

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Heidelberg Catechism		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	66		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Matthew 12:1-21		
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The Lord's Day (Part I)

38. Lord's Day

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)

(a) Tit. 1:5 For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: 2 Tim. 3:14 But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; 2 Tim. 3:15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 1 Tim. 5:17 Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. 1 Cor. 9:11 If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? 1 Cor. 9:13 Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? 1 Cor. 9:14 Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel. 2 Tim. 2:2 And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. (b) Ps. 40:10 I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation. Ps. 40:11 Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O LORD: let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me. Ps. 68:27 There is little Benjamin with their ruler, the princes of Judah and their council, the princes of Zebulun, and the princes of Naphtali. Acts 2:42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. Acts 2:46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, (c) 1 Tim. 4:13 Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. 1 Cor. 14:19 Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. 1 Cor. 14:29 Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. 1 Cor. 14:31 For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. (d) 1 Cor. 11:33 Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. (e) 1 Tim. 2:1 I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; 1 Tim. 2:2 For kings, and for all that are in authority;

that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. 1 Tim. 2:3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; 1 Tim. 2:8 I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. 1 Tim. 2:9 In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; 1 Tim. 2:10 But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works. 1 Tim. 2:11 Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. 1 Cor. 14:16 Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? (f) 1 Cor. 16:2 Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. (g) Isa. 66:23 And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD.

Was the Sabbath instituted at Creation (Genesis 2:2-3) or was it exclusively given to the nation Israel *after* the Exodus (Exodus 16)? Has Sunday replaced the Sabbath? Douma, in his excellent treatment on the ten commandments points out that the, “Sabbath is not *explicitly* maintained in the New Testament. We read nowhere that the Sabbath must be observed by the Christian church according to the fourth commandment. We do read that several times the disciples or a congregation gathered on Sunday (‘the first day of the week,’ John 20:19, 26; Acts 20:7), and also that on this day Christians in Corinth were to set aside money for the Jerusalem congregation (1 Cor. 16:2). We know also that John received the Spirit on the island of Patmos on ‘the Lord’s Day’ (Rev. 1:10), something that leads us to think immediately of Sunday as the day of Christ’s resurrection.

“But does all of this mean that Sunday has come in the place of Sabbath? Is it not too strong to insist that Christ has transformed the Sabbath into Sunday, when we nowhere read of this?

“What must we do with those texts in the letters of Paul that can leave the impression that we do not need to observe a special day of rest any longer? We need not esteem one day above another, Paul says (Rom. 14:5). He disapproves of the custom among the Galatians of observing ‘days and months and seasons and years’ (Gal. 4:10). He even calls observances like a feast day, new moon or *Sabbath*, matters ‘which [were] a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ’ (Col. 2:16-17). Does all of this not indicate that the Israelite Sabbath has passed away like a shadow, since the reality of Christ has now come?”¹

He goes on to argue, “that from the very beginning, the New Testament church observed Sunday on the basis of the fourth commandment, but there are a number of indications that the church from the very *earliest* centuries did not do this. Before the second century, we find nothing to suggest that believers rested from work on Sunday. We receive the impression, for example, that people gathered in the early morning or late evening on Sunday, while the time between was used for daily labor.

“Under emperor Constantine, Sunday was proclaimed a day of rest in A.D. 321. Certainly that was a momentous event, whose impact during subsequent centuries we cannot easily overestimate. But it would be a mistake to think that this decision led to a new Sabbath with strict prescriptions for resting. Constantine let the farmers work on Sunday, because Sunday was often the best day for sowing and planting. In Constantine’s opinion, one should not pass up any appropriate opportunity offered by God’s propitious providence!

“Nor did the institution of Sunday as the day of rest signify for the first Christian emperor that from then on, ecclesiastical activities would be concentrated on Sunday. The Greek church historian Sozomenus tells us that as late as the fifth century, Christians in the churches of those days did not have a uniform time or manner for calling the church together. Some gathered on the Sabbath, others on Sunday.

“Disagreements persisted about the character of Sunday rest. The Council of Orleans (538) prescribed abstinence from agricultural labor on Sunday, but viewed regulations governing matters like traveling on Sunday, meal preparation, exertion connected with housework, or personal

grooming, as belonging more to Jewish superstition than to a Christian observance of the Lord's day.

“As we survey church history, we see that for centuries there was no indication that Sunday was observed ‘on the basis of’ the fourth commandment. The connection between Sabbath and Sunday was certainly made here and there throughout the early centuries, but it was not until the Middle Ages that such a coupling was explicitly argued in theological writings.”²

R.J. Bauckham in his excellent historical survey writes, “The Reformers’ break with medieval Sabbatarianism was not complete; neither Luther nor Calvin held that the fourth commandment requires Christians to rest on Sunday, but both held that, as a matter of convenience and order, a weekly day of rest for worship was needed. The individual Christian must rest and worship on the day prescribed by human authority (in practice, Sunday); he is at liberty only to exceed this requirement. Moreover, both Luther and Calvin placed their teaching about Sunday observance within their treatment of the fourth commandment, and in their commentaries on Genesis, though not elsewhere, both taught that a weekly day of rest for worship was ordained at creation.”³

