

THE *May 1, 2007* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Special Issue: *The Lord's Day*

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Judah's Profaning the Sabbath

In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals.

There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem.

Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath day?

Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath.

Nehemiah 13:15-18

In Nehemiah's day the Sabbath Day was being profaned. Nehemiah was cupbearer to the king of Persia, who appointed him governor of Judea.

God used Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, to secure Jerusalem against her enemies.

In this last chapter of the book of Nehemiah, we read of several reforms that Nehemiah made in Judea. The one that concerns us is the restoration of the Sabbath Day. In Judea and Jerusalem the Sabbath Day was being profaned. It was business as usual on the Sabbath Day. In response, Nehemiah reminded the elders of how Jerusalem had earlier been destroyed by Babylon exactly because Judah had profaned the Sabbath Day. And then Nehemiah put an end to the business conducted on the Sabbath.

The profaning of the Sabbath Day was not unique to Judah. It prevails also today in the church world. The church needs to hear the warnings that Nehemiah gave to the elders of Jerusalem.



God requires in the fourth commandment that we keep the Sabbath Day holy.

To understand what that means we must go back to the creation week. In six days God made the heavens and the earth and all that

they contain. On the seventh day God rested. This means that God ceased from His work of creation and enjoyed the works of His hands. This was the Lord's Sabbath or Rest.

At that time God also hallowed the Sabbath Day for us. To hallow something is to make it holy, that is, to set it apart as something special and unique. God hallowed the Sabbath Day in that He set it apart as a day of rest for us. Six days of the week we are to do our work. But the seventh day is a holy day. On this day we are to rest. This rest includes physical rest. We are to set aside as much as possible our daily work and activities so that the body may rest up. But this rest is primarily a spiritual rest. God has provided for us a great salvation in Jesus Christ. We are to put aside our daily work in order that we may enjoy our salvation in rich measure.

How busy we often are during the week with our daily work and responsibilities. This often takes our focus away from Jesus Christ and our salvation in Him. How little time there is to meditate on God's Word and to pray. How little time there is for the fellowship of

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The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692) is a semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc., 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

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\$17.00 per year in the U.S., US\$20.00 elsewhere.

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The Standard Bearer does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. These should be sent to the Editorial Office and should be accompanied by the \$10.00 fee. Deadline for announcements is one month prior to publication date.

16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm and 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms International.

Website for RFPA: www.rfpa.org
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the saints. But on the Sabbath Day we are able to focus on spiritual things. We have time to go to the house of God to worship Him and hear His Word. There is time for song and prayer. There is time for the fellowship of the saints. How enriching this is for our faith and the enjoyment of our salvation.

This is what God requires in the fourth commandment.

In the Old Testament this Sabbath Day was the seventh day of the week. In the New Testament it has been changed to the first day of the week.



Judah was profaning the Sabbath Day.

On his tour of Judah as its governor, Nehemiah discovered that the Jews did not observe the Sabbath Day as a holy day. It was business as usual. Some were treading the winepresses. Others were bringing grain, wine, grapes, and other produce loaded on donkeys to sell in Jerusalem. Men of Tyre also brought fish and other merchandise to Jerusalem to sell.

There were things that contributed to Judah's forgetting the Sabbath. It was likely that the Jews had not been allowed to keep the Sabbath during their exile, and afterwards they simply continued that to which they had become accustomed. Perhaps the cessation of the temple service for fifty years contributed to the practice as well. Besides, these were not the most prosperous times. Many perhaps felt compelled to work on the Sabbath to provide for their daily bread. And then there was the fact that the men of Tyre had established themselves in Judah and had brought with them an evil influence, also of profaning the Sabbath. But the bottom line was that Judah forgot the Sabbath Day and profaned it, treating it as any other day of the week.

And the same is happening today in the church.

Church attendance is on the decline among many confessing Christians. Many attend church only once a Sunday and fill the rest of the day with recreation and/or work. Many Christians work on the Sabbath, and do so with the approval of their church. Many churchgoers completely forget the Sabbath Day on their vacations. They often give little prior thought to what they will be doing on the Sabbath Day during vacation. They often travel on Sunday to get an extra day of vacation time.

There are things that contribute to this. We live in a society that no longer observes the Sabbath. Consequently, many of the sports and recreation events that we enjoy are on the Sabbath. In addition, the world is pressuring the Christian to work on Sunday. The sad fact is that the Sabbath Day is being greatly profaned today by many in the church.



When the church forgets the Sabbath Day, she brings the wrath of God upon herself.

Nehemiah reminded the elders of Judah of this fact.

The neglect of the Sabbath Day had brought the wrath of God upon Judah earlier. God had sent the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem and the temple. The

people had been uprooted and transported to other lands, far from the land of promise and blessing. In their long years of captivity Judah was left to remember Zion and weep (Ps. 137).

Judah's profaning of the Sabbath Day brought this wrath of God upon the church for two reasons.

First, by profaning of the Sabbath Day Judah had turned her back on God's salvation. The Sabbath Day was God's gift to Judah to bring to her the riches of God's salvation. But Judah had little de-

sire for that salvation. This brought upon Judah the anger of God.

Secondly, Judah's profaning of the Sabbath Day led to other evils. Judah needed the Sabbath Day to maintain her spiritual strength and health. By neglecting the Sabbath Day Judah became spiritually weak, so that she strayed into idolatry and all the sins that came with it.

And so God's wrath came upon Judah.

God's purpose was to chastise and correct Judah.

After seventy years of refining and correction God led Judah back to the land of promise to enjoy the blessings of His covenant and salvation.

But Judah had not learned. She was about to bring more wrath upon herself by again profaning the Sabbath Day.


Let us heed the warning of Nehemiah to Judah.

Also today the wrath of God is on those who profane the Sabbath Day. They are turning their back on the great salvation that He has purchased with the precious blood of His Son. And they are neglecting their spiritual health, so that they stray into the sins of the world. The wrath of God is seen in the judgments that He sends on the sins that arise from ne-

glecting the Sabbath Day. God's design is to chasten and correct. And those who will not be corrected will eventually perish under God's wrath in their generations.

Let us remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.

The Sabbath is a great gift of God to us to maintain our spiritual health and to enjoy the riches of God's salvation.

Those who remember it will be blessed indeed. 

When the church forgets the Sabbath Day, she brings the wrath of God upon herself.

Editor' Notes:


Call the Sabbath a Delight!

Welcome to our special issue on the Lord's Day. The Old Testament name *Sabbath* emphasizes the truth that we are to rest in the mighty works of God, notably our salvation sealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The New Testament name *Lord's Day* emphasizes that Jesus Christ is Lord of the entire Sabbath, and He determines what is

right for the day. This special day, established by God as a creation ordinance, is one that even the ungodly cannot ignore totally. And yet, in both respects—as Sabbath and as the Lord's Day—God's law is trampled underfoot. That the unbelieving and ungodly do so is to be expected. What especially grieves God's people is the sight of family members and churchgoers desecrating

this day. Far greater sorrow we have at the realization of how little regard we believers have for it.

May God be pleased by this special issue to instruct, encourage, admonish us all in the profitable use of His day.

A hearty thanks to our regular writers as well as the special contributors, Rev. Mark Shand and Mrs. Michael Bosveld. 

Editorial

Prof. Barry Gritters

The Command We Love to Keep

If a denomination will survive as a true church of Christ, she will delight in keeping the fourth commandment. A denomination may perish for other reasons, but refusal to keep the fourth commandment will ensure it.

She will perish, not because her permission to violate the Lord's Day makes her unpopular among the people and she withers away. But she will cease to be true church because God will judge her. The Lord will not be pleased, even though her changed stance on the fourth commandment may well be met with praise by people.

God's judgment on Israel in the Old Testament came in part on account of Israel's despising the Sabbath. God sent the famine of the Word because the people were eager for the Sabbath to be finished (Amos 8:4-14). He kindled a fire in Jerusalem's gates because the people did not hallow the Sabbath (Jer. 17:27). Jehovah poured out His fury on them to consume them because they polluted his holy day (Ezek. 20:12, 13).

Nor will the PRC endure without careful obedience to the fourth commandment.

Denominations are quickly

abandoning observance of the day. With the claim that the fourth commandment is kept spiritually, every day of the week, by resting in the gospel of Christ (true enough), these churches are not calling their members also to obey a command to keep holy the first day of the week (disastrously mistaken).

Not all churches have abandoned the day. A few denominations, some Reformed, others not, are serious about the day. A fourteen-year-old spelling bee champ from Indiana recently declined to contend for the national championship because the tournament was to be held on the Lord's Day. He said, "My chief purpose in spelling is to glorify God. My chief purpose in not spelling will be to glorify God." Because of the Lord's Day!

But the fourteen-year-old puts to shame old Reformed denominations who have come to new conclusions about the Lord's Day: "On this day, you may do your pleasure, in work or play. We will not visit you for failing to attend worship. We will not discipline you for working or playing on this day."

But all the other Reformed de-

nominations will go the same way unless they love the Lord's Day, unless they delight in keeping the fourth commandment. Also the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Keeping the commandment without love is not really keeping it, any more than attending church heartlessly is really worshiping. Besides, observing the commandment without love will soon lead to no observing of the day, even outwardly.

A command to love

The fourth commandment is a command. It is one of the ten commandments, written with the finger of God on two tablets of stone. As a creation ordinance, linked as it is with the creation week, the fourth commandment would not be abrogated. Nor did Christ abolish it in His ministry: witness, in the gospel accounts, His own conduct on the day of rest (Mark 1:21; 3:2; 6:2; Luke 4:31; 13:10-16; 14:1-6; John 5:9-18). So it is not a matter of Christian liberty to observe the day or not. And its observance is more than a spiritual keeping of it all the days of our lives, as the Heidelberg Catechism puts it. It is obeyed by reserving one whole day of the

week, the first, for holy service of God. The day is commanded.

In keeping with the example of the New Testament church, recorded in Scripture, the church today keeps holy the *first* day. The Holy Spirit calls this first day the "Lord's Day" in Revelation 1:10. In a unique way this day belongs to the Sovereign Lord Jesus. He is Lord of it (Matt. 12:8). On the first day He rose from the dead (Luke 24:1), returned in His Spirit (Acts 2), and empowered His disciples to worship (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:1,2), after His own example of meeting with them on this first day (John 20:19, 26). Observance of this day was not merely the custom of the early church, by her own decision.

But the church must keep this commandment in love. She must keep it as an expression of love for the Lord whose commandment it is.

It is not difficult to number the reasons a believer loves this commandment. It would not be hard for any believer who put his mind and heart to it to write another pamphlet entitled *I Love the Lord's Day*, as an old Scottish minister once did.

First, it is a commandment to find rest in Jesus Christ—and what believer does not need rest? Believers are weary of their sin. Very weary of their own sins. Weary not so much of the sins of others, but their own (weary also of their own sin of ignoring their own by looking at others). Their own shortcomings, their own failures that hurt others and dishonor God. Their native inability to do battle against sin and do good. On this day especially the church hears Jesus call, "Come to me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Of the heavy burden of sin's guilt the believers are relieved. The weight of the fear that life's hard circumstances are God's pouring out of His wrath is lifted on this day. The gospel proclaims the love of God, the forgiveness of sins, the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, and the certain hope of heaven. The believers

love the command because they love to hear Jesus say, "Rest."

