

THE LORD'S DAY

ITS PRESUPPOSITIONS, PROOFS,
PRECEDENTS, AND PRACTICE



SAM WALDRON

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Its Presuppositions, Proofs,
Precedents, and Practice

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Exodus 20:8

Sam Waldron

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CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

A. The Context of the Study

The subject of the Christian Sabbath has long been a matter of controversy among Christians of all types and backgrounds. But in the last few years the subjects of the Law and the Sabbath have become a topic of prolonged and at times heated debate. This debate is, however, but a small segment of an ongoing debate that has gripped Evangelicalism for much of the twentieth century.¹

This debate has been occasioned by the growing erosion of the Lord's Day observance among Christians in countries and churches that were traditionally Sabbatarian² in their theology and practice. As I see it, the debate has been between those Christians who view this erosion as dangerous, pernicious, and a violation of the Scriptures on the one hand, and on the other hand, those whose views of the Lord's Day have made them amenable to the modern trend.

To some degree, therefore, all of us approach this subject in a polemic³ atmosphere, a climate of debate. While it is to be gratefully acknowledged that God has often overruled such debate for the advancement of truth in His Church, such a polemic atmosphere is not necessarily the best climate in which truth and Christianity thrive. It has its dangers.

To be specific, it can lead to extreme and imbalanced views in both the doctrinal and practical realms. It may lead us to miss or depreciate aspects of truth that seem unfavorable to "our side." It may lead us to adopt either legalistic views of Sabbath-keeping in overreaction to the libertinism⁴ of our day, or it may cause us to overreact to the legal-

¹ Don Carson's introduction to the collection of essays, entitled *From Sabbath to the Lord's Day* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), corroborates this assertion.

² It is just as well to define the controversial word *Sabbatarian* early in this discussion. I will use "Sabbatarian" with the general meaning of one who observes a weekly Sabbath. In this discussion, I am defending the observance of the Lord's Day as a "Christian Sabbath." In this sense, I am a Sabbatarian and am defending Sabbatarianism. It is true, however, that the term *Sabbatarian* has at least two possible connotations that I do not intend to convey by using it. Sometimes Sabbatarian has been used to describe one who observes Saturday as a Sabbath. I will describe this as "seventh-day Sabbatarianism." The adjective *Sabbatarian* has also been used to describe one who favors a rigid observance of the "Christian Sabbath." I am a Sabbatarian, but I do not regard myself as either holding, defending, or practicing the "rigid observance" of the Christian Sabbath that I acknowledge even some "Christian Sabbatarians" have held. When referring to such beliefs or practices, I will refer to "extreme Sabbatarianism."

³ **polemic** – contentious; controversial; argumentative.

⁴ **libertinism** – practice of no moral restraint and the rejection of religious authority.

ism of extreme Sabbatarians into a totally antinomian⁵ view of the Lord's Day. Both responses are wrong and equally anti-Christian. The Pharisee and the Libertine are much closer to one another than to the true Christian. Personal pastoral experience has observed more than once the reactionary exchange of a youthful, extreme Sabbatarianism for an antinomian view and libertine practice with regard to the Lord's Day.

It seems indisputable to me that the Bible was written for sons of God, not defense attorneys. In other words, the Bible was written for sons willing to hear their Father's words without interrupting Him before He is finished speaking. It was not written for defense attorneys ready to catch at words, fabricate contradictions, interrupt before one is finished, and defend their case to the bitter end. If we are ever to come to the knowledge of the truth in our studies of the Scriptures, we must approach them as *sons*. Otherwise, it is altogether too possible that our lot will be that of those professing Christians of which Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:7, who were "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

B. The Outline of the Study

This discussion of the "Christian Sabbath" has four sections:

Section 1: Its Presuppositions;

Section 2: Its Proofs;

Section 3: Its Precedents;

Section 4: Its Practice.

⁵ **antinomian** – *Greek: anti* "against" and *nomos* "law"; thus "against law"; one who holds the theological view that God's Law has no place in the life of a believer. See *The Law and the Saint* by A. W. Pink; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

SECTION ONE

ITS PRESUPPOSITIONS

CHAPTER 2

THE ORGANIC UNITY OF THE SCRIPTURES

I am utterly convinced that, in approaching the question of the Christian Sabbath, we must first consider the issue of the presuppositions with which we approach the Scriptures. Much, very much—indeed, in a sense, everything—depends on the presuppositions with which we come to this issue. These presuppositions form the foundation of our doctrinal edifice. If the foundation of a building is out of plumb,⁶ the building itself must be severely affected.

Furthermore, if we can agree on our foundations, I believe that we are almost certain to agree on our conclusions. Even if, however, we do not agree on our conclusions, those who accept our foundations will be safeguarded from more serious error. On the other hand, those who disagree with these foundational assumptions will fall into far more serious error than those who merely come to slightly different conclusions, but with the same foundations.

Five crucial presuppositions with reference to the interpretation of Scripture on this subject must now be examined.

Perhaps the most fundamental assumption about proper, biblical interpretation is the organic unity of the Scriptures. The Bible is one book with one author, God Himself, and it therefore has one all-embracing theme. This one theme unfolds in an organic, or growing, unity. Geerhardus Vos has stated this reality very persuasively and eloquently:

⁶ **out of plumb** – not perfectly aligned. If the foundation is not level, the walls will collapse over time.

Although the knowledge of God has received material increase through the ages, this increase nowhere shows the features of external accretion,⁷ but throughout appears as an internal expansion, an organic unfolding from within...The gospel of Paradise is such a germ in which the gospel of Paul is potentially present: and the gospel of Abraham, of Moses, of David, of Isaiah and Jeremiah, are all expansions of this original message of salvation, each pointing forward to the next stage of growth and bringing the gospel idea one step nearer to its full realization.⁸

If the Bible is an organic unity, then it must be studied and understood as such. John Murray properly remarks:

The Bible revelation should never be compared to a pile of blocks, even should we think of these as blocks of the finest granite, well-shaped and masterfully hewn, arranged in the most symmetrical order. The Bible is an organism; its unity is organic. It is not a compilation of isolated and unrelated divine oracles. The Bible is something that grew over a period of some fifteen centuries. It grew by a process of divine revelation and inspiration.⁹ At sundry times and in divers manners, God progressively revealed Himself and His will until, in the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, Who is the brightness of His glory and the “express image” of His person (Heb 1:3).

Our knowledge of the Bible, if it is to be really adequate, must be knowledge of the Bible as it is, and must reflect this organic character—not knowledge of the piecemeal or block variety, but knowledge of the vital organic unity that belongs to the Bible. We must understand that the whole Bible stands together and the fibers of organic connection run through the whole Bible, connecting one part with every other part, and every one truth with every other truth.¹⁰

Murray is absolutely correct. The Bible is not a sack of rocks, but a tree, each part of which is organically related to every other part. If we believe this, it will irresistibly force us to ask of each part of the Bible, “How does it fit in with the rest of the Bible?” The organic unity of the Bible constrains us to ask how the institutions of the New Testament are related to those of the Old.

For instance, Acts 20:7 records that the church at Troas met for worship “upon the first day of the week.” If we viewed the Bible as a sack of isolated rocks, it might be possible to be insensitive to the relationship of this passage to other similar mentions of the first day of the week in the New Testament (1Co 16:2; Luk 24:1; Joh 20:1, 19, 26). If, however, we approach the task with the presupposition of the organic unity of Scripture, such insensitivity is impossible.

Similarly, it may be possible for the anti-Sabbatarian to evade confronting the question as to the relation of two such similar institutions as the Lord's Day (Rev 1:10) and the weekly Sabbath of Israel, just so long as he assumes the sack-of-rocks view of the Bi-

⁷ **accretion** – increase by gradual additions from external sources.

⁸ G. Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 11.

⁹ See *The Doctrine of Revelation* by A. W. Pink, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

¹⁰ John Murray, *Collected Writings*, vol. I (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 5.

ble. When, however, the organic unity of the Scriptures is considered at all, this question must be squarely faced. When it is faced, I am persuaded that it will be difficult to avoid the admission of an organic unity between these two institutions.

CHAPTER 3

THE FUNDAMENTAL CONTINUITY OF THE LAW OF GOD

A. One in All Ages

A second foundational perspective is the fundamental continuity or unity of the Law of God in all ages. This is obviously a perspective closely related to the first, but it has its own peculiar evidence and significance.

The precise language used to describe this perspective must be carefully observed. I have spoken of the “fundamental continuity or unity” of the Law of God. By so speaking, I mean to imply that there are ceremonial (or positive) laws that endure only for a season of the world’s history. It is assumed that certain laws, consequently, lost their authority with the first advent of Christ. Examples of these are the dietary and Levitical laws of the Old Covenant. The words *fundamental unity* simply assert that despite this undoubted reality, the fundamental truth about God’s Law is that it is one in all ages.

Why is this the case? The reasons are really quite simple. It is the case because God does not change and man fundamentally remains the same (Act 17:26). Since God’s Law is simply the transcript of His own character as it impinges upon the appropriate conduct of men, fundamentally God’s Law does not change. His Law is simply His own holy, just, and good character (Rom 7:12) coming to expression in and for the regulation of human conduct.

The classic text that forcefully exhibits this truth, that God’s Law is fundamentally the same in all ages, is Romans 2:14-15. Paul’s concern in this text is to show why it is just for God to condemn the Gentiles who did not possess the Law (v. 12a): “For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law.” Paul’s response to this concern is contained in verses 14 and 15:

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.

Its substance is to the effect that the Gentiles are in possession of God’s Law and, thus, liable to divine judgment. Two questions must be asked and answered at this point.

B. Gentiles Possessing the Law?

First, how are the Gentiles in possession of the Law? Two phrases put the answer to this question beyond doubt. Verse 14a speaks of the Gentiles doing “by nature” the

things of the Law. The word *nature*, here and frequently elsewhere in the New Testament, speaks of that which was created by God. Verse 15a corroborates this by means of the phrase “the work of the law written in their hearts.” Since all Gentiles are assumed to have this writing in their hearts, the writing here mentioned can only be a writing that took place by means of the creation. It is, therefore, via creation that the Gentiles possess the Law.

Second, what law is it that the Gentiles possess via creation? The simple answer to this question is substantially the same Law given to Israel and to the Church. Several exegetical facts conspire to demand this conclusion.

C. The Same Law: Gentiles, Israel, the Church

First, note the definite references to “the law.” The definite article is present both in verse 14a (“the things contained in *the* law”) and in verse 15a (“the work of *the* law”). The presence of the definite article in these phrases clearly evidences a reference to some definite law mentioned in the context. What is “*the* law” to which contextual reference is made? There can be no legitimate doubt. It is the Law given to Israel on Mount Sinai (Rom 2:12-13, 17-27). John Murray cogently remarks:

The “law” referred to is definite, and can be no other than the Law of God specified in the preceding verses as the Law which the Gentiles in view did not have, the Law the Jews did have and under which they were, the Law by which men will be condemned in the day of judgment. It is not therefore a different law that confronts the Gentiles who are without the Law, but the same Law brought to bear upon them by a different method of revelation...The point is that it is not an entirely different law with which the Gentiles are confronted; the things of the Law they do are not things of an entirely different law—it is essentially the same Law. The difference resides in the different method of being confronted with it and, by implication, in the less detailed and perspicuous¹¹ knowledge of its content.¹²

Second, note the clear allusion to the moral obligations incumbent upon the people of God in both the Old and New Covenant. The phrase in verse 15a, “the work of the law written in their hearts,” is reminiscent of and was suggested by language familiar to Paul from the Old Testament. The language of Jeremiah 31:33 (which is itself alluding to a number of references in the Book of Exodus regarding the writing of the Law by the finger of God) anticipates Paul’s terminology. In Jeremiah 31:33, the Law written on stone is said to be rewritten in the hearts of the New Covenant people of God. It needs to be clearly noted that it is not a new law that is in view, but the same Law written in a different place. By this allusion to Jeremiah 31:33, Paul suggests a connection between the law written on the heart of men by creation, the Law written on stone in the Old Covenant, and the law re-written on the hearts of men through the grace and power of the New Covenant.

¹¹ **perspicuous** – clear in statement or expression; lucid; easily understood.

¹² John Murray, *Commentary on Romans*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 74.

Third, we must note the reference to the Gentiles doing “the things contained in the law.” While the exact meaning of this phrase is disputable, upon either plausible exegesis¹³ of the phrase it suggests that “the work of the law written in their hearts” confronts Gentiles with a richness and variety of ethical content. It is not, in other words, simply the law of love in some ambiguous sense that is in view. This is confirmed by the assumptions of the surrounding context about the ethical knowledge possessed by these Gentiles (1:18-23, 28-32; 3:19-20).

If we really appreciate this emphasis, it will be of enormous assistance in enabling us to properly evaluate the evidence for the Christian Sabbath. Most of the emphasis in our day is given to the contrasts or differences between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Bible, however, while recognizing diversity in the different periods of covenant history, emphasizes and assumes the fundamental unity of the Law of God in all ages. The evidence for the Christian Sabbath can only be appreciated by one who understands this perspective and approaches the Bible with it. This perspective confronts us with the important question: On what basis, by what right, do I deny the authority of some law which was at one time binding on God's people? The perspective I have laid out will prevent a casual attitude to this critical question.

¹³ **exegesis** – biblical explanation that establishes the meaning of a passage, using the literal, grammatical, and historical method of interpretation. See “Methods of Bible Study” course available from Mount Zion Bible Institute.

CHAPTER 4

THE ASSUMED PERPETUITY OF OLD TESTAMENT LAW UNLESS ABOLISHED

The third fundamental perspective that must provide the framework for our thinking on the Christian Sabbath is the assumed perpetuity¹⁴ of Old Testament Law unless abolished in Christ. In expounding¹⁵ this interpretive principle, we will note in order: its denial, its defense, and its difficulty.

A. Denial of Perpetuity

This principle has been pointedly denied by most dispensationalists.¹⁶ In pointed contradiction to the principle enunciated above, they teach that only those laws reiterated in the New Testament are for Christians. L. S. Chafer, whose dispensational credentials no one should question, asserts of the Law of Moses:

But the entire system, including the commandments as a rule of life, ceased with the death of Christ (Joh 1:17; Rom 10:4). The Law of Moses, to be sure, was an *ad interim*¹⁷ dealing in effect only until Christ should come. For the time being it gave to sin the character of transgression (Rom 5:13; Gal 3:19). It was preceded (Exo 19:4) and followed (Joh 1:17) by grace.¹⁸

If we are accustomed to think of such a view as peculiarly dispensational, we will be surprised to find men in the Reformed tradition taking a similar position. Albertus Pieters remarks:

Whatever in the Decalogue¹⁹ is binding upon us, is so binding not at all because it is there, but because it has been reaffirmed by Christ and the apostles as a moral principle of the Christian life.²⁰

¹⁴ **perpetuity** – the quality of lasting forever; of being endless, perpetual.

¹⁵ **expounding** – explaining; setting forth in detail.

¹⁶ **dispensationalists** – those who hold to the system of theology that divides the Word of God into arbitrary periods with supposed differences in the way God saves men from their sins. It proposes that the Old Testament saints were not a part of the Church of God, and that the Law has no bearing on the Christian as a guide to moral living. Along with some other premillennialists, they uphold the rapture of the Church and a literal 1,000 year reign of Christ.

¹⁷ **ad interim** – temporary.

¹⁸ L. S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 7 (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1969), 225-226.

¹⁹ **Decalogue** – The Ten Commandments.

Jon Zens is Reformed²¹ in his soteriology.²² At least at the time when he wrote the following statements he was writing within the Reformed tradition. This statement makes clear that Zens too has substantially a dispensational approach to the abiding validity of Old Testament Law:

His explication of “law” in His Kingdom *incorporates* elements of the Mosaic code into the New Covenant...It is in this area of doing justice to the reality of Old Covenant abolishment, and the implications of this for New Covenant community, that Reformed theology has failed...And Christ as Mediator²³ has the prerogative to delineate what “law” is in the New Covenant...The Church stands bound, not to the minutely detailed Mosaic code, but to those new documents inspired by the Spirit of Christ...This immediately raises the question of “Sabbath.” It is obvious that nine of the Ten Commandments are reiterated in the New Covenant. Respected brethren have always differed on whether the “Sabbath” is still in force.²⁴

Please carefully note exactly what these men are saying. They are not denying that we must obey at least nine of the Ten Commandments. They are saying that we only obey them *if and because* they are reiterated by Christ and the apostles and, thus, specifically incorporated into the law of the New Covenant, the law of Christ. The key words in the above quotations are *reaffirmed*, *incorporates*, and *reiterated*. We obey these laws not because they are in the Ten Commandments or in the Old Testament, but because they are in the post-Pentecost portions of the New Testament. The principle [these men follow] is: Whatever is not reiterated in this part of the New Testament is not authoritative for us.

B. Defense of Perpetuity

The great question that must be pressed upon the advocates of such a hermeneutic²⁵ is this: when one reads the ethical standards of the New Testament, does one receive the impression that a new law or code of ethics is being established or revealed? In other words, does Christ or His apostles reveal a new ethical system? The short answer to this simple question is no. Instead these advocates *assume* one. Everywhere, for instance,

²⁰ Albertus Pieters, “Calvin’s View of the Fourth Commandment,” *The Calvin Forum* (February 1942): 137.

²¹ **Reformed** – pertaining to the doctrines of the Scriptures recovered during the Reformation, as articulated in the Swiss Reformation that soon spread to the rest of Northern Europe. These were the major Protestant counterpart to Lutheran doctrine. Original Reformed doctrine continues to be reflected in the major confessions: the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), the Heidelberg Confession (1563), and the Belgic Confession (1566).

²² **soteriology** – theology of the doctrine of salvation.

²³ **Mediator** – go-between; one who intervenes between two hostile parties for the purpose of restoring them to a relationship of harmony and unity. See *Free Grace Broadcaster* 183, “Christ the Mediator”; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

²⁴ Jon Zens, “Crucial Thoughts Concerning Law in the New Covenant,” *Baptist Reformation Review* 7, no. 3 (Spring 1978): 11-13.

²⁵ **hermeneutic** – particular way of interpreting Scripture. Hermeneutics is the branch of theology that deals with the principles of biblical interpretation.

there are extensive lists of sins that are merely asserted as obviously evil. The burning question for the advocates of the neo-dispensational hermeneutic of law noted above is: where did the apostles obtain this extensive ethical system?

All of this may be viewed from another standpoint. Do we find a new, comprehensive, ethical system in the New Testament? If we look for one, we will surely be disappointed. Viewed as a new law, the statements of Christ and the apostles as divorced from the Law of the Old Covenant must and will seem a random and motley collection. Contrary to the view advocated by Pieters and Zens, the New Testament everywhere points us back to the Old Testament Law as God's comprehensive revelation of law. We are reminded of the statement of the apostle John, "The law was given by Moses" (Joh 1:17). The doctrine of the New Testament may be stated in pointed contradiction to the view that says, "Whatever is not reiterated is not for us." The doctrine of the New Testament is, rather, this: "Whatever is not abolished in Christ is abidingly valid for us." That this is the doctrine of the New Testament is shown in myriad places where the New Testament cites or refers to Old Testament Law (Mat 5:17-20; 7:12; Luk 18:20; Rom 7:7; 12:19; 13:8-10; 1Co 5:1 [see Lev 18:8; Deu 22:30; 27:20]; 1Co 5:13 [see Deu 13:5; 17:7]; 9:8-9; 14:34; Eph 6:1-3;²⁶ 1Ti 1:9-10; 5:18; Heb 12:5; Jam 2:8-13; 1Pe 3:10-12 [see Psa 34:12-16]). Everywhere the New Testament assumes that, in and of itself, the Old Testament Law is abidingly valid unless some aspect of it is fulfilled in Christ.

It is clear from the above texts that the abiding validity of the Old Testament Law cannot be restricted to the Ten Commandments. The texts cited *do* show, however, that the Ten Commandments are the heart of Old Testament Law. This is further borne out by the fact that the Old Testament sometimes singles out the Ten Commandments as "the covenant" (Exo 34:28; Deu 4:10-13; 5:2-22).

Our conclusion must be that, when we come to the abolition of the fourth commandment,²⁷ the burden of proof rests with those who deny its abiding validity. This is so because the New Testament doctrine is that, unless something is abolished, it remains valid. It is therefore up to those who deny its validity to show this. An argument from silence will not do; in itself such an argument would favor the perpetuity of any particular law. The presumption is that if something is part of the Old Testament Law, it is for us—unless it is abolished in Christ. This is especially true of the moral heart of that Law, the Ten Commandments.

²⁶ B. B. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*, vol. 1 (Nutley: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970), 322f.

²⁷ "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it" (Exo 20:8-11).

C. Difficulty of Perpetuity

1. *The Difficulty Stated*

The view here defended has a difficulty that may be stated very simply. The New Testament teaches that the Old Covenant itself was abolished in Christ. How, then, can we say that any of its laws are valid for us? Further, since the Ten Commandments are in the places cited above identified as “the covenant” [i.e., the Old Covenant established at Mount Sinai], must we not view even the Ten Commandments as abolished in Christ? The evidence for the abolition of the Old Covenant appears to be quite clear (note 2Co 3:11-14; Heb 8:7, 13; 10:9).

The opponents of the view defended above have not been slow to tax it with the problem here suggested. Jon Zens remarks:

When Jesus died on the cross, “the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent” (Mat 27:51)...This decisive, supernatural act visibly demonstrated the end of the Old Covenant and the establishment of the New.

Thus, within this restricted perspective of the abolishing of the Old and the beginning of the New, it is proper to see the “stones” as included in that which was terminated...²⁸

Before commencing the exposition of the answer to this difficulty, the breadth of the difficulty with which it confronts us must be understood. The evidence previously cited for the assumed perpetuity of Old Testament Law cannot be exegeted out of our New Testaments. This evidence requires that we reject the superficial conclusions that Zens and others would have us draw from the exegetical data with which they have confronted us. The comprehensive evidence of the New Testament demands that we look further than the solution which Zens has offered us.

2. *The Difficulty Resolved*

The resolution of the difficulty suggested by the abolition of the Old Covenant may be accomplished by remembering two things. We must, first, remember the precise way in which the Old Covenant was abolished. We must, second, remember a crucial distinction or paradox found in the New Testament.

a. *How the Old Covenant was abolished*

We must remember the precise way in which the Old Covenant was abolished. Simply put, it was abolished by way of *fulfillment*. This is the pervasive teaching of the New Testament. In Matthew 5:17-20, Jesus speaks of not coming to destroy the Law and the prophets, but to fulfill. In Hebrews 10:1, the Law is spoken of as the shadow of good things to come. When we speak of the abolition of the Old Covenant, we must always remember that we are speaking of abolition by way of fulfillment.

Hebrews 8 explicitly connects the abolition of the Old Covenant with its displacement by the New Covenant (Heb 8:7, 13). This permits us to examine the terms of the

²⁸ Jon Zens, “Crucial Thoughts Concerning Law,” 10.

New Covenant in order to gain further clarification as to what exactly its fulfillment, and abolition of the Old Covenant, means. Indeed, when we examine the two great blessings for which the Old Covenant provided, not a little light is shed on the meaning of abolition by way of fulfillment.

The *first* great blessing for which the New Covenant provided was the writing of the Law of God on the hearts of His people. In the Old Covenant, the fundamental principles of the Law of God were written on stone. Now, so the promise runs, that Law is to be written by the Spirit in the hearts of God's people. This is a fulfillment motif. The movement from "tables of stone" to "hearts of flesh"—suggested in Jeremiah 31:33 and elaborated in 2 Corinthians 3—does not, it must be noticed, imply a change in what is written. It rather clearly implies the opposite. The fundamental principles of the Old Covenant Law (as expressed in the Ten Commandments written in stone) are not, then, to be abolished by the coming of the New Covenant. Though the Old Covenant is superseded, its moral laws are not.

The *second* great blessing for which the New Covenant provided was the remembering of the sins of God's people no more. The ramifications of this for the sacrificial system of the Old Covenant are suggested in Hebrews 10:1-18.

*But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance
again made of sins every year. (Heb 10:3)*

The repetitive sacrifices of that sacrificial system suggest to the writer of Hebrews that, under the Old Covenant, sins were still remembered (v. 3). (The root word is the same in verses 3 and 17.) The New Covenant promise in view, then, was a virtual prophecy of the abolition of the Old Covenant sacrificial system. The New Covenant meant that all the ceremonial laws pertaining to the Levitical system would be annulled (Heb 7:12, 18-19).

This, then, is our first way of resolving the difficulty posed by the abolition of the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant, we must remember, was abolished by way of fulfillment. Such abolition means different things for different aspects of that covenant. For the Law written on stones, it means continuity by means of being written on the hearts of men. For the Levitical and sacrificial system, it means discontinuity and abrogation²⁹ by means of the sacrifice of Christ.

b. A crucial paradox in the New Covenant

We must also remember a crucial distinction or paradox found in the New Testament. The New Testament simply views the Law of the Old Covenant from two perspectives. Sometimes the Old Covenant and its Law are viewed as a temporary covenant pointing forward to Christ. On the other hand, sometimes the Old Covenant Law is viewed as a permanent revelation of moral principles. For instance, the dominant perspective in Hebrews is that the Law is a temporary covenant pointing forward to Christ (Heb 7:19; 8:4-5; 10:1). In contrast, the dominant perspective in Romans is that the Law is a permanent

²⁹ **abrogation** – abolishment; doing away with.

revelation of abiding moral principle (Rom 2:14-15; 3:19-20, 31; 4:15; 6:14; 7:12; 10:4; 13:8-10).

This distinction or paradox needs to be fleshed out by means of several observations.

First, as a temporary covenant, the Christian is not under the Law in any sense: not as a way of salvation, not even as a rule of life. In fact to return to the Law in this sense is to deny the redemptive-historical significance of the work of Christ. Since Christ's first advent, to return to the Law in this sense is to fall away from Christ. While Christ had not yet come, the Law pointed forward to Him. By doing so, it was a saving revelation to Israel. But if we return to the Old Covenant now that Christ has come, we necessarily pervert it into a covenant of works.³⁰ Thus, to return to it now is to return to a system in which one cannot be saved. It is to return to a system of works' righteousness. This, if I understand him properly, is Paul's whole point in his letter to the Galatians.

Second, as a permanent revelation, the Christian is under the Law as a rule of life. He is obligated to obey its instruction in righteousness (2Ti 3:16-17).

Third, this distinction is not, first of all, a distinction between two distinct parts of the Law. It is rather a distinction between two different perspectives of viewing the whole Old Testament. It is not just the Decalogue that is relevant for the Christian. The laws for sexual purity in Leviticus 18, the laws of affinity and consanguinity,³¹ the promise of long life to sons who honor their parents (Pro 3:1-2; etc.)—all these have binding authority and continuing relevance in the New Testament. On the other hand, there are certainly details contained within the bounds of the Ten Commandments, as they are recorded in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, that do not bind the Christian. For instance, even though the fourth commandment is itself of perpetual significance for the Christians, the data that expands on the fourth commandment in both these passages assumes the observance of the seventh day of the week (Exo 20:10, 11; Deu 5:13-14).³²

Fourth, while this distinction is not a distinction in the first place between two parts of the Law, it remains true that when these two distinct perspectives of the New Testa-

³⁰ **covenant of works** – covenant God established with Adam in the Garden of Eden before his fall into sin. It established man's obligation to obey God, with a continued life of fellowship with God, and if he disobeyed, the penalty of eternal death (Gen 2:16-17). When men today seek to receive life by their obedience, it is a return to this failed covenant.

³¹ **consanguinity** – relation by blood; having common ancestry.

³² Some Sabbatarians have argued that the Ten Commandments require only the observance of one day in seven, not the seventh day. This view is not convincing for the reasons noted and is not, therefore, helpful in the Sabbatarian polemic. It is better to distinguish between the fourth commandment itself, found in Exodus 20:8 and Deuteronomy 5:12, and the supplementary data provided in the subsequent verses in both cases. This supplementary data clearly may vary. This, in turn, suggests that it is not to be viewed as properly part of the fourth commandment. It seems right to assume this on the basis that the fourth commandment in its essence must remain the same in the two accounts. If this distinction is proper, it would be possible for Sabbatarians to argue that the fourth commandment merely requires the observance of the Sabbath without specifying the day. It is the supplementary data which makes plain that, in the Old Testament, God's holy day or Sabbath was the seventh day. In this way, Reformed theologians might defend the unqualified perpetuity of each of the Ten Commandments without qualification.

ment with reference to the Old Covenant are examined, different and distinct facets of the Old Covenant gain prominence. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the ceremonial and civil dimensions of the Old Covenant are clearly prominent. Chapter seven teaches the abrogation of the Levitical priesthood (7:12). Chapter nine adds an emphasis on the book of the covenant, the summary of Israel's judicial law (9:19). The language of chapter nine even suggests equivalence between the Old Covenant and the book of the covenant (vv. 18-20). Chapter ten provides instruction on the termination of the sacrificial system of the Old Covenant (vv. 1-3, 17-18).

On the other hand, when the New Testament contemplates the Law of the Old Covenant as a permanent revelation of moral principle, it is certainly the Ten Commandments that become prominent (Rom 2:14-23; 3:19-20, 31; 7:12; 13:8-10; Eph 6:1-3; 1Ti 1:8-10). This observation justifies the Reformed confessions in their insistence on a distinction within the Law of the Old Covenant between its moral, civil, and ceremonial dimensions.

It may be asked: how we are to determine in more detail which aspects of Old Testament Law are permanent and which are temporary? This is not the place for an elaborate response to this question. It is sufficient for our purposes that we have vindicated the assumed perpetuity of Old Testament Law unless abolished in Christ. Along the way several hints have been given with regard to how the determination in view may be undertaken. Those hints may be briefly collated: *First*, the work of Christ pointedly abrogates³³ the civil and ceremonial dimensions of Old Testament Law. *Second*, the New Testament explicitly teaches the abiding perpetuity of the moral dimension of the Old Testament Law as centered in the Ten Commandments. *Third*, if a law embodied in the Old Covenant is grounded in a creation ordinance, this suggests its perpetuity. *Fourth*, if a law appears to be universal or natural in character (as, for instance, if it is seen as mandatory for the Gentiles), this suggests its abiding perpetuity.

A final observation may further evince the necessity of holding to the paradox or distinction that I have here defended. It seems clear that failure to see this paradoxical viewpoint of the New Testament will lead inevitably to one of the popular imbalanced views of our day. Theonomy³⁴ has tended to view the Law almost exclusively as a permanent revelation of moral principles. Dispensationalism³⁵ has committed the opposite er-

³³ **abrogates** – abolishes; does away with.

³⁴ **Theonomy** – literally “God’s law”; or Reconstruction. A theological view that holds the Law is given (in addition to its traditional uses for driving men to Christ and as a standard to judge sanctification) to maintain order in society, restraining and arresting civil evil—that every area dominated by sin must be “reconstructed” according to biblical principles and laws, including the individual, family, church, and wider society (to include the state and civil government). Its main difference with orthodox reformed theology is in sanctification: it holds that “justification is by the grace of God in Jesus Christ; [and] man’s sanctification is by means of the law of God” (Rousas J. Rushdoony). Theonomy emphasizes law-keeping for sanctification to the possible detriment of God’s grace.

³⁵ **Dispensationalism** – system of theology that arose in England in the late 1800s; divides the Bible into different periods wherein God dealt differently with men, and often diminishes the continuity of the Law between Testaments. It holds to a rapture of the Church out of this world, followed by a

ror of emphasizing only what the New Testament says about the Law as a temporary covenant. The balance embodied in the view here defended certainly commends it.

literal 1,000 year reign of Christ. Advanced by C. I. Scofield (1843-1921) in his *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909).

CHAPTER 5

THE OVERARCHING PRIORITY OF THE OLD AND NEW CREATIONS

What has the force of law for Christians' ethical conduct? The answer is related to the normative significance of the old and new creations. The Old Covenant Law is valid for the Christian against the backdrop of the old and new creations, and as it is defined by that backdrop. This is illustrated by Paul in the ethical discussion found in 1 Corinthians 11:1-16. Here the ethical question of head coverings for women is discussed and resolved by Paul (vv. 4-6). It is not necessary here for us to discuss the precise nature of the answer that he gives to this question. Our point in considering this passage is to observe the *way* in which Paul answers this question. In other words, we must notice the sources to which he appeals. In verses 7-16, Paul proceeds to defend his answer. In his defense Paul appeals to two indisputable authorities:

(1) Creation (or nature) (vv. 7-15).

(2) New creation (v.16). The apostles (“we”) and the churches they founded (“the churches of God”) were the authentic exemplars³⁶ of the standards of the new creation in Christ.

