

Remember the Lord's Day - Is there a 'Christian Sabbath'?

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And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made (*Genesis 2.2-3*).

Why was the sabbath day instituted by the Lord, and does it continue now as the Lord's Day? If so, in what way has it changed with the coming of Christ? How should it be kept? Is it true there was a conflict of views about the continuation of the sabbath between the early and later Reformers? This booklet responds to these and other questions, showing that the sabbath principle is still God's will for believers today, and listing its purposes and blessings.

We begin at the obvious place – *Genesis 2.2-3* – where we are told that God ended his creative work, then blessed the seventh day and sanctified it. This became a very special day by divine decree from the beginning, elevated to a unique place three millennia before the time of Moses. It was given to the human race at creation, firstly to commemorate God's creative work, secondly to establish a day of rest and worship, and thirdly to provide (in future years) a picture of the eternal rest to be entered by all who 'rest' from their own works and trust in Christ. (This third purpose of the sabbath is taught in *Hebrews 3 and 4*.)

A Unique Day

Some take the view that the fourth commandment of Exodus 20.8-11 ('Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy...') no longer applies, having been intended for the Jewish period only. However, it is clearly far greater than this as it was started by God at creation. It is a 'creation ordinance', and the people who lived between Adam and Moses would have known about it, and been required to keep it.

Some people, however, teach that sabbath-keeping started only at the time of Moses and the giving of the law. They think that although God provided the model of a sabbath day at creation, the people were not told to observe it. This viewpoint is based on the absence of any mention of the sabbath between Genesis 2 and Exodus 16, but it does not explain the powerful statement of Genesis 2 that God very specifically blessed the seventh day and sanctified (or hallowed) it. These words can only refer to something truly momentous that God did for the obedience and benefit of the human race, and communicated to Adam and Eve, because God himself lives above time and days. The words mean that God gave to the human race a distinctive, special place to one day out of every seven, which was to be elevated above all other days, and reserved for spiritual pursuits.

Consider carefully that a day was blessed, whereas usually in the Bible it is people who are blessed. Also, a day was distinguished above others and sanctified (which means declared holy), whereas usually it is people or places or objects which are sanctified. God's sanctifying of a day means that he claimed one out of seven for spiritual purposes. The obvious message of God's great act was that there would be blessing attached to the keeping of this day, which was to be set aside as a day for him, and for rest from work (the principle for this being that if God 'rested' on this day, so should man, who is made in his image).

Adam was given the task of dressing and keeping the land, and although he most probably rebelled

well before the second sabbath, the knowledge of this special day and its obligations would continue with him after the Fall.

Those who deny that the sabbath day began in the Garden of Eden have no explanation for what God did when he blessed and sanctified this day. For them the Lord's immensely significant act becomes a mysterious irrelevance for many centuries, until the fourth commandment was given through Moses. Nor do they have any explanation for the words that introduce the fourth commandment – 'remember the sabbath day' (*Exodus 20.8*). The word 'remember' looks back to the sabbath inaugurated in the Garden of Eden, showing that they knew about it. This is clear because the fourth commandment says so, including these words: 'For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it' (*Exodus 20.11*).

Having failed to explain these monumental texts, those who want to confine the sabbath to the covenant of Moses simply sweep it away, saying it was not previously there. However, God's act in inaugurating the sabbath at creation was undoubtedly for the whole human race, and after the Fall it continued as a call to engage in worship, spiritual pleasure, and the proclamation of the Creator.

Interestingly, it has often been pointed out that sabbath observance is hinted at in the account of Noah's Flood, where several events occurred at seven-day intervals, as though each new action in the ark waited until after a sabbath. The seven-day weekly cycle inaugurated in Eden is seen in *Genesis 7.4* and *10*; *8.10* and *12*. In *Genesis 8.10* for example we read of Noah: 'And he stayed yet other seven days,' repeated in verse 12. The seven-day week given to Adam in the Garden certainly became a standard throughout the ancient world.

The record of *Exodus 16* is of special importance in proving that the sabbath was in force from Adam to Moses (whether faithfully observed or not), because it is here mentioned before the giving of the commandments. We read about the giving of manna, and how the rules for collecting it involved the honouring of the sabbath. The people had to bring in a double portion of manna on the sixth day because the seventh was the sabbath of the Lord. Verse 23 reads – 'This is that which the Lord hath said, To morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the Lord.'

We may well assume that the 'godly seed' of Adam and of Abraham had remembered the sabbath right up to this point, although it may well have needed reviving after the years of captivity and forced labour in Egypt. In *Exodus 16* Moses certainly assumed the people already knew what the sabbath was. [See endnote 1].

Purposes of the Sabbath

John Flavel, an outstanding Puritan, notes several special marks of honour which God placed on the fourth commandment, and we have to ask – are these the marks of an 'inferior' commandment which may be treated lightly today?

- (1) It is the longest of all the commandments.
- (2) It has a solemn reminder and warning prefixed to it.
- (3) It is delivered both positively and negatively, which the other commandments are not.
- (4) It is enforced with more arguments to strengthen the command than any other.

To see the purposes we must note the words of introduction to the commandments in *Exodus 20.2*: 'I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.' The commandments were given in the context of deliverance. We have already seen that the

sabbath was inaugurated at creation to be (i) a memorial to creation, (ii) a day of rest and worship, and (iii) a symbol of eternal rest. But with the commandments came another purpose, namely, to honour God for deliverance. This is said specifically about the sabbath in *Deuteronomy 5.15*: ‘And 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.’

