

“Keeping the Sabbath Holy”

Exodus 20:8-11

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Even within the past 50 years, in many Christian churches and homes, there were certain things you couldn't do because it was Sunday.

Sunday was a day to stop work and give the day to worship, to fellowship, or to helping the sick and poor.

It was not a day for fixing things around the house or even for recreation.

I have told you before the story of my father deciding to not harvest hay on a Sunday even though it meant a financial loss.

I remember discussions of whether playing ball on Sunday was okay or not – incidentally my parents decided it was fine.

- Most of you know that even today in Denver, car-dealerships are closed on Sundays.
- Not that long ago most stores were closed on Sunday.
- Even today in 2005, Bergen County, New Jersey, hosting one of the largest shopping areas near to New York City, is completely closed on Sundays.

The first law prohibiting work and commerce on Sunday was issued by The Christian Emperor Constantine in A.D. 321 “Let all judges and all city people and all tradesmen rest upon the venerable day of the sun...” (Wikipedia.org)

Today, in huge contrast, with some seemingly quaint exceptions, hardly anyone suggests that Sunday be treated as different than any other day of the week.

Oh Christians may like a day off, but Sunday is not observed primarily because it is the Sabbath but because it allows freedom to do as we choose.

God says in Exodus 20:8-11 “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh

day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Why do you think God commanded his people to observe one day in seven as a day of rest from work?

- Was it because God needed the attention that they would give him on that day?
- Was it because God wanted to make life hard for people by restricting the time they could work to make a living?
- Was it because God wanted to make one day in seven miserable for active boys? Of course not

At creation itself, God established a rhythm that he knew human beings needed.

It was for the welfare of people that God created the Sabbath.

Sabbath keeping was not punitive but liberating.

We'll come back to that later.

So what about the Sabbath?

Many Christians consider the 4th commandment about remembering the Sabbath to be irrelevant.

Some will point out that the 4th commandment is not specifically reiterated in the NT even though the other nine are.

Honoring parents is reiterated in the NT.

Stealing, murder, adultery, covetousness, and the rest of commandments are spoken about in the NT- all except Sabbath-keeping.

- Others will say that Jesus fulfilled the law so that Sabbath keeping is done.
- Still others will note that Jesus and Paul repeatedly criticized the **legalism** that had attached itself to Sabbath keeping (Romans 14:5-8, Galatians 4:10, Colossians 2:16-17).
- And NT writers certainly emphasize that in Christ we live under grace.

And some people couple those ideas and conclude that the 4th commandment is a non-issue.

Is that right? Is Sabbath keeping irrelevant to us as believers?

By the time Jesus was here on earth, the Jews had made Sabbath a **burden** to the people rather than **liberating** as God intended.

They had determined 39 categories of activities that they said were prohibited by the 4th commandment.

Those prohibited activities included: Plowing, grinding, baking, weaving, sewing stitches, writing more than one letter, kindling a fire, or carrying anything for a distance of more than a certain number of feet. (Wikipedia.org)

- The legalists of Jesus day were upset that his disciples **picked** some heads of grain to eat on Sabbath. (Mark 2)
- They were angry with Jesus because on the Sabbath he **healed** a man with a shriveled hand. (Mark 3)

The Jews had turned the law of Sabbath into **legalism**.

They took the commands of God, given for the welfare of his people, and turned them into a way to earn God's favor or incur his wrath.

Instead of living by grace through faith in God they turned Sabbath into a merit system.

It is no wonder that the average Jew vacillated between legalism and libertarianism – between precision in attempting to keep every law perfectly or giving up and doing whatever they wanted to do.

Jesus repeatedly challenged that legalism but **never** by breaking his own commandments – the commandments of God.

He challenged the misuse of the law, not the law.

Through the centuries since Jesus' resurrection, people have struggled with how the 4th commandment applies to Christians.

As I said earlier, some simply dismissed the commandment.

But others, seeing the validity of God's gracious laws for the good of his people, attempted to apply Sabbath to Christians.

By the 17th Century, some, in spite of their good motivations and contrary intentions, had turned Sabbath keeping once again into legalism.

In 1668, as one example, John Wells, a devout Christ-follower and church-leader wrote an 800-page book on what to do and not do on the Sabbath.