In the hierarchy delineated in verse 3, these two authorities are implicit. The statement that “the man is the head of a woman” certainly anticipates the appeal to creation in verses 7-15. On the other hand, this part of the hierarchy is placed in the context of redemption, or the new creation, by the flanking statements referring to the “Christ”: “the head of every man is Christ...the head of Christ is God” (v. 3). Thus, in the present stage of the new creation, redemption does not annul, but rather reinforces the demands implicit in the old creation.

If we are to understand what has the force of law for Christians, then we must understand how the old and new creations structure human history and consequently human ethics.

A. Human History: This Age and the Age to Come

Human history is structured in terms of two ages: *this age* and *the age to come*. The two-age concept is the most important scriptural structure for understanding the Bible's view of history. This terminology or parts of it occur 18 times in the New Testament. In addition, there are many synonymous phrases or terms. Perhaps the single most en-

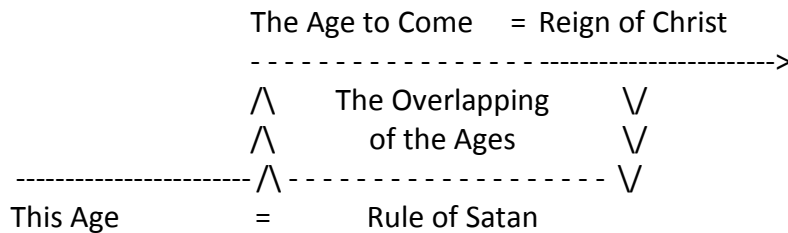
³⁶ **exemplars** – things serving as excellent examples, worthy to be imitated.

lightening passage where this concept is used is Luke 20:34-36. Verses 27-40 comprise the larger context of this passage and compose Jesus' discussion of the resurrection with the Sadducees.

What are the contrasts between the two ages posited in this crucial passage?

<u>This Age</u>	<u>The Age to Come</u>
1. Marriage	1. No Marriage
2. Death	2. No Death
3. Natural Men	3. Resurrected Men
4. Evil and good men coexist	4. Sons of God exclusively

Note the simplicity of this structure and the biblical eschatology³⁷ it outlines! This basic structure of history has, however, been in a certain sense modified—or perhaps better, supplemented—by the First Advent of Christ (Heb 2:5-9; 6:5; 2Co 4:4; Eph 2:2; 1:21).



Thus the age to come takes place in two installments; the kingdom comes in two stages: an inaugural stage and a consummate stage (note the parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13). This sub-structure pervades and structures many New Testament doctrines, among them the old and new creations.

B. Old Creation and New Creation

The old creation and new creation are basically synonymous concepts to that of *this age* and *the age to come*. The two ages are equivalent to the two creations. There is the basic structure in Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3:10-13. There is the modified structure with its characteristic overlapping in Galatians 6:15 and 2 Corinthians 5:17.

C. The Doctrine of the Law and the Christian Sabbath

The doctrine of the Law and the Christian Sabbath is governed by this structure.

³⁷ **eschatology** –part of systematic theology that deals with last things, or end times.

<u>Old Creation</u>	<u>New Creation</u>
1. Marriage	1. No Marriage (Luk 20:34-36)
2. Labor	2. No Labor (Rev 14:13)
3. Weekly Sabbath	3. No Weekly Sabbath (Heb 4:9)

1. In the Consummation

In the consummation, the new creation supersedes the ordinances of the old creation. Earlier it was stated that God's Law for man remains fundamentally the same, because it is basically the transcript of God's attributes as it impacts the ethical conduct of man. Since God does not change, and human nature does not basically change, we drew the conclusion that God's Law remains fundamentally the same in all ages of the world. This rule is not broken by the above observations. Rather, these exceptions prove the rule. God's Law for man changes because man himself changes in the consummate stage of the new creation (1Co 15:45-49).

2. In the Present Overlapping of the Ages

The new creation does not supersede the ordinances of the old creation in its inaugural phase, i.e., in the present overlapping of the ages. Rather, the old creation remains the regulating factor of human life. This is illustrated in the case of marriage (Mat 19:3-12). Note the reference in context to the Law of Moses as secondary to creation (v. 8). Note further the reference in this context to the exceptions resulting from the Fall and redemption (v. 12). The biblical doctrine of subordination of women to men³⁸ also illustrates this (1Co 11:7-9; 1Ti 2:13). Note how Paul stresses that the very details of the order of creation are significant. The ordinance of labor also illustrates this (2Th 3:10; Eph 4:28; 1Th 4:11-12). While there is no reference to creation, there may be allusion to the facts of the account of Genesis 1-3 (1:28; 2:15ff; 3:17-19). At any rate, it is clear that the creation ordinance of labor remains in effect.

A number of practical observations flow out of an understanding of this structure.

(1) This shows the importance of whether or not the Sabbath is a creation ordinance. If it can be established that the Sabbath was instituted at creation, then the case for the Christian Sabbath is won. For then the clear teaching of Scripture is that creation ordinances continue to regulate human life. Exegetically and historically, the creation institution of the Sabbath leads inexorably³⁹ to the doctrine of the Christian Sabbath. Creation ordinances are not abrogated in the inaugural phase of the new creation. One may believe in the Christian Sabbath if one denies its creation origin (i.e., as John Bunyan⁴⁰), but one must believe in the Christian Sabbath if one holds to its creation origin.

³⁸ **subordination of women to men** – not regarding value or quality, but regarding differing role and responsibility.

³⁹ **inexorably** – in a way that is impossible to stop or prevent.

⁴⁰ **John Bunyan** (1628-1688) – Baptist pastor; author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

(2) The two-phase coming of the new creation refutes a superficial appeal to Colossians 2:16-17 in order to prove the abolition of the Sabbath. Anti-Sabbatarians are fond of quoting this text:

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

A more detailed explanation of this text will be given later, but a preliminary response to the anti-Sabbatarian appeal to it may be given here on the basis of what we are now considering. That response is as follows: Yes, the body is of Christ, but the fulfillment brought by Christ comes in two stages. Especially if the Sabbath is a creation ordinance, this must be considered before superficially appealing to the fulfillment brought by Christ as proof that the weekly day of rest has been abolished. Even if we lay aside the creation origin of the Sabbath, we must not jump to the conclusion that, during the inaugural stage of the kingdom, all need for a day of weekly rest has been superseded.

3. *The New Creation and Creation Ordinances*

The new creation gives a new context and significance to creation ordinances. This is illustrated by the cases of marriage and labor. Now, after the coming of the new creation, marriage points to the union between Christ and the Church (Eph 5:22-33). Labor now also has added significance (1Th 4:12) and sanction (2Th 3:6-15). Significantly, in 2 Thessalonians, the context is that labor was being neglected by Christian zealots who thought the age to come was about to be consummated (2:1-2). What is true of marriage and labor is all the more true of the Sabbath. It now in the new age commemorates a new creation and the resurrection of Christ.

The fact that the new creation gives a new context and significance to creation ordinances provides a climate in which the change of the day upon which the Sabbath is kept makes sense. Given the nature of the Sabbath as a creation ordinance, and given the overlapping of the old and new creations in the Christian era, the change from the seventh day institution to the first day institution is precisely what one would expect. The change to the first day is the sign that the new creation has come. The continuance of a weekly Sabbath is the reminder that the old creation has not yet passed. Thus, once the nature of the Sabbath ordinance and the overlapping of the ages are understood, one can understand how the day can be changed, while the Sabbath remains. The so-called "problem" of the change of day evaporates.

4. *A Key to Unlock Hebrews 3:7-4:11*

The pertinence of these perspectives about the old and new creations and the overlapping of the ages for the issue of Sabbath are illustrated in its usefulness as a key to unlock Hebrews 3:7-4:11. This passage in Hebrews 3 and 4 has been the subject of varying interpretations. While some of these interpretations were strongly supportive of the Christian Sabbath, other interpretations actually used the passage as a polemic against this doctrine. The crucial text is Hebrews 4:9, which states that a Sabbath-rest

(σαββατισμος) remains for the people of God: “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.”

Several observations will help to open up the significance of this text in its context for the doctrine of the Christian Sabbath.

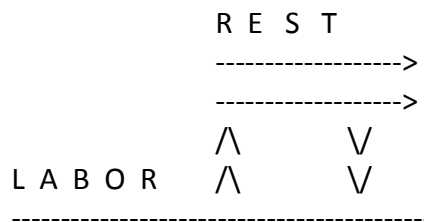
(1) This Sabbath-rest is identified with God’s rest at creation (4:3-4, 6).

(2) This Sabbath-rest is yet future for the believer. It is important here to note the imagery of Israel’s wilderness sojourn used in this context. The point of the wilderness imagery is precisely to indicate the present situation of believers. They have been delivered from Egypt, but they have not been yet brought to the Promised Land. There is the time between the overlapping of the ages that requires diligence and perseverance to gain the rest of Canaan. This means that the “rest” in this passage is future. The statement of 4:11 makes perfect sense in this context: “Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.” It is clearly an admonition to persevere addressed to professing Christians. It is clearly *not* an admonition to conversion addressed to the lost.

Thus, the real meaning of verse 3 is tied to the present tense of “enter”:

For we which have believed do *enter* into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.

Here we must see the present tense as durative. We “are entering” our rest, just as Israel was entering their rest during their travel through the wilderness. Of course, the Christian’s rest is viewed as a present reality in other passages in the New Testament (Mat 11:28-30), but that is not the perspective here. Note again the overlapping of the ages in these two perspectives about the Christian rest as both present and future.



(3) This Sabbath-rest is typified by the weekly Sabbath. Gaffin notes the significant change of vocabulary in 4:9 from *katapausis* (3:11) to *Sabbatismos*, and remarks:

While it may not be possible to determine fully what motives prompted the introduction of this term, the effect of its employment is plain. It identifies “my rest” as specifically Sabbath rest, and so in the most explicit fashion ties together this rest (in the sweeping scope and all of the dimensions that we have seen it has in this passage) to the institution of the Sabbath and its observance. More particularly, in that it is this rest as entered by believers at the consummation that is termed a Sabbath rest, Sabbath observance would appear to be related to this eschatological Sabbath keeping as an anticipatory sign. Although never stated by the writer, the clear implication is that the recurring observance of Sabbaths has its significance as a type of eschatological

CHAPTER 6

THE FUNDAMENTAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN NATURAL AND POSITIVE LAWS

The Baptist Confession of 1689 (reflecting the Westminster Confession of Faith) describes the Sabbath commandment as “a positive moral and perpetual commandment.” This is fascinating language because it asserts that the Sabbath is on the one hand moral and perpetual, but on the other hand positive. This is interesting because of the other context in which the Confession uses the adjective *positive*. In chapter 28 paragraph 1, the character of baptism and the Lord’s Supper is described in the words, “ordinances of positive and sovereign institution.”

What exactly is meant by the terms “positive and sovereign”? To understand these terms, we must understand their opposites, those ideas to which they stand in contrast. Webster’s first definition of “positive” says, “opposed to natural.”⁴² What is natural law or the law of nature? Romans 2:14-15 teach that natural law is that which is law because of the nature of God and the nature of man.

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.

It is that law which must exist because God is Who He is and man is what God has made him. Such a law must always have existed and be unchangeable. A positive ordinance or law is something in addition to the law of nature. It is something not demanded by nature. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are not a part of the law of nature. They did not exist in the Old Testament, but came into existence with the New Covenant. David was not obliged to be baptized. Abraham was not required to take the Lord’s Supper. If they had been part of the law of nature, they would always have existed. But they did not always exist. Thus, they are positive laws.

All laws of God are positive, natural, or a combination of the two. The Confession speaks of natural laws (1.6; 19.1-2), positive laws, (28.1), and laws of God that are a combination of natural and positive law (22.7).

⁴² *Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1968), 1140.

The distinction between positive and natural law is simply the ethical application of the distinction between general and special revelation.⁴³ Just as there are two forms of revelation, so also there are two basic sources for—or kinds of—laws. There are natural laws, which, while they may be republished in special revelation, are given with general revelation and, thus, natural. There are positive laws, which cannot be known except via special revelation.

All the ceremonial laws are positive in character. But the terminology, natural and positive, is to be preferred to the terminology, moral and ceremonial. This is so because the word *ceremonial* has loaded connotations. Most people think of ceremonial law as something peculiar to the Old Testament. In fact, however, baptism and the Lord's Supper may be properly described as ceremonial laws. Thus, it is not beneficial to describe the Sabbath commandment as a mixed commandment with a ceremonial and a moral part. It is better to use the terminology of the Confession, which speaks of it as positive and moral. This terminology avoids the implication that the weekly Sabbath has even partially been abolished. It also avoids the implication that the Lord's Day Sabbath is exclusively natural in character.

Reflection on the Sabbath institution helpfully clarifies its character as both positive and moral. What aspects of the Sabbath ordinance are a part of natural law? Four aspects of this ordinance quickly suggest themselves: that God must be worshipped, that God must be worshipped corporately, that such worship will require a particular time, and that God should appoint such time.

What aspects of the Sabbath ordinance are positive? Two such aspects may be mentioned: that the exact proportion should be one day in seven; and that the exact day should be the seventh from creation to Christ, and the first from Christ to the end of the world. It is obvious that these aspects of the Sabbath are positive because they are rooted in the fact God created the world in six days and rested the seventh. God did not need to create the world in six days. This way of creating the world was not inherent in the character of God, but was the result of a sovereign decision on His part.

This fundamental distinction is crucial in responding to many objections raised against the doctrine of the Christian Sabbath. It is often objected that if the Sabbath were a moral, perpetual law, it could not be altered. Since it is altered, it cannot be moral. The reply to this is simply that the Sabbath law is both positive and natural. If the Sabbath were completely natural law, the objection would be valid. Since, however, the Sabbath is partly positive, its form may be altered while its essence remains the same.

This distinction also resolves the objection that Sabbath-breaking is not a sin for which the Gentiles are indicted in Scripture. There is no need to deny the premise of this objection and argue that Gentiles were required to keep the Sabbath in Israel. While this is true and relevant to the case for the Sabbath, Gentiles without special revelation are not

⁴³ **general and special revelation** – General revelation is that which God has revealed to all mankind through creation and His workings in nature. Special revelation is that which He gives supernaturally and more specifically: His inspired Word.

arraigned⁴⁴ for failing to keep the Sabbath. The simple reason is that, being without special revelation, they do not have sufficient revelation to observe the Sabbath institution. The mandated observance of both the seventh day in the Old Testament and the first day in the New was revealed by special revelation and, therefore, restricted in its proper observance to the chosen people of God. James 4:17, therefore, reveals the reason why the Bible does not indict Gentiles for failing to keep the Sabbath: “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

⁴⁴ **arraigned** – called before a court in order to answer an accusation of wrongdoing.

SECTION TWO

ITS PROOFS

CHAPTER 7

ITS INSTITUTION AT CREATION

In endeavoring to lay out this critical area of inquiry, we will look at four major sub-headings:

- A. The conclusive evidence for its institution at creation,
- B. The supposed evidence against its institution at creation,
- C. The instructive implications of its institution at creation,
- D. The necessary conclusions from its institution at creation.

A. Conclusive Evidence for Its Institution at Creation

There are four biblical texts lending support to the thesis that the weekly Sabbath was instituted at creation. The first is, of course, Genesis 2:1-3 itself. The others are Exodus 20:8-11, Mark 2:27-28, and Hebrews 4:1-11. We will examine these texts one at a time.

1. Genesis 2:1-3

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.

The relevance of this text for the subject of the Sabbath is made explicit by the statement in verse 2 that God “rested,” in which word the verbal form meaning “to sabbath” is used. One natural interpretation of verse 3 (indeed, we think the most natural

interpretation of that verse) is that God then appointed His Day of rest as a day of rest for mankind. Whether we see God's resting on the seventh day as itself the act by which the day was blessed and sanctified, or whether we see the acts of blessing and sanctifying the seventh day as acts in addition to His resting, God's example is seen as normative for the creature made in His image (Gen 1:26-27).

Furthermore, it is natural to see God's actions of resting, sanctifying, and blessing as terminating in their didactic⁴⁵ focus upon mankind. The whole passage has an anthropocentric⁴⁶ focus. God did not need to create the world in seven days. God did not need to rest. God had no need for His own sake to bless and set apart as holy the seventh day of the creation week. These apparently obvious facts certainly are responsible for the natural and *prima facie*⁴⁷ impact of the passage—to the effect that we have here a divine example of working six days and resting the seventh that was to be normative for mankind. In other words, the passage clearly suggests, by way of initial impression, that resting on the seventh day of each repeated seven-day cycle was to structure human life from the period of creation onward.

This passage must be examined in greater detail below. Its purpose here is simply to underscore the fact that it creates the forceful impression that the weekly Sabbath was instituted at creation. This impression, however, has not gone unchallenged by anti-Sabbatarians. Their polemic has frequently consisted of two thoughts. *First*, they have noted that there is no explicit command for Sabbath observance in the passage. Dressler remarks, "Genesis 2 does not speak about a religious, cultic feast day or any institution at all. There is no direct command that the seventh day should be kept in any way."⁴⁸ *Second*, they have argued that the reference to the blessing and sanctifying of the day has a proleptic⁴⁹ character. Dressler again remarks, "God separates the seventh day; we interpret this in terms of an eschatological, proleptic sign indicating some future rest."⁵⁰ The term *proleptic* means anticipatory. Dressler's idea is apparently that the seventh day is somehow set apart for some kind of future significance or importance.

Any number of responses occur to these claims. The claim that there is here no institution of any kind seems rather tenuous when the use of both the terms *sanctify* and *bless* in the Old Testament make them most appropriate Hebrew words for designating an institution of some kind (Gen 1:28; Exo 13:2). Further, we must ask the question: Does the ordinary reader of Scripture really expect God to appoint a cultic feast or provide detailed "Sabbath" law in the confines of the Garden of Eden, when God's own presence would guide them in the observance of every recurring seventh day?

⁴⁵ **didactic** – morally instructive.

⁴⁶ **anthropocentric** – viewing and interpreting everything in terms of human experience and values; man-centered.

⁴⁷ **prima facie** – *Latin*: at first view; before investigation.

⁴⁸ Harold P. Dressler, "The Sabbath in the Old Testament," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 28.

⁴⁹ **proleptic** – representing something in the future as if it already existed or had occurred.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 29. Note also Robert A. Morey, "Is Sunday the Christian Sabbath?" in *Baptist Reformation Review* 8, no. 1 (First Quarter 1979): 6.

The crux, however, of Dressler's argument, and that of anti-Sabbatarians in general, is that no equation between the seventh day of Genesis 2:3 and the weekly Sabbath is permissible. He says, "Genesis 2 does not mention the word *Sabbath*. It speaks about the 'seventh day.' Unless the reader equates 'seventh day' and 'Sabbath,' there is no reference to the Sabbath here."⁵¹ This is an amazing assertion. Surely, it is something very close to special pleading when Dressler asserts that the term *Sabbath* is not used in the text, when its verbal form is used in verse 2. But of even more interest is the admission that the relation of the "seventh day" and the "Sabbath day" is critical and pivotal to the interpretation of the passage. It is just such an equation that is asserted in the next passage of Scripture.

2. Exodus 20:8-11

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

We will endeavor to establish the assertion just made by noticing the proof of the reference and the significance of the reference to Genesis 2:1-3.

a. The proof of the reference to Genesis 2:1-3

There are three related considerations which prove that the entirety of verse 11 refers to Genesis 2:1-3.

(1) The explicit reference of verse 11a to creation and specifically Genesis 2:1-2 proves this.

(2) The clear reference of the four Hebrew perfects (made, rested, blessed, sanctified) to creation makes this clear.

(3) The clear reference to and even quotation of Genesis 2:3a in verse 11b conclusively establishes this.

Some may ask whether the terms "blessed" and "sanctified" refer to certain later activities of God that did not occur at creation. Could they refer to the event of Sinai? Do they mean that God blessed and sanctified the Sabbath at Sinai? No, clearly the perfect tense shows that they describe events that were already in the past at Sinai.

Some might also wonder if they could refer to the events of Exodus 16 (manna gathered during six days, but not on the seventh). Again the answer must be no.

⁵¹ Ibid., 28.

(1) There is no record of the Sabbath being divinely blessed and set apart in Exodus 16. That is to say, Exodus 16 never says that then and there God blessed and sanctified the Sabbath.

(2) The first two Hebrew perfects in Exodus 20:11 both refer to events recorded in Genesis 2:1-3. By what right do we then take the two following perfects and refer them to a totally different occasion? To refer them to Exodus 16 defies the immediate context.

(3) Verse 11b clearly alludes to the statement of Genesis 2:3a. It is almost a quotation. The words for bless and sanctify are precisely the words used there (*Barak* and *Qadosh*). The unavoidable conclusion is that verse 11b is teaching that God blessed and sanctified the Sabbath day at creation.

b. The significance of the reference to Genesis 2:1-3

All of this confirms the interpretation given of Genesis 2:1-3 suggested above in several ways.

(1) It confirms the relevance of the divine example. Some might want to doubt the idea that we should follow the divine example given in the creation week. Exodus 20:8-11 explicitly teaches that the divine example must be followed in this case.

(2) It confirms the inadequacy of the “proleptic” view. This view, as we have seen, teaches that the events of Genesis 2:3a were recorded proleptically, in anticipation of what God would do later in the Exodus period. In other words, God later blessed and sanctified the seventh day, because at creation He had rested on the seventh day. Exodus 20:11 clearly teaches that the seventh day was blessed and sanctified *at creation*.

(3) It confirms the meaning of the seventh day. Dressler made clear that the identity of *seventh day* in Genesis 2:3 is pivotal. Clearly, Exodus 20:11 understands it to be a reference to every recurring seventh day modeled after God’s original seventh day. Exodus 20:11b is practically a quotation of Genesis 2:3a with only two minor changes. *LORD* (Jehovah) is substituted for *God*; and *Sabbath* is inserted in the place of *seventh day*. Let it be carefully noted: in the paraphrase of Genesis 2:3 found in Exodus 20:11, *Sabbath* is substituted for *seventh day*. But what, it must be asked, is the meaning of “Sabbath” in Exodus 20:11? Clearly, it is to every recurring seventh day as the weekly Sabbath. Thus, Jehovah Himself tells us the meaning of seventh day in Genesis 2:3, and makes explicit that the weekly Sabbath was, indeed, instituted at creation. Beckwith and Stott see this crucial point and state it admirably. Quoting Exodus 20:8-11, they remark:

The seventh day, then, was “blessed” and “sanctified” to be a day of rest: indeed, by a significant variation of language, we are told that it was not the seventh day but the “Sabbath” day...which God blessed and sanctified at the creation. So what Genesis 2:2ff implies, when read in the light of this commentary supplied by Exodus, is that at the creation God commanded man to imitate his Maker by “doing work” for six days and “resting” on the seventh. Since man had been made in the image of God (Gen 1:26ff), imitation of his Maker was no inappropriate vocation.⁵²

⁵² Roger T. Beckwith and Wilfrid Stott, *The Christian Sunday* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 2-3.

Read in light of its Old Testament background, a third passage is remarkably confirmatory and suggestive of the institution of the weekly Sabbath at creation.

3. *Mark 2:27-28*

*And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man,
and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son
of man is Lord also of the sabbath.*

a. *The proof of the reference to creation*

It is to be noted that Jesus is engaged in an ethical dialogue with the Pharisees in this context. He is reasoning with His hearers on the basis of Scripture. He expects them to know what He is saying from the Old Testament. This demands that we inquire into the Old Testament backdrop of Jesus' words in this passage. In this way we shall see confirmed that Mark 2:27 is a commentary on Genesis 2:1-3. There are five indications of this reference in the passage, which together constrain us to see such a reference.

(1) There is, first, the reference to the making of the Sabbath. Mark 2:27 refers explicitly to the making of the Sabbath and implicitly to the making of the man. The Sabbath was made for man; man was not made for the Sabbath.

The verb used here in Mark 2:27 for both the making of the Sabbath and the making of the man is *γίνομαι*. It is used in John 1:1-3 of creation; and, fascinatingly, in the LXX⁵³ of Genesis 2:7, it is used to describe the "making of the man." Nowhere else do we read of the "making of the Sabbath," but such terminology clearly refers to the origin of the Sabbath. The contextual allusion to the making of the man (Gen 2:7) surely makes a reference to creation attractive. Even besides the suggestive way in which such terminology alludes to creation, it is clear that the Sabbath originated when it was first blessed and sanctified. Exodus 20:11, however, makes clear that the Sabbath was blessed and sanctified, i.e., "made," on the seventh day of creation. Thus, both in the reference to the making of the Sabbath and the making of man, there is a clear reference to creation.

(2) There is the reference to the benefit of the Sabbath. The whole thrust of Mark 2:27 is that the Sabbath was made for man, that is, for his good, his benefit, his blessing. How did Jesus know this? Why did He expect His hearers to believe it? Is it merely a general deduction from the goodness of God? Hardly!

As we shall see, the meaning of "the blessing" in the early chapters of Genesis is that God makes something an effectual channel of good, blessing, and benefit. Hence, the blessing of the seventh day speaks of its being made for the benefit and good of mankind. The whole of Mark 2:27 is, thus, grounded in the blessing of the seventh day recorded in Genesis 2:3.

(3) There is the reference to the recipient of the Sabbath. English translations say, "The Sabbath was made for *man*." Understood in this way, Mark 2:27 is saying only that

⁵³ LXX – common abbreviation for the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which derives from its alleged "seventy" translators. Made approximately third century BC, it was the Bible of the early church.

the Sabbath was made for generic humanity. (Note Matthew 4:4; John 2:25; and Ecclesiastes 1:3 and 3:19 [LXX] for the use of *ho anthropos* in this way.) This certainly does not support the view that sees the Sabbath as given exclusively to the Jews. It must, however, be pointed out that another interpretation is very probable which even more emphatically makes clear the creation origin of the Sabbath. Literally read, the original says, “the Sabbath was made for *the man*, not *the man* for the Sabbath.” The article is present. “The man” is the characteristic designation of Adam in the creation account. These precise words *ho anthropos* occur repeatedly with reference to Adam there (Gen 1:27; 2:7-8, 15, 18 in the LXX). Given the cumulative evidence for a reference to creation already noted, it seems clear that Christ was saying that the Sabbath was made for Adam, not vice versa.

(4) There is the reference to the purpose of the Sabbath. Jesus says that the Sabbath was made *for* the man, not the man for the Sabbath. The question must be asked, how does Jesus know this? Why does He expect His listeners to recognize this? The answer comes in recognizing the parallel reasoning of Paul in a similar connection (1Ti 2:12-13; 1Co 11:8-9). Paul argues the supremacy of man over woman by showing that the man has precedence in the order of creation. In precisely the same way, Jesus argues the supremacy of man over Sabbath by showing that man has precedence over Sabbath in creation. Man was created, in other words, on the sixth day. The Sabbath was instituted on the seventh day. The reference to creation is patent.⁵⁴

(5) There is the reference to the Lord of the Sabbath. Verse 28 cannot be saying that the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath [in order] to destroy and abrogate what was made for man’s benefit. This would not be consistent with the gracious nature of His kingdom.

This may be illustrated by means of the apocalyptic⁵⁵ symbolism of Daniel 7. There the Gentile kingdoms that are swept away by the messianic kingdom are likened to beasts. They are like beasts in their dreadful, savage, and violent character. Such kingdoms are often terribly harmful to the interests of the men subjected to them. In contrast to this symbolism, the messianic kingdom is symbolized by the appearance of one like unto a son of man. This epitomizes⁵⁶ its humane and beneficial character. John Murray comments:

What the Lord is affirming is that the Sabbath has its place within the sphere of His messianic lordship, and that He exercises lordship over the Sabbath because the Sabbath was made for man. Since He is Lord of the Sabbath, it is His to guard it against those distortions and perversions with which Pharisaism had surrounded it and by which its truly beneficent purpose has been defeated. But He is also its Lord to guard and vindicate its permanent place within that messianic lordship which He exercises over all things—He is Lord of the Sabbath too. And He is Lord of it, not for the purpose of depriving men of that inestimable benefit which the Sabbath bestows, but for the

⁵⁴ **patent** – open to view or knowledge; manifest; evident; plain.

⁵⁵ **apocalyptic** – pertaining to the end times. Transliteration of the Greek word for revelation; the name of the last book of the Bible: The Revelation.

⁵⁶ **epitomizes** – to make a condensed representation of something.

purpose of bringing to the fullest realization on behalf of men that beneficent design for which the Sabbath was instituted.⁵⁷

The main point to be noted here is that the lordship of the Son of Man is universal. Repeatedly, the term *Son of Man* is associated with universality in the Old Testament (Psa 8; Dan 7:13-14). The point is just this: the universality of the lordship of the Son of Man points to [the Sabbath's] origin at creation, and undercuts a supposed origin with the Jews in Exodus 16.

The cumulative force of these five clear indications proves that Jesus is referring to the creation account of the Sabbath. This being the case, what do we learn about His interpretation—the only proper interpretation—of Genesis 2:1-3? Many things:

b. The significance of the reference to Genesis 2:1-3

By means of this understanding of Mark 2:27-28, the seventh day of creation is clearly seen to be the Sabbath. By the Sabbath, Jesus means every recurring seventh day of the week, which is to be kept holy to God. Thus Jesus clearly teaches that the duty to keep the Sabbath originated at creation.

Furthermore, it is frequently objected that in order that he might keep the Sabbath, Adam must have known of its institution. It is then asserted that one cannot prove that Adam knew about the Sabbath from the creation account.

The implication of Exodus 20:11, which teaches that the Sabbath was blessed and sanctified at creation, is certainly that Adam would have been informed of God's actions in blessing and sanctifying the seventh day. Mark 2:27, however, specifically says that the Sabbath—when made at creation—was made for the man. This demands that we assume Adam would be informed of the institution of the Sabbath. Only by his knowledge of and conformity to such institution could it be for his benefit.

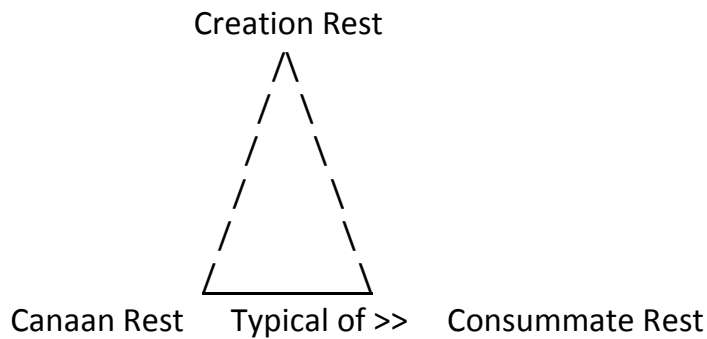
4. Hebrews 4:1-11

There is no need for comment to prove the reference to Genesis 2:1-3. Genesis 2:2 is quoted in Hebrews 4:4. Two points are relevant with regard to this citation of Genesis 2:2 in Hebrews.

a. God's creation rest identified with eternal eschatological rest

Hebrews 4 identifies God's creation rest with the eternal eschatological rest. Canaan rest is symbolically related to both (vv. 3-5, 9-10).

⁵⁷ John Murray, *Collected Writings*, vol. I (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 208.



b. The weekly Sabbath typical of the great eschatological rest

The weekly Sabbath is, therefore, seen as typical of the great eschatological rest. Note verse 9: the eternal rest is called a Sabbath-keeping. “There remaineth therefore a rest [σαββατισμός, sabbatismos, meaning keeping a Sabbath] to the people of God.” Thus, the weekly Sabbath is symbolic of that final, eternal rest. There is no need, therefore, to deny that the weekly Sabbath instituted at creation had a typical⁵⁸ significance. It might be supposed that an interpretation of the creation account which sees there the origin of the weekly Sabbath would exclude an understanding of the typical and eschatological significance of the Sabbath of God on the seventh day of creation. This supposition is false. The weekly Sabbath instituted at creation was itself typical. It pointed forward to the consummation of history when Adam would have entered a higher condition, and would have entered into God’s rest, had he successfully completed his probation⁵⁹ in the Garden of Eden.⁶⁰ The six days of labor symbolized the labor of history; the seventh day [symbolized] the rest to be entered at the end of history, when the creation mandates of God had been successfully completed.

B. Supposed Evidence against Its Institution at Creation

Now that the solid evidence for the creation origin of the weekly Sabbath has been set forth, we are in a position to rightly estimate the supposed evidence against the institution of the weekly Sabbath at creation. Two arguments have been brought forward by anti-Sabbatarians.

1. The Argument from Silence

The argument of those who deny that the Sabbath was instituted at creation runs as follows: there is no mention or record of the observance of a weekly Sabbath before Exodus 16. Therefore, the Sabbath was not instituted at creation.

a. This kind of argument from silence is without significance.

(1) The failure to mention the observance of a law does not prove that it was not observed. It only proves that the writer saw no need to mention it. The observance of the

⁵⁸ **typical** – representing something else as a symbol with similar characteristics.

⁵⁹ **probation** – testing in order to prove one’s nature; trial.

⁶⁰ John Murray, *Collected Writings*, vol. 1, 223-224.