Old Testament Jews were intended to add this dimension to the sabbath, and to commemorate and proclaim their redemption from Egypt. Since Christ, we obviously focus on the much greater deliverance of which theirs was a type – the deliverance secured by Christ on Calvary. The ‘Christian sabbath’, therefore, also has this purpose: it is a day for the worship and proclamation of Christ the Deliverer.

Returning to Exodus 20.8 we read: ‘Remember the sabbath day,’ indicating that the sabbath already existed, and was well known to them. That word ‘remember’ picks up the past, but it is also an ongoing command for God’s people in the future.

We naturally want to know how much of the sabbath commandment is binding for today: all or some of it? Under the law of Moses additional rules came in (for that covenant) that were extremely strict. For example, no food was to be prepared on the sabbath, no fire kindled, no sticks gathered, and there were ceremonial rules for shewbread and special sacrifices, with the severest of penalties for profaning the day. During the period from Moses to Christ, the sabbath acquired these ceremonial commitments because it also served as a sign of the special covenant that God had with the Jews (*Exodus 31.12-17*). The reason sabbath-breaking was severely punished was because it showed contempt for the special covenant relationship God had with that people. But when Christ came, that temporary covenant with the Jews came to an end, and the strict, inflexible extra regulations given to Moses for sabbath-keeping also ended. Also, once Christ came, all symbols that pointed to him were fulfilled, becoming obsolete. Not surprisingly the ‘sabbath’ was moved by God to the first day of the week, the day of Christ’s resurrection, which signalled the success of his work on Calvary. This was obviously implemented by the apostles, who would have been moved by the Holy Spirit to do so, perhaps from the fact that Christ appeared to them on successive first days of the week, and also by revelation.

In *Colossians 2.16-17*, Paul tells Gentile converts that they must not let any Judaizer entice them back into cancelled Jewish ritual, or condemn them for ignoring it, including the keeping of the Jewish sabbath, for these were merely ‘a shadow of things to come’. Colossian believers had been taught to keep the new sabbath, the Lord’s Day, just as churches at Corinth and Galatia did (according to *1 Corinthians 16.1-2*). The new Lord’s Day did not continue the extra duties and symbolic rites of worship given to Moses, but it preserved the vital essence of the fourth commandment, which included the following reasons and purposes:

- (1) God’s reserving of one day out of every seven is a creation decree, and also one of the ten commandments, which are abiding moral law, written by the finger of God.
- (2) There must, therefore, always be a day of commemoration of creation.
- (3) There must continue to be a day for worship and instruction.
- (4) There must continue to be a day for remembering and proclaiming redemption, now in Christ. Proclamation is a particular element of the day, for Christ displayed and explained the works of God on sabbaths, and so must we by the evangelisation of adults and children. [See endnote 2.] One of the reasons that churches find it so hard to restart Sunday Schools for the young is that ease and

recreation has invaded the Sundays of many believers.

(5) There must continue to be a day of rest for all workers, so that they also may benefit from (1) to (4). This precludes the -unnecessary use by Christians of Sunday trading industries, whether shops, restaurants, filling stations or recreational facilities. (*Deuteronomy 5.14*: 'That thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou'.)

Two other purposes of the Lord's Day must be added to our list, these being of tremendous importance. They are:

(6) Like the sabbath, observance of the Lord's Day is a witness to the world.

(7) It is also a shaping, sanctifying practice, ordering the priorities of God's people.

A Witness and a Shaping of Ordinance

One of the effects of the Jewish sabbath was its witness to the pagan world. We may imagine how the nations surrounding Israel reacted on seeing them observe the sabbath. In an age when most people were farmers, they knew the difficulties of organising routines so that all work could be stopped for one day every week. They would no doubt have said to themselves, 'How do those Jews manage?' Those pagan nations saw an entire culture organised around one day in seven, to worship the one true God, and this was a powerful testimony.

It is the same for us today in this present age when society at large has no sabbath. 'Who are these Christians,' people may wonder, 'who abstain from work and entertainments on Sunday so that they may worship? We see the churches open, and these people commemorating their Creator and worshipping together.' The impact of such a testimony on families, colleagues and society at large cannot be overstated. The Lord's Day is partly designed by God for this very purpose, that the reality of our faith may be evident to all.

The Lord's Day is also deeply influential in the believer's personal sanctification, a fact which should not be overlooked. One day every week we must carefully order our priorities to honour the Lord, and this trains us to do the same in every area of life. A church that treats the Lord's Day lightly (and this is typical of some of the so-called 'mega churches' of the USA and Britain, including some claiming to be 'reformed'), not minding that worshippers go from the morning service to the restaurant, and then proceed to fun and leisure, playing golf outdoors, pool indoors and indulging in numerous other recreations, is a church that denies its members an immensely profound ordinance that shapes and moulds their Christian character. If we submit our personal plans to God for his day, we will subsequently order our lives and priorities for Christ more diligently and conscientiously on all other days.

We should note the words of Exodus 16.4, spoken by God to Moses in connection with manna (even before the giving of the commandments). God said that the sabbath arrangement for the collection of manna was given – 'that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no.' The Lord's Day is a test of obedience, challenging us every week of our lives to willingly and gladly obey the Lord's will. Disregard it, and we collapse into a self-centred, self-serving, self-indulgent Christian lifestyle, as many have already done. The Lord's Day is both a day of spiritual opportunity, and a spiritual safeguard for all of life.

Wrong Teaching Today

Before we look at the flexibility of the Lord's Day by comparison with the Jewish sabbath, we must reply to teachers who turn away from the Reformers, the Puritans, historic confessions and the overwhelming majority of Christians in past generations, to claim that the fourth commandment is

not in force today, and was never repeated in the New Testament.

