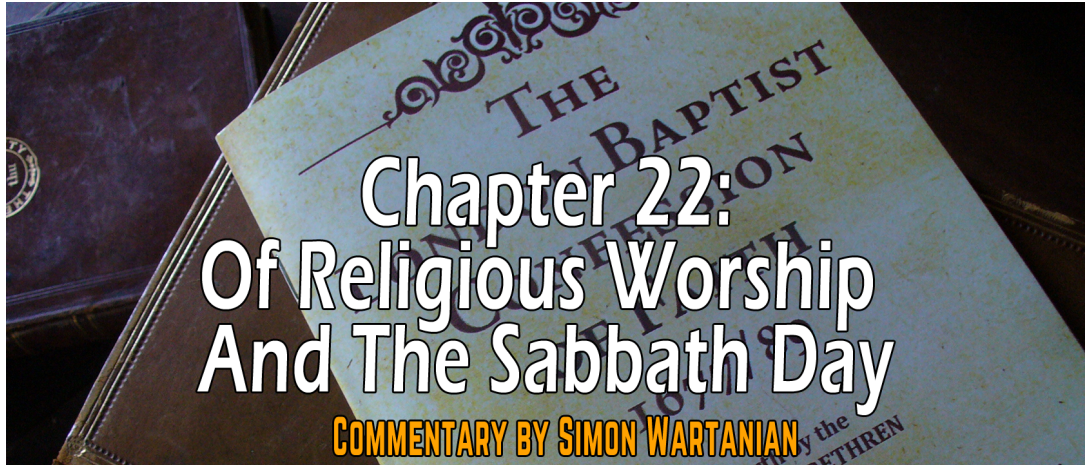


1689 BAPTIST CONFESSION CHAPTER 22: OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP AND THE SABBATH DAY - COMMENTARY

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CHAPTER 22: OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP AND THE SABBATH DAY

How are we to worship God? What is the Regulative Principle? Is it taught in the Scriptures? What are the elements of worship? What are circumstances? Are we only to sing the Psalms? Can we use musical instruments in public worship?

Is there a specific day of worship? What is the Sabbath? Which day is it? When was it first instituted? How is it that Sunday is the Christian Sabbath? Where does Scripture teach the change of the day? What about Romans 14:5-6; Galatians 4:9-11; Colossians 2:16-17? Don't these passages teach the abrogation of the Sabbath? How is the Sabbath to be kept?

§1 The Regulative Principle Of Worship

1. The light of nature shews that **there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all;** is just, good and doth good unto all; and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart and all the soul, and with all the might. **1 But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God, is instituted by himself,** and so **limited by his own revealed will,** that **he may not be worshipped according to the imagination and devices of men,** nor the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures. **2**

1. Jer. 10:7; Mark 12:33^[1]

2. Gen. 4:1-5; Exod. 20:4-6; Matt. 15:3, 8-9; 2 Kings 16:10-18; Lev. 10:1-3; Deut. 17:3; 4:2; 12:29-32; Josh. 1:7; 23:6-8; Matt. 15:13; Col. 2:20-23; 2 Tim. 3:15-17

The light of nature or natural revelation as we call it shows **that there is a God, Who hath lordship and sovereignty over all** (Rom. 1:19-23). That there is a God, no one will be able to deny when they stand before God. Both creation and the Creator testify to God. This is basic Romans 1. Furthermore, this God is **just, good and doth good unto all** (Ps. 145:9) as evidenced by the things which we have and receive. Therefore, He is to be worshiped and **served** with the whole of our being. Yet He is not to be worshiped as we like. **But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God, is instituted by Himself** (Ex. 20:4-6; Deut. 4:2; 12:29-32). It is God Who determines how He is to be worshiped. This **acceptable way** is **limited** by His **revealed will**, i.e., Holy Scripture. The unacceptable way of worshipping God as **according to the imagination and devices of men** (Acts 17:29; Col. 2:23), **the suggestions of Satan, visible representations** (Ex. 20:4-6) and **any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures** (Lev. 10:1-3) is abominable to God and He is not pleased with it. God is not to be worshiped as we think He would like to be worship. Why should we think of ways of

worshipping Him when He has revealed how He desires to be worshiped? Neither is He to be worshiped through or by **any visible representations**. This excludes all images and statues of the persons of the Godhead as well as the saints who according to Roman Catholic theology can act as intercessors between us and God/Jesus. The most important aspect of what is called the Regulative Principle of Worship is expressed in the last clause: **any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures**. Not only is He to be worshiped according to His revealed will, but He is *not* to be worshiped through that which He has not revealed. If it is not **prescribed in the Holy Scriptures**, it should not be an element of His worship. If it is prescribed in the Holy Scriptures, it should.

There Is A God

Creation testifies to everyone without question that there is God. General Revelation is sufficient to reveal God to the world and to hold them accountable ([see chapter 20](#)). Everyone knows that there is a God. But not only that there is a God, but also that this is a God that must be worshiped. This explains the countless religions that have existed and still exist. It is all because of the Fall that we have a multitude of religions rather than only one. Romans 1 speaks about those who suppress the truth about God through idolatry. All religions in one way or another try to appease the god(s) and serve them. That is the sense that they get from General Revelation. There is a God to Whom they owe their existence and blessings, therefore they are to serve and love Him. But the Confession is quick to add the way in which the true God wants to be worshiped is instituted by Himself alone. To that now we turn our attention.

What Is The Regulative Principle?

In the words of Derek Thomas, “the regulative principle of worship states that the corporate worship of God is to be founded upon specific directions of Scripture.”^[2] For everything we do in worship, we must have a **scriptural warrant**. Sometimes the language of *command* is used. **All that is commanded is acceptable, and what is not commanded is forbidden.** We must be careful with such a language. What is meant is not we must have imperatives for everything in corporate worship. But rather, the Regulative Principle of Worship teaches that for every element of worship in the corporate worship of God’s people, there must be a Scriptural warrant. We cannot simply add things to the worship of God which have no warrant in the Word of God.

The Confession says that there is an “acceptable way of worshiping the true God” which presupposes that there is an *unacceptable way*. We are not to worship God as we feel and as we think He would like us to worship Him. Rather this “acceptable way” is determined and “instituted by himself”. It is God who commands, directs and shows His people in His Word how He desires to be worshiped. How He desires to be worshiped is “limited by his own revealed will”, meaning, the Holy Scriptures. Only things which God (directly) has commanded and/or have a Scriptural warrant may take place in the corporate worship of God’s people. Simply said, the **Regulative Principle of Worship is the application of Sola Scriptura to the corporate worship of the Church**. This Regulative Principle is contrasted with the *Normative Principle*. In the time of the Reformation, those who held to the Regulative Principle were the Reformed and the Puritans, while those who held to the Normative Principle were the Lutherans and Anglicans, among others. But, what is the Normative Principle? The twentieth article titled “Of the Authority of the Church” from the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, reads:

The Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith: And yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything contrary to God’s Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and a keeper of holy Writ, yet, as it ought not to decree any thing against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce any thing to be believed for necessity of Salvation.^[3]

This is the position of virtually all non-Reformed churches these days. Whatever is not commanded is permitted, unless expressly forbidden. The church may decree “Rites or Ceremonies” but these must not be against “holy Writ”. The Regulative Principle, on the other hand, states that only those things described and commanded in Holy Writ as they concern the worship of God’s people, are to be part of the worship of the Church. Therefore, the Puritans saw a return to Rome in the teaching of the Church of England. They saw that the Normative Principle left the door to Rome open. While the Regulative Principle shut tightly the door to Rome and held fast to Scripture as the basis for the elements and way of worship.

The last observation concerns the fact that this Regulative Principle concerns the worship of *the gathered church*. The corporate/public worship of the church on the Lord’s Day (or any other day that the church gathers to worship) is to be regulated by the Scriptures alone in all its elements of worship. Not all life is to be regulated by this principle, but only the corporate worship of the church. Therefore, Dr. Waldron speaks of “*the regulative principle of the church*” and says that

"God regulates His worship in a way which differs from the way in which He regulates the rest of life."^[4] After writing about the uniqueness of the church gathering of the New Covenant and its connection with the tabernacle and Temple in the Old Covenant, Dr. Waldron says:

God never told Moses precisely how to construct Moses' tent. God never told Moses precisely how to regulate His family. Those tasks He left to the discretion of Moses because it was Moses' tent and Moses' family. But it is for that very reason that God exercises such pervasive control over the tabernacle and its worship. The tabernacle was God's tent; it ministers to His family. Thus, He rules its worship with a special and detailed set of regulations to which He expects precise obedience.^[5]

God is jealous for His worship and He has actually not given man freedom to do as they will in His worship. We shall shortly see how jealous God is concerning His worship and the way He is worshiped, by the measures He deals to those who pervert His worship. John Calvin is considered to be one of the first who advocated for the Regulative Principle of Worship. In a letter to Emperor Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire (24 February 1500 – 21 September 1558), Calvin writes in 1543:

I know how difficult it is to persuade the world that **God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His Word**. The opposite persuasion which cleaves to them, being seated, as it were, in their very bones and marrow, is, that whatever they do has in itself a sufficient sanction, provided it exhibits some kind of zeal for the honor of God. But since God not only regards as fruitless, but also plainly abominates, whatever we undertake from zeal to His worship, if at variance with His command, what do we gain by a contrary course? The words of God are clear and distinct,

"Obedience is better than sacrifice." "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men," (1 Samuel 15:22; Matthew 15:9.)

Every addition to His word, especially in this matter, is a lie. Mere "will worship" ἑθελοθησκία [ethelothreskeia] is vanity. This is the decision, and when once the judge has decided, it is no longer time to debate.^[6]

Every addition to God's Word in the matter of *His* worship is a lie. It is not, Calvin says, a bad suggestion or a bad idea, rather it is a *lie*. This is a very serious charge. The reason that such a thing is a lie and sin is that it perverts the true worship of God, which should solely be based on what He has said. In conclusion, the Regulative Principle teaches that:

- Whatever is commanded concerning worship is to be done;
- Whatever is forbidden is *not* to be done;
- Whatever is not spoken about, is *not* to be done.

Scriptural Support

What is the Scriptural support for this doctrine? We will explore a few examples which will serve to prove that we are not to introduce new things to the worship of God and that it is only the prerogative of God to order and regulate His worship. There are a multitude of examples, but we will content ourselves with a few.

Cain And Abel

Gen. 4:3-5 In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, 4 and Abel also brought of the **firstborn of his flock** and of their fat portions. And the **LORD had regard for Abel and his offering**, 5 but **for Cain and his offering he had no regard**. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.

Many have wondered why God was pleased with Abel, but not with Cain. There is no doubt that the offering of sacrifices is part of religious worship. We should also be careful to observe what is said here in the passage. The *person* and the *offering* are grouped together. God was pleased and had regard for "Abel **and** his offering", but that was not the case for "Cain **and** his offering". The problem or the reason for rejection was not only with the person himself but also with the sacrifice itself. Cain brought "an offering of the fruit", but Abel brought "the firstborn of his flock". Abel brought a blood offering, while Cain brought non-blood offering. But, you may ask, there is not a single command prior to this event of God commanding a blood offering while forbidding "fruit" offering. So, what was the basis that God rejected "Cain and his offering" then? The reason, I believe, is in what God Himself did for their parents. In Genesis 3:21 we read of the LORD making "garments of skins" for Adam and Eve. The only logical explanation is that God killed some animal(s) to provide their skin as covering for their nakedness and thereby picturing that we need a covering for our sins (Rom. 13:14). Blood was spilled to cover Adam and Eve's nakedness. God had provided in that event an example of what is pleasing to Him. As G. I. Williamson observes, "Abel

gave serious consideration to the revelation that God had given up to that time in history, while Cain treated it lightly.”^[7] Dr. Waldron writes:

First, the slaughter of animals to provide [sic] skin coverings for Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:21 is suggestive of the appointment of animal sacrifices. Second, the mention in Genesis 4:4 of “the firstborn of the flock and of their fat” anticipates later appointments of the sacrificial laws. For the sacrificial significance of the firstborn notice Leviticus 27:26 and Numbers 10:37. For the sacrificial significance of the fat notice Exodus 23:18; 29:13; Leviticus 3:3-4, 9-10; 7:3-4, 23-24.

Here we have very early on an example of the Regulative Principle. In fact, we even have it from an example and not a direct command of “You shall.” In the example of the LORD in the Garden, there was sufficient warrant that He only commanded and accepted blood sacrifices. In the blood is the life of the animal (Lev. 17:11), therefore, to offer a blood sacrifice demonstrates that one life had to be given for the other to be spared. We see here, from very early on, the principle of “what is *not* commanded, is forbidden.” Williamson concludes:

It is no exaggeration at all, then, to say that this was Cain’s downfall: *he was not willing to limit himself to worship that had God’s approval.*⁽⁵⁾ We therefore see a clear principle: *worship which is not sanctioned by God is forbidden.*^[7]

The Second Commandment

Exod. 20:4-6 “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for **I the LORD your God am a jealous God**, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

First of all, we have dealt with this commandment briefly in chapter 19 on the Law of God ([see here](#) for that). What does this commandment concern itself with? In the simple, brief or basic form of the commandment, it says, “You shall not make yourself a carved image” or “You shall not have any idols.” The first commandment says “You shall have no other gods.” What is then the difference between the first and the second commandments? I believe the difference lies in this:

1. The first commandment teaches us not to have any other god or object of worship other than the LORD God.
2. While the second commandment teaches us *how* we are *not* to worship this one God.

It is here necessary to dispel the idea that we sometimes may have of the ancients. No one thought that the idol itself (i.e., the image) was the deity they’re worshipping. Rather, the idolaters wanted to get to the deity *through* that dumb idol. Second, we need to reconsider the idolatry of the golden calf. It is often thought that Israel quickly went astray after other gods in that instance. But in actuality, that is not the case. They had clearly seen the power of God working among them. They were not so dumb as to quickly go after other gods. They knew that there is but one God and He had manifested Himself clearly to them. Well, what was their sin then? Their sin was to worship God *through* the golden calf! Israel tried to worship God in a way that He explicitly forbade in the Second Commandment, which was declared by God in their hearing. Aaron, who made the golden calf, said, “Tomorrow shall be **a feast to the LORD**” (Ex. 32:5). That’s the *Tetragrammaton*! A feast to Yahweh, the true God. As to the “gods” in vv. 1 and 4, the word *Elohim* is plural even when speaking of the true God, therefore, its translation, among other things, is dependent on the context and the margins mention that it also can be translated “a god” and not “gods.” Support for seeing that it is speaking of a singular god is seen in Aaron’s declaration above. The feast is to be to Yahweh, and not to other false gods. They tried to worship Yahweh in a way which He clearly had forbade in the Second Commandment. They tried to make representations of Him, which He clearly forbade and His wrath was kindled against them. It is generally understood in the Reformed tradition that the Second Commandment has to do with worship. Therefore, the Westminster Larger Catechism says:

Question 109: What are the sins forbidden in the second commandment?

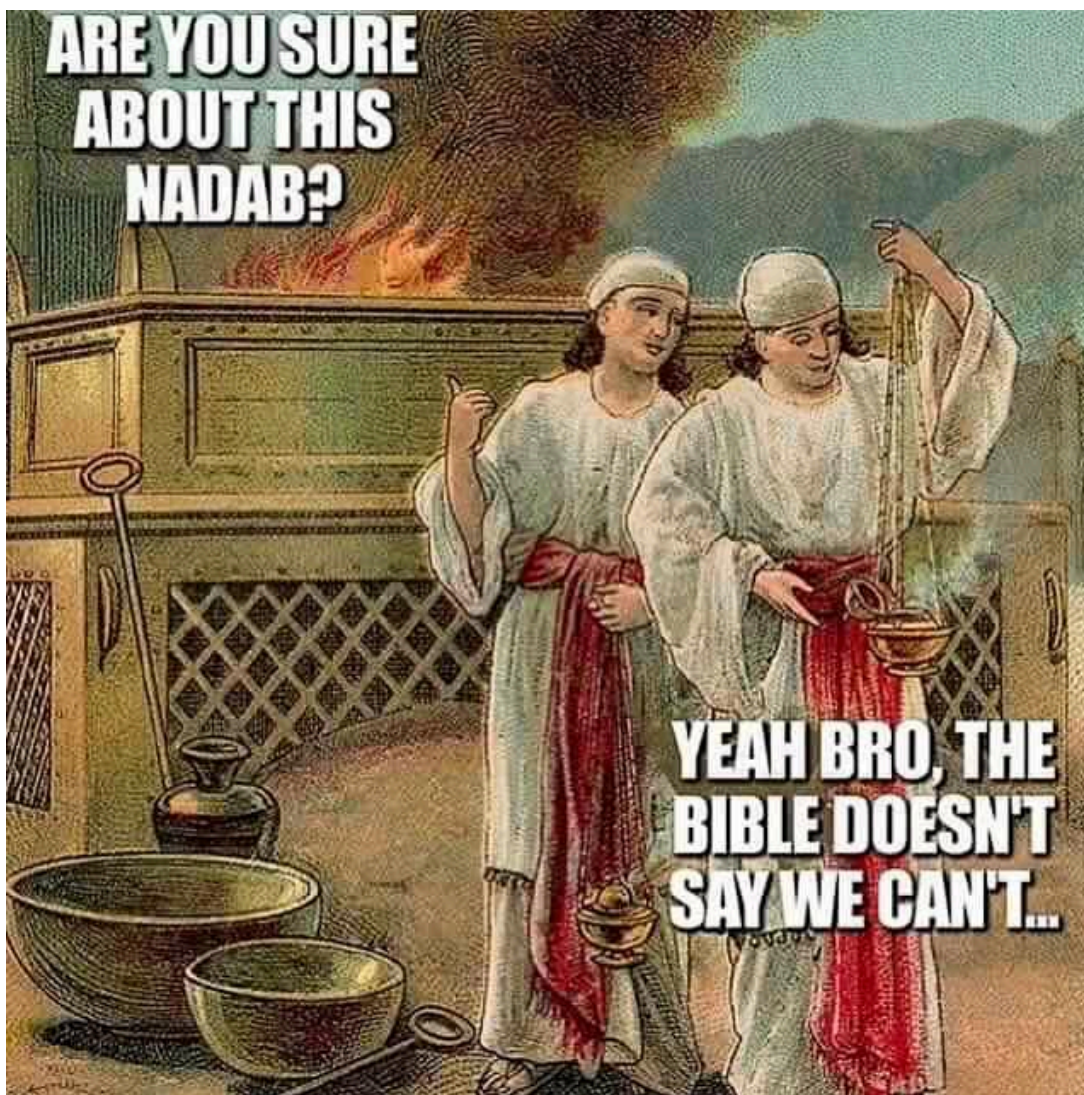
Answer: The sins forbidden in the second commandment are, all devising, counseling, commanding, using, and anywise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself; tolerating a false religion; the making any representation of God, of all or of any of the three persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any creature: Whatsoever; all worshiping of it, or God in it or by it; the making of any representation of feigned deities, and all worship of them, or service belonging to them; all superstitious devices, corrupting the worship of God, adding to it, or taking from it, whether invented and taken up of ourselves, or received

by tradition from others, though under the title of antiquity, custom, devotion, good intent, or any other pretense: Whatsoever; simony; sacrilege; all neglect, contempt, hindering, and opposing the worship and ordinances which God has appointed.^[8]

Nadab and Abihu

Lev. 10:1-3 Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and **offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them.** 2 And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. 3 Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD has said: 'Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.'" And Aaron held his peace.

I think the clearest and most cited example of the Regulative Principle of Worship is the case of Nadab and Abihu. In a sense, you may have sympathy with them and we may see the reaction of God as over the top. But then again, as priests, they had to listen carefully to what God commanded and do that, not turning to the right or to the left. 'The mere fact that they dared to bring "unauthorized fire" (the translation of the NIV) brought fiery death upon them.'^[9] In this case, as was with Cain and Abel, we have the principle of "what is not commanded, is forbidden."



In Exodus 24:1, Nadab and Abihu are explicitly mentioned and commanded to come and worship in the very presence of God. In fact, the text says "they saw the God of Israel" (Ex. 24:9-10). In Exodus 28:1, they were instituted as priests to the Lord. But in Leviticus 10 we read of the action which brought their immediate death. They dared bring something to the worship of God which He had *not* commanded. There is not a command that no other fire may be presented before the Lord. The fire which Nadab and Abihu brought was not from the fire which the LORD sent from heaven:

Lev. 9:24 And **fire came out from before the LORD** and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.

This fire lit the burnt offering and the altar. All the other necessary fires had to be taken from *this* fire. But the fire which Nadab and Abihu brought, was “unauthorized” or “strange” because it came from another source. Then the text explicitly says that concerning this strange fire “he had not commanded them.” John Gill observes:

which he commanded not; yea, forbid, by sending fire from heaven, and ordering coals of fire for the incense to be taken off of the altar of burnt offering; and this, as Aben Ezra observes, they did of their own mind, and not by order. It does not appear that they had any command to offer incense at all at present, this belonged to Aaron, and not to them as yet; but without any instruction and direction they rushed into the holy place with their censers, and offered incense, even both of them, when only one priest was to offer at a time, when it was to be offered, and this they also did with strange fire. This may be an emblem of dissembled love, when a man performs religious duties, prays to God, or praises him without any cordial affection to him, or obeys commands not from love, but selfish views; or of an ignorant, false, and misguided zeal, a zeal not according to knowledge, superstitious and hypocritical; or of false and strange doctrines, such as are not of God, nor agree with the voice of Christ, and are foreign to the Scriptures; or of human ordinances, and the inventions of men, and of everything that man brings of his own, in order to obtain eternal life and salvation.^[10]

Williamson observes:

Now it does not say this happened because they were not sincere -- or because they lacked ‘good intentions’; it doesn’t even say it happened because they did something God had expressly forbidden. No, what it says is that they did this without first making sure they had a warrant to do it. So, again we see that worship not commanded by God himself is, therefore, forbidden.^[7]

Dr. C. Matthew McMahon likewise observes:

The[y] offered “strange fire”. Now this is somewhat of an odd statement. God never told them that they could not offer this strange fire. You would look through the Scriptures in vain to find the commandment which stated they were not allowed to do this. Rather, we do find what God does tell them. Though God did not expressly forbid this strange fire to be brought, we see from the text that God did not approve of it, and killed them on the spot for offering it.^[11]

As I said in the beginning, what they did does not seem to the human mind as a sin deserving of death. It seems that they were sincere and had no evil intentions and they were obviously not expecting to die. But God sees their bringing fire “he had not commanded them” a thing which deserves the death sentence because it perverts His worship, which He is jealous for. By bringing strange and unauthorized fire before the Lord, Nadab and Abihu did *not* regard the Lord as holy, therefore, He brought immediate judgment upon them, so that the people would know that God is jealous for His worship and He is not pleased with “strange fire.” Again, we have here the principle of “what is not commanded, is forbidden.”

It is proper here to observe how patient God actually is among us. We should not merely think because God does not bring immediate judgment (upon the unregenerate) or discipline (upon His children) for worship which He has not authorized, that God is actually pleased with it. We should not take the *patience* of God as a sign of His *approval* of “strange fire...which he did not command them.” Rather, we should all the more and vigorously search the Scriptures to learn about the way in which God wants to be worshiped.

You Shall Not Add To It Or Take From It

Deut. 12:29-32 “When the LORD your God cuts off before you the nations whom you go in to dispossess, and you dispossess them and dwell in their land, 30 take care that you be not ensnared to follow them, after they have been destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire about their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods?—that I also may do the same.’ 31 You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the LORD hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods. 32 **“Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it.**

In warning Israel against idolatry, the Lord likewise commands them to follow His words *only*. They are to worship the LORD their God in the way that He has commanded them. They should not invent ways of worshiping God as the heathen did for their idols. Rather, the true worship of the true God is instituted by Himself alone. John Gill observes on this passage that we should “neither add any customs and rites of the Heathens to them, nor neglect anything enjoined on them”^[10]. The

command in v. 32 concerns especially the commandments concerning the worship of God. What is said is also applicable to all of God's commandments, but *especially* in this context, to the way which God ought to be worshiped. The people of God should neither add to the worship of God, neither take away from the worship of God. Rather, they are to do everything that God's commands us concerning His worship. Calvin notes on v. 32:

What thing soever I command. In this brief clause he teaches that no other service of God is lawful, except that of which He has testified His approval in His word, and that **obedience is as it were the mother of piety**; as if he had said that **all modes of devotion are absurd and infected with superstition, which are not directed by this rule**. Hence we gather, that in order to the keeping of the First Commandment, a knowledge of the true God is required, derived from His word, and mixed with faith. By forbidding the addition, or diminishing of anything, he plainly condemns as illegitimate whatever men invent of their own imagination; whence it follows that **they, who in worshipping God are guided by any rule save that which He Himself has prescribed, make to themselves false gods**; and, therefore, horrible vengeance is denounced by Him against those who are guilty of this temerity, through Isaiah,

"Forasmuch as this people draw near me, etc., by the precept of men; therefore, behold I will proceed to do a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish," etc. (Isa 29:13.)

Now, since all the ceremonies of the Papal worship are a mass of superstitions, no wonder that all her chief rulers and ministers should be blinded with that stupidity wherewith God has threatened them.^[12]

Keil & Delitzsch note concerning the place of this command:

Strictly speaking, the warning against inclining to the idolatry of the Canaanites (Deu 12:29-31) forms a transition from the enforcement of the true mode of worshipping Jehovah to the laws relating to tempters to idolatry and worshippers of idols (ch. 13).^[13]

Therefore, until the previous chapter, God, through Moses, taught His people the *right* way of worshiping Him and now He moves to the discussion of idolatry and what ought *not* to be done in chapter 13. Lastly, Matthew Henry comments:

He therefore concludes (v. 32) with the same caution concerning the worship of God which he had before given concerning the word of God (ch. iv. 2): "*You shall not add thereto* any inventions of your own, under pretence of making the ordinance either more significant or more magnificent, *nor diminish from it*, under pretence of making it more easy and practicable, or of setting aside that which may be spared; but observe to do all that, and that only, which God has commanded." We may then hope in our religious worship to obtain the divine acceptance when we observe the divine appointment. God will have his own work done in his own way.^[14]

Uzzah And The Ark

The Ark of the Covenant fell into the hands of the Philistines and was later on delivered from their hands and they placed it in the house of Abinadab (1Sam. 7:1). Now as they are trying to bring the Ark back to Jerusalem from the house of Abinadab, a terrible thing happens. They had brought a new cart, with what it seems to be good intentions so that the Ark of God may not be defiled by an old cart. They were happy, singing and praising the Lord with music. But all the sudden, "the oxen stumbled" and without any intervention, this would have caused the Ark to fall into the dirt. With, what seems to be, all good intentions Uzzah puts his hand so that the Ark would not fall to the ground and is struck down by God. What's the reason that God judged him so harshly?



Greg L. Price notes that there were three things which caused God's judgment to come severely upon Uzzah:

The violation of God's Regulative Principle was at least in three areas: (1) Uzza was apparently not a Levite (he was the son of Abinadab from Kirjath Jearim of the tribe of Judah, cf. 2 Sam. 7:1; 1 Chron. 2:50; 1 Chron 13:6-7) and according to Numbers 4:15 God commanded Levites to move the Ark (cf. 1 Chron. 15:2); (2) The Ark of God was not to be carried on a cart as the heathen Philistines had done in 1 Samuel 6:10-11 (Israel was not to follow the ways in which the heathens served their gods, Deut. 12:30-32). God had specifically commanded the Ark to be carried on the shoulders with poles (Ex. 25:12-15); and (3) The Ark of God was touched by Uzza, whereas God had commanded that no one touch it (Num. 4:15).^[15]

Uzzah, along with David, violated the commandments of God concerning the Ark and the carrying thereof. God explicitly commanded that the Ark should be 1) carried by the Kohathites (Num. 3:30-31; 4:15; 7:9); 2) that it was to be carried by poles (Ex. 25:14; Num. 7:9), not upon a cart; and 3) the Ark was not to be touched (Num. 4:15). But Uzzah, David and the priests who should have known better, violated the commands of God. God did not strike them all but only punished Uzzah to demonstrate His holiness as He did with Nadab and Abihu. Right from the beginning, they went wrong in neglecting to inquire what God has actually said concerning how the Ark should be treated. John Gill notes on v. 3:

And they set the ark of God upon a new cart,.... Which was a great mistake, since it ought not to have been put upon a cart, old or new; it was to be borne upon men's shoulders, and carried by Levites only, and those of the family of Kohath, to whom no wagons were given, when others had them, for the above reason, Nu 7:9;^[10]

Israel, in this instance (again), tried to follow the custom of the heathen. The Philistines had put the Ark on a cart (1Sam. 6:7-8), but God's people should have listened to God's Word. Uzzah was judged more harshly than the Philistines because he should have known better. The second time they try to bring the Ark to Jerusalem, they know better. David says to the priests:

1Chron. 15:13 Because you did not carry it the first time, the LORD our God broke out against us, because we did not **seek him according to the rule.**"

Williamson carefully observes:

Uzzah died because -- as David explained later on -- "we did not inquire of [God] about how to do it *in the prescribed way*" (1 Chron. 15:13). It happened, in other words, because they failed to limit themselves to what God had expressly commanded.⁽¹²⁾ But how different it was when "the Levites carried the ark of God . . . *as Moses had commanded in accordance with the word of the Lord*" (1 Chron. 15:14). Again we see the same principle clearly revealed: *the only thing that pleases God is what He has commanded.*⁽¹³⁾^[7]

Devised From His Own Heart

The last Old Testament example is that of Jeroboam's idolatry. After the split of the united Kingdom of Israel into the northern and southern kingdoms, Jeroboam, the king of the northern kingdom, was afraid that the people abandon him and side with Judah, the southern kingdom. That was because of the absence of the Temple in the northern kingdom. What he does is foolishly repeat the sin of Israel at Sinai.

1Kgs. 12:28 So the king took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. **Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.**"

As we observed above on the [Second Commandment](#), so likewise here we observe concerning the word "gods" which could also be translated as "god" in the singular. John Gill notes, "that these [the two calves] were representations of the true God, who had brought them out of Egypt; and that it might as well be supposed that God would cause his Shechinah to dwell in them as between the cherubim over the ark."^[10] These words sadly echo what Israel said at Sinai (Ex. 32:4). It appears that Israel had *still* not learned its lesson. Not only did Jeroboam institute this false worship of images, but also, instead of letting the people go to the appointed place of the Lord, which was Jerusalem, he instituted a false priesthood to promote this idolatry (1Kgs. 12:31). Not only did he do that, but he even appointed a feast by his own authority (1Kgs. 12:32)! The text says:

1Kgs. 12:33 He went up to the altar that he had made in Bethel on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, in the month that **he had devised from his own heart**. And he instituted a feast for the people of Israel and went up to the altar to make offerings.

He had no divine warrant for such idolatrous and blasphemous ways of worshiping God. He had to follow God's Law and what it said concerning how He is to be worship and not to devise "from his own heart" how God should be worshiped. After this incident and in subsequent history, Jeroboam becomes an example of a sinful and evil king (e.g. 1Kgs. 10:29, 31; 13:2, 6, 11; 16:2, 19-20, 26; 21:22; 22:52; 2Kgs. 3:3; 14:24; 15:9, 18, 24, 28; 17:21-22; 23:15). Notice especially 2 Kings 10:29. In the next chapter (1 Kings 13), God sends a prophet to prophesy about the abolishment of this false worship. It is obvious that God was not pleased with this innovation of worship which had no basis in His Word. Jeroboam, as the text says, "devised" these things "from his own heart" (1Kgs. 12:33), which was wicked and deceitful (Jer. 17:9). Williamson notes:

Jeroboam was always spoken of, after that time, as the one who "caused Israel to sin" (as a corporate body) (I Kings 15:30). We hardly exaggerate, then, when we say that this was a major source of Israel's ultimate downfall. Worship which had been appointed by God was replaced by a new form of worship. But because this worship was not commanded by God it was therefore rejected.^[11]

What God has not commanded, is forbidden. What God has commanded is to be done and that alone is to be done.

In Vain Do They Worship Me

Mark 7:6-8 And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, "'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; 7 **in vain do they worship me**, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' 8 You leave the commandment of God and hold to the **tradition of men.**"

Now we come to the New Testament and there is not a hint that the Regulative Principle, so clearly articulated in the Old Testament, has been changed or that we now operate under a different principle. Obviously, some things have been changed such as sacrifices, the Temple, the priesthood and so on. But concerning those, we have a warrant to understand they're done away with and fulfilled. But there is not a hint in the New Testament that God no longer regulates His worship or that God is no longer jealous for His worship.

The Jews in this passage were bringing a tradition of the elders to the same authority as the Scriptures. They required that they wash in a particular way before eating. Therefore, when they saw the disciples of our Lord eating with "defiled hands" they accused them of "not walk[ing] according to the tradition of the elders" (Mark 7:5). Our Lord's response is cited above. The first accusation is that they're hypocrites. They merely appear religious and try to be religious on the outside, but on the inside they're false. They present themselves as devout to the Word of God, but pay more careful attention to the "tradition of men" than the "commandment of God". They try to invent ways of pleasing and worshiping God. But God's response to their innovations is that they are "vain". This passage the Lord Jesus cites from Isaiah 29:13 from the LXX, which is slightly

different from the Hebrew:

Isa 29:13 LXXE And the Lord has said, This people draw nigh to me with their mouth, and they honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me: but **in vain do they worship me**, teaching the commandments and doctrines of men.

Their worship is merely outward and is therefore false. Even if it would have contained the right “parts of worship” it would have been false because it was not from the heart. But that was not the only case with the Pharisees. Their heart was not right, but the content of worship was likewise not right. They had added to the worship and commandments of God as the Lord accuses them of doing. In the way that they elevated their “tradition of the elders”, they made void the Word of God and worshiped God falsely and in vain. Calvin notes:

But in vain do they worship me The words of the prophet run literally thus: *their fear toward me has been taught by the precept of men*. But Christ has faithfully and accurately given the meaning, that *in vain is God worshipped*, when the will of men is substituted in the room of doctrine. By these words, all kinds of *will-worship*, (ἑθελοθησκεία,) as Paul calls it, (Col 2:23,) are plainly condemned. For, as we have said, since God chooses to be worshipped in no other way than according to his own appointment, he cannot endure new modes of worship to be devised. As soon as men allow themselves to wander beyond the limits of the Word of God, the more labor and anxiety they display in worshipping him, the heavier is the condemnation which they draw down upon themselves; for by such inventions religion is dishonored. ^[12]

Philip Schaff notes on Matthew 15:9 that this “vain worship” is “both *groundless* (without true principle) and *fruitless* (without proper results).”^[16] Christ still, under the New Testaments, holds tightly to the Regulative Principle of Worship. He elevates the commandments of God above the tradition of men. God is to be worshiped in the way which He Himself has instituted. It is His worship and He alone has the prerogative to dictate and regulate it. The traditions of men ought not to be added to the commandments of God. If they do, then God is vainly and falsely worshiped.

The Father Seeks Worshipers

John 4:19-24 The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” 21 Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; **we worship what we know**, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when **the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth**, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must **worship in spirit and truth**.”

In His encounter with the Samaritan woman, the Lord Jesus goes into a conversation with her about worship. The Samaritans accepted only the Pentateuch and did not worship God in Jerusalem (as they lived outside of Jerusalem). Basically, they did not hold to the Regulative Principle. God had appointed Jerusalem and the Temple to be the place of His worship on earth. But they did not obey the voice of God in this matter. The Lord Jesus says concerning the Samaritans that they “worship what [they] do not know”. But in contrast, “we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22). The Jews worshiped in the place of God’s appointment. The Lord Jesus declares the worship of the Samaritans as false. But He also declares that the hour is coming when the worship of God would not be tied to a particular place. Calvin notes on v. 21—

Woman, believe me. In the first part of this reply, he briefly sets aside the ceremonial worship which had been appointed under the Law; for when he says that the hour is at hand when there shall be no peculiar and fixed place for worship, he means that what Moses delivered was only for a time, and that the time was now approaching when the partition-wall (Eph 2:14) should be thrown down. In this manner he extends the worship of God far beyond its former narrow limits, that the Samaritans might become partakers of it. ^[12]

But the hour is here when “the true worshipers”, which means that there are *false* worshipers, will worship God in “spirit and truth”. What does this phrase mean? The word “spirit” here does not refer to the Holy Spirit, I believe, but rather to our own spirit. Thereby it means that the true worship of God is the worship which is *invisible* and *internal*. It is the worship with all the heart, mind, soul of the true God. It does not concern itself with outward ceremonies and representations. It does not concern itself with a place worship, whether Jerusalem or Mount Gerizim (as was the case with the Samaritans), but worships God wherever they are. Calvin says on v. 23—

The worship of God is said to consist *in the spirit*, because it is nothing else than that inward faith of the heart which produces prayer, and, next, purity of conscience and self-denial, that we may be dedicated to obedience to God as holy sacrifices.^[12]

Albert Barnes' comments are likewise helpful on "in spirit":

The word "spirit," here, stands opposed to rites and ceremonies, and to the pomp of external worship. It refers to the "mind," the "soul," the "heart." They shall worship God with a sincere "mind;" with the simple offering of gratitude and prayer; with a desire to glorify him, and without external pomp and splendor. Spiritual worship is that where the heart is offered to God, and where we do not depend on external forms for acceptance.^[17]

To worship God "in...truth" means to worship Him according to the truth. The Lord Jesus would, later on, declare that "your [God's] word is truth" (John 17:17). To worship God in truth, therefore, means to worship Him according to His Word. To worship Him according to what He has commanded in the Holy Scriptures. To worship Him according to His liking. We should not add to the worship of God like the Pharisees did who were accused of worshiping God "in vain" (Mark 7:7, [see above](#)), lest we want to receive the same accusation. John Gill notes that to worship God in truth means to worship Him

in opposition to hypocrisy, with true hearts, in the singleness, sincerity, and integrity of their souls; and in distinction from Jewish ceremonies, which were only shadows, and had not the truth and substance of things in them; and according to the word of truth, the Gospel of salvation; and in Christ, who is the truth, the true tabernacle, in, and through whom access is had to God, prayer is made to him, and every part of religious worship with acceptance^[10]

John MacArthur writes on v. 24—

in spirit and truth. The word "spirit" does not refer to the Holy Spirit but to the human spirit. Jesus' point here is that a person must worship not simply by external conformity to religious rituals and places (outwardly) but inwardly ("in spirit") with the proper heart attitude. The reference to "truth" here refers to worship of God consistent with the revealed Scripture and centered on the "Word made flesh" who ultimately revealed his Father (14:6).^[18]

Jesus says that "the Father is seeking such people to worship him." The worship of God is the most important thing in the world. It is the most important thing for people to concern themselves with. God goes through lengths to regulate His worship and teach His people how He is to be worshiped. Therefore, it is something that is very important to Him. God is seeking those who will truly worship Him in the way that He has prescribed. God desires worship which is "in spirit and truth." The prime example of this is the Lord Jesus Christ. We should look to Him and learn concerning our duty toward God from God.

"God is spirit" means that He is invisible, without a body. Therefore, those who worship Him, should likewise not worship him, as the Confession says, "under any visible representations". But rather, we worship Him invisibly, by our spirit and in truth. We do not abide in the shadows and types of the Old Testament, but now we enjoy the realities of Christ in the New Covenant. God seeks those who desire to worship Him in His prescribed way. He teaches us in His Word the way that we should approach Him and worship Him as His people. Therefore, we should pay careful attention to worship Him "in spirit and truth", which means that we worship Him according to His Word alone without man-made additions.

Will Worship And Self-Imposed Worship

Col. 2:20-23 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— 21 "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" 22 (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? 23 These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting **self-made religion** and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

Our main focus here is the word translated "self-made religion" in v. 23. But let us first observe what is said previously to that in this chapter. We are freed in Christ from the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament, but not only that, we are also freed from everything that is contrary to His Word. These things concern the doctrines of the false teachers about asceticism. We should not submit to their "regulations" (v. 20), which are contrary to the Word but are "according to human

precepts and teachings” (v. 22). We should reject these regulations and precepts because they are useless and godless. They do not have the warrant of Scripture and therefore they are vain. These additions to His word, which Calvin says are “a lie”, appear to have wisdom and appear harmless. But in fact, if God has not authorized them, they are forbidden and they promote “self-made religion” (v. 23). Now we turn our attention to this word.