Sabbath is not mentioned between Deuteronomy and 2 Kings. Does this prove it had not been previously instituted or was not being observed?⁶¹

(2) Even if the silence proved that for much or most of the time between Genesis 2 and Exodus 16 the Sabbath was not being observed, this would not necessitate the idea that it was not instituted at creation. It would only prove that such observance had lapsed through human sin. The remark of Nehemiah is noteworthy: "And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so" (Neh 8:17).

b. The Bible is really not so silent.

Beckwith and Stott note,

The existence of the seven day week is reflected right through the book of Genesis and the early chapters of Exodus. Periods of 7 days...or 8 days are referred to repeatedly (Gen 7:4, 10; 8:10, 12; 17:12; 21:4; 31:23; 50:10; Exo 7:25; 12:15-19; 13:6ff.)...and in Genesis 29:27ff., technical reference seems to be made to a 'week.'⁶²

We are so used to the division of time into sevens, and the symbolism of seven, that we easily miss the significance of these repeated references to periods of seven days. If the division of time into weeks was customary during this period, this carries along with it the idea that both the week and the Sabbath, which ended it, were observed between Genesis 2 and Exodus 16. Certainly, to urge the so-called silence of Scripture against its creation institution is to ignore the evidence.

c. Secular history is not so silent.

Some people think that, if the Sabbath was instituted at creation as a moral law, we should expect all men to be observing it after the Fall. They argue, "If it were a moral law, would not the nations observe it?" This reasoning may be tested by applying it to monogamy.⁶³ This argument would imply that if monogamy were a moral law, all nations would observe it. But what do we find? Not even the covenant people consistently observed it (Jacob, Abraham). Does this prove that monogamy was not instituted at creation as a moral law? No (Mat 19:5); it only proves that men are terribly depraved. It is even so with the Sabbath.

Nonetheless, it must be noted that there are vestiges of Sabbath-keeping among the Gentile nations before Moses. While these vestiges do not from themselves establish a pre-Mosaic Sabbath, they are certainly most consistent with such a backdrop and difficult to explain apart from it. Beckwith and Stott remark:

⁶¹ Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, vol. 2, 114; Daniel Wilson, *The Lord's Day* (London: The Lord's Day Observance Society, 1956), 16. Wilson as well remarks, "We read nothing about circumcision from the death of Moses to the days of Jeremiah, an interval of eight centuries; but does anyone imagine that circumcision was not performed?"

⁶² Beckwith and Stott, loc. cit., 4; cf. Patrick Fairbairn, loc. cit., vol. 2, 114.

⁶³ **monogamy** – marriage between one man and one woman.

As Willy Rordorf shows, those who have tried to find the source from which Israel derived its seven day week and Sabbath in Babylonian or other non-Jewish cultures have failed. Yet the evidence to which these writers have appealed could well be the last relics of an earlier Sabbath-institution, even if they are not sufficiently similar to deserve to be regarded as the formative origins of a later one. The “Pentecontad Calendar”—which Lidgard and Julius Lewy (followed by Julius Morgenstern) claim to have traced among the Semitic peoples of Assyria, Babylon, Syria, and Palestine from the end of the third millennium BC onwards—was an annual calendar to some extent based on periods of seven or eight days (Lewy, *Origin*, pp. 1-152); and it seems certain from the evidence quoted by Rordorf that the Babylonians divided the month into four parts, particularly distinguishing the seventh, fourteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eighth days, and called the full moon (round about the fourteenth day) *sappattu*.⁶⁴

The argument from silence seems to be derived not so much from the real silence of Scripture and history, but from the deafness of the anti-Sabbatarian ear.

2. *Argument from the Origin of the Sabbath at time of the Exodus*

It is frequently urged that the Bible places the origin of the weekly Sabbath at the time of the Exodus. Three passages are commonly urged in favor of this thesis: Exodus 16, Nehemiah 9, and Ezekiel 20. We will examine them one at a time.

a. Exodus 16:4-7, 22-30

As is well known, this is a hotly disputed passage. Some advocates of the Christian Sabbath believe that it proves that the Sabbath was instituted at creation. Some adversaries of the Christian Sabbath are equally certain that it proves that the Sabbath had not been instituted previously. This situation ought to make us cautious about being too dogmatic with reference to the proper meaning of this passage on the doctrine of the Christian Sabbath.

What is it about this passage that makes some people think that the Sabbath was not instituted previously? It appears to indicate that the people were unfamiliar with the Sabbath, that it was a new and surprising thing to them. This apparent implication is found in the action of the leaders in verse 22; the explanation of Moses in verses 23, 25, and 26; and the disobedience of the people in verse 27.

Two remarks may be made about this seeming implication. First, none of these things prove that the Sabbath was totally new to the Israelites. *The action of the leaders does not prove it.* The verse does not say that they were surprised. They may simply be reporting to Moses that what he said had happened. Note in verses 4-7 that Moses had not referred to the seventh day at all. They may simply have desired further instructions.

The explanation of Moses does not prove it. Of course, some may argue, “If it were instituted previously, they would not have needed this explanation.” This assertion ignores the darkness and low spiritual condition that characterized Israel at the time of the Exodus; circumcision was also explained and reiterated (Lev 12:3; Exo 4:24-26).

⁶⁴ Wilson, loc. cit., 18-19; Beckwith and Stott, loc. cit., 3f.

The disobedience of the people does not prove it. “But how could the people have disobeyed if the Sabbath had been previously instituted?” Ask Aaron and the people how they could make the golden calf if God had previously forbidden idols!

Second, if the passage does indicate not total ignorance of the Sabbath, but only some ignorance of its proper observance, then this lack of familiarity is to be explained as a result of the darkness and oppression of the Egyptian captivity. Beckwith and Stott say, “Exodus 16 may indeed be the revival of the Sabbath as something relatively new, after its inevitable disuse during the Egyptian bondage.”⁶⁵

Let me illustrate this by supposing that I was running a recreational softball league in one of the city parks during the summer. If I said to the youth, “You may play one game per day and twice on Saturdays, but never on Sundays,” how many of our modern American pagans would approach me and want to know why? Some might be totally ignorant of the Lord’s Day observance. Others, who might know something of the Lord’s Day, would still not realize that proper observance would involve abstaining from softball. This would not prove that the Lord’s Day had not been previously instituted. Their questions and ignorance would prove nothing.

b. Nehemiah 9:14

In Nehemiah 9:14, it is said of God that at Mount Sinai He made *known* unto them His holy Sabbath. Before hasty conclusions are drawn from this assertion, the similar statement of Ezekiel 20:9 should be examined. There Ezekiel remarks that God made Himself *known* unto them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt (Eze 20:9). Here the same verb is used. Does it imply that the Israelites had no knowledge of God before? Of course not! Why then must it imply in Nehemiah 9:14 that Israel had no knowledge of the Sabbath before? It only implies in both cases that God and the Sabbath were revealed in a new way at the time of the Exodus. It does not imply that either was made known for the first time at the Exodus. As a matter of fact, anti-Sabbatarians themselves believe that the Sabbath was “made known” prior to Sinai in Exodus 16.

c. Ezekiel 20:12

Here Jehovah asserts, “Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them.” On this basis, anti-Sabbatarians have said: “See here that it was only at the Exodus that God gave the Sabbath!” John 7:22 is relevant here: “Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers).” The New Testament can say that Moses gave circumcision without meaning to deny that it originated earlier.

In Ezekiel 20:12 and 20, Ezekiel is merely teaching that the Sabbath was given to Israel at the Exodus for the first time *as a covenant sign*. Before the period of the Exodus, the Sabbath had not been a sign of God’s covenant with Israel. It now was given as such (Exo 31:12ff.). This, then, is the probable meaning of Nehemiah 9:14. At the Exodus, the Sabbath was made known in its new significance as a covenant sign.

⁶⁵ Beckwith and Stott, loc. cit., 5; Fairbairn, loc. cit., vol. 2, 115.

C. Instructive Implications of Its Institution at Creation

We are now prepared to look in a more detailed way at the institution of the weekly Sabbath at creation. Since the biblical evidence assures us of its origin, we may now with confidence examine several instructive implications. Genesis 2:1-3 reads,

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.

We must notice first,

1. *The Assumption of the Passage*

The assumption of this passage is clearly that a divine example is relevant for and regulative of human conduct. Plainly, it is on the basis of God's resting (keeping Sabbath) on the seventh day that the day is blessed and sanctified as a Sabbath for mankind. Why, however, is man obliged to imitate God's example? This important question may be answered, *first*, by saying that man is described in his distinguishing identity as God's image in the very account that records God's institution of the Sabbath (Gen 1:26-27). As God's image, Adam is God's son (Gen 5:1-3; Luk 3:23, 38). Furthermore, man continues in some sense to be God's image even after the Fall (Gen 9:6; 1Co 11:7; Jam 3:9). Thus, he continues to be obliged to imitate the divine example in appropriate ways.

A *second* response to the question just raised is that man's distinguishing identity as God's image-bearing son determines his ethical obligations. Greg Nichols aptly remarks:

The son is obligated to imitate and obey his Father. Adam's obedience to his Father's will came to its pinnacle in the commandment of Genesis 2:16-17. But the obligation of an image-bearer is deeper. He is accurately to *reflect* his Father; he is not to misrepresent Him. What his Father loves, sanctions, and highly regards, he is to love, sanction, and highly regard. This likeness of heart forms the bedrock of moral obligation. Man is to reverence what God reverences. This involves the sanctity of God's constituted authority, human life, marriage-commitment, private property, truth, and the inner life. These basic sanctions revered by God were given concrete and specific application to Israel in the Ten Commandments. Failure to reverence what God reverences is sin. Our sin is therefore both slanderous misrepresentations of God and arrogant rebellion against Him—at the same time. We not only fail to picture God as He really is, but we also fail to do what God commands. Thus, proper image-bearing and obedience to moral law coincide.⁶⁶

Such obligatory imitation finds illustration in a father saying to his son, "Here's how I mow the lawn." It is also illustrated in the statement, "I am setting aside Monday as a special night." In such statements there are no explicit commands, yet the Father's mere example amounts to the same thing (Mat 5:43-48; Luk 6:35-36; Eph 4:32-5:1; 5:22-33; 1Pe 1:14-16; 2:9; Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7).

⁶⁶ Greg Nichols in the unpublished paper, "An Affirmative Reply to 'Is Sunday the Christian Sabbath?'" 22.

The point of all this for our present study is that divine example, especially with reference to the seven day cycle of the creation week, is relevant for and regulative of human conduct. Why else did God create in the context of the seven-day week? He seems to have so created precisely to give mankind an example to imitate for the regulation of their time. The statement of verse 3 implies the relevance of God's example. God's resting on the seventh day entails or results in its being blessed and sanctified for human observance. As we have seen, Exodus 20:8-11 explicitly teaches this. This biblical data illustrates the scriptural bankruptcy of anti-Sabbatarians who find humorous the idea that God's example is authoritative for mankind.⁶⁷ Note our high calling in ethical matters: our duty is nothing less than to image God!

A further useful implication of the preceding is this: anti-Sabbatarians have frequently argued that we have no explicit command to observe the Lord's Day. If, however, the creation Sabbath is instituted by divine example, then we do not need to find an explicit precept to ground the institution of the Lord's Day. Divine example in inaugurating the new creation is sufficient. We do have the equivalent of Genesis 2:1-3 in the New Testament's teaching that the new creation was brought to birth on the first day of the week.

2. The Assertions of the Statement

a. An overview of the assertions

Greg Nichols has ably summarized the assertions contained in these verses by means of the following outline:

Verse 1: The circumstance that forms the occasion for the Sabbath institution: finished creation.

Verse 2: The divine example that forms the basis for the Sabbath institution: completed work and rest.

Verse 3: The divine activities that form the essence of the Sabbath institution:

- Their identity (v. 3a)
- Their rationale (v. 3b)

b. An analysis of the assertions

Four issues within these assertions call for further analysis.

1) God's rest

The first is the meaning of God's rest. John Murray's three expository statements properly epitomize the meaning of God's rest in this place.⁶⁸ He notes that God's rest is not one of inactivity; that God's rest is cessation from one kind of activity, the work of creation; and that God's rest is the rest of delight in the work of creation accomplished.

⁶⁷ Robert Morey, loc. cit., 6. In response to the idea that Genesis 2:1-3 is intended as a pattern for men, Morey says, "We hope not. After God worked six days, He rested on the seventh day, and He has been 'resting' to this very time (Heb 4:10-11)...At any rate, to prove that Sabbath-keeping is a creation ordinance, we must be shown an example of man's keeping of it..."

⁶⁸ John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 30-31.

2) *The seventh day*

The second issue concerns the meaning of the seventh day. Many commentators (both friends and enemies of the Christian Sabbath) have thought that the seventh day of the creation week was an unending day.⁶⁹ It is true that the divine rest commenced on the seventh day is unending. Hebrews appears to put this beyond doubt. This does not, however, mean that the seventh day itself is unending. If the other six days were literal days with evenings and mornings, there is every reason to think, indeed the greatest constraint to believe, that the seventh day is a literal day. Exodus 20:11, where the seventh day is described as the Sabbath, appears to put beyond doubt that it was a literal day.

It may, of course, be asked, “Why is the formula of evening and morning omitted?” I do not know for sure. I suspect nobody else knows for certain either. It may perhaps be that it is omitted because the activity begun by God on the seventh day was unending, but certainly not because the seventh day was unending.

The implication of all this is as follows. The seventh day of these verses is the seventh day of God’s creation week. Because this week is the archetype, the original, of every week of history that follows, its seventh day is the archetype, the original, for every seventh day that follows. Thus, in sanctifying and blessing the original and archetypal seventh day, God sanctified every recurring seventh day of creation.

3) *God’s blessing the seventh day*

The third issue concerns the meaning of God’s blessing the seventh day. The thought may be alien to us. What can it mean to “bless” a day? Five times, however, in the early chapters of Genesis, we read of God’s blessing someone or something (Gen 1:22, 28; 2:3; 5:2; 9:1). God’s blessing in these passages undoubtedly expresses the Creator’s good will, favor, and delight in His creatures.

There is, however, much more than this. God’s blessing is effectual. It powerfully makes that which is blessed a source of good.⁷⁰ Thus God, in blessing the seventh day, made it a source of blessing of good—not (obviously) for Himself, but for men. Thus, in Mark 2:27 we read that the Sabbath was made (blessed) for man. The question should be pressed: how is the seventh day a source of blessing to men if the reference is not to the Sabbath day? Only the recurring seventh-day Sabbath satisfies the thought contained in the divine blessing of the seventh day.

4) *Sanctifying the seventh day*

The fourth issue concerns the meaning of the sanctifying of the seventh day. Something that is sanctified is set apart for a sacred, special, religious use. Thus it is set apart for God (Exo 19:23; 29:1; 28:3, 41). The question may be properly asked, “What possible meaning does this have if the reference is not to every recurring seventh day?” On the other hand, it is perfectly evident what is meant if every recurring seventh day is set apart for sacred use.

⁶⁹ Morey, loc. cit., p. 6; John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, 30.

⁷⁰ Note Calvin’s comments on Genesis 1:22.

D. Necessary Conclusions from Its Institution at Creation

Three conclusions may be drawn from the above exposition of the institution of the weekly Sabbath at creation.

1. *Its Perpetuity*

The institution of the weekly Sabbath at creation demands its perpetuity. What has its beginning at creation is for the New Testament ethically normative. Note Matthew 19:4-8.

4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, 5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? 6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. 7 They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? 8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.

Jesus here assumes in His argument that the structure instituted by God for human life at creation remains abidingly valid. Just as He refuted the perversion of divorce by saying “from the beginning it was not so,” so we may refute those who say that the Church now has no Sabbath, by saying “from the beginning it was not so.” Note also 1 Corinthians 11:7-12 and 1 Timothy 2:13. As Paul silences the feminists of his day by an appeal to creation, so we may silence the enemies of the weekly Sabbath by precisely the same appeal. If creation ordinances do not remain normative for human life, then Jesus and Paul could not have argued as they did.

2. *Silencing a Main Argument against It*

The institution of the weekly Sabbath at creation by divine example silences one of the main arguments of those who deny the Christian Sabbath. Many argue that, since there is no explicit precept to keep the Lord's Day holy in the New Testament, it cannot be our duty to keep it holy. To such argumentation we reply as follows. We deny that an explicit precept is necessary to ground the Christian Sabbath. If God can institute the creation Sabbath by His own example without an explicit precept, why can He not institute the Christian Sabbath by His example without an explicit precept? Who are we to tell God how He must reveal our moral duty? It simply is not true that we must have explicit precepts to ground duty.⁷¹ Where is monogamy taught in Genesis 2 by explicit command? But Jesus regarded it as taught there by the divine example. Where is the subordination of women to men taught in Genesis 2 by explicit command? But Paul regarded that duty as taught there.

⁷¹ **It simply is not true...to ground duty** – That is, as a basis for our duty, it is not necessary to have a specific command.

3. *The Change to a First Day Rest with the Coming of Christ*

The original typological significance of the creation Sabbath permits and prophesies the change to a first day rest with the coming of Christ. The original goal of the human race was to enter God's rest at the consummation of history. This original goal was forfeited by Adam in the Fall. Christ, by the work of redemption, restores and redeems creation. He brings creation to its original goal. Thus also He brings man again to enter God's rest. This work of redemption has been finished on the cross, though it awaits consummation at the end of the age. Thus it is most appropriate that the seventh day of the creation Sabbath has become the first day of the Christian Sabbath—the long promised rest has been inaugurated in Christ. Therefore, the weekly rest has been altered. It no longer ends our week, but rather begins it. Our labor is no longer to attain rest. Our labor proceeds on the basis of the rest already attained in Christ.

CHAPTER 8

ITS PROMULGATION BY MOSES

The second major proof for the doctrine of the Christian Sabbath is embedded in the promulgation⁷² of the Sabbath by Moses in the Old Covenant. There is a wealth of relevant data with regard to Sabbath law in the Old Covenant. This data is germane⁷³ to the doctrine of the Christian Sabbath in at least two respects. In order to bring these two lines of thought into clear relief, we will examine:

- A. The Mosaic Sabbath as Moral Law,
- B. The Mosaic Sabbath as Covenant Sign.

A. The Mosaic Sabbath as Moral Law

The first way the Mosaic Sabbath must be viewed is as moral law. The thesis of this section may be simply stated: the Mosaic Sabbath is a moral law.

1. The Explanation of the Assertion: The Great Debate

By speaking of the Mosaic Sabbath, I am here mainly referring to the fourth commandment. Many Sabbatarians have asserted that the Sabbath is a moral law just like every other moral law. Having asserted this thesis, they set about to defend it against all comers. Many anti-Sabbatarians assert the opposite. To them, the Sabbath is a ceremonial law just like every other ceremonial law. In speaking of the fourth commandment as moral law, it may appear that I have taken the Sabbatarian side. Since I would rather not take sides in this particular debate, this appearance is somewhat deceiving. Let me explain myself.

I do not like the terminology. This whole debate is framed within an antithesis⁷⁴ of moral laws versus ceremonial laws. This terminology (compare Section 1, chapter 6) is vague and ill-defined. What exactly is a “moral” law? What exactly is a “ceremonial” law? Where does the Bible use such language about law? Biblical language and thought would lead us (as we have seen) to speak of natural and positive laws, i.e., laws revealed in nature and laws revealed only in special revelation. This distinction carries different connotations than the distinction between moral and ceremonial laws.

Neither do I like the alternatives. The debate is frequently carried on in terms of either/or. I do not like either option. Why must every law of God be either moral or ceremonial, natural or positive? Where does the Bible say all laws are *either* moral *or* ceremonial? Where is the justification for this preconceived cookie-cutter structure?

⁷² **promulgation** – making known by open declaration.

⁷³ **germane** – closely related; pertinent.

⁷⁴ **antithesis** – direct or exact opposite.

Why may not laws be both, a combination of the two? As one stands back and watches the debate between those who see the Sabbath as exclusively moral and those who see it as exclusively ceremonial, neither side can gain a clear-cut victory. Personally, I am certainly more impressed with the Sabbatarian side, but there are points at which it becomes difficult to prove that the fourth commandment is a moral law exactly like every other moral law.

Therefore, my assertion is not that the fourth commandment is a moral law like every other. Though I would alter his terminology, the statement of the Dutch theologian Ursinus is more accurate:

Although the ceremonial Sabbath has been abolished in the New Testament, yet the moral still continues and pertains to us as well as to others.⁷⁵

The Westminster Confession of Faith and its daughter confession, the Baptist Confession of 1689,⁷⁶ put the matter more accurately by avoiding the terminology *moral* and *ceremonial*. They describe the Sabbath as a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment.⁷⁷ The Sabbath is both positive and natural. It embodies natural law in a necessary positive institution. It is *for this reason* that I call it moral! It is moral not *as opposed to* ceremonial. It is moral because it is a positive institution, which gives necessary embodiment to natural laws binding on men from the beginning to the end of creation. This is what I mean by calling the fourth commandment a “moral law.”

2. *The Support of the Assertion: Its Inclusion in the Decalogue*

Is there, however, support for the idea that the Sabbath is a moral law? Yes, there is. The great fact that points to the morality of the Sabbath is its inclusion in the Decalogue. We have previously established the abiding validity of the Law of the Old Covenant. We have seen that when the New Testament regards that Law as a whole as a revelation of moral principles, it is the Ten Commandments that are in the forefront of its attention. When the moral law of God is being discussed, the Ten Commandments occupy a central position. There are eight considerations that confirm these thoughts.

a. Audibly spoken by God

The Ten Commandments were audibly spoken by God (Exo 20:1, 18-21; Deu 5:22). The comment in Deuteronomy 5:22 that God “added no more” clearly underscores the dignity of the Ten Commandments *as those alone uttered by the divine voice*.

⁷⁵ Albertus Pieters, “Three Views of the Fourth Commandment,” *The Calvin Forum* (January 1941): 120.

⁷⁶ The London Baptist Confession of 1689 is substantially the same as the Westminster Confession (1646), with the exception of the chapters on baptism and church government; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

⁷⁷ The Baptist Confession of 1689, 22:7; Westminster Confession of Faith, 21:7; The Westminster Larger Catechism, Q&A 121.

See *The Ten Commandments from the Westminster Larger Catechism*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

b. Alone written on stone

The Ten Commandments alone were written on stone (Exo 31:18; 32:15-16; 34:1, 28). This sets them off from all other Mosaic statutes (Exo 24:4-7) and eloquently suggests their relative permanence and perpetuity.

c. Awesome display

Their promulgation was marked by a peculiarly awesome display of God's power on Mt. Sinai. This display is the subject of frequent comment in the Scriptures and points to the peculiar solemnity of their promulgation (Exo 20:18; Deu 4:10-12; 5:22-24; Heb 12:18-20).

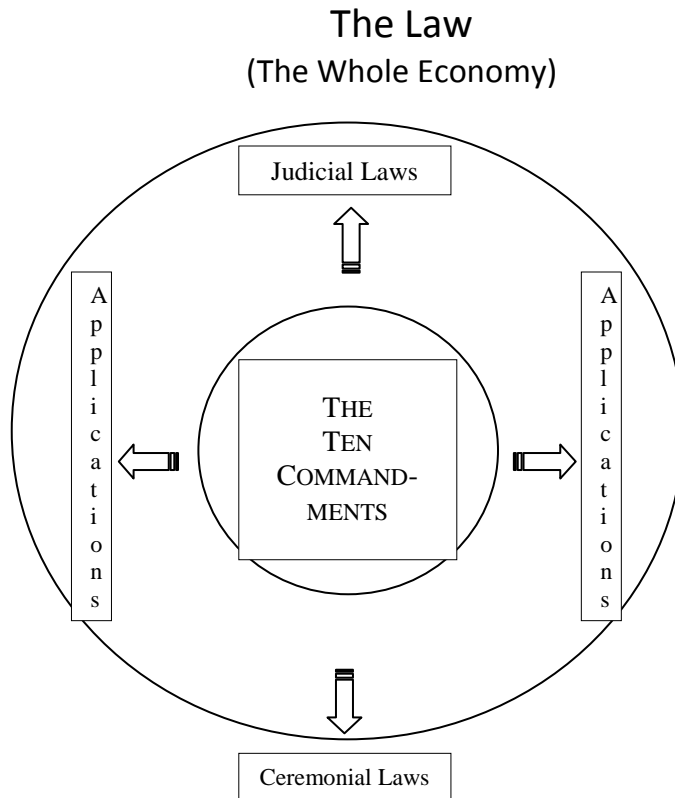
d. Placed in the ark

The Ten Commandments alone, of all the laws given to Israel, were placed inside the ark of the covenant. The others were placed beside the ark (Exo 25:16; 40:20; Deu 10:4-5).⁷⁸

e. Called "the covenant"

It is not surprising, therefore, that on occasion the Ten Commandments are singled out and in a special sense called "the covenant" (Deu 4:10-13; 5:2-22; Exo 34:28). All of the circumstances relevant to the giving of the Ten Commandments combine to teach us their peculiarly close relation to God, and hence their dignity and perpetuity. The Ten Commandments are the heart, core, and center of God's revelation of His Law to Israel.

⁷⁸ Deuteronomy 31:26 carefully asserts that "the book of the law" was to be placed "in the side of the ark of the covenant." Keil and Delitzsch perceptively comment, "The tables of the law were deposited in the ark...and the book of the law was to be kept by its side. As it formed, from its very nature, simply an elaborate commentary upon the Decalogue, it was also to have its place outwardly as an accompaniment to the tables of the law, for a witness against the people, in the same manner as the song in the mouth of the people." *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 462 (of the third volume in volume 1).



The statement is often heard that the Mosaic Covenant is a unity and cannot be divided up into moral, ceremonial, and civil chunks. The impression is often given that the poor Israelite could not have distinguished between the more important or less important aspects of God's Law. Whatever small element of truth there may be in this, it remains true that there was a clearly visible distinction between the Ten Commandments and the rest of the Law. Though we need not assert that the moral aspects of the Law were limited to the Ten Commandments, the Jew could see that the moral center of the Law was the Decalogue.

f. Content not ceremonial

The content of the Ten Commandments is not ceremonial. If we leave aside the commandment being debated, it is clear that there are no ceremonial elements in the other nine commandments.

The objection may be made to this assertion that this is not the case, that there are ceremonial elements in the Ten Commandments. It will be asserted that there are ceremonial elements in the fifth commandment, where in Exodus 20:12 a long life in the land is promised for obedience to this command. The preface to the Ten Command-

ments will also be seen as ceremonial because of its reference to the redemption of Israel out of the land of Egypt (Exo 20:2).⁷⁹

However, there is a clear distinction between the laws themselves and their enforcements. The laws themselves are moral, while their enforcements may contain local and temporary (ceremonial?) aspects. This distinction is supported by three considerations.

(1) It would be uncharacteristic of biblical revelation to find any revelation of moral law without specific orientation of that law to its historical situation.⁸⁰

(2) The structure of each of the Ten Commandments exhibits this distinction. In each command the moral law is stated first, and then there may be explanation and enforcement.

(3) This distinction is borne out by the fact that Moses can profess to be reiterating the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5, and yet totally alter its enforcement (cf. vv. 1-5 with v. 15).

To say the least, it would be surprising to discover that, while all the other commandments are exclusively moral without the slightest ceremonial element, the fourth commandment is in its totality ceremonial.

g. Written on hearts

It is specifically those commandments that were written on stones, i.e., the Ten Commandments, that are alluded to in the prophecy of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31. There it is asserted that these laws are to be written on the hearts of God's people (v. 33). Here is another indication that the Ten Commandments are the moral center of the Old Covenant Law.

h. New Testament regards as moral law

The New Testament repeatedly regards the Ten Commandments as moral law. Always they are cited, without elaboration, as valid for the Christian (Mat 5:17ff.; 19:16ff.; Luk 16:16-18; Rom 7:7ff.; 13:8-10; Eph 6:1-3; 1Ti 1:8-10; Jam 2:8-13). In these texts the very order of the Decalogue is sometimes followed, or there is allusion to the position of the command in the Decalogue (note 1Ti 1:8-10; Eph 6:1-3).

This is too massive an array of evidence to be neglected or ignored in one's consideration of the morality of the fourth commandment. It surely is trifling with the Scriptures to fail to give it weight in the debate surrounding this issue. Everything conspires against the extreme and imbalanced position that the fourth commandment is exclusively ceremonial. Especially is this the case when all the other commandments embody matters that are of permanent moral sanctity from the beginning of creation. Interestingly, this permanence from creation onward is emphasized in the fourth commandment.

⁷⁹ **redemption of Israel** – Such redemption came by sacrifice of the Passover lamb, and is thus “ceremonial.”

⁸⁰ Patrick Fairbairn, *Typology*, vol. 2, 100.

3. *The Objections to the Assertion*

Several objections are raised to the morality of the fourth commandment. Before we deal with these objections, I remind you that it is not my intention to deny that in one sense the fourth commandment is a positive law. My sole intention is to prove that, while the Sabbath is a positive command, it is also moral. I will respond to four objections to the morality of the fourth commandment. The first is this:

a. *Not repeated in the New Testament*

The fourth commandment is not repeated in the New Testament, and therefore does not apply to Christians. A number of responses may be made to this objection.

(1) This is an argument from silence and is, therefore, useless.

(2) This objection forgets or denies the abiding validity of the Law. As shown previously, the hermeneutic that requires a law to be reiterated in the New Testament in order to its being the Christian's duty is not consistent with the New Testament itself.⁸¹

(3) It is not just the fourth commandment that the New Testament fails to quote or cite. Not one of the first four are cited or quoted. Why this is so may be hard to discern, but it remains a fact. This is obvious where the New Testament cites some of the Ten Commandments: there is no explicit mention of the first three commandments (Mat 19:16-19; Rom 13:8-10; 1Ti 1:8-10).

(4) It is true, of course, that the first three commandments are repeated as to their substance. It will be my contention when we deal with the new creation Sabbath that the Lord's Day is for substance the repetition of the Sabbath.⁸²

(5) It is obvious that (since the seventh day observance implied in the fourth commandment is changed) a citation of it would have entailed the observance of the seventh day. Thus, such a citation would be misleading without extended explanation.

⁸¹ Bob Morey in his article, "Is Sunday the Christian Sabbath?" in *Baptist Reformation Review* 8, no. 1 (First Quarter 1979), states on pp. 14 and 15, "We must approach the New Testament with the important assumption that whatever is not reintroduced and reinstated in the New Covenant is no longer in effect. Everything in the Old Testament has been abrogated by fulfillment in Christ...The argument from silence can be valid when it is used to demonstrate that *in principle* all ceremonial laws have been abrogated, and if something is not reinstated, it is no longer binding. This is using silence in a scriptural manner." This is the dispensational hermeneutic with a vengeance. As shown previously, it cannot come to grips with the plainest and most pervasive perspectives of the New Testament.

⁸² We do not deny of course that the positive institution of seventh day observance is superseded. Our thesis is, however, that the same natural laws embodied in the seventh day institution are embodied in a similar institution of first day observance. Sabbaths need not be celebrated only on seventh days. No verbal or logical connection exists between seventh and Sabbath, as the ceremonial Sabbaths of the Old Testament show (Lev 23). Thus, the abolition of seventh day observance and the change of the day do not and cannot in themselves require the conclusion that no day of rest now exists in the New Covenant.

b. A ceremonial element in the fourth commandment

The command to observe the seventh day is a ceremonial element in the fourth commandment, and therefore was abrogated in Christ. To this objection a number of important responses must be made.

(1) Even if the observance of the seventh day were ceremonial, this would not be significant since my thesis is not that the fourth commandment is exclusively moral in the sense of its being natural. My thesis is that it is *not exclusively ceremonial*.

(2) It is not accurate to call the seventh day a ceremonial element in the fourth commandment. The observance of the seventh day originated not with post-Fall ceremonial laws, but with pre-Fall creation ordinances. Since the observance of the seventh day was part of a creation ordinance, it is right to assert that, had there been no Fall and no redemption, there would have been no change till the end of creation in the seventh day observance. Only a new creation could have abrogated a creation ordinance. It is, therefore, inaccurate and misleading to call such a matter ceremonial.

(3) The passing of the seventh day observance in the New Covenant does not prove that it was a ceremonial law. It only proves that nothing less than a new creation with new creation ordinances has come. To describe seventh day observance as a positive law is accurate, to use the word *ceremonial* is misleading.