Second, they love the memory of their redemption from the bondage of sin, and they love to hear that reminder every Lord's Day: "...remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm; therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day" (Deut. 5:15). They love that reminder!

Third, the day for believers is a festive celebration because it's the Lord's Day, and they love the Lord. On the Lord's Day they commune with Him for whom their souls yearn (Song of Solomon). They delight to hear the Lord say to them, as He said to His disciples, "Peace be unto you.... Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you."

They love this command because by it their Lord assembles His people in sweet communion. They do not "forsake the assembling of themselves" on that day, because they love the Lord's brothers and sisters. Considering their needs, they provoke one another to love and good works (Heb. 10).

They love the day that points to heavenly rest, eternal Sabbath, "Where congregations ne'er break up, and Sabbaths never end."

Of course, there are reasons we resist this command, even hate it. The day encroaches on our own pleasures. It crimps our vacation plans, minimizes time to play, and makes it difficult to make as much money as desired. But all of God's commands have a way of doing that. The devil's work is to see to it that obedience to God's command does not come without a price. Jesus told us it would be so. We are not surprised. But that's our flesh resisting. Christ in us loves the command and its rest.

Protecting and Promoting What We Love

Love for the day and its command motivates believers to be on

guard against what would undermine obedience, erode observance, and thus bring God's judgments on the church. And they may not be so naïve as to suppose that all is well just because there are two worship services per Lord's Day, because most of the people spend the day in the quietness of their home, and because no one is mowing his lawn or out fishing. We may not be so naïve as to forget that Jesus' great foe in His day was the Pharisee, whose "strict observance" of the day received His strongest condemnation.

The churches' love for the day will prove itself in more ways than two worship services, a quiet afternoon, and no work and no play.

First, the denomination that will survive God's judgments and even prosper will promote the knowledge (is this surprising?) of her own sins and weaknesses, and thus her own need for rest in Jesus Christ. Without this she becomes an assembly of hypocrites, Pharisees who need no rest, "holier than thou" (Is. 65:5) critics. "I...I am evil, born in sin; Thou desirest truth within" (*The Psalter*, 140).

Second, she will promote solid preaching twice on the Lord's Day. For God gives Sabbath rest through preaching. To "ride on the high places" (Is. 58:13) the people must hear Jesus speak to them in the gospel. For this, the church will support and maintain her seminary that trains men to be faithful pastors. She will support and bless her pastors, encouraging as well as correcting, so that the "shelves are well-stocked" on this "market-day for the soul."

Third, the denomination that loves the commandment will prove that love by loving the poor and needy, whose care in a unique way is attended to on this day. The texts listed above show that the Lord has a special care for them. So do the people of God. What other day is more fitted for the spiritual care of these needy saints than the Sabbath? Is it exaggera-


tion to call it grossest violation of the spirit of this day when the people of God spend the day for themselves, maybe sleeping the afternoon away, while the widows and others languish in their homes or institutions? It is shameful if the only ones to work the works of mercy on the Lord's Day get paid \$10 or \$20 an hour for it.

Fourth, she will prove her love for the day by removing the littlest leaven that would corrupt the whole lump. She will discipline those who violate the day. Almost 70 years ago the PRC's mother denomination urged her consistories to "take a firm stand in dealing with concrete cases of what they regard as transgressions of the

fourth commandment." Do the denominations who still preach obedience to the fourth commandment need such urging? Will they discipline the powerful businessman who allows his business to be occupied or promote itself on the Sabbath? Would they censure the impenitent elder who allows his athletically talented son or daughter to play ball on the Lord's Day?

Such discipline is also exercised in the preaching. Faithful preaching calls the people to an obedience to this command that is deeper than mere quietness, refusal to work, and attending church. It rebukes me when the newspaper gets more attention than the church magazines and good books, when

I forbid lawn mowing but allow doing the science worksheet. It warns me that travel on the Lord's Day is disobedience to Jesus, warranting discipline, and then carries out that discipline. It shows me the reasons the Lord still says, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." It also enables me to write a pamphlet that explains why I love the Lord's Day.

Lord of the Sabbath, give the church rest from her guilt. Increase her resolve to hate sin, flee from it, and more and more to love obedience to the fourth commandment, which is love for Thee. Receive our worship, especially on the holy day. We anticipate the day when it will never end. 

Rev. Kenneth Koole

The Fourth Commandment: Our Catechism, Calvin, and Ursinus

In its treatment of the fourth commandment (Lord's Day 38) our Heidelberg Catechism is noticeably brief, one Q. & A. (103); and in reference to the lawful keeping of the Lord's Day, it is without reference to any prohibitions whatsoever. Just positive exhortations, saying nothing about things that are forbidden. And when it comes to the important matter of the fourth commandment's abiding authority, or perpetual character, and the first day of the week replacing the seventh as the God-ordained New Testament Sabbath, it is as silent as William of Orange.

The Westminster Standards are quite explicit on these matters.

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Happily so, we are convinced. The Shorter Catechism, in its treatment of what the fourth commandment still requires of New Testament believers, is representative.

Q. 60 How is the Sabbath to be sanctified?

A. The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employment and recreations as are lawful on other days: and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy.

We could wish that the Heidelberg had been as explicit.

This, you understand, is not to say that what our Catechism teaches about the fourth commandment is in error. It is not. Its emphasis upon the positive keeping

of the Lord's Day is wholly proper. But the question remains, could it not, and would it not, have been better that it had said more?

At the same time, it must be stated that to acknowledge that our Catechism does not go as far as the Westminster creeds in explicitly forbidding common labor and recreation on Sunday is not the same as saying that Reformed believers are thereby freed from the fourth commandment's binding restrictions on work and recreation on the Lord's Day. This, after all, has become the popular argument among many Reformed today. "When it comes to Sunday observance, we will be bound only by the Reformed creeds; our Catechism does not forbid normal week-day activities on Sunday (which would turn it into some new Jewish 'Sabbath'); therefore, having regularly attended the worship service (and

'once' counts as regular), we are at liberty to engage in all those activities open to us on the other six days of the week."

A growing number of Reformed who, when it comes to Sunday observances, suddenly want to be 'loyal to the wording of their creeds!' (one could wish they had the same 'zeal' when it comes to Q. & A. 80 of their Catechism, the one that speaks of Rome's Mass as being 'an accursed idolatry') dismiss the Westminster creeds' rigorous application of the fourth commandment as a Puritan influence (hence, a new 'legalism'), and therefore not of true Reformed vintage at all. That Dutch Calvinists for centuries, for all practical purposes, in their Sunday observance kept the Lord's Day holy with the same vigor that their Calvinist brethren on the British Isles did is counted as evidence of foreign influence, and not as something properly required of the Reformed man loyal to his own creeds. (Cf. Andrew Kuyvenhoven's treatment of the fourth commandment in his book on the H. Cat., *Comfort and Joy*.)

What such conveniently forget is that, when it came to their exposition of the fourth commandment, the Reformed churches in the Netherlands did not differ in any essential way from what became known as the Westminster view. While it is true that the Synod of Dordt adopted the Heidelberg Catechism with its strikingly brief, and, I will be so bold as to say, insufficient explanation of the fourth commandment, the Great Synod also went beyond the Catechism's statement in its own supplemental declarations on the perpetual moral requirements of the fourth commandment (statements, mind you, that are as binding upon every Reformed church member today as what one 'only' finds in our Catechism). Dordt's supplemental declaration concerning Sunday as the New Testament Sabbath had six points (cf. page 349). For our purposes, the last

point is sufficient. Having established that there is to the fourth commandment a moral aspect that has abiding application, Dordt declared:

6. This day must be so consecrated unto the service of God that upon it men rest from all servile labors, except those required by charity and present necessities, and likewise from all such recreations as prevent the service of God.

Evidently Dordt deemed it necessary to say something more about the fourth commandment than was found in the H. Cat. they had adopted. The fathers were shrewd enough concerning human nature to anticipate exactly what we see happening in Reformed circles today, viz., members within the church insisting that, since the Catechism does not explicitly forbid engaging in various common, worldly pursuits on the Sabbath, they have the right to engage in such things without threat of discipline. The fathers sensed that more needed to be said. It is with men as with sheep, any weakness perceived in a good fence will be worried eventually into a gaping hole.

It is also worth noting that when it came to the fourth commandment, Dordt did not adopt Ursinus' Catechism as originally worded, but rather the Dutch translation by the great Dutch liturgist Peter Dathenius (in the 1560s). The original wording read "...and that, especially on the festive day of rest [*am Feiertag*], I diligently frequent the house of God." *Feiertag* is the German word for "holiday." Dathenius shrewdly substituted the words "...and that, especially on the Sabbath, that is, the day of rest [*op den Sabbat, dat is, op den Rustdag*], I diligently frequent the house of God." By that word "Sabbath" he strengthened Q. & A. 103 of Ursinus' Catechism considerably. The implication is that the New Testament Lord's Day was to be treated as the lawful replacement

of the Old Testament Sabbath, and its keeping was to involve not only spiritual activities special to the day (such as worship), but a *cessation* (what the word "Sabbath" literally means) from common labor and recreation as well.

There is reason why contemporary translators of the Catechism are suddenly enamored with Ursinus' original wording, rather than with Dordt's adopted version. The word "Sabbath" has a way of curtailing and condemning what more contemporary Reformed folk want to call their rightful Sunday festive freedom. The word *Feiertag*, while it places the emphasis upon spiritual activities to be enjoyed, is silent when it comes to restrictions. As a result, the word "holiday" now looms large in contemporary Reformed sermons on proper Sunday observance. And what is a holiday without a picnic?

Dordt knew what it was doing when it purposely adopted Dathenius' amended translation rather than Ursinus' original wording.

To understand the approach of our Catechism as Ursinus originally drew it up—strikingly brief, without either reference to any prohibitions, or designating the first day of the week as the New Testament Sabbath—one must refer back to Ursinus' revered mentor, John Calvin. And I will say it now, because it will help nothing by putting off saying it, when it came to the fourth commandment and its abiding authority for the New Testament age, Calvin was not at his best.

Our Catechism is the offspring of Calvin, following very closely Calvin's *Geneva Catechism*. This is exactly its strength for the most part. But at the 'fords' of the fourth commandment, this proved a weakness. At this point, Calvin faltered. Not in his own practice of keeping the Lord's Day—here he was above reproach; nor even in what he preached concerning proper Lord's Day keeping—he

was strict, exhorting his congregation “to lay aside our earthly affairs and occupations, so that we may be entirely free to meditate on the works of God” (*Sermons on the Ten Commandments*); rather, Calvin faltered by failing to ground this calling for a disciplined, self-denying Sabbath-keeping in a perpetual moral application of the fourth commandment. Ursinus, in his Catechism, could not bring himself to go beyond or contradict his revered mentor.

