgeley, 2:357).

<sup>102</sup> Edwards, 2:103.

pattern of one day of rest in seven as closely as possible. “Further, if necessity obliges us to engage in secular employments on the Lord’s day, as in the instances of those whose business is to provide physic [care] for the sick, let us, nevertheless, labour to possess a spiritual frame, becoming the holiness of the day, so far as may consist with what we are immediately called to do.”<sup>103</sup> One must also make sure that one is truly engaging in a work of necessity. There are many medical procedures (e.g., plastic surgery, removal of warts) that do not need to be scheduled for the Lord’s day. “Finally, if we have a necessary call to engage in worldly matters, and so be detained from public ordinances, we must endeavor to satisfy others that the providence of God obliges us to act as we do; that so we may not give offense to them, or they take occasion, without just reason, to follow their own employments, to do which would be a sin in them.”<sup>104</sup>

### 3. The Sabbath and Modern Industrial Civilization

There are certain industries that are crucial to dominion and the well-being of civilization that cannot be completely shut down on the Lord’s day. A few anti-sabbatarians have seized upon this fact as an argument against sabbath-keeping. Gary North writes, “Rethinking the sabbath question will involve a rethinking of the whole of Western industrial civilization. It will certainly involve the questioning of the last two centuries of rapid economic growth. Strict sabbatarians should at least be aware of the possible effects of their proposals. If the world should be conformed to Christian standards of Biblical law, and if the standards of Hebrew sabbath practice are, in fact, still the rule for the Christian dispensation, how would those standards be imposed on the population at large? Would it not make impossible our modern version of industrial specialized society? In other words, if such standards had been enforced for the past two centuries, could this civilization, which most modern Christians accept as far as its technological conveniences are concerned, have come into existence? How much of our economically profitable, efficient Sunday technology would we be forced to destroy? The costs, I suspect, would be considerable. It is time for strict sabbatarians to count these costs.”<sup>105</sup> North ignores the abundant biblical proofs for a moral and perpetual sabbath. Instead of a frontal exegetical attack on the Puritans, North constructs an economic straw man, implying that Christians must choose between modern industrial civilization and sabbath keeping.

The argument that obedience to the fourth commandment would entail the economic fall of western civilization is ludicrous. Sabbatarians acknowledge that certain economic activities

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<sup>103</sup> Ridgely, 2:358.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 2:358.

<sup>105</sup> North in Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 836. North calls the Sabbath a ceremonial ordinance (p. 824) yet fails to explain *why* a ceremonial ordinance was needed *prior* to man’s fall into sin. He mentions the “creation ordinance” argument in one sentence, yet offers no arguments against it (one would think that North would deal with an argument that completely destroys his antinomian and unbiblical view of the fourth commandment). He does not explain why a purely ceremonial law, a law that refers to God’s creation rest, is found in the ten commandments. North—a theonomist—apparently believes there are only *nine* commandments! He mentions Calvin’s view of Heb. 4 with approval (p. 825), a view that many of Calvin’s followers rejected (Heb. 4 is actually an excellent proof text *for* sabbatarianism [see above, pp. 26 ff.]). North’s only scriptural argument is an appeal to Rom. 14:5 and Col. 2:16-17 (p. 830), but these passages deal with *ceremonial* sabbaths (see above, p. 5). Until North explains how a creation ordinance is put away prior to the second coming, and how one of the ten commandments is abrogated, he has not really dealt with the sabbath question; his arguments are peripheral. It is like the anti-theonomist who focuses on Rushdoony’s refusal to eat pork, yet ignores his central core arguments. Although the author disagrees with North’s view of the Sabbath, his call for consistency and rigor among sabbatarians is needed and welcomed.

and industries cannot be completely shut down on the Sabbath. One example is the steel industry. If the smelter in a foundry takes several days to reach its proper temperature, then it cannot be shut down every Lord's day without shutting down the whole steel industry. Thus, at least a minimal crew is needed to keep the operation running through Sunday. But the benefits of steel for mankind (e.g., safer cars and buildings, the need for steel for the military) render it a necessity (wooden sailing ships would not have fared well against Japanese destroyers in the battles of the Pacific). Another example would be certain types of shipping. An oil tanker could not reach Japan from a port in Alaska in less than a week and thus would be in transit on the Sabbath (the shipping of oil is a necessity, since energy is needed for large populations to heat buildings, and for generating electricity). God does not require people to deforest the countryside or freeze to death in order to keep the Sabbath. Power and electric utilities and telephone companies must maintain service on the Lord's day. Hospitals, churches, homes, retirement communities and nursing homes need heat and electricity to preserve life and minister to the sick. Communication facilities need to operate for emergencies. Industries involving animals need to care for those animals (for example, cows must be milked every day or they will stop producing milk).

Industries that have a genuine need for labor on the Sabbath are few in number. The percentage of people working on the Lord's day should be very small compared to those who work on a given week day. The vast majority of economic activities on the Sabbath in America are totally unnecessary and sinful (e.g., shopping malls, sporting events, restaurants, movie complexes, newspapers, retail outlets). Those industries which require sabbath labor should rotate staff so that working on the Lord's day is kept to a minimum for each worker. Workers must also be given another day off in place of the Lord's day.

The central thesis of North's argument is that modern sabbatarians are hypocrites, because the fourth commandment, if followed today, would require that Christians refuse to use electricity and heating in their homes and churches on the Sabbath. North writes, "We often pride ourselves on the efficiency of modern technology, forgetting that many men and women must go to work and operate the machines that provide the power—the fuel—for our gadgets. These workers are committing sabbatarian capital crimes each Sunday, and every Christian sabbatarian who uses these gadgets, apart from some legitimate emergency, sends people to hell every Sunday, morning and evening, as he sits in the comfort of his air-conditioned church. If the sabbatarian creeds are correct, then sabbatarians are weekly condemning others to the flames of eternal torment, just so they can sit in 75-degree comfort."<sup>106</sup> North builds his case on Exodus 35:2-3 and Numbers 15:32-36. In Exodus 35 the Israelites were commanded not to kindle a fire in their homes on the Sabbath. The Numbers passage records the execution of a man for collecting sticks (firewood) on the Sabbath. Do these passages forbid Christians from using heat and electricity on the Lord's day? What are the facts?

The Exodus passage, as virtually all commentators (including North) acknowledge, does not forbid having a fire in one's home for heat; it refers either to the starting of a fire from scratch or to the kindling of a fire. "Orthodox commentators have taken two basic views of this passage. First, that 'kindle' must have referred to the starting of a fire, literally and figuratively from scratch. It was a difficult task to light up a fire once it had gone out, and this constituted extra labor which could have been avoided merely by paying attention to the home fire which should have been started a day before. The second view holds that 'kindle' refers to a fire used in business, such as in the case of a blacksmith. The latter view is singularly unconvincing. (A third

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, p. 834.

possibility, that no fires were going in Israel, even in the cold of winter, is unlikely, especially in the light of Jesus' liberal interpretation of sabbath observance [Matt. 12:1 ff].) Thus, it seems reasonable to assume that it was illegal to start a fire on the sabbath, but legitimate to keep yesterday's fire burning."<sup>107</sup> The passage in Numbers 15 forbids the collection of materials used to build a fire on the Sabbath. North points out that unlawfully collected sticks could be used for heating, lighting, cooking and selling.<sup>108</sup> He also notes that this commandment requires that fuel must be obtained and stored before the sabbath day.<sup>109</sup> North maintains that using electricity or heat on the Sabbath is no different than paying someone to collect sticks on the Sabbath; therefore (according to North), heating one's home or church is no different than going to the shopping mall or eating at a restaurant on the Lord's day.<sup>110</sup>

North's analogy is clever but does not hold up under close scrutiny. He fails to consider the major differences between a decentralized form of energy consumption (for heat or light) and a centralized form. The Hebrews were to gather their firewood six days a week but not on the seventh. They were permitted to have a fire in their homes as long as they did not start it from scratch on the Sabbath or use it for business. Thus, on the Sabbath each family was permitted to add wood to the fire to maintain heat and light in the home. In modern industrialized culture, man uses a centralized power production source to maintain heat and light in the home; this is *necessary* (at current technology levels) because of the huge increase of population since ancient times, and the massive population centers that have arisen with industrialization (cities of a million or more people are common). A decentralized form of energy consumption using wood or coal would ravage the environment (e.g., deforestation) and greatly increase air pollution and the diseases that accompany it. If a centralized form of energy production based on oil, natural gas or nuclear power can save human life, protect the environment and provide energy to populations that otherwise would not have it, then is it not a necessity? The medical and environmental benefits alone render a central, dependable, clean source of energy a necessity. Christ said it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath, to save human life (Mt. 12:12; Lk. 6:9). Does North believe that hospitals should burn filthy wood- or coal-burning stoves on the Sabbath, or that elderly people should be allowed to die of heat stroke in the summer, or that