(4) We have previously distinguished between the Ten Commandments themselves and their historical elaborations, explanations, and confirmations. It must, therefore, be noted that there is no mention of the seventh day in the fourth commandment proper. The fixing of the day is reserved for that part of Exodus 20:8-11 which elaborates the meaning of verse 8, where the fourth commandment proper is stated, and which is substantially altered in Deuteronomy 5.

c. Required only physical rest and not spiritual duties

The command to rest is purely ceremonial because all it required was physical rest (cessation from activity) and not any spiritual (moral) duties; therefore, it was abrogated in Christ. Bob Morey, with many anti-Sabbatarians, argues for this view of the Old Testament Sabbath:

When the concept of the Sabbath was first introduced, it only signified physical rest. It did not have any immediate spiritual overtones at all (Exo 16). But as the history of redemption unfolded, the concept of the Sabbath deepened in its meaning and began to have spiritual significance. The worship of God in private and public slowly became part of the Sabbath...If the Sabbath had been instituted since the creation of man, it would have deepened beyond mere physical rest by the time of Exodus 16. Since the Sabbath did not develop spiritual overtones until the later prophets, this reveals that it could not have been observed from the beginning of history, for then the dynamic unfolding and deepening process of biblical truth would have been stagnant from Adam to Moses.⁸³

To such a perspective a number of replies may be made:

⁸³ Robert Morey, loc. cit., 16.

(1) This objection draws a dichotomy⁸⁴ between physical rest and worship. Such a dichotomy is totally unjustified. God's rest, which we imitate in our weekly rest, is not simply one of inactivity, as we have seen. As God ceased from one form of activity and engaged in another, so also we are to do in our day of "rest." The Sabbath was sanctified, set apart. This implies that it was not only *set apart from* ordinary work, but *set apart to* another form of activity: worship. Nowhere in the Bible is a day of rest from ordinary labor dissociated from worship. Every day of rest *is* a day of worship (Lev 23:1, 3, 7, 21, 24-25, 26-28, 33-36). Is not the eternal state called a Sabbath,⁸⁵ and is [the eternal state] not a condition of constant worship? Thus the Sabbath is clearly a special day of worship in the Old Testament.

(2) Worship and Sabbath are linked together in Old Testament contexts (Lev 19:3-4; 26:2).

(3) The ordinary daily sacrifices continue, with added sacrifices on the Sabbath (Num 28:9-10). Thus the sacrificial Temple worship was intensified on the Sabbath.

(4) The showbread was renewed every Sabbath (Lev 24:8; 1Ch 9:32).

(5) The priestly courses changed on the Sabbath (2Ch 23:4, 8).

(6) There were special sacred assemblies throughout the land on every Sabbath (Lev 23:1-3; 2Ki 4:23).⁸⁶ These commands may provide the basis and origin of synagogue worship.

The conclusion must be that the seventh-day Sabbath was instituted for the purpose of worship. From its inception at creation and revival at the Exodus, it entailed the duty of special, corporate worship. Dr. Morey's ideas contradict dozens of clear Old Testament statements and the fundamental idea of the Sabbath. This is, of course, not without application to the Lord's Day. It, too, is a day belonging especially to God. It, too, is a day of corporate worship. This is precisely what the Sabbath was in its function and essence, yet we are told that we must never think of the Lord's Day in terms of the Sabbath. We

⁸⁴ **dichotomy** – division into two parts, not necessarily equal.

⁸⁵ "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God" (Heb 4:9). The word *rest* in this verse is the Greek *sabbatismos* in the original, which is derived from the Hebrew *shabbath*, which means the seventh-day Sabbath and also other Sabbath worship days in the Old Testament.

⁸⁶ How in the face of these texts Morey and others have been able to argue that the seventh-day Sabbath in the Old Covenant was not a day of worship from its inception escapes me completely. The idea that the phrase *in all your dwellings* would preclude larger assemblies in which different families would have to travel to a central location in their village or district is far-fetched and directly contradicts the command to observe holy assemblies on the seventh-day Sabbath. Matthew Poole (1624-1679) certainly is correct when he observes that the phrase *in all your dwellings* simply "is added to distinguish the Sabbath from other feasts, which were to be kept before the Lord in Jerusalem only, whither all the males were to come for that end; but the Sabbath was to be kept in all places where they were, both in synagogues, which were erected for that end, and in their private houses." *A Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 247. *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 896, defines the Hebrew word used here for assembly or convocation as follows: "*convocation, sacred assembly...term technically for religious gathering on Sabbath and certain sacred days.*" They cite the following parallel uses of the same word: Isaiah 1:13; 4:5; Exodus 12:16; Leviticus 23:2, 4, 37.

are told that Jews, our Lord's disciples—reared from childhood to associate a day of worship with a day of rest—never thought of the Lord's Day as a Sabbath. This is not only unlikely, it is impossible! A day set aside for corporate worship *was a Sabbath* to the Jewish mind.

d. The doctrine of the Christian Sabbath requires paedobaptism

Objection: The doctrine of the Christian Sabbath logically requires or permits the doctrine of paedobaptism.⁸⁷ I am writing this as a convinced Baptist. Jon Zens and others dealing with this subject from the tradition of believers' baptism have, however, seen Sabbatarians as inconsistent with such Baptist convictions. They have argued that the hermeneutics that recognize sufficient unity between the Testaments to justify the Christian Sabbath "constitute a major concession to paedobaptists."⁸⁸ Those in the Baptist tradition will find such claims significant. They properly desire a biblical examination of them. The following responses will sufficiently evince the wide disparity between arguments for paedobaptism on the one hand, and on the other hand, those for Sabbath observance based on the unity of the Scriptures.

(1) One must recognize the general truth of the unity of the covenants. The divine covenants are the organic unfolding of God's one plan of salvation. If this is what is meant by "the covenant of grace,"⁸⁹ I, at least, have no quarrel with the term. I have no difficulty in affirming with Reformed theology as a whole the unity of a) salvation, b) the Law of God, and c) the people of God in all ages.

(2) One must recognize the functional similarity and, thus, the continuity of circumcision and baptism. Both point to the reality of a cleansed life through God's grace. Both are initiatory rites by which symbolic covenant status is conferred. Although it is certainly wrong to speak of baptism being substituted for circumcision, yet this does not require us to deny all covenantal continuity between the two rites. More will be said on this subject later.

(3) One must recognize the vast differences between the arguments for the Christian Sabbath and paedobaptism. Here we raise the question: do the Sabbath and circumcision equally participate in the underlying unity of the covenants? Or, are they equally abolished in Christ? The following distinctions show that the two ordinances are unequal and dissimilar. These distinctions allow us to affirm that while the infant membership principle was abolished, the Sabbath principle was not. While we believe in the abiding validity of the Old Covenant Law, it is not valid for us without distinction or qualification. The abiding validity of any part of the Old Covenant Law must be determined in terms of a complex set of factors.

⁸⁷ **paedobaptism** – Greek: *paedion* "young child or infant"; the practice of baptizing infants as the sign and seal of the covenant of grace, replacing circumcision as the sign and seal of the Old Covenant.

⁸⁸ Jon Zens, *Baptist Reformation Review* 8, no. 4 (4th Quarter 1979): 48.

⁸⁹ **covenant of grace** – covenant among the Persons of the Godhead, consisting of God's gracious, eternal purpose of redemption, conceived before the creation of the world, first announced in Genesis 3:15, progressively revealed in history, accomplished in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and appropriated by faith in Him.

<u>Sabbath</u>	<u>Circumcision</u>
1. A creation ordinance	Not a creation ordinance. An Abrahamic covenant ordinance.
2. In Ten Commandments	Not in Ten Commandments
3. Sabbath and Lord's Day - similar outward institution - stresses continuity	Circumcision and Baptism - dissimilar institution - stresses discontinuity
4. Old Testament prophesies the continuation of Sabbath observance.	Old Testament prophesies nothing about circumcision, but does predict the end of the national order and the ethnically structured people of God.
5. New Testament gives explicit evidence for the continuation of the Sabbath in the Lord's Day.	New Testament gives explicit evidence for the abrogation of the national order and infant circumcision, while providing no instance of paedobaptism.
6. New Testament does not abrogate in the present era the old creation or its structuring of human life in terms of the Ten Commandments.	New Testament does abrogate the theocratic ⁹⁰ national order of the Mosaic Covenant grounded in the Abrahamic Covenant. Since circum- cision is the sign of this national order, it is abrogated.

B. The Mosaic Sabbath as Covenant Sign

The data in the Mosaic Covenant with regard to the Sabbath, as we have said, may be conveniently treated under two headings: *The Mosaic Sabbath as Moral Law* and *The Mosaic Sabbath as Covenant Sign*. While anti-Sabbatarians often have turned to the data that we will examine under this second heading in order to refute the doctrine of the Christian Sabbath, it is my purpose to show that it is, in fact, quite supportive of a Christian Sabbatarian position.⁹¹

⁹⁰ **theocratic** – Greek: *theos* (God) and *kratos* (power); pertaining to system of government where power resides in God, i.e., God is the ruler.

⁹¹ There are not lacking those who have elaborated more or less Christian Sabbatarian positions primarily on the ground here to be examined. Cf. P. M. Misselbrook's unpublished paper, "Sabbath," and John Bunyan's work entitled, "Questions about the Nature and Perpetuity of the Seventh Day Sabbath" in *The Whole Works of John Bunyan*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 359f; also available from www.ChapelLibrary.org/literature/bunyan.

An introduction to the Mosaic Sabbath as a covenant sign may be provided by the following considerations:

(1) The Sabbath is the peculiar sign of the Mosaic Covenant (Exo 31:17; Isa 56:4, 6; Eze 20:12, 20). It is thus akin to the rainbow, the sign of the Noahic Covenant (Gen 9:12-17), and circumcision, the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 17:11). As a sign, it possesses a peculiar and appropriate symbolic significance, like that of the rainbow and circumcision. We must ask and answer the question in this section: what is that symbolic value?

(2) The fact that the Sabbath is a sign of the covenant provides no certain proof that the Sabbath is not a moral law. Again, the structure of our thinking must not be either/or, but both/and. The Sabbath is both a moral law and a covenant sign, not either a moral law or a covenant sign. It is consistent, therefore, for its observance to be both a sign of Israel's unique covenant status and a moral requirement rooted in creation. A friend illustrated this by noting that if a woman was married on her birthday, that date would from then on be both her birthday and her anniversary.

I will endeavor to open up the Mosaic Sabbath as a covenant sign under three headings:

1. Its dual significance,
2. Its deeper unity,
3. Its temporary aspects.

1. Its Dual Significance

As a sign, the Sabbath clearly has a symbolic value. When, however, we examine the relevant passages with a view to learning what that symbolic value or significance might be, we discover that it is twofold. The Sabbath as a sign has a dual significance. Nothing more sharply underscores this than the amazing variation in the ground of Sabbath-keeping between Exodus 20:11 and Deuteronomy 5:15. In Exodus 20 the Sabbath is plainly grounded in the work of God at creation, while in Deuteronomy 5 the Sabbath is plainly grounded in the Exodus redemption of Israel. These two dimensions of the symbolic value or significance of the Sabbath must now be examined.

a. The Sabbath as a sign of creation

Here the key passage is not only Exodus 20:8-11. Exodus 31:12-18 also manifests the Sabbath as a sign of creation. In Exodus 31:17, the Sabbath is called a sign between God and Israel, and this is related to the creation week: "It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed."

What is the symbolic significance of the Sabbath in this sense? This significance includes the following elements. First, this verse points out that the God of Israel was the Creator of heaven and earth. Second, it points out that only Israel was the people of God, that only Israel among all the nations remained faithful to their Creator, that only Israel sustained a covenant relationship with the Creator.

How does it signify these things? Because Sabbath observance imitates God's peculiar method of creation [in which He rested on the seventh day], it is a memorial of creation. Since only Israel faithfully observed this memorial, it marked Israel as alone the people of the Creator God. All this confirms, rather than undercuts, its morality, because it provides a creation backdrop for Sabbath observance.

b. The Sabbath as a sign of redemption

1) The fact of its redemptive significance

Exodus 15:13 describes Israel's deliverance from Egypt through the Red Sea as a redemption. Deuteronomy 5:15 relates the Sabbath to this redemption by speaking of it as a memorial of the Exodus from Egypt. Thus, the Sabbath reminded them that the God of Israel was not only the Creator but also their Redeemer. Ezekiel 20:8b-12 and verse 20 explicitly calls the Sabbath a "sign." The context (in verse 9: "in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt") of this description in verse 12 relates this sign-value to the redemption of Israel from Egypt: "I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD that sanctify them [i.e., set apart by redeeming them]" (20:12). Thus, both the creating and redeeming acts of God are signified by the Sabbath.

2) The importance of its redemptive significance

As mentioned previously, this aspect of the Mosaic Sabbath's symbolism is often regarded as militating against its perpetuity under the New Covenant. It is asked, was not this redemption of Israel from Egypt a typical redemption fulfilled in Christ? If so, is not Sabbath observance abolished by Christ's anti-typical⁹² redemption?

To this question several replies may be made. *First*, the conclusion that Sabbath observance is abolished in Christ follows only if the Sabbath is only a sign to Israel and has no broader or more universal significance. This, as we have proven, is not the case. *Second*, even the fact that the Sabbath was a sign of the typical redemption of Israel from Egypt is quite suggestive with regard to the sabbatical significance of the Lord's Day in the New Covenant. This is just to say that, when this significance is properly evaluated, it points to the perpetuity of the Sabbath.

We must begin to understand the significance of the Sabbath for the Lord's Day by reminding ourselves that there were actually two great instituted memorials of the Exodus redemption. The Passover also memorialized the redemption from Egypt. In Exodus 12:13, the Passover blood is described as a sign of God's deliverance of Israel from the plague that struck down the firstborn of Egypt. As seen previously, this is the same word that is used in Ezekiel 20:12, 20 to describe the Sabbath. Further confirming the parallel between the Passover and the Sabbath as memorial signs of the Exodus redemption, derivatives of *zakar* (to remember) are used in Exodus 12:14 (speaking of the Passover) and in Exodus 20:8 and Deuteronomy 5:15 (both speaking of the Sabbath). Thus, there was appointed in Israel, for the remembrance of the Exodus redemption, both a memorial meal and a memorial day.

⁹² **anti-typical** – pertaining to what was foreshadowed by a previous symbol or type.

It is most interesting that this is paralleled in the New Covenant. There are two memorials of Christ's great work of redemption. These two memorials take the forms of a memorial meal and a memorial day. They are marked by the only two occurrences of the strong possessive form of "Lord" in the New Testament, κυριακος. In 1 Corinthians 11:20, we read of the Lord's Supper, and in Revelation 1:10 of the Lord's Day—both memorialize the redeeming work of Christ. Just as the Passover memorialized the sacrifice that secured the redemption, so also the Lord's Supper recalls the great sacrifice that finished redemption. As the Sabbath memorializes the blessing purchased in the Exodus, so also the Lord's Day reminds us of Christ's resurrection as the first fruits of redemption.

It is impossible to reflect on these parallels without being struck by the fact that there is a relationship between both the Passover and the Lord's Supper, and also the Sabbath and the Lord's Day. Surely, it cannot be thought that these parallels are coincidental.

This is not to say that the Passover was a type of the Lord's Supper. The Passover as it memorialized the typical redemption of Israel also foreshadowed the true redemption of the Church by the death of Christ. This is made explicit in 1 Corinthians 5:7, which asserts, "For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us." The following diagram attempts to illustrate this:

Exodus	<-----	Passover	----->	New Exodus
(by Moses)				(in Christ)

But while the Passover has its fulfillment in Christ, as it points to Christ our Passover, there is a richness in its connections that has not been exhausted by this fulfillment. The Passover also anticipates the great meal of covenant fellowship to be celebrated when the kingdom is consummated. It points, in other words, to the eschatological supper. This aspect of the significance of the Passover is made explicit in Luke 22:14-20. There in verses 15 and 16 Jesus says, "With [earnest] desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God." In verses 17 and 18, He speaks similarly when he says of the Passover cup, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come." The reference is clearly to the eschatological supper of which Jesus frequently speaks (Mat 22:1-14; 25:1-13). Thus, the Passover is seen as pointing beyond the sacrifice of the Lamb to the eating of the [eschatological] Passover meal.

Passover	-->	The True Passover	-->	The True Passover
		Sacrificed		Celebrated

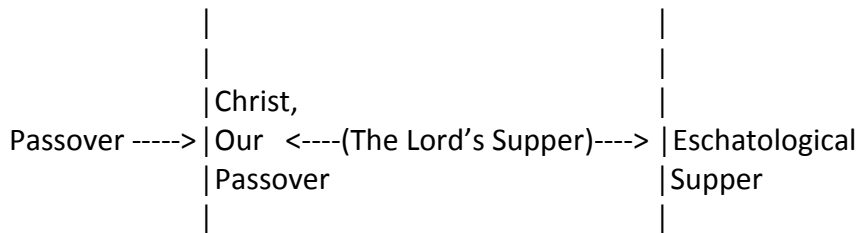
It is at this point that a relationship between the Passover and the Lord's Supper cannot be evaded. It is at the Passover recorded in Luke 22 that the Lord's Supper is instituted and first celebrated. Furthermore, the Lord's Supper anticipates the coming of

Christ and the eschatological supper. In Matthew 26:27-29, language parallel to that used of the Passover cup is used of the Lord's Supper cup:

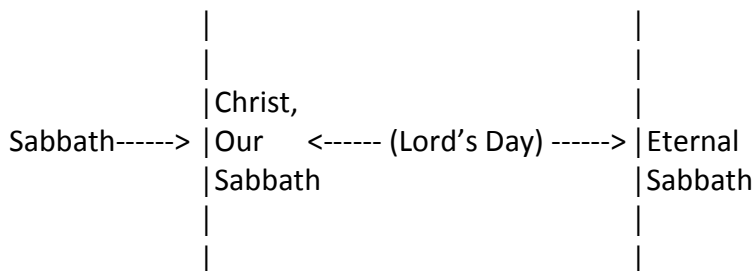
And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

In 1 Corinthians 11:25-26, this eschatological reference is repeated in the words that follow the identification of the cup as "the new testament [i.e., covenant] in my blood." Verse 26 says, "For as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew [i.e., proclaim] the Lord's death till he come."

The Passover, therefore, must be said to have a reference to or relationship with the Lord's Supper secondarily and indirectly. The following diagram endeavors to clarify this relation.



As a creation ordinance, the evidence for the Sabbath's perpetuity and its continuity with the Lord's Day clearly surpasses that of the Passover. Nonetheless, the Passover does illustrate the idea that symbolic institutions may have a multiple fulfillment in the New Covenant, a multi-leveled significance in the new creation. Though the Sabbath is fulfilled in Christ (Col 2:16-17), this does not mean that it is not fulfilled in the eternal Sabbath (Heb 4:9) or continued in the Lord's Day (Rev 1:10). In fact, precisely *because* it is fulfilled in Christ, it is continued in the Lord's Day. We have to do here with the peculiar effect that the overlapping of the ages (the old and new creations) have upon the typical institutions of the Old Covenant. Notice how the following diagram of the relations of Sabbath and Lord's Day parallels that of Passover and Lord's Supper.



Applications of this structure are various:

(1) This reminds us that we must always think of the Sabbath's fulfillment in terms of the two-stage fulfillment idea of the New Testament. There is fulfillment without consummation. Thus both Passover and Sabbath have fulfillments in the "first stage of inauguration," the "second stage of consummation," and finally "in the times between." The continuance of the "present evil age" and the delay of "the age to come" are symbolized in the continuing ordinances of the Lord's Supper and the Lord's Day.

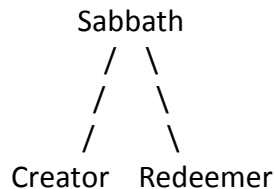
(2) This reminds us that we must not think in either/or terms when we approach the subject of the Sabbath's fulfillment: either it is a moral law continued in the Lord's Day or it is fulfilled in Christ—or since it is fulfilled in Christ, it must not be continued in the Lord's Day. No; it might be, it *is*, both.

(3) There are great differences between the Passover and the Lord's Supper as memorial meals. The first is a sacrifice, the second is not. These differences are important, but a line of continuity still runs between them. The differences between the Sabbath and Lord's Day do not negate the continuity between them.

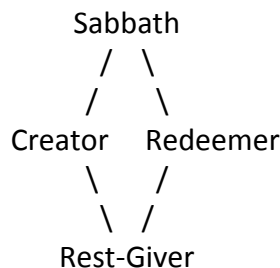
(4) It is possible to argue for a Christian Sabbath without necessarily presupposing the creation ordinance. One need only see that as the Sabbath memorialized the redemption of Israel from Egypt to rest in Canaan, so the Lord's Day memorializes the redemption of the Church in Christ to the resurrection-rest of the Eternal Sabbath.

2. *Its Deeper Unity*

We have seen that the Sabbath as a sign possesses a dual significance.



Both the reference to creation and the reference to redemption actually point to a deeper single idea and meaning: God as rest-giver.



a. *The creation Sabbath typified the rest of God at end of history*

The creation Sabbath typified the rest of God to be entered at the end of history. There was a higher state of existence possible even for unfallen, sinless Adam. In what ways could Adam's perfection have been improved upon?

(1) Spiritually, Adam's perfection could have become indefectible⁹³ holiness. In the ethical realm, Adam still possessed the possibility of sinning. A higher state of existence would eliminate this possibility (Gen 2:16-17; 3:6-7; note Heb 12:23; 1Jo 3:2).

(2) Physically, Adam's perfection could have become that of the "spiritual" body. In the physical realm, Adam labored under physical limitations capable of improvement (1Co 15:44-46). The resurrection will bring Christians to a higher state of bodily existence than that possessed by Adam. If Adam had properly fulfilled his probation, it is probable that he would have entered this perfected perfection at the end of history. This is probably implied in Genesis 3:22 and Hebrews 4:3-4.

b. Adam forfeited this higher life

By the Fall, Adam not only brought himself under God's wrath and the sentence of death, but forfeited the opportunity to gain this higher life of the age to come (Gen 3:22).

c. In Christ, man and creation brought to their original goal

In Christ, creation is not simply restored to its original condition, but man and creation are brought to the higher state of existence that was the original goal of creation (see 1Jo 3:2; Heb 12:23; 1Co 15:44-46; Rom 8:21). Not the original glory of a peccable⁹⁴ Adam, but the freedom of the glory of the sons of God is given in Christ; possessing resurrected, spiritual bodies, they are beyond sinning.

d. Rest typically restored in the Exodus

In the Exodus, the original rest of creation and the coming rest of the age to come were typically restored. The Canaan-rest is the type of the rest of the age to come. The land is a symbol and type of the redeemed earth.

The conclusion must be as follows: the rest typified in the Mosaic Sabbath is ultimately one: God's rest promised at creation, restored by redemption typically in Moses, and then truly in Christ. (1) The redemptive significance of the Sabbath does not negate its creation origin. It confirms it. (2) The typical significance of the Sabbath does not negate its being a creation ordinance. The term *typical* is equivalent to ceremonial in some minds, but the Bible does not teach that what is typical equals what is ceremonial. Adam was typical, but this does not mean that he was ceremonial (Rom 5:14).

3. *Its Temporary Aspects*

No treatment of the Mosaic Sabbath as a covenant sign would be complete—and certainly not balanced—if it did not raise the question of the temporary aspects of the Mosaic Sabbath. We will deal with these temporary aspects under two headings. The first is:

a. The ceremonial enlargements of the Sabbath sign

(1) The ceremonial Sabbath days (Lev 23:4-39; Num 28:11-29:40). These typified the New Exodus in Christ. Thus, they were fulfilled in Christ (Col 2:16-17; Gal 4:9-10).

⁹³ **indefectible** – not liable to defect or failure; unailing.

⁹⁴ **peccable** – capable of sinning.

(2) The ceremonial Sabbath years (Deu 15; Lev 25, 27; Exo 23:10-11). Such Sabbath years were regarded as typical of the redemption in Christ (cf. Isaiah 61:1-2 with Luke 4:18-19, which is speaking of the Year of Jubilee).

(3) Are such observances perpetual? Several considerations indicate they are not.

(a) They did not originate in creation.

(b) They are not part of the Ten Commandments.

(c) They are closely connected with aspects of the Old Covenant that were typical and temporary: ceremonial worship, the typical Exodus redemption, the land, and the theocratic state.

(d) All of this is not to say that they are not instructive in terms of general equity.⁹⁵

b. The civil sanction of the Sabbath sign

The punishment of death was required for the public violation of the Sabbath (Exo 31:15; 35:1-3; Num 15:32-36). This sanction passed away with the other judicial laws of the theocracy when God destroyed the Jewish state. No better reasoning on this subject can be found than that contained in the Baptist Confession of 1689 (19.4).

To them also He gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any now by virtue of that institution; their general equity only being of modern use.

The fact that Sabbath violations were punishable by death is not, of course, without significance for the discussion of the perpetuity of the Sabbath. Though the sanction passes away with the passing of the Jewish state, nonetheless that sanction bears witness to the relative importance of this particular provision of the Mosaic Law. It is correct to say that no merely ceremonial law had suspended over it the threat of the death penalty to be meted out by the civil authority. Fairbairn remarks:

The deeds that were of this description had all the penalty of death attached to them—shewing that the precepts they violated were of a fundamental character, and entered as essential principles into the constitution of the Theocracy.⁹⁶

c. Supposed stringency in the observance of the Mosaic Sabbath

Here we raise the question, Was Israel required to observe the Sabbath with an external stringency⁹⁷ no longer required of Christians?

1) The case of lighting fires

Exodus 35:3 is often taken as an absolute prohibition of the use of fire on the Sabbath. This is a misunderstanding of the text. We know that this is a misunderstanding

⁹⁵ **general equity** – theological term: Old Testament laws contain timeless principles, based on the character of God. The principles still apply today, even though the laws themselves may have been abrogated.

⁹⁶ Patrick Fairbairn, *The Revelation of Law in Scripture* (Winona Lake: Alpha Publications, 1979), 100. Note the list of crimes punishable by death mentioned in this context.

⁹⁷ **stringency** – strictness; rigor; tightness.

because, if it had been intended in this way, it would have meant an intolerable hardship (inconsistent with the goodness of God) for the Israelites. We think of the climate of Israel and Palestine as tropical and Sahara-like. Apparently, this was not the case. Snow is mentioned twenty-one times in the Old Testament, cold five times, ice or frost six times. Aware of this and believing that God would not command such hardship, many commentators have suggested alternative interpretations. Most suggest that the prohibition forbids the kindling of fire for the smelting necessary for the work to be done on the Tabernacle (Exo 35:4ff.).⁹⁸ Perhaps the emphasis is to be placed on the “kindling” of fire, but not the “using” of fire for heating or cooking. Or perhaps we are to remember the geographical circumstances of this prohibition, and say with Murphy, “For domestic comfort, fire was not a thing of necessity or mercy in the Peninsula of Sinai. In colder regions, it is otherwise; and there the law of necessity or mercy regulates the observance of the Sabbath.”⁹⁹

2) *The case of food preparation*

Sometimes it is assumed that the Israelites were forbidden all food preparation on the Sabbath because no kindling of fires was permitted. There is no proof for this. Exodus 35:3, for one of the reasons stated above, does not apply here. Luke 14:1ff implies at least some food preparation on the Sabbath (cf. especially v. 7). On the ceremonial Sabbath of the Day of Atonement, both eating and, thus, food preparation were forbidden (Lev 23:26-32).¹⁰⁰ This is, however, a unique feature of the Day of Atonement Sabbath. On the other ceremonial Sabbaths, rather extensive preparations were necessary for the feasts commanded in conjunction with them (Exo 12:16; Lev 23:4-21, 33-36; Neh 8:8-18). Thus, a spectrum of variations and distinctions is visible on this subject of Sabbath food preparation. It is, however, to be noted that the language used with reference to the rest of the seventh-day Sabbath is distinct from that used of the ceremonial Sabbaths. Its complete rest (Lev 23:3) is to be contrasted with the looser requirement of doing “no laborious work” (Lev 23:7-8, 21, 25, 36), but also with the stringent fasting required on the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:26-32). There is a spectrum ranging from

Stringency -----	to -----	Leniency
<u>Day of Atonement Sabbath</u>	<u>Seventh Day Sabbath</u>	<u>Festival Sabbath</u>
Eating: None Permitted	Eating & Feasting	Feasting
Food Prep.: None Permitted	Limited Prep.	Extensive Prep.

⁹⁸ Cf. the comments of Matthew Poole, Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, and George Bush (1796-1859, American biblical scholar).

⁹⁹ James G. Murphy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Exodus with a New Translation* (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1979), 367.

¹⁰⁰ Historically, the Hebrew term “afflict your souls” (Lev 23:27) included fasting.

C. Case Laws

If the principle of the Sabbath be once accepted, none of the other Sabbath laws seem unduly stringent or reflective of an increased Mosaic severity. Thus the command for resting in seed-time and harvest for farmers (Exo 34:21), the prohibition against the gathering of fuel (Num 15:32-36), and the prohibition against the ordinary activities of the marketplace (Neh 10:31; 13:15-22) are instructive applications of the Sabbath principle for us. One must, however, remember the common-sense rule that different circumstances may alter the precise applications. For instance, with reference to food preparation, far less labor is necessary now than then—yet there is still an application to women on this matter. The illustration of gathering fuel is also relevant. Some orthodox Jews have felt it their obligation to shut off their gas on the Sabbath. Again, however, we live in an entirely different situation. No laborious work is necessary to turn on a gas jet.

CHAPTER 9

ITS CONTINUATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: THE NEW CREATION SABBATH

Introduction

If one possesses a proper appreciation of the framework of biblical ethics, the passing and non-observance of the seventh-day Sabbath by the Church of Jesus Christ is startling. How can a creation ordinance, the fourth of the Ten Commandments, no longer be observed by God's people? How can these things be?

The coming of a New Covenant and "New Exodus" cannot by itself explain the fact. The Sabbath stood on the grounds of creation before it was incorporated into the Old Covenant. Nothing less than a new creation is sufficient to account for the passing of the seventh-day Sabbath institution of creation. Yet, it is nothing less than this to which the New Testament witnesses in the work of Christ. Not a New Covenant merely, but a new creation has come with Him. Yet this new creation has not yet reached its consummate form. Thus, the Sabbath principle first embodied in the old creation seventh-day Sabbath rises again and receives new embodiment in the new creation first-day Sabbath. This truly cosmic transition from the old creation Sabbath to the new creation Sabbath may be treated under three headings.

- A. The Change: The Preparation and Foundation in the Pre-Resurrection Period of the New Testament
- B. The Change: The Coming of the New Sabbath in the Post-Resurrection Period of the New Testament
- C. The Change: The Passing of the Old Sabbath in the Post-Resurrection Period of the New Testament

A. The Change: The Preparation and Foundation in the Pre-Resurrection Period of the New Testament

Introduction

Several words of introduction are necessary to place this material in the right setting.

a. The major significance of the Gospels for the Church

In this day of Dispensationalism, the significance of the Gospels for the Church tends to be depreciated and undervalued. While of course in the period up to the resurrection of Christ, the Old Covenant is legally in force, the transition from old to new is already in motion during the ministry of Christ. The following facts remind us of the relevance of the Gospels for us, the Church.

(1) Each of the Gospels was compiled many years after the inauguration of the New Covenant.

(2) Each of the Gospels was written for the Church and those it was evangelizing.

(3) Each of the Gospels was written by a theologian-evangelist of the Church in order to instruct the Church and those it was evangelizing.

(4) Each of the Gospels records the apostolic preaching of the gospel of Christ as it was authoritatively communicated. The assumption underlying each of these facts is that the Gospels have a *close, practical relevance* for the Church.

b. The major passages concerning the Sabbath in the Gospels

There is a quite astounding amount of material with regard to the Sabbath. It may be collated Gospel by Gospel as follows:

(1) Matthew 12:1-21

(2) Mark 2:23-3:6; 6:1-6

(3) Luke 4:16-22, 31-37, 38-41; 6:1-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-6

(4) John 5:5-18; 7:21-24; 9:1-16.

Note the massive array of material. This is a significant aspect of the Gospels' didactic material.

c. The major emphases of the Gospels regarding Christ and Sabbath

The major emphases of the Gospels with regard to the relation of Christ and the Sabbath are, first, His *observance* of the Sabbath. We will notice the relevance of this emphasis for the abiding obligation of the Sabbath. The second major emphasis of the Gospels is on His *fulfillment* of the Sabbath. We will notice here the redemptive significance of the Sabbath. Thirdly, we will notice His *lordship* over the Sabbath. Here we will observe how this anticipates the coming alteration of the Sabbath.

1. Christ's Observance of the Sabbath

a. The fact of His observance

A number of passages make very plain that Jesus did observe the Sabbath (Mar 6:2; Luk 4:16, 31; 6:6; 13:10 [Mar 1:21ff.]). It has been sometimes assumed that Jesus rejected the fourth commandment theologically and violated it practically.¹⁰¹ This position is, however, simply impossible to reconcile with the premises of orthodox Christianity. Paul asserts that the Christ was "made under the law" (Gal 4:4). This is, of course, the straightforward corollary of the fact that it was only by the death and resurrection of

¹⁰¹Beckwith and Stott, loc. cit., 21-22.