(1) First, we observe that the fourth commandment is certainly not abrogated (cancelled) anywhere in the New Testament. The three texts often claimed as a cancellation are nothing of the kind. [See endnote 3.] In vital passages (such as *John 14.15, 21; 15.10; 1 John 5.2-3*) that speak of obedience to the commandments, their entire, undiminished, unamended authority is always taken for granted. The fourth is never retracted. The claims that the fourth commandment is purely ceremonial is refuted by simply noting that it was announced in the Garden of Eden, long before ceremonies began.

It is also worth noting that the downgrading of the fourth commandment to non-perpetual status began in medieval Catholic doctrine, and is expressed in the Council of Trent 1545-1563.

(2) Secondly, we are also told in the letter of James that the ten commandments are an indivisible unit. You cannot take them apart at whim, and dispose of one. In *James 2.8-12* the commandments are referred to as 'the law', two of them being specifically quoted. James then declares: 'For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.' It is clear that the ten commandments are an unassailable unit, an integrated expression of God's holy standards, from which no man should presume to sever and extract a single component.

(3) Thirdly, the Lord explicitly said that, 'the sabbath was made for man' (*Mark 2.27*) and was not therefore solely for Israel. Those who say the fourth commandment is not mentioned in the New Testament fail to consider the universal scale and scope of Christ's words, when they relegate the sabbath to the scrapheap of Jewish ceremonial.

(4) Fourthly, and perhaps this is the overtowering point, the Saviour announced that 'the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath' (*Mark 2.28*). If the eternal Son of God claimed it as his own, and pronounced his lordship over it, how can anyone possibly say this principle of one-day-in-seven for God is finished, and not in the New Testament? Can we imagine that the Lord would make this magnificent announcement over something he was about to relegate to the level of discarded ceremonies? Those who do not see a sabbath day principle in the New Testament follow a strange method of interpretation in ignoring such a colossal, primary and pivotal statement by the Lord of glory.

Christ's lordship over the sabbath means nothing less than the following:—

- He owns the sabbath.
- He is to be the focus of its worship.
- He is its rightful interpreter (to change the day of the week, and shape its characteristics).
- He is its custodian and perpetuator.

(5) Fifthly, we must notice how the apostle John in Revelation 1.10 took up the statement of Christ that he is Lord of the sabbath, when he wrote the famous words, 'I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day . . .'

The first Christians indisputably had a special day, as we learn from other texts also, the day of Christ's resurrection, the first day of the week, which was their day to implement the moral and spiritual principles of the creation ordinance and the fourth commandment.

(6) Sixthly, we note the New Testament texts which specifically identify the first day of the week as the day for Christian worship:—

(a) *Acts 20.7*, referring to the church at Troas.

(b) *1 Corinthians 16.1-2*, which mentions how Corinth and all the churches of Galatia had precisely the same practice. We know from Acts that the churches of Galatia included such as Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, and there were no doubt others. Furthermore, if the Galatian churches worshipped on Sunday, then surely all the others founded by Paul did the same. It is simply not correct to say that a specific day for worship and proclamation – continuing the principle of the fourth commandment – is not present in the New Testament.

(7) A seventh wrong teaching asserting the non-permanent nature of the fourth commandment is the claim that it is not written in everyone's conscience (like murder) and cannot therefore be a moral matter. We reply to this erroneous approach in appendix 3, 'Is it in the conscience?'

(8) An eighth wrong teaching heard today is the idea that 'Christian liberty' releases us from adherence to the rule of the fourth commandment, and to insist on it is therefore legalism. But the doctrine of Christian liberty does not include liberty to ignore God's will and commandments. Believers are not free to say, 'I claim my Christian liberty to excuse myself from witness, or prayer.' People often misunderstand what Christian liberty is, and so we provide a definition as a footnote, but it is not freedom from obedience to the Word. [See endnote 4.]

Christ Now Rules The Sabbath

If the Lord's Day is to reflect the spirit and standards of the old sabbath, what latitude, flexibility and exceptions are possible, and by what authority? The answer lies in the teaching of our Saviour, and we turn to the pivotal text, *Mark 2.27-28*: 'He said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.'

This last statement (also in *Matthew 12.8*) is the key to the sabbath today. Christ rules the sabbath, because by his coming he fulfilled the symbolism of the Jewish sabbath, purchased our salvation, then took over the day, filling it with greater meaning.

Christ, being the one through whom all benefits to the human race are given, is the original designer of the sabbath, and he possessed the right to interpret it. The Jews had added considerably to the Old Testament rules for the sabbath, making it severe and burdensome, and these were reproved by the Lord. In *Matthew 12* we have the record of how he was passing through a cornfield on the sabbath day, when his disciples began to pluck and eat the corn. The watching Pharisees complained that they were breaking the law of the sabbath, but Christ said to them – 'Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; how he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat...?'

The Lord told the Pharisees they were wrong, pointing to the example of David who fed his men from that which was exclusively provided for the priests. It was legitimate for them to be fed in an emergency, because the sabbath rules should yield to necessity. It was always the case that things which are essential could be done on the sabbath. In extenuating circumstances, in emergency, David was in order to do what he did even in the Jewish era.

The Old Testament forbade taking in the harvest on the sabbath, but even this rule would have yielded to absolute necessity. The great 16th-century Swiss Reformer Henry Bullinger, referring to examples of sabbath emergencies, wrote the following: 'If, then, on the sabbath day it be lawful to draw out of a pit a sheep, or an ox in danger of drowning, why should it not be lawful likewise to gather in and keep from spoiling the hay or the corn which by reason of unseasonable weather has lain too long and likely to be worse if it stay any longer? Liberty is granted in cases of necessity.' [See endnote 5.]