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, p. 828. Ridgely argues for the second view: "Now it could not have been hereby forbidden to kindle a fire for refreshment in cold weather; for that was as necessary as any of the other conveniences of life, such as eating, drinking, sitting down when we are weary, &c. It was done, too, with very little pains or difficulty; so that it would not much hinder the religious exercises of the sabbath. On the other hand, the not making a fire, provided the season of the year was extremely cold, would indispose men for the worship of God. It is most probable, therefore, that the meaning of the text in question is this, that as at the time when this law was given, many of the Israelites were employed in the work of building and adorning the tabernacle, a work which, as all artificers know, required the kindling of fires for the melting of metals, heating of iron tools, &c., and, as the people might be apt to think that, because the building of the tabernacle required expedition, they might kindle fires and therewith employ themselves in the work of it, on the sabbath day; Moses tells them, that it was not a work so absolutely necessary that it required that they should attend to it on that day. This seems to be the reason of the law which prohibited the kindling of a fire on the sabbath day" (2:356-57). Ridgely's interpretation is the majority view of older commentators (e.g., Matthew Henry, Matthew Poole, John Gill, Jamison-Fausset-Brown, and Keil-Delitzsch). Dabney believes that the climate in Sinai was so mild that the command only refers to the preparing of food, because heat for the home was unnecessary (1:520-21).

<sup>108</sup> North in Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 831.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, p. 833.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, p. 834.

children should be allowed to freeze to death in winter? No, but he apparently likes to go out to dinner after church.<sup>111</sup>

A centralized power source would actually enable a Christian society to keep God's sabbath better. The Hebrews were permitted to burn fires in their dwellings on the Sabbath, as long as they did not use the fire for business purposes. The burning of a fire requires a certain amount of attention (i.e., work). Furthermore, a certain amount of smoke irritates the eyes and lungs. Although a central power system requires a crew to man it on the Sabbath, it enables millions of people to rest and worship God in a healthy, clean environment. In a Christian culture, those who work at the power plant would be rotated so that working on the Lord's day would be rare among power plant workers. There likely will come a time in the future when technology will enable power plants to run automatically with a skeleton crew for observation and security purposes. The keeping of the Sabbath is indeed compatible with modern industrial culture. God does not require Christians to return to the Stone Age every Lord's day.

#### 4. Preparing for the Lord's Day

Before turning to the question of how the day is to be sanctified, it is appropriate to discuss the need for preparation for the Sabbath. In modern hedonistic culture, Saturday evening is usually spent in various entertainments. Many people (especially those who are young and single) stay up very late watching TV or going to movies or social events (sports, theater, parties, concerts, etc.). While a certain amount of entertainment and fellowship is lawful and good for one's well-being, people must remember their duty to be ready in body and mind for the important spiritual exercises that are to take place on the Sabbath. A person who stays up late and misses public worship, or who comes to church so fatigued that his attention is not focused upon God and His Word, has violated the Lord's day. One of the most common reasons given by young adults for missing public worship is lack of sleep. Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you understand the depths of degradation and humiliation and the immense suffering that He endured for His people? You call yourself a Christian, a follower of Christ, yet you neglect His appointed means of grace so that you can watch TV or go to the movies. What a mockery, what hypocrisy!

Not only must Christians go to bed at a decent hour, but they must also prepare their affairs in such a way as to avoid the temptation of engaging in unnecessary labor or commerce on the Lord's day. If the house is dirty, clean it on Saturday, so that if people come to lunch after church, you will not be tempted to rush home and clean up. Make sure that the car has plenty of gasoline in order to go to and from public worship (or for emergencies). Businessmen and students must prepare for Monday's affairs on Saturday, not on Sunday. Paperwork or homework must be finished on Saturday. The preparation for Monday's activities should be

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<sup>111</sup> Kevin Reed writes, "I perused Gary North's fire-breathing essay on 'The Economics of Sabbath-Keeping.' Now here's a man who tells you plainly what he thinks about sabbatarianism. While presenting some valid questions, North resorts to caricature in order to ridicule sabbatarianism and discredit the position of the Westminster Confession.... On another occasion, I attended a conference at the prominent reconstructionist church in Atlanta, Chalcedon Presbyterian Church. During my visit, I was given a very nice rationale on why it is appropriate to routinely resort to restaurants on Sunday after church, in spite of the fact that the fourth commandment mandates a rest for servants and 'the stranger who is within your gates' (Ex. 20:10). I mention these experiences because they raise another perplexing question about the commitment of reconstructionists to the first table of the law. Is this not another case where theologians display an inadequate adherence to God's law?" (*The Antinomian Streak in the Reconstructionist Movement* [Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage, 1988], pp. 10-11).

thorough, so that on the Lord's day the mind may be fixed upon God and His works. Thorough preparation will help one avoid the temptation of thinking about the Monday morning business meeting, algebra exam or sales conference.

Housewives should prepare for sabbath meals as much as possible on Saturday. There are many kitchen duties, such as the kneading and baking of bread, preparing stuffing, cooking and mashing potatoes, that do not need to be done on the Sabbath. Moses spoke to this point in Exodus 16:23: "This is what the LORD has said: 'Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake today, and boil what you will boil; and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning.'" "The meaning of this is, that they were to gather the manna, working which would take up a considerable time, and to grind or prepare it for baking or seething. This was a servile or laborious work, and might as well be done the day before. Accordingly, they were commanded then to dispatch or finish it, that they might rest in and sanctify the Sabbath immediately following."<sup>112</sup> This law does not make it unlawful for Christians to prepare and heat up food on the Lord's day (for a certain amount of preparation is necessary), but it does teach that food preparation should be handled as much as possible on the day prior to the Sabbath, that we may apply ourselves more diligently to the means of grace and rest.

There is also a spiritual preparation for the Lord's day. This, of course, involves, first of all, repenting of any known sins to God. Second, if there is any known enmity between oneself and another Christian, reconciliation should be sought if at all possible (Mt. 5:23-24). Third, we should pray fervently that God would not only forgive our sins but also fill us with His Spirit on the approaching day. We should pray for God to subdue our fleshly appetites, worldly cares and unclean thoughts in order that we may focus in worship upon Christ, study His Word, and feed upon Him spiritually at His supper. We also should pray for the special assistance of God in the preparation and delivery of His Word by the teaching elders of the church, and that the Holy Spirit would convince and convict hearts unto a greater sanctification. Even the Apostle Paul exhorted the Ephesians to pray "for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel" (Eph. 6:19). "We ought to be very importunate with God, that he would sanctify and fill our thoughts, from the beginning to the end of the Lord's day, which he has consecrated for his immediate service and glory."<sup>113</sup> Fourth, we should read and meditate upon the preacher's text for the next day, if it is known. We should "desire the pure milk of the word that [we] may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2). What a wonderful privilege to have the Lord's day, a day in which the cares and vanities of life are forgotten, a day of blessed fellowship, communion and celebration with our Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>112</sup> Ridgely, 2:353-54. Although most commentators believe that the baking or boiling of *all* the manna was to take place prior to the Sabbath, the word *today* is not in the Hebrew, and thus the laying up of all that remains may refer to the uncooked manna. Matthew Poole writes, "The words *to-day* are not in the original, and possibly are better left out than taken in; or if they be taken in, they do not seem to me, as they do to many others, to prove that they were commanded to bake or seethe on the sixth day all that they were to eat both that day and the following sabbath, or that they were forbidden to bake it or seethe it upon the sabbath day; for there is not a word here to that purpose; and it is apparent from the whole context, that the rest of the sabbath is not opposed to their baking or seething of it, but to their going out in the field to gather it. Nay, the contrary is here implied, because after they had baked and sodden what they intended to bake or seethe, part of the manna did, as is here expressly added, remain over, and was reserved for the sabbath day's provision" (*op. cit.*, 1:151; cf. John Gill, *Exposition of the Old Testament*, 1:407). Whatever interpretation one holds, it is clear that spending an inordinate amount of time laboring over food in the kitchen is not in keeping with the spirit of the sabbath ordinance, especially in view of the fact that modern kitchens are equipped with refrigerators, microwaves and other labor-saving appliances.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, 2:354.