Christ that a “time of reformation” was initiated (Heb 9:10, cf. the context). Thus, it is nothing less than the doctrine of the sinlessness of Christ that requires us to assert that Christ never in the least violated the fourth commandment. If, in other words, Christ disobeyed the fourth commandment before its supposed abrogation by His death and resurrection, He clearly sinned.

b. The attack on His observance

Now, of course, not only modern fuzzy-thinking or heterodox¹⁰² professing Christians have claimed that Christ failed to observe the Sabbath. This claim was made even before His death. For what supposed violations of the Sabbath was Jesus attacked? The following list may be compiled from the Gospels. He was condemned for: healing on the Sabbath (Luk 13:14); for commanding a man to pick up his mat and carry it home after being healed on the Sabbath (Joh 5:8-11); and for permitting His disciples to pick, husk, and eat grain as they walked through the fields on the Sabbath (Luk 6:1-2). Let anyone acquainted with the Old Testament say whether any of these things were violations of either the letter or the spirit of Old Testament Sabbath law. Clearly, they were patently ludicrous and ridiculous examples of Pharisaic interpretation at its worst.

Commenting on one of these accusations, Hendriksen says,

Obviously, what was happening was that Christ’s enemies were burying the real Law of God—which did not in any sense forbid what the disciples were now doing—under the mountain of their man-made, foolish traditions.¹⁰³

We may assert even further that, if these charges were the worst the Pharisees could do, then what an impeccable Sabbath-keeper Jesus must have been! These very objections prove that Jesus kept the Sabbath. Surely if the scrupulous Pharisees could do no better than this, with all their eagle-eyed observance of Jesus, then Jesus’ Sabbath-keeping must have been exemplary.

c. The defense of His observance

1) The pillars of His defense

The remarkable thing is that Jesus honored such accusations with a reply at all. He did so in order to set out the proper interpretation of the Sabbath and its observance. The substance of Jesus’ reply was as follows. Their interpretation of proper Sabbath observance in general and their accusation of Jesus in particular were wrong for four reasons.

(a) It contradicted biblical precedent. Here Jesus argues on the basis of several Old Testament precedents. In Matthew 12:3-4, He cites the example of David and the showbread. In Matthew 12:5, He uses the example of the priests laboring in the Temple. In John 7:21-24, He argues from the administration of circumcision on the Sabbath.

¹⁰²**heterodox** – not in accordance with established or accepted doctrines; holding unorthodox doctrines.

¹⁰³William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel according to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 105.

(b) It misunderstood the divine intention. In Matthew 12:7, Jesus argues that God's intention in the Sabbath was not mere external observance, but compassion on men. In Mark 2:27, He argues that God's intention was beneficent, not repressive.

(c) It contradicted the practice of the Pharisees themselves (Mat 12:11; Luk 13:15; 14:5). In their better moments and when it was in their own self-interest, the Pharisees contradicted their own principles of Sabbath interpretation.

(d) It missed Jesus' dignity. The key text here is Matthew 12:6, "But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple." The crux¹⁰⁴ of Jesus' argument in this text is clear. If the priests in their devotion to the Temple service could exert great effort, surely it could not be wrong for the disciples, pursuant to their devotion to Christ, to engage in this slight and necessary activity of picking, husking, and eating grain.

2) *The question concerning His defense*

Serious questions have been raised about the nature of Sabbath law on the basis of the argument of Jesus in Matthew 12:1-5.

At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day. But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests? Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?

It has been asked, Does not this passage imply that the action of the disciples was a violation (although permissible) of the Sabbath? The further question has then been raised: Does not this mean that there are exceptions to the Sabbath law? Is it not, then, like ceremonial laws in this way? It was permissible to break ceremonial laws for higher reasons and thus, too, the Sabbath as a ceremonial law may be broken for higher reasons.

The following considerations show that Jesus was not teaching that the Sabbath law could for good reasons be broken. *First*, the action of the disciples was not unlawful in even a technical sense. The parallel analogy given by Jesus in verses 10-12 suggests this. It is not merely technically permissible, but downright lawful to engage in the labor of pulling a sheep out of a pit on the Sabbath.

Second, it is merely for the sake of argument that Jesus grants that His disciples had technically violated the Sabbath. Actually the statement in verse 4 that it was unlawful for David to eat the showbread, and in verse 5 that the priests profaned the Sabbath, have an air of sarcasm about them. Jesus is accommodating His language to the pharisaic point of view. They looked at the Sabbath in a merely external way as cessation of activity. Jesus, by His adoption of their viewpoint, manifests its folly—by ironically stating that it was un-

¹⁰⁴ **crux** – vital or decisive point.

lawful for David to eat the showbread, and a profaning of the Sabbath for the priests to labor in the Temple. Calvin saw Jesus' irony long ago:

When Christ says that the priests profane the Sabbath, the expression is not strictly accurate, and is accommodated to His hearers; for when the Law enjoins men to abstain from their employments, it does not forbid them to perform the services of religion. But Christ admits that to be true which might appear to be so in the eye of ignorant persons, and rests satisfied with proving that the labors performed in the Temple are not offensive to God.¹⁰⁵

Third, in verse 7 Jesus reverts to His own point of view and denies that the pharisaic viewpoint—contradicting as it does the clear arguments of verses 3 through 5—is proper. Like their approach to all the rest of the Law, their interpretation of the Sabbath was heartlessly external. Jesus' attack on the pharisaic misinterpretation of the Law is a constant theme of Matthew (Mat 5:33-37, 21-26, 27-32, 38-42; 15:3-6; 19:3-12; 22:37-40). As with adultery and murder, so also with Sabbath breaking, Jesus refutes a heartlessly external view of God's requirement in order to recover the observances required by the divine intention.

Surely this emphasis of the Gospels points to the abiding obligation of the Sabbath principle. This may be seen by asking two simple questions. The *first* question is this: What is missing in the Gospels? Two things, at least, are missing: any prediction or prophecy of the abolition of the Sabbath principle; and any example of Jesus violating, annulling, or depreciating the Sabbath. The *second* question is this: What is present in the Gospels? Three things, at least, are present: the strongest evidence that Jesus carefully kept the Sabbath; the clear teaching of the beneficial character of the Sabbath; the extensive clarification of proper Sabbath observance.

It is difficult, in the face of such an emphasis in the Gospels, to maintain that Sabbath-keeping is irrelevant to the Church. The Gospels were written to the Church, by the theologians of the Church, recording the apostolic preaching to the Church. Why teach, why bother to record at such length, the proper observance of the Sabbath if the Sabbath was abolished and had no relevance for the Church? Surely this points to the abiding obligation of the Sabbath principle. Beckwith and Stott remark:

But if Jesus regarded the Sabbath as purely ceremonial and purely temporary, it is remarkable that He gives so much attention to it in His teaching; and also that in all He teaches about it, He never mentions its temporary character. This is even more remarkable when one remembers that He emphasizes the temporary character of other parts of the Old Testament ceremonial law: the laws of purity in Mark 7:14-23 and Luke 11:39-41, and the Temple (with its sacrifices) in Mark 13:2 and John 4:21. By contrast, as we have already seen, He seems in Mark 2:27 to speak of the Sabbath as one of the unchanging ordinances for all mankind.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* vol. 16 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 48. (Of the second volume bound in vol. 16).

¹⁰⁶Beckwith and Stott, loc. cit., 26. Cf. also Daniel Wilson, loc. cit., 77-78.

2. *Christ's Fulfillment of the Sabbath*

One of the most striking features of the Gospel record of Christ and the Sabbath is its emphasis on Christ's healings on the Sabbath (Mat 12:9-14; Mar 3:1-5; Luk 6:6-10; Mar 6:2-5; 1:21ff.; Luk 4:31-37, 38-41; 13:10-13, 16; 14:2-4; Joh 5:1-10; 9:1-14). At least nine different occasions on which Jesus healed on the Sabbath are recorded. This emphasis is not accidental. It points to the redemptive significance of the Sabbath. These miraculous healings and exorcisms¹⁰⁷ were the signs of the coming of the kingdom (Mat 11:5), in which God would give the true and final rest to His people. Hence their being done on the Sabbath indicates its fulfillment as a sign of God's redeeming work. The Sabbath was a sign of the Exodus redemption and, thus, pointed forward to the New Exodus in Christ.

There are a number of exegetical indicators that point more overtly to the connection suggested above. When in Luke 4:16-21 Jesus speaks the momentous words, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (v. 21), it is not to be missed that the day happened to be a Sabbath (v. 16). This seems especially appropriate in light of the fact that the biblical reference Jesus reads in this passage is a reference to the Year of Jubilee. Luke 13:16 is also interesting in that Jesus sees a special propriety in the healing of the woman "bound" by Satan on the Sabbath. Jesus asks, "Ought not this woman...be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?" Matthew 12:1-14, when seen in its connection with Matthew 11:29, also appears to suggest the same thought. Immediately after Jesus issues the great Messianic promise, "Ye shall find rest unto your souls," we find Jesus going with His disciples through the grain fields on the Sabbath.

This emphasis on the fulfillment of the Sabbath sign by the coming of Messiah intimates the epochal¹⁰⁸ and momentous changes about to take place through His ministry. It indicates, therefore, the change about to occur with reference to the Sabbath. In this way, it speaks of the impending abolition of the seventh-day Sabbath and the coming of the new creation Sabbath.

3. *Christ's Lordship over the Sabbath*

This again is one of the most prominent and consistent emphases of the Gospels. Christ's sovereignty over the Sabbath is asserted in each of the four Gospels.

In Matthew 12:8, the connection points to the idea that the Son of Man, as Lord of the Sabbath, is aware of the divine intention in the Sabbath, and thus able to authoritatively and accurately regulate its observance. In Mark 2:28, a different facet of the meaning of this statement is brought out by the connection. The idea is that the Son of Man is the good and gentle sovereign of a beneficent kingdom. As Lord of the Sabbath, then, He will incorporate this beneficial institution into His kingdom. In Luke 6:5, it is difficult to discern a specific nuance of meaning.

The idea that Christ is Lord of the Sabbath carries, therefore, at least a two-fold significance: a) He is Lord of it to authoritatively regulate its observance, and b) He is Lord of it to incorporate it into His kingdom. He is not Lord of it to abolish or destroy it. This

¹⁰⁷**exorcisms** – acts of delivering someone from evil spirits.

¹⁰⁸**epochal** – pertaining to the beginning of a distinctive period in something's history.

contradicts the connections of both Matthew 12:8 and Mark 2:28. It also violates the closest Gospel parallels of this saying. In Matthew 9:38, 11:25, and 20:8, three parallel phrases occur: “Lord of the harvest,” “Lord of heaven and earth,” and “lord of the vineyard.” The idea of lordship for the purpose of abolition or destruction is absent in these passages. Thus, to introduce the thought of the abolition of the Sabbath by means of the statement that Christ is Lord of the Sabbath is clearly wrong.

In John 5:17, a different perspective is given. Jesus’ lordship over the Sabbath is even more exalted in John than it is in the synoptics.¹⁰⁹ It is as Son of Man that He is Lord of the Sabbath in the synoptics. It is here as Son of God that He claims the right to do as He was doing on the Sabbath. As the Father continues in His divine activities during the Sabbath, so also may His Son. This is the argument of Jesus. The reference to creation is clear. The implication is that the God Who rested at creation, and thus instituted the Sabbath, did not cease in a different sense to work even after He had rested. By describing this God as “My Father,” He identifies Himself with the God Who instituted the Sabbath by His example at creation.

Our conclusion must be that both as the Last Adam and the divine Son, Jesus is sovereign over the Sabbath. While this never implies the abolition of the Sabbath in the Gospels, it does anticipate the institution of the new creation Sabbath and the cessation of the old creation Sabbath. Jesus’ authority is the principle of the change that now is about to occur.

B. The Change: The Coming of the New Sabbath

Having seen the foundation and preparation for the great change in the Gospels before the resurrection, we now come to examine Christ’s lordship over the Sabbath as it is exercised in the coming of the New Sabbath, the Lord’s Day, in the post-resurrection period of the New Testament. Our method will be first to establish the fact of the Lord’s Day, in other words, its divine authority. We will then evince the sabbatic character of the Lord’s Day. Here I will show that the Lord’s Day is the Christian Sabbath.

1. The Divine Authority of the Lord’s Day

Is the first day of the week to be religiously observed? Is there divine authority for the religious observance of the Lord’s Day? Is the first day of the week the Lord’s Day? All these are simply different ways of asking: is the resurrection of Christ to be commemorated by the religious observance of the first day of the week? There is no doubt, of course, that Christ rose on the first day of the week. Why, however, should we think that this event is to be commemorated by the observance of each succeeding first day? Five reasons for the religious commemoration of the first day of the week may be given.

a. Previous significance of 1st and 8th days in the Old Testament

Jews, like the disciples of Christ, were prepared to see the significance of Christ’s resurrection on the first day of the week by the peculiar significance of first and eighth

¹⁰⁹**synoptics** – those which set forth a common view; used for the first three Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, based on their similarity in content and order.

days in the Old Testament economy. These days were not necessarily, of course, the first (or eighth) day of the week—but that is not the point. Despite this, the fact remains that, in a pervasive way, the Old Testament economy was fitted to give the impression of a special religious significance associated with first and eighth days in succession. It is this general impression that prepared the Jewish disciples of Christ to give more than passing interest to the fact of Christ's first-day resurrection.

With reference to the first day, a number of considerations are significant. The first day of Passover was a holy assembly (Exo 12:15-16; Lev 23:7; Num 28:18). The first day of the Feast of Booths was a holy assembly (Lev 23:35, 39).

With reference to the eighth day, there are a number of significant associations. The eighth day of the Feast of Booths was a rest, assembly, and sacrifice (Lev 23:36, 39; Num 29:35ff.). The eighth day was the day upon which circumcision was performed (Gen 17:12; 21:4; Lev 12:3). The eighth day was the day of the consecration of the firstborn (Exo 22:30; Lev 22:27). The eighth day was the fulfillment and conclusion of priestly ordination (Lev 9:1ff). The eighth day was the day of the offering in the cleansing of lepers, Nazarites, and those with a discharge (Lev 14:10; 15:14, 29; Num 6:10).

b. The peculiar mention of Christ's rising on the first day

Christians observe the first day for worship because of the peculiar mention and insistence upon the fact that Christ rose on the first day (Mat 28:1; Mar 16:1-2; Luk 24:1; Joh 20:1, 19).¹¹⁰ Is this five-fold re-occurrence of the phrase "the first day of the week" merely an interesting detail, or is it of religious significance? The singular importance of this repeated reference to the first day of the week may be seen by asking the question, How many [other] times are days of the week mentioned by their number in the New Testament? The answer is not once. The third day after Christ's death is mentioned. The Lord's Day is also mentioned. The preparation day for the Sabbath is mentioned. Yet, there is no other reference to a day of the week by its number in the entire New Testament. This being the case, it is difficult to think that the mention of "the first day of the week" five times by the evangelists is incidental. We are constrained to think that it has religious significance. But what is that significance? It appears to be recorded to show the origin of the Church's practice of observing the first day. There is no other natural explanation of this peculiar insistence on the "first day of the week" in the resurrection account.

c. The distinctions conferred by the resurrected Christ

Christians observe the first day because of the consequent distinctions conferred upon it by the resurrected Christ.

¹¹⁰Anti-Sabbatarians have recently become fond of translating the Greek phrase referring to the first day of the week as "the first after the Sabbath" (Bob Morey, loc. cit., 17). The standard Greek lexicons provide the translation "week" for σαββατων and also for the singular of the same word. The meaning "Sabbath" is impossible, for instance, in Luke 18:12. As the standard English translations indicate, there is no reason to adopt this eccentric translation of the text.

(1) We note first the phrase in John 20:26, “after eight days.” Since the Jews counted inclusively, this eighth day was the first day of the week. John is careful to include these details of time because they point to his Lord’s Day theology (Rev 1:10). In fact, four of the eight New Testament references to the first or Lord’s Day are in the Johannine literature of the New Testament (Joh 20:1, 19, 26; Rev 1:10).¹¹¹ John 20:26 increases strikingly in its significance when it is compared with John 21:14. In this latter passage the appearance beside the Sea of Tiberias is said to be “the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples.” This statement is, of course, problematic and must be qualified in some fashion. Whatever its specific meaning, it clearly marks the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus in John 20:19, 20:26, and 21:1 as unique and distinct. There were no intervening appearances of like character. Probably, the meaning is that Jesus, between these three appearances, did not appear to a large group of disciples (apostles). This means, of course, that between the first and eighth days of John 20 there were no like appearances to the disciples. This fact must have had a psychological effect upon the gathered disciples that would have clearly marked the first day of the week as of special significance for their resurrected Lord.

(2) Acts 2:1ff. is also significant because the day of Pentecost occurred upon the first day of the week (Lev 23:15-21). Pentecost, it is interesting to note, was a day upon which no laborious work was to be done. Thus, it was in a sense a Sabbath. At any rate, the two constitutive events of the New Covenant and the new creation (the resurrection of Christ and the Pentecostal giving of the Spirit) both occurred on the first day of the week. Surely the disciples of Christ could not have overlooked or failed to ponder these facts.

d. The observance of the first day by apostolic churches

Christians observe the first day because of the subsequent observance of the first day by apostolic churches.

1) Acts 20:7

It must be noted that Paul had been in Troas for seven days, but only the gathering of the church on the first day is mentioned. Since it appears that he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem (v. 16), this makes it all the more clear that his waiting was purposeful. He wanted to speak to the whole church when it gathered for its weekly services.

2) 1 Corinthians 16:1-2

The directions given in verse 2 had also been given to the churches in Galatia. This is brought out by the KJV translation:

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.

¹¹¹Doug Bannerman in a similar vein notes the following statistic, “Out of some twelve or thirteen recorded appearances of Christ to the disciples between His Resurrection and Ascension, six at least took place on the first day of the week.” [*The Scripture Doctrine of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 381]

Thus, the observance of the first day is seen to be common to both Corinth and the churches of Galatia.

Whether the money was saved at home or at church is disputed. Charles Hodge's comments, however, are full of good sense, and make a strong case against the interpretation that sees this saving taking place at home, and for the collection of these moneys every first day of the week when the church assembled.

To this interpretation [i.e., collection at home], it may be objected that the whole expression is thus obscure and awkward: "Let every one at home place, treasuring up what he has to give."

1) The words do not mean *to lay by at home* but *to lay by himself*. The direction is nothing more definite than *let him place by himself*, i.e., "let him take to himself what he means to give." What he was to do with it, or where he was to deposit it, is not expressed. The word *θησαυριζων* means *putting into the treasury*, or *hoarding up*, and is perfectly consistent with the assumption that the place of deposit was some common treasury, and not every man's own house.

2) If Paul directed this money to be laid up at home, why was the first day of the week selected? It is evident that the first day must have offered some special facility for doing what is here enjoined. The only reason that can be assigned for requiring the thing to be done on the first day of the week, is that on that day the Christians were accustomed to meet, and what each one had laid aside from his weekly gains could be treasured up, i.e., put into the common treasury of the church.

3) The end which the apostle desired to accomplish could not otherwise have been effected. He wished that there might be no collections when he came. But if every man had his money laid by at home, the collection would still be made [at the apostle's arrival]. The probability is, therefore, [that] Paul intended to direct the Corinthians to make a collection every Lord's Day for the poor, when they met for worship.¹¹²

It is clear that the first day of the week is regarded as an appropriate recurring day for such activity because it was the day of Christian holy assembly and worship. Thus, the first day is regarded as having special religious significance.

3) Conclusion

What we might have assumed is confirmed by these passages. The apostolic churches did see a special religious significance in the first day. It was their chosen day for corporate worship. This practice by apostolic churches implies and infers apostolic authority for the religious observance of the first day. It was not regarded as incidental that the resurrection of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit occurred on the first day. These events were viewed as setting apart the first day as one of special Christian significance.

All this suffices to prove the apostolic and divine authority of the Lord's Day, yet the strongest confirmation of the institution of the first day is yet to be discussed. In conjunction with the evidence already cited, it makes the divine authority of the Lord's Day explicit and undoubtable.

¹¹²Charles Hodge, *1 and 2 Corinthians and Ephesians*, vol. 1 (Wilmington: Sovereign Grace, 1972), 201-202.

e. *The designation of the first day by the apostle John*

Christians observe the first day because of its special designation by the apostle John in Revelation 1:10.

*I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard
behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet.*

Two questions must here be discussed.

1) *The fact of this designation*

Because this is the only use of the phrase *the Lord's Day* in the New Testament, we must ask here, Does the Lord's Day, in fact, designate the first day of the week? An affirmative answer is demanded by the following things.

(a) John assumes that what he means by the Lord's Day will be clear to the seven churches of Asia.

(b) The evidence of the rest of the New Testament for the observance of the first day makes this identification necessary.

(c) No other alternative can be suggested. Easter has been suggested, but there is no evidence in the New Testament for the yearly celebration of Easter. The Day of the Lord¹¹³ has been suggested, but two things clearly disqualify this alternative. First, it makes nonsense of verse 10. Second, the grammatical construction used in verse 10 is never used of the Day of the Lord in the dozens and hundreds of uses it is given in the Bible. Thus, if the first day is not meant, we must admit total ignorance of what the Lord's Day is, total ignorance of an institution that was a matter of common knowledge in a broad segment of the early church.

(d) The designation "Lord's Day" is a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. The day in view, then, is peculiarly connected with the lordship of Jesus Christ. There is only one day that possesses such a connection: the first day of the week. It was upon this day, when being raised from the dead, He entered in a new sense into the position of Lord (Rom 14:9; Act 2:30-36; 4:10-11; 5:30-31; Mat 28:18; Rom 1:4; Eph 1:20-22; 2:6; Phi 2:9-11; Col 1:18; Rev 1:5, 18). The mention of the Spirit (in Rev 1:10) is a reminder of the Pentecostal first day of the week upon which Jesus displayed His glory and lordship (2Co 3:17-18; 1Co 15:45).

(e) The current meaning of the phrase *the Lord's Day* in uninspired literature of about the same time was the first day of the week. The Revelation of John was probably written sometime during the years AD 95 to 100. The Lord's Day is, however, referred to in the *Didache*,¹¹⁴ which was written during the years AD 80-120. Ignatius, writing dur-

¹¹³**Day of the Lord** – Day of Judgment, when the works of men will be judged by Christ at the end of time (Mat 25:31-46).

¹¹⁴**Didache** – (*Greek*: "teaching"; known as "The Teaching of the Lord through the Twelve Apostles") a short manual of church life and morals. The first part provides a series of prohibitions and warnings. The second part provides instructions as to baptism, fasts, prayer, and the Lord's Supper. It was discovered in 1873 and published in 1883. The *Didache* is considered part of the category of second-generation Christian writings known as the Apostolic Fathers.

ing the years AD 107-116, also referred to the Lord's Day. This is not simply an argument from Church history, though that would not be without significance. Like many other words used in the Bible, the phrase *the Lord's Day* must be interpreted according to its historical context. In that historical context it was a reference to the first day of the week.¹¹⁵

2) *The significance of this designation*

In itself the significance of this phrase is quite clear. By designating the first day as the Lord's Day, the observance of the first day is shown to rest not on human custom, but on an actual divine institution. It is the *Lord's Day*, a day belonging to the Lord in a special way—not merely in human estimation, but by divine institution. It actually is, according to apostolic assertion, the *Lord's Day*.

As such, its observance, whatever that may involve, rests on divine command and not human preference. It is the Lord's Day; it must be treated as such. By the use of the term *Lord's*, a strong possessive, it is clear that the first day belongs to the Lord in a sense that other days do not. All days are the Lord's, but this one is especially His, else the words mean nothing.

The statement is often heard from anti-Sabbatarians that “all days are the Lord's.” They go on to say that they keep all days alike. This phrase clearly teaches that one day of the week is especially the Lord's. If you, therefore, keep all days alike, you are clearly failing in your duty.

The parallel between the phrase found in Revelation 1:10, *the Lord's Day*, and a phrase in 1 Corinthians 11:20, *the Lord's Supper*, confirms the thoughts just expressed. 1 Corinthians 11:20 contains the only other occurrence of the word *Lord's*—κυριακος—in the New Testament. Aren't we always to eat as unto the Lord (Rom 14:6; 1Co 10:31)? Aren't all our meals holy to the Lord? What, then, is the *Lord's Supper*? It is a special, Christian, religious observance that finds its origin in Christ and its regulation in the Word of Christ. Thus, also the Lord's Day is a special Christian religious observance that finds its origin in Christ and its regulation in the Word of Christ.

2. *The Sabbath Character of the Lord's Day*

Here we raise the question: Is the Lord's Day, however, a Sabbath? Is it to be thought of doctrinally and practically as the Christian Sabbath? The sabbatic character of the Lord's Day and the propriety of thinking of it as a Christian Sabbath are confirmed by the following considerations:

a. *Allusion to biblical phrases*

The designation *Lord's Day* clearly alludes to biblical phrases that tie it to the Sabbath. Isaiah 58:13 as translated in the KJV calls the Sabbath “my holy day” and “the holy of the Lord.” Matthew 12:8 and its parallels describe Jesus as “Lord...of the Sabbath.” Is it possible to think that, when John used the terminology *the Lord's Day*, he was not

¹¹⁵The Early Church Fathers Dionysius and Tertullian also use the designation *the Lord's Day* for the first day of the week at a slightly later period. Dionysius uses the word in approximately the year 170 and Tertullian in approximately the year 200.

remembering that the Sabbath had been the Lord's holy day and that Jesus had called Himself the Lord of the Sabbath?

b. Weekly reoccurrence

Like the Sabbath and unlike any other religious observance, the Lord's Day is the celebration of one day of weekly reoccurrence. We often forget the obvious and conspicuous similarities between the Lord's Day and the Sabbath.

c. Creation week and normative character

Like the Sabbath and unlike any other religious observance, the Lord's Day presupposes the seven-day week of creation and its normative character for the structuring of human time. The Lord's Day, thus, is rooted in creation and tied to the week of creation. Is it not an amazing proof of Christianity itself, and of the Christian Sabbath, that the division of time into seven-day periods increasingly dominates the world, in spite of the fact that there is no celestial reason for such a division?

d. A memorial

Like the Sabbath, the Lord's Day is a memorial. The Sabbath memorialized creation and the Exodus. The Lord's Day memorializes the resurrection.

e. Creation and redemption

Like the Sabbath and unlike any other religious observance, the Lord's Day is a memorial of both creation and redemption: a new creation and a greater redemption. As a memorial of Christ's resurrection, the Lord's Day commemorates both a new creation and a greater redemption.

1) A greater redemption

As the Sabbath memorialized giving Israel rest and release from Egyptian bondage (Deu 5:15), so the Lord's Day commemorates the event that has given us rest and release—redemption—from a greater bondage (Heb 2:14-15, note the language reminiscent of bondage; 2Ti 1:10; 1Pe 1:3-4; Act 26:23; Rom 1:2-4). The resurrection of Christ brings us to the rest of the eternal inheritance and releases us from the bondage of death and the fear of death.

2) A new creation

We have already seen that the Lord's Day, like the Sabbath, presupposes the seven-day week of creation. Besides those places in the New Testament that point us back to the resurrection, the first day of the week is mentioned by name only in one other place in the Bible: Genesis 1. This again points to a creation motif in the Lord's Day. Other connections are apparent. The peculiar activity of the first day was the creation of light. It is interesting to note that the resurrection is associated with the giving of light (2Ti 1:10; Act 26:23). The synoptic evangelists associate the resurrection with the return of light on the first day of the week (Mat 28:1; Mar 16:2; Luk 24:1).

The New Testament teaches, therefore, that there is a new creation *in Christ* (Gal 6:15; 2Co 5:17; Eph 2:10). The idea of new creation is frequently associated with Christ's resurrection (cf. Eph 2:10 with 2:5, 7; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10 with Rom 6:1-6; Col 1:15-18).

By union with Christ in His death, the old man is destroyed. By union with Christ in His resurrection, the new man is created. When He rose again, He became the firstborn of God's new creation. As He was the beginning of the old creation, so He is now the beginning of the new (Rev 3:14). Thus, the memorial of Christ's resurrection is of necessity a memorial of the new creation. Thus, the Lord's Day, like the Sabbath, and unlike any other religious observance, points to both creation and redemption.

f. Belonging to God

Like the Sabbath, the Lord's Day is a day belonging especially to God. Revelation 1:10 speaks of the day belonging to the Lord. The word *Lord's* is a clear possessive form designating the first day as the Lord's special possession. Since the reference is to the Lord Jesus Christ (Who is God according to Revelation 1:8 with 1:17-18 and 22:12-13), we have here a day belonging to God in a sense other days do not. This is, however, the essence of the Sabbath according to the repeated emphasis of the Old Testament. The Sabbath was emphatically God's day. "My sabbath(s)" are referred to 16 times (Exo 31:13; Lev 19:3, 30; 26:2; Neh 9:14; Isa 56:4; Eze 20:12-13, 16, 20-21, 24; 22:8, 26; 23:38; 44:24). "My holy day" is referred to one time (Isa 58:13). The Sabbath "of the LORD" (or God) five times (Deu 5:14; Lev 23: 3, 38; Exo 20:10; Isa 58:13). A Sabbath "unto [to, for] the LORD" is mentioned three times (Exo 16:23, 25; 35:2). Thus, as many as 25 times, and 17 times explicitly, the Sabbath is identified as the "Lord's Day"—His special possession. Thus, the New Testament Lord's Day is the same in essence as the Sabbath: a day for God, a day of God, a day belonging to God.

g. A holy day

Like the Sabbath, the Lord's Day is a holy day. The Sabbath was a holy day (Gen 2:3; Exo 16:23; 20:8, 11; Neh 9:14; 13:22; Isa 58:13; Jer 17:22, 24, 27; Eze 20:20). The Lord's Day is a holy day. On what basis may this be asserted? It is a holy day because it is a day that belongs especially to the Lord. It is sacred or holy because of its association with His sacred person. This is the meaning or definition of holiness or sanctification in the Bible. To sanctify is to set apart *from* common use *to* God and His service. This means that for something to be holy, and for it to belong to God in a special sense, are the same thing. It is the same identical thing for God to sanctify something and for Him to claim it as His special possession. We have seen a biblical example of this already: the Sabbath was a holy day just because it was God's day. If it is God's day, it must be holy for that very reason (Exo 13:1-2, 11-12; 19:5-6; Lev 23:1-2; Num 3:11-13; 8:12-19; 16:3-7; Deu 26:18-19; 28:9-10). Who will dare say, then, that there are no "holy days" in the New Covenant? Who will dare to assert that a day especially identified with the sacred and holy person of the Lord Jesus is not holy?

h. To be kept holy

Like the Sabbath, therefore, the Lord's Day is to be kept holy. The whole duty of the Israelite with reference to the Sabbath may be and is summarized in one concept: "sanctify it," "keep it holy," "hallow it" (Exo 20:8, 11; Neh 13:22; Jer 17:22, 24, 27; Eze 20:20). The Sabbath was to be kept holy because it *was* holy. The Lord's Day is a Sabbath, be-

cause our duty is to keep it holy. It *is* holy; our duty is, therefore, to keep it holy. Because the Lord's Day is a memorial, our duty is thus to remember it. Therefore, with explicit biblical basis, we can say in the very words of the fourth commandment, "Remember the Lord's Day to keep it holy." Our duty with reference to the Lord's Day is identical with the duty of the Israelite with reference to the Sabbath.

How is a day to be kept holy? We are not permitted to answer that question on the basis of our own speculation or ideas. It must be answered biblically. The Acts and epistles of the New Testament Scriptures never explicitly answer that question. They simply do not address it. It must be answered from the Old Testament, the Gospels, and the rest of the New Testament together. What does it mean to keep a day holy? Jesus and the fourth commandment both say the same thing on this matter.

Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates (Exo 20:9-10).

i. Corporate worship

Like the Sabbath, the Lord's Day is a day of corporate worship (Lev 23:1-3; Act 20:7).

"Yes," someone says, "but that is exactly my point. It is a day of corporate worship, but not a day of rest." There are at least four things wrong with the idea that the Lord's Day is a day of corporate worship but not a day of rest.

(1) The Lord's Day is not simply a day of corporate worship, but is also a day appropriate for private religious exercises. In fact, two of the three accounts of Lord's Day observance in the New Testament record non-corporate religious exercises (1Co 16:1-2; Rev 1:10—note that John was in exile, v. 9).

(2) The Lord's Day is not simply a day of corporate worship. It is a holy day. As we have seen, the biblical definition of a holy day demands rest from our worldly labors.

(3) To the Jewish disciples of Christ, a day of corporate worship that was not also a day of rest would have been inexplicable and incomprehensible. To a Jew, a day of rest and a day of worship could not be distinguished or separated. There is very good reason for this. In the Old Testament, rest or worship always implied the other. If you truly rested on the seventh day, you worshipped, and vice versa.