One chapter is titled, “A plea with Christians to outvie the Jews in Sabbath-holiness and observations.” (Bauckham in Carson, 327)

That kind of thinking prevailed in a large segment of the Christian church especially in England and America.

As much as I love the Westminster Catechism I take exception to its near-legalism when it says in answer to questions 60: “The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God’s worship, except for works of necessity and mercy.”

Not bad ideas to be sure, but so specific as to create an air of legalism.

It is no wonder that the average Christian vacillated between legalism and libertarianism – between attempting to keep the law perfectly or giving up and throwing it all over.

And overwhelmingly in our Christian culture, libertarianism has prevailed.

Today Sabbath keeping is largely a non-issue.

- Does anyone still ask what is permissible in observing the Sabbath?
- Does anyone still ask what might be dishonoring to God on the Sabbath?

I think not.

- No one any longer asks if working is okay on Sunday.
- No one asks if buying or selling is okay on Sunday
- No one asks if sports are okay for Sunday.

- Few ask if meeting with God's people for worship is more important than other activities.
Vacations, spectator sports, youth sports leagues, hunting, fishing, fund-raising events, community events or you-name-it, are perceived as equally legitimate uses of Sunday – equal to worship.

What happened?

Does it honor God and is it faithful to his Word for us to throw the baby of Sabbath out with the bathwater of legalism?

Some think that Sabbath is a uniquely Jewish concept that was abrogated when Jesus came.

It is true that the 4th Commandment of Sabbath keeping is not specifically restated in the New Testament.

But what is often overlooked is that Jesus observed the Sabbath, his disciples observed the Sabbath, and, until they were kicked out of the synagogues years later, all subsequent Jewish-Christians observed the Sabbath.

And just as importantly, nowhere does the NT even suggest that Sabbath keeping is no longer important.

It seems that the burden of proof would be on those who suggest that **one** of the Ten Commandments of God is no longer as important.

James Dennison wrote, "A moral law once delivered is perpetually obligatory until expressly repealed. The silence of the New Testament is a **confirmation** of the Sabbath, not an abrogation thereof." (Dennison in Sproul, 152)

One of the confusing issues for Christians who still think of Sunday as special is that for nearly 2000 years Christians have observed Sunday as the day of worship rather than Saturday as the Jews did and still do.

What is confusing about this is that we have tied the Sabbath concept inextricably to Saturday – we have equated Sabbath with Saturday.

We commonly say that the Jews observe Sabbath and we observe Sunday.

But Sabbath does not mean Saturday it means, “rest” or “ceasing.”

God established the 7th day as the day of Sabbath (“ceasing”) but he did not say that day had to be Saturday.

The Bible does not say that the 7th day was Saturday.

Just because somewhere in history-past the Jews chose to call Saturday the 7th day and then observe Sabbath on it, we easily think of Saturday and Sabbath as the same but they are not.

God’s command was not about Saturday Sabbath but about making one-day-in-seven, special to Him.

There was nothing wrong with the Jews making that one-day-in-seven, Saturday, but the Bible does not say it **had to be** what we call Saturday.

But whichever day it is, Sabbath as a one-day-in-seven, holy to the Lord, is a practice instituted by God and it has as much bearing on God’s people today as on God’s people in Moses’ day.

Jonathan Edwards considered the one-day-in-seven as morally binding because it was set at creation and ratified in the Ten Commandments. (Edwards, Works, IV, 620ff)

Though ever so briefly and incompletely, I have attempted to establish that the 4th Commandment is about one-day-in-seven being especially set apart to the Lord but that day is not necessarily Saturday.

I have attempted to show that such a one-day-in-seven Sabbath is as important for Christians today as for Jews in Moses’ day.

I attempted to show this is true by noting, among other evidences, that the command, honored by Jesus himself, has never been rescinded.

Sabbath is still to be understood and taken seriously by God’s people.

I wish to take a minute to show that Sunday became that special one-day-in-seven for Christians.

As early as immediately after the Resurrection, the disciples were meeting on, what was commonly called, the first day of the week (Sunday).

- John 20:19 “On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them
- John 20:26 They met again on Sunday.
- Acts 20:7 “On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people.”
- 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 “Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money...”