## 5. The time of the Lord's Day

The sabbath law teaches that man is to sanctify to the Lord one whole day in seven. A question that needs to be answered is: "When does the Christian sabbath begin?" Some argue that the Christian sabbath begins on Saturday evening, while others argue that it runs from midnight Saturday to midnight Sunday. Those who argue that it runs from evening to evening point to the Jewish ceremonial sabbaths for support: "On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the Lord's Passover" (Lev. 23:5). The Hebrew word translated "twilight" (NKJV, NASB, NIV, NTHSMT<sup>114</sup>) or "evening" (RSV) literally means "between the evenings." "The meaning of the phrase is much discussed. Most commentators think it means 'in the evening' (cf. Deut. 16:6, 'at sunset'), or more precisely, the period between sunset and complete darkness. The orthodox Jewish view is that it means 'between midday and sunset,' and this is supported...on the grounds that it would have been impossible to kill all the passover lambs in the temple between sunset and darkness. In NT times the passover sacrifice began about 3 p.m."<sup>115</sup> The evidence for an old covenant evening-to-evening sabbath is quite strong (cf. Lev. 23:32; Ex. 12:6, 30:8). Hendriksen believes that the Jewish sabbath began at 6 o'clock Friday evening: "According to the ancient Hebrew way of speaking, there were 'two evenings' (cf. Exod. 12:6 in the original). The first 'evening' which we would call 'afternoon' began at 3 p.m., the second at 6 p.m. Something of this is probably reflected in the phrase 'When evening fell,' for we cannot imagine that Joseph of Arimathea, a Jew, would have approached Pilate on Friday, 6 p.m., asking for the body of Jesus when the sabbath was beginning."<sup>116</sup>

Although the Jewish sabbath was probably from evening to evening (or sunset to sunset), the passages in the New Testament which discuss the Lord's day (the new covenant sabbath) point to a midnight-to-midnight observance. A passage which indicates that the inspired apostles no longer held to the old covenant system of a sunset-to-sunset sabbath is John 20:19: "Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, 'Peace be with you'" John is very specific in noting that this event took place on the first day of the week. "'On that day' would be enough, yet John adds, 'the first one of the week.'"<sup>117</sup> "It was evening. In light of Luke 24:29, 33, 36 we have a right to conclude that it was no longer *early* in the evening when the great event recorded in the present paragraph took place. As the

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<sup>114</sup> *New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1962).

<sup>115</sup> G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 302. A passage that may be helpful in defining the beginning of the O.T. Sabbath is Dt. 23:11: "But it shall be, when evening comes, that he shall wash with water; and when the sun sets, he may come into the camp." "Evening" apparently is set in parallel with the sunset. If the ancient Jews had two evenings, one beginning at 3:00 p.m. and another at 6:00 p.m. or sunset (as some scholars assert), then this passage could mean "at the first evening (at 3:00 p.m.) wash yourself with water, then at sunset (the second evening) come into the camp." Lee argues that the Jewish ceremonial sabbaths were sunset-to-sunset, but the seventh-day sabbath was morning-to-morning (*op. cit.*, pp. 72-75). There is strong historical evidence that the Jews celebrated the *weekly* sabbath evening-to-evening, not morning-to-morning. Edersheim writes, "And now the weekly Sabbath, the pledge between Israel and God, had once more come. To meet it as a bride or queen, each house was adorned on Friday evening. The Sabbath lamp was lighted; the festive garments put on; the table provided with the best which the family could afford; and the *Qiddush*, or benediction, spoken over the cup of wine, which, as always, was mixed with water..." (2:437). The *Qiddush* (or *Kiddush*) ritual signifies Sabbath sanctification; it is recited in Jewish homes and synagogues at the beginning of the Sabbath (i.e., on Friday evening).

<sup>116</sup> William Hendriksen, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), p. 979.

<sup>117</sup> R.C.H. Lenski, *Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943), p. 1364.



Jews compute the days, it was no longer the first day of the week. But John, though a Jew, is writing much later than Matthew and Mark, and does not seem to concern himself with Jewish time-reckoning.”<sup>118</sup> It is very significant that John emphasizes that the disciples gathered on the first day of the week, yet also records that it was evening, for if the apostolic church had maintained a sunset-to-sunset sabbath, then John would not have regarded it as the first day, but as the second. There then would be no reason at all for John to emphasize the time, for while the New Testament often emphasizes and singles out the first day (Mt. 28:1; Mk. 16:2; Lk. 24:1; Jn. 20:1, 19, 26; Ac. 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10), the second day holds no significance at all.

Another passage which indicates that the apostolic church had forsaken the sunset-to-sunset sabbath for a midnight-to-midnight<sup>119</sup> sabbath is Acts 20:7: “Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.” Luke describes a church service that occurred on the first day of the week, yet says very specifically that Paul did not finish his message until midnight. If the Christian church had followed the Jewish synagogue practice, Paul would have concluded his message before sunset on Sunday, and not late at night.<sup>120</sup> “Certainly, one would almost expect the midnight-to-midnight demarcation, not only in the light of the particulars surrounding Resurrection Sunday, but especially considering that Troas was a Roman colony possessing the *Jus Italicum* and which therefore certainly followed the Roman midnight demarcation as a colony. It is clear that the congregation at Troas met for worship at night well after sunset, for ‘there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together’ (Acts 20:8). Seeing that ‘the disciples came together to break bread’ in ‘the upper chamber,’ and seeing that there is no instance whatsoever in Scripture of religious meetings on Saturday night after sunset, it is reasonably certain that the disciples at Troas gathered on Sunday nights perhaps even before and certainly after sunset, even as their risen Lord had appeared to His Emmaus disciples on Resurrection Sunday and broken bread with them in the late afternoon, and long after the sunset of ‘the same day at evening, (still) being the first day of the week,’ had congregated with the Jerusalem disciples in the upper room.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Hendriksen, *John*, p. 458.

<sup>119</sup> Jn. 20:1 precludes a daybreak-to-daybreak sabbath, for Mary Magdalene came to Jesus’ tomb “on the first day of the week...while it was still dark.”

<sup>120</sup> While the Ac. 20 passage undoubtedly teaches that the apostolic church met for worship on Sunday and not Saturday; and points strongly to a midnight-to-midnight sabbath, there are practices recorded that seem rather unusual. First, they apparently ate the Lord’s supper after midnight (v. 11) which in a culture that burned oil lamps is very late indeed. Second, they talked throughout the night, even till daybreak (v. 11). The length of the evening’s activities was probably due to two factors: first, the service was interrupted by the death of Eutychus, who fell asleep and then fell to his death on the street below. His death and subsequent healing by Paul certainly caused excitement and the flowing of adrenaline. Second, Paul knew that he was departing in the morning, and thus spent more time in teaching and fellowship with those he dearly loved. Although one-seventh of the week is set apart unto God each week, God obviously does not expect His people to worship the full twenty-four hours. Staying up all night discussing theology is good yet unusual and not required. Thomas Boston concurs: “Now, it is the whole day that is thus to be spent, i.e. the natural day. Not that people are bound to be in these exercises without intermission all the twenty-four hours; for God has not the Sabbath to be a burden to man, but that we should continue God’s work as we do our own on other days, where we are allowed necessary rest and refreshment by sleep in the night” (*op. cit.*, 2:196).

<sup>121</sup> Lee, pp. 221-22. What is particularly interesting is the fact that Christ apparently used the Roman system of midnight-to-midnight day demarcation when speaking of His being buried three days and three nights. Lee writes, “Counting the ‘three days’ as Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, it is clear that Christ must have been in ‘the heart of the earth’ on part of Friday as well as on part of Sunday. But as He was not buried until Friday *evening* (Mt. 27:57-60), it seems clear that the end of each of the three days does not run from evening to evening (as Jews and Seventh-day

Furthermore, it is recorded that Paul departed at daybreak, or the break of the *next* day. If Luke had been following the sunset-to-sunset day demarcation system of the Jews, Paul would be described as leaving “later on the *same* first day of the week.”<sup>122</sup> But Luke says of Paul on Sunday evening that he was “ready to depart the *next* day” (i.e., early Monday morning at daybreak). Thus there is considerable evidence that the inspired apostles abandoned the Jewish method of day demarcation for a midnight-to-midnight system. Although the matter of sabbath day demarcation may seem trivial, it is important that the church and society follow the inspired apostles’ example for the sake of uniformity, determining when church discipline is appropriate, preparing properly for the Sabbath, and refuting heretics (such as Seventh-day Adventists). “The Jews are supposed to begin every day, and consequently their sabbaths, at the evening, in remembrance of the creation, Gen. i. 5, as Christians generally begin their days and sabbaths with the morning, in memory of Christ’s resurrection.”<sup>123</sup>

