

On the Sabbath - A study on the fourth commandment for the ministries and people of Trinity Presbyterian Church, Spring 2008.

Purpose: to determine a working theology for Trinity regarding the fourth commandment which will result in practices that honor God and bear fruit.

Genesis 2:1 says, "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them." Though what follows this text comprises the main subject of our study, we must not let this phrase pass us by. God's rest and his blessing a day as holy proceed from his completion of the work of creation. Perfect order and complete wholeness, i.e. *shalom*, constitute the finished work at hand. It is no wonder God himself stood back to marvel at what he had done.

But even as it represented the formal end of his creative work, it marked the beginning of all that he would do to make his own name glorious. And in that sense, his work had only just begun. Whatever follows, both in the Scripture and in our study, must be seen in this light. God's own rest, born out of utter delight in what he had done, in the completeness and wholeness of his work, and how all of it reflected his holiness - as the one, true and perfect God - is working itself out in all of history.

There is a remarkable echo on the cross of those words in Genesis. Having faced heart wrenching betrayal and abandonment, the agony of crucifixion, and the utter terror and despair of bearing our sins and enduring his Father's wrath, having lived a righteous life, perfectly obeying his Father and completing the work that he came to do, Jesus cries out with his last breath, "It is finished." It is an earth-shattering sentence. The earth shakes and the dead are raised as the very foundations of creation are forever changed. The veil in the temple is torn in two. Never again will God require a sacrifice to atone for sin. Nothing before it, not the flood, not the covenant at Sinai or the establishment of the Davidic dynasty had the impact, the pervasive, expansive force of that moment.

The *shalom* of God is here.

It should not surprise us to see Jesus' followers selling their possessions, devoting themselves to his teaching, to prayer and to the celebration of his sacrifice (Acts 2). It is no shock that the followers of Jesus suffer the loss of everything to know him and to proclaim him. Their lives have been completely redefined, and they fully intend to work out that redefinition in all that they see and in all that they do. What happened in that work, in the speaking of those words, marked a new and living way (Hebrews 10:20). It is the goal of this study to articulate that way as it pertains to the fourth commandment. It is the way to utter delight in God, complete wholeness and pervasive, holy rest. It is to this rest-filled end that we labor.

Summary of Views in our Tradition:

The following is a brief summary of the major differences in the views in the Reformed tradition. It moves from 'least' to 'most' Sabbatarian. (The basic content for this section was taken from the lecture notes from John Frame's Pastoral and Social Ethics class at Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando.)

Calvin/Continental:

- With the coming of the New Covenant, there is no particular day (or even weekly interval) at which Christians are obligated to abstain from work and engage in worship, etc.
- While it is preferable that Christians gather every day for public worship, that is impractical and an undue burden. Therefore, for the sake of order and consistency, the Church should meet regularly one day of the week.
- Since the historical Church has adopted Sunday for that regular meeting, it is appropriately called the Lord's Day.
- Positively, we keep the fourth commandment today 1) by laying aside our works and trusting God's grace for salvation, 2) by consecrating all our time to the Lord, and 3) by giving rest to those under our care and setting aside time for worship.

D.A. Carson (From Sabbath to Lord's Day):

- The Sabbath is fulfilled in the New Covenant: "If we keep the Sabbath in this dispensation, we are again denying Christ."
- However, the Sabbath is now replaced by the Lord's Day, which commemorates the Resurrection and symbolizes the accomplishment of our rest in Christ.
- We are obligated to keep the first day of the week (no other) as a day of worship. No cessation of work is required.

Puritan/Westminster:

- The New Testament Lord's Day is essentially the same as the Old Testament Sabbath, now properly observed on the first day of the week rather than the seventh.
- On this Christian Sabbath, believers must rest "from their own works, words and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations" (WCF, XXI 8).
- The whole day is to be taken up "in public and private exercises of his worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy."

Scriptural Exegesis

The Sabbath and Creation

Genesis 2: 1-3

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

This passage breaks the literary pattern established in the previous chapter (a description of God's creative work followed by the expression, "And there was evening, and there was morning..."). The first verse of chapter 2 tells us the work is completed, this is repeated again in v2 and then we are told about the 'seventh day.' The phrase 'seventh day' is used three times in verses 2&3. The phrase, 'his work that he had done' is also stated three times. Overall, two themes emerge: **time and content**. Verse 2 lays this structure out clearly: on the seventh day (time), God finished his work (content) – and again – on the seventh day (time), he rested from all his work (content). It is tempting to see the theme of time as primary. That is, we have set aside a day and then fill it with some content. Rather, verse three indicates the opposite. The seventh day is blessed and made holy 'because on it God rested.' The time serves the content, not the other way around.

Sabbath – The term Sabbath is not mentioned in the passage. The word for rest is *shabath*. Obviously, we derive the technical term Sabbath (*shabbath*) from this root, but it is at least noteworthy that the term itself does not appear in the Scriptures until Exodus 16.

God rests – That God rested does not mean he was tired or that he stopped working (see Psalm 121, John 5:17). Rather, as mentioned in the foreword, God's rest is born out of who he is in himself and what he had just completed, i.e. *shalom*. Colossians 1: 15-17 is an excellent meditation on this: "all things were created through him *and for him*." God's rest is nothing short of utter satisfaction, a pervasive peace and joy, in what he has made. As creation is a reflection of his holiness, unity, power, love and beauty, it calls forth praise, honor and glory to the Creator who ultimately delights in what he has done.

God blesses and sanctifies the day – Calvin sees these as one and the same (he blesses it, therefore it is holy). Regardless, God's actions gave the day special significance. The delight that God experienced in himself on that day is conferred to the day itself. But how the specialness/holiness of this first seventh day is transferred to subsequent seventh days at this beginning of human history is unclear. It is not hard to understand that this description serves as a foundation for the command given at Sinai and that the Holy Spirit through Moses gives us these details in Genesis so that the import and blessing of the command in Exodus is fully comprehended by the people, but the Genesis text itself does not give us that information.

Seventh day – In some measure, the debate over the role of the Sabbath in the New Covenant hinges upon the interpretation of this phrase. The Puritans have argued that what matters is "one day in seven" not the literal seventh (or last) day of the week. This idea will be fleshed out a bit more under the section on the Law, but in a plain reading, it is clear that the Genesis text has in mind the last day of the week. The seventh day is the culmination of God's creative activity. It would be wholly inappropriate for such an event (God's resting and blessing) to occur on any other day other than the last (i.e. seventh) day.

God goes first – Calvin said it this way, "For God cannot either more gently allure, or more effectually incite us to obedience, than by inviting and exhorting us to the imitation of himself." Again, the assumption of Calvin's comment is the later application of this Creation Ordinance to the command in Exodus. The text itself does not make clear to what end we are obeying God for what he has done on the seventh day other than the ultimately important reality that God is worthy of all honor, praise, respect and delight for his marvelously creative work and that, as his creatures, made on the sixth day, we comprehend our role of complete subservience and utter dependence upon the Creator. That, of course, is no small thing.

As we move into the application of this text, Calvin's comment is very helpful, for the whole of it can be summed in the phrase "As God did, so must we" – not simply that he models for us what we ought to do in this holy rest, but he embodies, deserves and, eventually, commands it. In this text, it can be understood through two themes: 1) Content: As God delighted in himself and in his work, he calls us to delight in him and his work. 2) Time: As God has so ordered things in our design and in his special blessing, we must regularly apportion time for focused, concentrated, undistracted delight in him.

The Sabbath and the Law

Exodus 20: 1-2, 8-11

And God spoke all these words, saying, 2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.... 8 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 10but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. 11For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

The Law-giving at Sinai is the bedrock foundation of Israel's identity as God's covenant people. At the heart of that Law are the Ten Commandments, given to define and instruct Israel in their special relationship with God. They are expressions of his grace. That is, they are given to his people whom he redeemed "out of the house of slavery," and, as a part of the whole Law, they are given to us – written on our hearts in the New Covenant by the Spirit of Christ (Jer. 31:33/Heb. 10:15-16).

There is much discussion among commentators about how the fourth commandment relates to the other nine. More specifically, the first four seem to be related to each other in their orientation toward God and our worship of him. Jonathan Edwards, as representative of the Puritan view, says, "The first command fixes the object [of worship], the second the means, the third the manner, *the fourth the time*" (italics added). Another view suggests that the first four commandments follow a pattern that shapes our thoughts, words and deeds toward God, the fourth being primarily concerned with our deeds (Motyer). Interestingly, these two views emphasize either time or content, stressing that the essence of the command is found in how it develops one or the other.

The fourth commandment also expresses well the historical nature of the Decalogue because it relies on God's own actions in Genesis 2 as he rested after creating the world. That is, the giving of the Law at Sinai is part of a larger story. It depends upon and shapes what has come before it, and, undoubtedly, just as what comes after it will in some measure depend upon it, it will be forever changed by those future events.* In the Sinai command, the creation ordinance is expanded in mainly four ways: 1) Israel's seventh day is given a specific name – the Sabbath, 2) the people are commanded to 'remember' the day, 3) they are prohibited from working on that day and, 4) are charged to make sure all under their care also rest from work on the day.

