

The Sabbath Day
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Note: Since this is such a complex subject with many interconnected elements there are times when things previously mentioned and defined are restated to apply them to various implications of the principle being expanded upon.

Westminster Confession of Faith 21:7, "As it is the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in his Word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment binding all men in all ages, he hath particularly appointed one day in seven, for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto him: which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which, in Scripture, is called the Lord's day, and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath."

Meaning of the word "sabbath"

The word "sabbath" translates the Hebrew noun *shabbat* (שַׁבָּת). It comes from the verb *shavat* which means "to cease," "to desist from something," "to rest." It is related to the Assyrian verb *sabatu* "to cease", "to be complete". The related Assyrian noun is *sabattum*.

The root meaning shows that a sabbath day means "a day of ceasing," It is a day of rest from that which was being done on the other days of the week. This is the contrast made in God's word.

Some have made the mistake of thinking that the word means "seventh". The Hebrew word for "seventh" is *shevi'i* (שְׁבִיעִי). It is related to the Assyrian *sibittu*. Other than having two letters in common, the roots and spellings of these words are totally different from the word used for sabbath.

The modern Hebrew Shabbat is kept from sun-down on Friday to sun-down on Saturday. That delimitation seems to have been practiced all the way back to the Roman period not long before the time of Jesus. We do not know how much farther back that practice goes. Many different calendars were in use down through history as various cultures and empires influenced the way years, months and days were reckoned.

The Moral Law as summarized in the Decalogue tells us to, "Remember the Sabbath day" using the same term. The reference is to "the ceasing day". The words do not in themselves mean the "seventh day." Attachment to some absolute corresponding universal calendar day used by everyone to mark off a week is not the essential moral issue as the inspired word states it. One day in every seven is designated by God for Shabbat as a creation ordinance. That day was to follow six days of labor, regardless of how that fit in with the calendar being used by society in general at that time.

Two Kinds of Sabbath

God's work of creation established the seven-day cycle. The Sabbath Day was a memorial binding upon Adam and the whole human race descending from him. The Bible clearly teaches that this obligation is perpetual. Much later when God's plan was expanded to Israel by Moses, other uses of the sabbath principle were imposed upon Israel to prefigure the redemptive work of the Messiah. Therefore we ought to recognize two separate levels of law included in the Sabbath principle at the time of Christ:

1. **Creation Sabbath:** binding perpetually upon all humans since Creation - commemorative of Creation
2. **Levitical Sabbaths:** binding upon Israel until fulfillment in Christ - revelatory of Redemption

In our previous studies about The Law of God it was demonstrated what we call "moral law" is characterized by particular properties which distinguish it from other types of law in Scripture. They are as follows:

1. Since basic moral principles express the nature of the Creator, it is not possible for these principles to be variable or optional in a creation intended to declare the Creator's glory, eternal power, and divine nature. Therefore we say that the moral laws are each necessary and cannot be abrogated without confusing or denying aspects of God's unchanging nature.
2. Since the nature of God is eternal and unchangeable, so also must the moral principles of his creation be perpetually binding.
3. Since God made all of Creation to declare his glory which includes his holiness and justice, therefore God makes known his moral principles obligating all moral creatures to obey them perfectly and personally for as long as creation exists.

Considering these properties, it will become evident as we go through the details in God's word that the Creation Sabbath fits the category of Moral Law, and that the Levitical Sabbaths do not. They fit into the category of Ceremonial Law. All law is "fulfilled in Christ" but not all in the same way since they had different purposes.

The *Creation Sabbath* is primarily related to the work of bringing the physical universe into being. Since all humans owe their existence to that event, and since this principle was imposed prior to the fall of man into sin, this day was set aside as special for all humans for all time. It has no specific redemptive element, though it lays the foundation for the means of salvation by establishing the Sovereign authority of God over all he made. It is nowhere stated in Scripture that the atoning work of Jesus fulfills the duty of everyone to honor God as Creator. Genesis records the introduction of Sabbath to the representative head of the entire human race in Eden:

Genesis 2:1-3, "Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made."

The Sabbath represents God's ceasing from his work of creating all things out of nothing. The main element was not recuperative rest, since God needed none. The "rest" is that of ceasing from what he had been doing. Therefore the primary focus of the Creation Sabbath is ceasing from our labors and remembering the Sovereign Creatorship of God to whom all glory belongs. This makes it a perpetual day of worship as long as the created heavens and earth remain. Therefore it is moral in its nature.

The *Levitical Sabbaths* were made binding upon Israel after the Exodus as part of the system later abrogated by Christ. That system of symbols, ceremonies, and sacrifices were instituted to reveal the redemption Messiah would accomplish and the benefits of that redemption. It was administered by the tribe of Levi.

These Levitical Sabbaths commemorated the rest granted to Israel upon her deliverance from Egypt and foreshadowed the rest promised in the land pledged to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That represented the greater rest we find in Jesus Christ as our Savior. They also marked out Israel from the nations as a covenant community by the special requirements they made upon their culture and calendar. It was a foreshadowing of the way God marks out all his people he ordained to be redeemed by Christ.

These temporal Sabbaths began in the deliverance from Egypt and were layered upon the moral principle given at creation rather than being an essential part of it. The rest promised was essentially fulfilled in the finished work of Christ. Therefore these special days, like the other special feast days established under Moses, have no place in the Messianic era that followed the ascension.

Since the sabbaths of the Levitical period deal with redemption from sin, they are only moral in the sense of revealing God's grace and justice during a particular time segment of history and are therefore not moral in nature, but are better categorized as ceremonial law.

Historical Evidence

Evidence shows that the Creation Sabbath is a perpetual, unchanging commandment, binding upon all humans to reveal the creation power and glory of God, and is therefore moral in nature.

1. The Creation Sabbath in Eden prior to the fall of man.

The sabbath principle was established at creation. Therefore it is a Creation Ordinance. Genesis 2:3 directly states this principle before the corruption of the human race through Adam.

2. The Creation Sabbath in the Pre-Mosaic period after the fall

Very little is recorded of the daily lives of God's people during the earliest ages of human history. The whole period between Adam and Noah covers many lifetimes, yet it is summarized in only two chapters of Scripture. Obviously God did not intend to record much detail about this time other than what was important for his purpose in showing the major events of redemptive history. Yet even here we see indications that the basic creation sabbath principle was in effect.

a) A seven-day cycle was assumed.

Even in the brief description of the life of Noah we see that twice the period of time he waited for the doves to return after the flood ended was seven days (Genesis 8:10,12). This is an unusual choice since such a period does not follow natural sun or moon cycles. The sabbath ordinance, already stated just a few chapters earlier by Moses, the same author, gives a contextual foundation that accounts for the time reference.

b) The manna gathering provisions assume prior knowledge of sabbath.

Exodus 16:4-5,13-30 shows that manna was not to be gathered on the Sabbath. Twice the needed amount was provided on the sixth day in the labor cycle so that no labor for provisions needed to be done on the seventh day.

16:23, "...Tomorrow is a sabbath observance, a holy sabbath to the LORD."

16:26, "six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the sabbath, there will be none."

These manna provisions were explained before the ten commandments and the other Levitical laws were given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Yet the manna arrangements clearly assumed that the people would understand what he meant without explanation. They must already have had some concept of the practice of keeping the Creation Sabbath by ceasing from labor.

c) The fourth commandment implies a prior knowledge and practice.