## 6. To Whom Does the Command Apply?

The fourth commandment is very specific. On the Sabbath, *no one* is to work. “The singular pronoun ‘you’ is supplemented by a list of six potential sources of labor, taking in the family, the employees, the work-animals, and even the visitor stopping temporarily with the Israelite.”<sup>124</sup> The commandment is very specific for a reason. Sinful hearts seek loopholes in God’s law; thus God plugs every conceivable loophole in advance. If the commandment were stated in an abbreviated form, a head of a household might attempt to circumvent the command by putting his children to work, or by hiring the heathen. But God says that no one, not even the work animals, is to work. “The sabbath rest is for all, rich and poor, master and servant, human beings and animals.”<sup>125</sup>

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Adventists allege), but from a point between evening and dawn—probably midnight—to the corresponding point twenty-four hours later. The ‘three days and three nights in the heart of the earth’ of Matt. 12:40 etc. would then be: sunset on Friday to midnight after Friday = the first ‘day and night;’ the midnight after Friday to the midnight after Saturday = the second ‘day and night;’ the midnight after Saturday to the sunrise on Sunday = the third ‘day and night;’ and the whole period in the grave from sunset on Friday to before dawn on Sunday morning = ‘three days and three nights,’ which expression is an idiom denoting a period of exactly three days and three nights (seventy-two hours) OR denoting any consecutive shorter parts thereof, such as the approximately thirty to thirty-six hours during which Christ was in the tomb” (Ibid, p. 273).

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, p. 222.

<sup>123</sup> Poole, 1:249. Note that Moses defines a day as evening and then morning: “God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day” (Gen. 1:5). Christ’s work of re-creation is so significant that it not only changed the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week but also gave priority to the morning over the evening. This is appropriate given the fact that Christ was buried in the evening, yet rose from the dead in the morning. Even the method of day demarcation in the new covenant honors Jesus Christ!

<sup>124</sup> John I. Durham, *Exodus* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), p. 289. Although the commandment is given in the singular *you*, it encompasses all heads of households: husbands, wives, etc. Thus, the wife is included in the command. The Bible treats families covenantally, and thus a command to the head of the household usually respects both superiors (husband and wife). Those who argue that the wife is not specifically mentioned because of her domestic duties (e.g., cooking, diapering, etc.) ignore the *universal* nature of the command.

<sup>125</sup> Terrance E. Fretheim, *Exodus* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1991), p. 230. “The command not to do any...work applied to both man and beast without exception. Those who were to rest are divided into two classes...*first*, free Israelites (‘thou’) and their children (‘thy son and thy daughter’); and *secondly*, their slaves (*man-servant and maid-servant*), and cattle (beasts of draught and burden), and their strangers, i.e. foreign labourers who had settled among

Although the fourth commandment applies to all, there is a special emphasis upon heads of households, or those in authority. The head of the house has a special responsibility to see to it that everyone under his or her authority rests on the sabbath day: children, servants, work animals and visitors. Two questions often asked by parents who take the sabbath law seriously are: (1) How does one instill in young children a knowledge of the difference between the Lord's day and other days? (2) How does one control young children on the Lord's day? The answer to both questions is: First, be a consistent *example* of a sabbath-keeper to your children. If you say one thing and do another, your children will likely imitate your hypocrisy. Second, engage your children in holy exercises on the Lord's day. Children are full of energy. If you spend the day in worship, study, and the discussion of the things of God with your children, they will develop the habit of sabbath sanctification. This truth was exemplified in the life of A.W. Pink. "When we were little, all our toys were put away on Saturday night and pictorial editions of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, etc., were brought out.' Of course, such practices were followed in many Victorian homes, but in the house in Claremont Terrace, the discipline was accompanied by the warm devotion to Christ.... Other memories of Sundays were of how 'the day began by our father reading to us God's Word,' and also of how 'quite a little of the time was spent in the singing of hymns.' In later years Pink was often to quote a verse which he learned in childhood: A Sabbath well spent brings a week of content, and strength for the toil of the morrow, but a Sabbath profaned, whate'er be gained, is a certain forerunner of sorrow."<sup>126</sup>

## 7. The Six Days of Labor

The Sabbath cannot be properly understood and appreciated without a consideration of God's positive command to work on the other six days. The command to labor is not incidental to the fourth commandment but a crucial aspect of it.<sup>127</sup> "The day of rest has no meaning apart from the background of labour. God's day of rest is the sequel to six days of creative activity and has no relevance in any other context. The sabbath institution implies labor; and its most significant feature in reference to labor is that it prescribes and defines, in terms of an established cycle, the extent of labor—six days of labor followed by one of cessation from that specific kind of employment which labor denotes."<sup>128</sup>

Thus the dominion or cultural mandate is intimately related to the sabbath ordinance. The ordinance of labor, like the Sabbath itself, is a creation ordinance. Both were instituted before the fall, and both were to complement each other. The dominion mandate declared to man, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the

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the Israelites. 'Within thy gates' is equivalent to in the cities, towns, and villages of thy land..." (Keil and Delitzsch, 2:119).

<sup>126</sup> Iain Murray, *Life of A.W. Pink* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1981), pp. 3-4.

<sup>127</sup> "'Six days shalt thou labor' is just as much a part of the commandment as is 'keep the sabbath day;' 'shalt thou labor,' ('*tha abod*'), is imperfect with imperative meaning, but probably less emphatic than is *zakor* ["remember"]. Certainly the commandment does not demand uninterrupted work for the whole of the twenty-four hours of each of the six days (as it does indeed demand the sanctification of the whole of the twenty-four hours of the sabbath day), nor does it demand that only one kind of work be engaged in for six days, and still less is it a bar to annual vacation or daily relaxation. The key to the meaning of this six days' work is found in the second part of the sentence: 'and do all thy work' ('*mlektheke*'), as opposed to doing one's *own* work on *God's* day; yet—it is *all* of man's work ('*kamlakah*') which is to be done on those six days, all of man's work as opposed to just his professional work, his '*abodah*'—for not even man's non-professional work or *melakah* is to be allowed to make inroads on the sanctification of God's sabbath day" (Lee, pp. 146-47).

<sup>128</sup> John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, p. 35.

birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen. 1:28). The task of developing the earth for God’s glory—God-honoring science, architecture, agriculture, arts, music, husbandry, etc.—was to be accomplished six days each week, followed by a day of rest, reflection, worship and celebration with God Himself. Although the earth and its resources were to be developed for man’s pleasure, well-being and enjoyment, everything was to be done unto God’s glory. Man was employed by God to develop God’s earth under God’s authority. “*The Sabbath presupposes work, work fulfilling God’s creation mandate and performed under God’s law, and the sabbath is the joyful rest from the exercise of this godly dominion. On the sabbath, a man rejoices that the earth is the Lord’s, and all the fulness thereof (Ps. 24:1). In that confidence man rests, and in that joy he surveys the work of his hands, knowing that his ‘labor is not in vain in the Lord’ (1 Cor. 15:58).*”<sup>129</sup>

Because work is a creation ordinance, part of the fourth commandment, and crucial to the dominion mandate, Christians should view their work as a blessing and calling from God. The fall of man into sin has not nullified the task of dominion and labor; it has, however, made both much more difficult. The earth has received a curse, and man’s nature has been polluted by sin. Thus, man has an interior and exterior impediment to godly dominion. The task of dominion can now only properly be achieved through redemption in Christ. “Without regenerating grace, man cannot keep God’s law and discharge his duties.... The redeemed man is a citizen of the kingdom of God, and he abides by the laws thereof: that is his work, his duty, and his path to dominion.”<sup>130</sup>

Christians must avoid two prominent errors regarding work. The first regards work itself as a curse. Work, according to this view, should be done only when necessary. The goal of life is not to work hard in one’s honest lawful calling but “to reach a position in life where work is unnecessary and where others can be commanded to work for you.”<sup>131</sup> This view leads to slave-owning cultures where masters lead lives of leisure on the forced labor of others.<sup>132</sup> This philosophy stands behind the nomadic, idle beatnik and hippie cultures where people exist by leaching off the producers in society (i.e., parents, friends, dumpsters, food stamps, etc.). For the hippie youth culture of the sixties, work was avoided at all costs in favor of an idle, hedonistic, drug-induced uselessness. This view also stands behind the welfare class which with the help of the state has in a sense made slaves out of the producers in society (i.e., taxpayers). Ghettos are notorious places of idleness typified by soap operas, junk food, fornication and loitering around street corners. In some cultures men force their wives and children to work like slaves so that the men can relax in leisure with their friends. “Women in the African tribes are treated as little better than cattle; indeed, in some tribes, like the Masai, the cattle are considered more valuable.”<sup>133</sup> “With the departure of Western man from the faith, a similar attitude has developed among Westerners. The goal of life has become vacations and retirement for all too many. The result of any such view, over a span of time, is a decline of productivity, a collapse in the

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<sup>129</sup> Rushdoony, *Institutes*, pp. 148-49.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>131</sup> Rushdoony, *Salvation and Godly Rule*, p. 371.