It was not that Calvin did not see the importance of the church setting aside a special day for worship and a time devoted to spiritual exercises and instruction. He did. But he refused to argue for this on the basis of an abiding authority of the fourth commandment for the New Testament believer—what the Westminster Confession describes as “a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment, binding all men in all ages...” (WC, XXI, 7). Rather, Calvin argued for due observance of a holy day on practical grounds, grounds having to do with past precedent and expediency. Surely all of sacred history should prove to us how wise designating a special day for laying aside secular encumbrances and attending to Word and sacraments was for every believer’s well being. How foolish to set aside all this precedence and its indisputable wisdom. But as for the fourth commandment itself, it was ceremonial, foreshadowing the perfect heavenly rest, and since Christ had done away with the ceremonial, and was Himself the fulfillment of the types and shadows, its binding character was ended (cf. *Institutes*, II, 34).

In his commentary on the Catechism, Ursinus is willing to warn against engaging in common labor (work) on the Christian Sabbath, but even then he would not ground this in an abiding authority of the fourth commandment as it now applied to the first day of the week. Ursinus wrote:

...or, in other words, there is a ne-

cessity that we should have a certain day on which the church should be instructed and the sacraments administered; yet we are not bound or tied down to *any particular day* [emphasis mine—KK] (*Com. on the H. C.*, p 564).

The old Presbyterian theologian R. L. Dabney could not bring himself on this issue to chastise Calvin by name. Having noted in his excellent article *The Christian Sabbath: Its Nature, Design And Proper Observance* that since ancient times “...there has existed a difference of opinion in the Christian world as to the authority upon which the Lord’s Day should be observed,” Dabney goes on to note with disappointment that the Reformers did not settle the issue, but rather aggravated it. And then all he could bring himself to say was, “The wrong side, as we conceive it, was held not only by papists, but by *some of the great Reformers* [emphasis ours—KK], and error was by them planted in some of the Protestant Churches” (*Discussions*, vol. 1, p. 497, BoTT). Calvin (and Luther, as well) remained unnamed. We could wish to extend the same courtesy; but the Heidelberg was not Dabney’s creed, it is ours.

The basis for the above charge is to be found in Calvin’s *Institutes* (Book II, 28-34), and, as stated above, in his *Geneva Catechism*.

The following quotation from the *Geneva Catechism* will make plain where Ursinus got our Catechism’s explanation of the fourth commandment. Calvin set up his Catechism as a discussion between a Master (instructor) and a young Scholar (student).

Master: Let us now see how far this [fourth] command has reference to us [in the NT].

Scholar: In regard to the ceremony, I hold that it was abolished, as the reality in Christ (Col. 2:17).

Master: What of the commandment then remains for us?

Scholar: Not to neglect the holy ordinances which contribute to the spiritual polity of the

Church; especially to frequent sacred assemblies, to hear the word of God, to celebrate the sacraments, and engage in regular prayers, as enjoined.

Master: But does the figure [of the OT law] give us nothing more?

Scholar: Yes, indeed. We must give heed to the thing meant by it, namely, that being engrafted into the body of Christ, and made his members, we cease from our own works, and so resign ourselves to the government of God.

Ursinus’ answer in his Catechism has little to add to the above exchange. And the phrases he does add (viz., “...that all the days of my life I cease from my evil works, and yield myself to the Lord, to work by his Holy Spirit in me...”) are lifted almost word for word from the *Institutes* (cf. II, 34). And plainly, by the phrase “...cease from our own works” Calvin did not have in mind special restrictions that applied to the Lord’s Day, but he is referring to ungodly activities that we are called to refrain from every day of the week.

Dabney summarizes what one finds in Calvin, without mentioning Calvin by name.

According to that [wrong] opinion, the sanctification of one day from every seven was a ceremonial, typical and Levitical custom, and it was therefore abrogated [sic!—a word Calvin used—KK] when a better dispensation came, along with other shadows of spiritual blessings. These persons admit that the Lord’s day deserves observance as a Christian festival, because it is a weekly memorial of the blessed resurrection and because the example of the church and enactments of her synods support it, *but not because it is now a commandment of God* [emphasis mine—KK].... To sanctify the whole day as a religious rest under the supposed authority of a divine command is Judaizing; it is burdening our necks with the bondage of a merely positive and typical ceremony which belonged to a darker dispensation” (op. cit., pp. 498-9).

It is clear from the *Institutes* that behind Calvin's attitude was a twofold fear. First, that Christ Jesus as the fulfillment of the ceremonies and Old Testament Sabbaths would be obscured (Christ, the perfect rest-giver), and with that, Christian liberty would be lost on the New Testament Lord's Day. And second, he feared a new form of Judaizing gripping the churches, that is, returning to what the Old Testament Sabbath had become in Christ's day, a mere refraining from doing a whole long list of things, and calling this "Keeping the Sabbath holy."

Not an unreal danger!

What Calvin wanted stressed was that the real purpose of any


New Testament holy day designated by the New Testament church must be that God's people be active in spiritual exercises and in things that benefit one's own soul and others', otherwise it profited little.

In this there is truth. And that certainly is the emphasis of our Catechism as well—a good, healthy, spiritual emphasis.

But what must not be forgotten is the reality of human nature. When the word preached puts no restrictions on what church members may *lawfully* do on the Lord's Day, Sunday soon becomes a day swallowed up either by recreation or by the opportunities of buying

and selling. As a result, time is not found for the truly profitable things intended by the divine Law-giver. The weakness of our natures, so easily preoccupied with the common affairs of life, must be taken into consideration if the spirit of the fourth commandment is to be kept.

Again, we are reminded that the church cannot rely upon any one man in all things, no matter what his spiritual wisdom and pedigree. None is infallible. Not even John Calvin.

Thanks be to God for the wisdom of a Dathenius, and of the fathers of the great Synod of Dordt, and of the Westminster Assembly as well. 

Rev. Mark Shand

The Westminster Standards: A Comprehensive Treatment of the Sabbath

The fundamental doctrinal position of the Westminster Assembly regarding the Sabbath Day is set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith in Chapter XXI, which bears the heading, "Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath-day." The Confession declares:

VII. As it is the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in his Word, by 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: 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, in Scripture, is called the Lord's day, and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath.

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

However, the statements in the Confession do not exhaust the

Assembly's treatment of the Sabbath Day. Indeed, the Westminster Standards provide the most full and expansive treatment of the Sabbath Day of all the Reformed creeds. The subject receives attention not only in the Confession, but also in the Shorter and Larger Catechisms, the Directory for the Public Worship of God, as well as the Directory for Family Worship.

The position of the Westminster Standards concerning the Sabbath Day can be summarized as follows:

- The Sabbath Day was a creation ordinance. From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, that day was the last or seventh day of the week. However, following Christ's resurrection, and according to Jesus' own mandate, that day has been

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changed to the first day of the week.

- The Sabbath as a creation ordinance was enshrined in the fourth commandment of the law of God, as given to Moses. Therefore, remembering the Sabbath Day is not a matter of Christian liberty. As a part of the moral law, it is a universal and perpetual command of God. As such, it binds all men in all ages.

- Consequently, all days of the week are not alike. One day in seven, the Lord's Day, is to be distinguished from the remaining days of the week. It is to be a Sabbath, a day of rest—rest from the ordinary and lawful activities in which men are engaged during the other six days of the week.

- The Lord's Day is to be kept holy or sanctified unto God, and as such is to be consecrated or set apart for the service of God. In order that men might devote themselves to the service of God on that day, they ought to cease from their ordinary work and recreational activities, save for those labors required on account of necessity or mercy.

An indication of the scope and detail of the Westminster Assembly's treatment of the Sabbath Day can be seen in the Directory for the Public Worship of God. Under the heading, "Of the Sanctification of the Lord's Day," the Directory has this to say:

The Lord's day ought to be remembered before-hand, as that all worldly business of our ordinary callings may be so ordered, and so timely and seasonably laid aside, as they may not be impediments to the due sanctifying of the day when it comes. The whole day is to be celebrated as holy to the Lord, both in publick and private, as being the Christian Sabbath. To which end, it is requisite, that there be a holy cessation or resting all that day from all unnecessary labours; and an abstaining, not only from all sports and pastimes, but also from all

worldly words and thoughts. That the diet on that day be so ordered, as that neither servants be unnecessarily detained from the publick worship of God, nor any other person hindered from the sanctifying of that day. That there be private preparations of every person and family, by prayer for themselves, and for God's assistance of the minister, and for a blessing upon his ministry; and by such other holy exercises, as may further dispose them to a more comfortable communion with God in his public ordinances. That all the people meet so timely for publick worship, that the whole congregation may be present at the beginning, and with one heart solemnly join together in all parts of the publick worship, and not depart till after the blessing. That what time is vacant, between or after the solemn meetings of the congregation in publick, be spent in reading, meditation, repetition of sermons; especially by calling their families to an account of what they have heard, and catechising of them, holy conferences, prayer for a blessing upon the publick ordinances, singing of psalms, visiting the sick, relieving the poor, and such other like duties of piety, charity, and mercy, accounting the Sabbath a delight.

The expansive treatment in the Westminster Standards of the ten commandments, particularly in relation to what is commanded and forbidden, has not met with universal applause. The noted nineteenth century church historian Philip Schaff, writing about the Westminster Larger Catechism, commented, "It is a masterpiece of catechetical skill, superior to any similar work.... It serves also in part as a valuable commentary or supplement to the Confession, especially on the ethical part of our religion. But it is over-minute in the specification of what God has commanded and forbidden in the ten commandments, and loses itself in the wilderness of details."¹ Twentieth century Scottish theologian and Professor of Church His-

tory and Christian Dogmatics at New College, Edinburgh Thomas F. Torrance went so far as to say that the Westminster Larger Catechism's treatment of the ten commandments was "highly moralistic."²

The explanation for Westminster's expansive and explicit statements regarding the Sabbath arise out of the Assembly's historical context. Towards the close of the reign of Elizabeth I, the issue of the observance of the Sabbath assumed considerable importance in the ongoing struggle between the established clergy of the Church of England and the Puritans. This issue was ignited following the publication in 1595 of a treatise on the subject of the Sabbath Day by Dr. Nicolas Bound.

In his treatise, Bound maintained *inter alia* that Christians were bound to rest on the Lord's Day; that the fourth commandment was moral and perpetual; and that it was not lawful to pursue worldly business on that day, nor to engage in such recreations and pleasures as were lawful on other days. The book enjoyed wide circulation and resulted in "a mighty reformation: so that the Lord's day, which used to be profaned by interludes, May-games, morrice-dances, and other sports and recreations, began to be kept more precisely. All the Puritans fell in with this doctrine, and distinguished themselves by spending that part of sacred time in public, family, and private acts of devotion."³

While the Puritans embraced this view of the Sabbath, the established clergy in the Church of England did not. They viewed it as being "a restraint of Christian liberty; as putting an unequal lustre on the Sunday, and tending to eclipse the authority of the church in appointing other festivals."⁴ Attempts were made by both the established clergy and the judiciary to contain the distribution of the book. Archbishop Whitgift and the lord chief justice Popham declared

that the Sabbath doctrine espoused by Bound “agreed neither with the doctrine of our church, nor with the laws and orders of this kingdom; that it disturbed the peace of the commonwealth of the church, and tended to schism in the one, and sedition in the other.”⁵ However, their concerted efforts to restrain the dissemination of the book proved of no avail.