(4) But the best reason for asserting that these two things were inseparable for the disciples of Christ is simply this: Every day of sacred assembly for the Jews was a day of rest (Lev 23:2-3, 7-8, 21, 24-25, 27ff., 36; note also Exo 12:16). The anti-Sabbatarian invention of a day of corporate worship that was not also a day of rest would have been totally incomprehensible to Christ's disciples. Just because the Lord's Day was a day of worship, it must have been viewed as a day of rest by Christ's apostles. It must be remembered that all these parallels were not being presented to the secularized minds of Gentile non-Sabbatarians in the twenty-first century who do not think in Old Testament categories. They were being presented to the minds of Jewish Sabbatarians of the first century who were keenly sensitive to the Old Testament's teachings.

The conclusion demanded by all this evidence is as follows: Christ's apostles thought of and observed the Lord's Day as a Sabbath. The evidence demonstrates the sabbatic character of the Lord's Day.

C. The Change: The Passing of the Old Sabbath

We now must consider the passing of the old Sabbath in the post-resurrection period of the New Testament. Romans 14:1-6, Galatians 4:8-11, and Colossians 2:16-17 are the passages in the epistles of the New Testament cited most often by anti-Sabbatarians. The reason for this is that they are the passages that emphasize the passing of the old Sabbath of the old economy. This is a crucial emphasis in the overall teaching of biblical revelation on this subject. For this reason, simplistic interpretations of both anti-Sabbatarian and Sabbatarian varieties must be carefully avoided. On the other hand, the true relevance of these passages for the issue of the Lord's Day Sabbath must be carefully delineated.

1. *Simplistic Interpretations*

Under this heading the question to be answered is, what do these passages not teach? There follow four simplistic and inaccurate theories as to the teaching and relevance of these passages to the Christian Sabbath.

a. *Error 1: Christian liberty*

"These passages teach that all observance of days in the New Covenant is a matter of Christian liberty, a matter of indifference." This theory asserts that there is no duty in the New Covenant to observe any distinction of days. Meeting on the first day is at best a matter of "theological preference" or "voluntary custom."¹¹⁶ This theory appears to be supported by Romans 14:5, "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind"; and also by Galatians 4:10-11, which says, "'Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain."

The reply to this theory is that this interpretation violates the great hermeneutical principle, "the analogy of faith." The Baptist Confession of 1689, echoing at this point the Westminster Confession of Faith, says in chapter 1, paragraph 9,

¹¹⁶Robert Morey, loc. cit., 17. This is what I glean from the following highly ambiguous assertion of Morey: "In light of New Testament teachings, there are several theological reasons (such as the first day being the time of the resurrection and Pentecost) for Christians *preferring* to meet on Sunday. But there are no *preceptual* directives which indicate that it is sin for the brethren to meet together on some other day" [italics are Morey's]. I know of no Sabbatarians who think it is wrong to worship God on another day beside the first day, but in spite of this misrepresentation, Morey's point still appears to be that meeting on the first day is merely a matter of preference. Note also this statement of Albertus Pieters, loc. cit., p. 121: "The choice of Sunday as such a day is without divine commandment. The Church chose this day, out of regard to the resurrection of Christ, in the exercise of its Christian liberty, but might without sin have chosen any other." In this statement Pieters purports to be summarizing Calvin's view. Since Pieters adopts what he describes as Calvin's view as his own view, this statement may be taken as representative of Pieters' views.

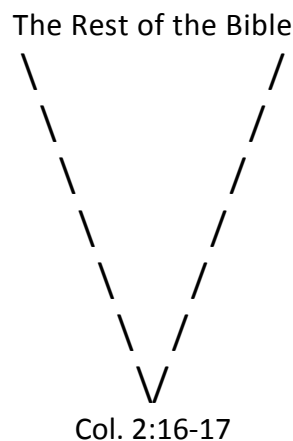
The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched by other places that speak more clearly.

The interpretation delineated here brings the Bible into conflict with itself, and Paul into conflict with both John and himself. The New Testament teaches that there is something special about the first day, that there is a Lord's Day. At the very least, then, a Christian must regard one day—that day—above another, and observe it differently than the rest. John Murray remarks,

If Paul in Romans 14:5 implies that all distinction of days has been obliterated, then there is no room for the distinctive significance of the first day of the week as the Lord's Day. The evidence supporting the memorial character of the first day is not to be controverted; and, consequently, in this respect also the assumption in question cannot be entertained—namely, that all religious distinction of days is completely abrogated in the Christian economy.¹¹⁷

This shows us that the interpretation of these passages is not as simple as this theory imagines and that we may fall into superficial misinterpretations and misapplications very easily. Such superficial thinking must be carefully avoided.

An illustration of a similar pattern of superficial interpretation is found in the man who rejects Christ's deity on the basis of Christ's assertion that "my Father is greater than I" (Joh 14:28). Such a man rejects the clearest scriptural evidence on the basis of his one supposed proof-text. Some approach the Sabbath issue in the same way. They stake their case on the three passages under discussion and forget the rest of Scripture. Thus, the facts that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance, is in the Ten Commandments, and has many parallels with the Lord's Day, are ignored. Such make the Bible stand on its head in the interest of this passage, as the following diagram illustrates:



A second false theory of the meaning of the passages under discussion is this:

¹¹⁷John Murray, *Romans*, vol. 2, 258-259.

b. Error 2: Not judge

“These passages teach that, although there is a Christian Sabbath, we ought not to judge how others observe the Christian Sabbath.” This interpretation is based primarily upon the statement of Colossians 2:16—“Let no man therefore judge you...in respect of...the sabbath days.” The reply to this misconception of the passages is very simple. This interpretation misses the underlying teaching of these passages. The reason one ought not to judge others in regard to the observances mentioned in Colossians 2:16 is that they form no part of the Christian’s duty. Such observances are shadows now fulfilled in Christ, which only the weak in faith feel constrained to regard (Col 2:16-17; Rom 14:1ff.; note particularly Gal 4:10-11). A duty of which others can never exhort you or rebuke you is a very strange duty. It is in reality no duty at all. Can it really be that someone who claims to believe in the Christian Sabbath could on the Lord’s Day go water-skiing, watch NFL football, and work non-mandatory overtime—and yet legitimately object to being rebuked for such activities by saying, “You must not judge my observance of the Sabbath!”?

c. Error 3: Not refer to the weekly, seventh-day Sabbath

“These passages do not refer to the weekly, seventh-day Sabbath.” This is a misconception that is often voiced by Sabbatarians. It regards the reference of these passages as exclusively a reference to the other ceremonial days and sabbaths of the Jewish economy. No less an exegete than John Murray advocates this idea. Note his argument:

In accord with the analogy of Scripture and particularly the teaching of Paul, Romans 14:5 can properly be regarded as referring to the ceremonial holy days of the Levitical institution. The obligation to observe these is clearly abrogated in the New Testament. They have no longer relevance, or sanction; and the situation described in Romans 14:5 perfectly accords with what Paul would say with reference to religious scrupulosity,¹¹⁸ or the absence of such, anent¹¹⁹ these days...To place the Lord’s Day and the weekly Sabbath in the same category is not only beyond the warrant of exegetical requirements, but brings us into conflict with principles that are embedded in the total witness of Scripture.¹²⁰

Careful exegesis, notwithstanding Murray’s deserved reputation as an exegete, shows that a reference to the seventh-day Sabbath cannot be excluded from these passages. This is so for at least three reasons.

(1) There is an allusion to Old Testament phraseology in Colossians 2:16-17 that definitely includes the seventh-day Sabbath (1Ch 23:31; 2Ch 2:4; 8:13; 31:3; Neh 10:33; Eze 45:17; Isa 1:13-14).

(2) Colossians 2:16-17 refers to those things that were a shadow of what was to come. The seventh-day Sabbath, as we have seen, did have a typological character from

¹¹⁸**scrupulosity** – minute carefulness, exactness, or precision.

¹¹⁹**anent** – concerning; in regards to.

¹²⁰John Murray, *Romans*, vol. 2; 257, 259.

the beginning of creation. It may, from that standpoint, be seen as a shadow. This character of the Sabbath as a shadow was further augmented by the Exodus.

(3) The preferable interpretation of Romans 14:5 sees in it an explicit reference to the seventh-day Sabbath. In all likelihood, Paul is thinking of the holy days of the Jewish calendar, and not to the days of the week or year, when he says, “One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike.” A probable reconstruction of the situation would be that Jewish believers, although they regarded much of it as fulfilled, continued to observe a part of this calendar of holy days. What day would naturally suggest itself as of more binding significance than the rest of the Jewish calendar? Clearly, the seventh-day Sabbath, because of its place in the Ten Commandments and in creation, would commend itself to such believers as different from the other holy days of the Jewish calendar. In this regard, it is interesting to notice that the Hellenistic¹²¹ Jews viewed the weekly Sabbath as a creation ordinance.¹²² It is probable, then, that the specific day that Paul says some regarded as more binding than the other days of the Jewish calendar in Romans 14:5, was the seventh-day Sabbath.

There is a pointed practical reason for not missing the clear reference of these passages to the seventh-day Sabbath. These passages provide a pointed reproof of seventh-day Sabbatarianism. Interpreted as I understand them, they clearly teach that the seventh-day Sabbath is not binding on the Christian Church. On the other hand, those Christian Sabbatarians who deny this reference to the seventh-day Sabbath, place themselves, in my opinion, at a distinct polemical disadvantage in dealing with seventh-day Sabbatarians.

d. Error 4: Refer to the weekly, seventh-day Sabbath

“These passages do refer to the weekly, seventh-day Sabbath and this forbids every sabbatic view of the Lord’s Day.” The reasoning of this group is very similar to the preceding, only with a different conclusion. Both groups think that if the passages under discussion are a reference to the seventh-day Sabbath, this automatically destroys the Christian Sabbath. Thus, on the one hand, some Christian Sabbatarians deny that they refer to it, and on the other hand, non-Sabbatarians conclude that because they refer to the weekly Sabbath, there is no Christian Sabbath.¹²³

This position is also simplistic and that for several reasons.

(1) It displays a great deal of ignorance historically. Many of the greatest Christian Sabbatarians have adopted this exegesis of Colossians 2:16 that allows it to include a reference to the weekly Sabbath without giving up their position.¹²⁴

¹²¹**Hellenistic** – pertaining to Greek culture, language, or heritage.

¹²²Beckwith and Stott, loc. cit., 8-9.

¹²³Steve Carpenter, in a lengthy paper entitled, “The Sabbath Institution: The Body Is Christ,” assumes that if he can establish that Colossians 2:16 is a reference to the seventh-day Sabbath, then he will have refuted the Christian Sabbath position.

¹²⁴Note the understanding adopted by B. B. Warfield in his *Selected Shorter Writings*, vol. 1 (Nutley: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970), 321-324; Robert Dabney, *Writings Evangelical and Theological* vol. 1 (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 526-530; Patrick Fairbairn, *The Revelation of Law in*

(2) It ignores the clear biblical evidence for the sabbatic character of the Lord's Day.

(3) Its distinction between observing the Lord's Day and resting on the Sabbath as two entirely different things has no support in the Scriptures. In fact, in Romans 14:5-6, the words *esteem* (κρίνω) and *regard* (φρονέω) are used to describe what was undoubtedly Sabbath observance!

(4) It is illogical. The passing of the positive institution of the observance of a religious rest on the seventh day of every week, known popularly as the Sabbath, may be asserted without at the same time asserting that the natural and moral foundation of that institution has been wrecked. The passing of the seventh-day observance of rest may be asserted without denying the coming of a positive institution in which the first day of the week is observed as a day of rest or a Sabbath.

This brings us to the proper interpretation of these passages.

2. *Proper Interpretation*

a. *Crucial perspective*

The above interpretations are inadequate and simplistic for many reasons, but one of the main reasons is that they do not take into account a crucial perspective that governs Paul's thought in these passages. This perspective is simply that Paul's emphasis and exclusive focus in these passages is on the old creation and its peculiar order. Paul is thinking only of the religious order of the old creation, and is not for the moment thinking of the new creation order.

One thing that makes this obvious is that Paul could never have spoken as he did in Romans 14:5-6, if he were not thinking exclusively of the *old order*. The fact is that there was a day in the *new order* that Paul regarded and observed as a matter of duty. This fact, however, is simply not within the universe of discourse found in Romans 14:5.

Galatians 4:8-11 also makes clear that it is the old order that is Paul's exclusive focus of attention. The reference to the "weak and beggarly elements" (v. 9) is a reference to the old order. Both the Gentile religions (v. 8) and divinely revealed Judaism were *old order* religions. One characteristic of both was an extensive religious calendar that possessed a mysterious significance.

All this becomes even clearer in Colossians 2. Paul is addressing a heresy that is retrogressive¹²⁵ in character, a heresy that carries over into the new age things abolished by the coming of Christ. Note the re-occurrence of the word elements στοιχια ("rudiments" of the world) in verses 8 and 20, the observance of Jewish dietary and calendar laws in verse 16, the observance of circumcision in verse 11, and the veneration of angels in verse 18.

It may be asked, how is the veneration of angels connected with the old order? Isn't the worship of angels wrong at any time? To this question, it may be replied as follows.

Scripture (Winona Lake: Alpha Publications, 1979), 472-474; Douglas Bannerman, *Scripture Doctrine of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 516.

¹²⁵retrogressive – degenerating; going backward.

Certainly, no one should ever have worshipped angels, but it is also true that angels occupied a place in the *old order* that they do not have in the *new*. This was in part the occasion of their veneration, though, of course, not an excuse for it. Angels occupied a prominent place in the giving of the Old Covenant (Act 7:38, 53; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2). Angels occupied a prominent place in the *old age*, which they do not occupy in the *new age* (Heb 2:5-9).

Paul counters this backward cult with an emphasis on the new creation in Christ, which makes all of these things outmoded for the Christian. These observances are a denial of Christ's work and person as the content of God's mystery and the bringer of the *new order* (Col 1:25-28; 2:2-3, 9). If we understand this crucial perspective, we are now in a position to deal with Colossians 2:16.

b. Necessary conclusions

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ. (Col 2:16-17)

What is it that Paul is concerned to guard against in the observance of Sabbaths? Paul tells us in verse 17 that he is concerned about any observance of the Sabbath as a shadow. He wants to guard against any observance of days that is a denial of the new creation in Christ, any observance that ignores or depreciates the new day brought by Christ. The seventh-day Sabbath was such a shadow. Its observance is, therefore, not mandatory for the Christian who understands that the shadows of the old order have passed in the blazing light of the revelation of God's mystery in Christ. The old Sabbath was a shadow and a mystery. To observe it is just to confess that God has not yet revealed in Christ the shadows and mysteries of the *old order*. This is, of course, to deny Christ. This perspective warrants three conclusions regarding the relation of this passage to the question of the weekly Sabbath.

(1) Paul's great concern here is not the mere observance of days, nor even the observance of days by means of a holy rest (Rom 14:5-6). His concern is the observance of anything *as a shadow*. He does not equate observing Sabbaths with legalism, but with superstition.

(2) The term *sabbath days* is a technical reference to the seventh-day Sabbath of the *old order*. That is to say, it is a reference to an institution of the *old order*, not to a mode of observing holy days. The abolition of the seventh-day Sabbath does not, therefore, carry with it the inference that (a) there is no Lord's Day, or (b) the Lord's Day is not to be observed by a holy rest.

(3) The Lord's Day even observed by means of a holy rest is not a shadow or mystery. It is a sign of Christ's resurrection by which He brought to light life and immortality. It is part of the body, the fulfillment that belongs to Christ. It is not a dark shadow, but a blazing testimony to the fulfillment brought in by Christ. The seventh-day Sabbath and the Lord's Day are two similar institutions in that they embody a common moral princi-

ple. Yet, they are also two different institutions. The great difference between them is that the one was a shadow or a mystery pointing forward to Christ. The other is not. This difference, then, has nothing to do with whether their observance should involve a holy rest or Sabbath.

SECTION THREE

ITS PRECEDENTS

CHAPTER 10

THE LORD'S DAY IN THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS

General Introduction

If one is by biblical conviction a Protestant and denies that Church tradition possesses any divine authority, Church history or historical theology can never be the root out of which his doctrinal convictions grow. Nevertheless, while Protestants cannot ascribe authority to Church history, neither can they ignore it. This is certainly true of doctrinal convictions that are more concerned with Christian ethics. The study of Church history, while it may never challenge the Word of God, may properly challenge, inform, and refine our fallible interpretations of it.

What William Cunningham (1805-1861), a faithful son of the Protestant Reformation, says of the early fathers is true of this subject in general.

Whatever weight may be ascribed to the opinions of the fathers, and on whatever grounds the weight that is ascribed to them may be made to rest, no one disputes the propriety and the importance of ascertaining, as far as we can, what their views really were; and most theologians in modern times, whatever opinions they may entertain upon the general question of the deference to be paid to the fathers, have shown some desire to exhibit in their own behalf the testimony of the early church, whenever it could with any plausibility be adduced; and this has given rise to a great deal of learned, voluminous, and often intricate and wearisome discussion...Both in these more ancient and in more modern times, men have acted upon a notion, more or less distinctly conceived, and more or less earnestly maintained, that the fact of a doctrine, or system of doctrines, having been held by the early church, afforded some

presumption that it had been taught by the apostles. As a general position, this may, perhaps, be admitted to be true; but it needs to be very cautiously applied, and to be restricted within very narrow limits.¹²⁶

This study of the church-historical precedents of the “Christian Sabbath” must necessarily be selective. Yet there are two church-historical questions with reference to this issue that are of importance on this subject. Those two questions have to do with the Lord’s Day in the Apostolic Fathers and the Lord’s Day in Calvin’s¹²⁷ thought.

The selection of these two aspects of Church history does not require extensive justification, but some comment is appropriate. The Apostolic Fathers are the earliest post-apostolic (and, thus, uninspired) writers of the Christian Church. Standing at that early position in Church history, we naturally expect to find in them some corroborating evidence for our interpretation of the New Testament. For this reason, their writings hold an unusual interest for Christians.

Calvin, similarly, stands as the principal figure of the Reformed tradition. For those who stand in the Reformed tradition, his views on any subject cannot but be of intense interest. This is particularly the case when it is understood that it was within the precincts of the Reformed tradition that the modern Christian Sabbatarian tradition primarily developed. For those who claim standing in the Reformed tradition it is, at least, of polemic significance to be able to claim so seminal¹²⁸ a thinker as Calvin for their understanding of the Lord’s Day issue.

Two questions are to be addressed here. They are substantially the same two questions that occupied our attention as we studied the New Testament’s material of the Lord’s Day.

- A. The Question of the Apostolic Origin of the Lord’s Day
- B. The Question of the Sabbatic Character of the Lord’s Day

A. The Question of the Apostolic Origin of the Lord’s Day

1. The Presentation of the Evidence

There are four references to the Lord’s Day in the period of the Apostolic Fathers.

AD 107 — Ignatius¹²⁹

Those, then, who lived by ancient practices, arrived at a new hope. They ceased to keep the Sabbath and lived by the Lord’s Day, on which our life as well as theirs shone forth, thanks to Him and His death, though some deny this.¹³⁰

¹²⁶Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, vol. 1, 176.

¹²⁷**John Calvin** (1509-1564) – the father of Reformed and Presbyterian theology. During the course of his 25 year ministry in Geneva, Calvin lectured and preached an average of five sermons a week in addition to writing a commentary on nearly every book of the Bible. Born in Noyon, Picardie, France.

¹²⁸**seminal** – in seed form; at the root or heart of an issue.

¹²⁹**Ignatius of Antioch** (c. AD 67-108) – Apostolic Father, third bishop of Antioch, and a student of John the Apostle; he was martyred for his faith.

AD 100 — *Didache* (Richardson supports an ancient origin for this section of the *Didache*. Note the section with reference to prophets that immediately precedes it.)¹³¹

On every Lord's Day—His special day—come together and break bread and give thanks, first confessing your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure.¹³²

AD 131 — Barnabas

Your present Sabbaths are not acceptable to Me, but that is which I have made; (namely this,) when, giving rest to all things, I shall make a beginning of the eighth day, that is, a beginning of another world. Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead. And when He had manifested Himself, He ascended into the heavens.¹³³

AD 112 — Pliny¹³⁴ (Though Pliny is, of course, not an Apostolic Father, his reference to the Lord's Day is cited here because of its being demonstrably of their period.)

But they maintained that their fault or error amounted to nothing more than this: they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before sunrise and reciting an antiphonal hymn to Christ as God, and binding themselves with an oath: not to commit any crime, but to abstain from all acts of theft, robbery and adultery, from breaches of faith, from denying a trust when called upon to honor it. After this, they went on; it was their custom to separate, and then meet again to partake of food, but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.¹³⁵

Schaff's conclusion from this evidence sums up the case for the Apostolic origin of the Lord's Day very well.

The celebration of the Lord's Day in memory of the resurrection of Christ dates undoubtedly from the apostolic age. Nothing short of apostolic precedent can account for the universal religious observance in the churches of the second century. There is no dissenting voice. This custom is confirmed by the testimonies of the earliest post-apostolic writers, as Barnabas, Ignatius, and Justin Martyr. It is also confirmed by the younger Pliny. The *Didache* calls the first day "the Lord's Day of the Lord."¹³⁶

Schaff's conclusion is further confirmed by the widely varying geographical origins of these four documents. They come respectively from Antioch in Syria, the Eastern Mediterranean area generally, Alexandria, and Bithynia in Asia Minor.

¹³⁰*Magnesians*, 9:1; Richardson, 96.

¹³¹Richardson, 162-166.

¹³²*Didache*, 14:1; Richardson, 178.

¹³³*Epistle of Barnabas*, ch. 15 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, 147.

¹³⁴**Pliny the Younger** (AD 61 - c. 113) – Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus; lawyer, author, and magistrate of ancient Rome. Pliny wrote hundreds of letters, many of which still survive, that are of great historical value for the time period. Some are addressed to reigning emperors or to notables such as the historian Tacitus and the emperor Trajan.

¹³⁵Bruce, *Spreading Flame*, 170.

¹³⁶Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 2, 94.

2. *The Significance of the Evidence*

Two positions are, historically speaking, most questionable in light of this evidence. The first is what may be called the extreme continuity view. By this title I intend to designate the view of the seventh-day Sabbatarians, i.e., the Seventh Day Adventists. Clearly, the Church in the period of the Apostolic Fathers regarded the first day of the week, and not the Jewish Sabbath, as its special day of worship. The second view is what may be called the extreme discontinuity view. By this title I intend those who deny all distinction of days under the New Covenant, i.e., Robert Morey¹³⁷ and certain Dispensationalists.

Given the contrast and antithesis drawn by the Apostolic Fathers between the Sabbath and the Lord's Day, any view of the Christian Sabbath that sees little or no discontinuity between Sabbath and Lord's Day, except a mere change of the day, is also questionable in terms of the historical evidence. (Some of the more extreme Puritans may have held such a position, though not ones like John Owen.¹³⁸)

For purposes of clarity, four positions on this issue may be distinguished—ranging from the extreme discontinuity position on the one hand, to the extreme continuity position on the other. Beginning with the former position, we may distinguish the following:

No Distinction of Days position (NDD),
 Non-sabbatic Lord's Day position (NLD),
 Sabbatic Lord's Day position (SLD), and
 Seventh Day Sabbath position (SDS).

At this point in our study, we may rate these positions in terms of their correspondence with the historical evidence as follows.

HISTORICAL PROBABILITY OF THE
 VARIOUS POSITIONS ON THE LORD'S DAY
 (BASED ON THE LITERATURE OF THE PERIOD
 OF THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS)

NDD	NLD	SLD	SDS
???	---?	---	???

KEY: ??? = VERY IMPROBABLE
 ? = IMPROBABLE
 --- = POSSIBLE

¹³⁷Robert A. Morey, "Is Sunday the 'Christian Sabbath?'" in *Baptist Reformation Review* 8, no. 1 (First Quarter, 1979): 3ff. (Note especially p. 17.)

¹³⁸John Owen (1616-1683) – called "The Prince of the Puritans," a chaplain in the army of Oliver Cromwell and vice-chancellor of Oxford University. Most of his life he served as a minister in Congregational churches. His written works are among the best resources for theology in the English language. Born to Puritan parents in the Oxfordshire village of Stadhampton.

B. The Question of Sabbatic Character of the Lord's Day

1. *The Nature of the Question*

There are two *essential elements* of a sabbatic Lord's Day position. *First*, Lord's Day observance embodies cessation from all unnecessary labors. The Lord's Day is a day of rest, though not of superstitious or legalistic cessation. *Second*, Lord's Day observance embodies continuity with Old Testament Sabbath observance, though not to the denial of all discontinuity between the Sabbath and the Lord's Day.

2. *The Necessity of Caution*

The historical evidence is of less significance on this than the previous issue. Two reasons may be given in support of this assertion. *First*, it is a less general, more precise issue. Recall the general introduction to this section. The distinction between a non-sabbatic view of the Lord's Day and a sabbatic view of the Lord's Day is clearly more subtle than the broad distinctions discussed under the first question. (See the diagram above.) *Second*, it is a less external and more theological issue. Theology tends to change faster than practice. Tradition tends to conserve practices after their theological rationale has disappeared.

3. *The Evaluation of the Evidence*

Here I have included later second-century evidence so as to avoid any appearance of bias.

a. Evidence against the sabbatic view of the Lord's Day

1) Presented

a) Ignatius

Ignatius appears to contrast the Sabbath and the Lord's Day rather than to set them in a relation of continuity.

Those, then, who lived by ancient practices, arrived at a new hope. They ceased to keep the Sabbath and lived by the Lord's Day, on which our life as well as theirs shone forth, thanks to Him and His death, though some deny this (*Magnesians* 9:1).

b) Justin Martyr (c. 160)

As mentioned above, I have included Justin Martyr here even though he is not from the period of the Apostolic Fathers. I have done so because he may be cited as a primary reference for a non-sabbatic view of the Lord's Day.

Fragment XV: Here Justin teaches that the seventh day was to be unending. This is often, though not always, an anti-Sabbatarian position.

And the fact that it was not said of the seventh day equally with the other days, "And there was evening, and there was morning," is a distinct indication of the consummation which is to take place in it before it is finished...¹³⁹

¹³⁹*Fragment XV, Ante-Nicene Fathers* 301-302.

Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, 12: Here Justin teaches that the New Covenant Sabbath is perpetual. This also sounds quite like a non-sabbatic view of the Lord's Day.

The new law requires you to keep perpetual Sabbath, and you, because you are idle for one day, suppose you are pious, not discerning why this has been commanded you; and if you eat unleavened bread, you say the will of God has been fulfilled. The Lord our God does not take pleasure in such observances. If there is any perjured person or a thief among you, let him cease to be so; if any adulterer, let him repent—then he has kept the sweet and true Sabbaths of God. If anyone has impure hands, let him wash and be pure.¹⁴⁰

Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, 19, 27: Here Justin asserts that there was no Sabbath before Moses. Again this is a typically, though not necessarily, non-sabbatic view of the Lord's Day.

Moreover, all those righteous men already mentioned, though they kept no Sabbaths, were pleasing to God; and after them Abraham with all his descendants until Moses, under whom your nation appeared unrighteous and ungrateful to God, making a calf in the wilderness...Or why did He not teach those—who are called righteous and pleasing to Him, who lived before Moses and Abraham, who were not circumcised in their foreskin, and observed no Sabbaths—to keep these institutions?¹⁴¹

Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, 21: Again, in a way typical of a non-sabbatic view of the Lord's Day, Justin teaches that the Sabbath was only a sign like other Mosaic precepts.

Moreover, that God enjoined you to keep the Sabbath, and impose on you other precepts for a sign, as I have already said—on account of your unrighteousness and that of your fathers, as He declares that for the sake of the nations, lest His name be profaned among them, therefore He permitted some of you to remain alive—these words of His can prove to you. They are narrated by Ezekiel thus: I am the Lord your God; walk in My statutes, and keep My judgments, and take no part in the customs of Egypt; and hallow My Sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that ye may know that I am the Lord your God (Eze 20:18-20).¹⁴²

2) *Evaluated*

While one must avoid the tendency to explain away data that appears to contradict one's own position, several remarks will serve to put the above data in perspective.

The contrast of Ignatius is an implied parallel, just as the Pauline contrast between Adam and Christ is also an implied parallel (Rom 5; 1Co 15). To use a non-biblical illustration, when Joe was substituted for Bill at third base, there is discontinuity; but there is also continuity, because both played the same position. In Ignatius' statement, both the Sabbath and the Lord's Day, so to speak, occupy the same position in their respective economies.

¹⁴⁰*Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, ch. 12, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, 200.

¹⁴¹*Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, chs. 19, 27, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, pp. 204, 208.

¹⁴²*Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, ch. 21, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, p. 204.

The polemic necessity of Justin and the early church tended to blind them to continuity. It must be remembered that Justin was arguing with a Jew, and so could be expected to emphasize the differences between Christianity and Judaism, and not their similarities. Thus, the historical situation tended to emphasize the differences, and disguise the parallels, between Christianity and Judaism. This imbalance is not surprising. As time passed, the parallels and continuity between the Old Testament and New Testament economies would be more evident. Illustration of this may be gleaned from the experience of moving to a different area of the country. Those who have had this experience will attest that it is the differences that are first noticed. In several years, however, the differences that appeared so stark at first may seem much less important, and the parallels and continuity of life wherever one lives will be more impressive. The same psychological principle appears to have influenced early Christians as they analyzed the relationship between Judaism and Christianity.

Finally, note what is glaringly missing in this evidence. There is no evidence—zero—that Christians worked on the Lord's Day. Not a line of proof for this frequently assumed idea is found in the Apostolic Fathers. Slaves may have worked out of necessity, but there is no evidence even for this.

b. Evidence for the Christian Sabbath view of the Lord's Day

We now must consider the evidence for the Christian Sabbath view of the Lord's Day, i.e., the sabbatic Lord's Day view.

1) Evidence for a broader observance of the Lord's Day

First, we consider the evidence for a broader observance of the Lord's Day than that usually associated with a non-sabbatic Lord's Day position.

In Ignatius' statement cited above, "living in observance of the Lord's day,"¹⁴³ a way of life is implied. This appears to be evidence for a broader observance of the Lord's Day than that usually associated with a non-sabbatic Lord's Day position.

The phrase in the *Didache* cited above, "the Lord's Day of the Lord,"¹⁴⁴ is translated by Richardson: "On every Lord's Day, His special day." There is an emphasis here that does not accord with the rather casual view of the Lord's Day characteristic of a non-sabbatic position.

Pliny implies that there were two distinct services on the Lord's Day.

But they maintained that their fault or error amounted to nothing more than this: they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before sunrise and reciting an antiphonal hymn to Christ as God...After this, they went on; it was their custom to separate, and then meet again to partake of food.¹⁴⁵

Justin Martyr parallels this with his description of Christian worship, where he says that "all from city and country assembled." The worship so described would appear to have

¹⁴³Ignatius, *Magnesians*, 9:1.

¹⁴⁴*Didache*, 14:1.

¹⁴⁵Bruce, *Spreading Flame*, 170.

been so time-consuming that, practically speaking, Sabbath observance would have been necessary.

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings or the prophets are read, as long as time permits. Then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do and willing give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succors the orphans and widows, and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want,¹⁴⁶ and those who are in beds, and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need.¹⁴⁷

2) Evidence for a sabbatic view of the Lord's Day

Justin Martyr in the year 160 gives the Lord's Day a creational context.

But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that on Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration.¹⁴⁸

In 170, Dionysius of Corinth says (according to Schaff's translation), "Today we kept the Lord's day holy."¹⁴⁹ The *Ante-Nicene Fathers* translation¹⁵⁰ is, "We passed this holy Lord's day."¹⁵¹

In the year 200, Tertullian is the first to teach explicitly and overtly the necessity of the cessation of labor on the Lord's Day. Around the beginning of the third century, Ter-

¹⁴⁶want – need.

¹⁴⁷*First Apology*, ch. 67, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, 186.

¹⁴⁸*First Apology*, ch. 67.

¹⁴⁹Schaff, 95.

¹⁵⁰*Ante-Nicene Fathers* (subtitled "The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325") – collection of books in ten volumes (one volume is indexes) containing English translations of the majority of early Christian writings. The series was originally published between 1867 and 1873 by the Presbyterian publishing house T. & T. Clark in Edinburgh, Scotland, under the title *Ante-Nicene Christian Library* (ANCL), edited by Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. In 1885, the Christian Literature Company, first of Buffalo then New York, began to issue the volumes in a reorganized form, edited by the Episcopalian bishop of New York, A. Cleveland Coxe, under the title *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. By 1896, this American edition/revision was complete.

¹⁵¹*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 8, 765.

tullian views the Lord's Day as figurative of rest from labor and typical of man's final rest, and says,

We have nothing to do with Sabbaths, new moons or the Jewish festivals, much less with those of the heathen. We have our own solemnities, the Lord's Day, for instance, and Pentecost. As the heathen confine themselves to their festivals and do not observe ours, let us confine ourselves to ours and not meddle with those belonging to them.