<sup>132</sup> It is interesting that, historically, in societies in which slavery was a predominant factor in economic affairs (i.e., the ancient Greeks and Romans) innovations in labor-saving devices were not used because it was believed that with cheap human labor they were really not needed. Thus, slavery inhibited the dominion mandate. An unbiblical view of work inhibits progress in society.

<sup>133</sup> Sean O’ Callaghan, *The Slave Trade Today* (New York: Crown Publisher, 1961), p. 59, quoted in Rushdoony, *Salvation and Godly Rule*, p. 371.

standard of living, and an erosion of moral character.”<sup>134</sup> Many people no longer see work as a divine calling, a holy task which contributes to dominion under God and for His glory, but merely as a prelude to pleasure. People work in order to play. “There is a marked flight from work; work is seen as a curse, and idleness as a blessing, a goal to be attained, and a state of bliss. Men work in order to be free from work and to be idle. Idleness is seen as the reward for and deliverance from work.”<sup>135</sup> But the Bible is very clear that work is a pre-fall ordinance: work is commanded by God, and lawful work is good for man and the earth.

When man fell into sin, God did not place a curse upon *work*, but upon the *ground*<sup>136</sup>: “Cursed is the ground for your sake” (Gen. 3:17). Before the fall, work was naturally pleasing, fulfilling, joyful and pleasurable for man. But after the fall, all work is accompanied by fall-induced impediments (e.g., weeds, thorns, thistles, diseases, disasters). “There is always pain and toil involved when man seeks to achieve productive results. And there are always counteracting forces that tend to restrict those results. In every instance man is faced with painful, laborious toil until the day of his death. Just as was the case with the woman, the actual punishment lies in the accompanying circumstances. Work as such is not a punishment. The punishment lies in the difficulties that are involved in performing the work and the opposing forces that tend to curtail the anticipated results.”<sup>137</sup> Although work is burdensome, the task of godly dominion is still in effect. The major difference is that now, it is a work of restoration in Jesus Christ. The recreation in Christ and the Great Commission parallel the original creation and dominion mandate. Although the church has a primary role to play in the work of restoration (church planting, missions, etc.) it is ordinary believers as they apply the Word of God to their vocations who fulfill the dominion mandate and develop Christian culture. The “Puritan work ethic” leads to economic prosperity, dominion and Christian culture. Modern Christians must not view work as the enemy—worldly or sinful—but as a command of God which brings great blessing.<sup>138</sup> “The reward for work is dominion and achievement. To tell men that the reward for work is leisure or idleness is the same as saying that the reward for sex is castration. The purpose of rest is not escape from work, but a rest in the Lord, and a refreshing before return to work.”<sup>139</sup>

The second error regarding work is to see it as a means of salvation or as an end in itself. Secular humanists of every variety (Marxists, socialists, fascists, welfare statist, etc.) have rejected God and adopted a secular version of the Christian postmillennial hope. But for

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<sup>134</sup> Rushdoony, *op. cit.*, p. 371.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 372.

<sup>136</sup> “Work, however, was never meant to be a strain or curse. True, a curse was *connected* with labor after the fall in Genesis 3:17-19, but it never was put on work itself. The curse was to be found in the pain, frustration, and strain that now accompanied work. God’s intention from the very beginning was that people would find joy, fulfillment, and blessing in the fact and constancy of work. Six days they were to work and then, like the Lord, they and their households were to rest” (Kaiser, p. 150).

<sup>137</sup> G. C. Alders, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 1:109.

<sup>138</sup> The Bible teaches that man should enjoy his labor: “Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God” (Eccl. 2:24). Man should rejoice in his works (3:22); labor and production are a gift from God (5:18-19); labor itself, apart from God, can never truly satisfy man (6:7); man should work very hard at his calling, for his work is limited by his lifespan (9:10); the worker should work as unto Christ and not unto man (Eph. 6:6; Col. 3:23-24); diligent labor leads to dominion, but laziness leads to slavery (Pr. 12:24); a consistent pattern of work and saving will increase wealth, but dishonest gain is quickly spent (13:11); a man skillful at his craft will be honored (22:29). There is nothing wrong with enjoying the fruit of one’s labor or enjoying times of leisure, but the focus of life should be on God—not money, things or leisure.

<sup>139</sup> Rushdoony, *op. cit.*, p. 373.

humanists, work, economic growth and scientific progress are viewed as the saviors of humanity, not as aspects of dominion under God and for God's glory. When work is divorced from its God-given meaning and intent it becomes first an idol and then an object of hatred and despair. For it is God and His plan that give work meaning. "If life is meaningless, work is also meaningless. Freud saw work as the chief means of binding an individual to reality, but if a man finds reality unpleasant, he will run from it into liquor, leisure, drugs, or some other means of escape."<sup>140</sup> There was a certain dedication to the secular humanistic ideal of an earthly paradise through labor for a time, but as people gained a more consistent understanding of their apostate presuppositions, work was seen as mundane and meaningless. The secular humanistic hope has been superseded by the quest for instant gratification, hedonism, leisure and raw power. It is common today for students to cheat, lie, steal and do what it takes in the quest for money and power.

Work must never be separated from God, His plan and His law. Everything that man is to do is done in reference to God, His Word and His glory. Work in such a context has meaning and brings great satisfaction. The Protestant Reformers regarded all work, no matter how humble in appearance, as a wonderful calling from God.<sup>141</sup> When work is done for God's glory, according to His law, it is as virtuous, holy and fulfilling as being a missionary or a brilliant scientist. Thus the Christian is patient and content in his labors, knowing that his "labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

## Chapter 6: The Sanctifying of the Sabbath

The Sabbath is not just a day of rest; it is a day of rest *in order that the people of God may devote themselves to holy exercises*. "To raise this notion of desisting from work to the primary and main idea of the sabbath was the error of Phariseism, always severely condemned by the Lord. It is very evident that one may completely refrain from doing any work on the first day of the week, and yet so crowd the day with his own work, with speaking his own words and following after his own pleasure, that for him the day becomes of all days most unholy. It is therefore important that we bear in mind from the outset that rest and idleness are not identical. In fact, that we desist from daily labor on the first day of the week has its purpose in the positive

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid, p. 374. John Murray has pointed out that labor divorced from God often degenerates into pure self-interest: "And as we descend in the scale of human values, is it not a well-recognized fact that the bane of much workmanship is that the workman worked well only when he was under the eye of his master or supervisor? It is the same vice that explains the lack of pleasure in work; labour is boredom and about all that is in view is the pay-check. This evil that turns labour into drudgery is but the ultimate logic of eye-service and men-pleasing. Perhaps the most tragic result of all is the way in which eye-service betrays moral judgment. If we seek to please men, then, in the final analysis, it is expediency that guides conduct. And when expediency becomes the rule of life, obedience to God loses both sanction and sanctity and the workman is ready to be the accomplice in furthering ends which desecrate the first principles of right and truth and justice. God-service is the first principle of labour, and it alone is the guardian of virtue in all our economic structure" (*Principles of Conduct*, p. 88).

