

## Introduction

When we apply both the fourth commandment and the teachings of Jesus on the Sabbath to Sunday worship, we are reading Scripture from a post-resurrection Christian perspective. We have to read the OT as Christians just as we have to read the Gospels as Christians. The things we read there are for us, for our instruction in righteousness, because on us has come the end of the ages (1 Co 10.13; 2 Tim 3.16). Again, reading the OT and the Gospels is like going back to the beginning of a mystery novel that has many hints and clues as to where various story lines are going. We know where the OT story lines take us, so when we go back to the beginning of the story, we cannot help but read in light of what we know of the ending. Therefore, as disciples of the Lord Jesus (upon whom the end of the story has come), we learn how to live for Him under His pleasant yoke of commandment keeping in general and under His pleasant yoke of Sabbath keeping in particular.

Furthermore, His pleasant yoke of Sabbath keeping involves living by the fourth commandment in the newness of the new covenant Sabbath. From the end of the story, we know that Jesus became Sabbath Lord by the resurrection. The resurrection was the day of His ascent to the throne of universal sovereignty as our redeemer. Accordingly, the first day of the week, resurrection day, remains in the memory of the church with a distinctiveness sealed forever on our hearts by His resurrection appearances on that day. Therefore, we know why the first day of the week is His day, the Lord's Day in a special sense (Rev 1.10). It is the day of His inauguration as Sabbath king, and He exercises Sabbath Lordship in a special way on Sunday; the first day of the week is distinctively His day even though all days are under His rule. Thus, the Westminster Shorter Catechism states: **From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, God appointed the seventh day of the week to be the weekly sabbath; and the first day of the week ever since, to continue to the end of the world, which is the Christian Sabbath (Q 59).**

In this light, I want to discuss the larger historical-redemptive context (picture or story line) that underlies Matthew 12 (and helps us see the shift from the Jewish Sabbath to the Christian Sabbath). The title for today is "The Fourth Commandment in the New Covenant Sabbath." To discuss this topic, we need to have both Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 on the Sabbath in clear vision before us. Exodus 20.8-11 is probably the most familiar text to most of us:

**Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but 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. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.**

Deuteronomy 5 helps us see the bigger picture of the fourth commandment:

**Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. <sup>13</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>14</sup> but 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. <sup>15</sup> 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 outline for today follows a Q & A pattern about these passages. We need answers in light of our place in the history of redemption under the new covenant. In this way, we pass the OT teachings through a sieve of fulfillment for new wineskin application. This process is intuitive and straightforward as we shall see.

1A. If we list the distinct items that appear in both texts, what would that list look like?

This question arises because there are things common to both passages, and there are things in one that are not in the other. The book of Exodus dates to a time soon after the departure of Israel from Egypt. We might call its record of the Ten Commandments the first giving of the Law. The book of Deuteronomy dates to a time just before the conquest of the land of Canaan under Joshua. The name of the book is literally the second (deutero) law (nomy). After the wilderness wanderings, Moses gave the Ten Commandments in His remembrance sermon, the book of Deuteronomy. Time passed and the Lord gave more light on the fourth commandment. Here is a list of each item in the Sabbath command with the corresponding verses, which show where the accounts agree and differ:

- 1) Remember the Sabbath day, Ex 20.8
- 2) Observe the Sabbath day, Deu 5.12
- 3) Keep it holy, Ex 20.8; Deu 5.12
- 4) As the Lord your God commanded you, Deu 5.12
- 5) Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, Ex 20.9; Deu 5.13
- 6) But 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 [Deu 5.14, your ox or your donkey or any of] your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, Ex. 20.10; Deu 5.14
- 7) That your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you, Deu 5.14
- 8) For in six days the lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy, Ex 20.11
- 9) 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, Deu 5.15

This list puts the text before us and will help us answer the remaining questions.

2A. What is the duty of the fourth commandment?

The duty of the fourth commandment is broader than the Sabbath. It includes the obligation to work six days and to rest on the seventh. God commands that in the daily and weekly unfolding of our lives that we follow a 6-1 temporal structure. We are to outline our lives in this prioritizing way.

Without defining exact parameters of what it means by a day, the command speaks of more than an hour or two at church. Per the analogy with the six workdays, the seventh worship day must refer, at the least, to the core of the day or the prime time devoted to rest, just as the core of the other days is devoted to work.