He thought it wrong to fast on the Lord's Day, or to pray kneeling during its continuance. "Sunday we give to joy." But he also considered it Christian duty to abstain from secular care and labor, lest we give place to the devil. This is the first express evidence of cessation from labor on Sunday among Christians. The habit of standing in prayer on Sunday, which Tertullian regarded as essential to the festive character of the day, and which was sanctioned by an ecumenical council, was afterwards abandoned by the western church.¹⁵²

In the year 131, Barnabas calls the eighth day "a Sabbath," a clear reference to the Lord's Day. This is explicit evidence that the sabbatic view of the Lord's Day was current in the period of the Apostolic Fathers. It is implied that it is such as a result of the new creation.

Further, he says to them, "Your new moons and your Sabbaths I cannot endure." Ye perceive how He speaks: Your present Sabbaths are not acceptable to Me, but that is which I have made, (namely this,) when, giving rest to all things, I shall make a beginning of the eighth day, that is, a beginning of another world. Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead. And when He had manifested Himself, He ascended into the heavens.¹⁵³

C. Concluding Observations on the Historical Evidence

1. Charity is warranted towards those who hold a high, though non-sabbatic, view of the Lord's Day. This position, though unsatisfactory in many regards, acknowledges the apostolic origin of the Lord's Day and avoids the extremes of those who deny any sanction beyond preference to the Lord's Day.

2. Confidence is warranted in the historical defensibility of a moderate Christian Sabbath (or a sabbatic Lord's Day) position. The evidence from the earliest period of the Church is, to say the least, more amenable to this position than any other.

3. Rejection, on the plane of historical defensibility, is necessary for the seventh-day Sabbatarian position and the position that claims there is no distinction of days. The words of Schaff bear quotation again at this point.

The celebration of the Lord's Day in memory of the resurrection of Christ dates undoubtedly from the apostolic age. Nothing short of apostolic precedent can account

¹⁵²Schaff, 95.

¹⁵³*Epistle of Barnabas*, ch. 15, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, p. 147.

for the universal religious observance in the churches of the second century. There is no dissenting voice.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴Schaff, 94. Later second century references to the Lord's Day are not mentioned in this treatment. Cf. Irenaeus, *Fragment VII* (*Ante-Nicene Fathers* vol. 1, 569), and Melito of Sardis' lost work (*Ante-Nicene Fathers* vol. 8, 758).

CHAPTER 11

THE LORD'S DAY IN CALVIN'S THOUGHT

A. Partisan Reaction

1. Sabbatarian Claims

Calvin has been frequently cited in support of Christian Sabbatarianism by later exponents of the Puritan view of the Sabbath. It is not, of course, surprising that Calvin's reputation would, if possible, be enlisted in support of any view taught by those in the Reformed tradition. The enlistment of Calvin's name in support of the Puritan view of the Sabbath originated in the work most closely associated with its birth. Nicholas Bound was the author of the first extensive Puritan interpretation of the Sabbath commandment.¹⁵⁵ John Primus remarks, "Nicholas Bound was acquainted with the writings of Calvin, surely regarded himself as a follower of Calvin, and even appealed to Calvin in support of some of his views on the Sabbath."¹⁵⁶ Later, Primus notes that these numerous citations come from Calvin's commentaries, and even more numerous from Calvin's sermons on Deuteronomy. He then remarks:

On the other hand, it is significant that there are no references at all to Calvin's *Institutes*¹⁵⁷ in spite of the fact that they were well known and widely used at Cambridge, and must have been well known to Bound. They were also available to Bound in his own language.¹⁵⁸

Thus, in the seminal Puritan work on the Sabbath, Calvin is extensively—but as Primus notes—selectively cited.

2. Anti-Sabbatarian Counter-claims

If the father of Puritan Sabbatarianism can quote Calvin in favor of his position extensively, its adversaries have frequently and emphatically quoted him against Puritan Sabbatarianism. Robert Morey makes his view of Calvin's position very plain:

The early church did not see any relationship between the Lord's Day and the fourth commandment. The Sabbath was viewed as a ceremonial law fulfilled in Christ...The pre-Reformers and early Reformers threw out the medieval Catholic Sabbath and re-

¹⁵⁵This treatise was entitled *The Doctrine of the Sabbath* (London: Orwin for Porter and Man, 1595).

¹⁵⁶John H. Primus, "Calvin and the Puritan Sabbath: A Comparative Study," in *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. David E. Holwerda, 41.

¹⁵⁷*Institutes of the Christian Religion* – one of the first statements of systematic theology and considered the foundational explanation of Reformed theology, published in Latin in 1536, with the definitive edition appearing in 1559.

¹⁵⁸Primus, loc. cit., 58-59.

turned to the theology of the early church (cf. Dr. Richard Gaffin, *Calvin and the Sabbath*).¹⁵⁹

Albertus Pieters maintains a similar perspective when he remarks:

Since the Reformation, three views with regard to the fourth commandment, which sharply differ from one another, have been held within churches usually called Reformed or Calvinistic...The best known is probably the Westminster view. It is stated in the Shorter Catechism...and in almost identical wording in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), chapter 21, section 7...At the opposite pole from this view is that of John Calvin, who denied that the fourth commandment has any authority as a rule of conduct for the Christian. This is stated in the *Institutes*...¹⁶⁰

These partisan reactions to the teaching of John Calvin with respect to the Sabbath constitute a call for a careful and balanced exposition of his statements on the subject, and a warning against a superficial assessment in which our own partisan prejudices are used to filter Calvin's teaching and make it approximate our own views. They also focus attention on what appears to be a discrepancy between the remarks of Calvin in his commentaries and sermons on the subject, and the exposition of the subject in the *Institutes*.

B. Balanced Exposition

1. The Methodological Question

It is useful to begin this attempt at a balanced exposition of Calvin's views on this subject by examining a question of methodology. The relative importance of the teaching of Calvin in the *Institutes*, as opposed to that of his sermons and commentaries, has been disputed.¹⁶¹ It cannot be maintained that the *Institutes* represent Calvin's earlier views since the final greatly expanded edition appeared in 1559, only five years before his death. Furthermore, Calvin did in some sense explicitly ascribe a systematic importance to the *Institutes* as compared to his commentaries. Calvin intended the second and subsequent editions of the *Institutes* as a companion volume to his commentaries. Thus, he avoided the necessity of taking up doctrinal themes in his commentaries and could maintain their brevity.¹⁶²

On the other hand, it would be plainly wrong to allow the systematic importance of the *Institutes* to blind us to the plain assertions of Calvin's other writings. It would be particularly wrong to allow our understanding of the *Institutes* to make us ignore other clear statements of Calvin. It would certainly be misguided to allow our interpretations of Calvin to be uninformed by the teaching of the other writings. Thus, no regulative or exclusive authority can be ascribed to the *Institutes* as opposed to Calvin's commentaries

¹⁵⁹Robert Morey, loc. cit., 17.

¹⁶⁰Albertus Pieters, "Three Views of the Fourth Commandment," in *The Calvin Forum* (January 1941), 119.

¹⁶¹ Albertus Pieters, loc. cit., 120.

¹⁶² John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, trans. John Allen (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education), 18-19.

and sermons. These other writings must be allowed to supplement and inform our understanding of Calvin's position.

2. *The Major Sources*

If we are to achieve, then, a balanced exposition of Calvin's view of the Sabbath, we must take into account at least three major sources of information: a) the *Institutes*, 2:8:28-34;¹⁶³ b) the *Commentary on Genesis*, 2:2-3;¹⁶⁴ and c) the *Sermons on the Ten Commandments* based on Deuteronomy 5, sermons 5 and 6.¹⁶⁵ These are the strategic sources, but, of course, Calvin's commentaries may be consulted at the other relevant places in Scripture and particularly his exposition of Exodus 20:8-11.

a. *Institutes*, 2:8:28-34

1) *Complexity of Calvin's view*

The opening remarks of Calvin on the fourth commandment make clear both the major theme of Calvin's treatment and its inherent complexity.

The end of this precept is that, being dead to our own affections and works, we should meditate on the kingdom of God, and be exercised in that meditation in the observance of His institutions. But, as it has an aspect peculiar and distinct from the others, it requires a little different kind of exposition. The fathers frequently call it a *shadowy commandment*, because it contains the external observance of the day, which was abolished with the rest of the figures at the advent of Christ. And there is much truth in their observation, but it reaches only half of the subject. Wherefore, it is necessary to seek further for an exposition, and to consider three causes, on which I think this commandment to rest. (2:8:28)

The opening words of this quotation state what may justly be called the major theme of Calvin's view of the Sabbath. It is for Calvin an ordinance intended to point the Jews to a kind of spiritual rest, in which we rest from, or die to, our sins and have God work in us spiritual grace. Even here, however, the complications of Calvin's view begin to become clear. Calvin goes on to mention in the same sentence that not only should we "meditate on the kingdom of God," but also "be exercised in that meditation in the observance of His institutions." What institutions Calvin has in mind will be made clear as this exposition proceeds.

The internal tensions in Calvin's view are also evident in his mention of the fathers calling the Sabbath a *shadowy commandment*. Calvin is attracted to this statement, but also not wholly satisfied with it, as "it reaches only half of the subject."

2) *Three causes of the fourth commandment*

The complexity of Calvin's view is finally made plain by the ensuing statement: that because of the inadequacy of viewing the Sabbath as merely a *shadowy commandment*,

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses called Genesis*, trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981).

¹⁶⁵ *John Calvin's Sermons on the Ten Commandments*, ed. and trans. Benjamin W. Farley (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980).

we must consider three causes for this commandment. Calvin's own summary of those three causes must be examined.

(a) *The first cause.* The first cause of the commandment to rest is stated as follows:

For it was the design of the heavenly Lawgiver, under the rest of the seventh day, to give the people of Israel a figure of spiritual rest, by which the faithful ought to refrain from their own works, in order to leave God to work within them. (2:8:28)

Paragraphs 29-31 are taken up with this first cause of the Sabbath commandment. In those paragraphs, Calvin describes this cause as "the principal design of the Sabbath" (2:8:29). He states (in 2:8:31) that it is "the mystery, which is principally exhibited" in this commandment. He goes on to argue that "all it contained of a ceremonial nature was without doubt abolished by the advent of Christ." He concludes this paragraph by asserting, "Christians therefore ought to depart from all superstitious observance of days."

Clearly, perspectives like this are given little voice in the Westminster Confession's treatment of the Sabbath. Just as clearly, they appear to anticipate the anti-Sabbatarian polemic against the Puritan Sabbath. Before, however, Calvin is crowned king of the anti-Sabbatarians, we must recall that this is only the first of three causes Calvin finds for the Sabbath.

(b) *The third cause.* Most significant are the words with which Calvin begins his treatment of the second and third causes in 2:8:32.

The two latter causes, however, ought not to be numbered among the ancient shadows, but are equally suitable to all ages. Though the Sabbath is abrogated, yet it is still customary among us to assemble on stated days for hearing the Word, for breaking the mystic bread, and for public prayers; and also to allow servants a remission from their labor. That in commanding the Sabbath, the Lord had regard to both these things, cannot be doubted.

The third cause of the Sabbath is the one of least interest to Calvin in the *Institutes*. In his opening summary in 2:8:28, he states it this way: "Thirdly, he thought it right that servants, and persons living under the jurisdiction of others, should be indulged with a day of rest, that they might enjoy some remission from their labor." Calvin's only further statements about this cause are his brief citation of evidence for it in 2:8:32, and his re-statement of it in his concluding summary in 2:8:34.

(c) *The second cause.* Calvin states the second cause of the Sabbath as follows:

His design was, secondly, that there should be a stated day on which they might assemble together to hear the Law and perform the ceremonies, or at least which they might especially devote to meditations on His works; that by this recollection they might be led to exercises of piety. (2:8:28)

Here is probably that to which Calvin alludes in his opening sentence in making mention of being "exercised in that meditation in the observance of His institutions." Thus, in this second cause we have the weight that balances Calvin's emphasis on the

ceremonial and mystic nature of the Sabbath. He expounds this second cause in the last half of paragraph 32, paragraph 33, and the first half of paragraph 34.

Calvin begins this exposition by making clear that both the second and third causes are important for the church.

Who can deny that both these things are as proper for us as for the Jews? Assemblies of the church are enjoined in the divine Word, and the necessity of them is sufficiently known even from the experience of life. Unless there be stated days appointed for them, how can they be held?...But if we feel the same necessity, to relieve that which the Lord enjoined the Sabbath upon the Jews, let no one plead that it does not belong to us. (2:8:32)

Calvin proceeds at this point to defend his position against “some unquiet spirits” who “have been raising noisy contentions respecting the Lord's Day. They complain that Christians are tintured with Judaism, because they retain any observance of days” (2:8:33). Calvin's reply to such people is based on a distinction that flows directly out of his specification of a diversity of causes for the Sabbath.

But I reply, that the Lord's Day is not observed by us upon the principles of Judaism; because in this respect the distinction between us and the Jews is very great. For we celebrate it not with a scrupulous rigor, as a ceremony that we conceive to be a figure of some spiritual mystery, but only use it as a remedy necessary to the preservation of order in the church. (2:8:33)

Calvin's point is that the Jewish Sabbath was a shadow pointing to Christ. Calvin elsewhere teaches (2:8:29) that the stress on and the rigor with which the Sabbath was observed and enforced in the Old Testament was associated with its identity as a spiritual mystery. Indeed, Calvin says, to observe the Lord's Day as a spiritual mystery pointing forward to Christ would be to Judaize,¹⁶⁶ but to use it simply as an appropriate day set apart for worship is not.

It is at this point that Calvin makes what appears at first glance an extraordinary statement with respect to the perpetuity of the Sabbath.

For in the churches which [Paul] founded, the Sabbath was retained for this purpose. He prescribes the same day to the Corinthians for making collections for the relief of the brethren at Jerusalem. If superstition be an object of fear, there was more danger of the holy days of the Jews than the Lord's Days now observed by Christians. Now, whereas it was expedient for the destruction of superstition, the day which the Jews kept holy was abolished; and it being necessary for the preservation of decorum, order, and peace in the Christian church, another day was appointed for the same use. (2:8:33)

Unless this passage is read closely, one could very easily read it as if Calvin were here calling the Lord's Day a Sabbath, and stating that such a Lord's Day Sabbath was retained by Paul in the churches he founded. Though our premises would certainly make

¹⁶⁶**Judaize** – force Christians to be circumcised and keep the Law as an essential part of justification. There were false teachers insisting upon this in the first century, whose errors are addressed in the books of Galatians and Hebrews.

this a natural interpretation of the passage, it is not Calvin's point. "Sabbath" here for Calvin is a literal reference to the seventh-day Sabbath of the Jews. Calvin is asserting that, for the purpose of the order of worship in the churches he founded, Paul retained the seventh-day Sabbath of the Jews. This interpretation is established beyond doubt by a reference to Calvin's commentary on this passage. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 16:2, Calvin writes:

The end is this: that they may have their alms ready in time. He therefore exhorts them not to wait till he came, as anything that is done suddenly and in a bustle is not done well, but to contribute on the Sabbath what might seem good, and according as every one's ability might enable—that is, on the day on which they held their sacred assemblies.

The clause rendered *on one of the Sabbaths*, Chrysostom¹⁶⁷ explains to mean "the first Sabbath." In this I do not agree with him; for Paul means rather that they should contribute, one on one Sabbath and another on another; or even each of them every Sabbath, if they chose. For he has an eye, first of all, to convenience; and farther, that the sacred assembly, in which the communion of the saints is celebrated, might be an additional spur to them. Nor am I more inclined to admit the view taken by Chrysostom, that the term *Sabbath* is employed here to mean "the Lord's Day" (Rev 1:10)—for the probability is that the apostles, at the beginning, retained the day that was already in use; but that afterwards, constrained by the superstition of the Jews, they set aside that day and substituted another.¹⁶⁸

These comments shed light on the somewhat obscure statement by Calvin with which we are dealing. Clearly, Calvin is saying that the Corinthians held their public meetings on the seventh-day Sabbath at the time Paul wrote his epistle to them, and that it was for this reason that he chose that day for the collection. To Calvin's mind, it was only later, because of the superstition of the Jews, that the first day of the week was chosen for Christian gatherings.

This is, of course, an extraordinary interpretation of the passage. It is one that is certainly incorrect both exegetically and historically. Nevertheless, it prevents us from claiming that, in the passage from the *Institutes* cited above, Calvin calls the Lord's Day a Sabbath or teaches the perpetuity of the Sabbath.

3) *Practical necessity for a day of rest*

From another standpoint, however, this unusual interpretation does put in relief¹⁶⁹ just how important to Calvin was the idea of the practical necessity of a day of rest set aside for worship. He further comments on 1 Corinthians 16:2,

We may, however, readily infer from this passage that believers have always had a certain day of rest from labor—not as if the worship of God consisted in idleness, but be-

¹⁶⁷John Chrysostom (c. AD 347-407) – Archbishop of Constantinople, an important early church Father, known for his eloquence in preaching. He died while in route to his site of banishment.

¹⁶⁸John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, vol. 2, trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 68.

¹⁶⁹relief – prominence, distinctness, or vividness due to contrast.

cause it is of importance for the common harmony that a certain day should be appointed for holding sacred assemblies, as they cannot be held every day. For as to Paul's forbidding elsewhere (Gal 4:10) that any distinction should be made between one day and another, *that* must be understood to be with a view to religion, and not with a view to polity or external order.¹⁷⁰

4) *Balancing the first and second causes*

Calvin concludes his treatment of the fourth commandment by again balancing the themes found in his first and second causes of the Sabbath against one another. In 2:8:34, he first stresses the fact that the Sabbath was a mystery fulfilled and abolished in Christ.

Thus vanish all the dreams of the false prophets, who in past ages have infected the people with a Jewish notion, affirming that nothing but the ceremonial part of this commandment—which, according to them, is the appointment of the seventh day—has been abrogated, but that the moral part of it, that is, the observance of one day in seven, still remains. But this is only changing the day in contempt of the Jews, while they retain the same opinion of the holiness of a day; for on this principle the same mysterious signification would still be attributed to particular days, which they formerly obtained among the Jews.

Taken by itself, of course, this appears to be all the evidence anti-Sabbatarians might need to claim Calvin as their champion. Nonetheless, Calvin concludes on a balancing note, which forms a nice transition to the two other major sources to which we must now turn. This balancing note stresses the general theme of the practical necessity of a day for worship.

But the principal thing to be remembered is the general doctrine: that, lest religion decay or languish among us, sacred assemblies ought diligently to be held, and that we ought to use those external means which are adapted to support the worship of God.

By *external means*, Calvin clearly means a day of rest for worship. Note particularly that he calls the use of such external means “the principal thing to be remembered” from the fourth commandment.

b. *Commentary on Genesis 2:2-3*

Our exposition of the *Institutes* has shown that there are complications and complexities in his position. These should introduce a note of caution into any claim that he was in the camp of those who later opposed the Puritan Sabbath. Nonetheless, it would be less than honest if it were not admitted that the Calvin's treatment in that place has the overall ring of anti-Sabbatarianism.

It may be more than a little surprising to many, that in his comments on Genesis 2:2-3, Calvin adopts exegetical positions now clearly identified with Sabbatarian views.

¹⁷⁰John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, vol. 2, trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 68.

Calvin's comments are by themselves sufficient vindication of the fact that he regards the Sabbath as appointed at creation for all mankind in all ages.

God therefore sanctifies the seventh day when He renders it illustrious that by a special law it may be distinguished from the rest. Whence it also appears that God always had respect to the welfare of men. I have said above that six days were employed in the formation of the world; not that God, to Whom one moment is as a thousand years, had need of this succession of time, but that He might engage us in the consideration of His works. He had the same end in view in the appointment of His own *rest*, for He set apart a day selected out of the remainder for this special use. Wherefore, that benediction is nothing else than a solemn consecration by which God claims for Himself the meditations and employments of men on the seventh day. This is, indeed, the proper business of the whole life in which men should daily exercise themselves: to consider the infinite goodness, justice, power, and wisdom of God in this magnificent theatre of heaven and earth. But lest men should prove less sedulously¹⁷¹ attentive to it than they ought, every seventh day has been especially selected for the purpose of supplying what was wanting¹⁷² in their daily meditation. First, therefore, God rested; then He blessed this rest, [so] that in all ages it might be held sacred among men; or, He dedicated every seventh day to rest, that His own example might be a perpetual rule.

In case any doubt remains that Calvin here views the Sabbath as a "creation ordinance," he later distinguishes between this creation ordinance of the Sabbath and the *new precept* given to the Jews.

Afterwards, in the Law, a new precept concerning the Sabbath was given, which should be peculiar to the Jews; and but for a season, because it was a legal ceremony shadowing forth a spiritual rest, the truth of which was manifested in Christ. Therefore, the Lord the more frequently testifies that He had given, in the Sabbath, a symbol of sanctification to His ancient people. Therefore, when we hear that the Sabbath was abrogated by the coming of Christ, we must distinguish between what belongs to the perpetual government of human life, and what properly belongs to ancient figures, the use of which was abolished when the truth was fulfilled. Spiritual rest is the mortification of the flesh, so that the sons of God should no longer live unto themselves or indulge their own inclination. So far as the Sabbath was a figure of this rest, I say, it was but for a season; but inasmuch as it was commanded to men from the beginning that they might employ themselves in the worship of God, it is right that it should continue to the end of the world.

Reference to the creation origin of the Sabbath also occurs in Calvin's comments on Exodus 20:11. There he says:

From this passage, it may be probably conjectured that the hallowing of the Sabbath was prior to the Law; and undoubtedly what Moses before narrated, that they were forbidden to gather the manna on the seventh day, seems to have had its origin from a well-known and received custom—whilst it is not credible that the observance of

¹⁷¹**sedulously** – diligently.

¹⁷²**wanting** – lacking.

the Sabbath was omitted when God revealed the rite of sacrifice to the holy (fathers). But what in the depravity of human nature was altogether extinct among the heathen nations, and almost obsolete with the race of Abraham, God renewed in His Law: that the Sabbath should be honored by holy and inviolable observance. And this the impure dogs accounted to be amongst the disgrace of the Jewish nation.¹⁷³

A question is raised in another place where Calvin alludes to the creation origin of the Sabbath. In the *Institutes* (2:8:34), Calvin remarks:

Yet I do not lay so much stress on the septenary number,¹⁷⁴ that I would oblige the Church to an invariable adherence to it; nor will I condemn those churches that have other solemn days for their assemblies, provided they keep at a distance from superstition.

In 2:8:32, Calvin adds these thoughts:

But why, it may be asked, do we not rather assemble on every day, that so all distinction of days may be removed? I sincerely wish that this were practiced, and truly spiritual wisdom would be well worthy of some portion of time being daily allotted to it. But if the infirmity of many persons will not admit of daily assemblies, and charity does not permit us to require more of them, why should we not obey the rule that we have imposed upon us by the will of God?

At first glance in these passages, Calvin seems to be contradicting his insistence in Genesis 2:2-3 on the continuance of the Sabbath as a rule for worship to the end of the world. R. J. Bauckham—who is no Sabbatarian himself—clearly sees, however, the probable solution to this apparent contradiction. Speaking of the statements we have just contrasted, he says:

If these statements are to be reconciled, the most plausible suggestion is that Calvin regards the requirement of one day in seven as a *minimal* requirement. God requires at least that, but it would be better to worship more often.¹⁷⁵

The third source to which we now turn supplements the Sabbatarian exegesis and theology of Genesis 2:2-3, with a practice in Geneva that can only be called “practically Sabbatarian.” This practice becomes clear in Calvin’s sermons on the Ten Commandments.

c. *Sermons on the Ten Commandments*

These sermons are based on Deuteronomy 5. Sermons five and six are of particular importance to us.¹⁷⁶ In these sermons Calvin distinguishes the same three causes for the

¹⁷³John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Last Four Books of the Pentateuch arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 439-440.

¹⁷⁴septenary – pertaining to the number seven.

¹⁷⁵R. J. Bauckham, “Sabbath and Sunday in the Protestant Tradition,” in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 317. This treatment of Bauckham is quite unprejudiced for one writing from a generally anti-Sabbatarian perspective, and provides a helpful and even for the most part balanced presentation.

¹⁷⁶Farley, loc. cit.

Sabbath commandment. With reference to the second cause, however, he elaborates at great length on what it requires by way of observance of the day set apart for worship.

Now we must come to the second point which emphasizes that the Sabbath day was a [type of] civil order for training the faithful in the service of God. For that day was ordained in order that the people might assemble themselves to hear the doctrine of the Law preached, to participate in the sacrifices, [and] to invoke the name of God. With respect to that, it applies as much to us as to the ancient people...

Now let us consider whether those who call themselves Christians require of themselves what they should. There is a large group who thinks that Sunday exists for the purpose of enabling them to attend to their own affairs—and who reserve this day for that [purpose], as if there were no others throughout the week for deliberating their business. For though the bell tolls for the sermon, they seem only to have time for their own affairs and for one thing and another. The rest glut¹⁷⁷ themselves and are shut up in their houses, because they do not dare display a manifest scorn on the streets. In any case, Sunday is nothing more than a retreat for them in which they stand aloof from the church of God...

Moreover, let us realize that it is not only for coming to the sermon that the day of Sunday is instituted, but in order that we might devote all the rest of the time to praising God...And when Sunday is able to help us practice that—that is, to consider the works of God—then certainly once we have meditated on His works for a long time in order to know how to benefit from them, we will surrender to Him all the rest of time. For this meditation will already have formed and polished us, [and] we shall be induced to thank our God on Monday and all the rest of the week. But when Sunday is spent not only in pastimes full of vanity, but in things which are entirely contrary to God, it seems that one has not at all celebrated Sunday [and] that God has been offended in many ways. Thus, when people profane in this manner the holy order that God has instituted to lead us to Himself, why should they be astonished if all the rest of the week is degraded?¹⁷⁸

These brief citations from Calvin's sermons make clear why even anti-Sabbatarians admit that the practice of Geneva was practically Sabbatarian. Primus says:

In fact, Calvin's Geneva was criticized for the practice of a Jewish "observance of days," an indication, incidentally, that a "Lord's Day" was quite strictly observed there...Calvin calls for a literal, physical cessation of daily labor on the Lord's Day, not as an end in itself, but to provide time for worship of God. Recreational activity should also be suspended, for such activity interferes with worship as certainly as daily labor does...Calvin urges that shop windows be shut on the Lord's Day, that travel be curtailed, and recreation avoided.¹⁷⁹

Baukhham notes:

¹⁷⁷glut – to fill to excess.

¹⁷⁸Farley, loc. cit., 108-110.

¹⁷⁹John Primus, loc. cit., 63, 68, and 69.

Second, there is the question of rest on Sunday. Unlike the Jew on the Mosaic Sabbath, the Christian is required to rest only to be free to worship. But Calvin sometimes interprets this requirement with surprising strictness. Both daily work and recreation should be suspended for the whole duration of the day in order that the whole day should be devoted to corporate and private worship and religious instruction.¹⁸⁰

Clearly, any anti-Sabbatarian treatment that a) ignores the complexity of Calvin's view, b) neglects his remarks on Genesis 2:2-3, and c) ignores the practically Sabbatarian practice prevalent in Geneva, is definitely superficial in its presentation.

d. The authority of the Lord's Day

In this overview of Calvin's view of the Sabbath, an important issue remains to be addressed: upon what authority does the observance of Sunday rest? We must now take up this question.

Again, two extreme interpretations of Calvin must be avoided in answering this question. The danger of these extreme interpretations is related both to the complications of Calvin's teaching and our own tendency to read him in light of later developments in the Sabbath debate.

On the one hand, it is easy to glean statements out of Calvin that appear to deny to the Lord's Day any divine authority. We have seen that Calvin does not see 1 Corinthians 16:2 to be referring to the Lord's Day, but to the seventh-day Sabbath. Calvin also thinks it "probable" that this is the reference of Acts 20:7. Furthermore, as we have seen, Calvin does not want to bind the church to "the septenary number"; yet, as we have also seen, the probable way in which this statement is to be harmonized with Calvin's comments on Genesis 2:2-3 is to understand Calvin as teaching the liberty of churches to meet more often during the week than merely on one day in seven. This interpretation is confirmed by Calvin's remark (in his 34th sermon on Deuteronomy) cited by Primus: "But yet must we observe the same order of having some day in the week, be it one or two, for that is left to the free choice of Christians."¹⁸¹

On the other hand, it is easy to read into Calvin's statements ideas that appear to lend to the Lord's Day a divine authority. His comments on Genesis 2:2-3 certainly appear to assume that God would have a Sabbath with perpetuity in all ages.

First, therefore, God rested; then He blessed this rest, that in all ages it might be held sacred among men; or, He dedicated every seventh day to rest, that His own example might be a perpetual rule...

So far as the Sabbath was a figure of this rest, I say, it was but for a season; but inasmuch as it was commanded to men from the beginning that they might employ

¹⁸⁰Bauckham, loc. cit. p. 317.

¹⁸¹Primus, loc. cit., 65. Primus here opines that this remark proves that Calvin "would not object at all if the worship and work pattern were one in six or five or four or three or two." Clearly, the most natural interpretation of the statement of Calvin does not support his opinion.

themselves in the worship of God, it is right that it should continue to the end of the world.

Calvin's assertions of the propriety of the Lord's Day for Christian worship may be placed alongside this. In the *Institutes*, Calvin remarks:

The ancients have not without sufficient reason substituted what we call the Lord's Day in the room of the Sabbath. For since the resurrection of the Lord is the end and consummation of that true rest that was adumbrated¹⁸² by the ancient Sabbath, the same day that put an end to the shadows, admonishes Christians not to adhere to a shadowy ceremony.

According to Primus, Calvin makes this similar remark in his 34th sermon on Deuteronomy:

But to the intent to show the liberty of Christians, the day was changed, because Jesus Christ in His resurrection did set us free from the bondage of the Law and cancelled the obligation thereof. That was the cause why the day was shifted.¹⁸³

Calvin definitely sees a certain propriety in the use of the first day of the week for Christians, and it would be easy to read into this the idea of the divine or apostolic authority of that day. It is at this point that we must beware of reading too much into Calvin. The simple fact is that Calvin, while speaking of the propriety of worshipping on the Lord's Day, never makes clear its divine authority. Several points make clear that this conclusion would be, indeed, quite doubtful. Calvin does not speak in these quotations of the apostles appointing the day, but of the "ancients." He does not even speak of the Lord's Day, but of "what we call the Lord's Day." Indeed, for Calvin, the whole significance of utilizing this day for worship appears to be that it underscores "the liberty of Christians." Calvin's willingness to contemplate both Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:2 as speaking of the use of the seventh-day Sabbath by Christian churches for their regular worship also speaks volumes about his perspective.

Much as it may disappoint us, inconsistent as it may seem to us, we must conclude that Calvin did not make clear and probably would not have spoken of the divine authority of the first day of the week. Here at least there seems to be a distinction between Calvin and the Puritans.

e. Summary conclusions

The time has come to step back and attempt an overall evaluation of Calvin. In whose camp shall we place him? The short answer to this question is, simply, no one's. The *Institutes* undoubtedly leave at first glance an anti-Sabbatarian impression, but they warn us about superficial evaluations by their being structured around the three causes of the Sabbath. The *Commentary on Genesis* and *The Sermons on the Ten Commandments* tend to support a more Sabbatarian view of Calvin.

(1) Anti-Sabbatarians speak of the Sabbath being abolished in Christ. Calvin certainly speaks this way and inveighs¹⁸⁴ against those who think that only the appointed day of

¹⁸²adumbrated – foreshadowed; faintly disclosed.

¹⁸³Primus, loc. cit., 63.

rest has been changed. He emphasizes that the Sabbath was a shadow and a mystery that was fulfilled in Christ, and that we must not for this reason observe the Lord's Day as the Jews observed the Sabbath. In this vein, he denounces those who think of any day as holy. Calvin also associates the rigorous observance of the Sabbath by the Jews with this mystery character of the Sabbath. Thus, he appears to be arguing for a less stringent way of observing the day of rest for worship.

(2) To all this, however, Sabbatarians may quite cogently respond. Sabbatarians need not deny that in one sense the Sabbath was abolished in Christ. Calvin himself distinguishes between the creation Sabbath and the Jewish one added later. Sabbatarians need not commit themselves to the idea that only the appointed day and nothing else has changed for the Christian. They may acknowledge, many of them do acknowledge, that Colossians 2:16-17 and also Galatians 4:10 do refer to the seventh-day Sabbath. Sabbatarians would probably be willing to speak of the Lord's Day being holy, but Calvin associates the idea of the holiness of a day with the mysterious shadow character of the Sabbath. Remember that, in his sermons on the Ten Commandments, Calvin himself speaks of the appointed day of worship as a "holy order":

But when Sunday is spent not only in pastimes full of vanity, but in things that are entirely contrary to God, it seems that one has not at all celebrated Sunday, [and] that God has been offended in many ways. Thus, when people profane in this manner the *holy order* that God has instituted to lead us to Himself, why should they be astonished if all the rest of the week is degraded?¹⁸⁵

Furthermore, if Calvin sometimes associates a rigorous observance of the Sabbath with its shadow character, Calvin himself, in the sermons just mentioned, argues for an observance of Sunday that would satisfy most Sabbatarians and horrify most anti-Sabbatarians. Finally, Calvin clearly teaches that the Sabbath day originated at creation. Such a position, later anti-Sabbatarians have rejected as inconsistent with their views.