The Greek word is ἐθελοθρησκεία (*ethelothreskeia*, G1479), which Thayer’s Greek Definitions defines as “voluntary, arbitrary worship” and “worship which one prescribes and devises for himself”.^[19] The word *ethelothreskeia* is a compound of two words. Θέλω (*thelo*, G2309), which is the verb meaning “to will” and the noun θρησκεία (*threskeia*, G2356), which means “religious worship.” Therefore, this word is often referred to as “will worship” by those writing for the Regulative Principle and it is thus translated by the KJV and YLT. The NET says “self-imposed worship”. Calvin, noting on this passage, writes of the word ἐθελοθρησκεία literally denotes a voluntary service, which men choose for themselves at their own option, without authority from God. Human traditions, therefore, are agreeable to us on this account, that they are in accordance with our understanding, for any one will find in his own brain the first outlines of them.^[12] This “will worship” (KJV), “self-imposed worship” (NET) and “self-imposed religion” (ESV) is “according to human precepts and teachings”, which the Church ought not to follow. By forbidding “self-imposed worship”, the Apostle Paul directs the Church to the God-imposed worship—the Regulative Principle of Worship. God ought to be worshiped in the way that He has prescribed, with no additions nor subtractions. Albert Barnes notes:

In will worship. Voluntary worship; that is, worship beyond what God strictly requires--supererogatory service. Probably many of these things they did not urge as being strictly *required*, but as conducing greatly to piety. The plea doubtless was, that piety might be promoted by service rendered *beyond* what was absolutely enjoined, and that thus there would be evinced a spirit of uncommon piety--a readiness not only to obey all that God required, but even to go beyond this, and to render him voluntary service. There is much plausibility in this; and this has been the foundation of the appointment of the fasts and festivals of the church; of penances and self-inflicted tortures; of painful vigils and pilgrimages; of works of supererogation; and of the merits of the “saints.” A large part of the corruptions of religion have arisen from this plausible, but deceitful argument. God knew best what things it was most conducive to piety for his people to observe; and we are most safe when we adhere most closely to what he has appointed, and observe no more days and ordinances than he has directed. There is much apparent piety about these things; but there is much wickedness of heart at the bottom, and there is nothing that more tends to corrupt pure religion.^[17]

This self-imposed religion and worship in this instance contain also what is said in Colossians 2:18. God is still displeased with worship that goes beyond what He has said in His Word or subtracts from His Word. Deuteronomy 12:32 still stands fast concerning what God has commanded about His worship:

“Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it.

Objection: “But Now We Are In The New Covenant”

There are several objections to the Regulative Principle which stem from a misunderstanding. I will *not* deal with those. My purpose was merely to provide a brief case for this doctrine. For those seeking those common objections and their answers, I refer you to Waldron’s chapter in *Going Beyond The Five Points*. But I will try to deal with one objection here.

Some suppose that just because we are now under grace and not under law (Rom. 6:14), that God is no longer strict concerning His worship. I beg to differ. We should not presume that the patience of God means that He accepts false worship. God is patient and that especially with His children who love Him, but yet do not completely follow His Word concerning His worship. We should not argue, “Oh look, we are not struck down like Nadab and Abihu or Uzzah, therefore God is pleased with everything we do.” But rather, we should diligently search the Scriptures to learn about how has God taught us to publically worship Him as a congregation on the Lord’s Day. Furthermore, God has in fact demonstrated Old Testament-like punishments in the New Testament. Consider the example of Ananias and Sapphira after one lie (Acts 5:1-11). Just because we lie against God and are not struck down, does not mean that God does not care. It simply means that God is unimaginably patient. Or the example of those who abused the Lord’s Supper in the Corinthian congregation. The Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:30, “That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.” God has, in fact, visited His people with Old Testament-ish disciplines and punishments (not for their condemnation, I believe). We have no reason to conclude that God is any less jealous for His worship in the New Testament as He was in the Old Testament. Worship is still about God, therefore, He alone still holds the prerogative to regulate and dictate it.

Elements and Circumstances of Worship

Although Confessional Reformed churches believe in the Regulative Principle of Worship, yet their applications of the

principle is not uniform. The order in which things are conducted is different. What is sung may be different. There are those who teach that only the 150 Psalms of the Bible are to be sung in corporate worship. While others (including me), believe that non-inspired songs may likewise be sung. Some believe that no instruments may be used in the worship service, while others (including me) do not forbid the use of instruments. All these groups agree about the Regulative Principle of Worship. Some of these groups would accuse the others of not holding tightly to the Regulative Principle. But nonetheless, both groups profess to hold it, yet their application of the Principle is different. My point is: while many churches hold to the Regulative Principle, yet their application is not uniform and there should be some tolerance and biblical conversations about the reasons. Even the Confession, in chapter 1 paragraph 6 admits this:

...there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.

There are certain things which God has left us some freedom in, but these concern the **circumstances of worship** and not the *parts* or *elements* of worship. What time do we worship? How long should the sermon be? How long should the service be? How many songs do we sing? How often should the Lord's Supper be administered? These are *circumstances* of worship, not *elements* or *parts*. Concerning the **elements of worship**, Tim Challies writes:

Said simply, the **elements of worship are the "what" of worship** - the parts that are fixed according to Scripture. Examining the New Testament will show the elements that are permitted and commanded by Scripture. These include reading Scripture, prayer, singing, preaching the Word and celebrating the sacraments of baptism and Lord's Supper.^[20]

We will discuss the elements of worship in paragraph 5 of this chapter. The elements or parts of worship is what *worship is*. The elements of worship define the corporate worship of Christ's Church. They are the *essence*. On the other hand, the *circumstances* of worship, Challies writes:

The **circumstances of worship are the "how" of worship** - the conditions that determine the best way to worship God within the structure provided by the elements...The *Directory of Worship for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* states, "The Lord Jesus Christ has prescribed no fixed forms for public worship but, in the interest of life and power in worship, has given his church a large measure of liberty in this matter." While **there is little freedom in the elements of worship**, there is **great freedom within them according to circumstances**. However, as with every area of life, this freedom must be exercised cautiously and in a way consistent with Scripture.^[20]

The circumstances of worship are those things that we could do without. While on the other hand, the elements or parts of worship are the things that we could not do without. If prayer or preaching is removed from the service, then an element and not a circumstance of worship is removed. But if, for example, the service starts at 12 o'clock instead of 10 o'clock, or a church decides to no longer use the beamer, then there is no change in the elements of worship, but merely the circumstances. Derek Thomas observes:

Thus, the regulative principle as such may not be invoked to determine whether contemporary or traditional songs are employed, whether three verses or three chapters of Scripture are read, whether one long prayer or several short prayers are made, or whether a single cup or individual cups with real wine or grape juice are utilized at the Lord's Supper. To all of these issues, the principle "all things should be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40) must be applied.^[21]

It is in the circumstances where the most differences are found in those churches which hold to the Regulative Principle of Worship.

Who Can Worship God Perfectly?

Christ the Lord was the only Man who has worshiped God perfectly "in spirit and truth." We all fall miserably short. God demands perfect worship, but we are unable to give God His due. Like all His Ten Commandments, no one can keep them perfectly, because they do not merely concern outward things, but they deal with the heart. Therefore, the Regulative Principle should drive us to the Lord Jesus and we should beseech Him to teach us through His Word and Spirit about how we ought to worship the Triune God "in spirit and truth." We should pray that we may be further sanctified to worship God more

truthfully. Even those who hold to the Regulative Principle are able to sin in not worshipping God truly with their heart. The elements and parts of worship may all be present, but if the heart is not present, it is vain worship.

We should pray that God may grant the grace for a reformation of worship according to His Word. Many churches nowadays do not care about what God has said concerning how He is to be worshiped, but rather look to the world for suggestions. They seek to learn from the world concerning what they desire to see in Church, rather than in the infallible and sufficient Word of God. They seek to draw people using means that God has not authorized and adding to His worship things which He has not commanded. May we pray that God would grant His people the grace and willingness to diligently search the Scriptures to learn about the way in which God desires to be worshiped.

Not Under Any Visible Representation

To worship God by visibly representing Him in statutes or pictures (any of the Person of the Blessed Trinity) is to break the Second Commandment. To worship God “in spirit and truth” includes the idea of worshipping God invisibly, without any representations whatsoever. This does not mean that we may not have pictures of Bible verses or crosses, but it means, that no Person of the Holy Trinity may be visibly represented at all. For more on this see our discussion in chapter 19 about the [Second Commandment](#).

§2 Religious Worship Is To Be Given To God The Father, Son, And Holy Spirit

2. Religious worship is to be given to **God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit**, and to him alone;
1 not to angels, saints, or any other creatures; **2** and since the fall, **not without a mediator, nor in the mediation of any other but Christ alone.** **3**
 1. Matt. 4:9-10; John 5:23; 2 Cor. 13:14
 2. Rom. 1:25; Col. 2:10; Rev. 19:10
 3. John 14:6; Eph. 2:18; Col. 3:17; 1 Tim. 2:5

All three persons of the Trinity, **God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit** should receive **religious worship** and to God **alone**. No **angels, saints, or any other creature** (Rom. 1:25; Rev. 19:10) should receive **religious worship**. It is for God alone. Furthermore, this **religious worship** is mediated by **Christ alone** (Eph. 2:18; 1 Tim. 2:5). We cannot go to God without Christ. Christ is our only access to God in all things.

Through Christ Alone

That worship is to be offered to the Triune God is seen from the fact that God ought to be worshiped and that all three Persons of the Holy Trinity are co-equal and co-eternal ([see chapter 2](#)). Therefore, worship is to be offered to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. All three Persons should be prayed to and worshiped. While that is true, it is usually true, as with prayer, that we worship the Father through the Son by the power of and in the Holy Spirit (*not* referring to John 4:24). Since the Fall of man in the Garden man needed a mediator, someone who would stand between him and God. The only mediator between man and God, is the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5). The Lord Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father (John 14:6). He is the only One in Whom salvation is found (Acts 4:12). It is only through His mediation that we can approach God. Every religion which denies the perfect and **sole** mediation of the Son, is a false religion. [See chapter 8 “of Christ the Mediator.”](#) Many false religions have tried to put either persons alongside Christ, or persons in place of Christ as mediators. Now, to such a religion we turn our attention against which the Reformers wrote.

Pray Not To The Dead

The Roman Catholic religion teaches that not only prayers to God are to be made, but prayers to the departed saints may also be made. Now, simply applying the Regulative Principle of Worship or even looking through the Bible for any example or command to pray for or to *departed* brothers and sisters, we would search in vain! Scripture is twisted left and right to make it say things which it simply does not say. They often abuse Revelation 5:8 to teach that the saints know the contents of our prayer and therefore, somehow this gives us a warrant to pray to them. These 24 elders are not the Church, but they are angelic representatives of the Church. This is seen in the fact that they *exclude* themselves from the song of redemption (contra the Textus Receptus) in Revelation 5:9. Moreover, the fact that they know the content of our prayers, does not in any way give us a warrant to pray either to departed saints or to angels. Furthermore, the Roman Catholic religion has an

unbiblical understanding of sainthood. The New Testament teaches that all believers are saints (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; etc...) and that the saints are not a special class of Christians, contrary to Roman Catholicism.

But Catholics will object that the prayer to the saints or through the saints, is just like asking a Christian on earth to pray for you. This is dead wrong and the objection does not work. First of all, those whom we ask for prayer on earth are still alive. Second, that is a thing that we're directly commanded to do (e.g. 2 Thess. 1:11; 3:1; Jas. 5:16). But contact with the dead is expressly forbidden in the Word. Not only do we not have a command to pray to departed saints, nor do we have a *positive* example of anyone doing that, but we have actually a negative example. Saul tries to make contact with the now-departed Samuel through a medium and gets rebuked by Samuel in 1 Samuel 28. We are not to have any contact with the dead. We are forbidden by Scripture to have any contact with the dead (Deut. 18:10-12), nor are we anywhere commanded to pray to or through them.

Most importantly, this doctrine is wicked because it casts doubts upon the perfect mediation of Christ. When Roman Catholics pray to Mary and other saints, asking them to intercede with God on their behalf, they are denying the perfect mediation of the Savior. They are asking the departed saints to pray for them from heaven. No such thing has any warrant in the Bible, but the reason why I find it a vile and blasphemous doctrine is because it diminishes the doctrine of Christ's mediation. Christ is no longer important and He is no longer the *only* way to God when such heresies are taught. Catholics pray to Mary, ascribing to her all kinds of titles and positions which the Bible doesn't give her, thinking that their prayers will be better answered, rather than going to the Father directly through the Son. Contrary to this blasphemous doctrine, the Bible states that we may have confidence in our approach to God:

Heb. 4:16 Let us then with **confidence** draw near to the **throne of grace**, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

The only Mediator between man and God, is Christ Jesus. There are no other viable candidates. We go to God through Christ and in His Name alone do we make our prayers (John 14:13-14; 16:23-24). To try to put any other person between man and God is to reject the intercession and mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ, our faithful High Priest who "ever liveth to make intercession for [us]" (Heb 7:25 KJV). We have a perfect Mediator through Whom we can confidently come to God by the power of the Spirit. Why should we seek another? Let's put away all human traditions and heresies and worship God in spirit and truth, according to His Holy Word alone.

§3 The Doctrine Of Prayer

3. **Prayer, with thanksgiving**, being one part of natural worship, is by God **required of all men**. **1** But that it may be accepted, **it is to be made in the name of the Son**, **2 by the help of the Spirit**, **3 according to his will**; **4** with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love, and perseverance; **5** and when with others, **in a known tongue**. **6**

1. Ps. 95:1-7; 100:1-5
2. John 14:13-14
3. Rom. 8:26
4. 1 John 5:14
5. Ps. 47:7; Eccles. 5:1-2; Heb. 12:28; Gen. 18:27; James 5:16; 1:6-7; Mark 11:24; Matt. 6:12,14-15; Col. 4:2; Eph 6:18
6. 1 Cor. 14:13-19, 27-28

Prayer is **one part of natural worship**, that which does not require special revelation. Natural worship is required of all men based on natural revelation. Religious worship is that worship which is based upon His revealed will. That is why prayer to God is **required of all men** (Ps. 100:1-4). But this does not mean that is accepted or acceptable since God has revealed the way in which we ought to pray. Although God is gracious and answers even some prayers of unbelievers. The acceptable way of prayer is to pray in the **name of the Son** (John 14:13-14), i.e., based on His authority and graces. It is **by the help of the Spirit** (Rom. 8:26), realizing our utter need for His guidance and help. Prayer is to be made knowing that our prayer should be **according to the will** of God (1John 5:14). Prayer is to be made with **understanding**, knowing what we are asking for. It is to be made with **reverence** since it is God to Whom we are praying. It is to be made with **humility** since we deserve nothing from God. It is to be made with **fervency**, i.e., with zeal and passion. It is to be made with **faith** that God will give us that which we ask for if it is according to His will. It is to be made with **love** to God and to others. It is to be made with **perseverance**, i.e., not giving up when the prayer is not answered quickly (unless led otherwise to not ask for that specific thing) and in preserving in prayer. Prayer in the presence of others should be **in a known tongue** so that everyone can understand what is being prayed and thereby "amen" it (1 Cor. 14:13-19, 27-28).

What Is Prayer?

Praying to God is “one part of *natural* worship”. This means that no special revelation is needed to teach us that we should worship God through prayer. It is natural. We want to thank God when there is goodness in our lives and we seek His help when bad things happen. Dr. Wayne Grudem defines prayer as “personal communication with God.”^[22] Keach’s Catechism 109 defines prayer as “Prayer is an offering up of our desires to God, for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgment of His mercies.”^[23] God is described as a God who hears our prayers (e.g. Ps. 65:2) and Who answers our prayers (Ps. 143:1). Prayer is an essential and necessary part of religious worship. In fact, the Apostle Paul teaches us to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17) and to pray “at all times” (Eph. 6:18). The Lord Jesus taught us a model of how we ought to pray (Matt. 6:9-13). J.I. Packer beautifully writes of prayer in these words:

God made us and has redeemed us for fellowship with himself, and that is what prayer is. God speaks to us in and through the contents of the Bible, which the Holy spirit opens up and applies to us and enables us to understand. We then speak to God about himself, and ourselves, and people in his world, shaping what we say as response to what he has said. This unique form of two-way conversation continues as long as life lasts.^[23]

But for prayer to be acceptable, certain things have to be followed which we now turn our attention to.

Acceptable Prayer

There are, whether you believe it or not, conditions which God places for answering prayer. The conditions are:

1. Prayer must be made in accordance with God’s will (Matt. 6:10; Luke. 22:42; 1John 5:14).
 - a. We pray according to God’s revealed will and submit to His sovereign pleasure, knowing that His promise stands fast (Rom. 8:28) and He knows what is best for us better than we do.
2. Prayer must be made in the Name of Christ (John 14:13; 16:24; Heb. 13:15).
 - a. Praying in Christ’s Name is not a magical formula, rather, it is praying on the basis of Christ’s work and authority. We pray, pleading with God not on the basis of our righteousness, but Christ’s. The “name” of a person, to the ancients, represented the character and authority of the person. Grudem observes, “Thus, the name of Jesus represents all that he is, his entire character. This means that praying “in Jesus’ name” is not only praying in his authority, but *also praying in a way that is consistent with his character*, that truly represents him and reflects his manner of life and his own holy will. In this sense, to pray in Jesus’ name comes close to the idea of praying “according to his will” (1 John 5:14-15).”^[24]
3. Prayer must be made in the Holy Spirit (Eph. 6:18; Jude 1:20).
 - a. Relying on His power and graces to intercede on our behalf (Rom. 8:26-27).
4. Prayer must be performed in faith (Jas. 1:6; Matt. 21:22).
5. The one making the prayer should keep God’s commandments (1John 3:22).
6. Prayer must be made with confession of sin (Jas. 5:16; Ps. 66:8).
 - a. So that we would remove hindrances that may stand between us and God. We, first of all, confess all known and unknown sins and ask for forgiveness and cleansing.
7. Prayer must be made with good intentions and motives (Jas. 4:3; 1 Pet. 4:11).
8. Prayer must be made with thankfulness (Phil. 4:6; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:16-18).
 - a. Two things that I can *always* pray for are confessing my sins and thanking God for His amazing grace. We should always be thankful to God for everything.
9. We must pray continually (Luke 18:1; 1 Thess. 5:17; Col. 4:2).
10. Prayer must be made with pure hearts (Isa. 1:15-16; Heb. 10:22; Ps. 66:8).
11. Prayer must be made with a forgiving spirit (Mark 11:25).

12. Prayer must be done with the glory of God as the goal (1 Cor. 10:31).

These are the things which the Bible teaches us about how prayer is to be made and it touches upon all of the things which this paragraph of the Confession touches on except on one point. Prayer, in public form, is to be made in a known language. I should not pray in Armenian or Arabic, in an English or Dutch church. A prayer must be made in a known and understand language so that others may "Amen" it. This follows the principle that Paul laid for tongue-speaking in 1 Corinthians 14:13-19.

Oftentimes, God answers our prayers out of amazing grace, even when we do not follow the prescribed ways of prayer. But this does not mean that it is irrelevant and we should neglect what God has said about acceptable prayer. Rather, it should demonstrate to us the magnificent and mind-stretching grace of God toward us and our sinfulness.

Unacceptable Prayer

Just like the Bible speaks of prayer that is acceptable to God and which God will answer, so likewise, the Bible speaks of prayer which is unacceptable to Him. In many ways, this is simply the negative of what was said concerning the conditions of acceptable prayer, but there are some positive statements in the Bible concerning prayer which does not delight God. The amazing fact is that oftentimes, God does, out of amazing display of grace and patience, answer these "unacceptable" prayers.

1. The prayer of unbelievers (Prov. 15:8; Ps. 34:15-17; John 9:31; 1 Pet. 3:12).
2. The prayer with the wrong motives and intentions (Jas. 4:3; Prov. 21:27).
3. The prayer of the one who loves sin (Ps. 66:18; Isa. 1:15-17; Micah 3:4).
4. The prayer of those who do not fear the LORD (Prov. 1:28-30).
5. The prayer of those who do not help the poor (Prov. 21:13).
6. The prayer of those who have problems with their spouses (1 Pet. 3:7).
7. The prayer of those who doubt and are double-minded (Jas. 1:6-8).
8. The prayer of those who want to be seen by people (Matt. 6:5; Luke 18:9-14).
9. The prayer of those who heap up empty phrases (Matt. 6:7).

Private And Public Prayer

From the statement of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 6:6, some have supposed that public prayer is not to be offered. Otherwise, we would be praying like the Pharisees who wanted to be seen by men. Rather, true prayer is private in one's room. So they reason. But this is wrong. The **Lord Jesus does not forbid public prayer**, what He forbids is *hypocritical prayer*, which is done not to honor and worship God, but rather to be seen as pious by men. That is the context of that passage. Rather than praying to "be seen by others" (Matt. 6:5), the Christian should pray in secret (Matt. 6:6). He hereby does not forbid public prayer, rather contrasts false and true prayer. He contrasts those who pray to be seen by men and those who do not care to be seen by men, who even go to the privacy of their room without anyone knowing that they're praying. The Lord Jesus Himself goes on to pray loudly and in public in vv. 9-13 and on other occasions (e.g. Matt. 11:25-27; 26:36; John 17). Therefore, the interpretation which excludes public prayer cannot possibly be right.

Public prayer, just like private prayer, is commanded. 1 Timothy 2:8 says:

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling;

The men are to lift their hands and pray. This most likely refers to the gathering of the Church. The early church prayed publicly and loudly together (Acts 4:24ff; 20:36). Furthermore, there is a warrant for public prayer in the Old Testament too (Neh. 9; Ezra 10). When the context of Matthew 6:6 is properly understood, we see that the Lord Jesus says nothing negative about public prayer.

§4 The Subjects Of Prayer

4. Prayer is to be made for things lawful, and **for all sorts of men living**, or that **shall live hereafter**; **1** but **not for the dead**, nor for those of whom it may be known that they have sinned the sin unto death. **2**
 1. John 5:14; 1 Tim. 2:1-2; John 17:20

Prayer is to be made for things lawful, i.e., things according to the will and commandments of God. It is to be made **for all sorts of men living** (e.g. 1 Tim. 2:1): ourselves, relatives, friends, government, good people, bad people. It is even to be made for people who **shall live hereafter**, i.e., unborn children or children not yet conceived or converts (John 17:20). But it should **not** be made **for the dead**. This a Roman Catholic practice to pray for those who are dead, but it is absolutely unscriptural. And there is yet another group for whom we should not pray and these are they who **have sinned the sin unto death**. This is drawn from 1 John 5:16 although it is disputed what this "sin unto death" is. Whatever it may be, the Confession includes it in the list because Scripture speaks about it. Furthermore, if we are really sure that a person has committed this "sin unto death" then we should not pray for them.

Prayer is only to be made to living persons or those who will yet live (unborn children). It is not to be made for the dead, as Roman Catholics, for example, do. Because we do not have any command or example to do that from the Scripture. Furthermore, there is no use in our praying for them. Catholics pray for the dead because they believe in Purgatory, which the Bible knows nothing about. Thinking that by their prayers they could ease the suffering of their loved ones. No prayer will help those who have passed into eternity without Christ, because their fate is sealed. Neither will any prayer be needed for those who are in the arms of Christ, for they are already in blessed forever and await the resurrection. David knew that as long as his infant child was alive, He could pray, but once he died, there was no need to pray anymore (2Sam. 12:21-23). The Bible teaches us that we are to pray for:

- Ourselves (1Chron 4:10; Ps. 50:14-15; 106:4-5; 2 Cor. 12:7-8; Heb. 5:7; John 17:1).
 - Fellow believers (James 5:16; Rom. 1:9-10).
 - Ministers of the Word (Eph. 6:19-20; Col. 4:3; 2 Thess. 3:1-2; Acts 13:2-3; Matt. 9:38).
 - Those converted through our ministry (John 17:9-26; 1 Thess. 3:9-13).
 - Sick brothers (James 5:14-16).
 - Brothers who commit a sin not leading to death (1John 5:16-17).
 - All saints (Eph. 6:18; John 17:9, 20; Ps. 36:10).
 - Our children (1Chron. 29:19).
 - Our rulers (1 Tim. 2:2-3).
 - The city where we live (Jer. 29:7).
 - The conversion of the Jewish people (Rom. 10:1).
 - Our enemies (Luke 6:28; 23:34; Matt. 5:44; Acts 7:60).
 - All kinds of men (1 Tim. 2:1).
-

§5 The Elements Of The Religious Worship of God

1. The **reading of the Scriptures**, **1 preaching**, and hearing the Word of God, **2** teaching and admonishing one another in **psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs**, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord; **3** as also the administration of **baptism**, **4** and the **Lord's supper**, **5** are all parts of religious worship of God, to be performed in obedience to him, with understanding, faith, reverence, and godly fear; moreover, solemn humiliation, **6** with fastings, and thanksgivings, upon special occasions, ought to be used in an holy and religious manner. **7**

1. Acts 15:21; 1 Tim. 4:13; Rev. 1:3
2. 2 Tim. 4:2; Acts 2:42; 10:42; 14:7; Rom. 10:14-17; 1 Cor. 9:16
3. Eph 5:19; Col. 3:16
4. Matt. 28:19-20
5. 1 Cor. 11:26
6. Esther 4:16; Joel 2:12; Matt. 9:15; Acts 13:2-3; 1 Cor. 7:5
7. Exod. 15:1-19; Ps. 107

The Confession goes on to enlist *elements* or aspects of the religious worship of God. The **reading, preaching, and hearing the Word of God** (Acts 15:21; 2 Tim. 4:2, 13; Rev. 1:3) is an essential part of the religious worship of God since in this we have God speaking to us. We are also to teach and admonish each other in **psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs** based on Colossians 3:16 (cf. Eph. 5:19). **Baptism** and the **Lord's supper** are likewise **parts of the religious**

worship of God. All these things are to be **performed in obedience to God, with understanding, faith, reverence, and godly fear** similar to what was said of natural worship in paragraph 1. The Confession finally touches upon **solemn humiliation, with fastings and thanksgivings.** These are to be performed **upon special occasions** and should be used in a **holy and religious manner.** Scripture is full of examples of this: in the time of Esther (Est. 4:16); for Paul (Acts 13:2-3); for appointing elders (Acts 14:23).

The elements of worship refer to what worship actually is. As Challies was quoted saying above, they are the “what” of worship. They are the essence of the true and acceptable worship of God. Our Confession lists in this paragraph 5 points, but I believe that an additional point must be added which was treated in paragraphs 3-4—prayer—is likewise an element of worship. In fact, it is called “one part of natural worship” in paragraph 3, so how much more it is an element and a part of acceptable and *revealed* worship. Therefore, I will try to provide a brief biblical testimony to the six elements of Reformed Worship.

1. The Reading Of The Scriptures



It is essential, especially in this age of ignorance of God’s Word, to have the Scriptures read at Church. Many so-called Christians do not read their Bibles, know very little of it, read only the parts they like and misuse the Holy Scriptures. God has given us His Word as a guide and light for our lives. His Word is the rule and measuring rod of our life. We should live our lives in accordance with what we learn from the Holy Scriptures and do that which is pleasing to God. But if we are ignorant of the Word, how should we do this? Therefore, careful attention should be given to the public reading of Scripture in the Church.

The Apostle Paul in instructing the young elder Timothy, tells him: “devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture” (1 Tim. 4:13). The Greek word for *read* is used in Acts 13:15; 2 Corinthians 3:14 and in these instances is meant the public reading of Scripture. Jamieson, Fausset, Brown note concerning the word “reading”:

especially in the public congregation. The reading of Scripture was transferred from the Jewish synagogue to the Christian church (Luk 4:16-20; Act 13:15; Act 15:21; 2Co 3:14). The gospels and letters being recognized as inspired by those who had the gift of discerning spirits, were from the first, according as they were written, read with the Old Testament in the church (1Th 5:21; 1Th 5:27; Col 4:16) (Justin Martyr, ‘Apology,’ 1: 67). Probably the Spirit intended also to teach that the pastor’s Scripture reading in general should be the fountain of all “exhortation” and “doctrine.”^[25]

Likewise, another commentary says:

(a) ἀνάγνωσις, *reading*, is not the *private* study of Scripture (Chrys.), but the *public* reading of the O.T. in the congregation, a custom taken over from the synagogue (Luk 4:16; Act 15:21; 2Co 3:14). The Apostolic letters were also read in the Christian assemblies in the Apostolic age (Col 4:16; 1Th 5:27); and by the time of Justin Martyr's *Apology* (i. 67) portions of O.T. and N.T. Scripture alike were read aloud by the ἀναγνώστης at the Sunday Service.^[26]

It is essential for the people of God to hear and be fed the Word of God. The necessity of the public reading and hearing of God's Word is seen when we understand that God speaks to us in the Bible and that His people must know His Word. This is something which the Jews continually did on the Sabbath and feast days and which Christians are likewise to do (Acts 15:21). There is a blessing in reading, hearing and meditating upon God's holy Word. An explicit blessing is attached to the book of Revelation:

Rev. 1:3 Blessed is the one who **reads** aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who **hear**, and who **keep** what is written in it, for the time is near.

I suppose that this is also the case for our portions of Holy Writ. There is a blessing when God's Word is heard. We thereby learn the will of God and God ministers to us.

2. The Preaching And Hearing Of The Scriptures



In Reformed churches, the pulpit stands supreme symbolizing the necessity and centrality of God's Word. The pulpit is the place from which God, through His Word expounded by the faithful preacher, speaks to His people. Preaching the Word is an essential part of worship. Many people nowadays think that worship takes place when we sing, but that is dead wrong. It is true that we worship through song and music, but we worship likewise when we hear the Word of God faithfully expounded. The preaching of the Word is the most important aspect of the divine service. For in the faithful exposition of Scripture we hear God speaking to us and teaching us. The early church is described as those who "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42). They were dedicated to the teaching of Scripture by the Apostles. It is evident that the Apostles largely expounded upon the Old Testament, showing how the prophecies of old were being fulfilled in their days as they did on Pentecost, for example. There is a solemn and very serious task for pastors to preach the Word. The Apostle writes:

2 Tim. 4:1-2 **I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ** Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: 2 **preach the word**; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

Timothy is solemnly charged to preach the Word. There is a necessity on his part to do this. He is given a solemn obligation as a pastor to do this for his congregation. For if the Word is not faithfully preached, people will find for themselves "pastors"

who will “suit their passions” and “will turn away from listening to the truth” (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Furthermore, the necessity of hearing the Word of God and it being explained is seen in the fact that God’s Word ministers to us in ways that we do not comprehend and God speaks to His people by His Word. The faithful shepherd and pastor of God’s people should declare “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27) and “make the word of God fully known” (Col. 1:25) to God’s people. Albert Barnes notes that preaching “was to be the main business of the life of Timothy, and Paul solemnly charges him, in view of the certain coming of the Redeemer to judgment, to be faithful in the performance of it.”^[17] Charles J. Ellicott notes:

Preach the word.—The language of the original here is abrupt and emphatic, written evidently under strong emotion and with intense earnestness. St. Paul charged his friend and successor with awful solemnity, as we have seen, “preach,” or proclaim. loudly and publicly, as a herald would announce the accession of his king. The exact opposite to what St. Paul would urge on Timothy is described by Isa. (Isa. 56:10), when he speaks of God’s watchmen as “dumb dogs, who cannot bark, sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber.”^[127]

The Apostle had just written to Timothy about the all-sufficient Word of God and now exhorts him to preach and teach this all-sufficient and infallible Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17). He was acquainted with the Word of God from his youth (2 Tim. 3:15). Not only is he to proclaim and preach the Word of God, but he is also to 1) reprove, 2) rebuke, and 3) exhort.

1) The word ἐλέγχω (*eegcho*, G1651) means “to convict, refute, confute” and “to find fault with, correct”.^[28] Young Timothy is to battle and refute unsound teaching and heresy by teaching and preaching properly from the Word of God. He is to refute his opponents that they may come to true repentance and faith (2 Tim. 2:24-26). John Gill notes, “**reprove**; errors, and men for their errors and heresies; make use of convincing arguments taken out of the Scriptures, which are profitable for reproof of this kind; and which reproof sometimes is to be given with sharpness, as the case requires, that men may be sound in the faith.”^[10]

2) To rebuke is ‘A sharper and more severe word than the preceding [reprove]. It is used by St. Jud. 1:9, in his report of the words addressed by St. Michael to the devil: “The Lord rebuke thee.” It frequently occurs in the Gospels. (See, for instance, Mat. 17:18, “And Jesus rebuked the devil.”)’.^[27]

3) To exhort means “To urge by strong, often stirring argument, admonition, advice, or appeal”.^[29] The word is translated with “encourage” in the HCSB. The pastor is to admonish and encourage his people by the Word of God. John Gill notes:

Exhort; to all the duties of religion respecting God and man; to show love, and to do good works; to hold fast the profession of faith, and walk as becomes the Gospel of Christ; and to persevere in faith and holiness: or “comfort”, as the word may be rendered; for as the ministers of the Gospel are in some cases to be “Boanergeses”, sons of thunder, so other cases they should be Barnabases, sons of consolation; and comfort distressed minds, by preaching the comfortable doctrines of peace, pardon, righteousness and salvation by Jesus Christ:^[10]

The faithful pastor is to reprove error, rebuke false teaching and to exhort his people. This he should do with and in patience and teach the Word of God. Paul writes concerning the Lord’s servant that he “must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness” (2 Tim. 2:24-25).

1 Tim. 3:1-2 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires **a noble task**. 2 Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, **able to teach**,

To be a pastor and a teacher is a great privilege and blessing. But, as we also read in 2 Timothy 4:1, it is a solemn charge and task, which should not be toyed with. The preacher ought to teach God’s people God’s Word and preach the Gospel of Christ for the salvation of sinners and the upbuilding of the Church. It is indeed a solemn and noble task.

3. The Singing Of Psalms, Hymns, And Spiritual Songs



Singing is an important element of worship. It is our response to what the Lord has done and what He will do. Music and song are an important part of expressing our feelings and thoughts as humans. From the earliest times, people have engaged in worship through song and music. When the Lord delivered Israel through the Red Sea, the people responded with a song of praise (Ex. 15:1-21). It was a natural reaction to what the Lord’s work to burst into song and praise. The book of Psalms is a collection of 150 songs and prayers for God’s people to use, inspired and given by His Spirit and should be used by them. Yet, inevitably, the question of Exclusive Psalmody comes up when we speak about the Regulative Principle of Worship. Are Christians only commanded to sing the 150 Psalms? I would like to give a brief defense that we’re allowed/commanded to sing more than only the 150 Psalms.

Exclusive Psalmody?

First, let us notice the [different wording](#) of our Confession here from the Westminster and the Savoy, which it heavily depended on.

1689 Baptist 22:5	Westminster 21:5	Savoy 22:5
...teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord...	...singing of psalms with grace in the heart...	...singing of psalms...

Rather than following the wording of the Savoy, as I believe that the Confession mainly does, or the wording of the Westminster Confession, the framers of the 1689 chose to follow the words of Paul in Ephesians 5:19. Some of those who hold to the Westminster Confession likewise do not have a problem with singing *uninspired* songs in the worship of God. Notice that the wording is “singing of psalms” not “singing of the Psalms.” The word “psalm” is defined by Webster as:

A sacred song or hymn; a song composed on a divine subject and in praise of God. The most remarkable psalms are those composed by David and other Jewish saints, a collection of one hundred and fifty of which constitutes a canonical book of the Old Testament, called Psalms, or the book of Psalms. The word is also applied to sacred songs composed by modern poets, being versifications of the scriptural psalms, or of these with other parts of Scripture, composed for the use of churches; as the Psalms of Tate and Brady, of Watts, etc.^[30]

The word “psalm” simply means a hymn or a song of praise. It does not necessarily refer to the 150 Psalms in the Bible. It is true that it appears to have been the practice of many Reformed churches in the Reformation to only sing the Psalms or other Scriptural songs, as Calvin did for example (the Ten Commandments, the song of Zachariah), yet this does not prove that the *Bible* supports exclusive Psalmody. It merely says that many of the Reformers practiced exclusive Psalmody. I will try to give several reasons why I believe that we are allowed to sing more than the 150 Psalms.

First of all, the mere singing of the Psalms would not distinguish a Jewish congregation from a Christian church. Whether metrical or non-metrical, you would not be able to distinguish a Christian church from a Jewish synagogue by the Psalms. The songs of the Church should reflect its theology and understanding of God. We cannot, if we hold to Exclusive Psalmody, sing the precious name of the Savior or about the great truths which come to a *greater light* in the New Testament as the Holy Trinity, the cross, the atonement, the resurrection and so on. No doubt, Exclusive Psalmody would argue that we can find these themes in the Psalter, but we can never clearly sing about them. Why should we still live in the shadow of the Old Testament, if we have the realities now in the New Covenant? I am not against Psalm singing, but what I object to is *Exclusive Psalmody*, although I oftentimes find it attractive because it tries to make the Word of God the central part of its worship. It is commendable, but I do not think that it's entirely biblical. Jonathan Edwards answered those who were suspecting the work of God in the Great Awakening:

But what is more especially found fault with, in the singing that is now practised, is making use of hymns of human composure. I am far from thinking that the book of Psalms should be thrown by in our public worship, but that it should always be used in the Christian church to the end of the world: but I know of no obligation we are under to *confine* ourselves to it. I can find no command or rule of God's word that does any more confine us to the words of the Scripture in our singing, than it does in our praying; we speak to God in both. And I can see no reason why we should limit ourselves to such particular forms of words, that we find in the Bible, in speaking to him by way of praise, in metre, and with music, than when we speak to him in prose, by way of prayer and supplication. And it is really *needful* that we should have some other songs besides the Psalms of *David*. It is unreasonable to suppose that the Christian church should for ever, and even in times of her greatest light, in her praises of God and the Lamb, be confined only to the words of the Old Testament, wherein all the greatest and most glorious things of the gospel, that are infinitely the greatest subjects of her praise, are spoken of under a veil, and not so much as the name of our glorious Redeemer ever mentioned, but in some dark figure, or as hid under the name of some type. And as to our making use of the words of others, and not those that are conceived by ourselves, it is no more than we do in all our public prayers; the whole worshipping assembly, excepting one only, makes use of the words that are conceived by him who speaks for the rest.^[31]

Second. The Psalms themselves call us to sing "a new song" (e.g. Ps. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1). I have heard that some say that this "new song" refers to a new song in the Psalms. But, Psalm 149:1, at the end of the Psalter could not refer to this. Songs are responses to what God has done or will do, as prayers are words of communication springing from the heart to God. We have a lot of prayers in the Bible, but we do not confine ourselves to their wording, so why should we do so for songs? John Gill, commenting on Psalm 149:1, says:

sing unto the Lord a new song; for a new mercy received, a new victory obtained, or a new salvation wrought; more particularly the new song of redeeming grace through Jesus Christ, the song of the Lamb, in distinction from the old song of Moses and the children of Israel at the Red sea, on account of their deliverance, which was typical of salvation by Christ, the oldest, being the first song we read of; but this is a new one, which none but the redeemed of the Lamb can sing; a song suited to Gospel times, in which all things are new, a new church state, new ordinances, a new covenant, and a new and living way to the holiest of all; a song proper for renewed persons to sing, who have new favours continually to bless and praise the Lord for;^[10]

Song is a proper response to what God has done in our lives. Matthew Henry likewise, commenting on Psalm 149:1 says:

We must by all proper ways show forth the praises of God: *Sing to the Lord*. We must entertain ourselves, and proclaim his name, by *singing praises to him* (v. 3), *singing aloud* (v. 5), for we should sing psalms with all our heart, as those that are not only not ashamed of it, but are enlarged in it. We must sing a *new song*, newly composed upon every special occasion, sing with new affections, which make the song new, though the words have been used before, and keep them from growing threadbare.^[14]

Stephen Pribble gives a serious word for those who adhere to the Regulative Principle of Worship saying, "Since we are clearly commanded to sing a new song in worship to God, does not adherence to the regulative principle demand that we do just that?"^[32]

Third. Scripture records non-Psalms used in worship. The song of Moses in Exodus 15 is sung by the congregation concerning the Lord's deliverance of Israel, but not found in the Psalter. It was a response to the Lord's work on their behalf. Habakkuk rejoices in the Lord with a song not found in the Psalter (Hab. 3:17-19). The responses of worship by Mary (Luke 1:46-55) and Zechariah (Luke 1:67-79), while heavily depended upon the Old Testament, did not come from the Psalter. W. Gary Crampton writes:

Leonard Coppes, in his unpublished essay, “Exclusive Psalmody and Progressive Revelation - A Response,” argues that the numerous songs that existed in Old Testament Israel prior to the formation of the Psalter militate against exclusive Psalmody. He contends that other songs were obviously used in the Jews’ worship of God. For example, in *Exodus* 15 we have the song of Moses (verses 1-18), which is repeated in Heavenly worship (compare *Revelation* 15:3), and the song of Miriam (verses 20, 21). In *Judges* 5, we have the song of Deborah (see also *Numbers* 10:35, 36; 21:17, 18). Even the inspired Psalmist (*Psalms* 119:54) speaks of the Mosaic statutes, and not simply the Psalter, as being his songs.^[33]

Touching on my next point, Stephen Pribble writes that the “the existence of other inspired songs in Scripture...cannot be denied” and goes on to list:

There are the songs of Moses (Ex. 15:1-18, Deut. 32:1-43), Miriam (Ex. 15:21), Deborah and Barak (Jdg. 5:2-31), David (2 Sam. 22:1-51, 1 Chr. 16:8-36), Habakkuk (Hab. 3:1-19), Mary (Lk. 1:46-55), Zechariah (1:67-79), the heavenly host (2:14), Simeon (2:29-32), the Apostle John (Rev. 1:5-7) and the saints in glory (4:8, 11; 5:9-10, 12-13; 7:10, 12, 15-17; 11:15-18; 12:10-12; 15:3-4; 16:5-7; 19:1-8). There is an entire book called the Song of Solomon. The book of Lamentations is a collection of five psalms, including four acrostic psalms. The prophecy of Isaiah is literally filled with songs. It is probable that Paul included hymns in his epistles (Rom. 11:33-36, Phil. 2:6-11, 1 Tim. 3:16). It is difficult to believe that God would include so many songs in the Bible and not intend for them to be sung!^[32]

Fourth. The New Testament contains hymns outside the Psalms about Christ. This would include the *Carmen Christi* (Hymn to Christ) in Philippians 2:6-11 and the hymn in Colossians 1:15-18. These are clearly not from the Psalms and they are clearly speaking about the realities which we have under the New Covenant revelation, which we do not have in the Psalms. Nowhere in the Psalms can we sing so clearly about the incarnation of our Lord or of His supremacy. These are hymns given to us by God (inspired) which are found outside of the Psalter! This does not support Exclusive Psalmody. Furthermore, the early Christians were described by the heathen as those who sing to “Christ as to a god”, which sounds a lot like the words of Philippians 2. Pliny the Younger writes:

They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and **sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god**, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so.^[34] [emphasis added]

Not only does this pagan understand that Christians worship Christ as God from the earliest of times, but they also *sang* to Him as God. There are no such clear references in the Psalms, but there are in the New Testament, especially the *Carmen Christi*. Furthermore, the host in heaven sing songs not found in the Psalter. In response to the Lamb’s work, the host in heaven sings of the Lamb in these clear words:

Rev. 5:9-10 And **they sang a new song**, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, 10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

This is the song of redemption. This is the proper response in worship and adoration for the work of Christ. Heaven sings the song of Moses (which is not found in the Psalms) and the song of the Lamb (which is likewise not found in the Psalms) in Revelation 15:3-4, though the ideas are heavily depended upon the Psalms, obviously. The same is the case in Revelation 11:16-18 in response to the coming of the end and the final judgment. Crampton writes:

Dr. Coppes maintains that the songs found in the book of *Revelation* (e.g., chapters 4, 5, 7, 11) support the use of more than the 150 *Psalms* in formal worship. After all, we in the New Testament church have, through our Mediator Jesus Christ, already entered into Heavenly worship (*Hebrews* 2:12, 13; 9:24; 10:19-22; 12:22). He writes, “the Biblical standard for song in worship is faithfulness to what has been revealed and not inspiration.... Wherefore, the regulative principle does not obviate the use of uninspired songs in worship whether private or public.” As long as an uninspired hymn is Biblically correct and appropriate for worship, it should be allowed in the public worship of God.^[33]

If singing non-Psalms in heaven is good, so likewise we on the earth can sing non-Psalms which are theologically faithful to

God's revelation and are proper responses to His work in and for us.