Creation Ordinance – The basis for the command is God's action in Genesis 2, but how does it relate? Time: clearly, the command delineates a specific day to observe and gives it a name. It also prescribes the means for setting aside the time, "six days you shall labor... but the seventh day... on it you shall not do any work..." Content: the only positive instruction given in the command concerning *how* to keep the day is the first phrase, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." As God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, so the people remember the day in order to uphold its holiness. That is, they commemorate it as a blessing and are blessed in this remembrance.

The creation ordinance forms the basis of the command. It is also the motive. Edwards, in his sermon series on the Sabbath, explains that the Sabbath served as a memorial to God's creative acts in Genesis. Every Sabbath, as God's images, the people were to reflect on the week's work and be grateful. Ceasing from labor that day underscored that the same creative power

that fashioned the heavens and the earth was at work to bring them blessing and security through their own labor, but only, in a wonderful twist, as they put down their tools, stepped back from their fields and depended upon God to provide.

This look to Genesis 2 as the basis for the command also implies something about human beings. We need rest. Though God did not tire and need rest, his gift of a weekly 24-hour period of rest for his people certainly reinforces what we already know to be true; we do tire and need rest. It is a design issue.

Sabbath – The word Sabbath (*shabbath*) is first used in the scriptures in Exodus 16:23. It may seem a bit strange that the Sabbath is mentioned before it is commanded at Sinai (ch. 20) until one remembers that the actual event at Sinai took place before the writing of the book of Exodus, so the people would have understood the earlier reference in written form having been present at the foot of the mountain during the event itself. Henry speculates that the nation had practiced some form of Sabbath rest prior to the giving of the Law, modeled on God's own rest in Gen. 2. In this light, the admonishment to 'remember' the Sabbath is seen as a reminder to return to a practice once in place among the people. One added nuance is that the last verse (v11) of the command projects the term back into the Genesis text – quoting Genesis 2:3 but replacing 'seventh day' with 'Sabbath.'

Seventh Day – As mentioned in the section on Genesis 2, the interpretation of the 'seventh day' has formed the basis for particular lines of reasoning on the continuation of the Sabbath into the New Covenant. The issue is whether the command stipulates observance of the literal seventh day of the week or simply says that the Sabbath must be kept one out of every seven days. Of the fourth commandment, Jonathan Edwards writes, "The words of the fourth command do not determine which day of the week we should keep as a Sabbath. They merely determine, [sic] that we should rest and keep as a Sabbath every seventh day, or one day after every six." His position is important because he uses this line of reasoning to justify why the Sabbath command remains in force in the New Covenant yet the day itself has changed from Saturday to Sunday.

While Calvin does not appear to take a hard line on the issue, he clearly sees significance in the notion that the Sabbath is the literal last day of the week. Looking at the larger symbolism in the choice of the seventh day, he writes, "It would seem, therefore, that the Lord through the seventh day has sketched for his people the coming perfection of his Sabbath in the Last Day..." (Calvin's Institutes, 396, 2.8.30) Calvin picks up on the fact that part of the richness of the Sabbath command is its association with the completion of God's work in creation which is undeniably on the last (seventh) day of the week.

Others in our tradition are more forthright in their disagreement with the Puritan position. Speaking explicitly about it, A.T. Lincoln questions,

What criterion allows them to isolate the seventh day aspect, which after all is at the heart of the commandment and its rationale (cf. Ex 20:11), as a temporary feature belonging only to the Mosaic period... If the Mosaic law were designed to teach the principle of one day's rest in seven instead of seventh-day rest, it might be expected that its legislation would have provided for a different day of rest for the priests (cf. Num. 28:9-10), but it does not. (p355)

Finally, it is worth repeating from the discussion above that the last phrase of the command in Exodus 20 places the word 'Sabbath' into the Genesis text – replacing the word 'seventh.' And from the exposition of Genesis 2, it is a difficult case to make that the Genesis text meant anything other than a literal seventh day. Undoubtedly, this issue has incredible resonance for the whole discussion. We will reserve judgment for our Theological Summary.

Remember – The word for 'remember' (*zakar*) is used often in the Old Testament. It is rich with meaning and is used in many senses: along with the common sense of remembering something from the past, God often says he will *remember* (keep) his covenant and people call upon God to *remember* (acknowledge) them in their afflictions. The command to remember in Exodus 20 calls the people to keep both the past and the future in focus. On the one hand, God

established something in creation that must not be forgotten. Just as humans require physical rest, spiritual rest is an essential part of human nature as God's image. He took time to reflect and delight (i.e. rest) in his work and in himself; the command calls Israel to rest in him – delighting, finding complete satisfaction, fulfillment and security in him and what he has done. On the other hand, God in the creation narrative blessed and sanctified the seventh day. In the same way, the people are to treat the Sabbath as a special, holy day. The call to remember implies that one must prepare to observe it. Remembering it, i.e. looking forward to it, keeps what is most significant in their sights, in their path, on their hearts and, in a practical sense, on their calendars.

Work Prohibition – Ironically, the command to not labor on the Sabbath does not get much attention among the commentators. Perhaps this is because it is obvious and so clearly stated. This idea is at the heart of the command as it is fleshed out in the rest of the Old Testament and it seems to be at the heart of the Pharisees' keeping of the day and of their problem with Jesus' keeping of it. This prohibition is the means and not the end of the command. That is, in order to 'remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy,' the people needed to cease from all other activities. It becomes a crux on which obedience to the command is assessed (Jeremiah 17:19ff). Ceasing from one's labor is a statement of dependence upon God and an acknowledgement of his ownership of all things. In that sense, it is also a grace and a promise – providing for the people's physical rest and implying God's provision and blessing.

Those under their care – The command comes on its way to someone else. If God's people are to benefit from the pursuit of rest in God and what he has done, they must *work* to see that those under their care also have opportunity for it. In the practical sense, employing one's servants, livestock, etc. while not personally working is really just an outward show of obedience – a want to see the work continue even if you are not directly there to manage it. It is no act of faith at all. In a deeper sense, nothing is truly embraced as a blessing until it is also offered as good for one's neighbor.

The fourth commandment is based on and gives fuller expression to the creation ordinance. At the heart of the command is the call to 'remember' and the admonishment not to work. Interestingly, because of later Old Testament passages, commentators have explained the command in terms of its association with worship, but the command itself does not point to any particular elements of Jewish worship life. It is more foundational, more basic than that – establishing a pattern of life that will expose, for good or ill, who or what the people honor and worship. As well, it provides the appropriate space into which that peculiar worship life of the nation can develop. As we will see in more detail in later passages, God is concerned with the content of his worship, and, with a shepherd's heart, he also understands how quickly human hearts (and time) are filled with other things. In short, direct form in Exodus 20, God reminds his people, and us, that remembering (i.e. honoring, glorifying, delighting in) him is not an option for those who are called his people, and in an ultimate sense, for those who are living as they were designed to live. The command also graciously provides specific means, a 24-hour period, for physical and spiritual rest.

*This is not intended as a statement espousing a relativistic view of the Law. Rather, it is evidence that the fourth commandment on its own is an incomplete revelation, and in its very construction anticipates a fuller revelation in Jesus.

Exodus 31:12-17

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

This passage, coming after the giving of the Law at Sinai, is supplemental to that earlier passage. It is situated just after the instruction for the design and construction of the Tabernacle and is God's final declaration before he fashions the two tablets and gives them to Moses.

Commentators take interest in the fact that the Sabbath is mentioned at the end of the instructions about the Tabernacle. They point to a connection between the Sabbath and the laws governing Israel's worship. The Sabbath is also mentioned again in ch. 35 just before the work to construct the Tabernacle begins. The two passages (31: 12-17 & 35: 1-3) also bookend the story of the golden calf and its aftermath. This arrangement in the text is as significant if not more so than the proximity to the passages about the Tabernacle. If the underlying thrust of the fourth commandment mandates a life of dependence on and security in God, no other story more demonstrates the opposite than the golden calf. The people grow impatient, fall into unbelief and work themselves into a distracted frenzy, over something as absurd as a metallic representation of a baby cow, and all while the very presence of God hovers over the mountain in awesome glory. It underscores the necessity of mechanisms of remembrance and delight, ordered in the commandment, all for their well-being and wholeness.

On the whole, the second half of the book of Exodus seems to answer the question: "How must one worship God?" Instructions about building the Tabernacle and its construction, as well as a narrative about how not to worship him both make perfect sense in this context. Clearly, restatements of the Sabbath command belong in such a section. This is, of course, why the fourth commandment is surrounded by controversy. What is the relationship between the Sabbath and the Tabernacle (ceremonial) worship of Israel? How does it move forward into the New Covenant with the abrogation of the sacrificial system?