This is not to suggest that God **commands** worship on **Sunday** but only to show that very early in church history Sunday worship became the practice.

In fact it was so much the practice that by the time John wrote the book of Revelation, within 50 years of the Resurrection, he refers to that weekly day of worship as “The Lord’s Day.” (Revelation 1:10)

It was called the “Lord’s Day” because it was the day of the week on which Jesus was powerfully shown to be the sovereign Lord by his resurrection.

J Bauckham writes, “(Sunday) was simply, by the normative custom of the apostolic church, the day on which Christians met to worship, and, for us, the use of its title, “The Lord’s Day”, in Revelation 1:10 gives that custom the stamp of (biblical) authority.” (Bauckham in Carson, 240).

In other words, the **author** of the NT, the Holy Spirit himself gives Sunday the title of “The Lord’s Day” – a day belonging to the Lord in ways that other days don’t.

And as soon as it was legally possible, under the Christian Emperor Constantine, in A.D. 321, Sunday was given special status by the government and people were allowed to cease working on that day.

It is no wonder then that eventually Sunday became known as the Christian's Sabbath.

It is true that Sunday is never commanded as the Sabbath day for Christians but precedence alone is as instructive for us as the centuries of Saturday Sabbath was for Jews.

But more importantly, the Sunday Resurrection of Jesus and the Bible's reference to Sunday as "The Lord's Day" make a strong case for observing Sunday as the Christian Sabbath.

One-day-in-seven is God's gracious instruction and Sunday is both the meaningful and practical application of that instruction.

It is meaningful because it is Resurrection day.

It is practical because, as much as possible, we need to select **one** day for God's people to gather rather than everyone selecting his or her own day.

So what does all this mean for us?

It means that we must not run to the extremes of either legalism or libertarianism.

As to legalism, to say that we must set aside one-day-in-seven as holy to the Lord does not mean that by doing so we earn God's grace.

- You will never be more loved by God because you keep the commands of God.
- You will never be more condemned by God because you fail to keep the commands of God.
- You are loved by grace, not by your precise observance of certain commands.
- You are accepted by God because Christ fulfilled the perfect law of God not because you keep the law.

But knowing that does not mean that we run to libertarianism; that we ignore God's gracious instruction in the commandments.

Or as Paul asked it in Romans 6:15 "Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!"

So how do we respond to God's command of a one-day-in-seven Sabbath?

What did God say?

Exodus 20:8 “**Remember** the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

- “Remember” means “observe without lapse; hold as a present and continuing priority.” Durham, 289
- “Remember” not as in merely mentally recalling but doing something about it.

Foolish is the man says he remembers this is his wedding anniversary but does nothing more.

So how do we remember it?

We remember by “keeping it holy.”

“Keeping it holy” means to set it apart as different and differently used than other days.

The very word “Sabbath” gives us understanding.

As I said earlier, the word means “cease,” “rest,” or stop.

Exodus 20:9-10a Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God.”

The 7th day is a “ceasing” a “resting.”

What are we to cease? We are to cease laboring/working.

But what constitutes work or labor is not specified here.

Oh, there were a couple of times in Israel subsequent history that they had apparently so egregiously violated the spirit of God’s law that specific illustrations of what they were not to do were given. (Jeremiah 17:22,24)

But by and large they and we are not told specifically what we are not to do.

I think that is very intentional.

God wants us to enter into his commands with a attitude of love for him not legalist fear of him.

If we desire to please him we will seek to act in ways that we think will please him.

And because we know he loves us, we can be assured that if we are seeking to please him, even our poor attempts will be met with approval and encouragement.

We aren't looking for what we can get away with; we are looking for how we can personally make this day holy to the Lord.

We ask what we can do to make it special.

To make it special we look at what God says about the Sabbath.

In Exodus 20:11 "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

So first of all, Sabbath was a celebration of creation.

God made order out of chaos at creation and he continues to do that in our lives at all times.

The week of six days of work with one additional day of ceasing work is the creation pattern.

Not only were **six** days needed but **all seven** were needed and specifically the 7th day brought something to creation that the first six did not.

Sabbath keeping is part of creating order out of chaos.