When the Sabbath law was codified in the Ten Commandments as recorded in both Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 the people were told to *remember* the Sabbath, and to keep it holy. It is hard to read these words as having no reference to something the people previously knew and practiced.

Moses did not institute or begin the idea of sabbath at this time. No explanation was given. There was no implied need to help the people know what a Sabbath was. It should be noted also that none of the other commandments represent a new moral idea either. Moral law did not begin at Sinai. It is a serious error to limit the moral law of the Creator to the Ten Commandments. They were only a summary of moral principles to clarify them for the covenant people of God.

3. The Creation Sabbath in the Mosaic / Levitical period

No one seriously questions the proper application of the Creation Sabbath in the time of Moses. The Fourth Commandment in Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15 is the longest and most detailed of the Ten Commandments.

a) Time of the Kings and Prophets (the later Levitical period)

Many references in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the books of Kings, Chronicles, Nehemiah and elsewhere show the vital importance placed upon the Sabbath by God's prophetic messengers. Isaiah 58:13-14 speaks of keeping Sabbath as a major blessing to God's people. Many of our most respected Bible scholars have shown that this text primarily looks forward to the time of Messiah's rule (Hodge, Calvin and others).

b) In the Life of Jesus (the end of the Levitical period)

Jesus regularly attended the synagogue on the Sabbath day showing his own respect for the principle underlying this ordinance in its then present Levitical form. Luke 4:16 "... as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read."

When Jesus reproved the Pharisees for their wrong attitude toward Sabbath, and when he corrected their attempts to accuse him of breaking Sabbath, he never said that the Sabbath law did not apply anymore. Nor did he ever say that a time would soon come when it would be eliminated as he did with the Samaritan woman concerning the place of worship (John 4). Instead Jesus used Scripture to show them where they were wrong in their understanding and application of the Sabbath law and its underlying principles. For example in Matthew 12:1-13 he used several Old Testament references to show his accusers that they should have given better heed to the law of Moses and its interpretation by David (1 Samuel 21:6).

With all the man-made rabbinic regulations that Jesus corrected, it would have been so easy if He just said, "the Sabbath was for an age that is now passing." But Jesus did not take that approach. Neither did Paul in his epistles, nor did the writer of Hebrews as he detailed the changes in biblical regulations for the gospel era. Instead, Jesus took great

care to correct the errors of the Jews where they had drifted from the Old Testament commandments. He constantly supported the keeping of the Sabbath while he opposed its abuses.

4. The Creation Sabbath in the Apostolic Period

After the ascension of Jesus we often find the Apostles attending and taking part in regular Sabbath worship during that transitional period. At Thessalonica Paul regularly took part in the Sabbath services without any indication that they had become obsolete. Acts 17:2 "according to Paul's custom, he went to them and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures."

Note: We will take up the change from the seventh day to the first day of the week in a later section of this study.

Though the Sabbath law was not re-stated or commanded anew during the New Testament period, the Creation Sabbath principle was either recognized or regulated in each socioeconomic setting. There is no support in the Bible that God would have to regularly repeat himself in order to cause his laws to remain in effect. We must presume a continuation without expiration of what God commands unless he in his word gives us direct revelation to the contrary.

5. The Creation Sabbath in the Church possessing a complete Bible

While the Scriptures are our only authoritative word concerning the proper keeping of Sabbath, subsequent records show that the church kept the Creation Sabbath throughout the major periods of its history. Only in recent times have some churches actually championed the open rejection of the fourth commandment.

While the practices and interpretations of law have varied, the Sabbath has been honored by the church in the time of the early church fathers, the Roman Period, the time of the Reformation, the era of Puritans and Separatists in England, and all who have adhered to a complete and inerrant Bible.

Virtually every main branch of Christianity has recognized the Creation Sabbath requirements. The confessions and catechisms of the Presbyterians, Episcopalians (including the Methodists, and Anglicans), the Roman Catholic churches, the Eastern Orthodox churches, and the Baptists (the London Confession of 1689 and the Philadelphia Confession of 1720) all attest to the continuing force of the Creation Sabbath along with all the other creation ordinances and moral laws.

Sabbath keeping as with all Moral Law did not begin at Sinai. It was recognized from the time of pre-fall Eden and throughout all of biblical history. To show how important it is, God at Sinai put the Creation Sabbath law into covenant form, and included it with his summary of the other commandments that together summarize the principles of moral law.

The Sabbath commandment was present from Eden to Sinai where it was dramatically engraved in stone by the finger of God. It is evident through the times of the prophets, and into the era of Messiah and his apostolic church. Today every moral commandment is still respected by those who love and trust in the grace of God as made known in his inerrant word.

Was the Creation Sabbath Abrogated in the New Testament?

Fundamental to our conclusion that the Creation Sabbath was an expression of moral law rather than of ceremonial law, is the condition of its being perpetual. Some claim that the New Testament Scriptures set all of Sabbath law aside after the completion of the atoning work of Jesus Christ. If this could be supported then all other arguments must be re-evaluated in the light of that information. God alone may change his requirements. If he does, then we must follow the changes he institutes and confess our finite understanding as unworthy of challenging the sovereign will of our Creator. But if such an abrogation cannot be supported, then we must likewise abandon attempts to dismiss obligations previously laid upon us in the binding word of God.

As each passage is considered we must keep in mind the principles we have already derived from the Bible concerning the nature of biblical law. Jesus interpreted the continuing value of God's law in Matthew 5:17-20.

In that text, Jesus denied that he came to abolish or to destroy any part of the law or the words of the prophets. He came instead to bring them to their full measure. This is the meaning of the word *plerosai* (πληρῶσαι) which he used in that passage. As the application of that principle is seen throughout the New Testament, it becomes clear that the ceremonial law added to prefigure the coming of Jesus as the Lamb of God was completed at the cross and finished as to its purpose. A sign of something to come is no longer needed once that to which it points has arrived. But the moral principles embedded in creation to declare the holiness and nature of God were not set aside, nor could they be without violating their purpose.

In each text that speaks of Sabbath in the New Testament, we must first determine if it is speaking of the Creation Sabbath, which was prior to Moses, or of the Levitical Sabbaths added at the time of Moses to prefigure the coming of the Messiah and the redemption he secured for his people.

Colossians 2:16-17, "Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day -- things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ."

The Greek word here is the plural, "sabbaths" [*sabbaton* (σαββατων)]. In itself that is not determinative. The plural in the Hebrew language, which this Greek expression represents, is often used to show majestic or high regard for something. The Creation Sabbath may be referred to in that way even though it is but one kind of Sabbath. But it is also consistent with the fact that in the Levitical set of laws there are many different Sabbaths.

The term "sabbaths" in this verse is surrounded by other examples of ritual laws all associated with the Levitical period prior to the coming of Christ. There are the direct comments in Acts and the Epistles that the dietary regulations given to Israel in the time of Moses were temporary and did not continue to be binding after the fulfillment of the work of Christ. Therefore they are not moral in nature, but ceremonial. The Hebrew calendar was also set aside since the elements that made it up were prefigurative of the work of Christ. The day of Atonement was fulfilled in the atonement it pointed toward. Jesus was declared to be the Passover of God. All the feasts and celebrations of new moons were clearly ceremonial and not of a perpetual moral nature beginning in Eden and extending on as long as the earth and heavens persist.