Death Penalty - The application of the death penalty for breaking the Sabbath demonstrates the tremendous weight placed upon the command. It is mentioned twice in the passage. God is deadly serious about obedience in general and especially as it relates to worship of and delight in him. Continuing to work that day exhibited a disregard for God's spoken word and his providential care. In short, it dishonored him. The death penalty is also a description of the certain outcome for failure to find ultimate spiritual rest in God. A life lived apart from his commands will certainly result in a death of eternal separation from all the blessing and presence promised in the commands. Application of the death penalty for breaking this command is found in Numbers 15:32-36.

A Sign - The Sabbath is called a sign. It is a special marker of the relationship between God and his people. It is one of the chief ways they are distinguished from the ways, practices, and values of the world. Even into the New Testament era, this pattern of six-day-work and one-day-rest differentiated them from other peoples. But more than that, the continual reshaping and reorientation that takes place as one marks off time to rest and delight in God and not in circumstances has lasting effects. Notice the promise coupled with the sign declaration, "so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy." In other words, as one submits to God's design, he promises to work to produce the beauty and holiness reminiscent of the pre-fall world and ultimately in himself.

The second mention of the sign (v17) connects it explicitly to the creation ordinance. By participating in the Sabbath, the people availed themselves of the *shalom* of that original seventh day. The verse also introduces an interesting nuance: "on the seventh day, [God] rested and *was*

refreshed" (italics added). In this passive sense, 'was refreshed' (*naphash*) means to be refreshed, as if by the wind. The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge observes, "God, in condescension to human weakness, applies to himself here what belongs to man; though it may refer to the delight and satisfaction with which he contemplated the completion of all his works and pronounced them very good." The Sabbath symbolizes and, in some sense, invites one to participate in that great event. Psalm 92, said to be "A Song for the Sabbath," is an excellent meditation on this reality.

Forever – Several times, the command is said to be perpetual: verse 12 – "throughout your generations;" verse 16 – "as a covenant forever;" verse 17 – "it is a sign forever." This is not necessarily to be taken in a literal sense, as there are many things in the Old Testament – the priesthood, sacrifices, the various covenants – that are articulated in the same way. (Lincoln 352) Calvin has great insight here, suggesting that this sense of eternity is realized in Christ. He says, "Whatever was spoken of under the Law as eternal, I maintain to have had reference to the new state of things which came to pass at the coming of Christ; and thus the eternity of the Law must not be extended beyond the fullness of time, when the truth of its shadows was manifested, and God's covenant assumed a different form." Though the outward practice fades, the inward reality persists, realized and expanded in Jesus. Edwards suggests that the Christian Sabbath, Sunday, is celebrated to commemorate the work of redemption rather than creation. And so, this old sign of the Sabbath is swallowed up in the new creation yet lives on in the expression of Christian worship.

Overall, this passage adds depth to our understanding of the Sabbath and how it relates to the creation ordinance in Genesis 2. The placement in the text suggests a deep connection to the worship life of the nation. It makes sense that delighting in God and what he has done requires a system of practices that embody the greater reality, inviting the people to enter in and maintain the relationship. The passage also communicates the tremendous significance of the Sabbath in the lives of the people of Israel as the sanctity of the seventh day is reiterated and made deadly significant. As a sign and as a perpetual command, the Sabbath is central to the identity of the people as *God's people*. How it is realized in Christ is deeply significant for us as well.

Deuteronomy 5: 12-15

"Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. 13Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 14but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. 15 You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

The fourth commandment is restated in this second giving of the law, and there are significant differences from the Sabbath command in Exodus 20. This reflects Moses' pastoral approach to the Sabbath and Sabbath-keeping and, as mentioned about Exodus 20 itself, reinforces the historical nature of the command. He is concerned about faithful Sabbath-keeping among the people of Israel in light of their changing context. Thus, he addresses the specific issues that have arisen in the course of 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. In other words, the events between the giving of the Law at Horeb and its renewal at Beth Peor call for a new understanding of the meaning of the Sabbath and its proper observance.

Observe vs. Remember – In Deuteronomy, Moses uses the verb observe (*samar*) rather than remember (*zakar*). The word *samar* is a rich and diverse word used often as 'keep' and 'guard.' The Psalms use it fluidly of our obligation to the Law (119) and of God's ever-watchful care of his people (121). It only adds weight to the obligation of the day. Now that they are entering the land, full of blessing but also full of pagan peoples and their influence, Israel must uphold the fourth commandment with utmost care and concern. Vigilance and perseverance is required.

Motivation – The motive-clause (v15) is also different. In Exodus 20, Sabbath observance is rooted in the creation ordinance; in Deuteronomy it is rooted in the Exodus (i.e. redemption).

Their rest is the result of the work of God to free them from slavery and to bring them to a great and abundant land. Now, on the brink of that land, a place that in and of itself typified God's provision of rest for this people (Hebrews 4), the people need to remember where (who) that rest comes from. Spiritual rest is not only rooted in the design, it is rooted in all that God has done since the breaking of that design in the fall to restore his creation. As mentioned in the foreword, all of history is working toward this final *shalom* that God is preparing for those who believe.

Justice and Mercy – Born out of this motive is a fuller call to bring rest to one's neighbor.

Verse 14 ends with this concern "that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you." The people were slaves and God gave them rest, so they should give rest to their slaves. No doubt, as the people enter the land and conquer and then settle it and begin to prosper, they need to remember that this blessing is born out of God's redeeming love for them. Therefore, they must live toward all in this light, bringing rest to their families, to their servants, to their livestock, to the stranger with them and ultimately to the land itself. It is a picture of this *shalom* of God realized among the people and spreading to all who come in contact with it. God's anger against Israel is often based upon the poor treatment of the weak and helpless (Isaiah 1), those who should have been the first to benefit from Israel's upholding of God's commands. It forever connects issues of justice and mercy with true Sabbath keeping. Our Savior, Jesus, embodied this in all that he did and said on the Sabbath.

The restatement of the command in Deuteronomy adds to the weight of the need for the spiritual rest and delight of Sabbath keeping. Moses takes advantage of this new situation not only to remind them of the command itself but also to recast it for the journey ahead into the land. Eugene Merrill writes, "... this gives theological justification for the observance by the Christian of Sunday rather than Saturday as the day set apart as holy. For the Christian the moment of greatest significance is no longer creation or the exodus – as important as these are in salvation history. Central to his faith and experience is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, a re-creating and redemptive event that eclipses all of God's mighty acts of the past" (p. 152).

Other passages

There are many other passages in the Law that directly refer to the Sabbath and contribute to the body of knowledge and practices of what it means to keep the command. By in large, these passages reflect the connection between the Sabbath and the worship life of the nation. Some of the passages not mentioned in the above expositions include: Exodus 16:22-30; 23:10ff; Leviticus 16:31; 19:3, 30; 23:3, 11, 15-16, 32, 38; 25:1-7; 26:2, 34-35, 43; Numbers 28:9-10

Sabbath and the Prophets

Isaiah 56: 2-6

Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath, not profaning it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil.” 3 Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, “The Lord will surely separate me from his people”; and let not the eunuch say, “Behold, I am a dry tree.” 4 For thus says the Lord: “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, 5 I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. 6 “And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant –

Isaiah 58: 3, 13-14

‘Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?’ Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers.... 13 “If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; 14 then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

Jeremiah 17: 19-25

Thus said the Lord to me: “Go and stand in the People’s Gate, by which the kings of Judah enter and by which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem, 20 and say: ‘Hear the word of the Lord, you kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who enter by these gates. 21 Thus says the Lord: Take care for the sake of your lives, and do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem. 22 And do not carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath or do any work, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your fathers. 23 Yet they did not listen or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck, that they might not hear and receive instruction.

24 “But if you listen to me, declares the Lord, and bring in no burden by the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, but keep the Sabbath day holy and do no work on it, 25 then there shall enter by the gates of this city kings and princes who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their officials, the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And this city shall be inhabited forever.

Ezekiel 20: 11-24

I gave them my statutes and made known to them my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live. 12 Moreover, I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them. 13 But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness. They did not walk in my statutes but rejected my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; and my Sabbaths they greatly profaned. “Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them in the wilderness, to make a full end of them.

14 But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out. 15 Moreover, I swore to them in the wilderness that I would not bring them into the land that I had given them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands, 16 because they rejected my rules and did not walk in my statutes, and profaned my Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols. 17 Nevertheless, my eye spared them, and I did not destroy them or make a full end of them in the wilderness.

18 “And I said to their children in the wilderness, Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor keep their rules, nor defile yourselves with their idols. 19 I am the Lord your God; walk in my statutes, and be careful to obey my rules, 20 and keep my Sabbaths holy that they may be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God. 21 But the children rebelled against me. They did not walk in my statutes and were not careful to obey my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; they profaned my Sabbaths.

“Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the wilderness. 22 But I withheld my hand and acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out. 23 Moreover, I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them through the countries, 24 because they had not obeyed my rules, but had rejected my statutes and profaned my Sabbaths, and their eyes were set on their fathers’ idols.

Ezekiel 22:26

Her priests have done violence to my law and have profaned my holy things. They have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean, and they have disregarded my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them.

Amos 8:4-6

Hear this, you who trample on the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end, 5saying, "When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances, 6that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and sell the chaff of the wheat?"

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Amos all bring suit against the people of God because of their failure to keep the Sabbath. The main passages in focus are Isaiah 56 & 58, Jeremiah 17, Ezekiel 20 and 22 and Amos 8. Writing at different times and to different audiences, the prophets provide a unique window into God's will for Sabbath keeping. As we see themes emerge in their messages and as those themes intersect with other prophetic writings, we are able to get a better picture of what is at the heart of the command.

Profaning the Sabbath – The prophets speak of Israel's "profaning" of the Sabbath. Four times in chapter 20, Ezekiel uses the phrase: "they rejected my rules... did not walk in my statutes... profaned my Sabbaths" (v13, 16, 21, 24). The word most often translated as profane is *chahal*. It carries with it the connotation of pollution or stain. There is a kind of corporate component to it, meaning that to profane something does not just effect the individual but all with whom the violator is associated as well. Thus, in Ezekiel 22:26 (cf. Numbers 18:32) the priest is said to 'profane' the holy things by his violation. The people had treated the command in such a way as to not only reflect poorly on themselves but also on their neighbors, on the day itself, on the land, and ultimately on God. The last one, of course, is most critical. The Law is inextricably associated with the Law Giver. To set aside one is to set aside the other.

Sabbath as a sign – This is not new language, for Moses in Exodus 31 called the Sabbath a sign between God and his people – a special marker of their relationship. Ezekiel says it is a sign so that the people "may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them" (20:12) and "that you may know that I am the Lord your God" (20:20). The Sabbath is a special gift from God that his people would know him, delight in him and be made holy like him. The prophets use it as the quintessential example of the people's disobedience. To fail to keep the day is to thumb their noses at God's gracious offer of himself and of his promise to bless them in the keeping of his Law. It is to deny the very thing for which they were made – rest in God and what he had done. It was tantamount to rejection of the covenant relationship established between God and Israel at Sinai. Thus, violating it dishonored God's good work in creation and redemption (the Exodus), both of which stood as markers of God's grace and holiness to his people and were specifically named as motives for keeping the command.

Sabbath is holy – Israel had failed to uphold the unique character, the "set-apartness" of the day. Ezekiel 22:26 summarizes this accusation: "They have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between clean and unclean, and they have disregarded my Sabbaths." From the day's inception as a creation ordinance in Genesis 2, God blessed the day and made it holy. God gives it significance by resting on it and calling his people to the same. Codified in the fourth commandment, the Sabbath is made special as God's people use it to rest and delight in their God and what he has done.

Isaiah rails against those who seek their own pleasure on the day – drawing a contrast between honoring it and going one's own way (58:13-14). Interestingly, however, Isaiah's concern for honoring the day is directly connected to how others are treated on it. The people's outward show of religious observance is tainted by the oppression of the weak in their midst. "Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers," he says (58:3). The holy character of the day is imbedded in how the *shalom* of God is proclaimed and practiced among the people. To honor the unique character of the day is to believe and to live as if delight and rest are good for everyone.

The Sabbath exists as a testimony of the goodness and holiness of God in creation and redemption for all who will embrace him. The prophets expand this interpretation and application. Their chief concern seems to be an approach to the Sabbath as being a day of unreserved loyalty and devotion to God as the "sign" of a whole life of unreserved loyalty and devotion to Him. So in Isaiah 56, even the eunuch and the foreigner, the ultimate outsiders,

when they keep the Sabbath, are brought near and given a name “better than sons and daughters” (v5).

How does this holiness cross over into the New Covenant? Much of the Church agrees on the day of worship, but is that day holy, set apart, special, a blessing and a day for being blessed? What are the consequences for failing to keep it? These are only some of the questions we are attempting to answer through this study, and we are awed by the prophets’ care and concern to communicate the holiness of the Sabbath. Nevertheless, something radical and profound has taken place on this side of the cross, for, just as Peter heard it, “What God has made clean, do not call common” (Acts 10:15).

Sabbath and rest – Inherent in the creation ordinance of Genesis 2 and fundamental to the command in Exodus 20, rest is at the heart of God’s gift to Israel in the Sabbath. Though this rest is ultimately found in utter delight and security in God himself, in the minds of the prophets, it is embodied in two ways: 1) cessation of work and 2) justice for the oppressed.

Jeremiah 17 warns against the continuation of work on the Sabbath. The pattern of 6 days of labor and 1 day of rest was codified in Exodus 20. So, for the people to continue to bear burdens and bring them through the gates on the Sabbath was an act of overt disobedience and disregard for the command. (see also Nehemiah 13:15ff) Under the surface, it unmasked hearts that were not depending (resting) upon God to provide. Thus, Jeremiah pleads with them to believe that blessing and security will come to those who demonstrate faith and delight in God by keeping the command to not work on the Sabbath. Though physical rest is the immediate issue, the prophets desire to see lives of worship and devotion. To spend ourselves in “service and worship” of God, Matthew Henry says, is the reason “that worldly business must be laid aside, that we may be entire for, and intent upon, that work, which requires and deserves the whole man” (p. 524 – Isaiah to Malachi).

One of the primary ways God’s people demonstrate their love for him in Sabbath keeping is by loving their neighbors. Amos makes this case in chapter 8. The people’s impatience with the Sabbath, their insecure desire to work, their inordinate love of the ‘fruit’ of their labor results in oppression. Amos does not tell us how but he clearly states that the effect of this disregard for the delight and rest of the Sabbath is that the needy are trampled and the poor are brought to an end (v4). As discussed above, Isaiah also connects good Sabbath keeping to justice for the broken and the needy. Though his first chapter does not mention the Sabbath explicitly, it is clear that any outward show of worship or obedience is utterly tainted so long as the fatherless and the widows remain in need. (1:11-17) *Shalom* is for all. Good Sabbath keeping will mean relief for those in need.

The prophets are deeply concerned with Israel’s failure to keep the commands of God. Particular to the fourth commandment, the people’s unwillingness to stop working on the Sabbath and the continued oppression of the weak reveal deeper problems. God’s people are not living out of dependence and delight on the Holy God who made them, who delivered them and who blesses them. The keeping of the Sabbath seems to typify this. An unwillingness on the part of the people to deny themselves for one day, reveals hearts that do not delight in his goodness and holiness and that are not devoted to his work and the progress of his *shalom* to all the land and, ultimately, to all the world. Though God requires a day of them, he desires lives of devotion and worship, not going about their own business, not seeking their own pleasure, but unreservedly giving their whole selves to him, not just for one day in seven, but in all things at all times. No doubt, this desire has not changed.

Sabbath and the NT

Jesus and the Sabbath – Matthew and Mark

Matthew 12: 1-8

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. 2 But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." 3 He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: 4 how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? 5 Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? 6 I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. 7 And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. 8 For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."

Mark 2: 23-28

One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. 24 And the Pharisees were saying to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" 25 And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: 26 how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" 27 And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. 28 So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

The initial days of Jesus ministry are marked by conflicts with the Jews, specifically the Pharisees, over the Sabbath. It was so pronounced that John writes in chapter 5 of his gospel, "this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath." (v16) Matthew and Mark relate one of those conflicts in the story of the disciples plucking heads of grain as they traveled. We initially only intended to analyze one of the texts, but the two accounts have enough significant differences to warrant a closer look at both.

Starting with the structural similarities: 1) The occasion – in both Matthew and Mark, Jesus and his disciples are walking through the grainfields on the Sabbath. The disciples pluck heads of grain as they walk. 2) The accusation – in both, the Pharisees charge Jesus' disciples with doing what is "not lawful on the Sabbath." Reaping was 1 of 39 kinds of work forbidden in the prevailing rabbinical teaching, called Halakah. 3) Jesus' defense – he points to the story of David and his men at Nob. 4) Jesus' claim – both passages conclude with: "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Some structural differences: In Matthew, Jesus adds a second layer of justification for his disciples' actions by pointing to the work of the priests on every Sabbath. This point ends with the powerful statement, "something greater than the temple is here." His critique also includes a quotation of the prophet Hosea: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." In Mark, Jesus makes the very significant claim that "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

Jesus and the Pharisees – Even as the issue at hand pertains to the Sabbath, Jesus makes claims that go to the heart of the Pharisaical understanding of the Law. He is attacking their law-methodology. In this case, their rigid definition of "work" is not in accord with what Jesus sees as the intent of the fourth commandment. In his terms, their criticism falls flat and is not valid. First, the impulse of the Pharisees was to specify to the smallest detail, meticulously covering every conceivable scenario. Jesus, however, appeared content to speak in generalities. Their nitpicky approach to the Law is inappropriate, and Jesus does not debate their conclusions but instead "simply brushed aside the whole complex of Sabbath prohibitions with sweeping generalizations which seemed to make the whole discussion unnecessary" (France, p. 143). And second, the Pharisees' Sabbath regulations are largely negative. In contrast, Jesus' words contain a "general pronouncement in positive terms about the purpose of the Sabbath which breathes a different atmosphere from that of the halakhic regulations" (France, p. 144).