Finally, the use of "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" in Ephesians 5:19 (and also Col. 3:16) excludes Exclusive Psalmody. Here we must inquire what those three categories denote. Exclusive Psalmodyists argue that these are three categories or types of Psalms and these titles were used in the LXX for the Psalms. Therefore, they maintain, the meaning still is that we should sing only the 150 Psalms. But is this the case? Stephen Pribble, who has written a careful response to Exclusive Psalmody, argues:

The fact that these words are used in a Greek translation of the Old Testament in reference to the Psalms does not prove that they invariably refer to the Psalms and cannot refer to anything else, or that Paul's use of them in either context *requires* them to refer to the Psalter.^[32]

Likewise, in a footnote, he reminds us that while the LXX was the Bible of the Apostles in the Greek, it was nonetheless a translation and not the original infallible and inspired Hebrew. Furthermore, the LXX had a

tendency toward free paraphrase, note that it adds titles for the following Psalms where none exist at all in the Hebrew (all English numbering): 33, 43, 71, 91, 93, 94, 96, 97, 99, 104, 105, 107, 114, 116, 117, 118, 119, 135, 136, 137, 146, 147 and 148. It omits "of David" where the Hebrew has it in the titles of Psalms 122, 124, 131 and 133; and "of Solomon" where the Hebrew has it in the title for Psalm 127. It adds "of David" where the Hebrew does not have it in the titles of Psalms 33, 43, 67, 91, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 104, and 137.^[32]

Therefore, should our exegesis of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 really be resting upon a free translation? I am not denying the use of LXX to understand what the Apostles meant and from where they borrowed their words. But I am questioning whether Paul is making such a connection here. Furthermore, these three words are also found *outside* of the Psalter. Pribble writes:

It must be noted that the LXX does not limit its usage of the terms *psalmois*, *humnois* and *odais* to the musical selections collected in the book of Psalms. Habakkuk's psalm is called an *ode* (Hab. 3:1, 19); likewise, the songs of Moses (Ex. 15:1, Deut. 31:19, 21, 22, 30, 32:44), Deborah and Barak (Jdg. 5:12), David (2 Sam. 22:1) and Solomon (1 Kgs. 4:32). Isaiah 42:10 exhorts us to sing a new *humnon*. In Amos 5:23 God wishes to be rid of Israel's *odes* and *psalms*, and in 8:10 He threatens to turn their *odes* into weeping (probably not references to the Psalms as it is unlikely that the northern kingdom was still faithfully singing the Psalter while given over to idolatry). N.T. usage is comparable. In Revelation 5:9 and 14:3 the new song of the saints in glory is called an *ode*; likewise in 15:3 the song of Moses (which begins "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints" (not from the Psalter) is also called an *ode*.^[32]

Does the Exclusive Psalmodyist want us to sing these songs too? I doubt it. Exclusive Psalmody was neither the practice of the Old Testament church nor the New Testament church. In both Testaments, we find songs of praise outside the Psalter and we are commanded to "sing a new song" to God. Therefore, the terms "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" refer to three different types of songs, and not to different parts or categories in the book of Psalms. It would have been easy for Paul to say "singing from the book of Psalms" or singing "**the** Psalms."

An important observation should be made concerning the context of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. The context in neither passage is the public worship of God. Stephen Pribble writes:

Neither the Ephesian nor Colossian text specifically refers to the public worship of God; these Scriptures do not command the singing of "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" *in worship*. As such, there really is no immediate bearing upon the issue at hand. But even granting that there is an *application* in these verses to Christian worship, it must be stressed that the full phrase "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" as it is used by Paul is surely comprehensive and not restrictive; it includes all lawful song used in worship as determined by the whole of Scripture.^[32]

We have already seen that the Bible does not teach Exclusive Psalmody, but rather contains non-Psalms for worship and even commands the singing of new songs. Furthermore, the words used in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 are not restricted to the 150 Psalms. Now as to the meaning of these three words: 1) psalms; 2) hymns; and 3) spiritual songs.

1) The word **psalms** refers to the songs found in the book of Psalms. Remember, the word "psalm" basically means a

“sacred song or hymn.” These are songs of praise that were inspired by God and given to His people to sing. We are not against Psalm singing, but we are against *exclusive* and *only* Psalm singing. It is very appropriate for the New Covenant people of God to sing the songs which God gave to His Old Testament church. Singing things that were given so long ago by God creates a connection with us and the saints of the Old Testament. Neglect for Psalm singing, is neglect for an important part of worship which God has commanded. We believe that God has commanded the singing of Psalms, but not the Psalms *only*. J.P. Lange notes that “ψαλμός [*psalmos*] is something historical (Luk 20:42; Luk 24:44; Act 1:20; Act 13:33), the word should here retain the meaning of Old Testament Psalms, which were well-known and had been accepted in the public service (*Apost. Constitutions*, II. 57, Ephesians 5 : τοὺς τοῦ Δαβὶδ ψαλλέτω ὕμνους);”^[35] In the work referenced above which was a product from the fourth century we read:

...but assemble yourselves together every day, morning and evening, singing psalms and praying in the Lord’s house: in the morning saying the sixty-second Psalm, and in the evening the hundred and fortieth, but principally on the Sabbath day. And on the day of our Lord’s resurrection, which is the Lord’s day, meet more diligently, sending praise to God that made the universe by Jesus, and sent Him to us, and condescended to let Him suffer, and raised Him from the dead.^[36]

2) **Hymns** are songs of praise to God. Albert Barnes, while admitting that “it is not easy to determine precisely what is the difference in the meaning of the words here”, writes on Ephesians 5:19:

A *hymn* is properly a song or ode in honour of God. Among the heathen it was a song in honour of some deity. With us now it denotes a short poem, composed for religious service, and sung in praise to God. Such brief poems were common among the heathen, and it was natural that Christians should early introduce and adopt them...One thing is proved clearly by this passage, that there were other compositions used in the praise of God than the Psalms of David; and if it was right then to make use of such compositions, it is now. They were not merely “psalms” that were sung, but there were *hymns* and *odes*.^[17]

Barnes, who was a Presbyterian in the 19th century, was not an Exclusive Psalmist and he saw evidence in this passage against Exclusive Psalmody. Lange comments on *hymnos* saying:

ὕμνος [*hymnos*] is a song of praise, according to the context (Eph 5:19 : “to the Lord”) and to history (Pliny in Gieseler, *Kirchengeschichte*, I. 1, p. Eph 136: *Carmenque Christo quasi Deo dicere secum invicem*), to Christ, hence more strictly *Christian* hymns, songs of Jesus;

Remember also the words of Pliny the Younger concerning the Christians who sang “a hymn to Christ as to a god.”^[34]

3) **Odes** or **spiritual songs** are things which are about spiritual things. Barnes writes on Ephesians 5:19—

Odes or songs relating to spiritual things in contradistinction from those which were sung in places of festivity and revelry. An ode is properly a short poem or song adapted to be set to music, or to be sung; a lyric poem.^[17]

J.P. Lange sees *odes* as “being more general as regards matter and intended more for individual needs and private use.”^[35] Ken Puls notes the importance of the adjective “spiritual” here:

Not all music is composed for worship or should be used for worship. We are to sing music that is the result of the Spirit God working in hearts and cultures and peoples—music that is sanctified for (set apart for and intended for) God’s glory in corporate praise—music that helps us speak truth to one another, teaching, exhorting and encouraging one another.^[37]

Finally, John Calvin, commenting on Colossians 3:16, gives the three distinctions as he understands them:

They are commonly distinguished in this way — that a *psalm* is that, in the singing of which some musical instrument besides the tongue is made use of: a *hymn* is properly a song of praise, whether it be sung simply with the voice or otherwise; while an *ode* contains not merely praises, but exhortations and other matters. He would have the songs of

Christians, however, to be *spiritual*, not made up of frivolities and worthless trifles.^[12]

We see that the phrase “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” does not refer to different types of songs in the book of Psalms, but rather, to the songs in the book of Psalms and to new uninspired songs of praise from God’s people. These are my main reasons why I do not hold to Exclusive Psalmody, although I admire those who do hold to it, because they believe that is what the Bible teaches. But I do not.

Musical Instruments?

Exclusive Psalmody often not only reject non-Psalms, but they likewise reject the use of any instruments in the public worship of God. They believe that no musical instrument is to be used under the New Covenant. The argument is often that 1) instruments were tied to the Temple and were part of the ceremonial aspects of the Old Covenant and that 2) there is no mention at all of instruments in the New Testament. The second point is very weak. We do not go from the evidence of absence to the absence of the evidence. Just because a thing is not mentioned does not mean that it is rejected by the New Testament authors and no longer applicable. The first point has more merit, though I believe is likewise weak. What is the exegetical argument that musical instruments were part of the ceremonial worship of the Temple and that now are abrogated? There is no question that they were part of the Temple worship, but the question is whether they were only tied to the Temple worship. Before the Temple and its worship, a group of prophets was worshiping with “with harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre” (1Sam. 10:5). “trumpets and cymbals for the music and instruments for sacred song” were used in the time of David (1Chron. 16:42). Notice the “instruments for sacred song” in the previous passage, in another passage it is said that David *made* “instruments for music to the LORD” (2Chron. 7:6; c.f. 2Chron. 29:26-27). Some of the Psalms which David wrote before the establishment of the Temple were meant to be accompanied by musical instruments as seen from the titles (e.g. Ps. 4; 6; 54; 55; 61). In fact, as John Calvin observed in Colossians 3:16, “that a psalm is that, in the singing of which some musical instrument besides the tongue is made use of”.^[12] If instruments are part of the shadow and types of the Temple and Old worship system, why do they still appear in heaven? To what were they pointing, according to those who claim they were types and shadows? We read:

Rev. 5:8-10 And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, **each holding a harp**, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And **they sang a new song**, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, 10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

Not only do they sing a non-Psalm in the direct presence of God, but they use the harp as a musical instrument for their new song. Psalm 150 calls us to worship God with all kinds of musical instruments. If musical instruments were good under the Old Testament and are good in Heaven, why aren’t they allowed in the time between? I believe that musical instruments are certainly allowed in the worship of God, though they may be absent without thereby taking an element of worship away. I agree with Dr. Waldron that musical instruments are a circumstance of worship. He writes:

In my view, as well, once it is determined that singing the praise of God is a part of worship (as I believe it to be), then the issues of circumstances which must be decided becomes clear. Will there be musical accompaniment? Who will lead the singing? How will everyone know what to sing? Will a song sheet, hymnal, overhead projector, or power-point presentation be used? How long shall we sing? How many songs shall we sing?^[38]

Musical instruments *accompany* the singing of the people of God and empower their singing and worship. There may be legitimate worship and singing without the use of any instruments, if a church chooses to do so. But why would any church do so if God has commanded (a strong word?), as in Psalm 150, to praise Him with every kind of instrument? It does not, to me at least, matter whether the early church rejected musical instruments (I’m not well versed in church history) or if the Reformers rejected musical instruments. The important thing is, “What does Holy Writ say?” I believe that it commands the use of instruments as accompaniment to singing in worship.

4. Prayer



This point was mentioned in the previous two paragraphs ([see above](#)). We are to pray at Church as a Church especially because the Father's house is a "house of prayer" (Matt. 21:13).

5. Baptism



The Lord gave us two ordinances in which His Word is made visible to us. Before ascending to Heaven, He commanded His disciples to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). Baptism is an essential part of the Christian life. It does not save, yet the neglect thereof is a sin because it disobeys God's direct command. As a Baptist, I believe that baptism is only valid when a professing believer gets baptized, and not an infant. But more about this will be said in [chapter 29](#), Lord willing.

6. The Lord's Supper



The second visible sign which the Lord has given us is the breaking of bread as the early Christians called it (Luke 24:35; 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11; 1 Cor. 10:16-17). It is also called the Lord's Table (1 Cor. 10:21). We feast on Christ spiritually when we partake of the bread and wine, which reminds us of Him and of His great sacrifice on our behalf. His body was broken for our sins (Isa. 53:10) and by His blood, our sins are washed away (1 John 1:7). Moreover, the cup symbolizes, for our Lord alone, that He took upon Himself the full wrath of God on behalf of His people (e.g. John 18:11). As long as we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we remember His work done on our behalf, we feast upon Christ and His benefits and furthermore, He ministers grace to us as we intimately meet with Him. Therefore, this holy ordinance should not be neglected.

Some churches choose to partake of the Lord Supper every Lord's Day, but the danger in this is that it becomes very usual and nothing special. Other congregations celebrate the Lord's Table once a month (my current church non-Reformed church), or once in three months, or some even once a year. I believe that once a month is pretty good and I find myself often looking forward to the first Lord's Day of the month to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Once in three months and once a year seems pretty long to me to withhold the people of God from this means of grace. I think that there is directions in the Word of God to celebrate it every Lord's Day as in the words of Paul, "as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). Don't we want to proclaim the Lord's sacrificial death and subsequent resurrection every Lord's Day? Don't we want to remember Him each Lord's Day through this ordinance (e.g. 1 Cor. 11:24)? Why then not celebrate this token which the Lord Christ has given us each Lord's Day? Furthermore and especially for Reformed churches who believe the Lord's Supper to be a means of grace, why withheld this amazing means of grace from your people for so long? More on the Lord's Supper in [chapter 30](#), Lord willing.

§6 God Is To Be Worshipped Everywhere In Spirit And In Truth

6. Neither prayer nor any other part of religious worship, is now under the gospel, **tied unto, or made more acceptable by any place** in which it is performed, or towards which it is directed; **1** but **God is to be worshipped everywhere in spirit and in truth**; **2** as **in private families** **3** **daily**, **4** and in **secret each one by himself**; **5** so more solemnly in the **public assemblies**, **6** which are not carelessly nor wilfully to be neglected or forsaken, when God by his word or providence calleth thereunto. **7**

1. John 4:21
2. Mal. 1:11; 1 Tim. 2:8; John 4:23-24
3. Deut. 6:6-7; Job 1:5; 1 Peter 3:7
4. Matt. 6:11
5. Matt. 6:6
6. Ps. 84:1-2, 10; Matt. 18:20; 1 Cor. 3:16; 14:25; Eph. 2:21-22
7. Acts 2:42; Heb. 10:25

There was a time when the Lord chose special places where His religious worship ought to have taken place. But **now under the gospel** and the time of the New Covenant, it is not **tied unto, or made more acceptable by any place in which it is performed, or towards which it is directed** (John 4:23-24), as Daniel did (Dan. 6:10). Since God is spirit and is everywhere, we can worship Him anywhere we are. Furthermore, believers have God indwelling them! Therefore, He is always with us. Our worship should be **in spirit and in truth** and at various places and occasions as **in private families, in secret each one by himself** and most **solemnly in the public assemblies** on the Lord's Day, which we should not neglect or forsake (Heb. 10:25).

In the Old Testament, the place for prayer and the proper worship of God was the Temple in Jerusalem. But that is no longer the case. God is to be worshipped everywhere in the universe. There is no special place which God has appointed. God He will receive our worship and hear our prayers under the New Covenant. He is everywhere with us. We can worship Him loudly or in silence. Thank You, Lord! [See our discussion above on John 5.](#)

We are not to neglect the gathering together of God's people on the Lord's Day. Rather, we should look forward to the Lord's Day on which we come with God's people to publically worship our Lord, as a local church joining the worship in heaven (Heb. 12:22). We are not to be those who "neglect to meet together", rather "encouraging one another" to meet as a corporate body to worship the Lord. We should be joyful when we see the Lord's Day coming, preparing ourselves to the public worship of God in His congregation. We should be as joyful as David was:

Ps. 122:1 I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD!"

We do not treat the church gathering as something common, but rather consider it holy and solemn. For the Lord manifests Himself to us there in a special manner, in the midst of His local community. We should battle against the common sinful ideas of our age that church is unnecessary and it doesn't matter if we go or not, or the way in which we conduct ourselves there. We should understand that any place where God manifests His special presence, which He has promised to do in the gathering of His people in His name (e.g. Matt. 18:15-20), is holy ground. Therefore, the church assembly is sacred and is to be treated as sacred and separate. Not as a "common" thing. This is the reason why the Regulative Principle of Worship concerns the worship of the gathered church. Because the Reformers understood from both Testaments that there is a difference between the public and private worship of God.

When we neglect our assembling together on the Lord's Day with God's people we miss on God's blessings which He ministers to us in His congregation. We miss on the means of grace: the Word and the sacraments. The fellowship with brothers and sisters, the encouraging of each other, the testifying about what the Lord is doing in our lives. It is true that going to church does not make one a Christian, but it is a sin to neglect the meeting of God's people. It is a great error and sin to not heed the voice of God and assemble ourselves as a local body for His praise. We are not meant to be autonomous and on-ourselves Christians but are to grow in a family of like-minded believers, so that we may encourage and support each other.

§7 The Case For The Christian Sabbath

7. As it is the law of nature, that in general **a proportion of time, by God's appointment, be set apart for the worship of God**, so by his Word, in **a positive moral, and perpetual commandment**, binding all men, in all ages, he hath particularly **appointed one day in seven for a sabbath to be kept holy unto him**, **1** which from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ was the last day of the week, and from **the resurrection of Christ was changed into the first day of the week**, which is called the Lord's day: and is to be continued to the end of the world as **the Christian Sabbath**, the observation of **the last day of the week being abolished**. **2**

1. Gen. 2:3; Exod. 20:8-11; Mark 2:27-28; Rev. 1:10

2. John 20:1; Acts 2:1; 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1; Rev. 1:10; Col. 2:16-17

The law of nature reveals to us that **in general a proportion of time, by God's appointment, be set apart for the worship of God**. This is also evidenced by the feasts and religious days that all religions have had. But this says nothing how long or when this **proportion of time** should be. That is revealed by **His Word** as, for example, is the acceptable way

of worshiping Him revealed only by His Word (paragraph 1). The Confession then goes on to talk about the day of worship. The commandment is said to be **a positive moral, and perpetual commandment**. What do these words mean? **Positive** is something which is added to the law of nature or the moral law. It is not intuitive or part of that which is written in the hearts of men. That which is written in the hearts of men is that **a proportion of time should be set apart for the worship of God**. But as to *when* this time is, is revealed by His Word. It is also a **moral** commandment. It has its ground in God and its essence is written in the hearts of all men. Lastly, it is said to be a **perpetual commandment**, i.e., one which will not go away but remain with man forever. What does this commandment do? It is said to be **binding on all men, in all ages** that **one day in seven is a sabbath to be kept holy unto Him** (Ex. 20:8-11). This is the essence of the Sabbath commandment: one day in seven is a Sabbath unto the Lord. Finally, the Confession goes on to identify the specific day of the Sabbath under the Old Testament and the New Testament. Prior to the **resurrection of Christ**, it fell on **the last day of the week**. But **from the resurrection of Christ, it was changed into the first day of the week** (John 20:1, 19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10). The first day of the week is also called **the Lord's day** in Scripture and history (see the sections below). **The Lord's day** is to be continued as the Sabbath under the New Covenant, hence it is called **the Christian Sabbath**. The **observation of the last day of the week** has been **abolished** with the resurrection of Christ and the change of the specific day of the Sabbath from the seventh to the first (or eight).

Introduction

My Study

This is a topic that has fascinated me for some time. When I first read the Confession, I could remember that I had a general agreement with what was said here, but I couldn't have made a biblical case for it. At some times I thought that the Sabbath was abolished, other times I thought it was not. I was not sure. A desire came in me a while ago to study this subject and to understand why Reformed Christians observe the Christian Sabbath. By the grace of God, I was and am convinced that the Lord's commandments are not burdens, but a path of joy and liberty. I could never understand those who limit the Old Testament times to law and legalism. I can't read the Psalms (e.g. 1, 119) and say, "Yes, poor fellas. They didn't know what grace was and they were trying to gain righteousness through the law." I knew that these people were saved by grace through faith, the same way that I have been saved by God and they praised God and His Laws. They were not a burden to them, as they seem to be to modern Christianity. Therefore, if the Sabbath commandment is still binding, I knew that God designed it for my good and not to be a burden of legalism to me. Furthermore, it is clear that the Pharisees were, in fact, legalists concerning not only the Sabbath but many other matters. Yet, they were rebuked by our Lord on many points, including the Sabbath.

I was familiar with the usual idea of "only nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament and these are only binding." But it never clicked with me. Why should God repeat things for them to be binding and still true? At that time I did not give much consideration to the Sabbath question and assumed that it was somehow fulfilled in Christ and no longer binding as a day of physical rest.

In this paragraph and the following, I will try to lay a biblical case for the Christian Sabbath—the Lord's Day, as summarized by the Confession. I will likewise freely borrow from my discussion of the [Fourth Commandment](#) in chapter 19 and many other resources (listed below and in the footnotes).

The Name Of The Day

It does not matter what we call the day as long as the principle of the Sabbath carries over. Few early Christians called Sunday the Sabbath or Christian Sabbath because they associated the Sabbath with the Old Covenant and the *legalistic* observance of the Jews thereof. They rather called it the Lord's Day and contrasted the two. The phrase Lord's Day is used in Revelation 1:10 as a designation for Sunday, the day on which the Lord Christ rose from the dead. Yet, many of them basically "sabbatized" on the Lord's Day. They did the many things which were prescribed for the Sabbath and ceased from their worldly jobs. Therefore, by simply calling it the Lord's Day, they did not utterly disconnect it from the Fourth Commandment, but they wished to disconnect it from the Jewish observance thereof.

The Confession says that specifically, *the Lord's Day* is to be continued as the Christian Sabbath. The Lord's Day is the New Testament name for the day of worship and rest for the New Covenant people of God. The principle of the Sabbath, basically, carries over to the Lord's Day. Because this phrase is directly found in the New Testament, I prefer it. Yet, I am not at all against the use of the phrase "the Christian Sabbath." The latter phrase connects the Lord's Day with the Fourth Commandment and demonstrates that we do not have nine, but ten commandments still. While the former phrase closely associates the day with the Lord Jesus Christ and His blessed resurrection.

The question of the Sabbath I believe is an important one and I agree with Edwards that:

No Christian, therefore, should rest till he has satisfactorily discovered the mind of God in this matter. If the Christian sabbath be of divine institution, it is doubtless of great importance to religion that it be well kept; and therefore, that every Christian be well acquainted with the institution.^[39]

Arthur Pink likewise has a point that not much attention must be given to the terminology, rather, we should inquire if the Sabbath continues in the New Testament or not. He writes:

Our inquiry, then, narrows itself down to this: Does God require His people to keep a “Sabbath” during this Christian dispensation? If He does, then such a Sabbath is, necessarily, a Christian Sabbath. If He does not, then that is the end of the matter.^[40]

Resources

I will here freely quote from many authors, much wiser than me on the subject of the Sabbath. This Christian Sabbath study here could be seen as merely repeating what great theologians of the past and (some) of the present have said on this subject. Therefore, I will not hesitate to quote their words and give credit where credit is due. Below is a list of works that I’ve (either entirely or partly) read, listened to or watched on the Christian Sabbath.

Written Resources

- Philip S. Ross. **From the Finger of God: The Biblical and Theological Basis for the Threefold Division of the Law.** (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2010).
- C. P. Arand, C. L. Blomberg, S. MacCarty, & J. A. Pipa. **Perspectives on the Sabbath: Four Views.** Ed. C. J. Donato. (Nashville: B & H Pub. Group, 2011).
- Joseph A. Pipa, Jr. **The Lord’s Day.** (Fearn: Christian Focus, 1997).
- Robert Paul Martin. **The Christian Sabbath: Its Redemptive-Historical Foundation, Present Obligation, and Practical Observance.** (Trinity Pulpit Press, 2016).
- Francis Nigel Lee. **The Covenantal Sabbath.** (London, ILQ: Lord’s Day Observance Society. 1974; out of print). [Available online.](#)
 - This is a very extensive work on the Sabbath, which is out of print, but available online. Luckily, I was able to find a physical copy. Read my [review](#) here.
- John Owen. **A Treatise On The Sabbath.** (Forgotton Books, 2015). A photo-copy edition, which is also [available online.](#)
- Richard Barcellos, etc. **Going Beyond The Five Points.** Ed. by Rob Ventura. (San Bernardino, CA: [CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform], 2015). pp. 53-56.
- Richard Barcellos.
 - **The First Day of the Week in the New Testament.** [Part 1](#), [part 2](#), [part 3](#), [part 4](#), [part 5](#), [part 6](#), [part 7](#), [part 8](#).
 - **Getting the Garden Right: Adam’s Work and God’s Rest in Light of Christ.** (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2017).
- Roger T. Beckwith, Wilfrid Stott. **This Is The Day: The Biblical Doctrine Of The Christian Sunday In Its Jewish And Early Church Setting.** (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott. 1978, 181 pp. Out of print). Can be found [online.](#)
- Robert L. Dabney.
 - **Systematic Theology.** (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985). pp. 366-397.
 - [From The Seventh Day To The First: A Brief Look At The History Of The Sabbath Day Vs. The Lord’s Day.](#)
 - [The Christian Sabbath Its Nature, Design and Proper Observance.](#) 1882.
- Charles Hodge. **Systematic Theology, Volume 3.** 1872. [§ 8. The Fourth Commandment.](#)
- A. H. Strong. **Systematic Theology: A Compendium Designed For The Use Of Theological Students.** (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1970. Originally, 1907). pp. 408-410.
- Thomas Watson.
 - **The Ten Commandments.** 1692. [The chapter on the fourth commandment.](#)

- **The Christian Soldier; or Heaven Taken by Storm. Part 6, by sanctifying the Lord's Day and holy conversation.**
- Ezekiel Hopkins. [An Exposition Of The Ten Commandments](#). 1690. The Fourth Commandment. pp. 192-224.
- Jonathan Edwards. **The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 2**. Revised and corrected by Edward Hickman. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974 edition). pp. 93-103.
 - Three sermons entitled, "The Perpetuity and Change of the Sabbath" which could also be found online:
 - [Sermon I](#)
 - [Sermon II](#)
 - [Sermon III](#)
- Samuel E. Waldron.
 - **A Modern Exposition Of The 1689 Baptist Confession Of Faith**. (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2013). pp. 336-341.
 - [Lectures On The Lord's Day](#). 2007.
 - [The Lord's Day: Its Presuppositions, Proofs, Precedents, and Practice](#). 2017.
- John Giarrizzo. [The Lord's Day Still Is](#). Booklet, 2013.
- Philip Schaff. [The Lord's Day](#). Booklet, 2013.
- A.A. Hodge. [Sabbath, The Day Changed: The Sabbath Preserved](#).
- Archibald Alexander. **A Brief Compendium of Bible Truth. The Lord's Day**. 1846.
- B.B. Warfield. [The Foundations Of The Sabbath In The Word Of God](#). 1951.
- Francis Turretin. [The Fourth Question – The Lord's Day](#). 1679-1685.
- John Murray.
 - [The Sabbath Institution: Obligation, Sanctity and Observance](#). 1953.
 - [The Fourth Commandment According To the Westminster Standards](#). 1941.
- A.W. Pink. [The Christian Sabbath](#).
 - His comments on the fall of Satan being prior to the seventh day so that he does not accept the common understanding of "rest," I find very strange.
- Ian Campbell. [Why Easter Makes Me a Sabbatarian](#). The Aquila Report, 2012.
- Jon English Lee. **Biblical Theology and the Transfer of the Sabbath**.
 - [Part I](#)
 - [Part II](#)
 - [Part III](#)
- [From Sabbath to Lord's Day](#). Green Baggins, 2005.
- Bob Gonzales
 - [How I Justify a First-Day Christian Sabbath](#). 2014.
 - [Following My Re-Maker's Example: Why I "Sabbath" on Sunday](#). 2011.
- Tony Warren. [Who Changed the Sabbath Day to Sunday](#). The Mountain Retreat, 1996.
- Thomas Shepherd. [The Change of The Sabbath](#).
- Gleason L. Archer Jr. **Encyclopedia Of Bible Difficulties**. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1982). pp. 116-121.
- Nicholas T. Batzig. [The Theological Significance of the Eighth Day](#). Feeding On Christ, 2014.

Audio Resources

- **Paul Martin**. 24 Sermons on [The Christian Sabbath](#).
 - This is essentially where the content of the book came from.
- **Joseph Pipa**:
 - [The Blessed Day Of Worship](#) (2009)
 - [The Lord's Day & Communion with God](#) (2002)
- **Alistar Begg**. [Sermon series on the Sabbath](#)
- **Jeff Smith**. [18 Lectures on the Commandments and the Christian Sabbath](#).
- **Calvin Walden**. [Remember The Sabbath Day series](#)

- **Richard Barcellos**

- Four sermons on The Creator's Sabbath

- **Martin Nish.** [Three sermons](#) on the Sabbath in Creation, OT, NT.

Video Resources

- [Joseph Pipa's The Lord's Day sermons](#). 2015 Church Conference.
 - Can also be found as [audio](#).
- John Piper. [Is There A "Lord's Day"?](#)
- Mark Fitzpatrick - [Study: Are Christians supposed to keep the Sabbath?](#)

The Institution of the Sabbath

We will deal here with the fact that the Sabbath was instituted on the seventh day of creation as a day of rest for man. It was not something newly introduced on Mt. Sinai, but it is as old as the Creation. If it could be demonstrated that the Sabbath was not instituted at Sinai, but at the Creation, then arguments used against the Sabbath in connection with the passing away of the Mosaic Covenant are useless, since then the Sabbath would *transcend* the Mosaic Covenant and is not a unique and new part of it. Joseph A. Pipa writes:

Along with work (Gen 1:28; 2:15) and marriage (Gen 2:18-25), God instituted the Sabbath to govern the lives of all mankind. Just as the ordinances of work and marriage are permanent, so is the ordinance of the Sabbath.^[41]

Let's see if this statement is true and biblical. Our discussion of the Sabbath as a creation ordinance, a blessing and a commandment given to man at Creation will center around three texts: Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11 and Mark 2:27-28.

Genesis 2

Gen. 2:1-3 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. 2 And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and **he rested on the seventh day** from all his work that he had done. 3 So God **blessed** the seventh day and **made it holy**, because **on it God rested from all his work** that he had done in creation.

God, the Sovereign Lord and Creator, after finishing His work of creation took a rest. This rest was not needed because He was tired, for God does not get tired (e.g. Isa. 40:28). But this rest consisted in *enjoying* His "very good" creation, which He had made. Joseph Pipa observes, "By resting on the Sabbath, God reflected on the beauty and glory of His completed work, taking joy in it."^[42] God didn't need the rest because He was tired, rather His rest consisted in joy and delight. This at the outset shows us that our Sabbath rest does not consist merely in physical rest because of weariness, but rather upon meditating on the work and things of God. Furthermore, what was the purpose of God in creating in six days? Was there just too much to do so that He needed some time? Obviously not. "For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm" (Ps. 33:9). Rather, as many, including Archibald Alexander, observe, in doing this God was "thus setting an example to his creature man; for He not only rested on the seventh day, but sanctified it; that is, set it apart to a holy use — to be employed, not in bodily labour or converse with the world, but in the contemplation of the works and attributes of God, and in holding delightful communion with his Maker."^[43]

Although, the noun "Sabbath" is not present Genesis 2:1-3, yet we clearly see the Sabbath there. Dr. Sam Waldron remarks:

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.^[44]

Therefore, we basically have God *sabbathing* on the seventh day of creation. What we basically have in the Creation week are: six days of work by God and then a day of rest on which no work of creation was done. God entered His Sabbath rest on the seventh day. He stopped His work of creation, but the work of providence by which He upholds the Universe is never ceasing (e.g. Heb. 1:3; Eph. 1:11).

Yet, some still contend that there is no *command* for the Sabbath to be kept here on the part of man. This is insufficient to disprove that the Sabbath was indeed an institution given to man at the Creation. This is because the Lord Jesus and God Himself look back to the Creation for the basis of the Sabbath (Ex. 20:8-11 and Mark 2:27-28; as will be discussed below). The Seventh-Day Adventist Skip MacCarty responds with why such a hermeneutic or an approach simply doesn't work:

While Genesis 2:2-3 lacks an explicit Sabbath command, no command forbidding murder is recorded until Noah's Day (Gen 9:9-6 [sic, Gen 9:6]), and none of the other Ten Commandments is recorded until they were issued at Sinai. Yet Cain was held accountable for the murder of Abel, and Joseph knew that adultery was "sin against God" (Gen. 4:6-11; 39:9)...Instructively, the early chapters of the Bible do not explicitly state that God loves people, is merciful or compassionate, or will forgive sins; that was all revealed in the covenant He made and the Law He gave at Sinai (Exod 20:6; 34:6-7). Those characteristics, as well as the continued observance of the Sabbath by God's people, were all assumed in those early chapters of the Bible that cover at least 2,500 years of human history.^[45]

The idea that the Sabbath was not instituted in Creation per Genesis 2:1-3, Dr. Archibald Alexander calls "an unnatural and forced construction."^[43] It is clear, to the unbiased mind, that the Sabbath was instituted by God at the Creation per Genesis 2. Furthermore, this truth is even more strengthened when subsequent revelation looks back to the Sabbath in Creation. For whom would the Lord institute and bless the Sabbath but for man? It is for man's benefit, not God's. Although Genesis 2 contains no command, yet the divine example is sufficient for Adam to understand. After reflecting on the idea of man as the image of God and that doctrine entailing in it an obligation to follow God's conduct, Dr. Waldron notes:

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 seven day week? He seems to have so created precisely to give mankind an example to imitate for the regulation of their time.^[46]

By resting on the seventh day, the Sabbath, God blessed and made holy, that is—sanctified, the Sabbath day from all the other days. To sanctify or make holy a thing means to set it apart *from* common use. Dr. Pipa helpfully observes what it means that the Sabbath was sanctified and blessed at the Creation:

God's purpose in blessing the day is made clearer when we understand what is meant by His "sanctifying" the day, by declaring it to be holy. When God sanctified something, He removed it from its common use and set it apart for a special religious use connected with His worship and service. For example, He declared to be holy or sanctified the garments of the priest, the altar, the sanctuary, and all the furnishings and utensils in the tabernacle and, later, the temple. On account of this sanctification, these things were to be used only for the holy purposes of worship (e.g. Exod 30:37-38).^[47]

The Sabbath Day is no ordinary day, but is a high and special day by God's own sovereign appointment. There is some truth to the claim that "all days are holy," but it is a half-truth. God has explicitly blessed the Sabbath day. Waldron remarks:

God's blessing in these passages [Gen. 1:22, 28; 5:2; 9:1, where the idea of blessing also occurs in the early chapters of Genesis] 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. Thus God in blessing the seventh day made it a source of blessing--of good—not (obviously) for Himself--but for men.^[48]

A few doubt that the Sabbath Day instituted at the Creation was, in fact, the seventh day of the week. But notice that the holiness of the seventh day is not in the day itself, but rather in the blessing of God. There is nothing special in any of the seven days. There is nothing special, until—God distinguishes one above the others, by blessing it and making it holy. The "holiness" of the day is not in the seventh day itself. Therefore, a change could be made without offering violence to the essence of the Sabbath. The word "Sabbath" does not mean "the seventh day of the week," rather it means "rest", "cessation" or something similar. Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology writes on the word "Sabbath":

The origin of the Hebrew sabbat [שבת] is uncertain, but it seems to have derived from the verb sabat, meaning to stop, to cease, or to keep. Its theological meaning is rooted in God's rest following the six days of creation (Gen 2:2-3).^[49]

The particular day of the week is not of the *essence* for the Sabbath. The day was decided by the positive command and institution of God. The Lord blessed the seventh day and made it the Sabbath. He could, likewise, if He chose to, move it to the first day. But more on this later. A.A. Hodge observes that "it is evident that the particular day set apart is not in the least of the essence of the institution, and that it must depend upon the positive will of God, which of course may substitute one day instead of another on suitable occasions for adequate reasons."^[50] Therefore, in the subsequent discussion, it will not

do to repeat the claim, “for four thousand years the Sabbath was known as the seventh day of the week” over and over again. It is *not* of the essence of the commandment that it should be the seventh day of the week. The essence is simply: one day of rest in seven. The particular day of the week must be decided by the divine will.

To close our discussion on Genesis 2, let me give you a quote from John Owen on this passage:

Set aside prejudice, however, and pre-conceived opinions, and **any man would think that the institution of the Sabbath is here as plainly expressed**, as in the fourth commandment. The words are the continuation of a plain historical narration : for having finished the account of the creation of the world in the first chapter, and given a recapitulation of it in the first verse of this, Moses declares what immediately ensued thereon ; namely, the rest of God on the seventh day, and his blessing and sanctifying that day whereon he so rested ; — even that individual day in the first place, and **a day in the revolution of the same space of time for succeeding generations**. This is plain in the words, or nothing can be plainly expressed. And if there be any appearance of difficulty in those words, ‘he blessed and sanctified it,’ it is wholly taken away in **the explication given of them by himself afterwards in the fourth commandment**, where they are plainly declared to intend its being set apart and consecrated to be a day of sacred rest.^[51]

Owen ties what is written in Genesis 2:1-3 with the Fourth Commandment to which we turn our attention now.