The text categorizes all the elements in this statement as mere shadows of what was to come, the substance belonging to Jesus Christ. The Creation Sabbath was commemorative of the completion of Creation and was revealed prior to the need for redemption. It was not a shadow of the work of Messiah. In contrast, the Levitical Sabbaths were mere shadows attached to the priestly and temple system of sacrifices.

One of the problems Paul was dealing with in the early church was the influence of the Judaizers who wanted to impose all the Levitical ritual laws upon the new Gentile converts to Christ. That troubling problem at the time would account for the need for the comment made in Colossians 2:16 as well as in other similar passages.

In conclusion, the context, historical setting, and theological facts surrounding this verse argue strongly against it having any reference to the Creation Sabbath in this abrogatory statement. The Apostles and early church clearly continued to honor the weekly Creation Sabbath which would also support the interpretation given here.

If we are to conclude that God has set aside both the Levitical Sabbaths and the Creation Sabbath as well, we would need a far clearer revelation from God, the Lord of the Sabbath, than what this verse offers.

Romans 14:5, "One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind."

This portion never mentions Sabbaths so it should not be used as a direct argument by anti-sabbatarians. Sadly it is often used that way. Some apply the general principle taught here to the more specific issue of the Creation Sabbath. There is certainly a general principle being taught. The question the honest exegete of Scripture must answer is, "to what does this general principle apply?" Nothing must be excluded that God intends to include, and it must not be extended to anything that God does not intend to include.

The context makes it clear that the issue here is much like that addressed to the Colossians in the previously considered verse. It warns that we should not make laws binding upon the conscience of men that God himself does not require.

There were two relevant influences in that era. The pagan Greeks had a mixed culture. Many indulged in anything they desired without any moral concern that it might be wrong. They commonly consumed meat and wine that had been consecrated to their idols. This caused concerns for the Jews and the Christian believers who felt that doing so in some way gave their consent to the idolatry behind it. In contrast, some Greek sects like the Neo-Pythagoreans reacted against the moral looseness and chose to abstain from many things.

The Jews who still held to the Mosaic ordinances continued to follow the Levitical dietary laws, even though God's vision to Peter (Acts 10:9-16) specially revealed that those particular laws no longer applied. Certain Rabbis had added volumes of regulations which went far beyond the regulations of Scripture. There were even some in that day who became vegetarians as a moral issue, and abstained from all wine.

It was in this mixed climate of conflicting rules about food, drink, holy days, and rituals that the early church struggled.

The word of God was clear regarding the Levitical rituals, diets, holy days, and sacrifices. The fulfillment of the ceremonial law was made known in the earliest days of the post-Pentecost church. One example is the Acts 10 vision where God commanded Peter to "kill and eat" foods that were formerly forbidden in the Scriptures. God made it clear that the Levitical laws given to Israel had changed with the coming of the new era. He said, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy."

The same principle was articulated by Paul in his epistles to the churches in Corinth, Galatia, Colossae and here to the Romans. In his later Pastoral letters Paul said,

1 Timothy 4:4, "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude;"

Titus 1:15, "To the pure, all things are pure ... "

This general principle applies to the ceremonial laws which were given to Israel alone. They were only to be applied during the time under the Levitical priests.

There is nothing wrong with personally and voluntarily keeping a day as holy, or choosing to limit one's diet. The problem is when we make it to be a law of God when no such requirement exists. We cannot presume such things to be binding upon the conscience of others who for their own reasons have not chosen to follow our custom. This is how Paul follows the verse we are examining.

Romans 14:6 "He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God."

There is no mention in the entire context of anything on the level of moral law. The weekly Creation Sabbath falls into a different category. It was not limited in time to the nation of Israel under the Levitical priests. It was established and practiced from the time of creation.

It was God who had commanded it, not for just one era or for just one nation. Only God could declare it to be no longer binding. But the Bible does not present even one reference to the abrogation of the moral principle of Creation Sabbath.

Galatians 4:9-11, "But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain."

Again, this portion is written to the early church struggling in a society begging them to adopt the ascetic practices of the pagan Neo-Pythagoreans, or those of the Rabbinic Jews who made restrictions mandatory which God never mentions in his word. Paul was concerned that this kind of superstitious practice would tempt believers away from the freedom Christ ensures to them, a freedom which releases them from the ordinances of men, even from the symbolic limits related to the Levitical practices imposed by God before the time of their fulfillment by the Messiah.

The days, months, seasons, and years mentioned have nothing to do with the weekly Creation Sabbath which the Apostles and early church were faithful to observe at every mention of it in the Bible.

There is a liberty we have now in Christ

Fallen hearts look to restrictive human rules as if somehow they could make them more holy or draw them closer to God. Superstition is an element of the fallen nature and a part of our fallen culture. It drives people to abstain from good things thinking they will be better for it. They also tend to judge those who do not abstain as if they were inferiors. This has no place in the believer's life.

The Jews were set free from the ceremonial practices which God himself had imposed for that one segment of their history. Some of them not only bound their conscience against good things, they also judged others for engaging in what God had pronounced as pure. They condemned those who did not keep their strict calendar which no longer had meaning since what it represented had now been completed on the Cross. There is only one perpetual holy day set aside by God. The weekly Sabbath was sanctified from the time of creation.

God never promised that we would be set at liberty from his moral law. Those ordinances laid upon us at creation and which continued in every era of human history are here for a different reason. They do not foreshadow the cross. They represent the eternal and unchanging moral nature of the Creator as it is revealed in creation. God would no more rescind his law against polytheism, idolatry, using his name in vain, disobeying parents, murdering, committing adultery, stealing, lying, or coveting, than he would rescind the obligation of pausing after six days of labor to remember the completed work of Creation which declares his power and glory.

Entering the Rest of Hebrews 4

This portion speaks of the rest of God into which we enter by our Lord's promises which are made ours through the work of the Messiah. The rest into which God entered on the day after he completed his creation was not a recuperative rest. God needed no recuperation. It was a time of ceasing from his former work, the work of creating things. He did not resume the work of creation on the next calendar day.

The lesson is figurative, not to be measured in hours or days. Through Christ we enter a rest from our works and sufferings.

In Hebrews 3 we see that unbelieving Israel was not permitted to enter Canaan which was symbolic of the rest we have in Christ. That rest we have in the promise of a Savior is a ceasing from the sinful works of creature-centeredness and all the tension it generates. In regeneration believers enter the state of reliance upon the Creator who provides for righteousness in Christ. This brings the true believer into the state of earthly gospel peace which continues in eternal glory. The regenerate enter this rest (typified in Canaan). The unbelievers do not enter that rest. God calls it "my rest" because he provides it, not because it is his own resting.

The promise continues. Just as the Creator ceased from his work of creation when all was completed, so also believers enter into the state of ceasing from sinful works of creature-centeredness, to enter a state of reliance upon the Creator. The stress of believing that works are the means of salvation, and the sense of guilt are both removed. The believer stops (ceases) from resting in self, to find his rest to be upon the completed work of the Savior.

This is clearly a redemptive promise, not one having to do with remembering the completion of God's creation on a weekly day of ceasing from labor. The writer of Hebrews proves that this rest was not fulfilled in the entering into the land of Canaan promised by Moses. He shows that there remains yet a rest for the people of God. Nothing could be more clearly redemptive.