In 1618 James I, who had succeeded Elizabeth I on the English throne in 1603, sought to stop the growth of Puritanism and at the same time to restrict the influence of the Papists. He sought to achieve those dual goals by bringing his royal authority to bear upon the issue of the observance of the Sabbath Day. On 24 May 1618, he published “A Declaration to encourage Recreations and Sports on the Lord’s Day.” The declaration formally authorized the desecration of the evening of the Lord’s Day. The heart of the declaration read as follows.

The report of this growing amendment amongst them made us the more sorry, when with our own ears we heard the general complaint of our people, that they were barred from all lawful recreations and exercise upon the Sunday’s afternoon, after the ending of all divine service, which cannot but produce two evils: the one the hindering of the conversion of many, whom their priests will take occasion hereby to vex, persuading them that no honest mirth or recreation is lawful or tolerable in our religion, which cannot but breed a great discontentment in our people’s hearts, especially of such as are peradventure upon the point of turning: the other inconvenience is, that this prohibition barreth the common and meaner sort of people from using such exercises as may make their bodies more able for war, when his Majesty or his successors shall have occasion to use them; and in place thereof sets up filthy tippling and drunkenness, and breeds a number of idle and discontented speeches in their ale-

houses. For when shall the common people have leave to exercise, if not upon the Sundays and Holy-days, seeing they must apply their labour and win their living in all working-days? ... as for our good people’s lawful recreation, our pleasure likewise is, that after the end of divine service our good people be not disturbed, letted or discouraged from any lawful recreation, such as dancing, either men or women; archery for men, leaping, vaulting, or any other such harmless recreation, nor from having of May-games, Whitsun-ales, and Morris-dances; and the setting up of May-poles and other sports therewith used: so as the same be had in due and convenient time, without impediment or neglect of divine service: ... but withal we do here account still as prohibited all unlawful games to be used upon Sundays only, as bear and bull-baitings, interludes and at all times in the meaner sort of people by law prohibited, bowling.

The royal court set the example for desecration of the Sabbath by holding balls, masquerades, and plays on Lord’s Day evenings. Following the royal example, “the rustics repaired from the house of worship to the ale-house or the village green to dance around the May-pole and to shoot at butts.”⁶

At the instigation of Archbishop Laud, Charles I, the son of James I, who followed his father on the English throne, re-issued the same declaration on 18 October 1633, with a few embellishments of his own. Charles required the declaration be published by ministers in all parish churches.

The declaration failed to have the desired effect. Though the declaration had the support of the established church, it struck many “with a kind of horror, to see themselves invited, by the authority of the king and church, to that which looked so like a contradiction to the command of God.”⁷

Those clergy who refused to read the declaration, and there were many, were suspended from

office, and some were even excommunicated. The treatment meted out to conscientious ministers over the issue of Sabbath observance served only to lodge the issue more deeply in the affections of the people. The desecration of the Sabbath Day by royal command was one of the issues that led to the ultimate demise of Charles I.

As a result of Charles’ despotism, duplicity, and treachery, civil war descended upon England in 1642; the king against the Parliament. Amidst this civil and ecclesiastical chaos, the Westminster Assembly was convened in 1643. The ultimate goal of the Assembly was to settle upon one form of church government, one Confession of Faith, one Catechism, and one Directory for the Worship of God, with the design that these documents would form the basis for uniformity within the churches of the three kingdoms.

It is evident that the Assembly’s detailed specification of what God has commanded or forbidden in the fourth commandment arose from the desire of the Assembly to combat the different abuses that had been sanctioned by James I and Charles I. Those abuses had become so prevalent among the populace that specific and detailed instruction on the proper observance of the Sabbath Day was necessary.

The criticisms of Schaff and Torrance are unjustified. The reality is that the Westminster Stan-

1. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, 1998), vol. 1, p. 786.

2. Thomas. F. Torrance, *The School of Faith* (New York: Harper, 1959), p. xvii.

3. Daniel Neal, *The History of the Puritans* (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, 1979), vol. 1, p. 367.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., p. 368.


6. Schaff, vol. 1, p. 780.

7. Neal, vol. 1, p. 561

dards' treatment of the fourth commandment provides a useful basis for meditation and self-examination. It opens up the meaning of the commandment for the benefit of the believer who seeks to live a godly life. One way of testing the veracity of those statements is to review the Assembly's statements regarding the Sabbath in both the

Confession and the Directory for the Public Worship of God, and ask, what in those statements would a believing child of God reject?

Undoubtedly, the Reformed believer needs to guard against the error of a legalistic observance of the Sabbath, which frequently entails a scrupulous observance of

man-made regulations, especially those of a negative persuasion. Like the Westminster divines, the Reformed believer on the Lord's Day will put aside the ordinary work of the other six days of the week and enter into the rest of that day—the spiritual and eternal rest of God, found in Jesus Christ and His salvation. 

Rev. Richard Smit

The Synod of Dordrecht and the Sabbath

The sessions of the Synod of Dordrecht on Friday, May 17, 1619 were filled with deliberations over issues that had been scheduled for treatment the previous day. On Thursday, May 16, Synod decided that it would treat on Friday many different issues, such as missions in the East Indies, infant baptism, marriage, the procedure for the receiving of ministers who came to the Reformed churches from Roman Catholicism, the theological schools, the persecuted brethren from other countries, the Formula of Subscription, which is still signed by our officebearers today, and the removal of the profanation of the Sabbath Day by members in some of the churches.

Among many of its decisions on May 17, 1619, the Synod adopted six statements or formulations to promote and instruct the members of the Reformed churches in faithful Sabbath observance on the Lord's Day.

The need for these decisions

arose from a decline in proper Sabbath observance and a threat to the basic principles underlying proper Sabbath observance. This occasion for the decisions of the Synod of Dordrecht regarding proper Sabbath observance was noted in the record of the Synod near the end of its 163rd session, which took place on Friday morning. The record reads:

When the formulation concerning the removal of the dishonouring of the Sabbath [was discussed], a question is aired concerning the necessity of observing the Sabbath, which was beginning to be agitated in the churches of Zeeland: the professors are requested to consider this question with the brethren of Zeeland in a friendly conference, and to see whether certain general rules can be prepared and set forth by common consent, within whose limits both parties involved with this question may delay [a final decision] until such time that the question can be given further consideration by the next National Synod.¹

This quotation indicates that there were two distinct issues that necessitated the decisions of the Synod regarding proper Sabbath

observance. The Synod saw the necessity to oppose the threat of the desecration and the dishonoring of the Lord's Day and the necessity to oppose those who were questioning whether the observance of the first day of the week as the day of rest was even required by God for the church in the New Testament. If Synod said nothing about these things, the principles of proper Sabbath observance for the New Testament church would have been undermined and the floodgates of worldliness would have been opened wide and engulfed the church in complete Sabbath desecration.

We receive a little glimpse into the seriousness of this problem in the Reformed churches from a letter that was adopted a year later, in 1620, by the particular synod of the churches in Zeeland, a southern province of the Netherlands. The particular Synod of Zeeland (1620), which was held in the city of Goes, adopted and addressed a letter to the Dutch government with the request that the government assist in the maintenance of proper Sabbath observance as much as it was able. From this letter to the authorities we learn gen-

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erally about the main problems afflicting the Reformed churches, especially in the province of Zeeland, which the general Synod of Dordrecht had addressed a year earlier.

The important part of the letter regarding the problems about Sabbath observance reads:

In the third article of the third chapter of our minutes, this Synod petitioned Your Honors that it may please them to pass laws against the desecration of the Day of Rest and of Roman feast days in this nation. In the first place the Fourth commandment is publicly disobeyed; (being nevertheless of the same value as all other commandments), against which transgression the Lord has threatened in His Holy Word to punish not only persons, but in general whole nations. This is the Day of the Lord which came in place of the Sabbath of the Jews, and was ordained by the apostles. Augustine writing about this, states that if the unhappy Jews kept their Sabbath with so great devotion, how much more must Christians keep this day to the Lord alone.

We know from Church History what Constantine the Great decreed, and how zealous he was to keep the Day of the Lord sacred in all his empire. The Church before him kept the Lord's Day well, but the Emperor ordained that pagans and sectarians should also keep from doing ordinary labours, and spend the day in public and solemn rest, so the religious services of the Christians would not be hindered by public works and other irregularities. The same Emperor eliminated pagan feast days, although in many instances their place was taken by Romish feast days. Synod judges that it would be edifying to take the remains of the latter away from Reformed nations. For many spent these days in reveling and frivolities, which at times lead to gross sins. It is also no secret that the godly among us, and foreigners visiting this nation from other Reformed countries are offended by the way the Sabbath is desecrated, and other filth and smut

remaining from popery is seen.

There are, besides the license given in these lands to desecrate the Sabbath, many, who work for employers, hindered from hearing, or reading God's Word to exercise godliness to which they are heartily inclined. The fourth commandment also clearly dictates the powers that be, to persuade (*aanporren*) civil servants to hallow the Sabbath. Moreover there are some who noticeably defy the Day of Rest in that they make an open show of their travels, hard work and other vain dealings on the Lord's Day. It is our hope that The Honorable Lords will seriously ponder this, and in their pious wisdom and zeal find ways and means, to truncate the above mentioned faults.²

The letter of the Synod of Zeeland (1620) illustrates that the problems about Sabbath observance were serious and widespread problems. This helps us to understand that for the peace and prosperity of the churches the Synod of Dordrecht was compelled a year earlier to defend the principles and practices of proper Sabbath observance.

After the regular recess for the midday meal, the Synod of Dordrecht reconvened on Friday afternoon, May 17, in its 164th session. After several hours of deliberations, the Synod adopted the following six formulations "concerning the removal of the dishonoring of the Sabbath."

Translated into English, the formulations are as follows:³

1. There is both a ceremonial and moral element in the fourth commandment of the divine law.
2. The ceremonial [element] is the rest of the seventh day after creation, and the strict observance of the same day was especially enjoined upon the Jewish people.
3. The moral [element] is that a certain and definite day be set aside for worship, and for the purpose that as much rest as is necessary for worship and for pious reflection upon it [be provided].

4. The Jewish Sabbath having been abolished, Christians must solemnly keep Sunday [in the original Dutch it is "the day of the Lord," RJS] holy.

5. This day has always been observed from the time of the apostles in the ancient Catholic Church.

6. This day must be so set aside for worship that on it people may rest from all ordinary labors (excluding those that love and present necessity demand) together with all such recreations that hinder worship.

Recognizing those decisions as part of our Reformed heritage, the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in 1881 re-adopted those six decisions of the Synod of Dordrecht in order to make clear that they were decisions that she embraced as her own and that each of her members must embrace in his confession and walk of life. Again in 1926, the CRC, when considering a concrete case about proper Sabbath observance, reiterated the decisions of 1881 and declared that these were her interpretation of the confessions regarding proper Sabbath observance.⁴

Although the decisions that the CRC took in 1926 are not binding upon our Protestant Reformed Churches, nevertheless the CRC's decision of 1926 shows that the 1881 decisions of our mother church regarding proper Sabbath

1. P. Biesterveld and H.H. Kuyper, *Ecclesiastical Manual Including the Decision of the Netherlands Synods and Other Significant Matters Relating to the Government of the Churches*, translated by Richard R. De Ridder (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1982), p. 216.