Exodus 20:8-11

Ex. 20:8-11 “**Remember the Sabbath day**, to **keep it holy**. 9 Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. 11 **For** in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. **Therefore** the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Now we move on to the Fourth Commandment to ground the Sabbath in Creation. I believe what has said above on Genesis 2 is vindicated here by Holy Scripture itself. When God gives the command, the simple form is: Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Furthermore, the grounding of the Sabbath is placed in the example of God Himself. John Murray rightly observed that the “Sabbath rest upon the divine example (Gen. 2:2)...is expressly stated in the fourth commandment.”^[52] Verse 11 begins with the word “for”, which gives a reason for something. The reason and the basis is found in the fact that the LORD Himself worked six days and then rested on the seventh, therefore, His people are to follow His pattern. He created in six days so that He would provide a pattern for man to follow. The words of v. 11b are borrowed from Genesis 2:3. Dr. Robert Martin observes that

the causal conjunction “for” (כי, because) and the inferential expression “therefore” (לכן, therefore) connect the commandment of vv. 8-10 to its rationale and justification in vs. 11. The pattern of six days labor followed by one day of rest is “because” of the pattern of God’s own behavior in creating the heavens and the earth. For this reason (“therefore,” i.e., by virtue of his example, as a logical consequence), Jehovah blessed and sanctified the day...^[53]

It is to be observed that He tells them to “remember” the Sabbath which the Creator observed. B.B. Warfield notes that “We may learn from it also that Israel was a people to whom the Sabbath was already known, and which needed not to be informed, but only to be reminded of it.”^[52] That the Sabbath was known prior to Sinai is evident from Exodus 16 ([see below](#)). They are to look at the Creator’s work pattern and copy that. They are to follow in His footsteps in their work and rest. Francis Nigel Lee observes the following on the creative reason for the Sabbath as it is found in the Fourth Commandment:

The creative reason (Ex. 20:11): “*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”. This conclusively proves the supralapsarian [prior to the Fall] Edenic institution of the sabbath for all men, whether believers or not. All are obliged to observe it as a result of their involvement in the universal Adamic covenant of works, Mark 2:27.^[54]

Mark 2:27-28

This truth is not confined to the Old Testament but finds support also on the lips of our Lord Jesus. In fact, this passage primarily is what convinced me that the Sabbath could not have been abrogated!

Mark 2:27-28 And he said to them, “**The Sabbath was made for man**, not man for the Sabbath. 28 So the **Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.**”

The Sabbath is Christ's. It belongs to Him. He exercises lordship over it. By this statement, the Lord makes a claim for deity. For Who is the Lord of the Sabbath but Yahweh? But we will not concern ourselves here with the deity of our blessed Lord, but as to what it means that He is the Lord of the Sabbath. The meaning I believe is, “that as he appointed the Sabbath, so he best knew how to interpret his own law.”^[43] It is His day. The Pharisees were accusing Him and His disciples of breaking the Sabbath. But the Lord here asserts lordship over that day and vindicates what His disciples were doing. They were accusing Him and His disciples of breaking the Sabbath, but over against their accusation, the Lord Jesus asserts His lordship over the day which they claim to venerate. The Lord Jesus here says nothing negative about the Sabbath. In fact, in all of His holy ministry, there is not a hint of any negativity about the Sabbath. As J.C. Ryle observes:

I find Him speaking eleven times on the subject of the Sabbath, but it is always to correct the superstitious additions which the Pharisees had made to the Law of Moses about observing it, and never to deny the holiness of the day.

He adds, against those would say that the Lord Jesus abolishes the Sabbath that, “He no more abolishes the Sabbath, than a man destroys a house when he cleans off the moss or weeds from its roof.”^[51]

But now let us back up a verse. Let's take a look at v. 27, which is the issue at hand. The Seventh Adventist Skip MacCarty writes:

When Mark recorded Jesus' words, “the Sabbath was made for man” (2:27), he chose Greek terms that would communicate the universal and permanent character of the Sabbath—*egeneto* “made” (literally, “came into existence”), and *anthropos*, “man.” The Greek word *egeneto* linked the Sabbath with creation; it is used 20 times in the Septuagint in the Genesis 1 creation story, once in Heb 11:3 in reference to God's creation of our world out of nothing, and three times in John 1:3, which establishes Jesus as the one through whom all things were “made” (created).^[56]

Understanding this passage changed my whole outlook about the relevance of the Sabbath in the New Covenant. The Lord Jesus exercises His lordship over the Sabbath, not by abolishing it, but by pointing to its original intent and by cleansing it from Pharisaism. Moreover, this blew the claim that the Sabbath was only given to the Israelites to smithereens. For the Lord does not only connect the “making” and the institution of the Sabbath to the Creation (for that is when all things were made), but He also claims that the Sabbath was made for man in general, not the Israelites in particular. Against those in His day who would have limited God's grace and the Sabbath to Israel, the Lord Jesus ‘used the broadest term available ($\alpha\prime\nu\theta\rho\omega\pi\omicron\varsigma$, “man/mankind”) to designate those for whose benefit the Sabbath was established. And in speaking this way, Jesus would have been understood as viewing the Sabbath as an ordinance established at creation for all men and not just as an ordinance established at Sinai for Israel.’^[57] Francis Nigel Lee writes:

Sixthly, Christ's words: “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27-8) plainly imply that the time when *man* was made was the time when the *sabbath* was made — evidently made for him at the time when he himself was made.^[58]

The Sabbath was made and established for Adam and his posterity as a whole. It was given for the benefit of man. It was not to put him down and burden him but to bless him. Warfield writes:

Because the Sabbath was made for man, he, the Son of Man, to whom has been given dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him—who reigns by right over man and all things which concern man—is Lord also of the Sabbath. There are obviously two sides to the declaration. The Sabbath, on the one hand, is the Lord's Day. It belongs to him. He is the Lord of it; master of it—for that is what “Lord” means. He may do with it what he will; abolish it if he chooses—though abolishing it as far as possible from the suggestion of the passage; regulate it, adapt it to the changing circumstances of human life for the benefit of which it was made. On the other hand, just because it is the Lord's day, it is nobody else's day. It is not man's day; it is not in the power of man. To say that the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath is to withdraw it from the control of men. It is to reserve to the Son of Man all authority over it. It is not man but the Son of Man who is Lord of the Sabbath.^[59]

Which day is the Lord's Day in the New Testament? Oh, wait...I'm getting ahead of myself. But this passage has also

implications about the change of the day, I believe.

In His declaration, the Lord said that the Sabbath was made for “the genus homo, and consequently is both binding on all men for all time and adapted to the nature and wants of all men under all historical conditions.”^[50] It was not particular to Israel, but rather, for all people even before the Fall. Therefore, on the basis of this, there was an inclusion of the already-existing-Sabbath in the Mosaic Covenant, not the first-in-time-institution of the Sabbath for man. This means that the Sabbath *transcends* all historical covenants and is not a peculiar, unique or new part of any covenant in the Bible, rather, it belongs to the Creation. When marriage will no longer be, then the Sabbath will be fulfilled. When work will no longer be, then the Sabbath will be fulfilled. It is necessary to understand that the Sabbath is a gracious gift of God to His image-bearers. J.C. Ryle is good on this point, he writes:

But the Sabbath is God’s merciful appointment for the common benefit of all mankind It was “made for man” (Mark 2:27). It was given for the good of all classes, for the laity quite as much as for the clergy. It is not a yoke, but a blessing. It is not a burden, but a mercy. It is not a hard wearisome requirement, but a mighty public benefit. It is not an ordinance which man is bid to use in faith, without knowing why he uses it. It is one which carries with it its own reward. It is good for man’s body and mind. It is good for nations. Above all, it is good for souls.^[51]

In giving us the Sabbath God was not planning to burden us, but to lighten us up with Himself and our meditation upon Himself. God gave the Sabbath as a grace and a blessing for our own good. Notice the great condescension of God and the lengths He went through to bless us. He first of all created in six days when He could have created in a millisecond, so as to provide a pattern for us to follow. And second, He instituted the Sabbath on that basis for our own good. He did not rest because He needed rest, but He rested so that we could learn from Him. We conclude with the words of Murray:

If the Sabbath was made for man, and if Jesus is the Son of man to save man, surely the Lordship which He exercises to that end is not to deprive man of that which was made for his good, but to seal to man that which the Sabbath institution involves.^[60]

Conclusion On The Sabbath As Creation Ordinance

If the Sabbath is a creation ordinance, then it cannot be abrogated by subsequent covenants, neither is it a unique part of any covenant (though it may serve a special purpose in a particular covenant). John Murray best explains the Sabbath as a creation ordinance:

The Sabbath was instituted at creation (Gen. 2:2, 3). It belongs, therefore, to the order of things which God established for man at the beginning. It is relevant quite apart from sin and the need of redemption. In this respect it is like the institutions of labour (Gen. 2:15), of marriage (Gen. 2:24, 25), and of fruitfulness (Gen. 1:28). The Sabbath institution was given to man as man, for the good of man as man, and extended to man the assurance and promise that his labour would issue in a Sabbath rest similar to the rest of God himself. The Sabbath is a creation ordinance and does not derive its validity or its necessity or its sanction, in the first instance, from any exigencies arising from sin nor from any of the provisions of redemptive grace. When sin entered, the circumstances under which the Sabbath rest was to be observed were altered, just as in the case of these other institutions. The forces of redemptive grace were now indispensable to their proper discharge. But the entrance of sin did not abrogate the Sabbath institution any more than it abrogated the institutions of labour, marriage, and fruitfulness.^[61]

The Sabbath stands fast as marriage and work stand fast to the end. For those who still contend that we do not have a command for the Sabbath in Genesis, therefore it was not instituted for man, John Giarrizzo answers:

If we accept the legitimate authority of labor and marriage as creation ordinances (without verbal commands), why then would we reject the authority of the Sabbath? If creation ordinances still remain in force today, and if the Sabbath is a creation ordinance, then the Sabbath remains in force today.^[62]

As to the implications of creation ordinances, Giarrizzo quotes Dr. Richard Barcellos saying:

When the bible looks back to creation and draws ethical principles from it, those principles are normative for all men at all times, under all circumstances. In other words, the creation account contains principles that function as moral law – they are not relative to covenant or culture but transcend both.^[63]

Law Of Nature, Positive Command, Moral, Ceremonial, Temporal

It is essential to understand the nature of the Sabbath commandment. I believe that it makes a huge difference if one understands the Sabbath to be essentially moral or ceremonial. It is my belief and the Confessional position that the Sabbath is essentially moral in nature, not essentially a ceremonial law as non-Sabbatarians contend. But it is also described as a positive command, what does that mean? What is the connection that the Confession makes with the law of nature? Are there any civil or ceremonial aspects of the Sabbath? To these questions, we turn our attention.

Law Of Nature

By the Law of Nature, the Confession refers to the moral law common to all men, which, [chapter 19](#) asserts was summarized in the Ten Commandments on Sinai. By virtue of man being in the Imago Dei, he knows that he has certain moral obligations which God has laid on him, without the help of special revelation. One such obligation is worship. Man is a religious creature. The Confession claims that it is common to religious man to want to worship God and do that as a community. There should be a time *especially* set apart for the public worship of God. The truth of this statement is seen by the various religions around the world and their feast days. The Confession is not claiming here that the Law of Nature reveals that one day out of seven should be dedicated to God, nor does it claim that we can know, without the Bible, that the seventh day was sanctified as the Sabbath from the Creation to the resurrection. But, the Confessional claim is that “a proportion of time” is to “be set apart for the worship of God”. No day is known via General Revelation, but what is known is that man ought to worship God. Ezekiel Hopkins writes:

Certain it is that a convenient portion, of our time is due to the service and worship of God by natural and moral right. ^[64]

The day is not evident from nature, but must be known via Special Revelation. Hopkins adds that “there is no evident natural reason why this day more than that; why every seventh day rather than every sixth, or fifth, or fourth.”^[60] The Sabbath was known and instituted from the beginning of creation (as it was argued above), but we must not forget the Fall. Through the Fall all kinds of corruption entered into our human experience, not the least was the neglect of the Sabbath, which man would have perfectly kept in his unfallen state. Which brings us to our next point.

Positive Command

A positive command is one which God, as Sovereign Lord, commands His people to observe. The Lord’s Supper and Baptism are described as positive commands in [chapter 28](#). The Confession has already asserted that in the Law of Nature it is evident that man is to worship God, yet the day is not known through the Law of Nature but must be revealed by God through Special Revelation. That is the *positive* aspect of the Sabbath. The day, whether the seventh or the first, is a positive and express command of God, which does not have its basis in the moral law. The specific day, in and of itself, is neither evident from nature nor is it essentially moral. Whether the seventh, first or fifth day, no day is of the essence for the Sabbath. The specific day has to be specified by Divine Revelation. Dr. Waldron explains:

The term ‘positive’ used here in the Confession means something in addition to the law of nature and general revelation...It is a positive commandment revealed only by special revelation.^[65]

Dr. Joseph Pipa describes positive law as “a commandment of God that is not morally necessary (i.e., is not inherently right or wrong)...Such laws are binding only on the person or nation to whom they were given.” Natural (non-positive) moral laws are commanded because they are good. On the other hand, positive moral laws are good because they are commanded. The goodness of the one is in itself (as the virtue reflects the nature of God), while the other is good because God commands it. Notice carefully that our claim is that the specific day is a positive command, not the Sabbath as a whole!

A law or a commandment being positive moral law in no way diminishes the fact that it is binding and obligatory. Hopkins writes concerning the specific day that it “is from his positive will and command, and therefore is as binding and forcible as if it were a law of nature engraven on our hearts; unless the same authority alters it that did first enjoin it. For this being a positive law, is therefore good and necessary, because commanded.”^[66] Robert Dabney writes that the worship of God should also have a public and corporate aspect of it, which necessitates a specific day:

That it is man’s duty to worship God, none will dispute. Nor will it be denied that this worship should be in part social; because man is a being of social affections, and subject to social obligations; and because one of the great ends of

worship is the display of the Divine glory before our fellow creatures. Social worship cannot be conducted without the appointment of a stated day; and what more reasonable than that the Divine authority, who is the object of this worship, should meet this necessity, by Himself fixing the day for all mankind?^[67]

There is nothing inherently (in and of itself) moral about the seventh or first days of the week. What makes one day moral and obligatory is the command of God. Now we move to the more controversial part concerning the nature of the Sabbath.

Moral Command

What does it mean that the Sabbath commandment is moral? It basically means that it is eternal and cannot be abrogated. This is the Confessional description: a positive moral, and perpetual commandment. A commandment that will not go away in its essence and is ever-binding. The day is a positive command as we've tried to explain, which can be changed if the Lord so pleases. But the essence of the Sabbath, which is rest and worship, is demanded by the law of nature and is binding upon all men. A lot of Christians in the present time, which profane the Sabbath Day, contend that the Sabbath is merely and essentially ceremonial and not moral. In this way, they justify the abrogation or "fulfillment" of the Sabbath under the New Covenant. It is essential to this viewpoint that they understand the Sabbath as merely a positive command given at Sinai, not as we tried to prove, an institution from the seventh day of the world.

Creation Ordinance

That the Sabbath is essentially moral (we don't deny that there are ceremonial and temporary aspects more on which [see below](#)) is seen in the fact that it was instituted even before the Fall on the seventh day. It was "made for man" as our Lord taught us (Mark 2:27, [see here](#)). It was a gift from God given to Adam and to all his posterity, even before the Fall. Moreover, the Sabbath was moral in that it was based upon the Creator's example. The Sabbath was instituted and based on what God did. Six days of work; seventh day of rest. Therefore, man was commanded to keep the Sabbath by following his Creator's example. This is part of what it means to be in the Imago Dei. The words of Ezekiel Hopkins are very helpful here:

*This declaration, if the will of God concerning the sanctification of the Sabbath is attended with a moral reason; and therefore is not merely and barely positive, as ceremonial laws are. The reason is, that God rested on the seventh day; and therefore we ought so to do...since piety and religion require that we should imitate God in those things wherein he would have us imitate him. So that I account this command to be moral-positive: moral, in that it requires a due portion of our time to be dedicated to the service and worship of God: positive, in that it prescribes the seventh day for that especial service which the light and law of nature did not prefix; and *mixed of both*, in that it gives a reason of this prescription, which hath somewhat of natural equity in it, but yet such as could not have been discovered without special and divine revelation.*^[68]

Unity Of The Decalogue

But the stronger, and in my opinion, the most conclusive argument for the essentially moral nature of the Sabbath "is its inclusion in the Decalogue[e]."^[69] As it is clear and admitted by both Sabbatarians and non-Sabbatarians that all the nine commandments are essentially moral, then, in the words of John Murray, "It would require the most conclusive evidence to establish the thesis that the fourth command is in a different category from the other nine."^[52] The unity of the Decalogue dictates that the fourth commandment, like all the other nine, has its basis in the moral nature of God and is ever-binding on all. Murray is completely right that there needs to be overwhelming argumentation and evidence to prove that while commandments one through three, five through ten are essentially moral, that the fourth commandment, on the other hand, is merely or essentially ceremonial. There is no such evidence. The unity of the Decalogue and the inclusion of the Sabbath therein demand its morality. Moreover, the basis given for the Sabbath in the Decalogue (Ex. 20:8-11) goes back to Creation and has its grounds in the Creator's example and is therefore moral. Archibald Alexander observes:

Now, it is admitted, that all the other precepts of the Decalogue are moral; and would it not be an unaccountable thing that a ceremonial, temporary commandment should be inserted in the midst of these moral precepts? This is the law which Christ says he came not to destroy, but to fulfill. None of these commandments have been abrogated; and therefore the fourth, as well as the others, remains in full force. And it is remarkable that the prophets, in denouncing the sins of the people, always mention the violation of the Sabbath in the same catalogue with the transgression of moral precepts.^[43]

The Sabbath is a big deal in the prophets and its profanation a great sin. Furthermore, the unity of the Decalogue demands that all the commandments thereof be equally binding upon all men. Dr. Martin cites Daniel Wilson as saying:

As Daniel Wilson says, “Whatever authority any have, that authority is possessed by this. Whatever obligation the first, the second, the third, or any other carry with them, the same obligation carries with it the fourth. If men are bound in every age and under all dispensations to acknowledge only one God, to worship Him, not with graven images, but in spirit and in truth, to reverence the divine name, to obey their parents, to abstain from murder, adultery, theft, false witness, concupiscence, they are equally bound to consecrate a Sabbath to their Maker’s service, after six days of ordinary labor and toil.”^[69]

We must not forget that the Sabbath commandment “is an element of that basic law which was distinguished from all else in the Mosaic revelation by being inscribed on two tables of stone.”^[52] This reveals the everlasting character of all the Ten Commandments. They are not temporary, nor were they absent or unknown prior to Sinai ([see chapter 19](#)). But they summarized and clarified beyond misunderstanding the duty of man toward God and man known from the Law of Nature (unwritten moral law). Therefore, Murray writes again, “That it finds its place among the ten words written by the finger of God upon tables of stone establishes for this commandment, and for the labour and rest it enjoins, a position equal to that of the third or the fifth or the seventh or the tenth.”^[52] B.B. Warfield likewise voices the same opinion concerning the Sabbath and the moral unity of the Decalogue:

And it is not less the duty of all men to worship none but the one true God, and him only with spiritual worship; not to profane his name nor to withhold from him the time necessary for his service, or refuse to reverence him in his representatives, that these duties are impressed especially on the heart of the Israelite by the great plea that this God has shown himself in a peculiar manner his God. The presence of the Sabbath commandment in the midst of this series of fundamental human duties, singled out to form the compact core of the positive morality divinely required of God’s peculiar people, is rather its commendation to all peoples of all times as an essential element in primary human good conduct.^[59]

We close this point with Dabney about the unity of the Decalogue:

How can it be believed that this one ceremonial precept has been thrust in here, where all else is of obligation as old, and as universal as the race? This is strengthened also by the reflection that the ground first assigned in Genesis, and here repeated for its enactment, is in no sense Jewish or nation. God’s work of creation in six days, and His rest on the seventh, have just as much relation to one tribe of Adam’s descendants as to another.^[70]

Death Penalty And The Sojourner

The death penalty was attached to the desecration of the Sabbath day (Ex. 31:14-15). What other “merely ceremonial” command has the death penalty attached to it? The death penalty was applied to moral matters as is demonstrated from the death penalty being imposed for the violations of all the Decalogue except the tenth commandment (because it is a sin in the inward man). For that, [see chapter 19 here](#). Dr. Pipa, citing Charles Hodge, writes:

The violation of no merely ceremonial or positive law was visited with this penalty. Even the neglect of circumcision, although it involved the rejection of both the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenant, and necessarily worked the forfeiture of all the benefits of the theocracy, was not made a capital offence. The law of the Sabbath by being thus distinguished was raised far above the level of mere positive enactments. A character was given to it, not only of primary importance, but also of special sanctity.^[71]

Not only was the death penalty instituted for the Sabbath as part of the civil law of Israel, but even the non-Israelite sojourner was to observe the Sabbath day. Exodus 20:10 contains the phrase “shall not do any work...the sojourner who is within your gates” (cf. Ex. 23:12). Even “though they could not take part in the feast or in temple worship”^[72], yet the sojourners ought to keep the Sabbath holy. This is also seen in Nehemiah 13:15-21. Dabney observes, after citing Exodus 20:10:

To see the force of the argument from this fact, the reader must contrast the jealous care with which “the stranger,” the pagan foreigner residing in an Israelitish community, was prohibited from all share in their ritual services. No foreigner could partake of the Passover—it was sacrilege. He was even forbidden to enter the court of the temple where the sacrifices were offered, at the peril of his life. Now, when the foreigner is commanded to share the Sabbath rest, along with the Israelite, does not this prove that rest to be no ceremonial, no type, like the Passover and the altar, but a universal moral institution, designed for Jew and Gentile alike?^[73]

Yes, it does, Dabney.

The Language Of The Day Being Ceremonial

I agree with Dr. Waldron when he takes care about using “ceremonial” language concerning the specific day of the Sabbath. He writes:

It is not accurate to call the seventh day a ceremonial element in the 4th 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.^[74]

I share in his criticism as it is not altogether clear what it means that the day is ceremonial. It is more accurate to say that the day is *temporal*, and is subject to change if God please to do so. But there is no doubt that the Sabbath commandment had ceremonial expansions or parts to it (see below). It is simply my contention and Dr. Waldron’s to speak more accurately about the day being *temporal* rather than ceremonial. The first day Sabbath will likewise pass away as we enter the eternal Sabbath in the New Creation. The day being “ceremonial” or “temporal” does not present a defect to the nature of the Sabbath as essentially moral. Although it must be noted that most of the people using the “ceremonial” language to the specific day of the Sabbath by it mean that the day is not essentially moral and is subject to change. I believe it is better to use more accurate/clear terminology than that.

Non-Moral Parts

By non-moral, I do not mean that they were not binding upon the people of Israel. All **three divisions of the law** were binding upon Israel as long as the Mosaic Covenant was in effect. But by “non-moral” I mean, parts or expansions of the Sabbath which are not of the essence of the Sabbath. These would include:

- Sabbath year for the slaves: six year service, seventh year freedom (Ex. 21:2).
- Sabbath year for the land: six years of sowing, seventh year of rest (Ex. 23:10-11; Lev. 25:1-7).
- The Day of Atonement is called a Sabbath and even the foreigners should not work on it (Lev. 16:29-31).
- The death penalty for the desecration of the day (Ex. 31:14-15; 35:2).

Moreover, every time in Leviticus 23 when there is a holy convocation, the people may not do ordinary work (see v. 7 for the Passover; v. 21 for Pentecost; vv. 24-25 for the Feast of Trumpets; v. 28 for the Day of Atonement where all work is forbidden; v. 35 for the Feast of Booths). See also in Numbers 28:16-29:40. This is essentially the spirit of the Sabbath attached to ceremonial feasts under the Mosaic Covenant. These things were simply temporary applications and enforcement of the Sabbath commandment. They are not of the essence. It is not only the fourth commandment which had ceremonial/temporary or civil aspects. Dr. Robert Martin cites Leviticus 22:17-33 to the effect that various applications were made to the third commandment, but this in no way would support the claim that the third is essentially ceremonial or temporary. “While basically a moral law, positive enactments were attached to it, but this does not change the basic character of the commandment itself or reduce its universal applicability.”^[75] Likewise for the various commandments which under the Mosaic had the death penalty attached to them for the breaches thereof. Consider the application of the second commandment under the Tabernacle/Temple worship and the worship of the New Covenant. Or the temporal aspect of the fifth commandment which we touched upon in a previous chapter ([see here](#)).

As Dr. Martin notes, we should not merely think of the Sabbath as only ceremonial or only moral, but both. He says:

And, indeed, we also have seen that positing the question in such a way as to demand an all-or-nothing answer (*i.e.*, as either all natural/moral or all positive) reveals a naiveté concerning the nature of biblical law in general and of the fourth commandment in particular.^[76]

Dr. Waldron agrees, saying, “there are points at which it becomes difficult to prove that the Fourth Commandment is a moral law exactly like every other moral law.”^[74] As Francis Turretin observed:

The accommodation of the fourth precept to the peculiar state of the Jews (which was in the observance of the seventh day from the beginning of creation) did not render this precept ceremonial any more than the promise to give the land of Canaan to the people of Israel makes the fifth commandment ceremonial; nor the preface, where the bringing of the people out of Egypt is mentioned, makes all the precepts ceremonial. Indeed, we grant that a somewhat stricter observance of the Sabbath was commanded in those times, accommodated to the training and servitude of the times, which does not obtain in all ages. However, this does not hinder the observance itself from being moral and common to all ages.^[77]

Just because the commandment has ceremonial/temporal aspects does not mean that it is *essentially* ceremonial. The essence remains moral as we have seen from various considerations.

The Sabbath Before Sinai

The Fourth Commandment concerns the observance and sanctification of the Sabbath. The institution of the Sabbath takes place on the seventh day of creation by God Himself (Gen. 2:3), although it is not explicitly commanded, yet the Lord Christ looks back to this time and declares that “the Sabbath was made for man” (Mark. 2:27). When was the Sabbath made but on the seventh day and in the Creation week? The Sabbath was instituted for man’s benefit, not God’s. It is true that we do not read of the patriarchs resting on the seventh day, but this is evidence for neither position, for no text says that they did not rest. Nor does the biblical account of Genesis claim to give a detailed history of the Patriarchs. In fact, the pattern of seven day weeks was known from even as far back as the Flood (Gen. 7:4). But what basis is there for a seven-days week but from the Creation? Dr. Robert Martin observes that “Every other cycle on the ancient calendar had a natural origin”, but “there is no natural cycle reflected in the existence of the seven-day week.”^[78] The seven-day week is out of tune with nature. It is was instituted by the Sovereign as He created the world in six days and sabbathed on the seventh. If a pattern of a seven-days week existed prior to Sinai then this is further evidence for the existence of the Sabbath that was instituted at Creation. As I’ve tried to argue above that there is a clear biblical teaching that the Sabbath was “made,” established and instituted on the seventh day of Creation. As Ezekiel Hopkins observes, “The Sabbath is but one day young than man.”^[79] That is sufficient proof that the Sabbath predated the Mosaic Covenant on Sinai, whether it was observed or not is not the issue at hand. There are two examples that I would like to take a look at.

Genesis 4

I don’t remember exactly how I first came in touch with this text and the connection of the Sabbath here, but since then I’ve been fascinated by it. The text reads:

Gen. 4:3-4 **In the course of time** Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, 4 and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering,

There is here clearly religious worship of the Lord God by Cain and Abel; the one gets rejected, the other accepted. We’ve looked at [this text above](#) on the Regulative Principle of Worship, but now we look at it for the Sabbath. But, you may ask yourself, “where is the Sabbath here?” That depends on the translation of the opening phrase. Literally, the phrase “in the course of time” (ESV, NIV, HCSB) is “at the end of days” (as translated by YLT). The phrase is variously translated as: “So it came about in the course of time” (NASB), “And in process of time it came to pass” (KJV), “Later, after a while” (ISV), “At the designated time” (NET). The translations vary as you can see, but the literal reading is simply “at the end of days.” In a sense, these various translations explain the input well, but I think that they miss a connection which perhaps Moses was willing to make with the Sabbath. For, let us ask ourselves, where have we read of days prior to Genesis 4? Well, in chapter one: the six days of creation and then the seventh-day Sabbath. It is our understanding that the “end of days” intended here is the “end of [the] days [of the week].” In other words, the last day of the week—the seventh-day Sabbath. Jamieson-Fausset-Brown think that this is a reference “probably” to “the Sabbath.”^[25] Likewise, Matthew Poole, after giving two options for the understanding of the phrase, says, “More probably at the end of the days of the week, or upon the seventh and last day of the week, Saturday, which then was the sabbath day, which before this time was blessed and sanctified, Gen 2:3.”^[80] A.W. Pink is more optimistic and says “the end of days must be *the end of the week*, and that, of course, is *the Sabbath*.”^[40]

If we understand that the Bible teaches the institution of the Sabbath on the seventh day of Creation, then we will have no problem in seeing this very early instance of worship on that blessed day. Notice that both Cain and Abel come on the same day to offer this sacrifice to God. Was that coincidental? Or is it more proper to say that the Sabbath was instituted as a religious day from the beginning, as subsequent biblical revelation sheds more light on the nature of the Sabbath? Again, the answer for this text depends entirely upon when we see the Sabbath was instituted. In light of the establishment of the Sabbath in Genesis 2:2-3, this text receives more force for the argument for the Sabbath. Arthur W. Pink asks:

Now, why has the Holy Spirit told us that the sons of Adam and Eve worshipped God at “the end of days,” if it is not so intimate that they worshipped at the *Divinely appointed* season?^[40]

The proof which Pink provides for this understanding is the use of the word “end” in Genesis 2:4, which is the first use of the word and the present passage has the second use of the word. He says in Genesis 2:4 ‘the only “ending” referred to in the context is the ending of *the six days’ work*.’ And therefore ‘the “end of days” means, and can only mean, the end of the working week’.^[40] For those unpersuaded that “the end of days” here refers to the end of the week, i.e., the Sabbath, we give you Dr. Martin’s words:

To this point in Genesis, Moses has primarily used the word “day” (יוֹם) to refer to days of the creation week, including the seventh or Sabbath day (2:2-3). He also distinguishes ordinary “days” from “seasons” (עֵת) and “years” (שָׁנָה), showing that the terms “seasons” and “years” were available if he meant to express the ideas that these words represent (1:14)...It is much more in line with his usage to think that he mean “at the end of the week,” i.e., on the seventh and last day of the week, which is the Sabbath day.^[81]

Dr. Martin concludes:

The most reasonable conclusion from the data (such as it is) is that Cain and Abel brought their sacrifices on a Sabbath day.^[82]

As a summary, let us read the words of Dr. Nigel Lee:

Now this text states that the sacrifice of Cain was brought “in process of *time*”, or “at the *end of days*”, as the marginal rendering has it. This implies that the sacrifice was brought at the occurrence of an *event* in time which could meaningfully be described as taking place “at the end of days”. “At the end of *which* days?”, one may ask; and the only series of days with an event “at the end of [those] days” which has previously been described in God’s Word, is the seven-day “creation week”, with the rest day or sabbath day “at the end of [those] days”, Gen. 1:1–2:3. Hence the “end of days” at which point Cain’s sacrifice was offered in Gen. 4:3, can in all probability only be “the end of the week”, and “the end [of the week] of days” can only mean the weekly sabbath day.^[83]

Exodus 16

The next explicit mention of the Sabbath after Genesis 2 is two months before Sinai in Exodus 16. There we read concerning the manna which the Lord gave Israel in the wilderness. The Lord will give them manna daily according to their needs. They will go out and gather a portion for one day. But on the sixth day, they must gather for two days so that they may rest on the seventh. Despite the clear command of God, some people went out on the seventh day to gather some manna. We read:

Exod 16:22-29 On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each. And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, 23 he said to them, “This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘**Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD**; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.’” 24 So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it. 25 Moses said, “Eat it today, for today is a **Sabbath to the LORD**; today you will not find it in the field. 26 Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none.” 27 On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. 28 And the LORD said to Moses, “**How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?** 29 See! The LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day.”

Let us first notice how the Sabbath is described in v. 23. It is a day of solemn rest. It is a sacred day and one which is characterized by rest. Moreover, it is not merely a day of rest, but it is “a holy Sabbath to the LORD”. It is likewise a day of worship. It is a day which should be sanctified and kept holy, not to one’s self, but to Yahweh. Arthur Pink writes:

This: “Tomorrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the Lord.” These words *repeat* the three primal features of the Sabbath: first, it is designed for “rest;” second, it is “holy”--set apart from the six working days; third, it is to be kept

“unto the Lord-” that is, it is a day for Divine worship.^[40]

Now, we will particularly take notice of vv. 28-29. Some suppose that this is the first observance and command of the Sabbath in the Bible, contrary to what we have argued above about the Sabbath as a creation ordinance. They say that the description of the Sabbath here seems to be something new. But is that really the case? Archibald Alexander writes:

When the Sabbath is first mentioned by Moses, after the exodus, there is no appearance of its being a new institution; but it is referred to as a day accustomed to be observed; or, at least, as one on which it was not lawful to perform the common labours of the week.^[43]

Well, there is a contrast! One side says that it is clear from the text that this is the first observation of the Sabbath, while the other says that it is clear that this is not giving Israel a new command. So which is it? It is interesting to take notice of the wording of God’s complaint. Why would God, referring specifically to the Sabbath, say “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?” if in reality the Sabbath commandment was just given a day before? The wording of “how long” does not fit the Sabbath as being first commanded in Exodus 16. Pink says that this “how long” proves the fact that the Sabbath was not something new, but a commandment which is continually neglected. It is reasonable to say that the Sabbath was neglected by Israel in Egypt. I don’t think the hard taskmasters in Egypt were so generous to the Israelites so as to give them a day of rest. Add to that the fact that they’ve been 400 years in this continual and harsh bondage. Dr. Martin writes that this

incident is indicative of a long-standing pattern of violating his command in such matters...The expression “how long” (עַד־כַּיָּהוֹךָ) seems out of place if this is the first Sabbath in history. Is “how long do you refuse” the language for first-time transgression? Jacobus rightly says that the Lord’s choice of words implies “that they had been guilty of this inattention to the Sabbath before this time. And it justifies the supposition that in their Egyptian bondage (also) they had been prone to neglect the Sabbath.”^[84]

John Giarizzo likewise says that ‘If the Sabbath law had just been instituted, one would expect different words, such as, “Why do you refuse to keep my (new) commandment and law?”’^[85] It seems perhaps that this is a *revival* of the Sabbath first instituted in the Garden, than the first institution of it (contrary to what we’ve argued above). Dabney writes concerning this incident:

In Exodus xvi:22-30, where we read the first account of the manna, we find the Sabbath institution already in force; and no candid mind will say that this is the history of its first enactment. It is spoken of as a rest with which the people ought to have been familiar. But the people had not yet come to Sinai, and none of its institutions had been given. Here, then, we have the Sabbath’s rest enforced on Israel, before the ceremonial law was set up, and two weekly variations wrought in the standing miracle of the manna, in order to facilitate it. And when at length we come to the formal command of the decalogue, it is expressed in terms which clearly indicate that the Sabbath was an institution already known, of which the obligation was now only re-affirmed.^[86]

Dr. Waldron answers a common objection which may be brought up at this point:

Some may argue, of course, “If it was instituted previously, they would not have needed this explanation.” This assertion ignores the darkness and low spiritual condition which characterized Israel at the time of the Exodus. Circumcision was also explained and reiterated (Leviticus 12 and Exod. 4:24-26). *The disobedience of the people does not prove it.* “But how could the people have disobeyed if the Sabbath was previously instituted?” Ask Aaron and the people how they could make the golden calf if God had previously forbidden idols!^[87]

Moreover, as a further answer to the common objection why the Sabbath was not mentioned in the lives of the patriarchs or in Genesis, Francis Nigel Lee answers thus:

Twelfthly, even if it were admitted that there is no reference to the seventh-day rest in the inspired records of the sacred history of the world before Ex. 16, it would not follow that it was not observed by man during that period. For from Joshua to Samuel, a period of perhaps five hundred years, one searches in vain for a single reference, explicit or implicit, to the *sabbath*; the same applies in respect of the *offerings* during the at least fifteen hundred years between

Abel and the flood; again, from Joshua to Jeremiah includes a period of about eight hundred years, in the course of which *circumcision* is never named. Had the Jews then, during all this time, set aside this sacrament and national sign? For such inference would be quite legitimate on Paley's premises. Yet such inference is, of course, absurd; as absurd as the denial of the pre-Sinaitic sabbath or the offerings on similar premises.^[88]

The Sabbath commandment is the one most easily neglected. I do not have a problem thinking that this was a point of revival for the Sabbath, but I do have a problem with the position which claims that this is the first observance or institution of the Sabbath. Therefore, here we have plainly the observance of the Sabbath by Israel prior to Sinai in which it is taught that the Sabbath was not something new, but a long-neglected command.

A Sign Between Me And You

Exod. 31:13-17 "You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, 'Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a **sign between me and you** throughout your generations, that you may know that **I, the LORD, sanctify you**. 14 You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. 15 Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. 16 Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, **observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever**. 17 It is a **sign forever** between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.'"

Under The Old Covenant

The rainbow was the sign of the Noahic Covenant; circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant and the Sabbath was the sign of the Mosaic Covenant. Dr. Waldron reminds us that we should not think simply because the Sabbath is the sign of the Mosaic Covenant, that it is therefore ceremonial. Rather "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."^[89] As a sign, the Sabbath has some symbolic value for the people of God. The Sabbath is grounded in Creation in Exodus 20:11 and in redemption in Deuteronomy 5:15. In Exodus 31:13-17, the Sabbath is grounded in Creation and is to function as a sign and a token between Israel and God. A sign is a visible representation of an invisible reality. The Sabbath serves as a sign and token between God and His people that He is the One who sets them apart, making them holy. He has given them the Sabbath as a sign that He is their God and they are His people. This in no way denigrates the abiding moral nature of the Sabbath. Dr. Waldron explains it in the way of a woman marrying on her birthday. The date is the same, but there is an *added significance* to the date after her marriage. This in no way diminishes the fact that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance for all men.

The chief sign according to **Exodus 31:13** is "a reminder that the covenantal relationship that Jehovah had established with their fathers and with them was a relationship that had sanctification as its central feature."^[90] This covenantal relationship between God and His people which the Sabbath signifies, is because of God's sanctifying work. We are to know God, through the Sabbath, as our Sanctifier. The Sabbath, as a visible sign, was given to always remind Israel of God their Sanctifier. He has set us apart as He has set apart the Sabbath day for His worship. In **Ezekiel 20:12, 20**, we also read of the Sabbath being a sign of sanctification and a sign that they are God's people. The Sabbath was instituted on the seventh day, but came with force as a sign of the Mosaic covenant. Ezekiel 20 is "teaching that the Sabbath was given to Israel at the Exodus for the first time *as a covenant sign*."^[91] Iain Campbell says that the heart of the matter is that "Israel was to keep days and specific years, holy, sanctifying them as a sign that God was the one making Israel holy. There is an intimate link between Sabbath observance and God's sanctifying work in his people."^[92] Based on these two verses, Dr. Martin writes:

From the parallelism of these verses [Ezk 20:12, 20] we may deduce that the covenant relationship expressed in the words "I am the Lord your God" includes also the commitment "I am the Lord who sanctifies you." The Sabbath was meant to be a reminder of these truths.^[93]

After the general apostasy of humanity from the commandments of God and the fourth commandment in particular, Dabney observes the importance of the Sabbath as a sign:

To understand this "sign" we must remember that all the world except the Hebrews had gone off into idolatry, neglecting all God's laws and also the proper observance of his Sabbath. The covenant which Israel made with him was, to be separate from all the pagans and to obey his law, so neglected by them. Now, the public observance of the Sabbath gave the most obvious, general, visible sign to the world and the church of this covenant, and of the difference between God's people and pagans. Hence it was eminently suitable as a sign of that covenant.^[94]

The Seventh-Day Sabbath Pointed To Christ

The Sabbath moreover was a sign of a greater reality, namely, rest in Christ. The seventh-day Sabbath under the Old Covenant pointed toward spiritual rest in Christ. The Israelites were eagerly expecting to enter the Promised Land and thus into their rest. In some places, the idea of rest and entering the land is connected together (e.g. Deut. 12:9; Josh. 1:13). Their rest in part consisted in receiving the Promised Land, but this was not what the Sabbath was pointing to ultimately. As we have argued above, the Sabbath was first of all given to Adam and for him to keep. It was not given first in Exodus 16 or on Sinai. Therefore, Adam had an obligation to keep the Sabbath holy, following his Maker's example. The Lord told Him to obey Him, otherwise he will die (Gen. 2:16-17). He had to toil in his state of probation, however long that was designed to be, and after passing God's test, he would have entered and shared into God's rest, too. He would have entered into God's Sabbath rest. God rested from His work of creation since the seventh day and had Adam obeyed God in his time of probation, he would have shared in God's Sabbath. But he did not. Concerning the eschatological significance of the Sabbath even from the Creation, Dr. Waldron writes:

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 probation in the Garden of Eden. The six days of labor symbolized the labor of history and the 7th day the rest to be entered at the end of history when the creation mandates of God had been successfully completed.^[95]

To the effect that the seventh-day Sabbath under the Old Covenant pointed to rest in Christ, we read in Hebrews 4:

Heb. 4:8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on.