The placement of the passages in their respective contexts also highlights the controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees. In the passage prior to our text in Matthew (11:25-30), Jesus

prays, thanking God for revealing himself to “little children” as opposed to the “wise and understanding” – certainly a dig at the Pharisees. He goes on to offer a “rest” that includes an easy yoke and a light burden, in contrast to the heavy load of the Jewish leadership (cf. Luke 11:46). Likewise, the Mark passage comes after Jesus is questioned about why his disciples do not fast and of Jesus’ discussion of new wine and old wineskins (v18-22). That passage certainly has in mind the difference between the established leadership and its ways among the Jews and Jesus’ new way. Finally, both passages are followed by the story of Jesus healing the man with the withered hand (Matt. 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6). Again, the stated point of conflict between Jesus and the Jews involves the Sabbath. Their disposition toward the day prompts Jesus to ask, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” After this event, the texts tell us, “the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.”

The conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees over the Sabbath merits some reflection. They are evidently hard working and well-intentioned men who care deeply about the Law of God.* Yet, it is clear they have completely missed the point. Their self-righteousness and pride have propelled them into a life of faithless rule keeping. Is part of their failure a desire to make the Law manageable and measurable, to delineate the command to such a degree as to at least give the doer the false sense, like the rich young ruler, that he has accomplished all that is required? Some raise this concern about Westminster and its categories of necessity and mercy and the debate over what constitutes recreation. (Lincoln 359, 394) Remarkably, Jesus’ general statements about the Sabbath have a breadth and a depth that make the command less oppressive, not like a stern master looking over the shoulder, yet his statements are more profound and total so that one comes to understand that whatever has been done to keep the command has been far too little. It also makes sense that Jesus is working against a system that is largely expressed in negative terms. This Pharisaical strategy rubs against the fourth commandment and its positive call to remember the day and keep it as holy. It looks like a keeping of the command motivated by fear. That we are apt to appropriate the command out of fear and/or pride should not surprise. That Jesus comes to us with the declaration of his Lordship over the Sabbath and that it is first and foremost a gift to us should make us humbly reverent yet courageously emboldened to participate in the life of faith, love, and rest, to which he is calling us.

These texts have direct implications for our understanding of the Law and the Sabbath that move beyond the controversy with the Pharisees. To consider the implications for us, we will look more closely at Jesus’ series of statements in defense of his disciples.

David - The first example Jesus points to in defense of his disciples is David (1 Sam. 21:1-6), who, on the run from Saul, took the bread of the Presence for him and his men to eat. This was a clear violation of the Law established in Leviticus 24 (v5-9), and Jesus does not shy away from this dilemma. Rather, that David’s act was “unlawful” appears to be Jesus’ main point. This not only comes directly against the Pharisaical tendency to enumerate *potential* violations of the command, but it asserts Jesus’ authority to redefine the meaning of the Law itself. This argument by Jesus is especially interesting because there is little to indicate that Jesus or his disciples have done anything against the Law.** In other words, though he could have singularly attacked the Pharisees’ additions to the command, instead Jesus takes the discussion to a whole new level and makes a claim that the Pharisees, in a sense, could not have anticipated.

Calvin tries to make sense of Jesus’ weighty declaration. He reasons that Jesus cannot mean that what David did was truly “unlawful.” “If David had attempted to do what was contrary to law,” he writes, “it would have been in vain for Christ to plead his example; for what had been prohibited for a particular end no necessity could make lawful.” So, in Calvin’s thought, Jesus is bringing a new clarity to the original meaning of the command, one that had been understood to some degree by David and which allowed for his apparent violation of it. This meaning has been deeply obscured by the religious leadership of Jesus’ day. Unfortunately, Calvin is not clear on the content of this ‘new clarity’ but holds simply to the notion that Jesus was not contradicting the Law. Henry asserts that the category of ‘necessity’ explains Jesus’ interpretation. That is, in both David’s and the disciples’ cases, because the act is merely to sustain themselves in their journey, it does not constitute a violation of the command. (We will

grapple with Henry's (also Westminster's) category in the Theological Summary.) Nevertheless, the implication is the same in Henry as Calvin – that David did not really break the command. As for the example of David, the import of the statement is made clearer in the coming verses, but at least we know that Jesus allows for the command to be 'broken' in some cases and, ultimately, David's actions do not really break it but reflect its true purpose.

Priests – The example of the priests, found only in Matthew, reinforces that Jesus is redefining, or at least bring new clarity, to the command. Again, Jesus' word choice is profound, saying that the priests "profane (*bebelousin*, from *bebeloo* – to desecrate) the Sabbath and are guiltless." (cf. Acts 24:6, Eze 24:21, Neh 13:17) Calvin sees the strong language as a kind of figure of speech, "accommodated to his hearers." It is not out of the question for Jesus to speak hyperbolically to make a point (cf. Luke 14:26). Henry, as well, does not take Jesus' language literally but sees that Jesus is again introducing a category for exemption from the general command to rest on the Sabbath. The passage, he says, "intimates, that those labours are lawful on the Sabbath day which are necessary, not only to the *support of life*, but to the *service of the day*... Sabbath rest is to promote, not to hinder, sabbath worship." It is interesting to ponder Henry's use of the word 'lawful' to describe the action of the priests and David when Jesus seems content to speak as if the actions are violations. This tension gets at the heart of the issue. To suggest that Jesus would commit or even uphold an actual violation of a previous command of Scripture sounds like utter heresy. So, if he is not doing that, is he merely employing strong language to drive home the point with the Pharisees? Or is he asserting the existence of something greater than the Law, a rule of life, more pervasive yet less defined, one that when properly applied may even *apparently* break the Law?

Greater Than the Temple – Certainly, verse 6 indicates that Jesus is proclaiming a new order. Scholars debate whether Jesus is referring to himself or to something else (like the Kingdom), but, at the very least, it is clear "that a new and greater development-thing-person has arrived at this point in history, something not there before." (Carson Commentary on Matthew, 282) In this new reality, Jesus has authority not only to reinterpret the Law in order to clear up misconceptions and poor applications of it but also to expand it and recast it in the light of his own life and ministry. Henry's comments on this verse are great:

If the temple-service would justify what the priests did in their ministrations, the service of Christ would much more justify the disciples in what they did in their attendance upon him... Christ, in a corn-field, was *greater than the temple*, for in him dwelt not the *presence of God* symbolically, but *all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*. Note, if whatever we do, we do it *in the name of Christ*, and *as unto him*, it shall be graciously accepted of God, however it may be censured and caviled at by men.

Jesus' argument sets up a hierarchy, so to speak. The Sabbath regulations, he says, are subordinate to the temple regulations which required the priests to work on the Sabbath.*** The temple regulations, however, are also subject to something greater. This is the meaning of his inclusion of Hosea 6:6, and this quotation is especially powerful because it reinforces that what Jesus is teaching has always been true. The Law itself has always been subject to a Higher Law, one that does not contradict the Law but subsumes and surpasses it. Jesus proclaims himself as that "One" in the next verses.

Lord of the Sabbath – All of this leads to the gigantic claim that he is Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus has commandeered both the example of David and the regular work of the priests to make his case before his critics, but now he declares himself to have comprehensive authority over the day itself (and assumedly the Law, the feasts, and all things associated with its keeping and blessing). Calvin intimates, in his discussion of John 5 (see below), that though the accusation against Jesus seemed appropriate, once the accusers learned who had directed the man to take up his bed on the Sabbath, they should have immediately rescinded their accusation. We too must submit all of our thoughts and actions regarding the fourth commandment to the Lord of the Sabbath.