2. Abraham Vande Velde, *The Wonders of the Most High (a 125 Year History of the United Netherlands 1550-1675)*, (Edmonton: Still Waters Revival Books, 1997), pp. 106-108.

3. *Ecclesiastical Manual*, p. 218.

4. J.L. Schaver, *The Polity of the Churches* (Chicago: Church Polity Press, 1947), p. 34.

observance as taught by the Synod of Dordrecht are a part of the Reformed heritage of our own Protestant Reformed Churches. We are obliged to embrace the six Sabbath observance formulations of our forefathers in 1619 and 1881 as true to the Word of God and our confessions.


What do these decisions demand of us, who seek to walk in the good traditions of our Reformed forefathers? First, it demands of us that we fight earnestly the current spiritual pressures against proper Sabbath observance. Some of the problems against which the Synod of Dordrecht and the Synod of Zeeland wrote are the same problems that churches face today. Are we, then, guarding dili-

gently proper Sabbath observance and faithful attendance of the means of grace on the Lord's Day from the potential intrusions and the hindrances of vacation, entertainment, leisure, and even business pursuits? Are we using the entire day as much as we are able "for worship and for pious reflection upon it..."? In faithfulness to the Word of God and in harmony with the instruction of our Reformed forefathers, we must.

Second, the decisions of the Synod of Dordrecht demand of us that we defend the principle that the first day of the week must be set aside as the day of rest for the New Testament church, and oppose the false idea that observance of the Sabbath on the first day of the week is a man-made custom or

simply a matter of Christian liberty.

Finally, this heritage demands that we promote by instruction and example in our homes the proper honor for the Lord's Day as the day for worship in God's house and for meditation upon the heavenly and spiritual things of the kingdom of Christ. That is important because we need the Lord's Day for the maintenance of our spiritual health and growth in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

May God keep us faithful to the old paths in which our Reformed forefathers have led the way, in order that we may be preserved in faithfulness to our Lord on the day to be set aside for worship to our covenant God. 

Rev. Doug Kuiper

The Sabbath and the Covenant

Foundational to a proper understanding of the Sabbath is a right view of God's covenant. God made the Sabbath for man (Mark 2:27)—specifically, for His covenant people. He gave Israel the Sabbath as a sign of His covenant (Ex. 31:13). The rest that we enjoy on the Sabbath is covenant rest.

It follows that a wrong view of the covenant will negatively affect our view of the Sabbath. If God's covenant with Old Testament Israel is essentially different than His relationship to His New Testament church, does the fourth commandment apply to Christians at all? Or, if God's covenant with us is conditioned on our faith and/or obedience, can I truly enjoy the *rest* that

God provides, of which the Sabbath speaks?

God's covenant is the bond of fellowship that He sovereignly, graciously, and unconditionally establishes and maintains in Jesus Christ with elect sinners (Gen. 17:7; Ps. 89:19-37; Jer. 31:31-34). It is an everlasting covenant (Gen. 17:7, 19; II Sam. 23:5; Is. 55:3; Heb. 13:20). Our part in the covenant is not to help God establish or maintain it, but to live as those who are in it, by obeying God's law out of gratitude (Gen. 17:1-2; Ex. 19:4-6; 20:1-17).

The child of God who appreciates the wonder of God in establishing and maintaining this covenant relationship, and who desires to enjoy covenant fellowship with God, will therefore *want* to observe the weekly Sabbath, will strive properly to keep it, and will long to enjoy the everlasting Sabbath in heaven.

The True Nature of the Sabbath—Covenant Rest

The rest that God gives His people on the Sabbath Day is the rest of the covenant.

That the Sabbath is a day of rest is clear from three considerations. First, the word "sabbath" means "rest." Second, God called Israel's weekly Sabbath "the sabbath of rest" (Ex. 31:15, 35:2; Lev. 23:3; see also Ex. 16:23). Third, God's law prescribes that on the Sabbath Day we rest from our ordinary daily labor (Ex. 20:10; Deut. 5:14).

Although God's law requires us to cease from our ordinary labors, the true nature of the Sabbath rest is not physical, to be enjoyed in the body, but spiritual, to be enjoyed in the soul.

He who thinks of Sunday as merely a day of physical recreation, or a day on which to catch up on sleep, does not understand the true

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nature of the Sabbath rest. He who thinks that going to church twice is in itself the keeping of the Sabbath, and so ignores the opportunity that the Sabbath provides to grow in grace by private study and devotion, and to manifest one's love to fellow saints, does not enjoy the true Sabbath rest deeply enough.

For the true nature of the Sabbath rest is the enjoyment of salvation from sin!

The consciousness of sin destroys all possibility of rest. God judges sin by burdening man with the guilt of sin, withholding inner peace and true happiness, and causing man to experience that he has been separated from God, the source of true life and joy.

Some bear this just judgment of God throughout their entire earthly life, and to eternity. But to His people God gives deliverance in and by Jesus Christ, in the form of rest. The rest that the Messiah gives is glorious (Is. 11:10). Jesus identifies this rest as being rest for our souls—rest from the heavy toil and burden of sin (Matt. 11:28-29). God gives this rest by assuring His people that He does not declare us guilty of sin, but has imputed to us Christ's righteousness on the basis of His atoning death. Therefore we have peace with God (Rom. 5:1) and the enjoyment of His favor and covenant fellowship.



Already in the Old Testament, God showed that salvation from sin and enjoyment of covenant fellowship with Him is true rest.

Israel enjoyed this rest typically by dwelling in Canaan, which Moses called "the rest and...the inheritance which the LORD your God giveth you" (Deut. 12:9). God also indicated that Canaan would be a place of rest, by swearing that those who manifested their unbelief when they heard the evil report of the ten spies should not enter into His rest (Ps. 95:11). Canaan's rest stood in direct con-

trast to Egypt's bondage. Egypt's bondage depicted our bondage to sin; Canaan's rest typified our fellowship with God in Jesus Christ.

Israel enjoyed this rest in Canaan only in the way of obedience to God, which obedience manifests covenant fellowship with God. Repeatedly Israel found that, though she lived in the place of promised rest, God judged her sins by sending the nations against her to bring her into bondage. Only in the way of repentance, and through the work of the judges as pictures of Christ, did she again have rest (Josh. 3:11; 3:30; 5:31). To Israel under David and Solomon God gave rest, for these kings directed Israel in the fear of God (II Sam. 7:1; I Kings 5:4). Israel's rest from earthly enemies and her freedom to serve Jehovah according to His commands were pictures of our being delivered from Satan's power, into the service of God again. Her rest was not that of inactivity, but of worshipping God in His tabernacle and living in holy fellowship with Him.

Even before the fall, Adam enjoyed true covenant rest in the form of fellowship with God, and in the way of obedience to God's law. Genesis 2:15 says: "And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it." The Hebrew word here translated "put" means literally "caused to rest": God caused Adam to rest in Eden. Commenting on this verse, Keil and Delitzsch write that Adam "was placed there to lead a life of repose, not indeed in inactivity, but in fulfilment of the course assigned him, which was very different from the trouble and restlessness of the weary toil into which he was plunged by sin."* Adam's rest was not that of idleness, of lying down on the ground and watching the clouds go by, for Adam was to dress and keep the garden. And it was not the rest of deliverance from enemies, and from sin's bondage, for he had not yet sinned. It

was, however, true covenant rest—that of enjoying covenant fellowship with God in the way of serving God perfectly.

Adam's rest in Eden, and Israel's rest in the earthly Canaan, point us to the rest that awaits us in heaven. The inspired writer to the Hebrews speaks of a rest of which Canaan was a picture, and which still remains to the people of God (4:1-11). This rest is clearly spiritual, for it is appropriated by faith in the word of the gospel (4:2-3). It will be the rest that the people of God enjoy, of ceasing from sin, of being bothered no longer by Satan, and of being devoted to God forever, serving Him in love and obedience.

This is the nature of the Sabbath rest!



No Reformed believer may think otherwise. Not only *must* each one confess that the Sabbath rest consists of enjoying the spiritual blessings of God's covenant, but each one *does* confess this. For in the Heidelberg Catechism's explanation of the fourth commandment, the believer confesses the necessity of diligently attending church. Then he says: "Secondly, that all the days of my life I cease from my evil works, and yield myself to the Lord, to work by His Holy Spirit in me; and thus begin in this life the eternal Sabbath" (A. 103). The Westminster Confession of Faith makes essentially the same point: "This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men ... are taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of his worship..." (Ch. 21, Art. 8). Underscoring that the Sabbath rest is not one of inactivity, the Westminster Larger Catechism (A. 119) and Shorter Catechism (A. 61) identify "the profaning of the day

* C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), vol. 1, p. 84.

by idleness" as a sin forbidden by this commandment. A cursory glance at the fourth commandment would not lead to this conclusion—after all, the commandment prohibits us to work! But the reason for the prohibition of earthly labor is that we might have time to enjoy spiritual rest.

What rest can I enjoy, if God's covenant is conditioned on any activity of mine? If the enjoyment of this rest depends even in part on me, I cannot enjoy it in this life, for until I die I must be fulfilling the conditions. Even then, I cannot confidently expect to enjoy it in the next, for the possibility exists that I fall short of fulfilling my part. Holding to a conditional covenant, one cannot properly view the Sabbath as an opportunity to begin to enter into this rest already now, and to enjoy a picture of the complete rest that awaits. Rather, the Sabbath must be a weekly reminder that I have not yet entered that rest, and must work to do so. Then, instead of a day of rest and joy, a day to praise Jehovah for saving us, the weekly Sabbath becomes the very opposite—a day of toil, a day to lament our inability to save ourselves, or a day in praise of man's ability to contribute to his salvation. Then we would expect the fourth commandment to have read something like this: "Be sure to work twice as hard on the Sabbath as you do on any other day; for even though God delivered you from Egypt, He will not bring you into Canaan; you must find the way there yourself."

Totally depraved man can never fulfill such conditions. But because God's grace is given irresistibly and completely, we are not required to do so. The Sabbath is a day to enjoy the salvation God gives.

The Instituted Sabbath—Covenant Sign

Because the true Sabbath rest is the covenant rest, God instituted the Sabbaths in the Old Testament

as signs of His covenant: "Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you.... Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant" (Ex. 31:13, 16; cf. also Ezek. 20:12, 20). God promises blessing to those eunuchs who "keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant" (Is. 56:4).

In these texts the plural, "sabbaths," is used. Partly this is because there were other sabbaths than the weekly Sabbath—the annual day of atonement and other feast days were called sabbaths. The plural also teaches us that every week, God appoints one day as a Sabbath; each weekly Sabbath is another picture of God's covenant.

The sabbaths could serve as signs of God's covenant, because the reality of the Sabbath—rest—is a covenant reality. In other words, to observe the Sabbath-rest properly was to enjoy covenant fellowship with God.