Joshua had in fact given them rest (Josh. 21:43-45), but this rest was not the one which the seventh-day Sabbath pointed to. The seventh-day Sabbath pointed to the rest that people would have from the sinful labors and enter into the joyous and peaceful fellowship of God. No longer away from Him, but to be with Him forever. The Sabbath was not merely pointing to the rest which Israel would have had in the Promised Land, but also to rest in Christ and salvation. The Author says that "we who have believed enter that rest" (Heb. 4:3). It is by faith that we enter God's rest. But as we shall see later on, even though the seventh-day Sabbath was fulfilled by us resting in Christ, yet Hebrews 4:9 still teaches that there is still a Sabbath-keeping for the people of God under the New Covenant. Lee Irons writes:

The resurrection of Christ is therefore a crucial event, because it marks the first time that an obedient man has entered into God's eschatological Sabbath. The eternal rest of God himself, originally offered at the beginning of creation, has finally been achieved for man. As the second Adam and inaugurator of a new humanity and a new creation, the eternal rest of the new heavens and the new earth has intruded into the midst of history. The uninterrupted rest of the age to come has already begun. By faith we lay hold of Christ's rest and enter into the enjoyment of it (Heb. 4:1-11). We have put aside our own righteousness and now serve the living God with a clear conscience as the fruit of that rest, not in order to earn it by our sinful works (Heb. 6:1; 9:14). Thus every day is a Sabbath rest in Christ.^[96]

But he is also quick to add that "there is also a not-yet aspect of our rest" and warns that "We must not indulge in an overrealized eschatology".^[97] Thereby he does not deny the fact that there still is an obligation of keeping a Sabbath for the people of God. The Sabbath we keep now is a foretaste of the eternal Sabbath in heaven and in the New Earth. The entering into God's rest now is thanks to the work of Christ in restoring and redeeming creation and thereby bringing "man again to enter God's rest...the long promised rest has been inaugurated in Christ."^[98]

Under The New Covenant

But is the Sabbath only a sign for the Old Covenant? Does the Sabbath have any "sign" function under the New Covenant? Does it only signify that God separated physical Israel and claimed them as His own? Aside from Dispensationalism, we all recognize that the church is the Israel of God. The church is the true people of God. God does not have two peoples, one earthly and one heavenly, but only one people united together in Christ and in the Covenant of Grace. This would imply that we should not restrict the promises made to Israel under the Old Covenant to the ethnic people of Israel, but carefully apply them to the true Israel of God. Of course, this must be done with care and with consideration of what the New Testament also says.

We have seen that the Sabbath is a visible sign of an invisible reality, namely, that God has sanctified His people and claimed them as His own. Do we have any reason to disregard this significance of the Sabbath under the New Covenant? I don't think so. This is furthermore strengthened by the fact that (1) the Sabbath was not unique to Israel, but it was made

for man at the Creation (Mark 2:27-28), and (2) the New Testament does *not* teach the abrogation of the Sabbath (as we shall see below). Yes, we understand that the Sabbath was specifically given in the texts above to Israel as a sign of the Mosaic Covenant, but is this sign limited only to the Old Covenant people of God? Does not God, giving us the Lord's Day Sabbath, likewise show to us that He has set His people apart and claimed them as His own in the New Covenant also? The Old Testament assumes the abiding validity of the Sabbath in the last days (e.g. Isaiah 56, 58), and not its abrogation. Joseph Pipa writes concerning the moral nature of the Sabbath command pointing that even Gentiles within Israel were required to keep the Sabbath holy. He writes:

Nevertheless, Nehemiah [13:15-21] applied the Fourth Commandment to Gentiles as well as Jews. From this we conclude that the Fourth Commandment was more than a sign of God's covenant people with Israel. He required Gentiles living in the land to keep the law as well.^[99]

That the Sabbath was given as a sign of the Mosaic Covenant does in no way diminish its original institution, namely, on the seventh day of the Creation. From thence was the Sabbath made and instituted for man. It was not first instituted at Sinai, as we've tried to argue. Therefore, its application cannot be limited to physical Israel, but it binds all men everywhere. Yet, it cannot be denied that the Sabbath played a huge role in the Old Testament. God took that which He made for all people in the Creation, renewed it (for it was neglected) and applied it specifically to His covenant people. The fact that the Sabbath was made as a sign of the covenant and a sign between God and His people, in no way limits its application and obligation to His people. The Sabbath commandment itself obligates foreigners to observe the Sabbath (Ex. 20:10; Deut. 5:14). This observation adds to the strength and significance of the Sabbath. To use the example which Dr. Waldron employed from a friend of his, this is like a woman marrying on her birthday. Now the date of her birth becomes more important and receives more significance because from now on she will not only celebrate her birthday but also the day of her marriage. For Israel, the Sabbath was grounded in Creation (Exodus 20:11), as well as in redemption (Deut. 5:15). This new event (marriage), of the Sabbath, also functioning as a covenant sign does not diminish the first ground on which this day was considered important (birthday), but makes it even more special. Dr. Martin writes concerning the significance of the Sabbath for the New Covenant believer:

The Sabbath established at creation continues, and it retains its function as a reminder of that great work. Now it also functions as a reminder of the works of Christ and of the sanctifying relationship that we have with God through him. And it symbolizes (even giving us a foretaste of) the promise remaining of entering into this rest. The Mosaic Sabbath was the creation Sabbath made into a reminder of Israel's redemption from Egypt, and a symbol of the rest awaiting in Canaan. That Sabbath now has ceased. But it has been replaced by the Lord's Day, which is the creation Sabbath now made a reminder, for the new Israel, of God's redemption of his people from sin, and a symbol of the heavenly rest that is yet to be entered into by us.^[100]

The Sabbath is a sign, given to the people of God, pointing to the fact that we've been set apart by God and He is our covenantal God and we His covenant people. This sign is even more appropriate under the better and more glorious covenant with which the blessings of God are clearly seen.

The Lord's Day, Or The Christian Sabbath

Now we come to the most crucial aspect of the Christian Sabbath, namely, how do we justify such a Christian Sabbath on Sunday from Scripture? Where does Scripture ever teach that the Sabbath was changed from the seventh day to the first? I try to provide various biblical reasons why we believe that God did indeed change the day from the seventh to the first, yet not by divine command, but by Apostolic practice.

The Change Of The Day Not Affecting The Essence

First, we begin by noting that the change of the day, as we've noted a few times above, is not of the essence of the Sabbath. The Sabbath principle is simply that of the "one day out of seven is for rest and worship." That is the moral part of the commandment. The day, as we've pointed out, is the *temporal* (or as some call it, the ceremonial) aspect of the Sabbath. It was revealed by a positive command of God and therefore, is not unchangeable as the "one-in-seven" principle. There may be a difference between the application of the Ten Commandments under the Old Testament and the New Covenant without affecting the essence of the commandments themselves. Dr. Richard Barcellos points out the application of the Second Commandment, which all believe is still binding today, under the Old Testament and the New Testament, saying that "the second commandment is still in force the laws for what constitutes acceptable worship have changed (Heb. 9:1-10). This change is due to the coming of Christ and His work which is the fulfillment to which the ancient elements of worship pointed."^[101] Under the Old Testament they had to worship God through the ceremonial law, bringing their offerings and operating under the shadows and types. But under the New Covenant, these things have been abrogated *by fulfillment*. We

no longer serve and worship God through the typical ordinance, but purely in spirit and truth. But dare one say that the Second Commandment is no longer applicable and binding upon men? Obviously, the heart of the commandment is there and that is: we should worship God only in the way which He institutes, but the application under the Old Covenant and the New Covenant is radically different. Yet we still have the same commandment. Dr. Barcellos writes, “the application of the second commandment looks different than it used to in light of the coming of the Son of Man and His entrance into glory. We worship *how* we do in light of the coming and resurrection of Christ.”^[101]

The application of the Fifth Commandment likewise is different from under the Old Testament and the New Covenant. In Ephesians 6:2-3, the Apostle cites the Fifth Commandment whose promise concerns specifically the Promised Land and applies it generally to whichever land one lives ([see here for more](#) on this). But no one will say that this changed the essence of the Fifth Commandment. The essence remained and that is, the honoring of authority. Yet the promise was modified a little bit. In these two instances, we see two commandments that had different applications under the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, yet in essence, they are the same. In the same way, it is with the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Sabbath. The application of the Sabbath prior to the resurrection of Christ, the pivotal event of history, was to be on the seventh day of the week. The seventh day was temporary. After the resurrection of our Lord, the first day came to be the day of worship, the Christian Sabbath—the Lord’s Day. The essence of the command is still the same, namely, rest and worship, but the specific day is different. John Murray writes concerning the “one-in-seven” principle of the Sabbath:

The controversy that has turned on the question as to whether or not, in the Christian dispensation, the Sabbath is the first day of the week or the seventh, and as to whether we can be said to observe the fourth commandment when we substitute the first day of the week for the seventh, has too often been allowed to obscure the central principle, namely, that every recurring seventh day was by divine ordination distinguished from every other day. The difficulty that may be encountered in determining which day of the week is the Sabbath should never be used as a subterfuge to escape from the central and straightforward import of the commandment, that every recurring seventh day is specifically holy to God.^[102]

Dr. Barcellos adds, after looking at the application of the second and fifth commandments:

Just as the application of the second commandment looks different under the New Covenant due to the sufferings and glory of Christ (i.e., the *elements* of public worship have changed), so the application of the fourth commandment (i.e., the *day* for public worship has changed).^[103]

Therefore, it would not do to complain that for so many thousands of years the Sabbath was clearly known as the seventh-day of the week, therefore, it is not possible that it has been changed. For it cannot be proven that the specific day is as perpetual as the Sabbath principle of “one-in-seven.” Moreover, the specific day of the Sabbath was a positive command of God and could be changed without offering any violence to the heart and essence of the commandment, if God so willed. It appears that God did in fact so will from the glorious resurrection of our Lord.

The Christian Sabbath Is Not Contrary To The Fourth Commandment

The Fourth Commandment reads:

Exod. 20:8-11 “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 **Six days you shall labor**, and do all your work, 10 but **the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God**. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. 11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

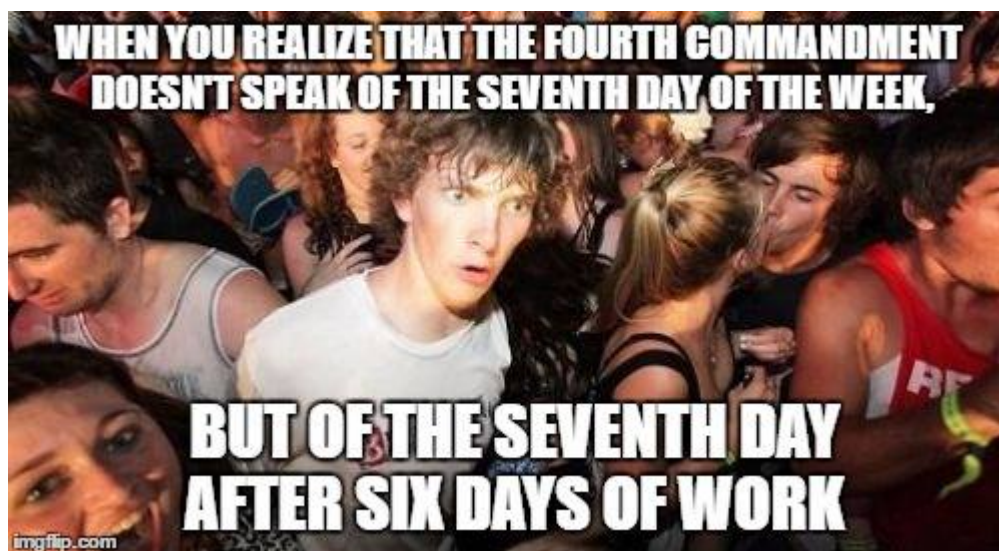
There is a common error which many of us fall into with regards to the specific day of the week mentioned in the Fourth Commandment. We reason, in the time of our Lord, we definitely know that the Sabbath was celebrated from Friday sundown until Saturday sundown, therefore, this is what is referred to in the Fourth Commandment. We basically think that the Fourth Commandment speaks about the seventh day *of the week*. This is, I believe, a very common error. While it is doubtless that the Sabbath was celebrated (basically) on Saturday in the time of our Lord, this does not mean that the Fourth Commandment itself refers to the seventh day *of the week* as the Sabbath. Notice that the assertion that the Fourth Commandment designates the seventh day of the *week* as the Sabbath is not found in the text itself. Rather, it is our own addition primarily from the application of the Sabbath under the Mosaic Covenant.

The commandment speaks of the specific day of the Sabbath in relation first to six days of work. Only after it gives man the

space of six days to work does the commandment go on to designate the specific day of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is not the seventh day *of the week*, but it is the seventh day *after six days space of work*. This is very crucial to understand. The specific day for the Old Covenant was most likely determined in Exodus 16 with the sending of the manna, while for the New Covenant it was designated by the resurrection of the Savior. When I first read of this observation it was really mind-blowing to me and I couldn't understand why I didn't see this previously. I read it first in Francis Nigel Lee's work, the Covenantal Sabbath:

"But the seventh day is the sabbath" ("w^eyôm hashshib'i") —not, as the Seventh Day Adventists insist, "the seventh day of the week", but simply, "the seventh day", that is, the seventh day in relation to the six days of labour just described in the previous verse. Hence the hebdomadal cycle of work and rest is clearly taught by the Commandment; but the precise day of the week which is the sabbath in each particular dispensation must be established by the extra-Decalogical data of the dispensation concerned. It is, however, always "the sabbath of the Lord thy God" — the day of man's personal Re-creating Creator ("Yăhveh 'Elôheykă"), and not of man.^[104]

Thanks to this observation we see that the Christian Sabbath on Sunday is not in the least in violation of the text of Fourth Commandment. It may be contrary to what was observed under the Mosaic Covenant, but it is not contrary to the text of the Fourth Commandment. Christians likewise have a space of six days to work (Monday - Saturday) and then rest and worship on the seventh (Sunday). The Fourth Commandment speaks of the seventh day in a cycle and not of the week. In this we have a confirmation that the essence of the Sabbath is "six days of work, the seventh day is for rest and worship."



The Day Of Resurrection And Appearances

It is undisputed that our Lord rose on the first day of the week—the Sunday. The practice of the church of Jesus Christ has been since the beginning to gather on the first day of the week to celebrate His resurrection. The resurrection is the climax event of all history. It is here where the Lord completed His work of redemption and brought us justification (Rom. 4:25). Without the resurrection, no one would be saved (1 Cor. 15:12-19). Both the death and resurrection of Christ are necessary and crucial for our redemption.

All four Gospels teach that our Lord was raised on the first day of the week—the day after the Jewish Sabbath—the Sunday (Matt. 28:1, 6; Mark 16:1, 6; Luke 24:1, 6; John 20:1, 19). One cannot minimize the importance of the resurrection in the Gospels. It is the celebration that our redemption was secured and death was defeated. By rising on the first day of the week, the Lord forever made special that day. It is the day of joy and peace in which our Lord secured our redemption. On the Jewish Sabbath, his body lay in the grave, but on the first day of the week, it was raised in glory. It was reasonable for the disciples to gather on the first day of the week to celebrate His life and resurrection, looking forward to their resurrection and life with Him. By rising on the first day, the Lord signaled the importance of the first day to Him. It should be a day of joy and celebration. Psalm 118:24 declares: "This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." This is a reference to Christ's resurrection and exaltation as can be seen from Acts 4:10-12 where Psalm 118:22 is cited. See also Matthew 21:42-43 for the Messianic character of the Psalm. The day of Christ's resurrection is said to be a day *especially* made by God and a day of rejoicing and gladness. The Christian Sabbath indeed has to be a day of rejoicing and gladness. While we may rejoice and be glad on every day, nonetheless, the Psalm specifically calls the day on which the Rejected Stone becomes the cornerstone "the day that the LORD has made".

Moreover, not only was the first day of the week the day of resurrection, but it was also the first day of the week on which

the recorded appearances of our Lord take place (John 20:19, 26). Why does the Holy Spirit find it so important to note the day, writing so emphatically “On... the first day of the week” (v. 19) or “eight days later” (v. 26), which would correspond to the next Sunday? There is certainly a significance to this that the Lord is trying to make clear. He meets with His disciples on *His* day, the day on which He rose from the dead. He fellowships with them on the first day of the week, as is explicitly taught in the text. Notice also the fact that in the first instance, at least the ten disciples were “assembled” and on the second instance, even Thomas is present with the rest. Did they all live in one place or is it more reasonable to see that they were gathered, at least the second time, because of Christ’s resurrection on that day, expecting to see Him again. Matthew Poole notes on John 20:26, saying:

Verse 26. *And after eight days again.* That is, on the return of the first day of the week. From this it appears that they thus early set apart this day for assembling together, and Jesus countenanced it by appearing twice with them. It was *natural* that the apostles should observe this day, but not probable that they would do it without the sanction of the Lord Jesus. His repeated presence gave such a sanction, and the historical fact is indisputable that from this time this day was observed as the Christian Sabbath. See Acts 20:7; 1Cor 16:2; Rev 1:10.^[180]

B.B. Warfield writes:

The appearance is strong that our Lord, having crowded the day of his rising with manifestations, disappeared for a whole week to appear again only on the next [first-day] Sabbath. George Zabriskie Gray seems justified, therefore, in suggesting that the full effect of our Lord’s sanction of the first day of the week as the appointed day of his meeting with his disciples can be fitly appreciated only by considering with his manifestations also his disappearances. “For six whole days between the rising day and its octave he was absent.” “Is it possible to exaggerate the effect of this blank space of time, in fixing and defining the impressions received through his visits?”^[159]

If it’s true that the central aspect of Christian worship is to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord, then isn’t it reasonable to meet corporately on the day of His resurrection to do that? By gathering on the first day of the week with the people of God, we commemorate the resurrection of our Lord and the redemption which resulted from His death and resurrection. The Lord singled out the first day of the week by rising on it and the practice of the Church, both in the New Testament and outside, confirms that the Christians worshiped on the day of Christ’s resurrection.

The Day Of Pentecost (Acts 2:1)

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were **all together in one place**.

Pentecost took place 50 days after the Sabbath (Lev. 23:16), which would have placed it on the day after the Sabbath—the first day of the week—the Sunday. It just so happens that they were gathered in one place? I don’t think so. There is already precedence from the resurrection appearances of our Lord on the first day, that this first day would be special and would be a day on which the people of God gather to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord. In the resurrection appearances, there were *at least* some half a dozen people, but now they are gathered with 120 people expecting something great to happen. Perhaps they were given directions by Christ to wait on that day, we don’t know. All that we know is that this took place on the first day of the week.

The first instances of the first days commemorated the resurrection of our Lord, but now, on the first day of the week, the Risen Lord sends His Spirit to rule the hearts of His people and to live within them. The outpouring of the Spirit is likewise a pivotal event. The Lord declared that it was better for the disciples that He leave so that the Spirit would come (John 16:7). The Lord Jesus lives His risen life and works through the Holy Spirit in His people. This adds all the more to the significance of the first day of the week for the New Covenant people of God. Matthew Henry writes on this passage:

This feast of pentecost happened on the first day of the week, which was an additional honour put on that day, and a confirmation of it to be the Christian sabbath, the day which the Lord hath made, to be a standing memorial in his church of those two great blessings--the resurrection of Christ, and the pouring out of the Spirit, both on that day of the week. This serves not only to justify us in observing that day under the style and title of the Lord’s day, but to direct us in the sanctifying of it to give God praise particularly for those two great blessings; every Lord’s day in the year, I think, there should be a full and particular notice taken in our prayers and praises of these two, as there is by some churches of the one once a year, upon Easter-day, and of the other once a year, upon Whit-sunday. Oh! that we may do it with suitable affections!^[14]

The Lord redeemed us by His death and resurrection and adopted us and lives within us by His Spirit, Whom He sent on Pentecost Sunday. Albert Barnes noted that “The day of Pentecost was kept by the Jews also as a festival to commemorate the giving of the law on Mount Sinai.”^[17] But now the New Covenant people of God celebrate the first day as a remembrance of their redemption and the writing of the Law of God on their hearts by the Spirit (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:25-27; 2 Cor. 3:3).

The foretaste of the Holy Spirit was also given on the first day of the week. ‘On the evening of that day, the first day of the week...he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit’ (John 21:19, 22). Not only the Spirit but also the foretaste of the Holy Spirit was given on the first day of the week.

We cannot downplay the importance of the first day of the week from these two events, the resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Certainly, God was signaling something important about this day when He chose to accomplish those things on the first day. As with the seventh-day Sabbath, the holiness of the day did not spring from the day itself, but from what God did on that day.

The Day Of Gathering And Breaking Bread (Acts 20:7)

On the **first day of the week**, when we were **gathered together to break bread**, **Paul talked with them**, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.

Why is it significant that Luke mentions the specific day on which the disciples met? I believe because he is signaling to us the practice of the early church to meet on the first day of the week, rather than the Jewish Sabbath. If it is objected that Paul taught on the Sabbath in the synagogues, then the simple answer is that he did it because he was trying to evangelize the Jews. But, when he is in the midst of his Christian brethren, they meet on “the first day of the week”. In this passage, we have important things which we, Christians, when gathered as a church on Sunday do. We have:

1. The gathering of the Church on the first day;
2. The breaking of bread;
3. Preaching.

First of all, the people were gathered specifically on the first day of the week as the text says. This harkens back to Pentecost when the 120 disciples were gathered together in one place (Acts. 2:1). This seems to have been because of Christ’s resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit. Notice also the context of the passage. Paul here is in a hurry. When he arrives he looks forward to the first day of the week, after which he goes to Assos (Acts. 20:13). It is important to note that although Paul was in a hurry and stayed for seven days, yet they were “gathered” specifically on the first day of the week. He arrived on Monday and waited seven days so that he would gather with the Church. Undoubtedly, Paul had contact with the people of God prior to the first day of the week, but it is also to be noted that the *gathering* of the Church is specifically said to be on the first day of the week. This was a Christian church, not a Jewish synagogue. If Paul was a Seventh-day Sabbatarian why did he not meet on the seventh day rather than the first day? He was in fact in a hurry, but he chooses to meet corporately with the people of God on the first day, the day of Christ’s resurrection. Warfield observes:

It is clear from a passage in Acts xx. 7 that the custom of “gathering together to break bread” “upon the first day of the week” was so fixed in the middle of the period of Paul’s missionary activity that though in haste he felt constrained to tarry a whole week in Troas that he might meet with the brethren on that day.^[59]

Furthermore, Joseph Pipa notes:

It was the custom of the early church to meet for worship on the first day of the week. This interpretation is confirmed by the fact that although Paul was racing to be in Jerusalem for the feast, he remained in Troas seven days in order to join with the church in worship on the first day of the week. He repeated this pattern in Tyre (Acts 21:4). If Paul wanted to have a special meeting with the church, he could have arranged it earlier in the week. No, Paul remained for weekly worship.^[105]

Jon English Lee writes, “Whether the transfer of Saturday to Sunday as the day of worship came from direct command of Jesus to the apostles or by the leading of the Holy Spirit, what is clear is that the apostolic-era church did gather on Sundays.”^[106]

Second. They were gathered “to break bread”, which means to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. That the expression of “breaking bread” refers to the Lord’s Supper is seen in Luke 24:35; Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17. They

were gathered, on the first day of the week, together to celebrate the Lord's death and resurrection. The Lord's Supper commemorates His death, while the Lord's Day commemorates His resurrection. This does not necessarily mean that the Lord's Supper may not be celebrated on other occasions, but Scriptures shows that the people of God were gathered on the first day to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Thomas Shepherd observes the connection between the first day of the week and the Lord's supper in this passage, saying:

the text speaks of it [the first day of the week] as of a time and day usually observed of them before, and therefore it is said, that "when they came together to break bread;" and Paul therefore took his opportunity of preaching to them, and seems to stay purposely, and wait seven days among them, that he might communicate with them, and preach unto them in this ordinary time of public meeting; and therefore, though he might privately instruct and preach to them the other seven days, yet his preaching now is mentioned in regard of some special solemnity of meeting on this day.^[107]

Third. The passage says that "Paul talked with them". This obviously does not refer to Paul talking with them as a friend does with a friend about worldly things, but without a doubt, this refers to preaching and exhortation. They celebrated the Lord's Supper and were taught the Word of God. Therefore, here we have an important element of worship taking place on the first day of the week.

In this passage, we have three important things. First, it was the practice of the early church and that of Paul to gather on the first day. Second, they celebrated the Lord's Supper on the first day. Third, they listened to the preaching of the Word of God on the first day. This corresponds to the Sabbath in Leviticus 23:3, wherein a "holy convocation" had to take place. This holy convocation is what later came to be the synagogue. The Sabbath was a religious day "to the LORD" and was to be dedicated to His worship. The same principle we have in the first day of the week. John Gill notes on Acts 20:7, writing:

And upon the first day of the week,.... Or Lord's day, Re 1:10 and which Justin Martyr calls Sunday; on which day, he says {i}, all, both in city and country, met in one place for religious worship; and on this day, it appears from hence, and from other places, that the apostles and primitive churches did meet together for religious exercises; see Joh 20:19 and so they did at Troas at this time, as follows:^[10]

Philip Schaff notes concerning the significance of the first day as seen from this passage:

This was evidently no accidental coincidence, this meeting together of the disciples on the first day of the week, because Paul was about to depart on the morrow. *The particular day*—'the first day of the week'—need not have been mentioned if it had only been a farewell gathering for the old teacher to share in. We have here an unmistakable allusion to the practice, which began evidently immediately after the resurrection of the Lord, of assembling on the first day of the week for religious purposes^[16]

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown note that "This, when compared with 1Co 16:2, and other similar allusions, plainly indicates that the Christian observance the first day of the week—afterward emphatically termed 'The Lord's Day'—was already a fixed practice of the churches."^[25] In this passage, we have a biblical justification for observing the first day of the week, the Sunday, as the day of worship for the Christian Church.

The Day Of Contribution (1 Corinthians 16:2)

1 Cor. 16:1-2 Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. 2 **On the first day of every week**, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.

Not only worship is to take place on the first day of the week, Sunday, but "the collection for the saints", i.e., contribution of money is to take place on the first day of the week. What is interesting here is the fact that this is a custom not only for the Corinthian church but also for the Galatian church. The monetary contribution for the church is to take place on the first day of the week. This is also the day on which the corporate worship of God took place (Acts 20:7). Therefore, the Christians are here directed to give their offerings on Sunday. That is the day on which the believers come together as a church. Why would Paul explicitly say that this "collection for the saints" should be done on the first day of the week unless that is also the day when the church corporately comes together and thus the contributions could be gathered in one place? Paul wants the first day of the week to be known and experienced as a day of mercy and of giving. It is a day especially designated by Apostolic command for offerings.

While reading books, articles, and commentaries, I came across the discussion concerning whether this collecting refers to laying aside money at home or at church. I don't directly see the relevance of this point to do any damage to our theses that the first day was the day of worship and of giving for the New Covenant community. What Paul does not want to do is to collect the offerings from each individual. Rather, when he comes, he wants to have the contribution of the church in one pot, so to speak. Robert Dabney writes, "Hence, whether this alms-giving were in public or private, we have here an indisputable instance, that an act of worship was appointed, by apostolic authority, to be stately performed on the Lord's day, throughout the churches."^[108] Francis Turretin notes that this was a custom taken from the Jews. He writes:

The apostle wishes collections to be made by believers upon each first day of the week (viz., on which their public assemblies ought also to be held), which he draws from the custom of the Jews who, according to Philo (cf. The Special Laws I. 14.76-78 [Loeb, 7:145]) and Josephus (AJ 18.312 [Loeb, 9:180-81]), on each Sabbath on which they were accustomed to assemble used to make collections in the synagogues of tithes and other voluntary offerings, afterwards sent to Jerusalem for the use of the temple and the Levites.^[77]

Our Lord taught us likewise that the "doing of alms and showing of mercy are proper works for the sabbath-day"^[109] (Matt. 12:7; Luke 13:15-16; 14:5). Therefore, in this is seen that the early Church pretty much did the same things that the Jews did on their Sabbaths, on the first day of the week. Albert Barnes notes that "there is here clear proof that the first day of the week was observed by the church at Corinth as holy time. If it was not, there can have been no propriety in selecting that day in preference to any other in which to make the collection. It was the day which was set apart to the duties of religion, and therefore an appropriate day for the exercise of charity and the bestowment of alms."^[17] This, therefore, makes the observation of the Christian Sabbath, the Sunday of the New Covenant, not a matter of Christian *liberty*, rather a Christian *obligation*. The same Apostle says in Romans 14 that "One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike" adding then "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5). If the observance of the first day of the week is a matter of Christian liberty, why does the Apostle here command the Corinthians to do their works of generosity on this particular day? Moreover, this is not something which he only taught the Corinthians but first taught it to the Galatians. Therefore, this shows that what is under discussion in Romans 14 is not the Lord's Day or the Sabbath. Romans 14 concerns itself with ceremonial and the observance of non-biblical feast days. But we will come to [Romans 14 below](#). Likewise, we may learn from this passage that Galatians 4:11 does not have to do with the weekly day of worship, the Lord's Day and the Christian Sabbath. Jonathan Edwards said that

although the inspired apostle was not for making that distinction of days in gospel times, which the Jews made, as appears by Gal. iv. 10. "Ye observe days, and months," &c. yet, here he gives the preference to one day of the week, before any other, for the performance of a certain great duty of Christianity.^[109]

The coming together of the whole church on the first day of the week and the gathering of the monetary contributions was not a particular command to the Corinthian church, but it was Paul's teaching (and thus a command from the Lord) to the churches which he ministered to. "Galatia was far distant from Corinth; the sea parted them, and there were several other countries between them"^[109], but nonetheless, they were given the same directions.

The Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10)

I was in the Spirit on [the Lord's day](#), and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet

Here is the passage from whence we get the New Covenant designation of the Christian Sabbath. The Confession strictly says that "the Lord's day" is to be observed "and is to be continued to the end of the world as the Christian Sabbath". The day of rest and worship for the New Testament is the Lord's Day, strictly speaking, and not the Sabbath. The phrase "Christian Sabbath" does not appear in the NT, while the phrase "the Lord's day" does. But obviously, such hermeneutic will get us nowhere, therefore, I am obviously not denying that the Sabbath principle continues in the New Covenant and is binding upon us as the Lord's Day. The Sabbath principle is continued in the day of worship and rest for the New Covenant—the Lord Day. I do not see a radical difference between the phraseology of the Christian Sabbath or the Lord's Day. The first stresses the fact that the Sabbath principle established in the Creation and repeated in the Fourth Commandment continues and is binding upon Christians. While the other claims that this day is one which is especially the Lord Jesus'.

It is certainly interesting to take note of the fact that John merely makes a passing reference about the Lord's day. We make a big deal out of it, but John does not. To him, it is something which everyone would have known and he did not give any explanations of it. "The term is used by John in Revelation 1:10 without remark or explanation, showing that the term must have been in general use and well understood by the audience."^[110] He expected his readers to directly know which day he

was talking about. The Greek phrase is τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ (*tē kyriakē hēmera*). This is not to be confused with the “day of the Lord”-like phraseology. The terminology there is different from here. The word κυριακός (*kuriakos*, G2960) is a strong adjective meaning “belonging to the Lord”^[111]. It is found only twice in the New Testament. In the first instance, it is used for “the Lord’s supper” (1 Cor. 11:20) and the second instance for “the Lord’s day” (Rev. 1:10). The first instance refers to the covenant meal which the Lord Jesus instituted for His people. The second instance refers to the peculiar covenant celebration day. The first instance refers to the remembrance of the Lord’s death and atonement, while the second instance is a remembrance and celebration of the day of His resurrection. Robert Haldane noted that “In the Lord’s Supper, we have a symbolical representation of the death of Christ, and in the Lord’s day we have a commemoration of his resurrection every week.” It is sufficiently clear that the day being spoken of is none other than the first day of the week, the Sunday. This may be seen from for example Ignatius (lived ~ 35/50 – 110-117 A.D.) who wrote early on:

If, therefore, those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, **no longer observing the Sabbath**, but **living in the observance of the Lord’s Day**, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death— whom some deny, by which mystery we have obtained faith, and therefore endure, that we may be found the disciples of Jesus Christ, our only Master— how shall we be able to live apart from Him, whose disciples the prophets themselves in the Spirit did wait for Him as their Teacher? And therefore He whom they rightly waited for, having come, raised them from the dead.^[112]

Here, a clear contrast is made between the Sabbath, by which is meant the Jewish Saturday Sabbath, and the Lord’s Day, the day of Christ’s resurrection, the Sunday. The Didache (early second-century document) says:

But **every Lord’s day gather yourselves together**, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure.^[113]

Notice the similarity of language here to Acts 20:7. Justin Martyr (~ 155-157 A.D.) likewise, without using the terminology of “the Lord’s day”, refers to Sunday as the day of worship for Christians, proving that a lot of things which we argued for above, were in fact practiced by the early Christians:

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; 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 succours the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need. But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of 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.^[114]

An interesting side-note for myself as an Armenian (not Arminian): the Sunday is called “Kiraki” in the Armenian language, which I, for a long time did not notice that it came from the Greek *kyriakē* until I read Revelation 1:10 in Armenian. The Greeks likewise still call Sunday *kyriakē*.

If the Apostle John wanted to speak of the Jewish Sabbath, the seventh day, he could have simply said: “I was in the Spirit on the Sabbath day.” But that was not his design, rather, he wanted to mention that the revelation of the Lord Jesus came to Him on the Lord’s Day, the Sunday. From his passing reference, we may deduce that the reference to the Lord’s Day was expected to be clear to the Gentile churches to which he was writing. It was known to them. John did not coin the term, but it was already in usage for the first day of the week by the Christians in honor of Christ’s resurrection. We have already seen that it was the custom of Christians to gather corporately on the first day of the week in honor of Christ’s resurrection (e.g. John 20:19, 26; Acts 2:1; 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). Christ was raised on the first day of the week and that’s why it is specially called the *Lord’s day*.

This designation of the Sunday destroys the idea that “all days are holy” or “all days are the Lord’s,” since John only

attributes a single day with that honor. The New Covenant does have a high and holy day—the Lord’s Day. I agree with J.C. Ryle about ‘why we are told so pointedly about the “first day of the week” and “the Lord’s Day,” if the Apostles kept no one day more holy than another, is to my mind whole inexplicable... I am convinced that, taking human nature as it is, the attempt to regard every day as a Lord’s Day would result in having no Lord’s Day at all.’^[155] “The Lord’s Day” is the God-sanctioned name for the Christian and New Covenant Sabbath day. It is the day which peculiarly belongs to the Risen Lord Christ and which He has separated from all the rest by calling it His own. John Owen makes some helpful remarks on this passage:

That from these times downwards **the first day of the week had a solemn observation in all the churches of Christ**, in the room of the seventh day has also been demonstrated. And that this was owned **from the authority of the Lord**, is declared by John in the Revelation, who calls it the ‘**Lord’s day**’ ; (chap. i. 10;) whereby **he did not surprise the churches with a new name**, but denoted to them the time of his visions, by the **name of the day well known to them**. And there is no solid reason why it should be so called, except that **it owes its preeminence and observation to its institution and authority** ; nor can any man, who denies these things, give any tolerable account, when, or from whence this day came to be so observed and called. It is *hemera kuriake*, (ἡμέρα κυριακή,) the Lord’s day, as the holy supper is *deipnon kuriakon*, (δεῖπνον κυριακόν,) the **Lord’s supper, by reason of his institution**. (1 Cor. xi. 20.) *Yehovah yom*, (יהוה יום,) the day of the Lord, in the Old Testament, which the Seventy render *hemera kuriou*, (ἡμέρα κυρίου,) no where *hemera kuriake*, (ἡμέρα κυριακή,) signifies some illustrious appearance of God in a way of judgment or mercy ; and so also in the person of Christ, this was the day of his appearance ; (Mark xvi. 9 ;) and was so called by the ancient writers of the church.^[115]

It is called the Lord’s Day because it owes its authority to and was instituted by the Lord Jesus. Dr. Waldron writes concerning the two memorials in the New Covenant and the Old 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, [κυριακός, *kuriakos*]. In 1 Cor. 11:20 we read of the Lord’s Supper and in Rev. 1:10 of the Lord’s Day. Both memorialize the redeeming work of Christ. Yet further, the Passover memorialized the sacrifice which secured the redemption, so also the Lord’s Supper recalls the great sacrifice which finished redemption. 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. 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.^[116]

Indeed, as the Passover was fulfilled by Christ our Passover (2 Cor. 5:7), so now we observe the New Covenant meal to remember His sacrifice on our behalf. So likewise, because the Sabbath reminded Israel of their redemption and their peculiar identity (e.g. Deut. 5:12-15; Ezek. 20:12, 20), so now the New Covenant Lord’s Day reminds the people of God of their accomplished redemption in the resurrection of their Savior and points them ahead to their eternal Sabbath and resurrection.

This particular day is to be sanctified to God. It is the Sabbath principle carried over to the New Covenant. Thomas Shepherd writes:

For, as the sacrament of bread and wine is called the Lord’s supper, and the Lord’s table, for no other reason but because they were instituted by Christ, and sanctified for him and his honour, so what other reason can be given by any Scripture light why this is called the Lord’s day, but because it was in the like manner instituted and sanctified as they were?... as the Jewish Sabbath, being called the Lord’s Sabbath, or the Sabbath of Jehovah, is by that title and note certainly known to be a day sanctified by Jehovah, as Creator, so this day, being called the Lord’s day, is by this note as certainly known to be a day sanctified by our Lord Jesus, as Redeemer.^[107]

Robert Dabney writes concerning Revelation 1:10—

The application of the name, Lord’s day, to Sunday, by inspired authority, of itself contains almost enough of significance to establish its claims to sanctification, without another text or example. What fair sense can it bear, except that it is a day consecrated to the Lord? Compare Isaiah lviii:15 [58:15], when God calls the Sabbath “my holy-

day.” If the Sabbath is God’s day, the Lord’s day should mean a Christian Sabbath. And the occupation of the Apostle this day, with peculiar spiritual exercises, gives additional probability to the belief that it was observed by the New Testament Christians as a day of devotion.^[117]

Here it is most interesting to note the fact that the Gospels especially attribute one day to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is said to be the Lord of the Sabbath (Matt. 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5), which means that He was the One Who instituted and Who is sovereign over the Sabbath. But Revelation 1:10 attributes *Sunday* as the peculiar day of the Lord Jesus. So how can these two things be reconciled? I believe the reasonable answer is that there is certainly a connection between the Lord’s Day and the Sabbath over which Jesus is Lord. They are the same. But, clearly, after His resurrection, the day for the New Covenant was no longer the seventh, but the first day of the week. For the seventh day pointed to redemption in Christ (Heb. 4:3-4) and the completion of the Creation. But the people of God no longer need to look back to the old creation (the present world) which was cursed because of man and doomed to pass away (2 Pet. 3:10). Rather, the people of God ought to look forward *toward* their eternal Sabbath and the *new* creation, which began with the resurrection of Christ and their redemption (e.g. 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15-16). To still observe the seventh-day Sabbath after the resurrection of Christ is to stay in the shadows which were fulfilled in Christ. The seventh-day Sabbath pointed toward the redemption of the people of God and the entering into God’s rest by faith (Heb. 4:3). But, after the people of God have entered into God’s rest by faith in the present world their observance of the seventh-day Sabbath is useless. Furthermore, the resurrection of Christ was the climax of history and the significance of that day for the Church is seen in the New Testament, as we tried to show how the Church basically did the things which the Jews did on their Sabbath on the Lord’s Day. A. H. Strong observes that “The Jewish Sabbath commemorated only the beginning of the world; the Christian Sabbath commemorates also the new creation of the world in Christ, in which God’s work in humanity first becomes complete.”^[118]

The continuity between the Creation Sabbath and the New Testament Lord’s Day is seen from the various similarities which both have and to which we have pointed to. This day is designated the Lord’s and is therefore holy and to be consecrated to Him. Edwards observes that “When any thing is called by the name of God in Scripture, this denotes the appropriation of it to God.”^[119] He then goes on to note that the people of Israel (Num. 6:27; 2Chron. 7:14; Deut. 7:6, 14), Jerusalem (Jer. 25:29; Dan. 9:18-19; Neh. 11:1), the Temple (1Kgs. 8:43) were appropriated to God, which denotes the holiness of these things. Therefore, when the Sunday is called the *Lord’s day*, this designation shows that God claims it as His own to be consecrated and kept holy to Him, which *is* the Sabbath principle. Jesus has claimed only one day to Himself called the Sabbath and the Lord’s Day.