(3) Only at one place does Calvin appear clearly to depart from the Sabbatarianism of his Puritan successors: he does not appear to attribute any divine authority to the Lord's Day. Of course, this is congenial to anti-Sabbatarians, but it goes far beyond what many anti-Sabbatarians would themselves wish to teach. Many anti-Sabbatarians would acknowledge that the Lord's Day has divine and apostolic precedents and authority.

Bauckham's summation states the proper conclusions quite adequately. Having commented on the creation origin of the Sabbath and the strict observance of Sunday as taught by Calvin, he remarks:

These two points do not quite make Calvin a Sabbatarian...The practical result, however, is remarkably similar to the teaching of medieval scholastic theology, and it can readily be seen how an emphasis on these aspects of Calvin's teaching could lead, in some later Calvinist writers, to a more Sabbatarian interpretation of Calvin.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴**inveighs** – attacks vehemently in words.

¹⁸⁵Farley, loc. cit., 108-110.

¹⁸⁶Bauckham, loc. cit., 316.

C. Puritan Connection

Under this concluding head, it is my purpose to say something more by way of explanation and justification of the course that led from Calvin to the Westminster Confession's enshrining of the Puritan view of the Sabbath.

1. *Development in Calvin*

The suggestion that there was development in Calvin toward a more "Puritan" view of the Sabbath cannot be dismissed. Both his *Commentary on Genesis* and the *Sermons on the Ten Commandments* are dated in the mid or late 1550s.¹⁸⁷ When this data is placed alongside a comparison of the 1536 and 1559 editions of the *Institutes*, these dates appear to become significant.

This is not to say that Calvin changes or retracts any significant statement about the Sabbath from the 1536 edition. What does happen, however, is that there is considerable addition and amplification in the 1559 edition. Most of this addition and amplification is in the Sabbatarian direction. Calvin himself is conscious of this amplification, because he says in 2:8:33:

I am obliged to be rather more diffuse on this point, because, in the present age, some unquiet spirits have been raising noisy contentions respecting the Lord's Day. They complain that Christians are tinctured with Judaism, because they retain any observance of days.

In the 1536 edition, only Sabbatarian superstitions are mentioned.¹⁸⁸ In the 1559 edition, this reference is balanced by the reference to the "anti-Sabbatarians," or as Calvin calls them, "the unquiet spirits" who "are raising noisy contentions respecting the Lord's Day."

When this newfound balance is placed alongside the Sabbatarian emphases emerging in the mid-1550s, it appears to be proper to say that Calvin has matured in a Sabbatarian direction. This maturation has taken place because of the practical, pastoral concerns for the church in Geneva, especially as that practical concern has been sharpened by the "anti-Sabbatarian" criticism mentioned in 2:8:33 of the *Institutes*. We see here in all probability the maturation of the iconoclastic¹⁸⁹ reformer of 1536 into the constructive pastor of 1559.

2. *Inconsistency in Calvin*

No one before Calvin ever taught the sufficiency of the Scriptures more plainly. Calvin clearly repudiated the authority of the tradition of the fathers in favor of the *sola Scriptura*.¹⁹⁰ No one applied it with greater consistency. Calvin even taught that the

¹⁸⁷Cf. Calvin's *Commentary on Genesis*, p. xviii, where a date of 1554 is given for it. In the *Sermons on the Ten Commandments*, p. 13, a date of 1555 is given for them.

¹⁸⁸John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1536 Edition, trans. and annotated Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 24.

¹⁸⁹**iconoclastic** – attacking cherished beliefs that are based on superstition or error.

¹⁹⁰**sola Scriptura** – *Latin*. "Scripture alone" as the highest authority in the Church, a key doctrine of the Reformation.

Scriptures are sufficient to vindicate their own divine origin without the witness of the Church (*Institutes*, 1:7:1ff.). It was out of this crucible that the Puritans developed their doctrine of the regulative principle of worship. This principle simply taught that every element of worship must have the explicit authority of the Word of God, resulting in a tremendous emphasis on the authority of God over His church and in its worship.

It is likely that it was in the light of the regulative principle that the Puritans saw clearly the necessity of teaching the divine authority and apostolic precedent of the Lord's Day. In so far as Calvin taught implicitly the very doctrine of the sufficiency and authority of Scripture taught by the Puritans, and which by logical extension they developed into the regulative principle, Calvin was simply inconsistent in grounding the observance of Sunday in nothing more apparently than the tradition of the early church. It may be argued on this basis that all the Puritans did was to correct an inconsistency in their mentor.

It may well be that it was Calvin's historical milieu¹⁹¹ that blinded him to the necessity of a divinely appointed Lord's Day. Calvin could and did assume the marriage of church and state. In such a system, the church would have the united support of the civil government in appointing the day of worship. Hence, it may well be that Calvin's inconsistency was in part owing to a dimension of his thought that has happily become archaic.

3. *Caution in Calvin*

It is, however, undeniable that a kind of stringency over Sabbath practice developed in certain strands of Puritanism. Furthermore, Nicholas Bound may have contributed to this tendency by his lengthy and detailed treatment of Sabbath regulations. Bound also seems to have completely neglected any appreciation of the ceremonial or positive elements in the fourth commandment.¹⁹²

Other Puritans protested against the stringent detail of extreme Sabbatarianism. John Owen protested, for instance, that "a man can scarcely in six days read over all the duties that are proposed to be observed on the seventh."¹⁹³ Even more importantly, the Westminster Confession of Faith departed from Bound's description of the Sabbath as "natural, moral, and perpetual."¹⁹⁴ Bauckham notes, "Thus, in place of Bound's phrase 'natural, moral, and perpetual,' the Westminster divines spoke of a 'positive, moral, and perpetual commandment binding all men in all ages.'¹⁹⁵

It is at this point that both Owen and Westminster seemed to have remembered something of the caution that Calvin's treatment of the Sabbath imparted to the Reformed tradition. Calvin's emphasis on the positive or ceremonial character of the fourth

¹⁹¹**milieu** – context or environment.

¹⁹²Primus, loc. cit., 41-58.

¹⁹³Bauckham, loc. cit., 327.

¹⁹⁴Primus, loc. cit., 46.

¹⁹⁵Bauckham, loc. cit., 324. Primus seems to be insensitive to this distinction between Bound and Westminster, loc. cit., 40f.

commandment is a standing reminder to that tradition against the legalism that came to dominate the Jewish Sabbatarianism of Christ's day.

D. Concluding Summation

This treatment of the Lord's Day in Church history has deliberately restricted itself to two critical periods that are of particular interest to evangelical and Reformed Christians. In both the cases of the Apostolic Fathers and of John Calvin, our investigations have shown the claims of anti-Sabbatarianism to be significantly overstated. Neither the Apostolic Fathers nor John Calvin can be claimed by the anti-Sabbatarianism without significant over-simplification and reduction of their thought. There are plainly dimensions of their thought and practice that bear a marked similarity to later Puritan thought on the Sabbath. On the other hand, it would be equally wrong, as we have seen, to claim either the Apostolic Fathers or Calvin as unequivocal Sabbatarianism. There are, indeed, significant perspectives within their writings that bear a startling resemblance to anti-Sabbatarian thought. These conclusions might lead the student to assume that, purely in terms of historical-theological considerations, Sabbatarianism and anti-Sabbatarianism have about equal claim to being the historic position of that stream of Church history with which we in the evangelical and Reformed tradition are willing to identify ourselves.

Such a position, in fact, would not be completely just. Specifically, it would not be fair to moderate Christian Sabbatarianism. Perhaps the most telling evidence for this assertion is that the most vehement anti-Sabbatarianism admit or imply that the general trend of the early and medieval church after the Apostolic Fathers was toward Sabbatarianism. Robert Morey admits this, while attempting to blunt its significance, when he says: "The Middle Ages saw the union of church and state, beginning with Constantine.¹⁹⁶ The Sabbath was introduced by theocratically-minded religious and civil leaders who drew from the Old Testament their societal law. Sabbatarianism had its greatest day in the scholastic period of Roman Catholic theology."¹⁹⁷ Bauckham confirms the growing Sabbatarianism in his chapter on the subject in the anti-Sabbatarian work, *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*.¹⁹⁸

As to the period of the Reformation following the life and ministry of Calvin, it is well known and admitted that Sabbatarianism became the hallmark of Puritanism. Even among the continental Reformed churches, a Sabbatarian tendency is evident. Bauckham documents not only this, but also that several of the other early Reformers were even more Sabbatarian than Calvin.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶Constantine the Great (c. AD 272-337) – Roman Emperor from 306 to 337. Well known for being the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity, Constantine issued the Edict of Milan in 313, which proclaimed religious tolerance of all religions throughout the empire.

¹⁹⁷Morey, loc. cit., 17.

¹⁹⁸Bauckham, loc. cit., 300f.

¹⁹⁹Bauckham, loc. cit., 312ff.

Hence, it must be concluded that Church history tilts clearly in the direction of awarding a moderate Christian Sabbatarianism the honor of being called the historic position of the Church.

SECTION FOUR

ITS PRACTICE

CHAPTER 12

Introduction

The order of our presentation of the subject is not arbitrary. We have noticed, first, the proof of the Christian Sabbath, *and only then* the practice of the Christian Sabbath. Many people reject the Christian Sabbath position because they reverse this order. They ask, What will this demand in terms of my practice? Only subsequently do they ask, What is the evidence for this position? This is not only totally backward logically, it is perverse ethically. The first ethical question that sinful men should ask must never be: What will this demand of me? But, what has God commanded? To reverse this order simply manifests that we do not understand how powerfully and subtly our sinful hearts can affect our fallible heads.

It should also perhaps be noted that the purpose of this section cannot be to recover all the ground we have covered in order to establish the doctrine of the Christian Sabbath. All the exegesis and exposition given in former chapters is here assumed. The peculiar purpose of this chapter is to expound the way in which the Lord's Day Sabbath should be practiced or observed. Several beneficial purposes, it is hoped, will be fulfilled by this exposition.

(1) It will serve the polemic purpose of showing that the Lord's Day observance is really possible and doable in the world in which we live—provided that we are willing to commit ourselves to it. Anti-Sabbatarians have sometimes ridiculed Sabbatarianism as inconsistent with our contemporary circumstances. A proper exposition of the requirements of the Lord's Day will silence this ridicule.

(2) It will show that a committed Sabbatarian need not be guilty of the blunder of attempting to give an overly detailed, legalistic, and externalistic list of do's and don'ts for the Lord's Day. Sabbatarians have sometimes given a legalistic impression—even though in most cases they were not legalistic—by providing extensive compilations of such “helps.”

(3) This treatment, it is hoped, will isolate the general principles involved in Sabbath-keeping with sufficient explication and illustration that sincere Christians, who are desirous of pleasing their Lord in this matter, will find as guidance in the sometimes difficult decisions of their lives. This is the fundamental reason for this concluding chapter.

A. The Fundamental Obligation of Lord's Day Practice

The key texts dealing with the fundamental obligation of the Sabbath observance are many (Gen 2:3; Exo 20:8-11; Isa 58:13-14; Exo 16:23; Neh 9:14; 13:22; Jer 17:22, 24, 27; Eze 20:20; Rev 1:10 with Num 16:3-7), but all these texts remind us that our duty is fundamentally one in regards to the Lord's Day. Our duty is not manifold, consisting of many different, unrelated responsibilities. The whole duty of the Israelite regarding the Sabbath and our whole duty regarding the Lord's Day may be summarized or stated in one word: the Lord's Day must be *sanctified*. We must remember the Lord's Day to keep it holy. Our obligation in regard to the Lord's Day is *not*, then, a matter of confronting a plethora²⁰⁰ of confusing details and a multitude of obscure, debatable, and difficult ethical issues. Our duty is simple and clear. It is to keep the Lord's Day holy.

These texts teach us that our duty is dictated by the identity of the day. Why must we sanctify the day? Because God sanctified it. It is holy; therefore it must be kept holy. It is a Sabbath, therefore we must rest. It is God's day; therefore it must be given to Him. Our duty regarding the day is derived from the identity of the day. In this, the fourth commandment is like all the other Ten Commandments. It embodies a single, fundamental "sanctity" of human life. Just as the first commandment involves the sanctity of God's being, the second the sanctity of God's worship, the third the sanctity of God's name—the fourth involves the sanctity of God's day.

B. The Basic Distinction of Lord's Day Practice

When we speak of our fundamental duty being to sanctify the Lord's Day, this assumes a basic distinction between one day of the week and the rest. The problem is this: Aren't all days God's days? How, or in what way, is one day especially to be given to Him? What is the basic difference?

You can also see this basic distinction by thinking briefly about the key descriptions or words used to describe this day. They are all two-sided. To sanctify is to set apart *from* something to something else. God's day is to be taken from us and given to Him. The idea of possession is also two-sided. If something belongs to God, it is to be taken from us and given to Him. In addition, the idea of rest is not merely negative, but also two-sided. It is rest *from* our labor *to* God; a holy rest as unto the Lord.

<u>Us</u>		<u>God</u>
From	---- sanctify ---->	to
From	---- possession ---->	to
From	---- rest ---->	to

²⁰⁰plethora – large or excessive amount or number.

What is the nature of this fundamental distinction that underlies our whole duty in regards to the Lord's Day? It is, obviously, not a distinction between sin and righteousness. It is not a distinction between activity and total inactivity. God places no premium on laziness. Our duty is not to sleep all day! It is a distinction between work and rest—biblically defined (Gen 2:3; Exo 20:8-11). Rest is not mere inactivity. God's resting did not indicate inactivity.²⁰¹ It is always called a holy rest *to* the Lord (Exo 16:23, 25; 35:2; Lev 23:3). This structure or distinction is assumed in our fundamental obligation regarding the Lord's Day.

Several observations are appropriate here:

(1) Here is a problem for those who wish to hold a non-sabbatic Lord's Day position. It is necessary for them to define clearly the basic distinction involved in the Lord's Day. It is not permissible for them to define this distinction in terms of personal conjecture or speculation. They must define it *biblically*. Where does the New Testament clearly and independently of the Old Testament tell us what this basic distinction or contrast is? The simple answer is that it does not. Only the basic biblical distinction between work and rest can supply us with this information. This means, however, that the Lord's Day is a day of rest, since it must be defined—if it is to be defined biblically at all—in terms of the distinction between work and rest instituted at creation.

(2) This means that the Sabbath involves a basic distinction between God and the world. It is a day for God, not a day for the world. This has provoked objections by some. Misselbrook has written,

We simply state that the understanding of Sabbath as a day devoted to God and therefore *cut off from all to do with this world* is not only quite foreign to the Old Testament concept of rest but is practically its complete opposite.²⁰²

I wish to strongly deny this objection. His assessment of it implies that this distinction is ascetic.²⁰³ It is not ascetic or even pietistic²⁰⁴ to distinguish between working unto the glory of God in the world and worshipping God. There is a difference between God and the world. There was a difference between trimming a tree and walking with God even for Adam! There was a difference for Adam between what he saw of God in the world and what he saw of God in theophany²⁰⁵ when he talked with God. There is a difference for us too.

²⁰¹John Murray's three expository statements aptly summarize the meaning of God's rest. He notes that God's rest is not one of inactivity; that God's rest is cessation from one kind of activity, the work of creation; and that God's rest is the rest of delight in the work of creation accomplished. John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 30-31.

²⁰²Peter Misselbrook, "Sabbath" (an unpublished paper), 10.

²⁰³**ascetic** – pertaining to an austere life involving extreme denial of worldly comforts for religious benefit.

²⁰⁴**pietistic** – marked by extremely strict devotion, or affectation of piety.

²⁰⁵**theophany** – manifestation or visible appearance of God to man.

(3) This means that the Lord's Day is a day primarily for worship. While we may glorify God in our labors in the world, specific acts of worship and interaction with God directly are necessary for men, Adam as well as ourselves.

C. The Proper Atmosphere of Lord's Day Practice

What was the proper atmosphere of Sabbath observance in the Old Testament is clearly suggested in a number of Old Testament texts (Gen 2:3; Psa 118:22-24; Isa 58:13-14). These texts indicate that the Sabbath was a day of joy and blessing.

The Lord's Day, commemorating as it does the resurrection of our Lord, is even more clearly a day of resurrection, light, joy, and gladness. Properly observed, there is no justification for the caricature of gloom and oppression associated with Sabbath-keeping. If it is properly observed, only carnal minds, which know nothing of holy joy, will find the sobriety of holy joy to be gloomy.

It may be objected that, as a matter of experience, it is difficult to joyfully observe the day. The difficulty, however, of joyfully observing the Lord's Day is no proof that it is not God's command. It is a proof of our own spiritual declension. Other commands may be most difficult at times even for Christians to observe with joy. Truly to observe the seventh commandment,²⁰⁶ and all its practical implications with the heart, may be agonizingly difficult and apparently joyless to a younger, single person. It is not for this reason to be doubted that it is the commandment of God.

D. The Beneficial Intention of Lord's Day Practice

Mark 2:27 is, of course, the classic text here: "And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." It suggests the reason that proper observation of the Lord's Day will never be oppressive. The reason is very simply that the proper observation of the Lord's Day is that which is in accord with its divine intention. God intended the Sabbath for man's good; and, therefore, any interpretation of its obligation that is truly oppressive is and must be a false interpretation. Keeping the Sabbath never necessitates neglecting true human needs. God's intention was not to starve hungry men, or to prevent sick men from being healed.

One implication of this is that we ought not to speak of such "works" as exceptions to the Sabbath. For instance, we ought not to speak as if a nurse working occasionally on the Lord's Day is a technical (though permissible) violation of the Sabbath. Any proper interpretation of the Sabbath must interpret it according to the divine intention in giving it. It was never God's intention to forbid nurses to take care of sick people in commanding Sabbath observance. It cannot be then even a technical violation of His command. It is lawful to do well. Just as the death penalty is not a violation of the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," so also works of mercy and necessity are not violations of the fourth commandment.

²⁰⁶"Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exo 20:14; cf. Mat 5:27-28).

E. The Appropriate Duties of Lord's Day Practice

Thus, as we come to deal with the duties appropriate to the Lord's Day, I am not going to speak of them as exceptions to resting on the Sabbath. These works are not exceptions to the Sabbath rest. They are the very things in which that rest consists. The Westminster Confession of Faith (21:8) and the Baptist Confession of 1689 define these duties in identical language. According to these venerable confessions, the Lord's Day is to be spent in "the public and private exercises of His worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy." According to this statement, three sorts of duties are not only permissible but required on the Lord's Day.

1. Duties of Worship

For the scriptural texts on the use of the day for public worship, compare Acts 20:7, John 20:26, and Acts 2:1. For private worship, compare 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 and Revelation 1:10. These texts, as they have been expounded in previous chapters, have a number of practical implications with regard to the duties of worship on the Lord's Day.

(1) One cannot limit the duties of the Lord's Day to public worship. Two of the three instances of Lord's Day observance by the church after Christ's ascension involve non-corporate acts of worship (1Co 16:1-2; Rev 1:10). It is the Lord's Day at 2 p.m. as well as at 9:30 a.m. and 6 p.m.²⁰⁷ Christ claims the whole day as His own. Whether you are a Christian Sabbatarian or not, it remains His Day throughout. You have no right to act or think at any time in it as if there were no difference.

(2) One ought to attempt to improve the Lord's Day as a special day for personal and family piety. It may be used for extra personal prayer or reading, instruction of children, praying with your wife, or fellowshiping with other believers.

(3) Failure to worship God on God's Day is wholly inexcusable. A man may have a dozen reasons all impeccably in line with Sabbath law that make it nearly impossible for him to gather with God's people on God's Day. Thus, he rarely worships God in any peculiar way on God's Day. That man is a Sabbath-breaker because he falls short of the divine intention of the Sabbath: to assure us special opportunities to worship God. If a man finds himself in a situation in life where even works of necessity related to his vocation make it rare for him to have a Sabbath for the worship of God, he must seriously endeavor to alter his vocational responsibilities.

2. Duties of Mercy

Matthew 12:9-13 is one crucial biblical text on the subject of the propriety of performing duties of mercy on the Sabbath. In verse 12 Jesus says, "Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days." I have, however, intentionally spoken not of "doing well" on the Sabbath, but of duties of mercy. The Bible does not teach that just anything that is right or good to do is right or good to do on the Sabbath. It is right to work at your job, but Jesus did not mean to say that this is legitimate on the Sabbath. By doing "well"

²⁰⁷9:30 a.m. and 6 p.m. – 9:30 a.m. on Sunday morning is the traditional time for morning services at many churches, and 6 p.m. for evening service.

in Matthew 12:12, He meant the kind of good mentioned: having mercy on a pressing need. This is a technical meaning for “good works” in the Bible. While in general good works are those that conform to the Law of God as revealed in the Scriptures, more specifically, good works are concrete expressions of *kindness* and *generosity*, especially of a practical and financial kind (Joh 10:31-33; Act 10:38; 9:36; 2Co 9:8-9; 1Ti 5:10; 6:17-18). Other texts that speak of such works of mercy as appropriate to the Sabbath are Luke 13:10-17 and 1 Corinthians 16:1-2.

Duties of mercy on the Sabbath are not forbidden; they are not even an exception to the Sabbath. The Lord's Day Sabbath is a very appropriate day for such works; even such ministries as are very vigorous and very tiring (like pulling a sheep out of a pit) are appropriate. The meeting of pressing human (and even animal) need is not to be put off because of the Lord's Day.

3. Duties of Necessity

Here we come to one of the more important and delicate questions that must be answered regarding the practice of the Christian Sabbath. What is a duty of necessity? Some people use the carefulness and precision with which this question must be answered to argue against the Christian Sabbath. They inquire, “Who can completely answer such a question?” However, it must be remembered that the Jews, at least, were Sabbath-keepers. They evidently were able to answer this question satisfactorily. What, then, is the answer?

A work of necessity, clearly, is *not* merely something that must be done. It is rather a work that must be performed every day or must be performed on the Lord's Day. Note the examples of Scripture in Matthew 12:1, Luke 14:1 and 7, John 5:8-11, and Joshua 6:1-5. These biblical examples make clear that one must not be scrupulous or silly in defining a work of necessity. Christ did not scruple²⁰⁸ about telling the lame man to take his bedroll home. The questions must be asked: is this really work? Does it really distract me from my duties? Only after that do we need to ask the question: is it necessary?

On the other hand, the Bible gives a number of clear illustrations of labors that are not a work of necessity. Exodus 34:21 states quite clearly that sowing and harvesting are not works of necessity. Numbers 15:32-33 shows that gathering firewood is not necessary on the Sabbath. Nehemiah 13:15 shows that treading wine presses and the labor involved in selling ordinary merchandise are not necessary on the Sabbath. Clearly, any definition of a work of necessity that would by implication destroy the basic distinction between the Lord's Day and the rest of the week must be wrong. We must not so define a work of necessity that the requirement not to rest from our labors becomes meaningless. Therefore, it would appear to be clear that any ordinary work connected with our vocations, which can be done on other days, is not a work of necessity.

Illustrations of modern works of necessity may serve to make concrete these principles. While building automobiles may be done on other days and is not a work of necessity, the maintenance of public utilities on the Lord's Days is a work of necessity. While

²⁰⁸scruple – hesitate.

sowing and harvesting are not works of necessity, milking cows on the Lord's Day is a work of necessity (it is, in fact, a work of mercy toward the cows). The telephone companies and other similar communications industries are a vital necessity that must be operated every day of the week, while it is not necessary for stores selling ordinary merchandise like clothing or groceries to be operated.

A thousand questions may remain in your mind about this or that. Dabney's response to such dilemmas is appropriate, "Let conscience and heart respond to God's requirement that His Day be hallowed by us, and the details will be easily arranged."²⁰⁹ If you truly embrace God's Law, you have adequate resources: prayer, your all-sufficient Scriptures, and wise, godly counselors.

F. The Forbidden Activities of Lord's Day Practice

Remember the basic duty of sanctifying the Lord's Day is two-sided. It must be *sanctified* to holy duties and *set apart* from ordinary duties. Thus, the confessions mentioned earlier add that we must "observe an holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations."

1. "Rest...from...worldly employments"

Any biblical view of the sanctifying of the Lord's Day must be built on the basic distinction between work and rest instituted at creation. Also, every day of worship in the Bible is also a day of rest (Lev 23:4-7). The clear teaching of the Bible is, then, that our ordinary work responsibilities must be laid aside in favor of worship (Exo 20:8-11; Neh 13:15ff.).

2. "Rest...from...worldly...recreations"

At first glance this may seem like a more difficult issue. Is worldly recreation to be put on the side of work or rest? A little thought will show the superficiality of those who equate worldly recreation with Sabbath-resting. Three considerations make this clear:

(1) It is difficult to distinguish employment and recreation. How would you do it? What if my vocation is recreational and enjoyable to me?

(2) Worldly recreations would negate the true purpose of the Sabbath as effectively as worldly employments. Football and water-skiing can keep one from worship as easily as or more easily than work. Clearly, both equally prevent resting *to* the Lord and, thus, are illegitimate.

(3) The Bible itself defines the work forbidden in the fourth commandment as including our pleasures in Isaiah 58:13.

If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words.

²⁰⁹Robert L. Dabney (1820-1898), *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological* (London: Banner of Truth, 1967), 544.

Here, keeping the day holy and honoring it (our very duties in regard to the Lord's Day) are contrasted both with our "own ways" and our "own pleasure." Please note that by "pleasure," God does not mean anything that makes us feel good. Rather, He means that which we call "legitimate recreations." The point is that delighting in the Lord and His Day exclude delighting in our personal pleasures, avocations, hobbies, and recreations. The positive delight requires the negative abstinence.

G. The Necessary Preparation of Lord's Day Practice

Engaging in the appropriate duties and avoiding the forbidden activities obviously must affect the way we live the rest of the week. The confessions of faith cited earlier mention "a due preparing of their hearts and ordering of their common affairs beforehand." I do not regard this as needing proof. Illustration will suffice, because this duty is required by the law of nature and simple logic. There may be for the full-time student a difficult biology or mathematics examination on Monday. If the Lord's Day is to be sanctified, most of the preparations for such an examination will need to be made on Saturday. Similarly, household chores that may be done on days other than the Lord's Day, like mowing the lawn, will have to be done on Saturday, if Saturday and Sunday are the only two days of the week in which sufficient time is available to do them. Similarly, homemakers will want to do their housecleaning, laundry, and much of their cooking before the Lord's Day, so that they are not distracted unnecessarily from observing it as a holy rest from their labors.

Several practical applications of the importance of preparation for the Lord's Day must here be underscored.

(1) Such preparation is one of the great benefits of Sabbath-keeping for us. It forces sloppy, undisciplined twenty-first century Americans to order their affairs. It thus gives them the gift of a more orderly life.

(2) This preparation is one of the great offenses of Sabbath-keeping for objectors. Do you want to know why some people reject Sabbath-keeping? They are simply not ready for the self-denial and discipline it will cost them.

H. Special Questions about Lord's Day Practice

1. The Children and the Sabbath

One of the most pressing questions for parents as they consider Sabbath-keeping is, What about the children? How do I deal with my children in regard to the Sabbath? Must children keep the Sabbath? Such questions are often asked both by those sincerely desirous of keeping the Sabbath, and also by those eager to show the impossibility of keeping the Sabbath. Either way they deserve an answer. There are the following considerations.

(1) It should not surprise us if the fourth commandment has a different application to children than adults. This is true of other commandments. "Thou shalt not commit adultery" has little application to those children who have not reached puberty. It is not totally irrelevant, but neither is it totally relevant. Putting a boy and girl together in a

bathtub at age one is no violation of the seventh commandment. Doing the same thing with the same two persons twelve years later would be!

(2) The commandment to rest implies the ability to work (Exo 20:8-11). The duty to keep the Lord's Day holy is built on the work/rest distinction. This is just to say that it is those who have the ability to work who have the duty to rest. It is rest from work. Can children work? Can children work like adults? Ought children to be made to work as if they were adults? I hope you will agree with me that infants have no ability to work, small children very little ability to work, and older children an increasing ability to work. Children play. Yes! But child's play is neither work nor recreation in the adult sense. This means that children have only a maturing ability to work. Consequently, they have only a maturing or increasing responsibility to keep the Sabbath. The responsibility to rest corresponds to the responsibility to work. In children, both are in flux.

This gives us the general principle: Children must keep the Sabbath according to their capacity, i.e., their childish nature. Accordingly, all child's play is not to be forbidden on the Lord's Day.

Caution must, however, be exercised here. We must not buy the modern line that children ought not to work until they are 18. Somewhere years before that, they can do adult work with almost full capacity.

(3) Children must be taught from their earliest ages to sanctify the Lord's Day, i.e., to put a difference between the Lord's Day and other days. Yes, they may play, but they must be taught to play more *quietly* and more *briefly*. It is probably not a good idea to allow the neighbor children to come over on the Lord's Day. Special toys and books may be reserved for the Lord's Day. Children are never too young to learn that the Lord's Day is special.

(4) In line with these general principles, parents, and especially fathers, must be responsible to order their children's lives, so that they have a growing sense of both the blessedness and holiness of the Lord's Day. The goal is to help them grow to become full-fledged, adult God-lovers when they are full-grown, who love to obey their God in keeping the Sabbath (Eph 6:4; Exo 20:8-11).

(5) Parents have a right to go beyond the explicit statements of the Word of God in implementing the Sabbath commandment with their children. Such a right is essential to parental authority. Your implementation of the Sabbath in your homes may appear arbitrary to others, but you are within your parental rights so long as it

- a) does not contradict the Word of God,
- b) provides a wholesome Sabbath experience for your children, and
- c) leads them to a mature appreciation and practice of the Sabbath.

We only must beware of insisting upon our exact implementation of the Sabbath to other parents with different circumstances and different children.

2. *The State and the Sabbath*

Historically, Christian Sabbatarians have often advocated or defended civil legislation enforcing at least the cessation of ordinary business and recreation on the Christian

Sabbath. Often, however, this advocacy has assumed a view of the union of church and state that is inconsistent with a) the separation of church and state and b) freedom of religion. Thus, Sabbatarian legislation is commonly associated with what can only be called a theocratic view of the state. The Sabbath legislation that began with the Constantinian change in the Roman Empire, and continued in the Middle Ages in Europe, and in the so-called Bible Commonwealths of New England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is illustrative of this tendency. This backdrop raises the most serious questions about the legitimacy of Sabbath legislation as it has ordinarily been conceived. Thus, we have no interest in defending such legislation.

All this is not to say, however, that there is no remaining concern for Christians in this matter. Christians now face a situation in the increasingly secularized states of the twenty-first century in which more and more economic hardship is involved in Lord's Day observance. As more and more businesses require employees to work on the Lord's Day, jobs that do not involve the violation of the Lord's Day become more scarce. This is the folly of the continuing anti-Sabbatarian polemic against the old Sabbath legislation. Professing Christians imposing their view of the Lord's Day on unbelievers via Sabbath legislation is really the least of our worries.

One does not need to have a theocratic view of the state to believe that the state does owe its right to govern, and thus its ultimate allegiance, to God. This is certainly the teaching of Romans 13:1-7. This does not mean, of course, that it is the state's vocation to enforce the "right" religion. It does mean, however, that the state should protect the freedom of religion and provide a context in which religion may be freely practiced. Here is where civil legislation may be not only appropriate but necessary. Is not the observance of holy days a common feature of all forms of religion? It certainly is a feature common not only to Christianity, but also to Judaism and Islam. Consistent with this, should not the legislation that purports to protect our civil rights and the freedom of religion be strengthened so that it protects explicitly the observance of a weekly holy day to be designated by the employee? If legislation may be enacted granting all sorts of other benefits to employees (for example, extended leave for pregnancy and childbirth), why cannot this minimal and comparatively inexpensive protection be extended to the state's best citizens?

We have examined a) the *Presuppositions* that shape our views of the Lord's Day, b) the *Proofs* of the Lord's Day in Scripture, c) selected *Precedents* to give additional insight into the Lord's Day, and finally d) the *Practice* of the Lord's Day. All our understanding of the Word must show itself in our walk with the Lord, especially on His Day. May the Lord use His Word, then, to bring all who know Him to a better understanding of the Lord's Day, and to a more scriptural and joyful practice of the same.