Jesus' declaration has eschatological implications. He is not merely Lord over the Sabbath in that he can manipulate it and require of us whatever he wills. More organically, through his actions rather than the delineation of new requirements and procedures, Jesus brings his lordship of all things to bear upon the institution. The foretaste of *shalom* typified in the setting aside of the seventh day to rest is given concrete expression as Jesus heals, feeds and instructs. Further, his offer of the 'easy' yoke of grace and mercy, made available by his death and resurrection, provides an ultimate spiritual rest that cannot help but spill over into the believer's life, calling forth a life lived *in* that promised rest (mind, body and soul) and lived *for* the rest of others. Finally, his lordship alters the focus from an Old Testament emphasis on ceasing from labor to a New Testament call to worship (cf. 1 Cor 10:31, Col 3:16-17). The rest we enter into is one of real delight and love for our Lord of the Sabbath. Matthew Henry's thoughts are worth quoting at length:

That law, as all the rest, is put into the hand of Christ, to be altered, enforced, or dispensed with, as he sees good. It was by *the Son* that God *made the world*, and by him he instituted the Sabbath in innocency; by him he gave the ten commandments at mount Sinai, and as Mediator he is entrusted with the institution of ordinances, and to make what changes he thought fit; and particularly, as being *Lord of the Sabbath*, he was authorized to make such an alteration of that day, as that it should become the Lord's day, the Lord Christ's day. And if Christ be the *Lord of the Sabbath*, it is fit the day and all the work of it should be dedicated to him.

Sabbath for Man – It is in that light that we can reflect on the additional comment made by Jesus as quoted by Mark: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." Even though this pronouncement occurs first in Jesus' speech, the second phrase proclaiming Jesus' Lordship is the foundational idea. As Henry articulates above, as the Creator and Lawgiver, the Lord of the Sabbath, has graciously crafted the Sabbath for the benefit of his most beloved creation – mankind. It is powerful and enlightening that Jesus takes the concept of the Sabbath all the way back to the creation and raises the issue of design. Recalling our earlier discussion of Genesis 2, as God looks at the complete wholeness and beauty of what he has made, he delights (rests) in what he has done. That original seventh day is perfect, holy and blessed. The command in Exodus establishes a way for the people to experience a taste of that perfect rest and blessing and typifies the coming restoration of the created order ultimately fulfilled in Christ. The whole of it is a testimony to God's greatness and graciousness – making what he wills and willing it as a wondrous blessing for all who live in it.

His declaration reminds us of the need to think of the Sabbath in positive terms. On the Mark passage, Henry writes, "What care we ought to take not to make those exercises of religion burthens [sic.] to ourselves or others, which God ordained to be blessings." We must take care to express the gift and blessing of the Sabbath rather than to live and speak by a list of prohibitions. "When the negative element overwhelms the positive," says one commentator, "as it has done repeatedly in the observance of the Christian Sunday as well as of the Jewish sabbath, something important has been lost." (France, p147) This is not the only time Jesus argues for a "positive morality" rather than a morality of avoidance/negation (cf. Mark 7:14-23; Matt. 15:1ff.). In the next chapter of Mark (3:1-6) Jesus asks, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" (v4). For Jesus, the Sabbath is a time for doing good, showing mercy, relieving suffering, and ushering in the restoration of *shalom* so long before modeled in Genesis and offered in Exodus. Again France writes:

This positive aim is assumed to override the definitions of 'work' which scribal ingenuity had devised. Together with the principle enunciated in 2:27, this verse establishes a positive approach to Sabbath observance which is in principle so elastic that it will be hard to rule out any act which is not in itself unacceptable. Certainly, it leaves no scope for the rabbinic enterprise of building a fence around the Sabbath law. (p. 150)

Looking at Jesus, his words and work delivered to us by Matthew and Mark, it is not hard to see why the disciples became men who led a movement known for its love for the poor and needy, where “no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common,” (Acts 4: 32) and where Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, is proclaimed as the author and giver of perfect peace and rest. But these passages are not merely about what Jesus offers to humanity in his coming, they are pictures of the wonder of who he is in himself. He is Lord, full of authority and wisdom to guide, direct and command. He is the incarnate God on earth and in history, walking through a grainfield with his friends, confronting oppression, overturning the dominion of Satan and restoring the peace, order and beauty of Eden, not just for one day in seven but for all of time and forever.

*One can certainly dispute the Pharisees’ love of anything close to godliness. The story of the man with the withered hand reveals their vindictive spirit and a willingness to commandeer the Law of God for their own diabolical ends.

**Deuteronomy 23:25 permits the plucking of heads of grain in a field that does not belong to you, so the disciples are not breaking the Law in this act.

***Many scholars see this fact as an argument against the “one in seven” approach to the Sabbath. If the command meant for the Sabbath to be observed only one day in seven (as opposed to every seventh day), then why do the scriptures not make provision for the priests to observe the Sabbath on another day?

Jesus and the Sabbath – John

John 5:16-17

16 And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. 17 But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”

The context of this passage (5:1-15) is Jesus’ healing of the invalid by the Sheep’s Gate pool in Jerusalem. This is a story unique to the Gospel of John, Henry says, because the other Gospels focus on his ministry in Galilee and this event takes place in Jerusalem. Jesus, seeing the man and knowing “that he had already been there a long time,” asks him, “Do you want to be healed?” The man’s answer indicates he does not understand the question or who it is that asks, so Jesus commands him, “Take up your bed, and walk.” The man obeys and is healed.

John explains that this occurs on the Sabbath. Now that the man is healed and carrying his bed, he is confronted by Jews who are concerned about his breaking the Sabbath command by carrying his bed. This appears to be a legitimate concern, for Jeremiah (chapter 17) had warned them about bearing burdens on the Sabbath. They are also concerned about who gave the man such a directive – never mind the man has been healed after 35 years. After a bit of a run-around, the Jews find out Jesus had healed him and told him to carry his bed on the Sabbath, and John writes, “this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus.”

Breaking the Sabbath – Interestingly, unlike the passages in Matthew and Mark, the conflict does not center on unnecessary rabbinic additions to the Law. Instead, the Jews appear to have a case, at least initially. What surfaces in this text is Jesus’ authority even over the Law. Commentators reflect on the implications of his authoritative behavior. Matthew Henry says that Jesus, as the Lord of the Sabbath, has “power to make what alterations he pleased about it, and to over-rule the law.” In a sense, Henry maintains, Jesus does not permanently altar the Sabbath by his actions but, rather, overrides it for his purposes. Calvin sees greater continuity between the Law and Jesus’ actions. He believes that the very purpose of the Sabbath is to make way for “divine work” in people’s lives. “The keeping of the Sabbath,” he writes, “is so far from interrupting or hindering the works of God, that, on the contrary, it gives way to them alone.”

The man does not violate the Sabbath, then, even in carrying his bed because it testifies to the healing work Jesus has performed for him.

This illustrates an important dynamic in the way the Law works in the New Covenant (or more likely, how it was always intended to work). The letter of the command is set-aside for a greater cause. In loving this man, Jesus does not just heal him from his ailment but offers him a tangible, visible sign of the new reality. Not only will you walk, Jesus says, but also you will pick up your bed, the symbol of your illness, and carry it away.

An audacious claim – Jesus’ verbal justification for his actions crystallize his claim of authority over the Sabbath and the Law. Essentially, in verse 17 he asserts himself to be the Son of God. That is, he calls God his Father and equates his own work with the Father’s. It was undoubtedly an offensive claim and is ultimately why the Jews hated him. But it had to have confused them as well. How does God’s work relate to his seventh day rest in creation and his command in Exodus 20? If God has become man and continues his work ethic on earth, what does that mean for the Sabbath? Calvin sees no confusion or inconsistency. As mentioned above, the very purpose of the command in his mind is that people might see and apprehend the works of God:

The Sabbath or rest of God, therefore, is not idleness, but true perfection, which brings along with it a calm state of peace. Nor is this inconsistent with what Moses says, that God put an end to his works, (Genesis 2:2) for he means that, after having completed the formation of the world, God consecrated that day, that men might employ it in meditating on his works.

Jesus’ healing ministry on the Sabbath is precisely its divine purpose: to create the physical and spiritual space for concentrated delight in God and his work.

The Sabbath has been expanded and reoriented by Jesus’ work. In fact, he works on the Sabbath to bring Sabbath rest – even to the degree that those around him think he is violating the command. And what is the responsibility of those called by his name and living by his Spirit?

John 7:22-24

Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. 23 If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man's whole body well? 24 Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

We will not spend a great deal of time on this passage. It is largely an expansion of the authority issue from the passage in John 5. Starting in verse 14, Jesus goes to Jerusalem in the middle of the Feast of Booths and enters the temple. There, he is questioned about his authority. Our passage is the end of his answer to the question. Jesus raises the Sabbath issue, no doubt alluding to the earlier situation in John 5, and warns them not to “judge by appearances.”

Jesus points out a major flaw in the Jews’ Sabbath theology. As demonstrated by their own willingness to circumcise on the Sabbath, all forms of work are not prohibited by the command. Why then should they accuse him of breaking the command because he healed a man? If not circumcision, he says, then why healing? It is an argument from lesser to greater. Circumcision, a ritual with enough significance that Moses himself almost lost his life for non-compliance (Exodus 4:24-25), pales in comparison to making “a man’s whole body well.” And yet, the people want to condemn him for it. Henry says, “The law works pain, and, if that work may be done on the sabbath day, much more a gospel work, which produces peace.”