Here we have a God-given sanction for the observance of the Lord’s Day as the Christian Sabbath, the peculiar and holy day of the Lord (Isa. 58:13-14). This is seen from the Lord Jesus’ claim of this day as His own peculiar above all others. As the *Lord’s Supper* was instituted for the remembrance of His death and atonement, so likewise, the *Lord’s Day* was instituted for the commemoration of Christ’s resurrection. Some early Christians did indeed see a direct connection between the Sabbath and the Lord’s Day, but admittedly, it was not often called the Christian Sabbath until the Reformation. The reason is that the Sabbath was closely associated with the legalistic and superstitious practice of the Jews, therefore, the Christians did not want to associate the Lord’s Day with the Jewish Sabbath. Moreover, the Sabbath of the Jews was on the seventh day on which our Lord lay in the grave and the Lord’s Day was on the day after the Jewish Sabbath on which our Lord rose. But Dr. Pipa notes:

There are, however, early references to the Lord’s Day being the Sabbath. Eusebius (ca. 260-339), in his commentary on Psalm 92, showed the relation of the seventh-day Sabbath to the Lord’s Day: “The Word, through the New Covenant, has changed and transferred the feast of the sabbath to the rising of the light and handed to us the image (*eikon*) of a true rest, the Lord’s Day, that brings salvation, the first, and the day of light.”^[120]

Dr. Martin gives a fuller citation of Eusebius’s words in which it is said that

the Savior of the world, after all his labors among men, obtained the victory over death, and passed the portals of heaven, having achieved a work superior to the six-days’ creation on this day, and received the divine Sabbath and the blessed rest...On that day which is the first of light and of the true Sun, we also assemble [Greek word], after an interval of six days, and celebrate holy and spiritual Sabbaths...[we, the redeemed] do those things according to the spiritual law [Greek words], which were decreed for the priests to do on the Sabbath;...All things which it was duty to do on the Sabbath, these we have transferred to the Lord’s Day [Greek words] as more appropriately belonging to it, because it has the precedence, and is first in rank, and more honorable than the Jewish Sabbath. For on that day, in making the world, God said, Let there be light, and there was light; and on the same day, the Sun of righteousness arose upon our souls. Therefore it is delivered [Greek word] to us that we should meet together on this day; and it is ordered [Greek word] that we should do those things announced in this psalm [92].^[121]

Personally, I am more interested in the biblical testimony to the Sabbath and the Lord's Day, but it is quite interesting that what is taught in Scripture is also confirmed in history. Matthew Henry noted on Revelation 1:10 that:

it was *the Lord's day*, the day which Christ had separated and set apart for himself, as the eucharist is called *the Lord's supper*. Surely this can be no other than the Christian sabbath, the first day of the week, to be observed in remembrance of the resurrection of Christ. Let us who call him *our Lord* honour him on his own day, the day which the Lord hath made and in which we ought to rejoice.^[14]

We end our discussion with a word from Thomas Watson about the appropriateness for the change of the day:

The grand reason for changing the Jewish Sabbath to the Lord's-day is that it puts us in mind of the 'Mystery of our redemption by Christ.' The reason why God instituted the old Sabbath was to be a memorial of the creation; but he has now brought the first day of the week in its room in memory of a more glorious work than creation, which is redemption. Great was the work of creation, but greater was the work of redemption. As it was said, 'The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former.' Hag 2: 9. So the glory of the redemption was greater than the glory of the creation. Great wisdom was seen in making us, but more miraculous wisdom in saving us. Great power was seen in bringing us out of nothing, but greater power in helping us when we were worse than nothing. It cost more to redeem than to create us. In creation it was but speaking a word (Psa 148: 5); in redeeming there was shedding of blood. 1 Pet 1: 19. Creation was the work of God's fingers, Psa 8: 3, redemption was the work of his arm. Luke 1: 51. In creation, God gave us ourselves; in the redemption, he gave us himself. By creation, we have life in Adam; by redemption, we have life in Christ. Col 3: 3. By creation, we had a right to an earthly paradise: by redemption, we have a title to a heavenly kingdom. Christ might well change the seventh day of the week into the first, as it puts us in mind of our redemption, which is a more glorious work than creation.^[122]

There Remains A Sabbath-Keeping (Hebrews 3-4)

Finally, we come to the last passage which has relevance to the doctrine of the Christian Sabbath. I agree with Pink when he says that "this change [of the day] is explicitly taught in Heb. 4."^[40] But now let us see how this is indeed the case. This is a crucial and important passage for the Christian Sabbath. It is a friend and not an enemy of the Sabbath. Some use it to argue for the fulfillment of the Sabbath principle in Christ, but scarcely people use it to argue for the *abrogation* of the Sabbath and that there is no Sabbath in the New Covenant. Rather, those who argue that it is fulfilled, say that the Sabbath is fulfilled when we rest from our works for salvation, in Christ by faith. Therefore, according to them, the Sabbath is fulfilled when we believe in Christ and rest in Him. But we believe that this passage teaches an ongoing observation of a Sabbath day for the New Covenant people of God.

The section on the subject of rest and the Sabbath begins in Hebrews 3:17 and goes through 4:13. Let us take a look at what is said there.

They Shall Not Enter My Rest (Hebrews 3:11-19)

The Author begins by showing the greatness of the Lord Jesus above Moses. Moses was merely a *servant* in God's house (Heb. 3:5), on the other hand, Christ is faithful *over* God's house as a *son* (Heb. 3:6). Therefore, if we are truly His house then we will hold fast to Him and walk in His ways. Therefore, the Author cites Psalm 95:7-11 here, which recounts what Israel did "on the day of testing in the wilderness", their hardness of heart and rebellion against the Lord Who brought them out of bondage. They were a crooked and an unthankful generation. Because of their continued sin and rebellion, the Lord declared:

Heb. 3:11 As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'" (Ps. 95:11)

We need to inquire about what "rest" is being spoken of here. The idea of rest and the Promised Land is closely associated with each other (e.g. Deut. 12:9; Josh. 1:13; Ps. 132:13-14), therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that this rest which Psalm 95:11 is speaking about is the Promised Land, which only the new generation of the Israelites (with the exception of Joshua and Caleb) possessed. Because of their transgressions they did not enter into God's land. Even Moses, for one sin, did not enter the Promised Land. This rest of God which was in the Land of Canaan, as Barnes observes, 'was undoubtedly regarded as emblematic of the "rest" in heaven.'^[17] This rebellious generation of which the Author is speaking who had "evil, unbelieving heart[s]" (Heb 3:12), neither entered God's rest in Canaan nor in heaven. Canaan was a type of heaven, our true resting place.

On the basis of this example, the Author warns his audience of not imitating what the children of Israel did to God in the

wilderness and being careful lest there be in them “an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God” (Heb. 3:12). It is because of disobedience that the crooked generation “who left Egypt by Moses” (Heb. 3:16), “whose bodies fell in the wilderness” (Heb. 3:17) did not enter God’s rest. It was not possible because of their unbelief (Heb. 3:19). They kept testing God and rebelling against His commandments, therefore, God had it with them and condemned them to death in the forty years of the wilderness.

We By Faith Enter God’s Rest (Hebrews 4:1-7)

But the Author, in chapter 4 (the original does not have chapter divisions), begins by stating the relevance of God’s rest to people living under the New Covenant. He writes:

Heb. 4:1 Therefore, while the **promise of entering his rest still stands**, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.

Now moving away from the instance which the Psalm described, which took place around 1200-1400 years from the time of writing the Epistle, the Author speaks of God’s rest as something that could be entered to in the *present time*. The “promise of entering his rest still stands” and the Author wants His audience to enter that rest. But what is that rest? I believe that this rest refers to the rest of believers in heaven (cf. Rev. 14:13; 2 Thess. 1:7), but not exclusively to that. It refers also to the rest of the believers from their toils and working for their salvation as they rest in Christ who provides them that rest (Matt. 11:28-29). There is a tension in the whole chapter between the already and not-yet. Although that rebellious generation did hear the good news, it did not benefit them because it was not enjoined with faith, therefore, they were condemned (Heb. 4:2). In contrast, “we,” the Author now speaks of the present time, enter that rest because “we...have believed” (Heb. 4:3). Furthermore, this rest, which is entered through faith, is specifically connected with the seventh day of creation and the Author cites Genesis 2:3 in v. 4. This is the rest into which the believers by faith enter both in the present time and in eternity. The rest referred to is God’s eternal and unending Sabbath. Believers do not enter into *their own* rest but enter into *God’s* rest. The word “enter” in the Greek is in the *present tense* indicating that this rest could be entered to now in the present, *the moment we believe*. As with the general already and not-yet eschatology of the New Testament, so likewise, this rest has two aspects. It is here and now, but it is not yet consummated. Nonetheless, the present rest which we have by faith does not undermine a present Sabbath-keeping as we shall see below.

The Typology Of The Seventh-Day Sabbath (Hebrews 4:8)

Heb. 4:8 For **if Joshua had given them rest**, God would not have spoken of **another day** later on.

The person here designated is Joshua the son of Nun and not the Lord Jesus, contrary to the KJV and other old translations, which may give us that idea. It was Joshua who was to lead the people into Canaan (e.g. Josh. 1:6) and under Joshua, after the conquest of Canaan, the Israelites did indeed have rest in the Promised Land, as the Lord promised to the Patriarchs (Josh. 21:43-45). Therefore, is the Author of Hebrews wrong here? Obviously not.

The Author here is pointing to the eschatological and typological function of the seventh-day Sabbath. As we discussed above ([see The Seventh-Day Sabbath Pointed To Christ](#)), the Sabbath had an eschatological function for Adam, in which after the time of his probation he would have joined God in His Sabbath rest and also for Israel, which pointed them to redemption in Christ through which they would join God in His Sabbath rest. They indeed had rest in the Land of Canaan under Joshua, David, and Solomon. But still, this was not the ultimate rest which the Land of Canaan typified. That’s why, while living in the Promised Land and under the kingship of David, the Lord promises another day/rest in Psalm 95, which is long after the conquest of Canaan. As Abraham was not looking for the earthly country, so the Promised Land should have pointed them to the heavenly country (Heb. 11:8-10, 16). The Land of Canaan itself was typological and pointed toward heaven and the New Earth. The rest which they had was political and in no way were all Israelites true believers and possessing spiritual peace. Therefore, argues the Author of Hebrews, because God spoke through David of a day of rest, so long after Israel had possessed the Land of Canaan, this means that the rest in Canaan was not the ultimate goal. Since even under Joshua, David and Solomon were there wicked and rebellious people who did not enter God’s rest. Because of this, God still calls on people to repent of their sins “today” and trust in Him, so as to enter into His rest and not be a rebellious people.

John Owen writes concerning the “rests” mentioned in this chapter:

Thus he declares, that the **rest mentioned in the psalm, is not that, which ensued immediately on the creation of all things** ; because it was spoken of a long time after, and that for another purpose, (ver. 4, 5.) Secondly, that it was **not the rest of the land of Canaan**, because that was not entered into by them to whom it was first proposed and promised ; for they came short of it through unbelief, and perished in the wilderness : but **this rest**

which is now afresh proposed is such, as the people of God must and will enter into. (ver. 6, 7.) And whereas it may be objected, that although the wilderness generation entered not in, yet their posterity did under the conduct of Joshua ; (ver. 8 ;) he answers, that this rest in the psalm being proposed and promised in David so long a time (above 400 hundred years) after the people had quietly possessed the land into which they were conducted by Joshua, it must needs be, that **another rest, yet to come, was intended in those words of the Psalmist**, (ver. 9.) And to conclude his argument he declares, that **this new rest had a new peculiar foundation, which the other had no interest or concern in ; namely, his ceasing from his works, and entering into his rest**, who is the author of it. (ver. 10.) This is his way and manner of arguing for the proof of what he had before laid down, and which he ends in that conclusion, "There remaineth, therefore, a rest for the people of God."^[123]

There Remains A Sabbatismos (Hebrews 4:9)

Heb. 4:9 So then, **there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God**,

Because not all Israel entered into God's rest, therefore and based on this, there is still a *Sabbatismos*. This *Sabbatismos* is specifically designated for the people of God, which in this instance refers to the believers in the New Covenant. Believers under the New Testament still have a duty of *Sabbatismos*. There "remains" in the present time "a Sabbath rest for the people of God." This *Sabbatismos*, whatever it is, it belongs to the people of God—those who are in covenant with God. Owen says, "God hath a people still; and wherever he hath so, rest is promised to them and prepared for them."^[124] Whatever this *Sabbatismos* be, we cannot say that it belonged only to the Old Testament people of God.

The Meaning Of Sabbatismos

The crucial question is what is actually the meaning of the Greek σαββατισμός (*sabbatismos*, G4520) here? The translation of the KJV is definitely incorrect here. Throughout this discourse, the Author uses two words to speak of rest aside from this *Sabbatismos*.

The verb καταπαύω (**katapauo**, G2664) which means "to rest, take rest"^[125] is used three times in identical form (aorist tense; active voice; indicative mood; third person; singular number) in Hebrews 4:4, 8, 10. The noun, which is derived from the verb, καταπαύσις (**katapausis**, G2663), which is used seven times in identical form (accusative, singular, feminine) in this discourse (Heb. 3:11, 18; 4:1, 3, 5, 10, 11). But there comes a radical change in v. 9. The word used there is utterly unique to the Bible, not to mention to the Greek language. The word **Sabbatismos** is only found here in the Bible. The meaning is "a keeping Sabbath"^[126] and "a keeping of a sabbath".^[127] The BDAG says "**sabbath rest, sabbath observance** fig. **Hb 4:9** a special period of rest for God's people modeled after the traditional sabbath". The word *Sabbatismos* is derived from the verb ἐσαββάτισεν (*esabbatisen*), which is used in the LXX in Exodus 16:30 ("kept sabbath") and perhaps was coined by the Author of Hebrews. Dr. Martin notes that the term does not denote "a Sabbath rest as a state to be entered into but a Sabbath-keeping as a practice to be observed. This, of course, corresponds to the word's morphology, for the suffix -μός indicates an action and not just a state."^[128] Therefore, this conveys not merely the idea of rest, but the *observance* and *keeping* of rest. He could have used the word Sabbath, but that would have pointed merely to the old Sabbath, which is fulfilled by faith in Christ. No, that was not the intent of the Author here. Rather, by using the word *Sabbatismos* the Author shows that the observance and keeping of a day of rest is not abrogated for the New Covenant people of God, but rather, it *belongs* to and *remains* for them. Moreover, this Sabbath observance and keeping likewise points to a greater reality, just like the seventh-day Sabbath did as we saw. Dr. Pipa observes that "The uniqueness of the word suggests a deliberate, theological purpose. He selected or coined the term *sabbatismos* because, in addition to referring to spiritual rest, it suggested an observance of that rest by a "Sabbath-keeping."^[129]

Many commentators and lexicons connect this *Sabbatismos* with heaven, but I believe that this is incorrect. **First** of all, the verb *katapauo* and noun *katapausis* have been used throughout this discussion to refer to that rest which is the believers' now (Heb. 4:3) and also in the future (Heb. 4:11), but here, a totally different word is used. Even some non-Sabbatarians take note of this and don't believe that this is merely a synonym or stylistic on the part of the Author. The Author did not shift the word merely for the purpose of avoiding repetition, rather the word must add an important nuance to his discussion. **Second**, the word *Sabbatismos* is derived from the verb *esabbatisen* meaning "to keep a sabbath" and which definitely meant a physical observance of a day of rest and not to a spiritual state of rest (e.g. Ex. 16:30). Therefore, the word *Sabbatismos* likewise has connotation of a physical observance of a day of rest. **Third**, this *Sabbatismos* is said to "remains" in the present "for the people of God". It is not something exclusively future, but it concerns a present obligation to the observance of a day of rest. Herein we find the principle and essence of the Fourth Commandment to observe a Sabbath day to the Lord. For those who complain that the Sabbath commandment is not repeated in the New Testament and is, therefore, no longer binding, I point to Hebrews 4:9. Arthur W. Pink writes:

Here then is a plain, positive, unequivocal declaration by the Spirit of God: “There remaineth therefore a Sabbath-keeping.” Nothing could be simpler, nothing less ambiguous. The striking thing is that this statement occurs in the very epistle whose theme is the superiority of *Christianity* over Judaism; written to those addressed as “holy brethren, partakers of the *heavenly* calling.” Therefore, it cannot be gainsaid that Hebrews 4:9 refers directly to *the Christian Sabbath*. Hence we solemnly and emphatically declare that any man who says there is no Christian Sabbath takes direct issue with the New Testament scriptures. ^[130]

The Already-Not-Yet Tension

The rest which Joshua provided the people of God under the Old Covenant pointed to the rest which believers have in Christ by faith in the present time. So likewise, this present obligation to the keeping of a day of rest, i.e. the keeping of a Sabbath, *points* to the eternal Sabbath and through it, we, in the present, have a taste of the eternal Sabbath, but we do not have the eternal Sabbath consummated. We, by observing a day of rest under the New Covenant, expect and look forward toward the eternal rest and *already* participate in that eternal rest of God. Nonetheless, we are not there *yet*. There still remains an aspect of that rest which we do not, in the present, experience. This is in accordance with the many “already-not-yet” tensions of the New Testament. There is the already-not-yet tension in the fact that:

- we have in the present eternal life, yet it will fully be consummated in the eternal state (John 3:16; Luke 18:30);
- we have in the present victory over sin and death, yet it will fully be consummated in the eternal state (Rom. 6:6-7, 9-14; 7:22-25; 1 Cor. 15:54-57);
- we have been adopted into the family of God, yet it will fully be consummated in the eternal state (Rom. 8:16, 18-23);
- we have already been raised with Christ in the present, yet it will fully be consummated in the eternal state (John 5:25-29);
- we have a kingdom in the present, yet it will fully be consummated in the eternal state (Rev. 1:6; 5:10, made us vs. shall reign);
- the kingdom of God is here, yet it will fully be consummated in the eternal state (Luke 17:21; Matt. 6:10; Rev. 11:15-18);
- we have been saved in the past, we have salvation in the present, yet it will be fully consummated in the eternal state (Eph. 2:5; Col. 1:18; Rom. 8:23);
- we have been sanctified in the past, we are being sanctified in the present, yet it will fully be consummated in the eternal state (Heb. 10:10, 14, Eph. 5:27).

Each of these points and more could be multiplied with biblical references, but my point here is not to make a biblical case for the already-not-yet tension in the New Testament. Rather, my point here is simply this: there is clearly a present and future aspects for many elements in our Christian life. Therefore, is it not likewise reasonable to conclude that we also have an already-not-yet tension with our Sabbath rest? We have rest in Christ through faith in the Gospel, to which the old Sabbath pointed. And even after believing, Hebrews 4:9 stills says “there remains [now] a *Sabbatismos* for the [New Covenant] people of God.” Therefore, we still have a day of rest to keep holy, which functions as a foretaste of our eternal and consummated rest and Sabbath. By keeping the Lord’s Day holy as a Sabbath under the New Covenant (which we have seen at least from Rev. 1:10 to be the first day of the week, the day which peculiarly belongs to the Lord Jesus and which He claims as His own), we look forward to the consummated and eternal Sabbath of our God and His Christ.

As faithful Israel, under the Old Covenant, by observing the seventh-day Sabbath in a cursed and fallen creation, looked forward to the redemption and restoration in the Messiah and to entering God’s rest (Heb. 4:2-3). So, in the same way, the Israel of God under the New Covenant, observes and keeps holy its Sabbath day—the Lord’s Day, in anticipation of the *new* and perfect Creation and to their consummated entrance to God’s Sabbath rest. Both the seventh-day Sabbath and the first-day Sabbath point to a greater reality. Yet, this in no way denigrates the essential morality of the Sabbath as we have tried to show throughout our discussion.

The Change Of The Day (Hebrews 4:10)

Heb. 4:10 **for** whoever [he who] has **entered God’s rest** has also **rested from his works as God did from his**.

Why have I titled this section “The Change Of The Day” and how do we get the change of the day from this (seemingly) clear reference the believer’s rest may most likely appear strange to the one unfamiliar about John Owen’s contribution to the Sabbath question. I must admit that as of yet, I have not fully read either Owen’s [Exercitations On the Lord’s Day](#) or his

[commentary](#) on the relevant sections about the Sabbath question in Hebrews 3-4. But I have read the abridged version of *Exercitations* in what is called “A Treatise On The Sabbath”. John Owen is not an easy author to read. I find him to be very lengthy and verbose and thus it is hard to have the patience to read, for example, 42-page commentary on two passages (e.g. Heb. 2:1-2). I do not doubt the benefit I would receive from his insight. I have, in fact, read his commentary on Hebrews 8:6-13, which has greatly helped me understand Covenant Theology as expounded by Reformed Baptists who affirm what is known as 1689 Federalism, for which I have argued in [chapter 7](#). What I have read are the works of those who employ Owen’s contribution concerning the Sabbath question in their works and in their words.

I would like to discuss this passage under the following headings:

1. Who is the one who has entered God’s rest?
2. How is this an argument for present Sabbath-keeping?
3. How the change of the day takes place.

The last two points will be treated under one heading.

Who is the one who has entered God’s rest?

The majority of commentators answer that this refers to the believer’s entrance into God’s rest (Adam Clarke, Albert Barnes, Jamieson-Fausset-Brown, Matthew Henry, Matthew Poole). Yet Owen stands both against the majority in his day and our day in his opinion that, literally, the “he” should be the “He” of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some have likewise followed him in this understanding (John Gill, Henry Alford, Joseph Pipa, Robert Paul Martin, Richard Barcellos). This was not the first unique observation and contribution of Owen. In [chapter 17](#), when dealing with Hebrews 10:29 ([see here](#)), we likewise noted Owen’s contribution.

Before beginning this important inquiry, let us get the literal translation of this passage. The ESV is unfortunately not wholly accurate in this verse.

Heb. 4:10 YLT for **he who did enter into his rest**, he also rested from his works, as God from His own.

Heb. 4:10 KJV For **he that is entered into his rest**, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God [did] from his.

What are the arguments for the assertion that v. 10 speaks of the Lord’s Jesus Christ here?

The Singular Person

It is to be noted that this is the first time in which the Author speaks of the one who has entered God’s rest in the *singular* person. The Author speaks of:

- “they” in Hebrews 3:11, 18, 19; 4:3, 5;
- the plural “you” in Hebrews 4:1, 7;
- “us” in Hebrews 4:2, 11;
- “we” in Hebrews 4:3;
- “some” in Hebrews 4:6;
- “he” in Hebrews 4:10.

Isn’t it interesting to see that throughout Hebrews 3:11-4:13 the singular person is only once employed for entering God’s rest? Whenever the Author speaks of the believer’s entering God’s rest, he always speaks of us collectively and in the plural number. Even after v. 10, in v. 11, the Author calls upon “us” that we should “strive to enter God’s rest”. If the Author is speaking of believers in v. 10, why doesn’t he continue with his use of the plural and say “for we have entered God’s rest and have also rested from *our* works...” It is certainly strange because that is how the Author speaks throughout his discourse. Moreover, notice that this rest which is entered into is Christ’s own rest or alternatively, the believer’s. But all throughout the Author’s discourse, the believers do not enter their rest, but God’s.

The Tense Of The Verbs

The work of the one under discussion is said to be in the past. He has both “entered” and “rested.” He is already fully in God’s Sabbath. But the believers are in fact *not* yet fully in God’s Sabbath rest. That is why they still need to “strive” and to persevere to enter that rest (Heb. 4:11). Yet the one being spoken of here has already entered and rested from his works. Dr. Pipa observes that “In verse 10, the writer described a rest that is already completed, while in verse 11 he clearly stated that the responsibility to enter into the rest remains for the believer.”^[131] Therefore, this cannot be the believer.

The Analogy

According to those who say that the believers are being spoken of here, what works are they resting from? Some say the works of the law (Adam Clarke); our cares, anxieties, and labors (Albert Barnes); and others generally see this rest as being resting from our sinful works and attempts of self-justification. But, whichever option we pick, how could there be a parallel and an analogy between the work of sinful man and the work of God in creating a “very good” world (Gen. 1:31)? How could it be said that the believer rested from his sinful works “as God did from his”? How could it be said that the believer rested from his attempts of self-justification “as God did from his”? You see, the analogy and the parallel which the Author here intends to make utterly fails if what we have in view is the believer and not the Lord Christ. Owen writes:

But how can they be said to rest from these works as God rested from his own? for God so rested from his as to take the greatest delight and satisfaction in them, to be refreshed by them: “In six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed,” Exo 31:17. He so rested *from them* as that he rested *in them*, and blessed them, and blessed and sanctified the time wherein they were finished.^[132]

It is proper to parallel the work of God the Father in Creation to the work of God the Son in Redemption. There we have a valid and an appropriate parallel and analogy, but not with the works of sinful man. Therefore, considering these points, we conclude that it is indeed the Lord Christ Who is being spoken of in the singular person in v. 11. The passage could be read as: “For Christ has entered into His rest and has also rested from His works as God the Father did from His.” Christ finished His work of redemption and has ceased from His work. But as with God the Father and the Creation, His rest does not imply inactivity. Christ now mediates for His people and points the Father to His perfect work on behalf of His elect. He is satisfied with His redemptive work and takes joy in it (Isa. 53:11).

This introduction of Christ in v. 10 is not at all out of place, for in Hebrews 3:6 the Author there speaks of the Lord Christ just before beginning his discussion on the Sabbath and rest saying, “but Christ is faithful over God’s house as a son.” Moreover, he is giving us a reason and a grounding for our obligation of present Sabbath-keeping and what greater reason than that our Lord Himself *sabbathed*? Furthermore, just after finishing this section, the Author goes on to speak of Christ: “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus...” Christ’s passing through the heavens is the entering into His rest. Dr. Martin writes:

While the transition from the “he” (God) of 4:8 and the “he” (Christ) of 4:10 is abrupt, it is not unprecedented. At 2:10-11 the writer makes a similar transition. There he also does not specify that a change of referent has taken place, though perhaps it is suggested by his mentioning “the captain of their salvation” (2:10). The readers, however, are expected to deduce the identity of the “he” of 2:11 either from what they already know apart from the teaching of this letter or from the general flow of the writer’s description of the Son’s identity. A similar decision must be made at 4:10 (regardless of our decision concerning the identity of the “he”).^[133]

The Flow Of The Argument And The Change Of The Day

Verse 10 begins with the word “for”, which gives us a reason and an explanation of something. The Author had just said that there is still a Sabbath-keeping under the New Covenant and in v. 10 he explains the reason. The reasoning of the Author is: there is still a Sabbath-keeping, *for* Jesus has entered into His rest which we should strive to enter in. A.W. Pink notes:

The opening “for” of verse 10 shows that what follows furnishes a reason *why* God’s people, now, must keep the Sabbath. That reason invests the Sabbath with a fuller meaning than it had in Old Testament times. It is now not only a memorial of God’s work of creation, and a recognition of the Creator as our Proprietor, but it is also an emblem of the rest which Christ entered as an eternal memorial of His finished work; and inasmuch as Christ ended His work and entered upon His “rest” by rising again on the *first* day of the week, we are thereby notified that the Christian’s six work-days must run from Monday to Saturday, and that his Sabbath must be observed on Sunday. This is confirmed by the additional fact that the New Testament shows that after the crucifixion of Christ the first day of the week was the one set apart for Divine worship^[130]

But when did Christ the Lord enter His rest? There are basically three options: 1) at His death; 2) at His resurrection; 3) at His ascension.

1) How could it be said that Christ entered His rest and ceased from His work of redemption when His **body lay in the grave** and His work unfinished? The resurrection, which is an essential aspect of Christ’s redemption, had not happened, therefore, this could not be the point of entrance into His rest. Moreover, his death was a part of His humiliation and

punishment on our behalf. Therefore, how could this be the point of entrance to His rest?

2) The resurrection is the answer and the point of Him entering into His rest. There, the work of redemption was completed and secured for the elect of God. Without the resurrection of Christ, we do not have justification (Rom. 4:26) and therefore we do not have the Gospel (1 Cor. 15:12-19). When Christ rose on that beautiful Lord's Day, He defeated the evil powers and secured the redemption of His people. Therefore, indeed, He looked and was satisfied with His work (Isa. 53:11).

3) The ascension was not the entrance to His rest, but rather to the *place* of His rest. His rest was entered into when He finished His work of redemption, which was when He was raised from the dead.

Thomas Shepherd wrote:

Thesis 12. Why the will of God should honour the day of Christ's resurrection as holy, rather than any other day of his incarnation, birth, passion, ascension: It is this; because Christ's rising day was his resting or Sabbath day, wherein the first entered into his rest, and whereon his rest began. For the Sabbath, or rest day, of the Lord our God, only can be our rest day, according to the fourth commandment. Hence the day of God's rest from the work of creation, and the day of Christ's rest from the work of redemption, are only fit and capable of being our Sabbaths. Now, the Lord Christ, in the day of his incarnation and birth, did not enter into his rest, but rather made entrance into his labour and sorrow, who then began the work of humiliation, (Gal.iv.4,5;) and in the day of his passion, he was then under the sorest part and feeling of his labour, in bitter agonies upon the cross and in the garden. And hence it is that none of those days were consecrated to be our Sabbath, or rest days, which were days of Christ's labour and sorrow; nor could the day of his ascension be fit to be made our Sabbath, because, although Christ then and thereby entered into his place of rest, (the third heavens,) yet did he not then make his first entrance into his estate of rest, which was in the day of his resurrection; the wisdom and will of God did therefore choose this day above any other to be the Sabbath day.^[107]

And now we come to the point to discuss the change of the day. As when God finished His work of Creation and appointed a day of rest because He rested, so in the same way, God the Son, after finishing His work of Redemption, appoints a day of rest. Basically, because Christ entered into His rest on the first day of the week, therefore, believers ought to Sabbath on the first day of the week. We are to copy the pattern of God the Son in redemption. The Author here intends to present a parallel between the work of God the Father in Creation and the seventh-day Sabbath which He instituted on the one hand, and the work of God the Son in Redemption and the institution of the first-day *Sabbatismos* on the other hand. The seventh-day Sabbath was instituted after God's example as we've discussed:

Ex. 20:11 For **in six days the LORD made heaven and earth**, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. **Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day** and made it holy.

It is because God rested on the seventh day that He blessed and made the seventh-day Sabbath holy. This seventh-day Sabbath, as we have tried to show, was fulfilled in the redemption of Christ and pointed forward toward entering God's rest in heaven, but it also pointed back to the Creation. In the same way, God the Son rested on the first day of the week thereby blessing it and making it His own peculiar day. Therefore, when we observe the first-day Sabbath we are looking backward to the beginning of the New Creation in the resurrection of Christ and the accomplishment of redemption by Him. But we are also looking forward to the consummation of this New Creation and the entrance into God's eternal Sabbath. Owen observes that "The first day of the week, the day of the resurrection of Christ when he rested from his works, is appointed and determined for a day of rest or Sabbath unto the church, to be constantly observed in the room of the seventh day, appointed and observed from the foundation of the world and under the old testament."^[134] He writes in another place:

Now, as God's rest, and his being refreshed in his work, on the seventh day of old, was a sufficient indication of the precise day of rest which he would have observed under the administration of that original law and covenant, so the rest of our Lord Jesus Christ, and his being refreshed in and from his works, on the first day, is a sufficient indication of the precise day of rest to be observed under the dispensation of the new covenant, now confirmed and established.^[135]

While in the other passages, which we examined, we do not *explicitly* have the "rest" aspect of the Sabbath, in this passage and by the use of *Sabbatismos*, we clearly have the "rest" aspect of the Sabbath in the Lord's Day Sabbath of the New Covenant.

Enter That Rest (Hebrews 4:11)

Believers are to "strive" (ESV) and "make every effort" (HCSB, NET) to enter the rest into which Christ has entered, which is

done by faith in Him in the present time already and by keeping the Lord's Day (the first day of the week) as a sabbath they look forward and anticipate their eternal Sabbath with the Lord of the Sabbath.

Conclusion On Hebrews 3-4

We have seen in this passage the different types of rest which the Author speaks of and proposes as rests to be entered into. He speaks of the rest in Canaan, the rest in Christ by faith and the present obligation of *Sabbatismos* as we look forward to the eternal Sabbath. We have tried to show that this word conveys an obligation of physical Sabbath-keeping and observance, which points forward to the eternal Sabbath of God. Moreover, the change of the day from the seventh to the first is grounded upon the entrance of Christ into His rest on the first day of the week with His resurrection. Therefore, as Christ rested on the first day of the week, so also we should rest on the first day of the week.

Conclusion On The Change Of The Day

I believe that there is enough evidence to believe that God did, in fact, change the particular day of the Sabbath, which was at the beginning enjoined by a positive command. God is sovereign in which way He changes and communicates things to us. We do not need to have a command for everything to know the mind of God. God did not choose to reveal this change by a direct command, but by the Apostolic practice shows us that it was in fact changed. The appropriateness of the change was the resurrection of Christ on the first day of the week. It is undisputed that since the earliest of times the Christians worshiped on the first day of the week in honor of Christ's resurrection. It is true that few of them still observed the Jewish Sabbath, but first-day worship was never disputed in the New Testament nor outside of it.

To summarize, we have seen that the Lord's Day is a day:

- Of corporate worship (Acts 2:1; 20:7),
- Of celebrating the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7),
- Of giving of alms (1 Cor. 16:2),
- Of rest (Heb. 4:9),
- Peculiar and holy to the Risen Jesus (Rev. 1:10).

We should also note that biblically, the rest aspect is implied every time worship is mentioned. For the Jews, there was no corporate worship without that day on which that took place being a day of rest. Note the simple principle in Leviticus 23 that whenever there is a holy convocation, the people may not do ordinary work:

- Passover (Lev. 23:7-8; c.f. Ex. 12:16);
- Feast of Weeks (i.e., Pentecost, Lev. 23:21);
- Feast of Trumpets (Lev. 23:24-25);
- Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:28);
- Feast of Booths (Lev. 23:35).

Dr. Waldron writes:

To the Jewish disciples of Christ a day of corporate worship which 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... In the Old Testament rest and worship always implied the other... 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.^[136]

Therefore, even for the one who does not believe our exegetical case for the change of the day, what reason have they to deny the principle from Leviticus 23? You may believe that Revelation 1:10 has nothing to do with a Sabbath-principle in the Lord's Day. You may believe that Acts 20:7 is insignificant and does not describe the normal practice of Christians. You may believe that Hebrews 4 has nothing to do with the Christian Sabbath. But what reason have you to reject the biblical principle that every day of worship is a day of rest? Is Sunday not a day of worship? If that is so, then it ought also to be a day of rest.

We end this section with a word from John Stone concerning the various changes from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant:

At the introduction of the Gospel, the whole state of the Church of God underwent a revolution. Almost everything was changed in some way, or to some extent. The Mediator was changed; Moses for Christ. The Priesthood was changed;

the Aaronic for the Christian. The Law was changed; the Levitical for the Evangelical. The promises were changed; those which looked apparently to temporal blessings, for those which looked expressly to eternal. The worship was changed; the stately and solemn ceremonials of the temple, for the simple and the spiritual devotions of the Christian house of prayer. The sacraments were changed; the Passover for the Lord's Supper, and the bloody rite of circumcision for the unbloody laver of Baptism. The whole dispensation was changed; the entire frame-work of the Jewish being taken down and laid aside, and the whole structure of the Christian being constructed—and setup in its stead. With all these changes, then, with everything thus made new, is it wonderful that the day of the Sabbath also was changed? The mode of its observance was certainly altered. What reason, then, is there to wonder at the alteration in the time of its observance?^[137]

The Lord's Day in Early Church History

We've tried to make a biblical case for the Christian Sabbath from Holy Scripture, which I believe to be convincing and faithful to the whole of Scripture. In this section, I would like to take a brief look at some of the writings after the New Testament which speak about the Lord's Day and the Sabbath. These writings shed light upon what Christians after the Apostles believed about the Lord's Day. Their words and practice are not authoritative for us, only the Scriptures are authoritative. But it is nonetheless interesting to see what we read in Scripture practiced and believed in church history. The following list of citations I've found in the various books listed above, especially [This Is The Day by Roger T. Beckwith and Wilfrid Stott](#). Part 2 of the book focuses on the Lord's Day in church history.

Clement of Alexandria (150-215 A.D.), has a long discussion on the Fourth Commandment, but it is mystical and Gnostic in nature. The interested reader may find it [here](#), but it will *not* be treated below. This list is by no means exhaustive. The citations given below are what I could find and what I deemed helpful and understandable for this topic. Many others could be found in the work referenced above.

Didache (50-120 A.D.)

The Didache, which means the Teaching (of the Twelve Apostles) is a document from the first century, which functioned as some kind of church manual. It is believed that it was certainly written before 120 A.D. This places it in the first century or at the most shortly thereafter. What interests us in the Didache is what is written of the Lord's Day in chapter 14:

14 **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. 2 Anyone at variance with his neighbor must not join you, until they are reconciled, lest your sacrifice be defiled. 3 For it was of this sacrifice that the Lord said, "Always and everywhere offer me a pure sacrifice; for I am a great King, says the Lord, and my name is marveled at by the nations." ([Richardson](#))

Does it have to be pointed out that the echo of Acts 20:7 is very clearly heard in verse 1? The passage is so closely connected with Acts 20:7 that it contains the same elements there and also connects the Lord's Day explicitly with spiritual sacrifices and worship. In verse 3, Malachi 1:11 is cited.

What is more interesting about this passage is the Greek of the first part of verse 1. Literally, it reads, "On every Lord's Day of the Lord." The Greek phrase is Κατὰ κυριακὴν δὲ κυρίου (*kata kuriaken de kurion*), which is a strange way to refer to the Lord's Day. The word *kuriaken* is used here and it is the strong adjective meaning "belonging to the Lord" which is used in Revelation 1:10. What is interesting is that the word for "day" is absent in the Didache, though this does not cast doubt upon the fact that what is being spoken of here is, in fact, the Lord's Day. What this indicates is that the designation "Lord's Day" was so popular and in Christian usage that it was enough to use *kuriaken* without "day" (*hemera*). That this is speaking of the first day of the week is confirmed by its reliance upon Acts 20:7.

It is very interesting to see how biblical language, New Testament language to be specific, is so influential so early on. Neither the author of the Didache nor John invented the designation "the Lord's Day", but both authors use it expecting their readers to understand to which day they refer. The phrase was in common usage and was coined prior to the writing of the Didache and Revelation.

Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 35-108 A.D.)

Ignatius of Antioch was an early church father who lived in the first century and the beginning of the second. He was martyred in 108 A.D. He wrote a letter to the Magnesians which is relevant to the Lord's Day. There is a shorter and longer version of the letter and of the chapter. Most scholars believe that only the shorter is original. In chapter 9, he speaks about the Jewish Sabbath and the Lord's Day. The longer version further comments upon the Sabbath and the Lord's Day, which will be noted below. In chapter 9, [he writes](#):

If, therefore, those who were brought up in the **ancient order of things** have come to the possession of a new hope, **no longer observing the Sabbath**, but **living in the observance of the Lord's Day**, on which also **our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death**—whom some deny, by which mystery we have obtained faith, and therefore endure, that we may be found the disciples of Jesus Christ, our only Master—how shall we be able to live apart from Him, whose disciples the prophets themselves in the Spirit did wait for Him as their Teacher? And therefore He whom they rightly waited for, being come, raised them from the dead.

Those who “were brought up in the ancient order of things” were the Jewish Christians as is obvious from the **previous chapter**. What is interesting is that those Jewish Christians, who were accustomed to the observance of the Sabbath had left their observance of the Sabbath in favor of another. They no longer observed the Jewish Sabbath, but now they are observing the Lord's Day. In fact, they are *living* in observance of the Lord's Day. That this is the Christian Sunday—first day of the week—is seen from its connection to the resurrection of our Lord, which according to the testimony of Scripture was on the first day of the week (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1-2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1).

By no longer observing the Jewish Sabbath they have not totally abandoned all observance of days, but they are observing the Lord's Day—the Christian Sabbath. They do not merely believe it, hope in it, or go to church on it, but they *observe* it as a holy day, as was the Sabbath observed and kept holy to the Lord.

While it is true that the longer version is not original, but it still reflects beliefs held by people at the time of the writing of the letter or thereafter. Therefore, it is still of interest to us to look at what is said there about the Lord's Day and Sabbath.

If, then, **those who were conversant with the ancient Scriptures** came to newness of hope, expecting the coming of Christ, as the Lord teaches us when He says, “If ye had believed Moses, ye would have believed Me, for he wrote of Me;” and again, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it, and was glad; for before Abraham was, I am;” how shall we be able to live without Him? The prophets were His servants, and foresaw Him by the Spirit, and waited for Him as their Teacher, and expected Him as their Lord and Saviour, saying, “He will come and save us.” Let us therefore **no longer keep the Sabbath after the Jewish manner**, and rejoice in **days of idleness**; for **“he that does not work, let him not eat.”** For say the [holy] oracles, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy bread.” But **let every one of you keep the Sabbath after a spiritual manner**, rejoicing in **meditation on the law, not in relaxation of the body**, **admiring the workmanship of God**, and not eating things prepared the day before, nor using lukewarm drinks, and **walking within a prescribed space**, nor finding delight in dancing and plaudits which have no sense in them. And **after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's Day as a festival**, the **resurrection-day**, the **queen and chief of all the days** [of the week]. Looking forward to this, the prophet declared, “To the end, for **the eighth day**,” on which **our life both sprang up again**, and the victory over death was obtained in Christ, whom the children of perdition, the enemies of the Saviour, deny, “whose god is their belly, who mind earthly things,” who are “lovers of pleasure, and not lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.” These make merchandise of Christ, corrupting His word, and giving up Jesus to sale: they are corrupters of women, and covetous of other men's possessions, swallowing up wealth insatiably; from whom may ye be delivered by the mercy of God through our Lord Jesus Christ!

