

There Remains a Sabbath Rest for the People of God:
The Eschatology of the Lord's Day
by Robert G. Hall

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Introduction

It is no small matter that there is wide disagreement over the application of the Fourth Commandment which reads:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 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. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy (Exodus 20:8-11).

We could relegate the difference to the many who adhere to a view of Scripture known as Dispensationalism, popularized in the United States by C.I. Scofield, whereby says he, “The Christian is not under the conditional Mosaic Covenant of works, the law, but under the unconditional new covenant of grace.”¹ This view makes it relatively easy to render the commandment to remember the Sabbath day, in any form of it, to a bygone era, namely, the Dispensation of Law, and, thereby, no longer applicable to the Christian.

There are those, however, who identify with a theology known as Calvinism or Reformed, who otherwise hold to the unity of the covenant of grace and the singularity of the people of God included in that covenant, who nevertheless adhere to a view of the Fourth Commandment not altogether different from the Dispensational view. D.A. Carson says, “There is no hint anywhere in the ministry of Jesus that the first day of the week is to take on the character of the Sabbath and replace it.”² A.T. Lincoln informs us that “The Resurrection is the accomplishment of the work of salvation that outranks and replaces the literal Sabbath.”³ Yet both writers acknowledge an eschatological dimension to the Lord’s Day and it is to this perspective this study is directed. Indeed, Calvin himself, following Augustine’s spiritualizing of the Fourth Commandment states: “For he who understands that the main object of the precept [the Fourth Commandment] was not external rest or earthly worship, immediately perceives, by looking on Christ, that the external rite was abolished by his coming; for when the body appears, the shadows immediately vanish away.”⁴

Yet J.I. Packer wonders why the Reformers in other places, “as a body *did* hold the divine authority and binding obligation of the fourth command, as requiring one day in seven to be employed in the worship and service of God, admitting only of works of necessity and mercy to the poor and afflicted [emphasis his].”⁵ Packer suggests that the Puritans corrected this inconsistency. If Jonathan Edwards represents the culmination and the best of the Puritan tradition, then consider his words in his sermon, “*The Perpetuity and Change of the Sabbath.*” (Proposition II, par. 7) “Was that shadow [commemoration of the deliverance from Egypt] so

¹ Scofield Reference Bible, see note 1 under Exodus 20.

² D. A. Carson, “Jesus and the Sabbath in the Four Gospels,” in From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation. D.A. Carson ed. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999. p. 85.

³ A.T. Lincoln, “Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament,” in *ibid.* p. 205.

⁴ Calvin, Calvin’s Commentaries Hebrews, I Peter, I John, James, II Peter, Jude, vol. XXII, Grand Rapids, Baker, repr. 2009. p. 99.

⁵ J.I. Packer, A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990. p. 237. See Patrick Fairbairn, The Typology of Scripture, Appendix A, for a full discussion of the inconsistency of the Reformers on the matter of the Fourth Commandment.

much to be commemorated, as that a day once a week was to be kept on the account of it; and shall not we much more commemorate that great and glorious work of which it was designed on purpose to be a shadow?"

Whereas it is granted by most serious Christian scholars that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Sabbath rest, several questions linger in our minds: (1) Does Sabbath fulfillment in Christ obviate the need to regard one day in seven as holy to the Lord? (2) Whence the continuance of the seven day weekly cycle if indeed Sabbath observance has been abrogated? (3) Is the gathering together on the Lord's Day merely a pragmatic suggestion derived from the New Testament, the frequency of which is to be determined by the individual believer? These questions will be addressed subsequently.

As a prerequisite to an eschatology of the Sabbath we will consider God's seventh day activity and his relationship to Adam in his state of innocence. Additionally, this study will examine pertinent truths that can be extrapolated from the reinstatement of the Sabbath at Sinai together with the Sabbath concerns of the prophet Isaiah, before we come to the relevant New Testament texts: Matthew 11:28-30; Luke 4:18-21; and Hebrews 3,4; Revelation 2:7; 22:2,14, 19.

In our final analysis we wish to show the applicability and the eschatology of the Fourth Commandment, the one day in seven principle observed in the present age, after the resurrection of our Lord, on the day called the Lord's Day. Moreover, we hope to have demonstrated that our eschatological longing for the eternal Sabbath rest, is foreshadowed in the weekly exercise wherein, "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 . . . are taken up, the whole time, in the public and private exercises of His worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy" (Savoy, XXII.viii.). "*So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God*" (Heb. 4:9).

The Sabbath from Adam to Moses

It is sometimes asserted that in the seventh day of the creation week, the seventh day stands apart from the previous six inasmuch as no evening and morning are mentioned. Moreover, it is asserted, that there is no record of a Sabbath observance from the garden to Mt. Sinai. This argument is typically deployed to show that Sabbath keeping was strictly for the nation of Israel as an integral part of the ceremonial law. Insofar as the ceremonial law points to fulfillment in Christ, it no longer applies to the church made up of Jews and Gentiles, so it is argued.

