

4th. Vos, Gaffin, and the Westminster Confession.2

1A. WCF on the Sabbath: key elements

- 1) 4th is a perpetual commandment binding on all men in all ages"; creation ordinance
- 2) The 7th day became the 1st day due to the resurrection; hence, Christian Sabbath
- 3) Worship is the core design of the Sabbath... "the whole time" in "public and private
- 4) The 4th is integral to the system of doctrine taught in Scripture

2A. Objections

A number of objections reveal the thinking that lies behind the pervasive neglect of the 4th; the most important one relates to the rediscovery of eschatology. What answers can we give to the following objections to the abiding validity of the 4th commandment as a creation ordinance?

- 1) There is no mention of Sabbath keeping from Eden to Sinai
- 2) There is no explicit command given to Adam

The cultural mandate of 1.28 is a clear command as is the prohibition of 2.16-17, but there is none in 2.1-3: **Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.**

- 3) In the NT, there is no command to the church to keep the weekly Sabbath.
- 4) In the NT, there is no command to change the day from the 7th to the 1st.
- 5) In the NT, there is no command to continue the Decalogue; instead, we are not under law but grace.

3A. The main objection contributing to the accelerating disregard for the Sabbath

Across a very broad front of Christian theology, in the 18th century there was a scholarly anti-eschatology followed by a strong reaction against it. The old liberalism claimed to separate the real historical Jesus who did not preach a future coming of the kingdom from the Christ of the Gospels who did: Jesus preached a present kingdom of high ethics, as in the Sermon on the Mount. Now it is "widely recognized that eschatology is not only essential to Jesus and the biblical writers but that their teaching is pervasively eschatological" (131), but this is not exclusively future oriented: indeed, the look to the future (the kingdom of God is *at hand*) is both inaugurated (already realized eschatology) and to be consummated at Christ's return (not yet realized fully). [Once resisted, this way of handling the coming of the kingdom in the NT is now widespread; it is even part of the thinking of "future" oriented dispensationalism; old dispensationalism (Scofield Bible) held that the kingdom was offered but never came being postponed to the future because of Israel's unbelief]

Accordingly, the resurgent awareness of the presence of the kingdom promised in the OT (realized eschatology) "has had a decisive impact on the Sabbath debate" because "the Sabbath is woven into the eschatological fabric of Scripture" as part of "a large scale system of signs (day, week, year, Jubilee year), all pointing to eschatological rest" that "has already arrived in Christ" (131, He said, "I will give you rest"; the kingdom rest promised is "now, at last, present in his person and work). Therefore, the sign pointing to what has now arrived in Christ "has discharged its function" and "lacks a rationale for continuing" and in turn, as Carson/Lincoln argue (*From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, 1982), a Christian Sabbath is a contradiction in terms (132).

How might we reply, initially and broadly, to the realized kingdom argument against a Christian Sabbath in light of the overall thrust of Hebrews 3-4 regarding the wilderness and Canaan?