In *Matthew 12.5* the Lord also pointed to the requirement of the law of Moses that priests should

work on the sabbath in connection with worship, technically desecrating the sabbath, but their holy work was exempted from the sabbath rule. The sabbath, despite its apparent inflexibility and prohibitions, always did yield, said the Lord, to special duty or necessity, and to works of mercy. This is obviously the case today, but necessity should not become a word so elastic that it stretches to cover anything we want to do, so that wholehearted dedication of the day to God is ruined. It has to be a real necessity. People must have it in their hearts and minds to honour the Lord's Day, but sometimes there are exceptional circumstances.

What Should Not Be Done

The standard for the Lord's Day is spelled out succinctly in the great Protestant confessions. People should 'rest all day from their own work, words and thoughts about their worldly employment, and recreations,' and be 'taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of his worship.' What, then, are the possible exceptions?

Let us be practical. You might run out of petrol on the Lord's Day, and you are at fault, because you should have taken care to fill up the day before, and for four reasons: (1) to avoid worldly distraction; (2) to avoid setting a bad example to others; (3) to avoid supporting unnecessary employment on the day of rest and worship; (4) to honour and obey the sabbath principle. However, if you are in a tight corner, and it is a matter of necessity, and you would be marooned by not doing so, then you may have to turn into the filling station on the Lord's Day, but you should not make a habit of it. You will not have committed a moral sin, but you should never allow yourself to slide into disregard for God's day.

In the case of the Jews, disregard for the sabbath incurred a terrible punishment, because the sabbath was the sign of the covenant, and breaking it constituted repudiation of that covenant. The Lord's Day, by contrast, is not the sign of that Jewish covenant, and breaking it does not amount to rejection of our relationship with God. However, to wilfully disregard the Lord's Day is an infringement of the fourth commandment, which Christians should gladly and willingly embrace as part of the perfect law of liberty.

If somehow a person or a family has no food, and there is no one to whom they may turn for help, they may have to go to a shop on the Lord's Day. They may be prepared to fast, although little children should not be subjected to that, but such measures should be the last thing we want to do. We should never plan to shop on the Lord's Day, but the sabbath does yield to genuine necessities.

If you are going on holiday you should not plan to board a train or an aircraft on the Lord's Day, for that is not a necessity, and is certainly outside the spirit of keeping a day for the Lord. It is therefore an act of disobedience, and of indifference to God's requirement. Such an act would also support the indifference of the travel industry to God's day. The Lord Jesus Christ showed that the sabbath can yield to necessity, but in good conscience it must be a necessity.

Is it a necessity for believing young people to become entangled with school journeys, camps and sports days, which will eliminate their Lord's Day? Should birthday parties be accommodated on the Lord's Day? Of course not, because one of the great purposes of the Christian sabbath is to place decisions before God's people, so that they may choose him, and thereby witness to all around them. Thomas Watson aptly said of the Jewish sabbath that it was 'a great badge of their religion to observe this day', and the same goes for today.

Restaurants on Sunday

Many Christian people, far more in the United States than in Britain, go to restaurants for dinner on Sunday, but how can this be a necessity? Furthermore, it supports an unnecessary catering

industry which sneers at the Lord's Day, and compels staff to work contrary to the creation decree and fourth commandment. The Puritans allowed home cooking, pointing to Simon Peter's mother-in-law caring for the Saviour on the sabbath (but not feasting, or very elaborate dining).

We know of pastors in the USA who would not dream of hiring workers on the Lord's Day, but on that day they go to restaurants which do. Is not this inconsistent thinking? The practice of eating out on Sunday was definitely not approved of by evangelicals in the past. It is something which has become widely acceptable only since the 1960s, and has more recently spread to engulf Christians in other parts of the world.

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle a large number of people bring their lunch on Sunday to the lower halls so that they can proceed afterwards to children's Sunday School ministry, and we are by no means the only church where this occurs. If we seek to bring the lost into God's house on the Lord's Day, and to proclaim him to all, it is not right to encourage unnecessary industry and employment on that day. The same thinking would apply to buying Sunday newspapers. We should be conscientious about such matters, and yet the Lord's Day, as the old saying goes, 'is to be observed not in the spirit of the law, but in the free spirit of the Gospel'.

What about turning on the television on a Sunday? Well unless you are going to listen to a few lines of news or something of that kind, it is surely totally unnecessary for a believer to turn on an instrument of public entertainment on a Sunday. I would strongly urge everyone who names the name of Christ, to keep the television off on the Lord's Day, for although it may sound legalistic to some, to have a no-television rule on Sunday will enable you to honour and hallow the Lord's Day with Christian thinking and fellowship. Surely, it is a clear breach of the perpetual sabbath principle to switch on secular entertainment on the Lord's Day.

Concerts (including so-called Christian cantatas) are surely out of place, and how tragic it is that many services of worship today are designed to be entertainment shows!

Some people have to work on the Lord's Day, and we are not talking here about easy cases, such as works of mercy by doctors or nurses, but of other occupations. There are many believers who are compelled to work on the Lord's Day or they would not be able to work at all, and who greatly wish they did not have to. Is it wrong? Not if it is an unavoidable necessity. If they really cannot obtain any other work to keep their families, we cannot judge them, for they are in a very similar situation to that of countless converted slaves in New Testament times and subsequently.