Some twist this passage around to mean that in Christ we are no longer to keep God's Creation Sabbath. They imagine that in some way we have entered into the kind of rest through Christ which causes the duty of honoring God as Creator to have expired. There are even some who say that this church age is a mere parenthesis in God's plan and not a real part of it. They teach that in this parenthesis age the obligation to the Creation Sabbath is suspended until the resurrection when we enter a perfect Sabbath rest in glory.

The problem arises when people blend the redemptive prefigurings of the Levitical Sabbaths with the Creation concept of Sabbath.

In the Hebrews passage the rest we have entered by redemption in Christ is typified by God's Sabbath rest. But it has to do with relief from our struggles when we find deliverance in the Savior. There awaits a yet greater deliverance in glory. To make that to be a suspension from the moral requirement to honor God on one day each week in remembrance of Creation violates the entire context and purpose of the passage.

Did Jesus and his disciples set the Creation Sabbath aside?

There are many passages showing the relationship of Jesus and his disciples with the Creation Sabbath. We can derive basic principles by a careful study of one of those passages.

In Luke 13:10-17 we see that Jesus following his usual custom came to a synagogue one Sabbath Day, and took part in the teaching portion of the worship. The many lessons and details of this passage will not be addressed here so that we can focus more specifically upon the Sabbath issue.

A Synagogue official became upset when Jesus healed a woman there who had a sickness for many years.

Luke 13:10-14, "And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all. And when Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, 'Woman, you are freed from your sickness.' And He laid His hands upon her; and immediately she was made erect again, and began glorifying God. And the synagogue official, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, began saying to the multitude in response, There are six days in which work should be done; therefore come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day."

The response given by the synagogue official has two parts. First, he correctly stated the basic sabbath law. God ordained six days for our usual labors which are to provide for our ordinary needs and pleasures. One day following those six is for us to cease from our labors and personal pleasures as a remembrance of God's completed work of creation.

Then the official misapplied the Creation Sabbath principle by extending it to forbid acts of mercy and necessity. God only forbids the kind of work done to secure our provisions. God specifically provides that good should be done at all times. He never said that good deeds and mercy would be among the things from which we must rest after six days of labor.

Jesus answered by clarifying God's Sabbath law.

Luke 13:15-16, "But the Lord answered him and said, 'You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall, and lead him away to water him? And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?'"

Jesus made it clear that those who believed what the synagogue leader said were hypocrites. They said they cared about keeping God's sabbath law, but they violated its primary purpose, the honoring of God as Creator.

To allow a part of creation to suffer unnecessarily is to abdicate responsible dominion. They were desecrating the Sabbath. They allowed animals to be helped to protect their own investment, but forbid giving help to humans who were created in God's image. Their concern for honoring God's Sabbath was false and hypocritical.

Jesus clarified what the Scriptures said about the Sabbath. He brought out the larger context of the law of Moses. The narrow limitations forbidding our labor were never intended to be extended to our other duties as assigned to us at Creation. On another occasion Jesus used a similar example.

Matthew 12:11-12, "And He said to them, 'What man shall there be among you, who shall have one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it, and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.' "

We must be careful when we refer to allowed activities as *exceptions* to the Creation Sabbath law. Things that were never forbidden can never be called exceptions in the normal use of the word. They actually *clarify* God's original intent in setting aside this one day for his own glory.

There are three categories of Sabbath activities that should never be considered as forbidden.

1. the work of worship

Worship is central in remembering God's glory in the work of Creation. God always provided that his ministers and priests would be very busy on the Sabbath conducting the worship of the people. All that is connected with worship that could not be prepared on the other six days of the week is not only permitted on Sabbath, it is expected and necessary.

2. work necessary to preserve life

It was provided in God's law that sanitary conditions should be kept up on Sabbath. Food could be prepared for families and their guests. Armies could defend against attacking enemies, and animals could be cared for and rescued on the Creation Sabbath. By extension of this principle Jesus showed that obviously God never intended man to outlaw acts needed to keep himself and others safe, healthy, and alive.

3. works of mercy

Caring for one another is a mandate that knows no calendar. In this text and in many others Jesus showed how the principles provided in the law obligate us to do good on the Sabbath. Certainly administrative things that could as well have been done on the other days of the week should not be saved for the Lord's Day. But feeding the hungry, healing the sick, explaining the gospel to the lost, and other such acts of mercy were never part of our daily labor to bring forth our provisions from the earth. Our regular labor for provisions is the only prohibited activity for the Creation Sabbath as part of the moral creation ordinance.

There is some overlap in each of these categories, but it is clear that such things are right activities for the day designed for us to cease from our labors and to remember the honor of our Creator.

Having exposed the hypocrisy and error of the synagogue leader, the people present rejoiced.

Luke 13:17, "And as He said this, all His opponents were being humiliated; and the entire multitude was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Him."

The question we must ask concerning any regulation is, "What has God said?" All of his law must be kept as he gave it. No rule of man should be allowed to stand on equal ground.

The same principles apply to the case of the disciples who were picking grain on the Sabbath for their own food, and to other cases from the life of Christ which are often cited by those who reject the continuing obligations of the Creation Sabbath.

There are no biblical grounds for abrogating the Creation Sabbath once it is properly understood. There are no grounds for confusing this law with the ceremonial Levitical Sabbaths which were introduced later and clearly set aside along with the rest of the ritual laws when Jesus completed what they represented.

Upon Which Day of the Week Should the Sabbath Be Kept?

Though God's moral principles are unchanging they must be applied to changing needs. The most significant act of God toward man after his creation was the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. While that did not free man from his duty of remembering God's creation, it did effect the way that law was applied to the circumstances of God's unfolding plan.

At the root of the creation ordinance of Sabbath is the duty to labor for six consecutive days, then to cease labor for a full day of remembering God's work and glory. Within the context of changing human circumstances there is an unavoidable detail that must be agreed upon. We must know which of the seven days should mark the beginning of the work week.

Before the atonement of Christ, the covenant people of God were told to keep the Sabbath on the seventh day of the labor cycle. The post-resurrection church keeps the Sabbath on the first day of the labor cycle. This is a circumstantial change only. It does not reflect a modification of the moral principle itself.

Meaning of the word "sabbath"

We have already established at the beginning of this lesson that the Hebrew word for Sabbath is *shabbat* (שבת). It comes from a verbal root which means "ceasing and desisting". It does not mean seventh. The Hebrew word for "seven" is sheva', and for "seventh" is *shevi'i* (שביעי). The roots and spelling are totally different. The Sabbath is the seventh day only in the relative sense that it follows the six days of labor. It is not the seventh as an absolute designation of the day of the week.

Did the original Sabbath fall on Saturday?

The modern Hebrew Sabbath is kept from sun-down on Friday to sun-down on Saturday. That delimitation seems to have been practiced in the time of Jesus. The Sundown start fits with the Levitical practice and calendar in Leviticus 23:5. We do not know for certain how much farther back in history that practice goes. We do not know how the weekly cycle of days in the time of Moses would overlay our modern rotation of week days. Many different calendars have been in use down through history as various cultures and empires influenced the way years, months and days are reckoned. God gave Israel a calendar to follow, but it was nothing like the type of calendar we use today. The only perpetual and universal guide was in the principle of six day work cycles separated by a day of ceasing from labor on which God was to be worshiped.

In its original statement, the sabbath principle was linked with God's creative acts. God designated the seventh day to mark his ceasing from any more acts of creation (the work he had been doing previously).