He goes on to observe that Zacharias Ursinus who, “was responsible for the very non-Sabbatarian-sounding Heidelberg Catechism (1563) – which nevertheless reverses the order of Calvin’s thought on the fourth commandment, teaching that it requires first the duties of public worship and secondly the ‘spiritual rest’ of sanctification. Unlike the Second Helvetic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism makes no mention of a day of rest and in fact refers the commandment’s teaching on worship only ‘especially’ to the Lord’s Day. The effect of the Decalogue structure of Protestant ethics was to broaden the scope of each commandment as far as possible. Just as the fifth commandment was taken to refer not only to obedience to parents but also to respect for all other authorities in church, state and society, concern for dependents, and parents’ duties to their children, so the fourth commandment was taken for the source of all duties in the spheres of public worship, almsgiving, the ministry, and religious education. Ursinus’ discussion of how the Sabbath is sanctified and how it is profaned is concerned not with rest but with these positive duties of church life, which are especially, but not exclusively, the duties of the Lord’s Day. Ursinus’s emphasis is not on rest, but the principle of a day of rest for worship is nevertheless basic to his thought. The abrogated ‘ceremonial’ aspect of the Sabbath was merely its prefigurative *significance* and the fact that it was tied to the seventh day in particular. Christian liberty and nondistinction of days are ensured by the abrogation of these aspects, so that *which* day of the week is now a ‘thing indifferent’ and the needs of ‘order and comeliness’ rather than ‘difference of days’ are all that now set the Lord’s Day apart.”⁴

I. JESUS ON THE SABBATH

My favorite theologian, B.B. Warfield, wrote, “We have no such formal commentary from our Lord’s lips on the Fourth Commandment. But we have the commentary of his life; and that is quite as illuminating and to the same deepening and ennobling effect. There was no commandment which had been more overlaid in the later Jewish practice with mechanical incrustations. Our Lord was compelled, in the mere process of living, to break his way through these, and to uncover to the sight of man ever more and more clearly the real law of the Sabbath – that Sabbath which was ordained of God, and of which he, the Son of Man, is Lord. Thus we have from him a series of crisp declarations, called out as occasion arose, the effect of which in the mass is to give us a comment on this commandment altogether similar in character to the more formal expositions of the Sixth and Seventh Commandments. Among these such a one as this stands out with great emphasis: ‘It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath even until now, and I work.’ Obviously, the Sabbath, in our Lord’s view, was not a day of sheer idleness; inactivity was not its mark. Inactivity was not the mark of God’s Sabbath, when he rested from the works which he creatively made. Up to this very moment he has been working continuously; and, imitating him, our Sabbath is also to be filled with work. God rested, not because he was weary, or needed an intermission in his labors; but

because he had completed the task he had set for himself (we speak as a man) and had completed it well. ‘And God finished his work which he had made’; ‘and God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good.’ He was now ready to turn to other work. And we, like him, are to do our appointed work – ‘Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work’ – and then, laying it well aside, turn to another task. It is not work as such, but our own work, from which we are to cease on the Sabbath. ‘Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work,’ says the commandment; or, as Isaiah puts it; ‘If thou turn thy foot from the Sabbath (that is, from trampling it down) ‘from doing thy pleasure on my holy day’ (that is the way we trample it down); and ‘call the Sabbath a delight, and the holy (day) of the Lord honorable; and shalt honor 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 make thee to ride upon the high places of the earth; and I will feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.’ In one word, the Sabbath is the Lord’s day, not ours; and on it is to be done the Lord’s work, not ours; and that is our ‘rest.’ As Bishop Westcott, commenting on the saying of the Lord’s which is at the moment in our mind, put it, perhaps not with perfect exactness but with substantial truth; ‘man’s true rest is not a rest from human, earthly labor, but a rest for divine heavenly labor.’ Rest is not the true essence of the Sabbath, nor the end of its institution; it is the means to a further end, which constitutes the real Sabbath ‘rest.’ We are to rest from our own things that we may give ourselves to the things of God.

“The Sabbath came out of Christ’s hands, we see then, not despoiled of any of its authority or robbed of any of its glory, but rather enhanced in both authority and glory. Like the other commandments it was cleansed of all that was local or temporary in the modes in which it had hitherto been commended to God’s people in their isolation as a nation, and stood forth in tis universal ethical content. Among the changes in its external form which it thus underwent as a change in the day of its observance. No injury was thus done the Sabbath as it was commended to the Jews; rather a new greatness was brought to it. Our Lord, too, following the example of his Father, when he had finished the work which it had been given him to do, rested on the Sabbath – in the peace of his grave. But he had work yet to do, and, when the first day of the new week, which was the first day of a new era, the era of salvation, dawned, he rose from the Sabbath rest of the grave, and made all things new.”⁵

¹ J. Douma, *The Ten Commandments: Manual for the Christian Life* (P & R, 1992), p. 111.

² *Ibid.*

³ R.J. Bauckham, “Sabbath and Sunday in the Protestant Tradition,” in *From Sabbath to LORD’S Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation*, ed. D.A. Carson (Zondervan, 1982), p. 317.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 320.

⁵ B.B. Warfield, “The Sabbath and Sunday in the Bible: Protestant Word of God in *From Sabbath to LORD’S Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation*, ed. D.A. Carson (Zondervan, 1982), p. 317.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 320.

⁵ B.B. Warfield, “The Foundation of the Sabbath in the Word of God,” an address delivered at the Fourteenth International Lord’s Day Congress held in Oakland, CA, July 27-August 1, 1915, published in *Sunday the World’s Rest Day*, 1916, pp. 63-81, and in *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Glasglow, 1918, pp. 316-319, 350-354, 378-383. Also as a pamphlet, Glasglow, 1918.