Spurgeon and Sunday Employees

In Spurgeon's day many members of his congregation worked as servants in large Victorian households, and could worship only at one service each week and often less frequently. To leave their work would have left them without references to other employers (a necessity in those days) and destitute. Many of the 600 young women in Mrs Bartlett's famous Bible Class were maids who could attend only once in every two or three weeks. Today we know of men who are working long shifts in security jobs, and we know how much they would love to be free throughout the Lord's Day, but cannot be. The churches of Jesus Christ support rather than alienate those whose faith must be lived out in difficult circumstances.

Once in a while a person in normal weekday employment is required to work on Sunday, such as for annual stock taking or audit preparation, and there is no way out. We understand that, especially if that person would be fired if not at work.

What about students completing assignments or revising for examinations? Is it a necessity for them to work on the Lord's Day, or is it a self-inflicted burden because they did not cover enough

ground on other days, and now find themselves in a tight corner, with assignments due, or an examination in a day or so? Is it really a necessity, or has it become a necessity because they never had in mind the importance of the Lord's Day, and never planned to preserve it by bringing forward their work? The Lord's Day will yield to necessity, but we should not allow its hours to be swept away by self-induced problems of indiscipline, poor organisation, or excessive recreation on weekdays.

As the Metropolitan Tabernacle has its bookshop, we must make mention of this. Is it a 'necessity' for this to be open on the Lord's Day? Actually, it is open only following the evening service, and that is for ministry. Lord's Day opening is a not-for-profit activity, staffed by volunteers, to make printed ministry available chiefly to visitors, and giving them an opportunity to procure audio-video materials and literature to which they would not normally have access. Audio-video materials at no profit are sold after all services, because they are a clear extension of the preaching ministry, and would come under the next paragraph.

We note again the sabbath rule for the Lord's service in *Matthew 12.5*: 'Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?' The priests worked as today's preachers work. We are not disregarding the Lord's Day when we are engaging in the service of the Lord.

In *Matthew 12.11* there is also the category of permitted work, already referred to, that we call 'works of mercy'. We have various acts of necessity also in connection with the service of the Lord, such as visiting the sick and helping others in emergencies. If the old sabbath allowed for such things, so will the gentler standards for the Lord's Day.

There is also the question of using public transport to travel to church on the Lord's Day. Even in these days of saturation car ownership, it may be a necessity for some to catch a bus or to take the tube. Is this not endorsing and supporting Sunday industry? Not necessarily, because local public transport is not quite like holiday air travel. It could be argued that some degree of public transport is an essential arterial system of modern society, and needs to be maintained. [See endnote 6.] Certainly, it is used by worldlings for purely recreational travel and shopping, but it is bound to be operated to some extent.

The days have long gone when you could walk everywhere you needed to go. Society is now largely organised into city-sized communities, and these cities grow ever larger. Often we live where we are compelled to live, through house prices or social housing placement, and cannot buy or rent where we want to be. We cannot simply re-establish ourselves nearer to our churches, and are therefore compelled to travel. With so few sound churches, and such distances to be covered in both town and country, and with the dangers of violent crime in town centres to be considered, people are obliged to use public transport, and it may therefore be argued that the liberty of necessity applies in this matter. If, however, we choose to board a bus or train on Sunday because a special excursion fare is offered for recreational travel, this would certainly not fall into the category of necessity.

The Change to Sunday

Proceeding to *John 20.1* we find guidance on whether the Christian sabbath should be the seventh day or the first day of the week. The answer of all but a very small minority of Christians down the centuries has been – the first day. The authority for this is the example of the church of the New Testament, which was no doubt commanded by God, through the apostles. The special day for Christians was distinguished from the Jewish sabbath, and set on the day of Christ's resurrection.

The Lord rose from the dead on the first day of the week, and in *John 20.19 and 26* we observe that other appearances of the resurrected Lord were also on subsequent first days. Verse 19 reads – ‘Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst.’ He stands amidst his people, and pronounces his peace upon them, on what came to be called, ‘the Lord’s Day’.

Verse 26 reads: ‘And after eight days again . . . then came Jesus.’ We would say after seven days, but the Jews started counting on the first day and finished counting on the last day and so they made seven, eight. The text intends to tell us that the Lord appeared the very next Sunday. We believe this was to show the disciples that this day would be the commemoration day of the resurrection. While the Jewish sabbath remembered the deliverance from Egypt (*Deuteronomy 5.15*), the Christian sabbath would focus on the day of resurrection, which was the proof of Calvary’s victory and success.

In *Acts 20.7*, as we observed previously, we learn a little more about this special day of resurrection. ‘And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to -depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.’

This was obviously the Christian version of the sabbath, and it is no longer on the seventh day of the week, but the first. Luke is an eyewitness here, and this is the first reference in the New Testament to a distinctive Christian worship service, incorporating the Lord’s Supper.

Further evidence for a Christian ‘sabbath’ on the first day of the week has also been cited already, namely *1 Corinthians 16.1-2*, where Paul notes that not only Corinth but all the churches of Galatia met upon the first day of the week. The well-known words of the apostle John in *Revelation 1.10* further imply a distinctive ‘sabbath’ for Christians on the Lord’s Day, undoubtedly the day of the Lord’s resurrection, the first day of the week. There are no pointless statements in the Scriptures, and we are especially told that it was on this day that John was taught great things.

The martyr Ignatius, who lived AD 30-107, the third minister of the church at Antioch and probably a student of John, wrote: ‘Let every friend of Christ keep the Lord’s Day as a festival, the resurrection day, the queen and chief of all the days of the week.’