Whereas it is true that there are no explicit examples of Sabbath observance in the time prior to Moses, and, whereas there are certain ceremonial aspects to the fourth commandment, which are no longer observed, such as the commemoration of Israel's redemption from Egypt, it must nevertheless be remembered that the observance of one day in seven is still part of the unchangeable moral law, the Ten Commandments. Furthermore, we still live with a seven day weekly cycle. To our knowledge there is no natural seven day rhythm in nature. Whence the current one day in seven? The Fourth Commandment begins with the word, "remember" (זכר) the Sabbath day. In Exodus 16, the people were commanded to refrain from gathering manna on the Sabbath day. This was before the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 20).

The command to remember the seventh day presupposed knowledge of the seven day week. Even if one should argue that there was no formal Sabbath activity prior to the Exodus, it

can be reasonably inferred that it was still a vestigial reminder of the creation week by means of general revelation. That the seven day week transcends any connection with lunar or astrological cycles of the planets, such as is common in pagan religions, suggests its divine origin.⁶ Though Israel followed a lunar monthly cycle they maintained a seven day week independent of an equally numbered division within the lunar cycle. The seven day week culminating in the Sabbath would be among the distinguishing marks of the nation of Israel. It is worth noting that the seven day week has survived into the modern era. Attempts to alter the work week during the French Revolution and in the Soviet Union under Stalin had to be abandoned and they returned to the seven day week.⁷ It is the dominant division of time, sociologically and commercially indispensable in today's world. Beyond the fact of general revelation is the more compelling argument of Patrick Fairbairn:

We meet the allegation [no Sabbath observance before Moses] with the statement that has already been repeatedly urged—that it was not yet the time for the formal enactments of law, and that it was by other means man was to learn God's mind and his own duty. The ground of obligation lay in the divine act [of sanctifying the seventh day]; the rule of duty was exhibited in the divine example.⁸

In other words, in the pre-lapsarian state, there was no need for an extended corpus of law, a simple probationary test was sufficient. Adam would learn precepts by divine example.

In the creation week, God rested from his work on the seventh day. He ceased from making anything new after the sixth day and yet he still governs and sustains it “*working all things according to the counsel of his will*” (Eph. 1:11); “*upholding all things by the word of his power*” (Heb. 1:3). All that he had created was good and on the completion of everything that he had made, including man made in his image, he declared it to be very good (טוב מאד). To read that God rested on the seventh day, we quickly dispatch the notion that he was in some sense weary from the exertion of the work of the previous six days and we immediately look for another meaning of the word *rest* (נָח). We infer from the following that God was enjoying his creation enjoying him: In six days God created the space-time universe that is distinct from his being but nevertheless it reflects his character. “*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork*” (Psalm 19:1). “*The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein*” (Psalm 24:1). “*Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD, your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones*” (Psalm 89:5).

Adam, the image of God and the crown of God's creation (Psalm 8:5), was created in true righteousness, holiness, and knowledge after the image of his creator (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). In the garden Adam was at rest. This is not to be understood in terms of some kind of idle recumbency that one might imagine to be something akin to an extended vacation at a luxurious spa. His rest was his fellowship with God and his faithfulness to the covenant of works.

Adam was at rest with respect to his capacity for reason and reflection. His mind was not at enmity against God. In his state of innocence Adam's consciousness of himself was perfectly derived from his consciousness of God. There was no intervening self-doubt or disquiet that would distort his knowledge of God and his consciousness of the world about him. He knew that he was a creature of God and therefore his knowledge of the world about him was dependent on

⁶ Eviatar Zerubavel, *The Seven Day Circle*, New York: The Free Press, 1985, p. 10.

⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 34, 42. See also Paul K. Jewett, *The Lord's Day*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1971. p. 16.

⁸ Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, n.d. vol. I, p. 262.

his knowledge of God. It was a finite knowledge but a true knowledge nonetheless. Adam was placed in the garden of Eden to work it and guard it (לעבדה ולשמרה). This working and guarding the garden meant that his work would be wholly dedicated to God. Moreover, his discovery of the world that God had made would be reinterpreted back to God for the glory of God. With the accumulation of his knowledge of God, therein would be added to his enjoyment of God. His Sabbath rest was nurtured by God and supported by his work for God.