When the moral law was summarized in the Ten Commandments the reason stated for the weekly sabbath law was God's sanctification of the day following the completion of creation (Exodus 20:11). We have no idea as to how that fit into the current designation of days of the week.

Curtis Clair Ewing points up some interesting problems in his work *Israel's Calendar and the True Sabbath*. The biblical descriptions of the special sabbaths and feasts of the Levitical period show that there were times annually when the first day of the week became a Sabbath in addition to the seventh (Leviticus 23). This would mean there was a double Sabbath every year which would shift the actual calendar day by one week day for the following year.

Did Israel then work six days as commanded after this 48-hour Sabbath and then rest on the next day? If so, then the seventh day after the six work days was actually what in the previous week would be the 8th day! Since the weekly cycle mandated that the next Sabbath would begin after six days of work, then that would mean that for the next year the Weekly Sabbath was actually kept on what had been the first day of each week. The following year it would be on the second day, and so on. There was no external week-day structure imposed upon Israel to force its Sabbaths to be consistently on the same calendar day each year. Ewing suggests that the Sabbath rotated year to year if superimposed on our modern calendar. (see also: R. J. Rusdoony on the Fourth Commandment on his "*Institutes of Biblical Law*").

In keeping the Sabbath on Saturdays, the Jews of that time just before the birth of Jesus were abandoning of the biblical way of keeping track of the Sabbath. In its place they adopted the cultural practices connected with the calendars set up in the time of the Greek and Roman Empires.

God's word gives no indication about an absolute solar or lunar day upon which the Weekly Sabbath should fall. Its association with Saturday, or more accurately Friday evening and Saturday until sundown, is more a circumstantial artifact of the calendars in use by the Roman Empire and the Jews of that same period, than any moral principle laid down at creation.

What is clearly evident in the moral part of the law is a cycle of six work days followed by a seventh day of ceasing from labor for our provisions. This basic fact is undisputed.

The Moral Law as summarized in the Decalogue states, "Remember the Sabbath day", it does not say "the 7th day." The day of the week as our modern calendars define it is not the essential moral issue. One day in seven is designated by God for Sabbath as a creation ordinance. Creation reveals this ceasing of creation by God and is remembered in the established 7-day cycle.

The day set aside as sabbath is not to be set by man. If the 7-day cycle is the key moral idea, then can anyone pick his own Sabbath to fit his own convenience and desires? The Scriptures do not give us that liberty. Quite to the contrary, the law and the prophets made it clear that the day was to be the same for all of God's covenant people. The Sabbath is God's day. Only he can set the required conditions that will meet the demands of the moral principle underlying the anthropomorphic aspects of the law.

Exodus 20:11 makes it clear that the Weekly Sabbath before the cross was set to what they then understood as the day that followed the six-day work cycle. There was no external calendar so it was simply referred to relatively as the "seventh day". From the time of Moses and extending to the resurrection of Jesus, the setting of the day was governed for the entire nation by the Priests and their work at the Tabernacle or Temple following the Levitical calendar.

In Deuteronomy we have the covenant form of the law. There Moses gives the deliverance from Egypt in the Exodus as a reason for sabbath. This redemptive idea was added as the whole array of restorative rules and rituals became part of what we know as the Levitical period.

The church after Pentecost (Acts 2) began to keep Sabbath on the first day of the week to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus. The term "First Day" directly translates the common Hebrew designation *yom rishon* (יום ראשון) which was at that time the name the Jews attached to "Sunday" on the Roman calendar.

The day of our Lord's resurrection was very important. All four gospels record that this took place on the first day of the week (Mt 28:1, Mk 16:2, Lk 24:1, Jn 20:1, 19). His resurrection was the turning point of all history. It marked the end of the Levitical symbols of expectation, and the beginning of the era of fulfillment when the things promised became facts of history. It took an event as great as creation itself to make the circumstantial change in attaching the celebration of the Creation Sabbath to a particular calendar day.

We are not left without direction as to the fixing of the day in each redemptive era. Prior to Sinai, the Sabbath was very simply whatever day followed the six days of labor. Many calendars came and went as various neighboring cultures came along in the long era before Moses. After the Exodus, the Levitical calendar set up a special ordering of days. They applied to that one era only.

Jesus commissioned his Apostles to act as his agents in laying the foundation for the church of the Messianic age which is directly stated in Ephesians 2:20. In a secondary but very real sense the Apostles are the foundation of the church as the called ministers of Christ. He is always the true foundation, but directly assigned the Apostles to represent him in the transition of the Covenant People from the era of symbols looking forward to the Cross, to the era of completed promises which had been illustrated in the Levitical forms.

By their example and leadership the early church was directed to begin the week with a Sabbath day and then to work six days. By our Lord's completing of the temporary redemptive laws, the old calendar set by God for the era of Mosaic practices was set aside. The variable calendar was no longer needed and for the first time since Sinai the day of ceasing could be set to a fixed rotation of days. There was no 48-hour Sabbath to effect the 7-day cycle.

The references to the worship of the New Testament church are God's preserved record that the Apostles in laying the foundation as commissioned, directed the early church to make this change from the seventh day following labor, to the first day of the week as identified by the Roman calendar.

Acts 20:7, "on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread ..."

1 Corinthians 16:2, "on the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come."

Revelation 1:10, "I was in the spirit on the Lord's Day..."

The phrase "on the Lord's Day" is based upon the idea expressed throughout the Old Testament where the Sabbath is referred to as a day belonging to the Lord. For example, in Isaiah 58:13 the Lord calls the Sabbath "My holy day". In Ezekiel 20 when the prophet warns about the neglect of Sabbath and its effects upon their children the Lord repeatedly makes reference to "My Sabbaths." It has always been His day, the Lord's Day. It is therefore inaccurate to make a dispensational distinction calling this day "Sabbath" in the Old Testament, and "the Lord's Day" in the New as if it was no longer based upon the same creation ordinance. Both terms are used both before and after the birth of our Savior. The New Testament use of the term "Lord's Day" is a proper designation based upon its use in the Hebrew Scriptures.

The Practice of the Early Apostolic Church

The earliest records of the church confirm that the Sabbath was kept faithfully by the church on the first day of the week in remembrance of the Lord's resurrection. These historical records are not authoritative in and of themselves. Only Scripture directly teaches us what God expects of us. However the views of the earliest teachers in the church show us how the Apostolic teachings were understood and were being implemented at that time. What we find is consistent with what we have already seen in the New Testament record.

Ignatius of Antioch (believed to have been a personal friend of the Apostles) said, Christians "no longer observing the seventh day, but living in the observance of the Lord's day, on which also our life has sprung up again, by Him and by His death."

Justin Martyr said, "on the day called Sunday is an assembly of all who live either in cities or in rural districts ... because Jesus Christ our Savior rose from the dead upon it."

How are we to Keep the Sabbath Day?

WCF 21:8 "This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations, but also are taken up, the whole time, in the public and private exercises of his worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy. "

Preparations for the Sabbath Day

There are two parts to the summary of the Creation Sabbath law in the Fourth Commandment. Besides instructing us to cease from labor on the one day God has set aside each week specially for his worship, it also commands that we spend the other six days doing our labor and all our work.