The term ‘the Lord’s Day’ powerfully indicates the way in which the day should be spent. It is for him, and it centres on him. It is not for us, for our earthly pleasures, our self-indulgence or our fun and games. It is for spiritual joys, learning and service, and for fellowship in him.

Warning about Sabbath Neglect

We have said many times in this booklet that the observance of the extra rules of the ceremonial law attached to the Old Testament sabbath after Moses is not prescribed for the Christian era, but the core duty of *Exodus 20.9-11* remains – the laying aside, wherever possible, of work, to dedicate the day to the Lord. In this context the Old Testament warnings about sabbath-breaking still carry great weight for believers.

Says Jeremiah – ‘But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden [do your trading], even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day [to trade]; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched’ (*Jeremiah 17.27*).

Do we think such scriptures as these are purely historical, having no relevance whatever for the Christian era? The words of Paul should correct us: ‘They are written for our admonition, upon

whom the ends of the world are come' (*1 Corinthians 10.11*). Some form of chastisement is bound to follow when believers persistently and wilfully disregard all 'sabbath' obligations, rejecting their sanctifying and shaping influence. We believe there will be discipline also for the secular state that neglects and destroys Lord's Day opportunities, but judgement begins at the household of faith.

Numerous Bible-believing churches no longer take seriously the Lord's Day, organising shows and recreational activities, cancelling evening services, and allowing Sunday Schools to wither and close because they interfere with leisure. Members do as they please, and wherever this laxity prevails, extreme spiritual superficiality and worldliness will ultimately follow, and this is already happening before our eyes.

Another warning is found in *Ezekiel 20.13*: 'But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness: they walked not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; and my sabbaths they greatly polluted.' For all these things a generation was not allowed to enter into the promised land. Will we not be subject to some form of discipline from the Lord if we regard the Lord's Day lightly?

The details of sabbath-keeping in Old Testament times are no longer in force, but the spirit of the honouring of a special day continues, with leisure pursuits and unnecessary work being set aside for the Lord's Day of worship and proclamation. The warnings of the prophets still reflect the Lord's disapproval at the abuse of this day.

Nehemiah 13.17-18 reads – '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.' These are solemn texts and we should not think they represent an attitude and tastes on God's part which he has now abandoned. The types and ceremonies of the law are no more, but the principle of commitment to a day of worship and proclamation remains most important for us today.

Promises about Sabbath-Keeping

On a more positive note we refer to *Isaiah 56.2* – 'Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil.' The subsequent verses say that non-Jews and outcasts will also be blessed for keeping the sabbath, because – 'Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.'

Isaiah 58.13-14 reinforces the promise: 'If thou turn away thy foot from [work on] the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth . . .'

The promise is that we will know communion with God in a special way on his day and spread the Gospel far and wide like triumphant conquerors in the quest for souls. How much hinges on the sincere honouring of the Lord's Day!

The whole of *Isaiah 58* is both a reproof to the Jews, and a prophecy for the future church of Christ. It focuses on the annual Day of Atonement, the only specified time in the Old Testament for fasting. This day was always to be treated just as if it were a sabbath day, and Isaiah shows how they should have kept this 'sabbath'. At the same time, the evangelical prophet shows what the

New Testament sabbath will be like, a day of unloosing spiritual burdens (verse 6), giving spiritual bread to the starving and the garments of righteousness to the naked (verse 7), shedding light and spiritual glory (verse 8), interceding for the lost (verse 9), reaching out to afflicted souls (verse 10), seeking guidance from on high and building up the church (verses 11-12).

‘If ye keep my commandments,’ said the Lord, ‘ye shall abide in my love.’ And the disciple whom Jesus loved said, ‘For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.’ [See endnote 7.] These commandments are the enduring moral law of the ten commandments, loved and appointed by God, never to be cancelled by us, and perfectly obeyed by Christ for our justification. The fourth of these moral commandments is especially designed for our blessing and enrichment, and we must honour it with great desire and anticipation all the days of our life, and out of love for our Saviour. It is his day.

The Vital Essence of the Fourth Commandment

1. God’s reserving of one day out of every seven is a creation decree, and also one of the ten commandments, which are abiding moral law, written by the finger of God.
2. There must, therefore, always be a day of commemoration of creation.
3. There must continue to be a day for worship and instruction.
4. There must continue to be a day for remembering and proclaiming redemption in Christ. Proclamation is a particular element of the day, for Christ displayed and explained the works of God on sabbaths, and so must we by the evangelisation of adults and children. (*John 5.1-18; Luke 4.31; 6.6-11; 13.10-17; 14.1-5.*)
5. There must continue to be a day of rest for all workers, so that they also may benefit from (1) to (4). This aspect of the fourth commandment naturally precludes the unnecessary use by Christians of Sunday trading industries, whether shops, restaurants, filling stations or recreational facilities. In *Deuteronomy 5.14* this principle is expressly stated in the sabbath commandment: ‘That thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou’.
6. Just as sabbath observance was a witness to the world, so is the honouring of the Lord’s Day.
7. It is a shaping, sanctifying practice, ordering the priorities of God’s people.