To keep the sabbaths, then, was not an option for Israel. As God's covenant people, she *must* enter into covenant fellowship with Him. Those who failed to do so were to be punished, for to profane the Sabbath was to profane God's covenant. By contrast, to sanctify the Sabbath was to "take hold of" God's covenant (Is. 56:6), that is, to uphold the covenant, to honor it, and to manifest it in one's life.

Because the Sabbath was a sign of the covenant, Jesus properly honored the Sabbath by doing the works of God on that day. In addition to teaching on the Sabbath, He did many miracles on that day. His miracles pointed to the true rest and salvation that He came to give.

Is the weekly Sabbath still, in the new dispensation, a sign of God's covenant?

Nowhere do the New Testament Scriptures indicate that this is so. Nor do they need to. Just as explicit commands to baptize infants of believing parents are unnecessary in the New Testament, because in the Old Testament God already made clear that He brings such into His covenant, so need we not find a reminder in the New Testament that the weekly Sabbath is a sign of God's covenant. God made this clear in the Old Testament, and nothing has changed!

True, the day on which we commemorate the Sabbath *has* changed. But God's covenant has not changed; it is everlasting! And the requirement to observe the Sabbath has not changed—it is perpetual! Nor has the true nature of the Sabbath changed—it is to be a day of spiritual rest! Therefore, the weekly Sabbath is still a sign of God's covenant.

It functions as a sign, as God's people gather in His house, to enjoy fellowship with Him—as we hear proclaimed the gospel of salvation from sin, completely earned and fully bestowed by Jesus Christ, and as we give ourselves over with genuine heart to serve this God.

A sign, that is, of a covenant salvation that God has fully founded in Christ's death, and that God completely realizes through the exalted Christ and by His Spirit. A sign, not of what we do in cooperation with God, but of what God has accomplished for us, apart from us! This is what makes the sign so marvelous.

The Everlasting Sabbath—Consummation of the Covenant

A time is coming when the institution of the weekly Sabbath, and all pictures of God's covenant, will be abolished. When the full reality comes, the signs will be rendered obsolete.

The voice that John hears out of heaven uses neither the word "Sabbath" nor the word "covenant," but expresses the reality of both in speaking of the fellowship

of God with His church in the new creation: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Rev. 21:3). That is the consummation of the covenant—the covenant fellowship of God and His people, enjoyed to the highest degree, forever!

In heaven will be no weekly Sabbath; it will be always Sabbath. Satan will have been destroyed in hell; those who defile and work abomination shall not enter into it; there shall be no more curse; thus our deliverance from the bondage

of sin and death will be perfected. There we shall live with God forever; we shall eat of the tree of life, having right to it; and we shall serve Him and reign with Christ to eternity.

No wonder, then, that the angel says of those who worship the beast and are consigned to hell, "they have no rest day nor night" (Rev. 14:11). By contrast, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them" (Rev. 14:13).

Rest from our labors—from the labor of sin! Thus entering into

perfect fellowship with God, and enjoying the fullness of His covenant blessings! The rest of the everlasting Sabbath!

Those for whom this rest is prepared live now as though they long for it. God notes this of those who die in the Lord—their works follow after them. Certainly, the works of faith and obedience that He notes are the fruit of His grace in us. But they are *inevitable* fruit. And among those works will be this—that His children have taken hold of His covenant, and kept the Sabbath in this life, in the hope of enjoying the everlasting Sabbath!



Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Sunday Labor

It is an age-old question. Is the fourth commandment still in effect for the New Testament church? "Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work..." (Ex. 20:8-10). Most of the church world no longer concerns itself with this commandment.

Most officebearers, as well as lay members, cannot even say which commandment it is, much less recite it.

The excuses for ignoring this commandment are numerous.

The antinomian denies that the law of the ten commandments has authority anymore in the life of the child of God. The law is an Old Testament set of rules that no longer applies to the church today. We are under grace and need not even take into consideration the law of the ten commandments. The

commandments are, at best, simply a divine set of guidelines that people should follow as well as they possibly can.

There are others who take the law more seriously, yet who are not at all convicted of it in their hearts and lives. How often one hears the excuse: "I don't really want to work on Sunday, but what can I do? My boss says I have to. There is no getting out of it." Likewise, the churches where they are members will preach the seriousness of the fourth commandment, but will not discipline its members when they violate it. This reveals that there is no true conviction of heart that this command is God's command and must be obeyed no matter what the cost.

Sanctification

Though every man and woman is under obligation to keep this commandment of God, we realize that only those who are sanctified in the blood of Christ are able to keep it. At the cross Christ destroyed the power and dominion of sin and Satan (Rom. 6:6).

Through His resurrection Christ also earned for us a new life (Rom. 6:10, 11). When Christ sends forth His Spirit to work salvation in our hearts, therefore, He works in us the power to fight against sin and to live a new and godly life. This is the work of sanctification. Christ sets us free from the bondage of sin, that we should no longer serve sin. We have been freed to walk according to God's law. Christ has made us holy: dedicated and consecrated to Him and His service. Grace, then, does not nullify the law but, on the contrary, gives to the child of God the ability and desire to keep the law. "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea we establish the law" (Rom. 3:31).

Being holy, therefore, the believer also understands God's command to keep Sunday holy (sanctified) unto the Lord. He must dedicate and consecrate this day to the Lord. On that day he must exercise himself in the things of God's kingdom. This requires ceasing from one's earthly labors and filling the day with spiritual activities.

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Sanctifying Sunday

The child of God who walks in faith knows of his need for this special day of the week. Jesus teaches us in Mark 2:27 that, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." God has given to us the fourth commandment in order that we might set aside one day of the week to devote to the things of the kingdom. We *need* that day! We need it to strengthen and encourage us in our faith. Faith as an activity in the life of the child of God fluctuates. Our knowledge of and trust in God can be strong, but it can also wane. When our faith is weak, then we also are apt to fall into temptation and sin. We need constantly to exercise ourselves in God's Word and prayer in order that we will remain vibrant in faith. For example, in order to remain physically healthy we need to exercise. When we lie on our sick bed for any length of time, our muscles become weak and our bodies become flabby. Surely, with the health craze of today we can understand the need to exercise our bodies to remain strong.

Would that people understood that this is even more true of our spiritual health! For our faith to remain strong, God has given you and me one day a week dedicated to exercising ourselves in the things of the kingdom of heaven. We must empty that day of all work and all pursuits of earthly pleasure in order to devote that day to the service of God. We must then fill that day with spiritual activities: the reading and study of God's Word, prayer, and, most importantly, the frequenting of God's house (Heb. 10:25). Neither is this merely good advice that the Scriptures give us. It is God's command! We *may not* desecrate the Lord's Day. It is required of us that we devote this day to worship. Our spiritual lives depend upon it! The spiritual decline of an individual and ultimately of a church begins when the Lord's Day is used

(and allowed by the church to be used) for our own pleasure and labor (Neh. 13:15-19; Is. 58:13, 14). To keep the Lord's Day holy means ceasing from earthly labor and pleasure and consecrating this day to exercise in the things of the kingdom of heaven. Again, a person who is holy and sanctified understands what it is to keep Sunday holy and sanctified.

Sunday labor

May I work on Sunday? No. That is the law. "Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work." We may not work on the Lord's Day. Neither may we use this day for our own private, earthly pleasure. When individuals walk contrary to this commandment, the church institute is called to discipline them. The Lord's Day must be strictly observed. A lax member of the church may not be given any occasion to think that when he/she desecrates the Sabbath Day he has a legitimate excuse. There is none. There are far too many so-called Christians who would rather earn money, if they can find an excuse, than give themselves over to the service of God on Sunday.

Despite the clarity of Scripture on the question of proper Sabbath observance, there is always a question that arises in connection with Sunday labor. Are *certain types* of labor allowed on the Lord's Day? It is true that earthly labor on Sunday is not itself sinful, as are, e.g., drunkenness and adultery. It is not that if I perform any kind of earthly labor on the Lord's Day I am automatically desecrating that day. To say that would bring the child of God under the bondage of the law again. It would place him in the camp of the Pharisees who, for example, insisted that keeping the Sabbath properly consisted, in part, in how far a person might travel on the Sabbath Day (Sabbath Day's journey—about 1,200 yards). If a

person took one step beyond that, he was desecrating the Sabbath. The church may not pass all kinds of little rules to govern that day. To pass a rule, for example, that it is a sin for a person to ride a bicycle on Sunday precludes a person's motive for riding that bike. What if he needed to do so as a necessary means of transportation to carry him to church?

Are not there many tasks that we perform on Sunday that are of an earthly nature? We drive our cars to and from church. During the winter, oftentimes the church sidewalk needs shoveling before the people arrive. The wife prepares the Sunday-afternoon meal. Then there is also the cleanup afterwards. People get sick on Sunday and require, at times, a doctor. Fires occur. Houses are robbed on Sunday, requiring the labor of civil servants. The list can go on. There are many mundane earthly chores that we find as a necessity on Sunday. The church must be careful not to fall into a legalistic approach to proper observance of the Lord's Day. "No reformed person, therefore, ever took the stand that all labor on Sunday is as such to be condemned as sin" (H. Hoeksema—*Standard Bearer*, vol. 18, p. 198).

Jesus Himself reveals this to us in His many debates with the Pharisees over proper observance of the Lord's Day. There are works of *necessity* to be performed on Sunday. It was on the Sabbath Day that Jesus and His disciples entered a field and picked and shucked corn to eat (Luke 6:1-5). In Luke 14:5 Jesus asks the legalistic Pharisees, "Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day?"

Jesus also emphasized that works of *mercy* may be performed on the Lord's Day. This is clear from the many miracles that Jesus performed on the Sabbath Day. Before healing a man with a withered hand Jesus asked the Pharisees this question: "Is it lawful to

do good on the sabbath days or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?" (Mark 3:4). Christ, who is the Lord of the Sabbath, therefore, teaches us that there are certain earthly labors that can be done on Sunday.


This has been the position of Reformed churches too. The Synod of Dordt, 1618-'19, adopted several points regarding proper Sunday observance. The last of these points reads as follows: "The day must be so consecrated unto the service of God that upon it men rest from all servile labors, except those required by charity and present necessities, and likewise from all such recreations as prevent the service of God" (Post-Acta, 164th Session, Synod 1618-'19). In the *Standard Bearer* article of Rev. H. Hoeksema we quoted earlier, he writes: "That even so there are things that cannot be put to a stop on Sunday. There are 'necessary things,' as well as works of mercy that must be performed on Sunday just as well as during the week" (p. 198). Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches, in its September 1983 meeting, confirmed this position as well when confronted with an appeal regarding police labor on Sunday.

There are a couple of matters that need emphasizing at this

point, however. First, it takes a mature Christian to understand the matter of Sunday labor. One who walks in faith is not too easily persuaded to sacrifice his Sunday for work. He is jealous of that day. He knows his need for that day. He is not one who readily gives up the spiritual exercise of that day because he knows the consequences for his spiritual life. Indeed, there are lax "Christians" who would use the principle that works of necessity and mercy are permissible on Sunday as an excuse to allow themselves to work almost any job. "After all," he would reason, "if my boss requires me to work on Sunday, then I guess my job is a work of necessity." Such a Christian is weak at best. He certainly is not living as one who is of a sanctified heart. The command of God is sure: "...in it thou shalt not do any work." No one ought to take that command lightly. The believer seeks to obey it in all earnestness.