<sup>141</sup> "That Adam's labour consisted in dressing the garden and keeping it informs us that it was highly worthy of man's dignity as created after the divine image to be employed in so mundane a task. This is eloquent warning against the impiety of despising and judging unworthy of our dignity the tasks which we call menial. And one cannot but suspect that the widespread tendency to take flight from agricultural and related pursuits springs from an underestimate of the dignity of manual toil and oftentimes reflects an unwholesome ambition which is the fruit of impiety. There is warrant for the judgment that economics, culture, morality, and piety have suffered grave havoc by failure to appreciate the nobility of manual labour" (Ibid, pp. 35-36).

notion that we should fill the day with other activities, with the work of God and for *the rest*.<sup>142</sup> While it is true that a person should live holy throughout the week and engage in daily prayer, Bible study, psalm singing, private and family devotions; the Lord's day (unlike other days) is *wholly* sanctified. On other days devotion to God must be fit in around the duties of business or school and other activities, but the sabbath day is *totally* devoted to God. "The Sabbath-rest resembles that of heaven, which is a rest without a rest, wherein the soul is most busy and active, serving the Lord without weariness."<sup>143</sup>

## 1. Public Worship

The sabbath day is the day that God has set aside for the public worship of Himself. This involves preaching from the Bible,<sup>144</sup> reading the Word of God,<sup>145</sup> the administration of the sacraments,<sup>146</sup> the giving of tithes,<sup>147</sup> hearing the Word of God,<sup>148</sup> prayer to God,<sup>149</sup> and the singing of psalms.<sup>150</sup> Those who believe and teach that church attendance and public worship are optional do not understand the Scriptures. Those who claim Christ as Savior, yet neglect the public gathering of God's covenant people on the Lord's day, the day specifically set aside to honor Jesus Christ, are Christ-dishonoring hypocrites. "The New Testament sabbath being observed on the first day of the week, is without doubt designed particularly for the honor of Christ, and to be celebrated as an abiding memorial of his resurrection from the dead, by which he was declared to be the Son of God with power, and our accepted surety: for, as by dying he paid our debt, being 'delivered for our offenses,' so by his resurrection he took out our acquittance, for he 'was raised again for our justification,' Rom. iv. 25. The advancement of that despised Stone to be the head of the corner, was that which made this day remarkable, Ps. cxviii.

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<sup>142</sup> Hoeksema, 3:256.

<sup>143</sup> Boston, 2:196. "Q. 35. How much of the Sabbath is to be spent in the public and private exercises of God's worship? A. The *whole* of it, from the ordinary time of rising on other days, to the ordinary time of going to rest; [except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy]" (*Fisher's Catechism*, p. 69). Does this mean that every waking moment on the Sabbath involves preaching, Scripture reading, psalm singing, etc.? No. While the day does include more of what people usually identify as private devotions and family devotions, it means that all conversation, meditation and thought on the Lord's day are focused upon Christ, His Word and work. It means that even after public and private *formal* exercises of worship are concluded, the worship of God continues in our hearts, minds and souls.

<sup>144</sup> Mt. 26:13; Mk. 16:15; Ac. 9:20, 17:10, 20:8; 1 Cor. 14:28; 2 Tim. 4:2.

<sup>145</sup> Mk. 4:16-20; Ac. 1:13, 13:15, 16:13; 1 Tim. 4:13; 1 Cor. 11:20; Rev. 1:13.

<sup>146</sup> Mt. 26:26-29, 28:19; Ac. 20:11; 1 Cor. 11:24-25. The neglect of public worship on the Lord's Day shows not only a total disregard of the fourth commandment, but also a disregard of the sacrament of the Lord's supper and God's visible church. God instituted a government—an authority structure—for His visible church. The administration of the Lord's supper is to be done on the Lord's day by a duly-appointed minister of the gospel. The Lord's supper is a public ordinance that is only for members of Christ's visible church. It also is only to be taken after the preaching of God's Word. In the Lord's supper, Christ's death is showed forth. Believers, by faith, spiritually feed upon Christ and are made "partakers of his body and blood with all his benefits." To purposely avoid becoming a member of Christ's visible church, and especially to spurn the Lord's table, is in a sense a form of *self-excommunication*. In the parable of the wedding feast those who refused to come because of various excuses (business, etc.) were cast into outer darkness (Mt. 22:1-14). Although this parable applies specifically to those who reject the gospel, what about those who spurn the Lord's table in order to sleep in or go to the beach, etc.?

<sup>147</sup> 1 Cor. 16:1-2.

<sup>148</sup> Lk. 2:46, 4:20; Ac. 8:31, 20:9; Rom. 10:41; Jas. 1:22.

<sup>149</sup> Dt. 22:5; Mt. 6:9; 1 Cor. 11:13-15; Phil. 4:6; 1 Th. 5:17; Heb. 13:18; Jas. 1:5.

<sup>150</sup> 1 Chr. 16:9; Ps. 95:1-2, 105:2; 1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16.

22, 24; and they who despise this dignified day, do in effect still trample upon that exalted Stone.”<sup>151</sup> When God has given us six days in which to conduct our affairs, the missing of public worship for sleep, business or personal pleasure is inexcusable. The state of our hearts is proved by our outward actions (Mt. 6:16-20); to neglect the public honoring of Jesus Christ for any reason other than illness or emergency proves that one’s love and allegiance to Christ are a sham.<sup>152</sup>

## 2. Family Worship

The Lord’s day is also a day for family worship.<sup>153</sup> This places a special responsibility upon heads of households to lead by example, to lead their families in worship and authoritatively command family members to keep the Sabbath. “It is the Sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings” (Lev. 23:3). Family worship “is the daily joining of all that are united in a domestic relation, or who are dwelling together in the same house and family, in singing God’s praises, Acts ii. 47, reading his word, Deut. vi. 7, and praying unto him, Jer. x. 25.”<sup>154</sup> Christians should engage in family worship every day, but on the sabbath day family devotions should be given greater prominence (note that in the ceremonial law God was given a double sacrifice on the Sabbath, Num. 28:9). On the Lord’s day family devotions should be engaged in with particular attention to the duties that were performed in public worship. Heads of households should engage their families in a discussion of the Scripture reading and sermon topic. A lively discussion of the Word publicly preached (with questions, answers, Bible reading, commentary

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<sup>151</sup> Matthew Henry, *Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 1:125.

<sup>152</sup> A portion of Scripture which clearly teaches that public worship is not optional for Christians is Heb. 10:24-25: “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” Christianity is not a private affair. While it is true that everyone must individually believe in Jesus Christ, once a person becomes a Christian, he is part of the body of Christ and must live in support of that body. Note that the author of Hebrews sets love and good works toward our brethren in opposition to forsaking the assembling of the saints. To forsake the public assembly is in essence a disregarding of Christ’s body. It shows a lack of love, unity, goodness and compassion. “Unconcern for the well-being of the body, of which they are members, is symptomatic of self-concern and egocentricity. Selfishness and divisiveness go hand in hand; for self love breeds the spirit of isolationism. He who does not love his fellow Christians fervently from the heart (1 Pet. 1:22) feels no compelling need to associate himself with them. Indeed, the genuineness of the Christian profession of a man in this state must be seriously suspect, for those who are one in Christ cannot help loving one another... Such unconcern for one’s fellow believers argues unconcern for Christ himself and portends the danger of apostasy” (Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977], p. 415). Many professing Christians view Christ as a mere fire escape from hell. They regard the institutional church as an annoyance, as unhip, as too structured and orderly, etc. For some reason (probably the influence of the sixties youth culture and the charismatic movement) chaos, emotional outbursts, and unstructured spontaneity are seen as movements of the Holy Spirit. The reality is that they are usually reflections of sloppy, heretical theology and a dislike of authority.

<sup>153</sup> “By worship, is understood some tribute paid by the reasonable creature to God as the Great and Sovereign Lord Creator, whether it is immediately and directly paid and performed to Him, as prayer and praise, or for Him and at His command and for His honor, as preaching, hearing, and receiving of sacraments, which are worship when rightly gone about. In a word, we call that worship, more strictly and properly, which is a duty of the first table, and comes in as commanded in it for the honor of God, and not for our own or another’s external profit, which though commanded in the second table, cannot be so properly called worship, much less immediate worship. Thus, teaching others the duties of piety may be worship when teaching the duties of any other ordinary calling is not” (Durham in Coldwell, p. 10).

<sup>154</sup> *Fisher’s Catechism*, p. 68.



reading, consideration of the Confession, and catechizing) will both sanctify the day and the believer's heart. "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Ps. 119:11). "The duties that are to be required on this day will require this; such as instructing one another, exhorting, admonishing, comforting, strengthening one another, and talking to, or conferring with one another, of the Word (Deut. 6:7-8)."<sup>155</sup> Regarding sabbath sanctification, our attitude should be that of righteous Joshua who declared, "But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Josh. 24:15). Our desire should be that God would say of us as He did of Abraham, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD" (Gen. 18:19 KJV).

The master of the house has a responsibility to ensure that family members and visitors converse about God and His works.<sup>156</sup> The fellowship of the day and all communing must be exercises of worship. "At meals, and in the interval of duties: our speech should be always, but especially on the Lord's Day, seasoned with salt, Col. iv. 6."<sup>157</sup> This logically follows from the fact that we are not to do our own works or speak our own words on the Sabbath; thus, family and friends must converse about God and His works or remain silent. But the day of joy, rejoicing and celebration is not a day of silence.