Work is honorable and was given as a duty to man before his fall into sin (Genesis 2:15). Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 said that those who will not work should not eat. A person who does not provide for his own family is said to be worse than an infidel in 1 Timothy 5:8. As noble as it is to carry out our work, if we believe we need to extend our work into the time God has set aside for himself we violate this basic Creation Ordinance. If we do, perhaps it is because we have not been as faithful as we ought to have been in making responsible use of the other six days.

Much Sabbath breaking is caused by failure to schedule wisely the time God gives us on the other six days of the week. It is our obligation to finish each week's obligations before the Lord's Day begins.

God gave us an example of this principle in his provision of the manna in the wilderness. A double portion was provided on the day before the Sabbath so that the gathering would not have to be done on the Lord's special day (Exodus 16:23).

Following the moral principle taught in this biblical example we should make sure we have completed our weekly tasks before Sunday. Work such as lawn care, house work, home work, business deals, inventories, shopping, gassing up the car, ironing our clothes, and other such chores should not need to be carried out on the day we are to cease from our labors.

Most people plan, prepare and pack in advance to be ready to leave on time for vacation trips so they won't miss a minute of their time off. They plan for days off by working hard to get office work out of the way. They plan for months to prepare for weddings, for the birth of babies, and for holidays. But do we as God's thankful children go through the simple preparations needed to keep the Sabbath Day holy? Do we plan how the day will be spent so that we do all God says we ought to do that day?

What a wonderful tradition for our families, to show our children a good example of Sabbath preparations. Before the Passover season God instituted preparations for families to engage in together so that all would appreciate the solemnness of the occasion. Similarly, we should be sure our clothes are ready and laid out the night before, that simple meals are planned to reduce housework that day, and a Sabbath-Eve family prayer could be said to prepare our hearts for keeping the day holy.

All of this should be finished in time so that all will get a good night of rest. No one should be late for Sunday classes and worship, or come unnecessarily tired and struggling to stay alert.

Some scoff at such notions of respecting the Sabbath. They piously excuse themselves from such preparations and practices saying that to them every day is the Lord's day. But that's not the way God sees it. While all our lives belong to him, it was our Creator, our Redeemer, who calls us to set aside one day in seven as a Sabbath Day to honor him *especially*. Though all is his, we are called to demonstrate this ownership and priority by sanctifying one day for special worship and holy duties.

This is not a vain tradition of men. It is the holy word of God. It is a principle so important that it was written with the divine finger as one of the Ten Commandments engraved on the tablets of stone. It was instituted in the first moments after the creation of the world. Its neglect was among the most repeated warnings of the ancient prophets. Its beauty was commemorated in many of the Old Testament Psalms. Our Lord Jesus Christ untangled the confusing rules added by the corrupt Rabbis. It was honored by the Apostles and the early church.

May our Lord forgive us for our apathy toward his special day. And may he enable us to learn to prepare for the Sabbath regularly so that we will honor it in ways that please him, lifting up our hearts in grateful praise for his glory.

How are we to keep the Sabbath Day Holy?

The Sabbath is first mentioned as a creation ordinance showing its most basic principles in Genesis 2:1-3. When the "heavens and the earth... and all their host" were completed, three actions of the Creator are mentioned:

1. Following day six, God ceased from his work of creating.
2. At the completion of his work of creating, God affirmed on the sixth day that it was all "good".
3. God blessed the day following the sixth and sanctified it.
He set that day aside as something different, unlike the other days.
It was to be a blessing and was designated for sacred purposes.

The basic moral principle of Sabbath keeping was clearly established even before the entry of sin into the human race. It was part of how the created world was to show forth the glory of its Creator.

Since the work God did was that of creating, and it was from that work that he ceased after day six, we must infer that man, the only creature made morally able to obey this sanctifying of the day, was also to cease from the work he was assigned.

Man's work was that of labor, the exercise of dominion over the rest of creation under the ultimate dominion of God, man's Creator and Lord. Therefore man's dominion is derivative and administrative. It was not original with his own desires and personal determinations (Genesis 1:27-30). All his labor in responsibly bringing forth his provisions is to be done in just six of the days in each seven day week.

It is not up to us to decide what is or is not proper activity for the Sabbath. God alone may specify how this day is to be holy, different from the other days.

It is our duty to discover from Scripture what limits God has set. He has revealed these boundaries both by direct instructions, and through his application of the creation principles to the human experience. Once we understand how this principle ought to apply, then we may move most freely within those boundaries.

On the Sabbath we are to observe a holy rest

The primary things we rest from are our daily labors. This is not a license for laziness on God's holy day. God's word specifies what things we are to cease from. We should remember that the rest spoken of here is not to be taken in the sense of recuperation or getting extra sleep. The term used in Scripture is applied to God's rest after creating all things. Certainly he did not need sleep or relaxation from stressful labor. If we are tired on Sundays and need to recover from excessive pressure or exhaustion from our work, then we need to better manage the other six days of the week to prepare for the Sabbath.

The primary meaning of the Hebrew word used is *cessation*. In musical notation we often come across a symbol which is called a "rest." It means that the instrument or voice is to stop for a moment and cease making the sound it had been making. It doesn't mean the musician is to close his eyes, take a nap, or recuperate in any other way. The Sabbath rest is not set aside to be your day for relaxing. That is not the meaning of the term.

On the Sabbath Day we are to cease from the works, words, and thoughts related to our worldly employments. The chores we cease from are those that have to do with maintaining the world we live in, with exercising our dominion over our areas or responsibility in bringing forth our provisions from the earth.

This is to be done for a whole twenty-four hour day. God did not set aside a Sabbath Hour or a Sabbath Morning. He calls us to sanctify one entire day, one just as long as each of the other six days when we work. This is why many churches have worship not only on the Sabbath morning, but also at a later time in the day. It helps the Christian community to remember that after lunch the Sabbath does not deteriorate into a day of personal recreation, entertainment, and sleep where the wonders of our Creator are forgotten.

It is nothing special to cease from sinful works, words, and thoughts on Sundays. Things offensive to God should not be done on any day of the week. Those who presume to honor God by ceasing from lusts, drunkenness, wild parties or other worldly habits on the Sabbath only make themselves out to be hypocrites. We do not honor God by setting aside our normal indulgences one day a week as if that should satisfy our Creator and Redeemer. God does not call us to be good one day a week. Holy living is our duty all the time. He calls us to specially consecrate this one day to his worship in the ways he has specified.

There are always jobs that need to be done in our sin infected world. God ordains six days for this. The boundary day that separates each group of our six days of labor is his. On it we must cease from all matters directly related to our regular bringing forth of our daily provisions. All week long we struggle in our labor against the "thorns and thistles" imposed upon our work by God's curse as we maintain our homes, our jobs, and our investments. On the Sabbath we set all those aside in honor of the one who made us and who in Christ strengthens us in the struggles attached to our creaturely duties.

On sabbath we are to cease from our recreations

Words often change their meanings with time. Our recreations today are certainly different from those in the time of Moses, or those when the Westminster Assembly drafted this chapter of its confession. Many become confused at this expression and imagine that it means we are to avoid any enjoyment on Sundays, any fun activities with our children, or all appreciation of God's creation at a beach or park. I've heard some pastoral candidates mistaken in their understanding of this concept openly declare that they do not agree with these particular words of the Westminster standards.

Some historical background is needed so that we can appreciate what was intended by this sentence. One of the issues at the time the confession was written was the abuse by the Church of England in its imposition of the *Book of Sports* which demanded attendance at state sponsored events which encroached upon keeping the Sabbath Day holy and sacred. It was aimed at keeping people from attending unauthorized sermons on Sundays in addition to the King approved messages mandated for Sabbath morning worship.