To work all of the time is to return to chaos – witness the rat race of so many.

One author noted, "Sabbath keeping puts all human striving aside, recognizes the decisive role of God in creation, and provides for a weekly oasis to rest back in the arms of this reality." (Fretheim, 230)

- In Sabbath keeping, in "ceasing," I take time to reflect on God, the Creator and my Creator.
- In "stopping," I stop long enough to take stock of my life as lived in his care.
- I revel in his benevolent sovereignty.
- I enjoy what he has created.
- I stop to enjoy the day, to enjoy his people, to rest in his love.

But there is more:

In Deuteronomy 5:15 after repeating the 4th commandment, Moses adds, “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.”

So Sabbath is also a commemoration of deliverance – of being set free.

In Egypt, Israel was condemned to 24-7 forced labor.

Moses requested time for worship but Pharaoh rejected the idea.

But God, on behalf of his people, would not be denied.

He delivered his people and set them free to work and cease working, to labor and to worship.

Sabbath keeping is a testimony to **God's** deliverance of Israel and us.

God will take care of us.

We don't need to work seven days a week to make ends meet.

We can trust him.

And when God says no one, not even servants or your animals are to work, it is to show the same humanitarian concern for those around us that God has shown to us; allow them the same ceasing to celebrate creation and deliverance that we enjoy.

Sabbath rest is not a burden but a gift to the world.

Listen to Isaiah's reflection on Sabbath keeping:

Isaiah 58:13-14 “If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath

and from doing as you please on my holy day,
if you call the Sabbath a delight
and the LORD's holy day honorable,
and if you honor it by not going your own way
and not doing as you please or speaking idle words,

then you will find your joy in the LORD,
 and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land
 and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob."
 The mouth of the LORD has spoken."
 The Sabbath was a delight.

Some say Sabbath keeping is boring.

I love James Dennison's response: "What is boring about setting aside one whole day to delight in the Lord Jesus Christ; what is boring about sequestering one day to enjoy the sweet presence of Christ in public, family and private worship; what is boring about sanctifying one day in teaching one's children the way of salvation, in opening the Scriptures to them at home, in dealing tenderly, lovingly, personally with their souls; what is boring about setting aside one day to visit and pray over the sick, to comfort and relieve the poor, to sit beside the lonely, to minister consolation to the bereaved, to join in warm fellowship with other Christians?" (Dennison in Sproul, 152)

But Sabbath keeping was not only for ceasing it was for also for acting.

God ceased working on the 7th day but he didn't stop acting.

In Leviticus 23:3 we read, "There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a Sabbath to the LORD.

This day is to be consecrated to the Lord.

In the Bible Sabbath is filled with praising the Lord (Psalm 92), with special sacrifices Numbers 28:9-10), with gathering for religious purposes (Leviticus 23:7-8), and for reading and studying God's word (Luke 4:16-21; Mark 6:2 etc).

In the NT, as God's people gathered together,
 they prayed,
 they worshipped,
 they gave to meet the needs of others,

they gave to carry on missionary activity in other places, and they fellowshiped and encouraged each other in their faith.

The joy of the Sabbath was not just in not working but also in rejoicing in the Lord – hence fellowship and worship naturally followed in the day of rest.

That's why the letter to the Hebrews 10:25 urges us: "Do not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another..."

All of that said, I know that some of you are waiting for me to spell out what is and what is not acceptable on the Christian Sabbath.

You will wait a long time.

God didn't do it and I won't.

Yes, God says "cease" labor and work, but God gives us reason more than specifics because he wants our hearts not just our compliance.

Too many of us think of Sunday as a day off but we don't couple that with our need for intimacy with God and God's desire to meet with us to spend time with us.

Simply changing the activity from required employment to selfish enjoyment doesn't meet the intent of Sabbath rest.

Many of us take time off of work but we don't complete the creation cycle with a Sabbath – we don't find rest for the soul.

Intimacy with God like intimacy with another person requires time.

St. Augustine wrote, in that well-known statement, "You have made us for yourself (God), and our hearts are restless until they find rest in You."

This speaks to the need for a person to have something more than just cessation from employment – but true rest for the soul.