The Lord tells us to find rest for ourselves and to promote it in others: **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 ox or your donkey or any of] your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates** (Ex. 20.10; Deu 5.14). It is a common sense principle to apply the reference to “your slaves” to the equivalent “your employees.” Therefore, the command includes promoting the six and one life structure in business: that your employees, male or female, “**may rest as well as you**” (Deu 5.14). For example, if you were an employer, then per this command you would do your best to see to it that your employees had Sunday off. Your hope would be that they use the day for royal resting in the presence of the great king, of course, without forcing compliance.

What do we learn from the addition of animals and sojourners? For one, sojourners may come to your house for a visit or into your city gates for trade as a part of their work. Here, the point is that you encourage them to rest for worship. This accents the point of promoting Sabbath keeping in others as a principle that goes with each of the Ten Commandments. In the big picture, this means that we call those of our contemporary culture to repentance; we call them to

the biblical worldview, and to the worship of God only (versus materialism), to worship Him as He prescribes, to honor His name and to honor His day (cf. commandments 1-4).

The reference to animals is surely symbolic. It is similar to the repenting of animals at Nineveh (Jonah 3.8). The sackcloth placed on them symbolized their repentance. The “repentance” of the animals symbolized the repentance of the people who owned them. Likewise, the fact that the animals are resting and not pulling plows in the fields symbolizes the commitment to resting with the Lord on the part of those who own these animals. Thus, in our contemporary setting, for example, the parked truck and backhoe that set there, before our eyes at rest, symbolize the commitment to resting with the Lord on the part of the Christian owner.

Of course, there is a clear indication here of a distinct duty of spiritual leaders in the home: **On it you shall not do any work, you or your son, or your daughter.** Accordingly, we can appreciate the emphasis in the Larger Catechism on the special duty of householders:

**Why is the charge of keeping the sabbath more specially directed to governors of families, and other superiors? A. The charge of keeping the sabbath is more specially directed to governors of families, and other superiors, because they are bound not only to keep it themselves but to see that it is observed by all those that are under their charge; and because they are prone oftentimes to hinder them by employments of their own (118).**

The last phrase reminds us of the importance of the godly example that spiritual leaders are to be in the home, church, and workplace. Those of us in leadership (pastors and heads of homes as well as employers) are prone to hinder those under our care by how we wrongly use the day. Being good examples means that our children will hear us pray together on the Sabbath; they will hear us sing, and hear us discussing the sermon, the things of God, and the Scriptures. I am speaking here about what they hear as an environment of spiritual nurture beyond the good things we do with them.

Hence, we are duty bound by the fourth command to a work-rest pattern of life, but most attention falls on the Sabbath-rest, which, notably, is a day on a par with the other six (cf. all the day...all that day, WCF 21.8; WSC 60). Finally, the place of spiritual leaders comes into distinct view.

### 3A. Why did the Lord give the Sabbath command?

The Lord tells us that He gave the Sabbath command because of creation and redemption.

First, He blessed the day and made it holy because the seventh day was the day on which God rested after completing the work of creating in six days. That is the emphasis in the first giving of the law recorded in Exodus 20. From Isaiah 66.1-2, we know that it is a special day as the inaugural day of His ascent to the throne of universal sovereign rule over all that He created. He praised the day and honored it with a special sanctity. From that time forward, from the beginning of the world, the seventh day in a six and one pattern is a holy day. We have a Sabbath because of creation week and the Lord’s example pattern of work and rest. We follow His example. Among other things, because He set the day aside as holy, so should we.

Second, from Deuteronomy 5, we get another reason for the Sabbath, redemption: **you were slaves in the land of Egypt, but the Lord brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm** (Deu 5.15). On this point, consider how easy it is to move forward in thought from Israel’s redemption to our redemption. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt but God brought them out by means of the Passover lamb that protected them from the wrath of God administered by the death angel (Ex 12). The fact that Christ is our sacrificial lamb leaps off the page. Jesus is our protection from the wrath of God and He is our redemption from slavery in sin.

In both promise and fulfillment, creation merges with redemption. Accordingly, Jesus becomes Sabbath king by the resurrection that sealed His work of redemption.

### 4A. How are we to rest on the Sabbath?

1) Devote the Sabbath day to the Lord

Both accounts direct our thoughts to the apex of the day, which is worship. Both state that **the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God (20.10; 5.14)**. That He is “your God” indicates that He is there for you and that you have the privilege of owning Him as your own. This is not as audacious as it first sounds. It means that we have the marvelous privilege of personal fellowship. The idea that God is “the Lord your God” is covenant language (I will be their God and they will be my people). Thus, Sabbath is the covenant (Ex 31.16) and we are to be covenant keepers (Hos 6).