Endnotes:

1. Calvin thought that although the sabbath had become extinct among heathen nations, it had continued among the race of Abraham, but had become ‘almost extinct’.
2. *John 5.1-18; Luke 4.31; 6.6-11; 13.10-17; 14.1-5.*
3. They are *Romans 14.3-6, Galatians 4.9-10, and Colossians 2.16-17*. Such texts warn Gentile converts who were keeping the Lord’s Day not to be subverted by the ‘Judaizers’ into adopting Jewish customs, including the sabbath, as a means of earning their salvation. Their dependence was to be on Calvary alone. In *Romans 14* Paul urges that no pressure be brought on converted Jews who cannot bring themselves to give up Jewish food laws and feast days, as long as they did not think these customs contributed to their salvation. No serious exegesis will conclude that these texts are against the fourth commandment as expressed in the Lord’s Day.
4. The doctrine of Christian liberty refers to the liberty of free access to God, without priest or mediator save Christ the Lord. It also includes the following freedoms:

- From guilt and condemnation.
- From ceremonial laws, not moral laws, of the Mosaic era.
- From bondage to the dominion or mastery of sin, the world and Satan.
- From fear of death.
- From dominion of religious authorities.

Christian liberty does not include exemption from any duty prescribed in God's Word.

5. Bullinger was expounding *Matthew 12.11-12 and Luke 14.5*.

6. For example, staff for hospitals and other essential services need to travel. Also, in cities, the extended family is often unavoidably spread over distances, and -people need to visit their elderly and infirm.

7. *John 15.10; 1 John 5.3*.

Appendix 1

Calvin and the Puritans

Some preachers today, in an effort to liberalise the Lord's Day, and pandering to the worldliness of many believers, have attempted to drive a wedge between Calvin and the Puritans, claiming that Calvin had an anti-sabbatarian view, while later Reformers together with the Puritans virtually went back to the Jewish sabbath. These preachers complain that it is the legalistic Puritan view we are burdened with in the 17th-century confessions (the Westminster, Baptist and Savoy). However, this claim is greatly mistaken because both Calvin and the Puritans, by varying routes, came to insist that believers should devote themselves entirely to God on the Lord's Day.

Any attempt to portray Calvin as anti-sabbatarian shows that his sermons on the fourth commandment have not been studied, for he urged upon Christians the complete death of self on Sunday, along with the putting aside of all distracting activities, in order to be 'filled' by God. Certainly he would have been appalled by the slackness that has developed in much of the evangelical world in the last forty years.

Later Reformers and Puritans laid greater emphasis on the abiding authority of the fourth commandment than Calvin, but all came to similar conclusions about the way the special day should be kept. We know that a few Puritan writers went to extremes over the Christian sabbath, prompting John Owen to remark, 'A man can scarcely in six days read over all the duties that are proposed to be observed on the seventh.' But extremism was not the general position. Exceptions to this consensus were kings, bishops and clergy who were anti-Puritan and largely anti-evangelical (especially in the reigns of James I and Charles I. It was James I who permitted Sunday recreations including dancing, archery, leaping and vaulting, and church beer parties. Charles I stipulated two hours in the morning for worship and the rest of the day for ease and recreation – rather like some evangelicals today.) It is tragic that some of their arguments are nowadays advanced by some preachers in reformed evangelical ranks.

Calvin stressed that, since Christ's coming, the lives of believers should be a constant sabbath, every day of the year being given up to God. However, because this is not possible on earth, and there is need for a day when congregations can meet together, God gave the Lord's Day to continue regular worship, devotion, and teaching, along with the provision of a day of rest for workers, in the spirit of the old sabbath.

There are, Calvin taught, differences between the old sabbath and the Lord's Day, for the latter is not a 'sacred' day in the same way, so that if we had opportunity we could have seven Lord's Days each week, or if compelled, could move it to another day of the week. However, the Lord's Day, in Calvin's view, perpetuates all the worship, sanctification and teaching features of the sabbath as well as the principle of total devotion. (Calvin's words are quoted on page 29 opposite.)

While the inflexible regulations added by Moses have passed away, along with the insistence on the seventh day, Calvin held that the principle and spirit of the fourth commandment continues.

Appendix 2

John Calvin's Counsel for the Lord's Day

Calvin gave these clear and beautiful exhortations in the course of his sermons on the fourth commandment, from *Deuteronomy 5*:–

'What has been commanded concerning the sabbath should apply to all. For if we take the law of God in itself, we shall have a perpetual form of justice. And certainly under the ten commandments God willed to give us a norm that would abide for ever. Therefore we must not imagine that what Moses has recorded concerning the sabbath day is superfluous to us.'

'When I said that the ordinance of rest was a type of a spiritual and far higher mystery, and hence that this commandment must be accounted ceremonial, I must not be thought to mean that it had no further objects also. And certainly God took the seventh day for his own, and hallowed it...that he might keep his servants altogether free from every care, for the consideration of the beauty, excellence and fitness of his works.

'There is indeed no moment which should be allowed to pass in which we are not attentive to the wisdom, power, goodness, and justice of God ...but since our minds are fickle and apt to be forgetful or distracted, God, in his indulgence, separates one day from the rest and commands that it should be free from all earthly business and cares, so that nothing may stand in the way of holy occupation.

'On this ground he did not merely wish that his people should rest at home, but that they should meet in the sanctuary ...In this respect we have an equal necessity for the sabbath as the ancient people, so that on one day we may be free, and thus the better prepared to learn and to testify our faith.'

In his Sermons on the Ten Commandments (*Deuteronomy 5.12-14*) Calvin shows his firmness in urging a truly devoted Lord's Day:–

'If we turn Sunday into a day for living it up, for our sport and pleasure, indeed how will God be honoured in that? Is it not a mockery and even a profanation of his Name? But when shops are closed on Sunday, when people do not travel in the usual way, its purpose is to provide more leisure and liberty for attending to what God commands us.'