Three things stand out: 1) as before, Jesus expands the typical understanding of the Sabbath command. Work and rest are redefined. Works of mercy take center stage. 2) The typical understanding of the command divides. As we will see in Paul’s letters (Romans and Colossians), people’s disposition toward and practice of the Sabbath command produces dislocation and dissent rather than love. There, like here, the people are warned against judging too quickly. 3) Jesus embodies his claim as Lord of the Sabbath. Taking on an institution as

important to Israel as circumcision, Jesus makes clear his rule and authority over the whole of Jewish life and faith.

The Sabbath and the Lord's Day

Revelation 1: 10

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet...

Looking at the rest of the New Testament, after the Gospels, we want to deal with the passage in Revelation first. Fleshing out this detail about the Lord's Day seems to help frame the other discussions about the first day of the week and Paul's writings on days. It is the final reference on this subject in the Scriptures, and, in some sense, has connotations that help illuminate the earlier and somewhat obscure references.

Interestingly, Calvin has no commentary on Revelation, so we looked to the Institutes to try and gain his perspective on the verse. In his thoughts on the fourth commandment (Book 2, ch. 8), he uses the phrase "the Lord's Day" in discussing Sunday as the day of Christian worship but never refers to Revelation 1. It seems to be an understood and acceptable technical term for the day with no need for explanation. Similarly, Matthew Henry's comments in his commentary do not suggest that there is any dispute about the connection between the phrase in Revelation and the day of Christian worship. He goes on to say that "this can be no other than the Christian Sabbath, the first day of the week, to be observed in remembrance of the resurrection of Christ."

The phrase "the Lord's day" occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, and, while it is clear that John is tending to his own spiritual life on this day, there is no mention of a larger practice held among the Christian community. It is notable, however, that his reference comes without qualification, thereby assuming some level of apprehension by his readers of the phrase's meaning.

The phrase comes into wider use in the Church in the mid to late second century. There is some debate about whether those early references are to Easter or to Sunday in general, but it is clear that the phrase eventually came to be linked specifically with the regular gathering of Christians for worship on Sunday.

Overall, this verse is part of a smattering of references in the New Testament that allude to a larger shift from Judaism to Christianity. From this passage, it is unclear if (and if so, how much of) the Old Testament Sabbath legislation is carried over into New Testament worship. But it is not nothing that John calls this day "the Lord's." In the larger context of the book of Revelation, a vision clearly proclaiming Christ as the Lord and Conqueror of all, it makes perfect sense that he begin by reminding his readers that their time is not their own. One scholar reflected on it this way:

Clearly the Apocalypse is about confessing Christ as Lord not only in the Sunday church meeting, but in the marketplace, the courtroom, and the arena. To understand lordship and worship in too narrowly cultic terms would run entirely counter to the book's intention. Yet the message of the Apocalypse is to be received by the churches in their weekly meetings for worship. John expects the churches' obedience to the prophetic messages he communicates from the Lord and their intensified understanding of what allegiance to the Crucified One involves in the whole of life to be rooted and nourished in their times of corporate meeting with the Lord. The Lord's Day in the Apocalypse is the day from which the Lord may reign over the rest of the week. ("The Lord's Day" R.J. Bauckham, From Sabbath to Lord's Day)

The Sabbath and the First Day of the Week

Acts 20: 7

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

1 Corinthians 16:1-2

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

Acts – The context of the passage in Acts is Paul’s final journey to Jerusalem. It describes Paul’s preaching past midnight and the subsequent fall of “a young man named Eutychus” from a third story window. The event occurs in Troas where Paul stayed for seven days after leaving Philippi.

The event is said to have occurred “on the first day of the week.” F.F. Bruce says that this is “the earliest text we have from which it may be inferred with reasonable certainty that Christians regularly came together for worship on that day.” (NIV Commentary on Acts) It even appears that Paul and his companions waited seven days in Troas so that they could be with the believers when they met and broke bread. There is no mention of the Sabbath or of any association in the text with Jewish worship patterns.*

1 Corinthians – The passage in 1 Corinthians 16, though written earlier than the Acts passage, is the supporting text because it does not specifically mention a gathering. Seen on its own, it might simply be a passing reference with the simple design of ensuring an orderly and not hastily done collection. Linked with the Acts passage, it seems to indicate a pattern. Gordon Fee makes the case that this evidence,

implies that this is the day when believers from a very early time gathered for their specifically Christian celebration of worship, which included the Lord’s Table. Thus, even though they were not necessarily to bring their gift to the assembly on this day, it was the fact that this day marked for them the specifically Christian day in their week that probably made it convenient for Paul to note it as the time for them to remember the poor among the brothers and sisters in Jerusalem.

Our Tradition(s) – Though not specifically articulated in the Scriptures, the majority of the Church has come to believe that the apostles made the shift from the seventh day to the first day because the resurrection and the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit both occurred on that day.** But is that shift normative? Not properly observing the Sabbath carried with it the possibility of a death sentence. Do the same prohibitions and admonitions carry over in this apparent shift from the seventh day to the first day of the week? Jonathan Edwards says, by in large, yes, stating, based on the 1 Corinthians text, that “It is the mind and will of God that the first day of the week should be especially set apart among Christians for religious exercises and duties.” Matthew Henry concurs, calling the day “the Lord’s Day” (see discussion on Revelation 1:10) and “a day of holy rest.” But Calvin disagrees. Ironically, his translation of *sabbaton* leads him to the conclusion that at the time of the writing of 1 Corinthians and of the story in Troas in Acts, that Christians were still meeting on the Jewish Sabbath and slowly, “constrained by the superstition of the Jews, they set aside that day, and substituted another.” This later move, according to Calvin, along with Paul’s admonitions against observing days in Galatians and Colossians, demonstrates that the day of Christian worship is a matter of Christian liberty and not a requirement or command. For order and regularity, he affirms the need to meet on a day of the week, but he does not believe a specific day is required.

These passages, though indicating a shift away from the Jewish Sabbath, are not clear as to whether that shift implies an abrogation of the fourth commandment or merely a change in the day of its observation. Whether one agrees with Edwards or with Calvin depends more on how

one interprets Paul's thoughts in Romans, Galatians and Colossians, so it is to those passages we turn.

* Interestingly, the Greek word translated 'week' is *sabbaton*, an obvious cognate of Sabbath and also translated elsewhere in the NT as 'Sabbath.' In Matthew 28:1, the root word is used twice, translated first as 'Sabbath' and then as 'week!' What criteria textual critics and scholars use to determine the difference, we do not know. Nevertheless, only Calvin translates *sabbaton* as 'Sabbath' in Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:2. We could find no other commentator or translation that uses Sabbath instead of week. Obviously, Calvin's choice affected his exegesis of these passages.

** References to the "the first day of the week" in the Gospels are all tied to the Resurrection (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20: 1, 19). The out-pouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 occurred on the Day of Pentecost. Also known as the Feast of Weeks (Lev. 23:15ff), it is celebrated 50 days (or 7 Sabbaths plus 1 day) after Passover. This day, of course, is the first day of the week.

The Sabbath and Paul's Letters

Romans 14: 5-6

One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. 6The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.

Galatians 4:8-11

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

Colossians 2: 16-17

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

These three passages comprise the whole of Paul's direct instruction concerning the fourth commandment. It is telling that all three at least cast suspicion on the role of the Sabbath in the New Covenant. In light of these passages, it is clear that a right understanding of the Sabbath is found in the larger issue of how Christians rightly apprehend and treat the whole of the Mosaic code. Importantly, as well, these passages do not simply have in mind issues of salvation and justification but are deeply concerned with how one's view of the Law affects love for one's neighbor and for how one cultivates a life of faith in Christ.

Paul's changing approach – There is some discussion among commentators about what appears to be Paul's changing attitude toward the Sabbath. Romans seems to reflect an open mindedness and that many points of view should be tolerated. Galatians, on the other hand, has a vehement tone, calling what they are practicing "the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world" and wondering out loud whether he has wasted his time on them. Perhaps it is a progressive view, reflecting his changing attitude over time. More likely, it reflects the pastoral concerns of each letter to their individual congregations. Nevertheless, this issue is not what *really* divides commentators, schools and churches (even in our own theological circles).