The second matter that needs emphasizing is an important aspect of proper Sunday observance. We are called on that day to frequent the house of God. We may not neglect the "assembling of ourselves together" (Heb. 10:25). The preaching of the gospel is a necessary

means of grace in the life of the child of God. He needs to sit under the preaching because God has chosen it as the power unto salvation (I Cor. 1:18 ff.). Even works of necessity and mercy ought never stand in the way of the consistent use of the means of grace. When these works begin to interfere on a regular basis with my sitting under the preaching of the Word, then there is a serious problem and I ought to reevaluate my job. It is striking that the decision of Classis West in September of 1983 reads in part, "because police work is a work of necessity it is a work in which the child of God is permitted to be engaged *if this work does not occasion the neglect of the means of grace on the Sabbath Day* (emphasis mine—W.B.)." The believer must understand his need to sit under the preaching of the Word. No manner of work ought to stand in the way of this important means of grace.

Sunday is a day of rest. It was given to us by God for that reason. Christ has established the command to keep this day holy by making us holy unto the Lord. In a day when the observance of the Lord's Day wanes, let us remember the Lord's Day and make it holy unto the Lord. 

All Around Us

Rev. Rodney Kleyn

What Happened to the Sabbath?

What has happened and what is happening to the Christian Sabbath in society and the church-world all around us? Where has the Sabbath gone?

I hardly need to tell you, if my purpose is to inform you. You can see it with your own eyes.

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But we do need to talk about it. Not because you are unaware, but because you, dear Reformed reader, are being desensitized by what is going on around you.

Historically

Historically, different attempts have been made at eradicating the Sabbath. In 1792 the French Revolutionary Convention enacted a decimal calendar that called for a

10-day week. It was abandoned after Napoleon came to power. In the last century the U.S.S.R. tried twice to alter the week, decreeing its length as five days in 1929 and six days in 1932. By 1940 the U.S.S.R. had restored the seven-day week. Probably this approach failed because it was too direct, too obvious. And so the Devil, in our society, has used a different approach.

Industrialization

Decades ago, probably as long as a century ago, the Sabbath began to lose its place on the weekly calendar. With the rise of industrialization, not only in the USA but all over the world, great factories were built that ran most efficiently when they operated seven days a week. Mostly, before the second world war, they were closed on Sundays, but the urgency of production during the war changed this. People began to work on Sundays.

For most, however, Sunday still was a different day to the other days of the week. Large segments of the population still went to church with their families, and most businesses were closed on Sundays. Even where some did not recognize this day as the “Lord’s Day,” still it was treated differently and there was a respect for the religious convictions of the Christian who would attend church, put aside earthly employments, and spend the day dressed in Sunday attire, while keeping himself from sports and recreation.

Sports and Recreation

But then came pro-sports, an increase in industrialization, an increase in national and personal wealth, a decrease in morality in other areas of life, and a loss of respect for the law of God. Stores and restaurants began to open on Sundays. People began to travel on Sundays to large sporting events. People needed to spend their hard-earned money on recreation. Theaters began to open on Sundays. Sunday labor increased. And if there had before been any residual respect in the world of unbelief for Sunday as a “holy day,” it disappeared. Civil Sabbath laws were repealed. People still went to church, but only if it was convenient, and the zealous and strict observer of the Sabbath who would not work or play, who would not turn on his radio or TV, who would not vacation over Sunday, and who went twice to church with his fam-

ily, became not only the exception, but the laughing-stock of society.

And that brought us into the 80’s and 90’s.

Change in the Church

These things put pressure on church members, pressures to work, pressures to turn on the media, pressures to visit sporting events, pressures to shop, pressures to participate in sport and recreation themselves, pressures to travel and vacation, etc. In turn, church members put pressure on church leaders, pressures to go easy on Sabbath desecration, to expand the permissible field of “necessary Sabbath labor,” to allow for short stints away from a church for the sake of vacation/refreshment, to take their own families on such trips. In turn, church leaders put pressure on church theologians to reconsider the biblical teaching on the Sabbath, to disconnect the Sabbath from Sunday and say the day you pick really doesn’t matter, to emphasize church-attendance at the expense of ‘whole-day’ Sabbath observance, to open churches and worship to contemporary trends and entertainment in order to keep the crowds, and to de-emphasize Sabbath teaching and Sabbath observance. The result? The whole biblical Sabbath theology and teaching was largely pushed aside. Instead of Sunday being a day “holy to the Lord,” it became a day “holy to man,” a day for personal pleasure and delight, not in anything other-worldly and spiritual, but in earth-bound pleasures. The fourth commandment was viewed, not as a commandment of hope and blessing, a commandment that gives us privilege in worship, and hope of the coming great rest of heaven, but as a commandment that was too strict, too binding, too restrictive, too impossible, and obviously one that belonged only to the Old Testament economy.

This is the scenario “all around us” today.

Salvaging Sunday

And now there’s another problem—empty churches—so an attempt has to be made to fill them again, at least in the mornings. Concessions are made to contemporary worship, to the clamor for entertainment, to the worship styles that are apparently more attractive to the young, etc. “What can we do to get people through the church door? And what can we do to get them to pledge money to the church?” These are the questions that are asked. And so they do what they can. And others chip in to help—discounts on golf if you have a church bulletin, etc.

Perhaps what we have today is best illustrated by the annual “Super-bowl Sunday” in the USA. Super-bowl brings it all together, the unbelieving world’s selfish use of the Sabbath and the church’s excuse for following suit. In an article from the *Journal Gazette* of Fort Wayne, IN (Fortwayne.com, February 1, 2007) we see this connection.

Football’s faithful will file into house parties, bars and, of course, Dolphin Stadium on Super Bowl Sunday to observe their holiest of holy days. But they’ll also turn out in force at churches across the country, which are tapping the popularity of sports in hopes of saving souls.

Organizers of church-sponsored Super Bowl gatherings see the events as a departure from the formality of organized religion—the type of events that could make someone who doesn’t typically attend services feel more at home.

“It’s a way of reaching out into our community in a very informal, low-key way where we show people we’re regular Joes like they are without the pressure of church,” said Pastor Luis Acosta of Pines Baptist Church, a Southern Baptist congregation north of Miami in Pembroke Pines.

Pines Baptist has been holding Super Bowl events for a few years and expects about 300 people, mostly men, at its flag football game and watch party this

year. The church drew about 250 people to a block party Jan. 13 which featured NFL-themed games, former Dolphins players signing autographs and giveaways including a plasma television.

Acosta said the church doesn't take a heavy-handed approach to nonbelievers who join in such events. There won't be so much as a prayer at the Super Bowl Sunday event. If a guest enjoys himself, a member might invite him to a church social group meeting, then maybe a Bible study, then perhaps an actual service.

So there has been change.

Excuses

Excuses are made, not anymore by the secular press, but among theologians and by churches. The Christian Sabbath made it big in the headlines just over a year ago when it fell on December 25, Christmas Day, 2005. On that Sunday, around the country, it was "Sorry, Church Cancelled for Christmas." The excuse was "It's about being family friendly and life-style friendly for people who are just very, very busy." At least, that's what Willow Creek spokeswoman Cally Parkinson said in an interview with the *Herald-Leader*.

In reality, these churches and these people see no special value in Sunday, and have no respect anymore for the Word or Law of God.

This is plain enough from what they say. When, several years ago, the *Grand Rapids Press* interviewed a Calvin Seminary professor, Henry DeMoor, on the subject of working on the Sabbath, this was his response (December 9, 2002):

...Henry DeMoor said the church has long recognized Sunday as a day of worship free from "servile works" except those involving charity and necessity.

"But in view of current society, it's hard for me to embrace that principle," he said. "If every Christian insisted we're not going to work on Sunday, I suspect there wouldn't be enough people to do the work.

"Ethically, a better position might be to tell church elders they work one Sunday a month. If they say they are conscious of the Fourth Commandment and honor it as much as they can, I'm sure elders would be satisfied," DeMoor said.

So, this is where we're at. Where has the Sabbath gone? Well, to busyness, and work, and enter-

tainment, and family, and self, and so on. Or, perhaps, the devil has stolen it, and with it is attempting to steal, to lure, whomever he can into this immoral, godless, vacuum of the modern Sunday.

How About You?


But, how about you, Reformed reader? It is May 2007. That means that, at least here in my adopted northern hemisphere, summer is just around the corner. The beaches, the sporting venues, the Nascar channel, the online scorecards, the vacation spots, the shopping malls, the gas stations, the restaurants, the workplace will all be luring you, on the Sabbath, to enjoy. As with Eve, and the forbidden fruit, there's an attraction, a temptation. Are you being desensitized? Are you changing, if not in position, in practice and in attitude?

Careful!

Remember!

In all the change, even perhaps in your attitudes, one thing hasn't changed and won't change, and that is God's Word.

Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy!

I'm sure you can read about that elsewhere in this edition of the *Standard Bearer*. 

Shari Bosveld

A Mother Looks at Sabbath Observance

Work. Busyness. Stress. These three words often define our life in this world. Whether we are parents or children, married or single, our lives are busy and stressful. Often we complain that there are not

enough hours in the day to accomplish all that we must do. As the hours pass quickly, so do the days of the week, and before long it is Sunday once again. What a temptation it can be to use Sunday as a convenient day to catch up on all of those things that we missed during the week. Or to use Sunday as a day to regroup, simply to relax and rest—something that our bodies crave after the stress and work

of the week. Are we honoring God if we use the Sabbath in this way? How must we, as children of God, use the Sabbath profitably?

There are definite guidelines set forth in Scripture as to how the Sabbath must be used by God's people. When the Lord gave the Ten Commandments to Moses in order that He might teach the Israelites how to live as befitting children of God, He gave clear instruc-

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tion as to how the Sabbath must be kept. In Deuteronomy 5:12-15 we read this: "Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee. Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou." Clearly, we are commanded here to set aside our daily work and to keep the Sabbath as a holy day—a day sanctified unto the Lord. It must be a day in which we cease from all the regular activity of the week—a day in which we devote ourselves to things of a spiritual nature. And finally, a day in which we seek the eternal rest of which the earthly Sabbath is a picture.

It is obvious that, left to our own sinful devices, we would have no hope of being able to keep the fourth commandment. It is only as regenerated, saved children of God that we have the desire to keep the Sabbath holy. This desire arises out of our deep love for God and for His Word.

Having the command and the desire, how then must we put the Sabbath to profitable use? There are several key things to keep in mind as we seek to keep the Sabbath holy. First of all, we must look at how we keep the previous six days of the week. If we use this time wisely, it will be all the easier to use our Sunday profitably. God, in His wisdom, gave us six days of the week in which we must do all of our work. It is during this time that we must also prepare for Sunday. Often, this work or preparation is of a practical nature. Consider the following examples: a father must see to it that he has the necessary money for the church collections, that the car has enough

gas for the drive to church, that his children have completed their schoolwork and are not tempted to finish it on Sunday, and that he and his family are well rested and fit to go to the Lord's house the next day.