### 3. Private Worship

The Lord's day is also a day for private devotions or secret duties toward God. This includes "secret prayer, reading the scriptures, and other soul-edifying books, meditation upon divine subjects, and self-examination."<sup>158</sup> On the Sabbath our minds should be focused upon God and His works. On the first sabbath Adam's attention was upon God and His miraculous work of creation. The Israelites looked back to the creation and their miraculous redemption from slavery in Egypt. Their sabbath worship (which involved the shedding of the blood of clean animals by a priest) focused their attention on the perfect Redeemer to come. Christians celebrate and meditate on the completed, perfect redemption of Christ, which culminated in His resurrection from the dead. On the first day of the week we commemorate and meditate upon the whole, complete, perfect work of redemption. Jonathan Edwards writes,

We keep the day on which the work was finished, because it is in remembrance of the whole work. We should on this day contemplate the wonderful love of God and of Christ, as expressed in the work of redemption, and our remembrance of these things should be accompanied with suitable exercises of soul with respect to them. When we call to mind the love of Christ, it should be with a return of love on our part. When we commemorate this work, it should be with faith in the Saviour. And we should praise God and the Lamb for this work, for the divine glory and love manifested in it, in our private and public prayers, in talking of the wonderful works of God, and in singing divine songs.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Durham in Coldwell, p. 12.

<sup>156</sup> "Our children, servants, strangers who are within our gates, are apt to profane the Sabbath; we are therefore to improve our power over them for God, in restraining them from sin, and in constraining them (as far as we can) to the holy observance of the rest of the Sabbath, lest God impute their sins to us, who had power (as Eli in the like case) to restrain them and did not; and so our families and consciences be stained with their guilt and blood" (Thomas Shepard, *Works* [Boston, 1853], 3:263).

<sup>157</sup> *Fisher's Catechism*, 2:69.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> Edwards, 2:103.

On the Lord's day we look back at God's creation and Christ's re-creation, His perfect work of redemption. We look upward to our triune God and focus on His infinite perfections and tender mercies toward us, unworthy sinners. We look forward to the second coming, the consummation and our eternal sabbath rest with Christ. We employ every aid possible in our spiritual exercises and holy meditations: the Holy Scriptures (first and foremost), prayer, the singing of psalms, public ordinances, the study of our Reformed catechisms and confessions, commentaries, theology books, tapes, etc. "And these duties are to be done with a special elevation of heart on the Sabbath-day; they ought to be performed with a frame suiting the Sabbath, Is. lviii. 13."<sup>160</sup>

The Lord's day is eminently a day of celebration, joy and gladness. "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the LORD has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps. 118:22-24). The day that Christ rose from the dead is not to be a day of gloom and depression but a day of happiness and great exultation. God's people should call the sabbath a delight (Isa. 58:13). Yes, it is true that our Savior suffered great humiliation and died an agonizing death as a common criminal, but He rose again, totally victorious over sin, Satan and death. He is now reigning as the exalted Lord of heaven and earth. "Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer" (2 Cor. 5:16). The first day of the week is the day in which the church celebrates, rejoices and honors Jesus Christ in a special way. It is the *only* day set apart by Christ in which the church is to celebrate His work of redemption.

#### 4. The New Covenant Holy Day

There are two important principles to learn from the new covenant Lord's day. First, since "the Lord's day is given in memory of the *whole work of redemption*,"<sup>161</sup> the popular idea of celebrating Christ's life piecemeal is totally unscriptural. We are *not* to set aside special days for Christ's birth, circumcision, baptism, etc. This practice came into the Roman church in imitation of pagan emperor worship. If Christ had wanted the church to have intricate church calendars where His life was divided into several parts, each having its own holy day, then He surely would have authorized such—but He did not. "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it" (Dt. 12:32). Second, since the Lord's day is the *only* divinely authorized day wholly set apart for the celebration of Christ's work, all

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<sup>160</sup> Boston, 2:196. "Reading the holy Bible and other good books, repetition, catechizing, singing psalms, praying, praising, profitable discourse—these are the exercises which, if they meet with a heart piously and devoutly affected towards God, will furnish us with such a pleasing variety of good works to fill up those hours of the Lord's day which are not spent in public worship, or in works of necessity and mercy, and will turn so much to our advantage, that we shall complain of nothing so much as the speedy returns of the sabbath-evening, and the shadows thereof" (Henry, *Works*, 1:131).

<sup>161</sup> George Gillespie, *English Popish Ceremonies* (1637), p. 146. "It is not to be supposed that this day was universally observed by the church at random, or by accident, without some direction given them. For as the apostles were appointed to erect the gospel church, and, as God's ministers, to give laws to it, relating to the instituted worship which was to be performed in it, it is reasonable to suppose that they gave direction concerning the time in which public solemn worship should be performed. Now, whatever the apostles ordered the church to observe, in matters belonging to religious worship, they did it by divine direction; otherwise the rules they laid down for instituted worship could not be much depended on, and they would doubtless have been flamed, as not having fulfilled the commission which they received from Christ, to 'teach' the church 'to observe all things whatsoever he had commanded them.' Nor could the apostle have made this appeal to the church: 'I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God...'" (Ridgely, 2:349-50).

other “holy” days such as Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, Whitsunday, etc., are forbidden. “All things in God’s worship must have a warrant out of God’s Word, must be commanded. It’s not enough that it is not forbidden.... Now when a man shall put a religious respect upon a thing, by virtue of his own institution when he hath not a warrant from God; here’s superstition! We must be *willing* worshipers, but not *will-worshippers*.”<sup>162</sup>

God was very generous to His people in giving them 52 holy days a year. When men or churches add their own days (e.g., Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, etc.), they detract from, denigrate, and even set aside the Lord’s day. Don’t most professing Christians regard Christmas and Easter as more special than the Lord’s day? They spend nearly the whole month of December in preparation for Christmas, decorating their homes, offices and churches; buying gifts, baking pies and cookies; practicing and memorizing Christmas carols; practicing for Christmas plays, Christmas carol recitals; etc. Yet many of these people do not give one minute of thought to Lord’s-day preparation. Many Americans rarely attend public worship on the Lord’s day, but would never miss the Christmas service. The typical American winks at sabbath breaking, fornication, adultery and drunkenness but considers Christians who do not celebrate Christmas to be deluded fanatics. Why do most Americans love Christmas yet hate the Lord’s day? Because the Lord’s day is the ordinance of God, while Christmas is the ordinance of man. James Bannerman writes,

In keeping the last day of the week as a day of religious observance, the Jews, by the very act, expressed their religious acknowledgement of God, who had appointed it, and did an act of worship to Him as its author, in the character of the one Creator who made the heavens and the earth. In keeping the first day of the week now, Christians, by the very act, recognize Christ as the author of it, and do homage to Him as the one Redeemer, who on that day rose from the dead, and secured the salvation of His people.... And who does not see, that upon the very same principle the observance of holidays appointed by the Church, as ordinary and stated parts of Divine worship, is an expression of religious homage to man, who is the author of the appointment—an unlawful acknowledgement of human or ecclesiastical authority in an act of worship. In keeping, after a religious sort, a day that has no authority but man’s, we are paying a religious homage to that authority; we are bowing down, in the very act of our observance of the days as part of worship, not to Christ, who has not appointed it, but to the Church, which has. We are keeping the season holy, not to God, but to man.<sup>163</sup>

Thus the world’s love affair with Christmas is an implicit rejection of the crown rights of Jesus Christ. It is an acceptance of autonomous law, of human tradition, of will worship. We are to observe only those things commanded by Christ (including those doctrines and ordinances

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<sup>162</sup> Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel Worship* (London: Peter Cole, 1650), pp. 9-10, spelling modernized. If King Jereboam, who ordained his own feast day, his own holy places and his own offerings “in the month which *he had devised of his own heart*,” was condemned by God for his innovations (1 Kgs. 12:32-33), then certainly we should avoid all such man-made “holy” days. “As under the Old Dispensation nothing connected with the worship or discipline of the Church of God was left to the wisdom or discretion of man, but everything was accurately prescribed by the authority of God, so, under the New, no voice is to be heard in the household of faith but the voice of the Son of God. The power of the church is purely ministerial and declarative. She is only to hold forth the doctrine, enforce the laws, and execute the government which Christ has given her. She is to add nothing of her own to, and to subtract nothing from, what her Lord has established. Discretionary power she does not possess” (James H. Thornwell, *Collected Writings* [Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1872], 2:163).