'We no longer have this figure and shadow [the Jewish sabbath] for the purpose of keeping a ceremony as rigid as it was under the bondage of the law. Rather its purpose is to gather us in order that...we might be trained to devote ourselves better to the service of God, that we might have this day fully dedicated to him, to the end that we might be withdrawn from the world.'

'We do not keep the day which was commanded to the Jews. For that was Saturday. But in order to demonstrate the liberty of Christians [from the Jewish order] the day has been changed, seeing that Jesus Christ in his resurrection has delivered us from all bondage to the law.'

The Lord's Day – 'exists for the purpose of enabling us to set aside our affairs and earthly business

in order that, abstaining from everything else, we might meditate on the works of God, and be trained to recognise the favours which God bestows on us...And when we have spent Sunday in praising and glorifying the Name of God and in meditating on his works, then, throughout the rest of the week, we should show that we have benefited from it.'

(Quotations from John Calvin's Sermons on the Ten Commandments, translated by Benjamin W Farley, Baker Book House, 1980, selected from a sermon on *Deuteronomy 5.12-14*, pp 97-113.)

Appendix 3

Is it in the Conscience?

Some modern teachers use another argument to remove the fourth commandment from its place in the ten. They say that if it were an ongoing moral commandment, it would be written in the heart or conscience of everyone, like the others, but it is not, and is therefore non-moral. This is a very shaky way of deciding whether a commandment has moral standing, elevating human endorsement above the Word of God. Since when was it a valid principle of interpretation to make our subjective feelings a judge over Scripture?

The reality is that moral commandments are frequently dulled and blotted out of the conscience by habitual disobedience, and especially by a culture of disobedience. Paul tells us in Romans 7 that he would not have known he was a sinner except by hearing the law, adding specifically: 'I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.' He speaks of how he lived seemingly undisturbed by his covetousness until 'the commandment came, sin revived, and I died,' meaning that the commandment revived his conscience and his awareness of the sin, and he felt condemned.

This reflects the experience of countless people who have never experienced a single pang of conscience while happily feathering their nests with this world's goods. It never occurred to them that they were victims of the lust of greed, until they came under the sound of the Word.

The same is true of so many young people today, who are taught that sexual activity is an essential human right, and who are brainwashed by television soaps and films propounding the same ideas. Many young people are 'sexually active' from an early age, and we encounter those who feel no natural inhibitions or subsequent shame whatsoever in connection with such sexual activity, because their young consciences have been 'seared with a hot iron', and rendered insensitive (*1 Timothy 4.2*).

How much more will the conscience be desensitised to the obligation to allocate to God a regular portion of one's life to worship, in an atheistic society where people have only ever known Sunday as a leisure day, and virtually everyone sees it that way!

The greatest tragedy of all in this matter, is that some Christian preachers are among those who are busy desensitising consciences by teaching that the fourth commandment is entirely ceremonial and of no moral or spiritual standing. It is surely awful that representatives of the Lord should set themselves against one of God's abiding commandments, and encourage Christian people to spiritual compromise.

A well-known Puritan response to the claim that the fourth commandment is non-moral because it is not engraved in the conscience, points out that Adam, who doubtless possessed a well-primed moral consciousness, nevertheless had to be told about the law of the sabbath. In other words, it is an exceptional moral law in that it must be introduced into the conscience by announcement. It is

certainly very agreeable to the consciences of Christians (except the worldly kind) who generally respond to it with a strong, natural inner sense of keen obligation.

Appendix 4

Did Adam Need the Sabbath?

Outside the tradition of the great Protestant confessions, teachers who regard the sabbath as an entirely Jewish affair, beginning and ending with the Mosaic covenant, [see endnote] say that there is no mention of Adam having to rest in the Garden of Eden, and no rules banning any specific activity there. They also say that the special regulations given to Moses would not have been relevant to Eden, because Adam would not have needed to light a fire, cook food, bear a burden, or buy and sell. Furthermore, as Adam had constant access to God in that perfect place, there would have been no practical difference between the sabbath and the other six days.

With such reasoning as this, the existence of a sabbath before Moses is rejected. But of course, no one has suggested that the extra rules for the sabbath given through Moses as a sign of the covenant, were in force in the Garden of Eden. This is a rather flippant way of trying to prove that God instituted no sabbath for the Garden. We have already noted that the day was blessed and made holy and distinctive by God, and this is an inescapable fact.

Then how exactly would Adam have kept that special day in the Garden, supposing he had not sinned? The answer is provided in *Genesis 2.3*. The first purpose of the day was to commemorate creation, and so if Adam had continued in paradise, every seventh day he and Eve would have laid aside the delightful task of dressing and keeping the Garden in order to reflect on the history of that place, and the order and wonder of God's work. During unfolding centuries of bliss, all the glory for creation would have been the Lord's. Our first parents were, after all, dwellers in time, and time itself would have been harnessed by the sabbath, and subordinated to the worship of the Creator. The Garden of Eden would have been a perpetual sabbath, but still there would have been a special, weekly, creation commemoration day.

The Lord who knows all things, however, anticipated the Fall and the subsequent needs of fallen mankind by giving the creation decree that one day in seven would be a day of commemoration and worship.

It is obvious that the inauguration of a day of rest in the Garden also looked beyond the Fall, because it 'contained' a type of Christ and salvation, as taught in *Hebrews 3-4*, and this may well have been perceived by Adam (in the light of God's promise of *Genesis 3.15*) after paradise had been lost, and served as a great comfort to him and his family.

The blessing and sanctifying of one day in seven in the Garden of Eden was an immense and monumental act of God which should never be underestimated, or minimised out of its full significance. Endnote: These include Schofield-type dispensationalists.

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