### 2) Remember the day, to keep it holy

Remember the day has to have a dual reference. It refers to the day and it refers to the Lord. That is, on one hand, we are to keep the day in focus. Do not forget about it and the responsibilities that we have on this day. Do not go to bed on Saturday evening with no thought about the privilege and importance that you should attach to the following day. Do not wake up on Sunday morning without the foggiest notion regarding what day it is. If you keep the day in memory, then you will see to it that you get proper sleep on Saturday night because the blessed and honorable day is coming. You know that the honorable day is not a sleep day and that worship with the saints is not for napping. You want to have sufficient rest the night before because you do not want to drag into church with toothpicks holding your eyelids, fighting to remain awake and alert. You remember that you come to the work of worship on the day of rest. On the other hand, the matter of being rested for the work of worship gets us right to the heart of things. You come to remember the Lord in a distinct and special way on His day with His saints according to His appointment.

The Catechism captures these things when it says this about how to sanctify the day: **making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy) in the public and private exercises of God's worship: and, to that end, we are to prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose and seasonably dispatch our worldly business, that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of that day (WLC 117)**. To remember the day means to remember the Lord. The Catechism picks up both of these ideas: a) on one hand, it speaks of the delight we should have in public and private worship. b) On the other hand, it speaks of purposefulness and foresight that should govern the move from the six to the one. Namely, we are to exercise diligence to put our work of the week in such order “that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of that day.” Free and fit are brothers (like the twin brothers that play professional tennis; they work together against opposition). The day is set aside without encumbrance and distraction so our time is free for wholehearted worship. Diligent planning and moderate living fit us; this involves having adequate rest for whole person worship, in body and soul. It is difficult to worship God with your whole soul if your body is asleep. Closed eyes for prayer may help concentration of mind, but it will not do so if we are unfit in body for worship. If we are unfit, then “closing will lead to dozing.” A great help here is the spiritual discipline of audible prayer for by it you help yourself concentrate better and you help others concentrate better.

### 3) Observe the day, to keep it holy

This commandment directs us to all the commandments, to submission to His authority in obedience to His commands. The Lord brings His people out of slavery to the Law (Ex 12-20). They are to learn His precepts and “be careful to do them” (Deu 5.1). This goes with learning how to keep the Sabbath. The fourth command encompasses all seven days of our week-by-week living. Part of observing the Sabbath is learning God’s word and will for living on the six days. There is no sacred/secular here.

Again, we note that worship of the Lord in the personal devotion of the day to Him involves discipleship. Therefore, worship includes attending to the preaching of the word with the goal of love, knowledge, and obedience as our Lord showed us in Matthew 12 looking back to Hosea 6. Loving worship is the central work of Sabbath observance and it includes learning for obedience in relation to other people (to love God and our neighbor).

Thus, we rest by personal devotion to the Lord in covenant remembering, which elevates the place of preaching in worship. In the preaching diet of both regular covenant remembering and communion covenant remembering, we remember His word and works.

**WLC 121 Why is the word Remember set in the beginning of the fourth commandment? A. The word Remember is set in the beginning of the fourth commandment, partly, because of the great benefit of remembering it, we being thereby helped in our preparation to keep it, and, in keeping it, better to keep all the rest of the commandments, and to continue a thankful remembrance of the two great benefits of creation and redemption, which contain a short abridgment of religion; and partly, because we are very ready to forget it, for that there is less light of nature for it, and yet it restraineth our natural liberty in things at other times lawful; that it cometh but once in seven days, and many worldly businesses come between, and too often take off our minds from thinking of it, either to prepare for it, or to sanctify it; and that Satan with his instruments much labour to blot out the glory, and even the memory of it, to bring in all irreligion and impiety.**

Here is a sketch of WLC 121 (why are we to *remember* the Sabbath day?):

We are remember the day because it is beneficial and needful.

A. It is beneficial

1. Remembering helps us prepare for the keeping the day
2. Keeping the day by remembering it helps us keep the other commands
3. Remembering focuses thankfulness for the benefits of creation and redemption

B. It is needful because we are ready (prone) to forget it

1. Because there is less light of nature for it
2. Because it comes but once in seven days
3. Because much work and mental effort on other things comes between
4. Because Satan works to blot out its glory and memory (for irreligion instead)

In this light, the *Westminster Confession* gives a good summary of Sabbath keeping (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.**

**Let us fall down before the majesty of our risen Lord and Sabbath king in humble confession of sin and earnest commitment to remember His Sunday-Sabbath to keep it holy to the Lord our God. To Him be the glory forever, amen.**