<sup>163</sup> James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1974 [1869]), 1:416.

deduced by good and necessary consequence from Scripture).<sup>164</sup> “This is what the Apostles did. They taught the whole counsel of God (Ac. 20:27). It did not include Christmas, Good Friday, or Easter, because they were not part of the things commanded by Christ. So, the one who understands ‘the true meaning of Christmas’ (or Good Friday, or Easter) is precisely the one who realizes that they are human inventions. And in order to honor Christ as the only King and head of the church, such a person will not observe these man-made additions to what our Lord commanded. A person such as this may be out of step with a very popular custom. The important thing is that he will be in step with Christ and the Apostles.”<sup>165</sup> Let us not detract from the honor due to Christ and His day, but honor Him by keeping His day and by setting an example to the outside world.

## 5. Is the Puritan Sabbath Too Strict?

Many have argued that the view of the Christian sabbath presented in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms is unduly strict. The teaching that *all* our activities, conversation and thoughts throughout the *whole* day (except in cases of mercy and necessity) are to be focused upon God, His Word and works is considered a Puritan perversion of the day. The idea that the whole day is to be spent in spiritual exercises and devotion is considered unrealistic, impossible, extreme and too strict.<sup>166</sup> Thus, many in the Reformed community have lowered the standards of the fourth commandment in order to make it easier for professing Christians to

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<sup>164</sup> “If we celebrate a holy day, we must prove from Scripture that God wants us to celebrate such a day. This scriptural law regarding worship is called the ‘regulative principle of worship.’ The regulative principle is taught throughout the Bible. In Genesis 4:3-5 we read that God *rejected* Cain’s offering of the fruit of the ground but accepted Abel’s offering of animal sacrifices. Why? Because even though offering fruit is nowhere prohibited, it was not commanded. Leviticus 10:1-2 records that God killed Nadab and Abihu because they offered strange fire, which God ‘commanded them not.’ The offering of strange fire is nowhere prohibited in Scripture, but it is not commanded. In 2 Samuel 6:3-7 we read of God’s judgment on David’s men who were moving the ark. Why were they judged? God was angry because they did not follow ‘the due order...as Moses commanded according to the word of the Lord’ (1 Chr. 15:13-15). Jesus chided the Pharisees for adding to God’s law: ‘Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?’ (Mt. 15:3). Jesus told the woman at the well that ‘they that worship him [God] must worship him in spirit and in *truth*’ (Jn. 4:24). Paul says that adding the commandments and doctrines of men to Christianity is ‘*self-imposed religion*, false humility’ and is of ‘*no value* against the indulgence of the flesh’ (Col. 2:20-23 NKJV). Jesus told the Pharisees who made up their own rules regarding worship, ‘In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men’ (Mt. 15:9). Sincerity is important, but sincerity must be in accord with divine revelation. Even in religious matters that may seem small or trivial to us, God commands that we act in accordance with His revealed will and not innovate according to our own will: ‘What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it’ (Dt. 12:30-32; cf. Dt. 4:2; Jer. 7:24, 31, 19:5; 1 Kgs. 12:32-33; Num. 15:39-40)” (Brian M. Schwertley, *Is Christmas Christian?* [Holt, MI: Reformation Forum, 1995], pp. 1-2).

<sup>165</sup> G.I. Williamson, *On the Observance of Sacred Days* (Havertown, PA: New Covenant Publishing Society, n.d.), pp. 9-10.

<sup>166</sup> “For example, the practice of sabbath keeping is one of the least popular (almost non-existent) practices in contemporary culture. Further, it is not accepted by the broader ‘evangelical’ community. Hence, it is not uncommon to hear the sabbath routinely spurned by candidates for ordination. This denial is regarded even more palatable if one makes a passing reference to Calvin, or the ‘continental view’ of the sabbath—even if the candidate has not the slightest idea of Calvin’s real views on the matter, or if the candidate’s practice bears no resemblance to the observation of the Lord’s Day among the Reformed churches on the continent of Europe” (Kevin Reed, “Introductory Essay” in Samuel Miller, *Doctrinal Integrity: The Utility and Importance of Creeds and Confessions and Adherence to Our Doctrinal Standards* [Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage, 1989], p. xix). Reed unfortunately is referring to some of the smaller conservative Presbyterian bodies in this country.

obey. Such thinking and such a downgrading of the Christian sabbath are wrong for a number of reasons.

First, the high standards for sabbath sanctification set forth by the Puritans and pre-twentieth century Presbyterians are simply reflections of what the Bible teaches regarding the fourth commandment. A study of the Puritan and Presbyterian works on the Sabbath (until the infiltration of modernism and dispensationalism) reveals a striking uniformity of thought on the subject. The teaching of the Westminster Standards on the Sabbath was arrived at by the careful exegesis of Scripture; that exegesis was sound and has yet to be refuted. Second, the idea (common in our day) that the Puritan view of the Sabbath must be wrong because it is so difficult could easily be applied to any of God's commandments. For example, the seventh commandment requires sexual purity in thought, word and deed. A person who has one impure thought—even for a moment—is guilty of breaking this commandment. The fact that it is impossible perfectly to keep the seventh commandment this side of heaven (because of indwelling sin) does not give man the excuse to redefine the requirements of the command to make perfect obedience easier. Is this not precisely what the Pharisees did? Did they not externalize the commandments because of the impossibility of perfect inward obedience? The best way for Christians to achieve sabbath sanctification is *not* to downgrade the Sabbath by redefining it downward until it suits our sinful, selfish desires, but rather to upgrade our behavior and continually examine ourselves in the light of God's perfect law.

In many Reformed churches there is a purposeful avoidance of being specific regarding the requirements of the fourth commandment. This is usually the result of two serious problems within church leadership. The first is hypocrisy: men are being ordained to the ministry who do not hold to the strict sabbatarianism of the Westminster Standards.<sup>167</sup> The second is cowardice: pastors avoid specifics and let each church member decide for himself what the Sabbath means. What would the church and society be like if everyone were permitted to define fornication, theft, murder or covetousness for themselves? Is it any wonder that we live in a time of great sabbath desecration?

## Conclusion

It is not an accident that the great decline of Lord's-day observance has occurred at the same time that unbelief, apostasy and wickedness have permeated western culture.<sup>168</sup> The love of

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<sup>167</sup> "As an accessory to subscription, ministers (and elders) in the Presbyterian church are required to take an ordination vow stating they 'sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures.' This vow is designed to *underscore* the authority of the doctrinal standards, not relax them. Yet, in one of the most perverse subterfuges of modern ecclesiastical politics, this vow is often treated as a negation. It is regarded by some as an escape clause, as if its purpose was to enable church offices to assent to the confessional 'system' in general, without any implied commitment to any of the particulars. In this line of thinking, church officers are free to disregard individual articles of our creed at their pleasure, with impunity, so long as they pay lip-service to the 'system' contained therein. Thus, the ordination vow is turned upside down, and employed as an instrument of denial" (Ibid, p. xvii).

<sup>168</sup> One factor that is not the root of the problem but which certainly contributes to it is the rise of electronic technology and Americans' obsession with entertainment. In the nineteenth century it was not uncommon for families to sit around and read books, tell stories, sing songs, play instruments, etc. Thus, on the Sabbath there would be an avoidance of labor and a shift in the *type* of books read, stories told, songs sung, etc. But in modern culture most families sit around and watch television or listen to the stereo. Reading books and engaging in activities that are compatible with keeping the Lord's day (if the subject matter is appropriate) are foreign to most Americans

God and of His day go hand in hand. When the love and fear of God no longer exist, His day is not honored. “If we did indeed love God as we ought, with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and might, we would not say, when we have been attending upon him two or three hours in public worship, ‘Now we have surely done enough for this day,’ when we are invited, encouraged and appointed still to continue our communion with him,—still to feast upon his holy word, and repeat our addresses at the throne of his grace in our closets and families. Would we be so soon weary of an intimate conversation with a friend we love and take pleasure in? No; with such a friend we contrive how to prolong the time of converse, and when the hours of sitting together are expired, we stand together, and, as those that are loath to part, bid often farewell, are we add to this a walk together for further discourses; is this thy kindness to thy friend, and wilt thou say of communion with thy God, ‘Behold what a weariness is it!’ and contrive excuses to contract it, to break it off, or cut it short?”<sup>169</sup> May God increase our love toward Him and thus enable us to sanctify His day as we ought. “The stream of all religion runs either deep or shallow, according as the banks of the sabbath are kept up or neglected.”<sup>170</sup>

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to begin with. Therefore, sabbath-keeping seems all the more difficult and radical to modern people. Thus, modern Christians need to have a biblical view of entertainment (most don't) and need to be even more diligent in the path of sabbath sanctification.

<sup>169</sup> Henry, *Works*, 1:131.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*, 1:134.