The author continues with the Jewish Christians and how they believed the Scriptures and do no longer keep the Jewish Sabbath. Instead, they are keeping the Sabbath in a non-Jewish manner. In saying “Let us therefore no longer keep the Sabbath after the Jewish manner”, the author is not saying that we no longer have to keep the Sabbath. Rather, we are not to keep it *after the Jewish manner*, but in a Christian manner. How is this Jewish manner defined? It is defined according to the practice of the Pharisees. We read of “idleness”, “relaxation of the body”, “walking within a prescribed space” (the so-called Sabbath day's journey as in Acts 1:12). All these items were things practiced by the Jews in their Sabbath-keeping. But Christians should not imitate the Jewish manner of Sabbath observance. Rather, the Sabbath is kept spiritually.

The author is here distinguishing the Sabbath from the Lord's Day. Every friend of Christ is to keep His day as a festival. Which day might that be? The “resurrection-day”, which is the sweetest and best of all days. The Lord's Day is also called “the eighth day”. The Lord's Day is a happy day which is to be *kept* and observed in a similar manner as to the Sabbath, but not in the Jewish manner.

Pliny the Younger's Letter on the Christians (112 A.D.)

Pliny the Younger was a Roman governor who wrote to Emperor Trajan asking for counsel on dealing with Christians. This letter was written around 112 A.D., so it is fairly early. What is of interest to us here is his reference to the day on which Christians met. He **wrote**:

They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were **accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn** and **sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god**, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was **their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food**--but ordinary and innocent food. Even this, they affirmed, they had ceased to do after my edict by which, in accordance with your instructions, I had forbidden political associations. Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition.

In the whole letter, Christians are found guilty, but in actuality, no guilt is found in them. We must remember that this is written by Pliny, a pagan, from a pagan perspective. With all this in mind, it is still amazing what this letter tells us about the Christians and how they conducted themselves.

What is of relevance here is that the Christians had the custom to meet on a *fixed* day. They did not decide every week on which day to meet, but there was a particular *fixed* day on which they were *accustomed* to meet. Furthermore, this coming together was very early on that fixed day. I can't help but hear the echoes of Matthew 28:1 here: "toward the dawn of the first day of the week". See also Luke 24:1 ("the first day of the week, at early dawn") and John 20:1 ("on the first day of the week...while it was still dark"). The Christians tried to pattern their meeting together after the resurrection of the Lord as they read it in or heard it from the Gospel. So dedicated they were to follow Christ and His example that even their meeting together was patterned after His resurrection on the dawn of the first day of the week.

It is also interesting to see that these Christians had two services. They came at the dawn together to sing and perhaps to hear the Word of God. But they also came at another time the same day "to partake of food". This is no doubt a reference to the Lord's Supper but from a pagan point of view. It was the Lord's *Supper*, which makes sense that it was not celebrated at early dawn.

Notice the list of "to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so" which reflects commandments from the second table of the Decalogue. Hence, in accordance with that they were also trying to obey the Fourth Commandment in connection to the worship of God and coming together as a congregation.

That this was on the first day of the week is confirmed by the testimony of Scripture on this (e.g. Acts 20:7) and also from the echo of Matthew 28:1 (and the parallels) here, which were in connection to the first day of the week.

Their example is an encouragement to us that no matter the circumstances, they did not forsake assembling together as a church to worship their risen Lord as God (Heb. 10:25)!

Epistle of Barnabas (ca. 80-120 A.D.)

The Epistle of Barnabas was written no later than 120 A.D., but it is doubted if the author thereof was Barnabas the companion of Paul. Either way, it comes from the first century and beginning of the second, reflecting beliefs at that time. It discusses a lot of things, including the Sabbath. In [chapter 15](#), we read:

Further, also, it is written concerning the **Sabbath in the Decalogue** which [the Lord] spoke, face to face, to Moses on Mount Sinai, "And **sanctify ye the Sabbath of the Lord** with clean hands and a pure heart." [Ex. 20:8; Deut. 5:12] And He says in another place, "If **my sons keep the Sabbath**, then will I cause my mercy to rest upon them." [Jer. 17:24-25] The Sabbath is mentioned at the beginning of the creation [thus]: "And God made in six days the works of His hands, and made **an end on the seventh day, and rested on it, and sanctified it.**" [Gen. 2:2] Attend, my children, to the meaning of this expression, "He finished in six days." This implieth that the Lord will finish all things in six thousand years, for a day is with Him a thousand years. And He Himself testifieth, saying, "Behold, to-day will be as a thousand years." [Ps 90:4; 2 Pet. 3:8] Therefore, my children, in six days, that is, in six thousand years, all things will be finished. "And He **rested on the seventh day.**" This meaneth: when His Son, coming [again], shall destroy the time of the wicked man, and judge the ungodly, and change the sun, and the moon, and the stars, then shall **He truly rest on the seventh day.** Moreover, He says, "Thou shalt sanctify it with pure hands and a pure heart." [Ps. 24:4] If, therefore, any one can now sanctify the day which God hath sanctified, except he is pure in heart in all things, we are deceived. Behold, therefore: certainly then one **properly resting sanctifies it, when we ourselves, having received the promise, wickedness no longer existing, and all things having been made new** by the Lord, shall be able to work righteousness. **Then we shall be able to sanctify it**, having been first sanctified ourselves. Further, He says to them, "Your new moons and your Sabbaths I cannot endure." [Isa. 1:13] 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.

[Scriptural references were added and the footnote references taken away.]

This is certainly interesting in many ways. The author begins by pointing to the Sabbath of the Decalogue and he connects that with the Sabbath at the creation, on the seventh day and God's rest thereon. And then he says something very weird, namely, the idea that the world will be finished in the seventh millennium after the creation. The idea is that the world shall last as long as the days of creation lasted: 6 days work, 1 day rest. Therefore, the seventh millennium is the eternal state (this passage is in no way supportive of the Premillennial scheme of things. Notice how the judgment and the end of the world is connected with the coming of Christ, which is not so in the Premillennial scheme of things.). This he connects with Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8. This may be one of the first abuses of this expression. How many times do we hear this expression used in the creation debate by old-earth creationists to justify that the days of the creation were no ordinary days. The original context of the passage has nothing to say on the topic of creation, neither of the Sabbath or when the world will end, but it has been abused in every way possible.

What the author argues is that it was impossible to keep the Sabbath in the way that it was intended. This he says in the words, "If, therefore, any one can now sanctify the day which God hath sanctified, except he is pure in heart in all things, we are deceived." It is impossible to obey God perfectly and therefore keep the Sabbath in the way that God intended. We always fall short.

But there is a way in which we will sanctify the Sabbath. This we will do in the New Creation as we enter the Eternal Sabbath. This, the author expresses in the words "having received the promise, wickedness no longer existing, and all things have been made new by the Lord" and this is also the time when we shall "be to work righteousness." Only then will we be able to sanctify the Sabbath as God wills it. Then the author moves to speak of God's displeasure at the "sanctifying" of the Sabbath by the Israelites with the words of Isaiah 1:13. The presents Sabbaths are not acceptable to the Lord, but there is a Sabbath which is acceptable to Him, namely, "the beginning of the eighth day", which is the "beginning of another world." The eternal state is when we will truly sanctify the Sabbath in all of its fullness. Then comes the part about the Lord's Day, which is here called "the eighth day". It is the eighth day because it comes after the seventh. It is symbolic of the New Creation. Because the New Creation will come on the eighth day, "Wherefore", we are to keep the eighth day. The reasoning for keeping the Lord's Day holy is based upon the idea that the New Creation will come on the eighth day, after this world. This eighth day is the first day of the week as can be seen from the fact that is referred to as the day of Christ's resurrection and His appearances to the disciples. I'm not sure if the author thinks that the Lord also ascended on Sunday.

But here we see that he believed that the eighth day was to be kept. It was to be kept with joyfulness and gladness because it was the day of Christ's resurrection and the day which pointed to the New World and the Eternal Sabbath there. This is the basis of their Lord's Day keeping, the resurrection of Christ and the forward-looking-element of the eighth day.

Gospel of Peter (ca. 150 A.D.)

The Gospel of Peter is a gospel account *not* written by Peter though it claims to be a first-hand account of Peter. It is a work from the second century, around the year 150 A.D. What is of interest here is the dependence of the gospel upon the true Gospels and how it references the first day of the week. Here is a table which compares three verses from the Gospel of Peter with the canonical Gospels. The following is the translation of Raymond Brown:

Gospel of Peter	Canonical Gospels	
[34] But early when the Sabbath [ΤΟΥ ΣΑΒΒΑΤΟΥ, <i>tou sabbatou</i>] was dawning , a crowd came from Jerusalem and the surrounding area in order that they might see the sealed tomb.	Matt. 28:1 Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.	Mark 16:1 When the Sabbath was past , Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him.
[35] But in the night in which the Lord's day [ἡ Κυριακῇ, <i>he kuriaken</i>] dawned , when the soldiers were safeguarding it two by two in every watch, there was a loud voice in heaven; [36] and they saw that the heavens were opened and that two males who had much radiance had come down from there and come near the sepulcher.	Luke 24:1-5 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn , they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. 2 And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. 5 And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"	

<p>[50] Now at the dawn of the Lord's Day [τῆς κυριακῆς, <i>tes kuriakes</i>] Mary Magdalene, a female disciple of the Lord (who, afraid because of the Jews since they were inflamed with anger, had not done at the tomb of the Lord what women were accustomed to do for the dead beloved by them),</p>	<p>Matt. 28:1 Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.</p>	<p>John 20:1 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.</p>
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All the references to the first day of the week have been replaced with the theological name of the day—the Lord's Day. What is also interesting is the fact that only the adjective *kuriaké* is used, though there is no doubt that this passage refers to the first day of the week. This is not only seen in its reliance upon the Gospel accounts but also in that it distinguishes between the (Jewish) Sabbath and the Lord's day in vv. 34-35.

Justin Martyr (ca. 147-161)

Justin Martyr was one of the first apologists for the Christian faith. He wrote and debated with Jews and pagans. He was martyred in 165 A.D. He is also credited with one of the most cited texts with reference to Sunday worship among Christians. The *First Apology* is believed to have been written somewhere between 155-157 A.D., though some place it between 147-161 A.D. [Cyril C. Richardson](#) dates it to 155 A.D. Either way, it was written in the second half of the second century. This work was addressed to the Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius, who ruled from 138-161 A.D. This is what he wrote in [chapter 67](#):

And **on the day called Sunday** [τῇ τοῦ Ἡλίου λεγομένη ἡμέρᾳ, *te tou Hiliou legomenon hemera*], all who live in cities or in the country **gather together to one place**, and the **memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read**, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the **president verbally instructs**, and **exhorts** to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and **pray**, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, **bread and wine and water are brought**, and the president in like manner offers **prayers and thanksgivings**, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; 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 succours the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need. But **Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God**, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, **made the world**; and **Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead**. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of 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.

"And on the day called Sunday", that is the Lord's Day, the first day of the week all Christians come together to one place. The reason for not using the designation "Lord's Day" is probably because he is writing to a pagan Emperor and that would not have been very intelligible to him, therefore, he used the more common name in the Roman Empire for the first day of the week. Notice the range of the people coming together: "all who live in cities or in the country". It is not a gathering of a handful of people. But all of one mind and from the same area come together as a church to worship the Lord. Notice also the things done in worship here:

1. the Bible is read ("memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read");
2. preaching based on the reading of the Bible ("the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things");
3. prayer ("Then we all rise together and pray");
4. the Lord's Supper is celebrated ("bread and wine and water are brought");
5. prayer and thanksgiving ("the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen").

After listing the things done in the service, Justin moves to explain *why* the Christians met on Sunday. Two reasons are given:

1. God made the world on the first day of the week;
2. Christ rose on the first day of the week.

The creation of the world began on the first day when God said, "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3). This is probably along the same lines of ideas as that in the Epistle of Barnabas about the eighth day and the beginning of a new world. In this way, the Christians were expecting a new creation as was promised to us by God (2 Pet. 3:13). The first day points to a new world.

The second reason that is given is the fact that Jesus rose on this blessed day. This is the consistent explanation of Christians about why we worship on Sunday: the resurrection of the Son of God! The resurrection is the epoch-changing event of all history. It is the beginning of the new creation and therefore, Christians, by observing the Lord's Day, they are having a proof of the new creation which is promised to us and which the Lord's Day points to. Within reason #2 it is also mentioned that the Lord Jesus appeared to His disciples on the first day of the week (e.g. John 20:19). The resurrection and the appearances of the Lord are one reason to meet together on Sunday. Lastly, the teaching which Justin presented to the Emperor is the teaching of Christ, including what he said concerning the Christian Sunday. This last point we may doubt as it is not said in Scripture, although *it is said* that He taught them about the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). But what we may not doubt is the fact that Christians met on the first day, because it is confirmed by many other testimonies.

Eusebius of Caesarea (pre 325 A.D.)

One of the more developed statements about the transference of the day comes to us from Eusebius of Caesarea. [Michael J. Hollerich](#) believes that his commentary on the Psalms was finished prior to the Council of Nicea (325 A.D.) because he "occasionally revert[s] to the subordinationist theological vocabulary that marks all of his books prior to 325". He was also the advisor of Emperor Constantine.

What he says on Psalm 92 (which in his counting is 91) is of interest to us. The Psalm has the inscription, "A Psalm. A song for the Sabbath." There, we read:

This present Psalm clearly teaches, on this point, that it is necessary that **leisure be made for the sabbath** and from **useless inactivity** and that they should **come together** for this same purpose; that is confession, praise, telling of God's mercy in the morning and telling his truth at night. So you see how many **things the present Psalm exhorts to be done on the day of the Resurrection (Sunday)**. The Psalm is for the sabbath, but the priests in the temple did many things, so **it does not tell us to empty the day**. The **sabbath was not commanded for the priests; but for those who could not give all their time to the service of God**, so that they might have leisure for works pleasing to God. They should do this at **intervals of six days**. But to those who fill the day with riotous living God says, 'They make false sabbaths'...and so repudiating these, **the Word, through the New Covenant, has changed and transferred the feast of the sabbath to the rising of the light and handed to us the image of a true rest, the Lord's Day**, that brings salvation, **the first**, and **the day of light on which the Saviour of the world, after all his works**, which had been done among men, and having brought back victory over death, **passed the heavenly gates and completed his work, receiving the sabbath** which pleased God and the blessed rest when his Father said 'Sit thou on my right hand...'

On that **day which is the day of the True Light and the True Sun** we ourselves have **gathered together with intervals of six days, celebrating holy sabbaths and spiritual**. We who have been redeemed through him from the nations all over the world, **do what the law had laid down for the priests to do on the sabbath. We fulfil this after a spiritual law**. We offer spiritual sacrifices and oblations, what are called the sacrifices of praise and rejoicing.

It is necessary that time be made for the observance of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is to be kept holy and it is not a day of idleness. It is necessary, according to this Psalm, says Eusebius, that people should gather and come together for the purpose of worship. The things written in Psalm 92, which is a song for the Sabbath, are to be done on the Christian Sunday! That the Sabbath is a day of rest does not mean it is an empty day. Eusebius distinguishes between the priestly Sabbath and the "common" Sabbath, if I may call it so. According to him, the Sabbath was commanded for the common man, the non-priests, so that they would have a day wherein they could worship God and devote the whole day unto Him. Notice the way that he says it, "so that they might have leisure for *works* pleasing to God." There are certainly works to be done on the Sabbath, but these are works in connection with the service of God. The Sabbath is not an empty day.

This Sabbath is kept "at interval of six days", not whenever we want. After every six days, there should be a Sabbath day devoted to the service of God. Repudiating the false Sabbaths of the Jews, the Lord Jesus—the Word—by the New Covenant has changed the particular day of the Sabbath from the seventh to the first. Notice that it is a feast of the Sabbath. It is a day of joy and delight in God. Furthermore, it is an image of our true rest, i.e., the eternal Sabbath and it is called the Lord's Day. It is the primal day and the first day. Perhaps Eusebius, by "the first", meant the first day of creation and used it as a reason for the change of the day as Justin Martyr did.

The Lord's Day is the day on which "Saviour of the world, after all his works...passed the heavenly gates and completed his work, receiving the sabbath". I can't help but wonder if Eusebius had Hebrews 4 and the argument we have made for it in

mind. If not, then there is a comparison between God's work at the creation and then the rest ensuing thereon, and the work of "the Savior of the world" and the entrance to the Father's Sabbath rest. A reason why we keep the Sabbath on Sunday is because the Savior of the world entered His rest on Sunday.

We gather not on the pagan "Sunday" but on the day of the "True Light and the True Sun" (i.e., Jesus). Eusebius desires to distance the observance of Sunday from the pagan observance and name. On the day of "the True Light and the True Sun" we come together as a church and we "celebrat[e] holy sabbaths and spiritual." Our observing of the Lord's Day is a celebration of holy sabbaths and is spiritual. In our service to God on the Lord's Day, we are observing the "priestly Sabbath" in that we are to be constantly engaged in the service of God, having been freed from our secular works. In our observing the Lord's Day we are fulfilling the spiritual law and offer sacrifices which are pleasing to God.

Passages Brought Up Against The Christian Sabbath

There are many passages which are often brought against the abiding validity of the Sabbath in connection with the abrogation of the ceremonial law or the Mosaic Covenant. But these passages will not further the cause of the non-Sabbatarians as we have sought to prove that the Sabbath has its basis ultimately in Creation, not the Mosaic Covenant. Therefore, the abrogation of the Mosaic Covenant does not abrogate the Sabbath which transcends it and belonged to the prelapsarian (pre-Fall), sinless world. Moreover, we have also tried to argue that it is certainly not a mere ceremonial law, but primarily a moral law with some ceremonial aspects under the Mosaic, which are now fulfilled in Christ. There are three passages which are often brought up against our case, which we will examine below to see if they indeed refute the foundation which we have sought to build.

Presuppositions

A word is due concerning the presuppositions which I will bring when examining these texts. Everyone has and uses presuppositions, whether consciously or unconsciously. I'd rather be aware of my presuppositions, than hiding or being ignorant of them. I have already tried to defend the abiding validity of the moral law as summarized in the Ten Commandments in [chapter 19](#). Therefore, my view is that the Ten Commandments are ever-lasting and ever-binding on all men, including the Fourth Commandment. The New Testament does not denigrate the law of the Decalogue or the Sabbath commandment. Moreover, Christ strengthens the Law and cleanses the Sabbath from Pharisaic hypocrisy and tradition. There is not a single negative word from our Lord concerning the Sabbath. Not a hint that He would exercise His lordship over it by abolishing it. There is a strong testimony in the Gospels concerning the abiding validity of the moral law. This, therefore, means that I understand the Sabbath to be as the Confession describes: a "positive moral, and perpetual commandment". Not a ceremonial law which could be disposed of. For the Sabbath to be abrogated, a huge and clear evidence must be shown to that effect for it is a moral commandment. The Sabbath is rooted in Creation and transcends any and every covenant. While it had peculiar ceremonial aspects to it under the Mosaic Covenant, these are not of the essence for the Sabbath. Jesus made the Sabbath for our own good, therefore, we have every reason to believe that it will continue to be for our good until we enter the Eternal Sabbath. The Sabbath will continue as marriage and work will continue until the world is no more.

I cannot read these supposed texts against the Sabbath without keeping in mind what we have already learned about the Sabbath. Everyone has presuppositions, the Sabbatarian (me) as well as the non-Sabbatarian. We need to come forward with our presuppositions. It is often the case that the non-Sabbatarian rejects the [Threefold Division of the Law](#), claiming that such a division is foreign to the mind of the authors of Scripture, and therefore whenever he reads about the fulfillment or abrogation of the old covenant, he includes within that abrogation the Decalogue, which also contains the Sabbath commandment. Moreover, the non-Sabbatarian likewise believes that the Sabbath is essentially a ceremonial and not moral law. Therefore, it is easy for him to think of the Sabbath as abrogated and done away with. Some operate upon the principle that "unless a command is repeated in the New Testament, it is not binding." But all these things (and more) are likewise presuppositions which the non-Sabbatarian brings to the text, just like I do. Therefore, it is simply naïve to think that all we need are those supposedly anti-Sabbath texts to prove that the Sabbath is done away with. The non-Sabbatarian begins with the idea that the Sabbath is not a creation ordinance, that it was instituted at Sinai as essentially a ceremonial law, given as a sign of the Mosaic Covenant and therefore peculiar to that covenant and its people. In this scheme, it is possible to see the abrogation of the Sabbath, but we don't believe that such a scheme is biblical. Therefore, our presuppositions are largely responsible for our interpretations of these texts.

The texts which we will examine are Romans 14:5-6; Galatians 4:10 and Colossians 2:16-17. The Colossians text is the clearest and in my opinion, the most important. The other two do not even mention the Sabbath, therefore, these texts do not come as often against the Sabbath as Colossians 2:16-17 does. My comments on the first two texts will be briefer than Colossians 2. Only Colossians 2:16 mentions the "sabbaths" while the other texts do not.

Romans 14:5-6

Rom. 14:5-6 One person **esteems one day as better** than another, while **another esteems all days alike**. Each

one should be fully **convinced in his own mind**. 6 The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.

What is the context of Romans 14? Paul is writing on the subject of Christian Liberty. Some Christians were still weak in faith and did not realize the freedom, which we have in Christ, from the ceremonial law. They were still observing the food laws, thinking that they're still binding as they were under Moses. While other, more mature, Christians knew that they've been set free from these things. Therefore, Paul instructs the believers "not to quarrel over opinions" (Rom. 14:1). Question time! Would Paul call a moral law as the Fourth Commandment an "opinion"? Something that is subject to Christian liberty? Something that is optional? Could Paul have said something similar, for example, about the Second Commandment concerning idolatry and sacrificing to idols? Could he have said the same about drunkenness? How about lust, fornication, and adultery? No moral law of God is ever the subject to Christian liberty. None of the moral laws of God are a matter of opinion. Rather, all the moral laws of God, as summarized in the Ten Commandments, are to be obeyed. As we observe from the discussion in vv. 2-4 about foods, which certainly concern the ceremonial law, so also Paul moves into days of the same kind of law.

The mature Christian esteems all days, while the weaker sees some "better than another" (Rom. 14:5). The weak brother, when he esteems one day better than another and observes it, does it to the Lord, as his conscience dictates. It is not yet clear to him that he has been set free from these ceremonial laws. What reason do I have to understand that Paul is speaking of ceremonial days and feasts here? **First**, Paul begins his discussion with foods (Rom. 14:1-3), which are clearly part of the ceremonial and not the moral law of God. **Second**, the moral law of God, which includes the Fourth Commandment, is never subject to human opinion or Christian liberty whether to observe or not. **Third**, as moral law and as an institution made for man, it is for every man as the other nine commandments are and not peculiar to the Jews. Therefore, if the Apostle was clearly speaking about the ceremonial law concerning foods, what reason do we have to understand him here to include a moral law as subject to Christian liberty? Paul names no days, but he gives us a category by his first example of Christian liberty, i.e., ceremonial food laws. "The days are specified by the ceremonial law and not by the moral law."^[138] As I indicated above, I unashamedly try to look at these passages in light of what I have already tried to establish about the Lord's Day Sabbath. Furthermore, there is no controversy amongst Christians, inside or outside the New Testament, concerning the observance of the first day of the week as the day of worship and rest. So to think that the Apostle speaks here of the Lord's Day/Sabbath doesn't make much sense to me. Sunday worship is one of the things which unites all kinds of Christians together throughout history, whether heretical or orthodox. Even with early heretical groups like the Ebionites, they observed both the Jewish Sabbath and the Sunday!^[139]

Going back to the text, let it be noted that the word "alike" in v. 5 is not in the original and "it may convey an idea which the apostle did not design."^[17] Adam Clarke comments that "We add here *alike*, and make the text say what I am sure was never intended, viz. that there is no distinction of days, not even of the Sabbath: and that every Christian is at liberty to consider even this day to be holy or not holy, as he happens to be persuaded in his own mind."^[140] The weaker brother observes all days to God. If he observes a feast day, it is to the Lord which he does it. If someone does not observe it, because of his stronger faith, it is also to the Lord. Paul at some occasions observed some ceremonial feast days and ordinances, while not obliging Christians to do so (Acts 18:18; 21:20-26 [Nazarite vow]; and perhaps Acts 20:6 [days of Unleavened Bread]). These things were a matter of Christian liberty as long as they were not seen as means of justification and they were done for the purpose of not being a stumbling block to others. Albert Barnes observes that "'This direction [KJV, Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind] pertains to the subject under discussion, and not to any other. It does not refer to subjects that were "morally" wrong, but to ceremonial observances."^[17] Charles Hodge says, "The sentiment of the passage is this, 'One man observes the Jewish festivals, another man does not.' Such we know was the fact in the apostolic church, even among those who agreed in the observance of the first day of the week."^[141]

To say that Romans 14:5-6 teaches no distinction of days is to deny what is said concerning the first day of the week, and especially of the designation "the Lord's Day." The Lord, even in the New Covenant and New Testament times, has attached His name to one particular day, which is the first day of the week, biblically speaking it is called the Lord's Day and we also call it Sunday. Since that is, in fact, the case as we have argued above not only for the perpetual obligation of a Sabbath-keeping but also of the change of the day under the New Covenant, the idea that Romans 14:5-6 teaches that there is absolutely no distinction of days, doesn't hold water. It is a simple Reformed principle that while interpreting Scripture, we seek to harmonize Scripture with Scripture (**the Analogy of Faith**). We do not isolate the Scriptures from each other. Since there is a single day in the week which is designated by the Lord and He has His name attached to it, therefore, there can be no Christian liberty about a matter which the Lord has spoken on.

Romans 14:5-6 says nothing of the Fourth Commandment obligation, but speaks of ceremonial days and foods, which are no longer binding upon Christians. To use this passage against the Sabbath is to read into it something which is not there.

Galatians 4:10

Gal. 4:8-11 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. 9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the **weak and worthless elementary principles of the world**, whose slaves you want to be once more? 10 You **observe days and months and seasons and years!** 11 I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.

Before going into the subject of the Sabbath and v. 10, we must keep in mind the context of the Galatian controversy. The Galatian church was plagued by false teachers who are called "Judaizers." These people wanted to take away the freedom of believers from the Law of Moses. They taught that the believers needed not only to believe in Jesus but also keep the Law of Moses to be saved (cf. Acts 15:1, 5). This is damnable heresy and this is an "another gospel" (Gal. 1:8-9). Some of Paul's harshest words were directed to them. Therefore, whenever we come to the discussion of commandments or laws in Galatians, we must keep this particular controversy in mind. The heretics at Galatia were not teaching the believers to keep the Law of God as a rule of life, which shows us right from wrong and what God desires from us (**the third use of the law**). Rather, they were teaching obedience to the law as a means of justification, not sanctification! This is a huge difference. They were a "Christian" version of Pharisaism. They were legalists who wanted to earn their way to God and not to come on His terms. Therefore, when mention is made of observing days or keeping commandments, this heresy must be kept in mind which the Apostle is presently writing against. Now we go to the text.

Formerly, the Galatian church, which mostly consisted of Gentile converts, were idol worshipers (Gal. 4:8). But after hearing the Gospel they were converted to the true God (Gal. 4:9a). But sadly, not long after that, the Judaizers began to plague them with their false teaching and drawing the Galatian believers after their heresies (Gal. 4:9b). In so doing, the Galatians are turning back to the "the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world" and becoming slaves again to those things which they were slaves of prior to their faith in Christ. Whatever these weak and worthless principles were (I don't want to inquire into them here), it is clear that it concerns some legalistic effort to win the approval of God and something which is unchristian and anti-Gospel. This is seen in the fact that it was their state and their "religion" prior to Christ. Whether this was through Judaism or paganism, it doesn't matter at this point. Just before going to v. 10, the Apostle warns them that in doing so, i.e., in abandoning the freedom in Christ, they are being enslaved by their former masters. They exist in a state of slavery, not sonship which belongs to the children of God (Gal. 4:5-7). Based on this, the observance of these "days and months and seasons and years" (Gal. 4:11) is anti-Christian. They observe them in a legalistic manner and in a way devoid of Christ and His Gospel because they're acting as slaves to their former masters, not as sons of God realizing the freedom they have in Christ.

If **days** in v. 11 does indeed have a connection with the Jewish calendar then "It is not a fair interpretation of this to suppose that the apostle refers to the Sabbath, properly so called, for this was a part of the Decalogue, and was observed by the Saviour himself, and by the apostles also."^[12] The Sabbath was not the only day under the Jewish calendar. They had also feast and fast days, even those which they celebrated without a command from God. Albert Barnes says that "the Jews had added many others, as days commemorative of the destruction and rebuilding of the temple, and of other important events in their history."^[12] The **months** would correspond to the new moons. **Seasons** or "times" (KJV) would include the Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles and Pentecost. **Years** may refer to the Jubilee year or the Sabbatical year. But I believe that we should not only connect these "observances" to the legalistic Judaizers, but also to pagan religion. That which formerly enslaved the Galatians was not Judaism, but pagan legalistic religion (Gal. 4:8). It is to these that they are becoming slaves again (Gal. 4:9) and therefore observing these days (Gal. 4:10). These observances would certainly include elements brought by the Judaizers, but we should also not ignore that pagan religions had also a plenty of holy feast days. That this indeed concerns legalistic and strict observance is seen in the word used. The word παρατηρέω (*paratereo*, G3906) is used 6 times in Scripture (Mark 3:2; Luke 6:7; 14:1; 20:20; Acts 9:24; Gal. 4:10). It is interesting that in all instances except this one it is obviously to be gathered that this concerns careful watching and observation by the enemies of the Gospel. The word is always connected with the Pharisees and those who are anti-Gospel. Marvin R. Vincent writes:

The word denotes *careful, scrupulous* observance, an *intent* watching lest any of the prescribed seasons should be overlooked. A merely legal or ritual religion always develops such scrupulousness.^[142]

Even if the Sabbath would be included under the category of "**days**," it must be kept in mind what we said at the beginning of this passage concerning the Galatian controversy. As Schaff said concerning this "observance":

The Apostle means a Judaistic, slavish, and superstitious observance which ascribes an intrinsic holiness to particular days and seasons..., and which makes such observance a necessary condition of justification^[16]

Legalistic observance of the Sabbath is done away with and should not be a thing which Christians concerns themselves with. It is one thing to strive to the keeping holy the Lord's Day, other to do so legalistically. Paul's polemic is against

legalism. Some Reformed Sabbatarians see the abrogation of the seventh-day Sabbath here and in Colossians 2:16. While at the same time, they do not hold that the Sabbath principle was done away with, but rather, continues in the New Covenant Christian Sabbath, the Lord's Day. Philip Schaff writes on this passage:

But it is a serious error to infer from this passage (and Col 2:16; Rom 14:5) that the Sabbath is abolished in the Christian dispensation. The law of the Sabbath, i.e., of one weekly day of holy rest in God (the seventh in the Jewish, the first in the Christian Church) is as old as the creation, it is founded in the moral and physical constitution of man, it was instituted in Paradise, incorporated in the Decalogue on Mount Sinai, put on a new foundation by the resurrection of Christ, and is an absolute necessity for public worship and the welfare of man. 'The Sabbath is made for man,' that is, instituted by God for man's spiritual and temporal benefit. So marriage is made for man, government is made for man. But the Judaizers reversed the order and made the Sabbath an end instead of a means, and a burden instead of a blessing.^[16]

I don't have a problem in including the seventh-day Sabbath in the category of "days" here. But my point is that we should not restrict these categories to the feasts in Scripture appointed by God under the Old Covenant, but also include extra-biblical feast days and some pagan feast days. Either way, this passage does not prove that the Sabbath principle is abrogated and thus no longer binding.

Colossians 2:16-17

This verse is much stronger to the cause of the anti-Sabbatarians than the previous two passages because of an explicit mention of the "sabbaths." This is also the only place where Paul uses the word Sabbath in his writings. But what does it mean? Is the moral obligation of keeping one-day-in-seven holy abrogated here? Why does the form of the word appear in the plural? Is there a pattern in the lists of v. 16? We need to put the passage in context and thus begin at v. 14. (The following is taken from our exposition of this passage in [chapter 19](#) with slight modification.)

Col. 2:14-17 by canceling **the record of debt that stood against us** with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. 16 Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of **food and drink**, or with regard to a **festival** or a **new moon** or a **Sabbath**. 17 These are a **shadow of the things to come**, but the substance belongs to Christ.

What is the record of debt? A more literal translation may be more helpful, "having blotted out the handwriting in the ordinances that is against us" (YLT). What does this handwriting signify? And what are the ordinances? Calvin notes on v. 14:

Now Paul contends that ceremonies have been abolished, and to prove this he compares them to a hand-writing, by which God holds us as it were bound, that we may not be able to deny our guilt. He now says, that we have been freed from condemnation, in such a manner, that even the hand-writing is blotted out, that no remembrance of it might remain. For we know that as to debts the obligation is still in force, so long as the hand-writing remains; and that, on the other hand, by the erasing, or tearing of the handwriting, the debtor is set free. Hence it follows, that all those who still urge the observance of ceremonies, detract from the grace of Christ, as though absolution were not procured for us through him; for they restore to the hand-writing its freshness, so as to hold us still under obligation.^[12]

The HCSB Study Bible notes:

The **certificate of debt** may refer to a handwritten document or to the Mosaic law. Paul typically viewed the law's purpose as revealing the guilt of sinners (Dt 27:26; Rm 7:13; 1Co 15:56; Gal 3:10). Some Jewish writings, likewise, speak of God keeping records of people's sins as debts against them. God, however, has abolished those records through Christ's substitutionary atonement that was accomplished when He died on the cross.^[143]

This passage does not refer to the abrogation of the whole law, but rather to the abrogation of condemnation brought by the law and that which was not inherently moral. This is seen in the close connection that one should have in interpreting this text and Ephesians 2:15. Why? Because these are the only two places where Paul uses the word **δόγμα** (*dogma*, G1378), which is defined as "a decree, statute, ordinance"^[144] and is used in Luke 2:1; Acts 16:4; 17:7; Ephesians 2:15 and Colossians 2:14. Only twice by Paul and therefore the meaning should be gleaned from the context of its uses. Not only that, but it is known to the student of Scripture that the Colossians and Ephesian epistles have many parallels together. This is one of

them about the freedom of Christians from the ceremonial law and the unity of the Church so that there would be no separation between Jewish and Gentile believers.

I believe that it is clear from Ephesians 2 that what the Apostle is speaking about when he says “abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances” is the ceremonial law which had set Israel apart from the Gentile nations and not the moral law which is on the heart of every man. Therefore, in Colossians 2:14, the reference is not to the moral, but the ceremonial law, as Calvin notes and Paul’s further discussion will lead to. Therefore, these things which had set Israel apart and were therefore against us were nailed to the cross and done away with. It is on this basis that the Apostle concludes (v. 16, “Therefore”) that no one is to judge Christians about foods or festivals. Because they were nailed to the cross and were abolished by fulfillment (Eph. 2:15), there is no longer moral obligation to observe them. The same God, Who by positive precept commanded them, has abolished and abrogated them.

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of **food and drink**, or with regard to a **festival** or a **new moon** or a **Sabbath**. 17 These are a **shadow of the things to come**, but the substance belongs to Christ.

Paul, in v. 16, declares that food (Lev. 11) and drink (Lev. 11:34; drink offerings also) laws are all shadows and were nailed to the cross. In this expression, the Apostle is generally saying that all things which were peculiar to the Old Covenant concerning eating and drinking are done away with. The next section, “festival or a new moon or a Sabbath” refers to all offerings and feasts. We believe that it refers to ceremonial Sabbaths and not to the creation ordinance Sabbath. **First** of all, the word “sabbaths” is in the plural, therefore it should more properly be rendered as “Sabbaths” and thereby not referring to the singular Sabbath day, but rather the different kinds of Sabbath days in the Old Testament. **Second**, these three designations are used in the Old Testament to designate festivals and offerings on these festivals. Joseph Pipa writes concerning an interpretation which gets the abrogation of the Sabbath from Colossians 2:16:

Such an interpretation, however, fails to take into account the context of these passages. Paul was dealing with Jewish practices about food and religious observances, not requirements of the moral law. He made this distinction by the terms he used in Col 2:16—“a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day.” These three terms are often used together to describe the special holy days of Jewish worship (2 Chron 8:13; 31:3; Lev 23:1-25).^[145]

To claim that the Sabbath of the creation ordinance is here being abrogated is not easily seen. It may be so on a surface reading, but comparing Scripture with Scripture reveals that the Sabbath was never abrogated. We have already seen from Hebrews 4:9-10 that there is still an obligation of Sabbath-keeping for the *New Covenant* people of God. Furthermore, in 1 Corinthians 16:2, the Apostle who is not fond of making days special, makes the first day special by commanding a specific religious act to be done thereon ([see above](#)). The Apostle John distinguishes a particular day by calling it the Lord’s Day (Rev. 1:10). These terms which Paul picked refer to ceremonial feasts and offerings. It is these offerings and feasts which find their fulfillment in Christ. But the seventh day Sabbath pointed to the believer’s rest in Christ, while the first day Sabbath, or the Lord’s Day, points to the eschatological rest that we will have in the hereafter as the eternal Sabbath of God.

The same threefold terminology in Colossians 2:16 is used in various places in the Old Testament to refer to ceremonial feasts and sacrifices, not to the one-in-seven Sabbath day (Neh. 10:33; 1Chron. 23:31; 2Chron. 2:4; 8:13; 31:3; Ezek. 45:17; Hos. 2:11). In fact, there was not only the moral fourth commandment Sabbath day but many ceremonial Sabbath days. For example, there is a Sabbath for the land which is one year long (Ex. 23:10-11). The Day of Atonement is called a Sabbath (Lev. 16:29-31). Every time in Leviticus 23 when there is a holy convocation, the people may not do ordinary work (v. 7 for the Passover; v. 21 for Pentecost; vv. 24-25 for the Feast of Trumpets; v. 28 for the Day of Atonement where all work is forbidden; v. 35 for the Feast of Booths) and there the people are called to a “solemn rest,” that is, keeping a Sabbath (although not explicitly named “Sabbath”). The threefold terminology used by Paul in Colossians 2:16 is always related to sacrifice in the Old Testament (Neh. 10:33; 1Chron. 23:31; 2Chron. 2:4; 8:13; 31:3; Ezek. 45:17; Hos. 2:11), therefore, what reason do we have that Paul means anything else? It is these sacrifices which pointed to Christ the High Priest who offered one final sacrifice to end all sacrifice and to bring in everlasting righteousness. Dr. Ross, after showing that there are more Sabbaths than only the fourth commandment Sabbath day, writes:

A simplistic equation between ‘sabbath’ and the fourth commandment is therefore inadequate, but what is most significant for the interpretation of Colossians 2:16 is that on six other occasions where feasts, new moons, and sabbaths are grouped together in the Old Testament they are always bound up with offerings (1 Chron. 23:31; 2 Chron. 2:4; 8:13; 31:3; Neh. 10:33; Ezek. 45:17), suggesting that the term is concerned more with the sacrificial activity of these occasions than with the days themselves...It is therefore most likely that just as the reference to food and drink designated an activity and served as shorthand for all dietary laws, so feasts, new moons, and sabbaths serve as shorthand for the offerings and rituals common on those occasions.^[146]

Therefore, on the basis of these things, it is just too simplistic to understand “Sabbath days” in Colossians 2:16 to be referring to the creation ordinance Sabbath, while ignoring the ceremonial Sabbaths all over the Old Testament and the use of the threefold terminology in the Old Testament.

What Colossians 2:16 teaches is the abrogation of all dietary laws, sacrificial laws and feast days under the old covenant, because they are shadows and have their fulfillment in Christ Who is the true sacrifice and the High Priest from a superior order—the order of Melchizedek, the King of Righteousness who at the same time is the High Priest of God’s people. Finally, v. 17 declares they are shadows which were pointing beyond themselves, but the “body” belongs to Christ. Meaning, these things pointed to the reality of Christ. Why should we observe things which pointed beyond themselves to something else, when that something has already come? These shadows lose their purpose and therefore are abrogated.

Moreover, even if we would hold to the position that Colossians 2:16 speaks about the abrogation of the Sabbath, the meaning would still be the abrogation of the Jewish Sabbath and not the Lord’s Day or the Sabbath-principle. That is, in fact, the position of Dr. Joseph Pipa and other Reformed Sabbatarians. The fact is that the Lord’s Day was never a point of controversy in the early church.