Many take time off of work only to fill that time fuller with other activities that only further bleed the soul.

In this regard, Abraham Heschel wrote, “He who wants to enter the holiness of the day must first lay down the profanity of clattering commerce, of being yoked to toil. He must go away from the screech of dissonant days, from the nervousness and fury of acquisition and the betrayal of embezzling his own life. He must say farewell to manual work and learn to understand that the world has already been created and will survive without the help of man. Six days a week we wrestle with the world, wringing profit from the earth; on the Sabbath we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul. The world has our hands, but our souls belong to Someone Else.” (Abraham Heschel “A Palace in Time” in *The Ten Commandments* William Brown (Editor), p 214)

Sabbath – God commanded it because he loves us.
Will we respond?

Exodus 20:8-11 “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

I close with this from a most helpful book entitled Keeping Sabbath Wholly, by Marva Dawn.

Sabbath is for:

The busy people who need to work from a cohesive, unfragmented self;

For social activists, who need a cycle of **worship** and action;

For those who chase after fulfillment and need to understand their deepest yearnings and to hear the silence;

Sabbath is for those who have lost their ability to play because of the materialism and technologization of our society - who need beauty and gaiety and delight;

For those who have lost passion and need to get in touch with feelings;
Those who are alone and need emotional nourishment;

For those who cannot find their life's priorities and need a new perspective;

Sabbath is for those who think the future is dictated by the present, who need hope and visions of the future to change the present order;

It is for those who are disgusted with dry, empty, formalistic worship and want to love and adore God;

And Sabbath is for those who want to be God's instruments, enabled and empowered by the Spirit to be world changers." (Marva Dawn, [Keeping the Sabbath Wholly](#), Dedication page.)

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy"

Bibliography:

Resources for practical application to our individual and family lives:

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Mains, Karen Making Sunday Special Word, 1987

Somewhat more detailed works:

Douma, J. The Ten Commandments especially chapter “The Fourth Commandment” (good history of Sabbath keeping)

Carson, D.A. (editor) From Sabbath to Lord’s Day Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, c1982. BV111 .F76 (Rather technical but essential)

Sproul, R.C. editor, Soli Deo Gloria Chapter 12 by James Dennison (helpful modern day Puritan application building from the work of Jonathan Edwards)

Still other resources:

Swartley, Willard Slavery, War, and Women: Case issues in Biblical Interpretation Herald Press, 1983 (especially pages 65-95)
(Saturday to Sunday among Christians – an excellent overview)

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Dennison, James T., 1943 The Market day of the Soul: The Puritan doctrine of the Sabbath in England 1532-1700 _ Lanham, MD :

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Haynes, Carlyle Boynton, 1882-1958 From Sabbath to Sunday: a discussion of the historical aspects of the Sabbath question, showing how, when, why, and by whom the change was made from seventh to the first day of the week Washington, D.C. Review and Herald, [c1928] BV125 .H38

Other Comments and Quotes:

The Bible does not say Sabbath was *instituted* at creation but that later Sabbath observance (Mt. Sanai forward) was *grounded* in creation.

Sabbath was instituted for God's people; it is not a law for all people (for non Jews and non-Christians) even though it obviously has value for all.

“The claim exerted upon Christian life and thought by Christ's resurrection simply implied that believers would most naturally use Sunday to commemorate Christ's resurrection. The transition from Sabbath to Sunday was not arbitrary, but flowed from the authority of the One who called himself Lord of the Sabbath and who was the fulfillment of the Sabbath. For this reason the treasure of the fourth commandment could not possibly remain tied to the Jewish Sabbath but required the celebration of another day, namely, The Lord's Day.”
(Douma, 138)

From the beginning, **Sunday** was consciously referred to as “the Lord's Day.” Rev 1:10

The Didache (c. A.D. 100) and Ignatius wrote that Christians “no longer observe (Saturday), but direct their lives toward the Lord's Day, on which our life is refreshed by him and by his death.”

Justin Martyr (A.D. 150) refers to “Sunday” as the day when the believers gathered together.

Dionysius of Corinth (A.D. 170) speaks of the holy Lord’s Day.

Tertullian (A.D. 200) said Sunday was a day of joy for believers.