Days – The crux of the matter is whether or not Paul, in all of the passages, refers to the Sabbath in general or to the more specific and special Jewish feast days. Recalling the Summary of Reformed Views at the beginning of this paper, the Puritan position holds that the Sabbath

command is very much in force but has moved from the seventh to the first day of the week. Of the Galatians text, Matthew Henry writes that Paul's complaint is that the church there had essentially joined "with the Jews in observing their various festivals, here signified by *days, and months and times and years.*" Calvin, on the other hand, argues strongly against such a position, saying, "Who but madmen cannot see what observance the apostle means? For [those whom he was addressing] did not regard the purpose to be political and ecclesiastical order; but, retaining Sabbaths...." The mediating position provides additional insight and possibility. Of the three passages in question, D.R. De Lacey writes,

What does this tell us about Paul's attitude to the Sabbath? The clear implication is that he refuses to dogmatise one way or the other. An individual may keep the Sabbath, or not... The important factor was not which practice one adopted, but one's motives. (Carson, 183-4)

There is very little clarity as to how to interpret 'days' in those passages and whether the broader Sabbath is in view or merely the festivals and feasts. No amount of etymological or historical analysis and argumentation seems to bring the positions closer together. It appears that one's conclusions about these individual passages depend very heavily on one's view of the role of the Law in the New Covenant. Someone who holds that the moral law, codified in the Ten Commandments, is universal and binding upon all people will interpret those passages appropriate to that framework.

Justification and Sanctification – Undoubtedly, Paul had in mind to exclude Law keeping from that which would justify sinners before God, and he expresses his thoroughgoing disappointment at the Galatians' adoption of Jewish rituals (they were Gentiles!) as a requirement for acceptance before God. But the other two passages have in mind issues of sanctification. Apparently, the Colossians had been counseled toward practices that were guaranteed to combat "the indulgence of the flesh." (v23) These practices included the Jewish calendar. Thus, Paul writes to remind them that the power to walk in Christ (v6) cannot be found in external observances but in this mysterious union with Christ so eloquently described in 2: 8-15. Therefore, they need not be concerned if others pass judgment on them for what they are or are not doing. In Romans 14, Paul is making application of his instruction in chapter 13 to "owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law." (v8) He applies this view to the issue of whether someone should be judged on what they eat – possibly referring to the problem common in other churches (see 1 Corinthians 8) of whether meat used in pagan rituals was appropriate for the neighborhood bar-b-cue. The issue in Corinth as in Rome is how one treats his brother in such a situation, and the circumstances become another opportunity to love. Paul brings up the days issue as a second area where love trumps basic rule keeping. Whether someone keeps the day or not, the important thing is faith in God which honors him and kindness to neighbor, i.e. love. It is also noteworthy that the one who keeps days is seen as the weaker brother.

In all, Paul's argument here as elsewhere hinges upon the New Testament idea that Love fulfills the Law. It is not something wholly alien to the Law, for Jesus quotes Deuteronomy and Leviticus when summing up the Law, but this approach is bigger and better and requires a thoughtful approach to individual circumstances, not a rigidly held system of rituals and obligations. We will grapple more with the implications of Paul's disposition toward the Law and the fourth commandment in our Summary.

The Sabbath and Eschatology

Hebrews 4: 6-11

Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, 7 again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. 9 So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, 10 for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. 11 Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

The context of this passage appears to suggest that the issue at hand is not the nature or content of the Sabbath or the seventh day. However, the author's discussion of entering rest has clear implications for the command. The chapter warns of the eternal consequences of continuing to strive for an eternal rest by any other means than a naked dependence on Christ and his intercessory work as our great high priest. The inclusion of the Sabbath and the seventh day provide insight into how the Sabbath command has been expanded and reoriented in the New Covenant, thus aiding us in understanding how we ought to view and practice it.

Rest and Redemption – The rest of God on the seventh day, i.e. the creation ordinance, is foundational for understanding what Christ's work accomplishes. F.F. Bruce says, "When we read that God 'rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done' (Gen. 2.2), we are to understand that he began to rest then; the fact that he is never said to have completed his rest and resumed his work of creation implies that his rest continues still, and may be shared by those who respond to his overtures with faith and obedience."* As God delighted in the peace and harmony of what he had made and rested in his own perfection, so the rest we are promised in Christ is one of perfectly restored harmony and fellowship with God (v16).

This puts the Sabbath command in a new light, for the creation ordinance, the basis of the command, connotes a rest that is more pervasive and total than merely resting from one's physical labor for one day per week. The command memorializes the event in Genesis, but it does not accomplish the complete and perfect rest the ordinance announces. Calvin says that that is precisely why the Law is fulfilled in Christ. "But by teaching them that [Sabbath observance] had a reference to something else," Calvin says, the author of Hebrews "gradually withdraws [his readers] from their superstitious notions. For he who understands that the main object of the precept was not external rest or earthly worship, immediately perceives, by looking on Christ, that the external rite was abolished by his coming." Henry, as well, sees the shift from the content of the command, rest from physical labor, to something greater. "A rest of grace, and comfort, and holiness," he says, is offered in the New Covenant, and, he continues, "This is the rest wherewith the Lord Jesus, our Joshua, causes weary souls and awakened consciences to rest, and this is the refreshing."

Today – It makes sense, then, why the author has a sense of urgency. The notion of a single day of rest is moot. Rather, the author invites his readers to see 'today' as the appointed day to embrace this rest. Calvin says, "The Apostle had no other thing in view by declaring that there is a rest for us, than to rouse us to desire it, and also to make us to fear, lest we should be shut out of it through unbelief." Whenever and wherever you can, believe on Jesus. Your life and needs now as well as your eternal peace and happiness depend on it.

This is not a new concept. Verse 11 indicates that the failure to apprehend the urgency of the call is exactly what Israel has done. Because of "their want of faith," Henry laments, "so few of the ancient Jews profited by that dispensation of the gospel which they enjoyed." It helps us to see why so many of Jesus' conflicts with the Jews centered on the Sabbath command. There is much that points to the Gospel in this offer of rest, yet the Jews Jesus encounters are blind to it.

However, even today, we do not experience the fullness of this promised eternal Sabbath rest. The author's phrase "there remains" alludes to this already/not yet dynamic. It is hopeful, yet he says we must "strive" toward it. F.F. Bruce concludes, "What then is this Sabbath rest which awaits them? It is evidently an experience which they do not enjoy in their present mortal life, although it belongs to them as a heritage, and by faith they may live in the good of it here

and now." This good is the promise of a "living and active" word of God and the invitation to enter God's very presence and receive mercy and grace.

Whatever the Old Covenant understanding of the Sabbath offered has been fulfilled in Christ. In this new reality, the concept of Sabbath rest has eschatological implications that far outstrip any call to observe a particular day. Rather, we are called to look back to God's original design to understand what lies ahead and embrace it all by faith in Jesus. Through the intercessory work of our high priest, Jesus, we no longer live under a secular/sacred dichotomy where certain things are marked off as holy and others profane, where some are clean and some are not, and where some days are better than others. (cf. Acts 10) Instead, we are called to repent and believe today and are encouraged to enter the very throne room of God with confidence.

*This quotation appears to contradict the concept that God's rest in Genesis did not mean he stopped working. Notice that Bruce says that God "is never said to have completed his rest and resumed his *work of creation*" (italics added). Commentators distinguish between God's work of creation and his work of redemption. The former has ceased; the latter continues. The Sabbath command is based on God's work and, subsequent rest, at creation. This rest continues.

Sabbath Observance by Jesus and the Apostles

Does Jesus' participation in the synagogue on the Sabbath demonstrate the binding nature of the fourth commandment in the New Covenant? The representative texts are Matthew 12:9, Mark 1:21, 6:2, Luke 4:16, 6:6, and 13:10. Luke, in chapter 4, uses the phrase "as was his custom," indicating that this was Jesus' regular pattern. However, in the Gospels, Jesus observes other portions of the Law, about which we do not dispute that they are no longer binding (see Matthew 3:15, Luke 2:22ff, John 2:13ff, 5:1; also note that the Lord's Supper is instituted during the Passover meal).

Also, Jesus' statement in Matthew 24:20, "Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath," is seen by some as evidence that Jesus intended the Sabbath to continue in force after his ministry. His discourse in chapter 24 alludes to the future destruction of the temple by Rome (70 A.D). Jonathan Edwards says that because this prediction pointed to a time after Jesus' ascension, "it is plainly implied in these words of our Lord, that even then Christians were bound to a strict observation of the Sabbath." Others disagree. A.T. Lincoln maintains that the mention of the Sabbath underscores "the extremity of the circumstances surrounding the judgment of Jerusalem." Speaking to the inhabitants of the city, i.e. Jews, if judgment comes on a Sabbath, the gates of the city will be closed and obtaining provisions for a quick flight will be difficult. (365)

Paul, as well, attends the synagogues regularly on his missionary journeys (Acts 13:14, 44, 16:13, 17:2, 18:4, 19). Luke again uses "as was his custom" in chapter 17. These visits appear to be motivated not by a desire to keep the Sabbath but to evangelize among the Jews. (Lincoln 366) Verse 18:4 says specifically that Paul "reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks." And in chapter 13, after the Jews of Antioch of Pisidia rejected Paul and Barnabas' message, Paul declares that they will now take their message to the Gentiles (v46). However, we must consider, regardless of what we conclude to be Paul's motivation for attending the synagogue on the Sabbath, that the book of Acts assumes the Sabbath is still the seventh day observance as celebrated by the Jews and has not transferred to another day of the week.

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