Conclusion On Supposed Anti-Sabbath Passages

None of these passages abrogate the Sabbath-principle established at the Creation and (re)applied in the New Covenant. Either they speak of legalistic observance of days or observance extra- and unbiblical days. The New Testament teaches that there is a holy day under the New Covenant still. It is called the Lord’s Day, the first day of the week and we also call it the Christian Sabbath. None of those supposed anti-Sabbath passages in the New Testament actually teach the abrogation of the Sabbath-principle when we take all of what the Bible has to say on the subject. The Lord’s Day is an essentially moral commandment given for the good of all men as a gracious gift by God.

§8 The Sabbath Is Then Kept Holy Unto The Lord

8. The **sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord**, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering their common affairs aforehand, do not only **observe an holy rest all day**, from their own works, words and thoughts, **1** about **their worldly employment and recreations**, but **are also taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of his worship**, and in the duties of necessity and mercy. **2**

1. Exod. 20:8-11; Neh. 13:15-22; Isa. 58:13-14; Rev. 1:10

2. Matt. 12:1-13; Mark 2:27-28

Finally, the Confession tells us how the Sabbath is to be **kept holy unto the Lord** (Ex. 16:23; 20:8-11). The sanctification of the Sabbath begins *before* the Sabbath. The Confession, first of all, speaks about **preparing of our hearts**. The Sabbath is never only a physical rest and activity, it is first of all spiritual. Then the Confession speaks about **ordering our common affairs aforehand**, which means doing things which are necessary for the Sabbath, before the Sabbath as, for example, making the groceries, filling the gas in the car and such other things. On the Sabbath, we are to **observe an holy rest all day** (Ex. 20:10). Notice that this rest is said to be **holy**, meaning that it is different from other kinds of rest as a vacation or a free day. Furthermore, it is a holy rest **all day**. It is not just a part of the day, as in the morning for the church service. It is called the Sabbath day and the Lord’s Day, not the Sabbath *portion of the day* and the Lord’s *portion of the day*. This rest is from **our works, words and thoughts** about our **worldly employments and recreations** (Isa. 58:13-14). We are not even to busy our minds with these things. But with what things should our minds be busy with? We are to be **taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of His worship**. The Sabbath is not a day of inactivity, but it is a day of rest from our **worldly employment and recreations**, and focus upon **His worship**. It is likewise not a day when absolutely no duty or work is to be done. Those duties and works which are permitted for the Sabbath are in the categories of **necessity and mercy**, which we will discuss below. The Sabbath rest is both spiritual and physical; it has to do with the worship of God most primarily.

Making a case for the Christian Sabbath was not easy, but what is likewise difficult is the *observance* of the Sabbath. Seventh-day Adventist Skip MacCarty observes:

Biblical Sabbath prohibitions are few: Exod 20:8-11, working; Exod 35:3, lighting a fire (likely for cooking, a major and time-consuming task in those days); Neh 13:15-17, trading; Isa 58:13, “doing as you please (likely secular activities

that detract from the purpose of the day).^[147]

The Bible does not actually give us a whole list of what may be done and what may not be done on the Sabbath. That caused the Pharisees to add a multitude of Sabbath prohibitions although God may not have prohibited the things which they did. Yet there were clear lines that the Scriptures gave as was mentioned by MacCarty and in the Confession. Sabbath observance is presented as twofold in the Confession:

1. Rest from our worldly employments and recreations, and/so that we would
2. Publically and privately be taken up in the worship of God and the performance of certain duties.

In this section, I would like to briefly look at Isaiah 58:13-14 and Matthew 12:1-12 to learn some things about proper Sabbath observance.

Isaiah 58:13-14

The Place Of Chapter 58

First, let us observe the interesting place of chapter 58 in Isaiah. It occupies a place where the ultimate concerns are the New Covenant days. Isaiah 53, for example, clearly speaks of the sufferings of Christ. Paul interprets Isaiah 54:1 as speaking of the Jewish-Gentile Church in the New Covenant (Gal. 4:26-28). This is also the time when the Lord will make “an everlasting covenant” with His people (Isa. 55:3). This is described as a time when foreigners and even eunuchs will join themselves to the LORD (Isa. 56:3). It is also said:

Isa. 56:4-5 For thus says the LORD: “To the **eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths**, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, 5 I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.

Even the eunuchs will observe God’s Sabbath. But what is more interesting is Deuteronomy 23:1, which says that eunuchs may not come into “the assembly of the LORD.” Eunuchs were not welcome in the midst of the covenant people of God under the Old Testament. But, there is a shift in the New Testament. In fact, Acts 8:27-28 explicitly notes that an Ethiopian *eunuch* was reading Isaiah, taught by Phillip and he was then baptized. This notes the first entrance of a eunuch into the assembly of the LORD, contrary to the rules under the Old Covenant. Therefore, this sufficiently proves that what is under discussion in these chapters are *primarily* the New Covenant days. Even the foreigners who “love the name of the LORD” are said to observe God’s Sabbath (Isa. 56:6).

The Context of Isaiah 58

Chapter 58 begins with a complaint to the people of Israel about their outward religious observance. The criticisms of our Lord of the Pharisees in many ways sound similar. They observe fasts outwardly, but they don’t do in a way pleasing to the Lord. Their fasts are merely outward and not likewise inward. They fast from food, but they abound in doing evil. When they fast, they do not observe a fast holy to the Lord, rather, “you seek your own pleasure and oppress all your workers” (Isa. 58:3). The merely outward and hypocritical way of fasting, which was practiced by Israel in Isaiah’s time, the Lord condemns. But He doesn’t condemn the wrong way without giving the right and proper way to fast. Their fasts should not only concern food, but concern fasting from self-centeredness and therefore serving others and fasting from doing evil. When they fast as the Lord has prescribed, then the Lord will bless His people abundantly. This passage is often used for fasting and for an encouragement to be involved in helping the poor and those suffering. It is proper to use it so, for it is meant to be applied by the Church of God.

Sabbath Observance

Isa. 58:13 “If you **turn back your foot** from the Sabbath, from **doing your pleasure** on my holy day, and **call the Sabbath a delight** and the holy day of the LORD honorable; if you **honor it**, not going **your own ways**, or seeking **your own pleasure**, or **talking idly**;

Here, God teaches us how we should treat the Sabbath as holy, mainly, by refraining from certain things which may be lawful on the other days of the week. All that the Lord has asked from us is one day out of seven. Six days we may do our pleasure and our thing, but the Sabbath day must be treated as holy and unique. Those things which are lawful on the other six days may very well be unlawful for the Sabbath day. I will treat v. 13 under two headings.

Not Doing Your Own Thing

The Lord calls upon His people to treat the Sabbath as sacred, holy and honorable. How? By *separating it* from the other days of the week by the things which they do on it. On the Sabbath, they are to “turn back [their] foot”. What does this strange expression mean? It is translated in different ways:

- ESV = If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath
- HCSB = If you keep from desecrating the Sabbath
- ISV = If you keep your feet from trampling the Sabbath
- KJV = If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath
- YLT = If thou dost turn from the sabbath thy foot
- NASB = If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot From doing your own pleasure...

The meaning seems to be that they should **turn back their feet**, i.e., stop their feet from desecrating the Sabbath day. They, it seems, regarded the day just like any other day. They traveled on it, they worked on it, they made their businesses on it. In short, they treated the Sabbath as just another working day and thus violated the Fourth Commandment. It did not matter to them that God declared that on the Sabbath “you shall not do any work” (Ex. 20:10). They pursued their vocations and their pleasures without regard to God’s commandments concerning His holy day. This, therefore, means that on the Lord’s Day Sabbath, we should not go to work. For some people, it may be necessary to go to work on the Lord’s Day, for example, doctors and police. Their work would be seen as a work of mercy and necessity, but they should try to get Sunday off when possible so that they would rest and join the corporate worship of God. If there are things in the house that need fixing and which could be done on other days of the week, then they should not be done on the Lord’s Day. If your house is on the fire or a water pipe is broken, then it is a work of necessity and mercy to fix that. There is urgency in the latter, but not in the former. My workplace is closed on Sunday, but if I were called on to work out of necessity, either there or another place, when there is no other option, then I would either 1) take no money or 2) donate all that I have earned on that day (even though usually you would get either paid either 150% or 200% on Sunday). I do not want to use the Lord’s Day as just another work and regular day. Sometimes work may be seen as an act of mercy and necessity for our neighbor.

The second thing mentioned is that they should **turn back from doing their pleasure**. They should turn back from doing whatever they want and like. There is nothing inherently wrong in seeking for pleasure and doing things that are pleasurable as long as they are not prohibited by the Scriptures. Therefore, the “doing your pleasure” should not directly be viewed as something negative. It may well be something that is lawful on the other days of the week, but unlawful on the Sabbath. On the Sabbath, we should seek for pleasure, but pleasure in God and in His day. The Sabbath day is called holy and thus separate and set aside above all the other days of the week, therefore, our conduct on it should reflect the sacredness of the day. Our conduct on the Sabbath declares to God and to the world around us about how we really feel about the Lord’s Day. Although all the days of the week are God’s, yet the Lord Christ especially lays claim on one day. It is His day, thus, we should do that which He commands on that day and refrain from things which He forbids. We may like doing sports on other days of the week, going to parks or other recreations. Those are good and pleasurable things, but on the Lord’s Day we should not seek these things, rather, we should seek the pleasures of God. Barnes writes, “While all time is his, and while he requires all time to be profitably and usefully employed, he calls the Sabbath especially his own - a day which is to be observed with reference to himself, and which is to be regarded as belonging to him. To take the hours of that day, therefore, for our pleasure, or for work which is not necessary or merciful, is to rob God of that which he claims as his own.”^[17]

Then at the end of the passage, we read “**not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly**”. We should forget ourselves and be consumed in the things and worship of God. The Lord’s Day Sabbath is the greatest day that displays self-denial. We are not to do our own thing, but do that which God commands and refrain from that which He forbids, even if these things are good for other days of the week. There is nothing wrong with shopping, but it should not be done on the Lord’s Day. Nehemiah said, “if the peoples of the land bring in goods or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day” (Neh. 10:31). We should neither buy nor sell on the Lord’s Day. These things are lawful on the other six days of the week, but not on the Sabbath day.

Then we read of “talking idly” (ESV), “speaking merely idle words” (ISV), “speaking [thine own] words” (KJV) or “speaking a word” (YLT). The meaning cannot be that we should not speak, but that, as the KJV supplies the words, speak *our own* words. This means, as with the other instances, we should not speak about our businesses and works beyond that which is necessary. We should not make phone calls for buying and selling when these things could be done on Monday or other days than the Lord’s Day. On the Lord’s Day, we should be speaking the Lord’s Word and be busy hearing and studying His holy Word. Barnes notes, “It is not less important that our conversation should be right on the Sabbath than it is that our conduct should be.”^[17]

This is how we are to honor the Sabbath, namely, by refraining from our secular activities on that day and being soaked up with the things of God.

Call The Sabbath A Delight

This is the expression which to my mind proved that the Sabbath was not a burden. It could not be a burden if this is what God desires His people to call His day. The Lord's Day is a *delight*! To be honest, the mere idea of the Sabbath as a delight gives me *delight*. I find myself always looking forward to the Lord's Day as I join the people of God in corporate worship and spend the rest of the day in the study of theology. The corporate worship of God is the highest point of the day. This is the day on which Christ rose and we will celebrate His resurrection. This is likewise the day that He has made to be a day of joy and gladness. According to the teaching and practice of the Pharisees, the Sabbath could not be a delight, but it was a burden. They had taken all peace and delight out of the Sabbath by adding all kinds of man-made rules to it. Therefore, in the Gospels, we see our Lord claiming back the Sabbath as His own and freeing it from the Pharisaic regulations. Barnes writes about the feelings of those who have "just [i.e., right] views of the Sabbath":

To them it is not wearisome, nor are its hours heavy. They love the day of sweet and holy rest. They esteem it a privilege, not a task, to be permitted once a week to disburden their minds of the cares, and toils, and anxieties of life. It is a 'delight' to them to recall the memory of the institution of the Sabbath, when God rested from his labors; to recall the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, to the memory of which the Christian Sabbath is consecrated; to be permitted to devote a whole day to prayer and praise, to the public and private worship of God, to services that expand the intellect and purify the heart...To all who have any just feeling, the Sabbath is a 'delight;' and for them to be compelled to forego its sacred rest would be an unspeakable calamity.^[17]

Thomas Watson wrote:

The Jews called the Sabbath *desiderium dierum*, the desire of days, Isaiah lviii. 13. 'Thou shalt call the Sabbath a delight.' This we should look upon as the best day, as the queen of days, crowned with a blessing, Psalm cxviii. 24. 'This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.' — He has made all the days, but hath sanctified this. We should look upon this day as a spiritual market for our souls, wherein we have holy commerce and traffic with God. This day of rest is the beginning of an eternal rest. This day God sets open the pool of Bethesda, in which those waters flow that refresh the broken in heart. And shall not we call this day a delight? The Jews on the Sabbath laid aside their sackcloth and mourning.^[148]

Then we read that we should "call...the holy day of the LORD honorable". The designation of the day sounds a lot like what we have in Revelation 1:10. We should not only honor God, but we should also honor *His day*. We should treat it with honor 1) by doing that which He commands on it and 2) by refraining from that which He forbids. Godless men call it un-delightful, un-honorable and a burden. They cannot wait until the Sabbath is over so that they would go on in pleasing themselves and doing their own thing (Amos 8:5). Contrary to this, God desires that His people should call His day a delight and honorable. We may summarize what is said here with the remarks of Barnes on v. 14:

We may see the manner in which the Sabbath is to be observed. In no place in the Bible is there a more full account of the proper mode of keeping that holy day. We are to refrain from ordinary traveling and employments; we are not to engage in doing our own pleasure; we are to regard it with delight, and to esteem it a day worthy to be honored; and we are to show respect to it by not performing our own ordinary works, or pursuing pleasures, or engaging in the common topics of conversation.^[17]

Blessings For Sabbath Observance

Isa. 58:14 then you shall **take delight in the LORD**, and I will make you **ride on the heights of the earth**; I will **feed you with the heritage of Jacob** your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

There are certain conditions, namely, when we honor the Lord's Day, the Lord of the Day has commanded then these blessings will certainly follow us. The Lord assures this promise by declaring that "the mouth of the LORD has spoken." By these words, God puts His reputation and Name on the line. He will do these things. He will bless those who call His Sabbath a delight and honor it. Three specific things are described to follow those who honor the Sabbath.

You Will Take Delight In The LORD

First of all, as you take delight in the Lord's Day, you will likewise delight in the Lord of the Day Himself. There will be a close communion between the believer and His Lord on that day. The Lord is in an especial manner among His people in their corporate gathering. As we call the Sabbath a delight and honor the Lord's Day, so we shall take delight in the Lord of the

Sabbath and honor *Him*. Our attitude toward His day displays our attitude toward Him. Rather than having pleasure in our own things and taking delight in our own thing, on the Lord's Day, the blessing that will follow is that we would have increased delight and pleasure in the Lord of the Sabbath. 'As we "delight" in keeping God's "Sabbath," so God will give us "delight" in Himself'.^[125]

I Will Make You Ride On The Heights Of The Earth

This is the language of victory. The Lord will give us victory over our enemies. This was, first of all, a promise to the soon-going-to-exile people of Israel concerning their return to the land. If they obeyed the Lord in what He said in v. 13, then He would grant them victory against their enemies as He did when He brought them out of Egypt (Duet. 32:13). But there is also an application beyond this. The Lord promises that we would have the victory against our spiritual enemies as we honor His day. Barnes notes, "The general idea of prosperity and security is undoubtedly the main thing intended".^[127] Matthew Henry notes:

I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, which denotes not only a great security (as that, ch. xxxii. 16, He shall dwell on high), but great dignity and advancement. "Thou shalt ride in state, shalt appear conspicuous, and the eyes of all thy neighbours shall be upon thee." It was said of Israel, when God led them triumphantly out of Egypt, that he made them to ride on the high places of the earth, Deut 32:12; Deut 32:13. Those that honour God and his sabbath he will thus honour.^[141]

I Will Feed You With The Heritage Of Jacob Your Father

What this means is that God will pour out upon them the blessings of the covenant. This is spoken of in Old Testament terms about greater New Testament realities. As we keep the Lord's Day holy, we shall likewise be abundantly blessed by God and enjoy the benefits and blessings of the New and Everlasting Covenant, which He has made with us in Christ.

Summary Of Isaiah 58

This passage teaches us what is truly good and acceptable Sabbath-keeping in God's eyes. The focus on the Sabbath day should be extra and especially on the Lord, His worship and His things. We should spend the whole day in His worship and the study of and meditation upon His Word. This passage forms the basis of "observe an holy rest all day, from their own works, words and thoughts" in the Confession. This is the Sabbath-keeping which the Lord delights in and He will display His delight by blessing us abundantly.

Psalms 92

This is a hymn dedicated to the Sabbath and is written so that it will be sung on the Sabbath. That is what we may gather from the title of the Psalm which is "A Song for the Sabbath." This is strangely the only mention of the Sabbath in the Psalms. A whole hymn is dedicated to that blessed day. Some of the old Rabbis claimed that this was a hymn sung by Adam after his creation. Barnes writes, 'The Chaldee Paraphrase has in the title, "Praise and a song which the first man spoke for the sabbath-day."'^[127] But as Spurgeon said, "the ravings of the Rabbis who speak of its being composed by Adam, only need to be mentioned to be dismissed. Adam in Paradise had neither harps to play upon, nor wicked men to contend with."^[149] This is also a Psalm which "We learn from the Talmud that it was sung at the libation of wine which accompanied the sacrifice of the first lamb of the Sabbath burnt-offering (Num 28:9-10)."^[150] Moreover, this was also a Psalm sung a lot by the church of God in the time of Spurgeon. He says, "In the church of Christ, at this hour, no Psalm is more frequently sung upon the Lord's day than the present."^[149]

This Psalm "celebrates the works of God, both that first and great work of creation, and that succeeding and no less wonderful work of his providence, by which he upholds and governs all his creatures, and especially that by which he ruleth all sorts of men, both good and bad, and that by which he preserveth and manageth his church and people."^[180] It is concerned with the worship of God, which is the chief business and highest point of the day. Therefore, we should make it our aim that we never neglect the corporate worship of God with His people (Heb. 10:25).

This is the Psalm on which Eusebius, in his commentary on the Psalms, observed the change of the day, saying:

the Savior of the world, after all his labors among men, obtained the victory over death, and passed the portals of heaven, having **achieved a work superior to the six-days' creation on this day**, and **received the divine Sabbath and the blessed rest**...On that day which is **the first of light and of the true Sun, we also assemble** [Greek word], **after an interval of six days, and celebrate holy and spiritual Sabbaths**...[we, the redeemed] do those things **according to the spiritual law** [Greek words], **which were decreed for the priests to do on the Sabbath**;...**All things which it was duty to do on the Sabbath, these we have transferred to the Lord's Day**

[Greek words] as more appropriately belonging to it, because it has the precedence, and is first in rank, and **more honorable than the Jewish Sabbath**. For on that day, **in making the world, God said, Let there be light**, and there was light; and on the same day, **the Sun of righteousness arose upon our souls**. Therefore **it is delivered** [Greek word] **to us that we should meet together on this day**; and **it is ordered** [Greek word] **that we should do those things announced in this psalm** [92].^[121]

The Lord's Day Sabbath is a day on which we corporately give thanks to the Lord for His works and sing His praises in the congregation. We want to extol God as God's people and rejoice in His salvation. The Lord's Day is not a day of mourning, but it is the day of gladness and joy on which our Lord rose victorious (Ps. 118:24). It is a day when the Church has God in its midst in a special manner as a corporate unity in the name of Christ. We sing the Lord's praises and play music to His glory, declaring His perfections and our thankfulness for His amazing grace toward us sinners. Celebrating the Lord's Supper which reminds us of His sacrifice on our behalf as we at the same time remember that this is the Lord's Day and that He did not stay in the grave, but rose forevermore victorious over sin and death.

On the Lord's Day, we remember the first work of God in creating the world out of nothing, which was very good before the entrance of sin. Yet we do not merely look back to the Creation, but also to the beginning of the New Creation in the resurrection of our Lord on the first day of the week, which signaled the change of the day. But even as we look around us to this fallen and broken world, redeemed eyes see plentiful of good to praise God for. As we look back to the beginning of the New Creation in the resurrection of our Savior, so we expect Him to come back and consummate and bring in finally this New Heaven and New Earth wherein *only* righteousness will dwell (2 Pet. 3:13). No more suffering and no more sin. We will then enter into the eternal Sabbath of God consummately and enjoy sinless and unhindered fellowship with Him. Oh, what a joy! On the Lord's Day, we should concern ourselves with the promises of God made to us concerning the next world and look forward to the eternal Sabbath of sinless glory.

The Lord will come and take us home, but as the Psalm says, the enemies of the Lord "shall perish; all evil doers shall be scattered" (Ps. 92:9). We also look forward to the time when evil shall be destroyed and punished. When God's holy Name will no longer be blasphemed. When His day will no longer be profaned. We look forward to Christ vindicating His holy Name and bringing judgment upon "those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2 Thess. 1:8). We look forward to the time when He will *manifestly* and *visibly* reign supreme over all and when every knee will bow (Phil. 2:10-11). As we realize this, we should, therefore, get an urgency of warning the world about the wrath to come, knowing that we are not better and we would have likewise perished if it was not for the grace of God.

Then the Psalm closes with blessings similar to Isaiah 58:14 which we have looked at above to those who worship God on His day. This Psalm reminds us that the main business of the day is the worship of God and the meditation upon God's word. Spurgeon wrote, "The subject [of the Psalm] is the praise of God; praise is Sabbatic work, the joyful occupation of resting hearts. Since a true Sabbath can only be found in God, it is wise to meditate upon him on the Sabbath day."^[149]

The Lord Of The Sabbath And The Sabbath

What attitude did the incarnate Son of God take to the Sabbath? How did He act in regard to it, and what was His teaching concerning it? We answer, unhesitatingly, He honored it; He kept it; He upheld its claims upon men.^[40]

What better source to learn about the Sabbath than from the Lord of the Sabbath Himself? Christ *never* desecrated the Sabbath even though He profaned the *Pharisees'* Sabbath, yes. He violated the Sabbath according to their teachings and traditions, not according to God's Word. In fact, He claims that He is the Lord of the Sabbath and therefore, its only proper interpreter. In this section, I would like to take a look at Matthew 12 and briefly point out how our Lord sanctions certain types of works for the Sabbath. He disagreed with the Pharisaical idea that the Sabbath was to be a day of idleness. Rather, it is to be a day of doing good and thereby honoring God and loving our neighbor.

Works Of Necessity (Matthew 12:1-4)

Matt. 12:1-4 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the **Sabbath**. His **disciples were hungry**, and they began to **pluck heads of grain** and to eat. 2 But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." 3 He said to them, "**Have you not read what David did when he was hungry**, and those who were with him: 4 how he **entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence**, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?"

It is not wrong to feed your hunger, even on the Sabbath. But according to the Pharisees, the disciples' action of plucking heads of grain constituted a work and thus a desecration of the Sabbath. Therefore, they point out to Jesus that His disciples violated the Sabbath law. Dr. Francis Nigel Lee instructs us concerning this particular encounter:

Now it is instructive to note that the Pharisees did not base their complaint on the fact that the disciples were eating of another man's corn — for their manner of eating was patently allowed by the Mosaic law. Neither did they complain that the disciples had walked further (through the cornfields) than the rabbinical tradition of the "sabbath day's journey" permitted— for perhaps the disciples, like the Pharisees, were all on their way to or from the synagogue. No, they based their whole case against the Lord and His disciples on the fact that He was allowing His disciples to transgress some of the merely traditional and anti-Scriptural thirty-nine "Aboth" by "reaping" (plucking the ears) and "threshing" (rubbing them in their hands) on the sabbath day.^[151]

As to those "traditional and anti-Scriptural" rules, in a previous chapter, Lee writes:

The Mishnic tract *Shabbath* is the first of twelve which collectively comprise the second of the six sections of the Mishnah, which second section (*Seder Moed*) deals with the various Jewish feasts. **Shabbath embraces no fewer than twenty-four chapters**, the seventh(!) of which is the most important. For this seventh chapter contains, amongst other material, **a list of thirty-nine "Aboth" or main categories of activities prohibited on the sabbath**, each of which is subdivided into a further thirty-nine "Toledoth", thus making **no fewer than one thousand five hundred and twenty nine** (= 39 X 39) "offsprings".

The thirty-nine "Aboth" — thirty-nine being the number of times the word "*labour*" appears in the Jewish Scriptures — were thought to have been drawn up by the Great Synagogue under the presidency of Ezra himself, and broadly refer to the **preparation of bread** [sowing, ploughing, reaping, sheaf-binding, threshing, winnowing, selecting, grinding, sifting, kneading and baking]; to **matters of dress** [wool-shearing, washing, beating, dyeing, spinning, beam-weaving, thread-making, thread-weaving, thread-separating, knotting, unknotting, sewing and tearing]; to **matters of writing** [deer-catching (for vellum), deer-killing, skinning, salting, skin-preparing, hair-scraping, cutting, writing and erasing]; and to **household matters** [building, demolishing, fire-extinguishing, fire-lighting, hammer-beating and carrying]. Indeed a formidable and punctilious list. Just how punctilious will be seen below.

As regards *sabbath work in general*, these miserable anti-Biblical traditions prohibit even such trivial operations as **unfastening a button** or **scraping one's shoes** [unless done with the back of a knife!]. Rolling heads of wheat was considered to be sifting, **rubbing them to be threshing**, bruising their ears to be grinding, and throwing them up in the hand to be winnowing. It was strictly **forbidden to wipe a wound on the sabbath**, yet quite in order to move a sheaf — provided a common spoon was first laid upon it and then removed — together with the sheaf! Not even "things" were allowed to work: **milk may not be left to curdle on the sabbath** — for that constituted "building", which was a prohibited activity; but mercifully (if inconsequentially), olives and grapes were allowed to remain in their presses.^[152]

Seeing all those extra-biblical traditions of the Jews, the Lord Jesus sides with His disciples and shows the Pharisees, by an example from the Scriptures, that they're wrong in their accusation and His disciples are *not* "doing what is not lawful" on the Sabbath. Indeed, as Dr. Lee observes, "In His reply to the Pharisaical complaints against His disciples, the Lord did not even deign to discuss their vain traditions. Instead, He went straight to the Word of God which their traditions transgressed."^[153]

The "work", which the disciples were doing, falls within the category of a work of necessity, or as some people would classify it—a work of *preservation*. We need to eat to keep the Sabbath properly and to be engaged in the worship of God and in the study of His Word, otherwise, we will faint and spend the Sabbath in idleness, which is not how we should observe the Sabbath. The Lord's example is from 1 Samuel 21:1-7 about David and his men when they were fleeing from Saul. The relevance of this is seen from the fact that the Bread of Presence was exchanged every Sabbath day and therefore, it is written concerning that account:

1Sam. 21:6 So the priest gave him the holy bread, for there was no bread there but the **bread of the Presence**, which is **removed from before the LORD, to be replaced** by hot bread on the day it is taken away.

From Leviticus 24:5-9 we learn that this replacement of the Bread of Presence happened on the Sabbath day. Therefore, David and his men ate the old Bread of Presence, which were actually twelve loaves of bread. This little detail is necessary for us, but it was not necessary for those who knew of this account as teachers and knew when the bread was replaced. Therefore, because David and his men were hungry, it was not wrong for him to eat that which is, by the ceremonial law, unlawful for him to eat. In the same way, it is not wrong for the disciples to satisfy their hunger and to "pluck heads of grain and to eat." They were not violating any Law of God. They were violating the law of the Pharisees, but not of God. Furthermore, not only did David's men eat that which is not lawful for them according to the ceremonial law but that all happened on a Sabbath day! In the same way, I do not believe it is wrong to cook on the Lord's Day. To prepare food back in

the day required a lot more work than it does nowadays (cf. Ex. 35:2-3). The death penalty for Sabbath desecration, as part of the civil law of Israel, has expired and thus we no longer punish Sabbath-breakers by the death penalty. This was a peculiar aspect of the Mosaic economy.

Works Of Piety (Matthew 12:5)

Matt. 12:5 Or have you not read in the Law how **on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless?**

Now the Lord points to another example against the Pharisees. The priests in the Temple work on the Sabbath day. In fact, additional offerings are to be presented on the Sabbath day (Num. 28:9-10). The Bread of Presence is to be made and replaced on the Sabbath day (Lev. 24:5-9). In short, the priests had more work to do on the Sabbath than on regular days. Their work was intensified on the Sabbath, yet they actually *did not profane* the Sabbath; they were guiltless. I don't think that the Lord Jesus meant that the priests really profaned God's Sabbath by doing that which He had commanded. Rather, the reply seems to be more in a spirit of sarcasm. They profaned the Sabbath of the Pharisees, not God's because the Lord Jesus declares them guiltless. If the idea of Sabbath observance according to the Pharisees was basically idleness, then the priests surely and greatly profaned the Sabbath.

At this point, we see that works of piety—works related to the worship of God—are not violations of the Sabbath and they are *not* works which are prohibited, but rather, encouraged to be done on the Sabbath. Therefore, every work which is done to promote the worship of God is not a violation of the Sabbath. The pastor has a lot of work to do on the Sabbath. People may have to drive long distances to come to church. Some people may have to teach Sunday school to kids and other such things. Some people may need to prepare the building or do some cleaning up afterward. These things, which at their central goal, have the promotion of the worship of God and the study of His Word, are not in fact violations of the Sabbath. Obeying God and doing that which He commands concerning His worship, even though it may be considered a “work,” is, in fact, lawful on the Lord's Day and is therefore not a violation of the Sabbath.

John 7:22-23 is another instance of works of piety. The Pharisees themselves acknowledged that they had to circumcise a boy even on the Sabbath because God's command was that a boy must be circumcised on the eighth day. And sometimes the eighth day fell on the Sabbath. The Pharisees themselves acknowledged that their work of circumcision on the Sabbath was lawful and not a desecration of the Sabbath. Therefore, likewise, the work of the Church and those who have duties on Sunday to perform are not violations of the Sabbath.

Works Of Mercy (Matthew 12:11-13)

Matt. 12:9-13 He went on from there and **entered their synagogue**. 10 And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, **“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”**— so that they might accuse him. 11 He said to them, “Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? 12 Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So **it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.**” 13 Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other.

The Lord Jesus here goes into the synagogue and the Pharisees seek out a man with a withered hand in an attempt to trap Him and find fault with Him. The wickedness of this account is seen in the fact that they know Christ's merciful heart. They know that Christ is willing to demonstrate His mercy toward this man and they want to use this opportunity to find fault with Him and accuse Him. Jesus points to the hypocrisy on their part: they would help an animal, but not a sick man when the opportunity presents itself. If you would help a sheep from a pit, how much more a human who had been suffering from a disability? Therefore, the Lord's answer is not only in the rhetorical “it is lawful to *heal* on the Sabbath?” but in the positive assertion that “it is lawful to do *good* on the Sabbath.” Not only healing is permissible on the Lord's Day, but doing that which is *good* for our neighbor and for our brothers and sisters in Christ. On the Lord's Day, we should be taken up in these works of necessity and mercy. Spending the day in idleness is actually *not* honoring the Lord's Day. Rather, we should all the more strive to do good on that blessed and holy day.

A necessary note must be added here concerning “doing good.” I'm sure that some people will read that and thereby conclude that anything “good” may be done on the Sabbath since the Lord said it is lawful to do good. That's true. But our decision of whether doing *that* particular thing must be guided by the goal of the day. The goal of the day is the promotion of the worship of God, both public and private and soaking ourselves in that. There are many good things which are not lawful on the Sabbath but are pretty okay on the other days of the week. In the same way, there are urgent things and there are things which we could do on other days. For example, if a house is burning down on the Lord's Day, as a neighbor, you do not just sit down in your house because it's the Sabbath. You would want to help them and minister to them. If they ask you for help, you should help. That is an urgent matter. But for example, if your neighbor or friend asks you for something to do on the Lord's Day, which does not promote the worship of God and neither is it urgent, I would think

twice before accepting. Maybe offering to help on another day and explaining why you'd prefer not doing it on the Lord's Day.

Dr. Robert Martin notes how in John 7:21-24 works of mercy and piety are connected with each other:

He says, "If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the Law of Moses should not be broken (*i.e.*, a work of piety is permitted on the Sabbath), are you angry with me because I made a man completely well (*i.e.*, performed a work of mercy) on the Sabbath? But how can Jesus compare these things? Does not the analogy fail because he is not comparing like things (*i.e.*, a work of piety and a work of mercy)? Not if a work of mercy is a work of piety as well, *i.e.*, an act of worship offered to God as well as an act of kindness done to the needy."^[153]

By doing good to our neighbor and observing the Second Table of the Decalogue, we are honoring the Lord of the Decalogue. There can be no fulfilling the Second Table concerning our neighbor without first fulfilling the First Table by honoring God. Therefore, when we do that which our Lord taught us is lawful and good to be done on the Lord's Day Sabbath, we honor it and follow the teaching of the Lord of the Sabbath. We render above all, service to Him. See John 5:1-19; Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6.

Summary

In Matthew 12, we have the teaching of the Confession about the Lord's Day as being taken up "in the duties of necessity and mercy" confirmed. These are the works that are lawful and good to be done on the Christian Sabbath. Again, to spend the day in idleness is not to observe the Lord's Day properly. J.C. Ryle wrote concerning works of necessity and mercy:

Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us this, and teaches also that all such works were allowable in the Old Testament times. "Have ye not read," He says, "what David did?" — "Have ye not read that the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?" (Matt. 12:5). Whatever, in short, is necessary to preserve and maintain life, whether of ourselves, or of the creatures, or to do good to the souls of men, may be done on the Sabbath Day without sin."^[151]

John Murray summarizes the three categories of works permissible on the Lord's Day:

A **work of piety**, that is, work connected with the worship of the sanctuary, is in view when He says, "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?" (Matt. 12:5). A **work of necessity** is referred to when He says, "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?" (Matt. 12:3, 4). That is to say, dire necessity warranted the doing of something which under normal conditions would have been a culpable violation of divine prescription and restriction. And a **work of mercy** is in view when He says, "What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?" (Matt. 12:11). It is this service of mercy which Jesus then in the most conspicuous way exemplified when He said to the man with the withered hand, "Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole like as the other" (Matt. 12:13). It is in reference to such works of piety, necessity, and mercy that Jesus says, "Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days," and, more specifically, it is in reference to the work of mercy illustrated by drawing a sheep out of a pit, and exemplified in the concrete situation by His own miracle of healing the man with the withered hand."^[154]

A.W. Pink wrote concerning Matthew 12:1-2:

Here, He reminded His detractors that the Scriptures furnished examples—in the case of David and of the priests in the Temple—that *works of necessity* were permissible. Those works which are required in order to supply *real* human wants are *not* a violation of the Sabbath law. Similarly, in Matt. 12:11, 12 we read, "And He said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath days." These words of the Son of God affirm that *works of mercy* performed on the Sabbath day are "lawful."^[140]

Conscience

In many ways, matters of what ought not to be done on the Lord's Day and what is permissible are left to the conscience of

the Christian. God has not given us a long list of do's and don'ts for the Sabbath. But there are, no doubt, some lines which He has put and what He has commanded us concerning them. There are two dangers. The first is *legalism* when we add to the commandments of God or try to bind the consciences of men by things that the Lord does not forbid. This is what the Pharisees did and therefore the Sabbath was no longer a delight. Legalism is not to be confused with *striving* to honor the Lord's Day. It is not legalism to try our best to observe the Lord's Day as He commands. It is legalism when we add commandments to God's Word and try to bind the consciences of other men. It is legalism when we forget grace and when we think that we're perfect Sabbath keepers, or that we're loved *because* of Sabbath-keeping.

The second danger to be guarded against is *laxity* and *looseness* with the Lord's Day. In this instance, we observe the Lord's Day however we like and we make our feelings and our conscience the arbiter of what ought not to be done and what should be done on the Lord's Day. "My conscience does not condemn me for working on the Lord's Day. In fact, if I work on Sunday I will have a higher wage than other days." When God has said "you shall not do any work" (Ex. 20:10), we cannot make ourselves the standard to the question of whether we can work or not. Wherever God has spoken on the Sabbath, that we should follow. On things which God has not spoken and which could not be deduced from what He has spoken on the Sabbath, let the Christian then use their "Christian common sense."

We should neither be legalists and dead observers of the Sabbath nor be antinomians and make ourselves the standard. These are the two pitfalls. Rather, we should try our best to honor the Lord's Day, but not in a spirit of legalism. We should rejoice, be glad and be delighted in the Lord's Day and more in the Lord of the Day. Turretin wrote, "Concerning the observance of the Lord's Day also there is not a little controversy. Some (in excess) incline to a too great rigor and severity and thus approach Judaism. Others on the contrary (in defect) use too great relaxation, which opens the door to profanity and license. The middle way, however, seems to us to be the safest."^[177] Trying to honor the Lord's Day carefully is no more legalism than trying to abhor idolatry, honor God's Name and pursuing sexual purity is legalism. God requires that we keep His day holy. The obligation is not any less strict than trying our best not to lie or lust. It is wrong to directly call those who try their best to honor the Lord's Day legalists just because they refrain from certain things on the Lord's Day which others do not. It is important to remember that the Sabbath is still part of the Ten Commandments, which God requires that we obey and honor Him thereby. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome" (1John 5:3).

Most importantly, we should not view the Sabbath through the lens of what we should *not* do. But we should see it as the day on which we celebrate the Lord's resurrection and do certain things which He has commanded for the Lord's Day. The Lord's Day Sabbath is not a day of inactivity and idleness. **It is a day of rest from secular works in order to perform religious works.** Joseph Pipa writes, "as we turn from work and pleasure, we are freed to worship Him corporately with His people, privately in our homes. We have time to serve Him by speaking His word, by going to the nursing home, by visiting the sick and the shut-in, by witnessing and passing out tracts, by teaching and preaching His word. We have the luxury of having people into our homes that we may enjoy their fellowship and minister to them."^[155] Dr. Martin summarizes the things which we ought to do on the Lord's Day:

(1) the public worship of God, (2) the personal and private worship of God, (3) the spiritual care of those under my authority and care, (4) the spiritual fellowship of the saints, and (5) those works of mercy and necessity which arise in the course of the day.^[156]

Sabbath-Breakers

Which brings us to our next and final point. As we fail to perfectly keep the other nine commandments, so likewise we will fail in (perfectly) honoring the Lord's Day. It is difficult for our flesh, which desires its lusts and to do its own thing, to know that this day is wholly dedicated to God and His worship. Therefore, when we fail to honor the Lord's Day as God has commanded we should not think that God no longer loves us. This is legalism. Rather, we should be driven to the cross, knowing the Lord Jesus has perfectly kept the Law for us, including the Sabbath. We break the Sabbath commandment as we break the other nine. This is not much different. In fact, it is one of the most difficult because it is a prime commandment on self-denial and it is the most neglected. We should not be pursuing our own thing on the Lord's Day, but be consumed with the things and worship of God (public and private). We should take a rest from our secular works to be engaged in works of mercy, piety, and necessity. Dr. Martin writes, "Self-denial is of the essence of the day even as it is of the essence of the Christian life."^[157] As with every commandment of God, the breach thereof should not drive us to despair, but to the cross (Heb. 4:14-16; 1John 1:8-10). There we receive forgiveness for all our transgressions. There we meet the Savior of the world. As we are forgiven of our sins, we should seek to strive to enter Christ's rest and have taste in that in the Lord's Day. We should focus on Christ while we strive to keep this commandment as we try to do for the others. Dr. Pipa writes, "All true Sabbath-keeping begins by our actively resting in God alone for our salvation. Without actively focusing on Christ and living in dependence on Him there is no true Sabbath-keeping."^[155]

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

(Exodus 20:8)

Footnotes

1. [^](#) Many Scriptural references have been supplied by Samuel Waldron's [Modern Exposition of 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith](#) which was apparently supplied by the [Westminster Confession of Faith 1646](#).
2. [a, b](#) Derek W.H. Thomas - [The Regulative Principle of Worship](#). Ligonier.
3. [^](#) [The 39 Articles of Religion](#).
4. [^](#) R. Barcellos, S. Waldron, E. Blackburn, & Paul R. Martin. *Going Beyond The Five Points*. Ed. by Rob Ventura. (San Bernardino, CA: [CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform], 2015). p. 65.
5. [^](#) *ibid.* p. 80.
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22. [^](#) [Keach's Catechism](#).
23. [^](#) J. I. Packer. *Concise Theology: A Guide To Historic Christian Beliefs*. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993). p. 187.
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26. [^](#) [Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges](#). Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). In loc.
27. [a, b](#) Charles J. Ellicott. [Commentary For English Readers](#). Taken from the [TheWord Bible](#)

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33. [a, b](#) W. Gary Crampton. [Exclusive Psalmody](#).
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