(Douma 139)

Law must be seen in the context of grace in the OT as much as in the NT.

The fact that the commandments also showed the people how much they needed God’s mercy and grace does not mean the commandments were not to be taken seriously.

God expected his people to keep the commandments but to do so not legalistically but in love – increasingly depending on the Lord to enable them to obey him.

The fact that the teachers of the Law had turned it into a sham, a mere pretense of its intention, does not nullify the commandment itself.

Jesus was not a commandment breaker, he was a commandment clarifier.

It doesn’t seem Jesus set out to be an iconoclast but when he ran into perversions of the law that would have prevented him from his father’s work, he did not hesitate to break such laws. Eg. Healing on the Sabbath, etc.

Throughout Mark 2 we see Jesus clarifying the issue of Sabbath (rejecting legalism but not breaking the real law)

From Saturday to Sunday?

The earliest indications are that Christians also continued to observe Sabbath-rest on Saturday. That they met on Sunday evening for worship as Christ-followers may have been out of convenience rather than any sense of changing Sabbath (6th day) to Sunday.

It is even reasonable to assume that they spent Sunday working, as did everyone else until Constantine. (Douma, 111)

Not until 321 was Sunday declared, by Constantine, a day of rest. (Douma, 111) But even then it was not uniformly observed as the day of worship. Some Christians continued to meet on Sabbath and others on Sunday.

The practice of Sunday worship for Christians instead of Saturday worship was well established among Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians within a very few years of Christ's resurrection.

By the end of the 1st Century A.D. Sunday was clearly the designated day of worship for Christians AND there is no record of controversy on this subject – it was wholly accepted. (Bauckham in Carson, 236)

The council of Orleans (538) prohibited work on Sunday but did not prohibit travel, meal preparation, personal grooming, etc. (Douma, 112)

It wasn't until the Middle Ages that theologians began to argue Sunday worship was connected to Sabbath-keeping.

Is it possible that Sunday worship has no connection to Saturday Sabbath but definite connection to the 4th commandment (one-day-in-seven)?

The **form** of honoring the 4th commandment (Saturday to Sunday) has changed but not the **function** (ceasing from work and giving even more attention to corporate worship and kingdom work).

“There are familiar social institutions and patterns which are generally recognized not only as undoubtedly Christian in origin but also as having had beneficial effects right down to our own time. One of the most important of these institutions is the Sunday holiday. The heathen world had no Sunday. Neither the peoples of classical antiquity nor our barbarian ancestors had any such holiday recurring regularly at short intervals.” (Th. Zahn in Jan Lochman's Signposts to Freedom, p 59)

Westminster Larger Catechism:

Q117. *How is the sabbath or the Lord's day to be sanctified?*

A. The sabbath or Lord's day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day [a], not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful [b]; and making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy [c]) in the public and private exercises of God's worship [d]: and, to that end, we are to prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose and seasonably dispatch our worldly business, that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of that day [e].

The Westminster emphasizes ceasing from literal work and recreation.

Heidelberg Catechism

Question 103. What does God require in the fourth commandment?

Answer: First, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained; (a) and that I, especially on the sabbath, that is, on the day of rest, diligently frequent the church of God, (b) to hear his word, (c) to use the sacraments, (d) publicly to call upon the Lord, (e) and contribute to the relief of the poor. (f) 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. (g)

The Heidelberg emphasizes a spiritual resting and worship.

This tendency to “spiritualize” or allegorize the law is as old as Origen (3rd Century). They see the work, we are to cease from, as “evil works” as in the Heidelberg Confession.

D.A. Carson (in From Sabbath to Lord's Day) does not see NT evidence that Sunday was perceived by the NT writers as the Christian Sabbath contra Edwards and Puritans.

By the end of the 1st Century A.D. Sunday was clearly the designated day of worship for Christians AND there is no record of controversy on this subject.

But it is noteworthy that no NT or early church writer makes the claim that Sunday is the command of the Lord for Christians.

The resurrection appearances may have been connected to Sunday worship early but the resurrection and appearances are not presented by NT writers as a reason for Sunday worship.