After a time when submission to the *Book of Sports* had been rescinded, King Charles the First proclaimed that again all Pastors must read an edict commanding all citizens to engage in the state sponsored Sunday activities. Most Bible believing English clergymen refused to read the King's decree in the Sunday worship service.

Ben Franklin tells about an English clergyman who, to his congregation's horror and amazement, agreed to read the royal edict in his church service. But that's not all this clergyman did. He followed the reading of the King's order with the words of the Fourth Commandment, "Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy." Then he added this challenge, "Brethren, I have laid before you the commandment of your king, and the Commandment of your God. I leave it to you to judge which of the two ought rather to be observed."

Today there is no king or dictator commanding that we violate God's law, or trying to silence our Sunday Bible studies with conflicting activities. But there are the dictatorships of financial greed, selfish indulgence in our own ways and comfort, and a willful ignorance of God's law, that call us to lay aside one of the Ten Commandments written in stone by the finger of God.

Understanding this historical context, we see that the use of the term "recreations" in the confession means that we must cease from our own activities as they interfere with our proper Sabbath activities, and as they may be opposed to the principles of our Creator.

The primary text cited by the Westminster Assembly in support of the wording they chose is from the warning of the Prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah 58:13-14, "If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your own pleasures on My holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD honorable, and shall honor it, desisting from your own ways, from seeking your own pleasure, and speaking your own word, then you will take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Here we are warned to honor and delight in the Sabbath by turning our feet away from doing our own pleasures on his holy day. We must desist from our own ways, from seeking our own pleasures, and from speaking our own words on this day. These concerns are contextually contrasted with calling the Sabbath a delight, holy and honorable.

The point is clearly that we are forbidden to despise what God has commanded and to replace those things with our own desires. When the Sabbath is thought of as a chore that interferes with our own agenda we sin and take from God a day that does not belong to us.

This verse does not teach that all enjoyment and pleasure should be avoided on the Lord's Day. Just the opposite is commanded. We need to find our pleasure in appreciating the glory of our Creator and Redeemer. It does not mean that we cannot speak words that are not a direct quotation of Scripture. That would make no sense and would contradict the practice of the Prophets, Priests, Jesus, and the Apostles.

The evil is in putting our ways over the ways of the Lord. As long as our Sunday activities avoid our regular labor for our provisions, and keep God's glory central in our thought, and as long as they don't keep us from the things commanded for the Sabbath, then we are not violating this part of the moral principle.

It is interesting to note that Calvin, Charles Hodge, Gesenius and many others in their exposition of this passage are convinced that this section of Isaiah is making reference to the era of the New Testament church. Those who take exception to this part of the Confession are in a real sense taking exception to the inspired words of Isaiah.

Today we might use the term recreation for taking a walk along a beach or nature trail. If such activities turn our thoughts to God and do not hinder our faithful keeping of the Sabbath, then they are fine things to do, and no where forbidden in Scripture or by our Confession rightly understood.

Our Obligations To Encourage Sabbath Keeping

The Creation Sabbath was instituted before any children were born to our first parents. At that time there were no racial or national divisions. It was imposed covenantally upon all of humanity in Adam. The Levitical Sabbaths were imposed much later and were limited to Israel in their obligations. They were abrogated by fulfillment when Jesus completed the promises of redemption. In contrast, the Creation Sabbath continues to bind all people everywhere and in all times since all were represented in Adam.

It has been established that considering the nature of God's Law, the Ten Commandments are a summary of moral principles showing how they apply in the most general sense. These form an ethic which is binding upon all who are created in the image of God.

In each statement of the Sabbath commandment, there is a stated obligation to encourage others to keep the Sabbath holy. This includes visitors to our homes, and those who do work for us. It even includes those who may not be covenant people. They are all created people and were represented by Adam.

Exodus 20:10, "but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you."

Deuteronomy 5:14, "but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in 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 cattle or your sojourner who stays with you, so that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you."

Our first obligation is obviously to honor the Sabbath personally. However, there is also a stated obligation toward others over whom we have an influence in bearing the authority God grants to us in our leadership roles on earth.

Parents have a duty to see that their covenant children, their sons and daughters, keep the Sabbath holy and pure. They need to teach and train them both by word and example to honor all of God's moral principles. If parents enable their children to neglect their Sabbath duties, either by apathy or active disobedience, they have broken this part of the commandment.

Those who stay in our homes as guests come under the covenant of God during their time with us. There are great advantages in being a guest in a covenant home. Even unbelievers can enjoy the influence of the pervasive peace of Christ upon believers, their hope in the gospel, the humble desire they have to obey God's law, and their quick willingness to admit to wrongs done and to confess them thankfully through the Savior.

Though no home is perfect, every covenant home ought to strive to provide this testimony to all who live there and to all who visit. Our hospitality should be far more than mere food and a place to sleep. While others are under our hospitality and care, God also obligates us to encourage them to keep the Sabbath holy. We should do nothing to encourage violation of the Sabbath by anyone. It is not always a thing guests appreciate or will accept. But if done in love and as humble servants of the Lord, your guests will see a testimony of the blessings God promises to those who keep the Sabbath holy. Sadly many homes go in the opposite direction and allow unbelieving guests to keep the covenant family from honoring the Sabbath as God requires of us for the whole day.

It is interesting to see that the text also commands us to impose the Sabbath rest from labor upon our animals. The ones listed here are used to help us bring forth our provisions from the earth. They are parts of God's creation which we use in our labor. They were not to be employed in doing work on the Sabbath. Our dominion duty is to impose the day of ceasing upon creation around us to the best of our ability. The principle might well be extended today to our machines and instruments which we use to do the things that ought to be done on the other six days. Labor saving devices can become a way of mechanizing the breaking of the Sabbath by automated manufacturing or maintenance. They can enable a detached violation of the call of the Lord's Day.

Cultural changes have transformed labor and servanthood. The male and female servants mentioned would have included all those employed to do our work for us. Today they would include employees we hire to help us in a business we might own or manage. They would also include those we pay to mow our lawns, baby-sit, serve us in restaurants, wait on us in stores, or entertain us in professional sports. This commandment makes it our duty to avoid support for such people who are breaking the Sabbath. Some criticized Jews who were said to have hired Gentiles to light fires for them on Sabbath. How are we any less hypocritical if we, knowing that we should not be working on Sabbath, pay and encourage others to do these things for us for our pleasure and comfort in our homes, restaurants, malls and professional sports arenas.

What Does God Prescribe for Sabbath Activities?

The focus of the Sabbath principle was originally upon the wonder of God's completed work of creation. One day of seven was to be sanctified, set aside as holy, special, and unique in contrast with the other days on which our provisions were to be brought forth. On that day we are specially to remember the completion of God's work of creating the universe which declares his glory.

After the resurrection of our Savior, another focus was added to the Creation Sabbath as it took on recognition of all the Levitical Sabbaths represented. By attaching the remembrance to the first day of the week the accomplishment of the atonement was to be honored. Along with our ceasing from labor, we consecrate this day as marking the ceasing of our bondage to sin.