The responsibility for a mother to be prepared for the Sabbath is equally great. Sundays are busy days. Children still need to be cared for and dressed, meals must be made and the family fed, dishes must be cleaned and the house tidied at the end of the day. If work is not done and preparations are not made earlier in the week, Sunday soon becomes a day of work, a day no different than Tuesday or Friday...rather than a day of rest.

There are many ways in which a mother can prepare for Sunday during the week and especially on Saturday: bathe the children and lay out their clothing for the next day, make certain that the ironing is finished well before Sunday morning, prepare as much of the Sunday meals as possible on Saturday—if not prepare, then certainly have them carefully planned. By seeing to it that these things are done prior to Sunday, a mother reduces the stress and busyness of her day.

Adults are not the only ones with a calling to be prepared for the Lord's Day; our children also share in this responsibility. As parents, we must help them in this calling. One way in which we can do this is to see to it that they are well rested for Sunday. This means making sure that our little children are in bed early on Saturday night and that our older children are home at a reasonable time, so that they too are able to unwind and prepare their minds for Sunday worship. Along these lines, there is an excellent article in volume 42 of the *Standard Bearer* by Rev. J. Heys entitled "Holiday or Holy Day?" In this article Rev. Heys makes the point that even though Saturday is a part of the work week, if its activities carry over into

Sunday and make it difficult for us to concentrate and to stay alert during the sermon, then we have already desecrated the Sabbath.

In addition to being well rested, our children must also be well prepared for any activities in which they engage on Sunday. If our young children have Sunday School on Sunday, it is our job to be certain that each child knows his lesson and assigned verse. A good way to do this is to set a goal to read the Sunday School paper during the week, perhaps at lunch time, when it can be given the time and attention that it deserves. That way we insure that it is not left for Saturday evening, as can so easily happen in our busy families.

Like our little children, our teenagers also need our guidance in using the Lord's Day profitably. We must not think that because they are young adults they no longer need our close supervision. Most of our teenagers attend Young People's Society on Sunday. In order to participate actively, they must be prepared. As parents, we need to be aware of what our child is studying. When we are aware, we can encourage. By encouraging them to read the assigned Bible passage and by suggesting they read another resource, such as *Matthew Henry's Commentary*, we help them to be better prepared for their Bible study.

Having established that there are practical ways in which we can prepare ourselves and our families for the Lord's Day, we must also be conscious of our spiritual preparation. Being prepared spiritually is even more important than physical preparation. As has been said earlier, in order to be spiritually fit and ready for worship, we must be well rested. We must also have set aside all of our cares and worries of the week so that we can fill our hearts and minds with praise and thanksgiving to God. What a difficult task this is! How far short we often fall in keeping the Sabbath day holy.

In addition to being prepared for the Sabbath, we must also be orderly in our use of the Lord's Day. Our God is a God of order. We see the evidence of that order all around us in His creation. We, as His creatures, must strive to be orderly in all that we do, especially in our use of the Sabbath. One of the blessings of our Reformed heritage is a Sabbath Day that begins and ends with a worship service. These worship services lend order to our Sunday, but there is still a large amount of time that is not scheduled. What a temptation it is to view the time in between and after the church service as our own time—a time in which we are free to relax, spend time with our family, or seek our own pleasures and interest. In the above-mentioned *Standard Bearer* article, Rev. Heys speaks of how our conduct on Sunday reveals the measure of our love for God. He points out that if we do indeed love our Lord, then Sunday will not be nearly long enough to fill with deeds of praise and service to Him. When our goal is to praise and glorify God through the use of the Sabbath, then we will use it profitably.

With the goal of glorifying God firmly in our mind, we can structure and plan for the wise use of our Sunday. It is simply a fact that, even with our careful preparation during the preceding week, there is still work that cannot be done except on Sunday. Readyng a family for church is work. Organizing and serving lunch is work. Seeing to it that the little children do indeed sleep at naptime is work. Having a set routine is a great help in these areas of the day.

Start your routine early in the day. Rising at the same time each Sunday and gathering at the table for devotions is an excellent way

to prepare ourselves mentally for entering the Lord's house and hearing His Word. This also serves as a good time to remind our children, not only as to how they must *behave* in church, but also as to their responsibility to *listen* carefully to the minister.

Prepare simple meals. Not every Sunday dinner need be the traditional Dutch dinner of meat and potatoes. By eating simple meals we save time in preparation and also in cleaning up after the meal.

Keep naptime short. There is nothing wrong with making a nap a part of our Sunday routine. Adults as well as children need to be well rested so that they can be alert and ready to worship our God. It is wise, however, to set definite limits for naptime. By going down at a specific time and getting up a short time later, we can keep our day structured and put it to better use.

Plan for the time between church services. Again, care must be taken that we do not use this time for those things that we should have done earlier in the week, such as schoolwork, reading the newspaper, or correspond-

ing with friends via e-mail. Rather, we must occupy ourselves with activities that praise and glorify God. Some may use this time as an occasion to sing together as a family. Others may find

time to visit members of the church who may be shut-ins or elderly.

An excellent use of this time is reading—not the books that we would read during the week, but books that we have specially chosen for Sunday reading. Sound, biblical reading material for adults seems obvious, but there are also many books available for children—young and older. Series such as *When the Morning Came*, *The*

Escape books, and the books written by Louise A. Vernon are some good choices for younger children. As for our older children, this is a nice opportunity to introduce them to our RFPA literature. A place to begin might be with the following books: *A Watered Garden*, *Therefore Have I Spoken*, or *Portraits of Faithful Saints*.

Bring the Lord's Day to a close. With the activities of the day behind us, Sunday evening is a time of relaxation and a time to enjoy fellowship with our family. However, we must be careful to remember that the Sabbath is not over when we have attended both worship services. We must still seek to spend this time profitably in God's service. This is a perfect time to reflect with our children on the sermons that we have heard. By taking the time to ask our children deliberate and pointed questions regarding the sermon, we can determine how well they are listening and help them to listen even better.

It is obvious that, as imperfect creatures, we are incapable of keeping the Lord's Day *perfectly*. But, by striving to be prepared and orderly in our use of the Sabbath, we will by the grace of God use it *profitably*. There is untold benefit for us in having spent the day as we should—not busy with things of the week but, rather, focused on praising and glorifying God. One benefit that is not immediately seen, but that will have lasting impact, is that children who are taught proper observance of the Sabbath will instruct their own children in the same manner. And we, having been spiritually fed and given a respite from the cares of the week, will be better prepared to fight the battle of faith in the days ahead. Certainly, with the conclusion of the Lord's Day, we will find ourselves eagerly longing for that eternal Sabbath of which our earthly Sunday is but a picture.



When our goal is to praise and glorify God through the use of the Sabbath, then we will use it profitably.

1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
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THE STANDARD BEARER

Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The congregation and council of the Hull PRC wish to extend their sincere Christian sympathy to Carl and Brenda VandeKamp, along with their children, as well as to Alvin and Betty Bleyenberg and Art and Mary Bleyenberg, following the passing of their father, grandfather, and brother.

ARNOLD BLEYENBERG.

May they be comforted by God's Word in Psalm 116:15: "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints."

Rev. Steven Key, President
Ike Uittenbogaard, Asst. Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Mary Martha Society of Hope PRC in Redlands expresses its deepest sympathy to fellow member Janice Baker and her family in the loss of her father-in-law,

MR. AUDIE COKER.

May the family be comforted by the words in Scripture from II Corinthians 1:3-4, "Blessed be God...the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation."

Rev. Martin VanderWal, President
Nancy Hendriks, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Mary Martha Society of Hope PRC in Redlands expresses its deepest sympathy to fellow members Bonnie Meelker, Carisa denHartog, and Jennifer Bleyenberg and their families in the loss of their father and father-in-law,

MR. ARNOLD BLEYENBERG.

May they find comfort in these words, "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart. Wait I say, on the LORD" (Psalm 27:14).

Rev. Martin VanderWal, President
Nancy Hendriks, Secretary

NOTICE

The Board of the Reformed Heritage Christian School Association of Kalamazoo, Michigan, is inviting applications for an administrator with some teaching responsibilities for the 2007-2008 school year. RHCS is a K-12 Christian school with approximately 60 students. We are in our 15th year as an Association of parents of various Reformed denominations. Successful applicants must be committed to the Reformed faith, biblical inerrancy, 6-day creation, male headship, the antithesis between Christianity and the world, and covenantal theology. Interested candidates should send a cover letter and resume to: Paul VanderBerg, Chairman, Education Committee; Reformed Heritage Christian School, 700 Fletcher Avenue, Kalamazoo, MI 49006. For more information, phone Paul VanderBerg at (269) 327-4452.

CALL TO SYNOD!!

Synod 2006 appointed Trinity Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, MI the calling church for the 2007 synod.

The consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2007 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 12, 2007 at 8:30 A.M. in the Trinity Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, MI.

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 11, at 7:00 P.M. Rev. VanOverloop, president of the 2006 synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Hib Kuiper, 3391 8th Ave., Hudsonville, MI. Phone: (616) 560-7925. E-mail: hkuiper@1800lastbid.com.

Consistory of Trinity PRC
Robert Drnek, Clerk

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RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Young Adult Society of Peace PRC expresses its Christian sympathy to Brian and Stacy and children, and to Joel and Shanda and children in the death of their beloved father and grandfather,

MR. ARNOLD BLEYENBERG.

Our prayers are with them and the extended family. May they find comfort in the words of the psalmist: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all" (Psalm 34:19).

Jessica Vermeer, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC express their Christian sympathy to George Slopsema in the death of his loving, faithful wife,

DOROTHY SLOPSEMA.

May George and his family find their comfort in God's Word in Psalm 119:172-175: "My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness. Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy precepts. I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy law is my delight. Let my soul live and it shall praise thee; and let thy judgments help me."

Rev. William Langerak, President
Ron Kooienga, Assistant Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Byron Center PRC extend their sincere sympathy to Jason and Julie Koll in the death of her father,

MR. RANDY VAN LEEUWEN;

to Bob and Judy VanTil and family in the death of her father,

MR. CARL TALSMAN;

to Tim and Beth Ondersma and Mark and Vicki Cnossen and families in the death of Beth and Mark's mother,

MRS. MARTHA CNOSSEN;

to Albertha DeKraker in the death of her sister,

HILDA VANDER PLOEG;

to Brad and Julie Dykstra and family in the death of her father,

MR. JACK TUINSMA.

May we find comfort in Psalm 31:7, "I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy: for thou hast considered my trouble: thou hast known my soul in adversities."

Rev. R. VanOverloop, President
Mike Elzinga, Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour

May 2006

Date	Topic	Text
May 6	"To God, My Exceeding Joy, I Will Go"	Psalm 43
May 13	"A Joyful Mother of Children"	Psalm 113:9
May 20	"My Soul Is Anchored in Heaven"	Hebrews 6:20, 21
May 27	"The Spirit-Led Are the Children of God"	Romans 8:14-16