“The Sabbath law is clearly motivated by religious and social concerns. First of all, the Sabbath was introduced to remind the people of Israel of a divine timetable. This timetable, the seven-day week is to be followed on earth. This is followed by a social concern; workers need a period of regular rest, which is provided of everybody – animals, servants, and aliens. But the Sabbath is more than an imitation of a divine pattern or an expression of social concern; it is a sign, a perpetual covenant between God and his people This sign tells of God’s grace (sanctifying his people), God’s holiness (for the people and Yahweh), and God’s authority (a covenant that must be obeyed).” Dressler in Carson, 26

“Sunday worship appears, when the evidence becomes available, in the second century, as the universal practice outside Palestine (as begun in Palestine before the Gentile mission began under Paul). There is no trace whatever of any controversy as to whether Christians should worship on Sunday, and on record of any Christian group that did not worship on Sunday.” Bauckham in Carson, 236

Jewish Christians probably continued honoring Saturday Sabbath but added Sunday worship. There is no evidence that Jewish Christians left synagogue worship until they were excluded because of the Christianity.

Jewish Christians rightly saw themselves as the renewed Israel (Abraham’s true children) and as such would have found it perfectly right to continue to observe Sabbath (even Saturday worship which was the custom of the Jews).

While Sunday was still a workday in the cultures of Palestine and Rome, the earliest records of Christian Sunday worship place it early in the morning and late at night on Sunday (an argument for Sunday night services- joke). (Bauckham in Carson, 239)

“Whether this choice of Sunday, was originally a matter of mere convenience or whether it was initially chosen as the day of the Resurrection, there can be no doubt that it was soon associated with the Resurrection, and only this can really account for the fact that worship on Sunday acquired normative status throughout the Christian world.” (Bauckham in Carson, 240)

“Our study of the origins of the “Lord’s Day” has given no hint of properly sabbatical associations; for the earliest Christians it was not a substitute for the Sabbath or a day of rest nor related in any way to the fourth commandment. It was simply, by the normative custom of the apostolic church, the day on which Christians met to worship, and, for us, the use of its title, “The Lord’s Day”, in Revelation 1:10 gives that custom the stamp of canonical authority.” (Bauckham in Carson, 240).

I am aware that it wasn’t until the 13th century that theologians began to connect Sunday worship with the 4th commandment. (Bauckham in Carson 306)

Part of the reason for that late date is that in the intervening years the prominent Christian theologians had spiritualized the commandment to the extent that they considered every day as a Sabbath to the Lord. (Bauckham in Carson, 300)

Not until Eusebius (A.D. 330 sermon) do we have the first evidence of an equation of Sunday worship with Sabbath rest but he proves too much when he equates the Jewish Sabbath with all days of the week for the Christian. (Bauckham in Carson 284)

Saint Augustine(A.D. 300s) likewise taught a spiritualized Sabbath (an eschatological “rest”) – seven-day-a-week Sabbath. Likewise the Lord’s Day is every day.

John Chrysostom (A.D. 400s) preached that Sunday worship honored the one-in-seven principle laid down by God and that on that day we should cease from work (Sabbath) to give ourselves to spiritual things. (Bauckham in Carson 287)

Not until the 500s did the Sunday-Sabbath as cessation from work become common. This Medieval Sabbatarianism grew from practical ground not theological. (Bauckham in Carson 303)

Thomas Aquinas in 1200s makes popular the moral versus ceremonial distinctions in the law and thus sees a moral law (Natural law) in the 4th commandment that requires man to set aside regular time for worship (one-in-seven was the established definition of regular). That moral law was kept by Jews in the ceremonial 7th day worship and Christians keep it by 1st day worship. (Bauckham in Carson 306)

It was this Thomist view promulgated by Roman Catholic teaching that made Sunday Sabbath (rest and worship) the norm in Christianity.

Bauckham claims that the Protestant Reformation broke with the Catholic Sabbatarianism and returned to a more apostolic view AND that it was later reformers (Puritans in particular) that restored a very strict Sabbatarianism.

Calvin and Luther:

The Decalogue remained, as with Augustine, the essence of Christian morality.

The distinction of moral and ceremonial law remained.

No attempt was made to establish Sunday worship on NT grounds.

The principle of a day of rest for worship (established in middle ages) was not repudiated.