This is the positive side of the Fourth Commandment. Sometimes people pay more attention to debates about what we should not do on Sundays, than about what should be taking up our time and occupying our thoughts on that day. There are things we should not neglect to do on every Sabbath Day so that we will honor it in the way prescribed in Scripture. These activities are sometimes called "exceptions" to the Sabbath commandment. In reality they are not exceptions to the prohibitions. They are the reason why there *are* prohibitions. They are the things commanded which are undermined if we engage in the duties that ought to belong to the other six days. We cease from our labor only so that we might, by our ceasing, enter into the joy of the completed work our God had performed. It is important that we declare what Sabbath is, rather than simply defining it only by saying what it is not.

In an earlier section of this study we saw that there are three general areas of proper Sabbath activity which clarify what this principle is about.

1. Time ought to be spent in Worship on the Sabbath

The center of the whole day should be the remembering of God's work of creation, and the triumph of the cross as seen in the resurrection of Jesus. This should move us to engage in all levels of worship on Sundays, both private and public. The elements prescribed for congregational worship should be engaged in when they are led by those God appointed to be responsible for the oversight of worship.

Some have criticized Pastors for telling others not to work on the Sabbath when it's the day when their own work is most visible to the congregation as a whole. Most often the comment is an attempt at humor. But when it is made as a serious excuse for violating of God's law, it exposes a tragic misunderstanding of the Sabbath principle and of the nature of the ministry of the word. The work associated with public worship on the Sabbath was never forbidden in God's word. It is enjoined upon us. To cease from the work of worship, or to make our Sunday worship no different than that of any other day, violates the commandment's central moral principle.

Many times Jesus taught that a plain, unbiased reading of the law should not lead to a complex, inconsistent, and prohibitive system like that of the Pharisees. He said, "have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath, and are innocent?" (Matthew 12:5). He obviously did not mean that the priests were violating God's commandment. Since God appointed their Sabbath duties in his word, the criticisms brought against the Christians were unfounded. They were inconsistent with the good things God's law required on Sabbath, such as those related to the worship of the Creator.

In our era there is much work done to support worship and the study of God's word on the Sabbath by Pastors, Elders, Deacons, instrumentalists, custodians, Sunday School teachers, and others in the church. Of course the work they do should only be that which is necessary for the proper Sabbath activities of the church and which could not be done on the other six days. There is no excuse for doing routine office work, lesson planning and other things on the Sabbath if they could be done on another day.

In our study of worship we showed the necessity of the gathering of God's people in holy convocations under the leadership of called men of God for regular Sabbath worship. One biblical example that shows the importance of this principle is stated in Leviticus 23:2-3, "... The LORD's appointed times which you shall proclaim as holy convocations - My appointed times are these: For six days work may be done; but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings."

The words translated "holy convocation" in this passage are the Hebrew words *miqra'ey qodesh* (מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ). The root word *miqra'* come from the verb *qara'* (קָרָא) which is a common word for "calling out or shouting out". Here it is made into a substantive and combined with the word for "holy", *qodesh* (קֹדֶשׁ), which means "something weighty". Together the expression means "a solemn assembly called together". The call is issued by the Elders, those God has called to shepherd his people.

It is the responsibility of the people of the congregation to respond obediently and joyfully to every call of the Elders for Sabbath worship (Hebrews 13:17). It is sinful to avoid a called gathering unless God prevents it providentially.

Hebrews 10:25 "not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near."

This assembly is not just any gathering of the saints anywhere, at any time of their own choosing. Some who wish to minimize the authority of the Elders and the biblical structure of the church are quick to quote Matthew 18:20 "where two or three have gathered together in my name, there am I in their midst." They intend this to be proof that when any two or more believers gather in the name of Christ, he is there in their midst to sanctify the gathering as proper corporate worship. Quite simply this is a gross misuse of the verse.

An examination of the context shows that it is not about God's people gathering for worship (on their own or otherwise). The verse describes the end of the discipline process (Matthew 18:15-20) when personal admonitions fail and the matter is brought before the church for its final judgment. When the Elders meet and agree upon the judgment, Christ is there in their midst to bless the delegated authority he has vested upon his ordained leaders.

This is the kind of distorted understanding of God's word that often emerges when those not studied in biblical interpretation attempt to create their own theology of worship and of church government.

Since gathering for the corporate worship of the church is of such high importance in God's word, we must not let vacation plans, travel plans, special sports events, television shows, or visitors in our home keep us from gathering together when the Elders call the congregation to worship on the Lord's Day.

The worship of the congregation on the weekly Sabbath provides a time for the administration of sacraments which are a sign and seal of the covenant of grace.

Acts 20:7, "on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to depart the next day... "

In Acts 2:42 the gathering of the body of the church included: teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer.

1 Corinthians 11:20,33 instructs us to partake of the Lord's Supper when we come together as a congregation. We should never celebrate the sacraments in private. It is only for the holy convocation issued by the Elders to the body of believers covenanted together as a local spiritual family.

The holy convocation on the Sabbath is the primary time and place where the church is taught and instructed in God's word. It was in the Synagogue on the Sabbath that the law and prophets were read and the people were exhorted.

Acts 13:14-15, "But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, 'Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.' "

The Sabbath should also include worship time engaged in by individuals and by Christian families in their homes. This is specially a good time for the instruction for our covenant children. When the children of God's people rebelled against the Lord, one cause the prophets gave was that they had not been well instructed or trained about the Sabbath. (Ezekiel 20:20-25).

Sabbath provides the proper time for the collecting of God's tithe and our offerings (1 Corinthians 16:2).

Clearly, one practice that should not be neglected on God's holy Sabbath is convocational worship, and the private reading, conversing, and thinking about the things God has made known concerning himself and his works.

2. Duties of necessity should not be neglected on the Sabbath

God has created us to have basic daily needs to preserve life and property. We need a proper amount of sleep, food, drink, sanitary conditions, and safety from lawbreakers. Sabbath was never intended as a time when such things are to be suspended for twenty four hours.

In Matthew 12:1-4 Jesus and his disciples were picking grain to eat for themselves on the Sabbath as they passed through a field. His answer to the Pharisees who found fault in this was neither an attack upon the Sabbath principle, nor an implication that Sabbath was just a temporal ordinance soon to be ended. His answer was to explain that the law never forbade such things. Jesus showed from the word of God itself that the law provided that it is right to prepare food and to take care of our other necessities on the Sabbath.

Similarly the vigilance of armies and of public law enforcement agencies is not to be suspended on Sabbath. However, they should only continue such duties as are necessary to preserve life and property, duties which could not be done on the other six days.

3. Time should be spent in works of mercy on the Sabbath

Matthew 12:11-12, "What man shall there be among you, who shall have one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it, and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

Charity and care for the poor and needy are not among the activities of labor that are forbidden on Sabbath. Hospitality was to be shown on Sabbath (Mark 3:4). It is also a good time to give help to the needy (Luke 6:6,10). These are all good Sabbath activities which have their foundation in creation principles. They are clearly articulated in the Levitical laws as they build upon those Creation Ordinances, and were affirmed by Jesus to be very proper for the Lord's Day.

The labor performed by doctors, nurses, fire-fighters, paramedics, and other such mercy and safety professionals, is not forbidden on the Sabbath based upon this principle. Yet these kinds of labor may only involve the actual work that is necessary to extend merciful care. Routine administrative duties that could be done on other days ought to be avoided on the Lord's Sabbath.

[Bible quotations are from the New American Standard Bible (1988 edition) unless otherwise noted.]