If we are correct in our observation that the seven day week, which antedates the Exodus, is very ancient in its origin and thereby a marker in general revelation of the creative week in which God blessed and sanctified the seventh day, and if we are correct in agreeing with Fairbairn in his observation that all that was needed for Adam, in his state of innocence and probation was the act and the example of God with respect to the seventh day, then it would follow that Adam would have intuitively observed a seventh day of rest. The blessing and sanctifying of the seventh day conveyed the nearness of God to his creation especially to Adam, endowed with his image. He would imitate his Creator in standing down from his daily work every seventh day in order to contemplate the wonders of his discovery, the fruit of his weekly labors, all of which pointed to the One who placed him in the garden. Therein lay Adam's rest as God's vice regent on earth as he enjoyed fellowship with his Creator.⁹

Relevant to the eschatological theme of this study we note that the garden was first and foremost the abode of God. Ezekiel calls it the garden of God (Ezek. 28:13: 31:8-9). Isaiah refers to it as the garden of the Lord (Isaiah 51:3). In other words the garden was a place of pleasurable delight [עֵדֶן] where God would receive Adam into fellowship with him. If the Tree of Life in the center of the garden (where also was placed the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil) is to be considered a sacrament of the eternal state, we are able to make a positive connection between the pre-lapsarian state of Adam wherein he lived in fellowship with God and the reappearance of the Tree of Life in the consummated eschatological state.¹⁰ *"To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God"* (Rev. 2:7). *"Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates"* (Rev. 22:17). We shall return to this subsequently.

The disobedience of our first parents meant expulsion from the garden away from the presence of God. Man was now in a state of *restlessness* owing to his separation from God, being cursed with a mind that distorts the truth about God, the sweat and toil of the cursed ground, the hostile forces of nature, indeed the hostility of one man to another. The rest that Adam enjoyed, by which is meant intimate fellowship with God and unimpeded consciousness of self and the world around him as derivatives of God, was interrupted and marred but it did not mean that the observance of one day in seven no longer applied. Indeed, it would be needed more than ever owing to the curse of man's work and the introduction of the sacrificial system that pointed to the seed of the woman from whose offspring the true Sabbath rest would be realized. An eschatological longing had been configured into the consciousness of man based on the promise of Genesis 3:15 and a sacrificial system that antedates Moses.

⁹ Fairbairn, *Typology*, Vol. I, p. 268-69.

¹⁰ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1948, p. 38.

The Sabbath in the Time of Moses

It is beyond the scope of this study to comprehensively delve into the many implications of the Sabbath for Israel in the wilderness. Our interest is in the eschatology of the Sabbath. It cannot escape our notice that there is a Sabbath command that is part of the moral law, written directly by the finger of God. There are other Sabbaths in addition to the weekly Sabbath that are associated with the ceremonial law for which there is no continuation with the appearance of the antitype, Christ himself. That one of the Ten Commandments is a command to remember the Sabbath Day is the divide over its application in the New Testament era about which there is much debate. The ceremonies cease (but they continue to instruct) the types are realized in the antitype. Do the Ten Commandments pertain primarily to Israel or are they binding on all people?

The seventh day Sabbath, as has already been alluded to previously, was the unique sign between Israel and her God (Exodus 31:13-17). As such it was a type and shadow. The inference, we are told, is that with the appearance of the antitype, the shadow disappears. The Sabbath has been fulfilled in Christ and therefore, the one day in seven principle no longer applies. We agree with the former premise but dissent from the latter. We agree that there are some aspects of the ceremonial law and civil law contained in the Fourth Commandment which are not brought forward into the New Testament era. We already mentioned the commemoration of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. In the civil sphere, the death penalty for violating the Sabbath would be another example. Yet here we would ask, what was it about the Sabbath commandment the violation of which was a capital offense? Is there something in the Sabbath commandment that is life-giving or life-preserving such that its violation would eventually lead to death? We answer in the affirmative.

The cessation of work to remember one's Creator (Exodus 20: 8-11), the source of all life and one's Redeemer (Deut. 5:12-15) their Covenant Head to whom they belonged, by the gracious binding of God, was incumbent on Israel to maintain her unique identity among the surrounding nations. Neglecting the weekly ceremony of the Sabbath in the Mosaic context would have brought on a slow death by virtue of the removal from their minds the source of life and the blessings of covenant renewal as one day would flow into the next with the exhausting activity of one person working to gain advantage over another.

The eschatological import of the Sabbath command is twofold. First, the Sabbath itself looks forward to Christ, who inaugurates the rest that was lost in the Fall. Second, the fact that the Sabbath command is one of the Ten Commandments which must be understood, not only as law (i.e. it is unchangeable and universally binding on all) but primarily as obligations of the covenant of grace which again looks forward to its fulfillment in Christ, the new covenant. The prologue to the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1-2 is the Gospel of gracious promise fulfillment: "*And God spoke all these words saying, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*" (Exodus 20:1-2) At the dedication of the Temple Solomon states: *And there I have set the ark, in which is the covenant of the LORD* [i.e. the Decalogue] *that he made with the people of Israel.* (II Chron. 6:11)¹¹ The relationship that God has with his people is by way of covenant and the principle of one day in seven, the Lord's Day, as we shall see, is part of our covenantal obligations.

Additionally, there was something in the Fourth Commandment that went beyond the truth that it was a covenant sign between God and his people, as important as that was. Any

¹¹ See also Jeremiah 11:2-4.

stranger, that is, unconverted person, who came to live within the boundaries of Israel, was also the beneficiary of the Sabbath rest even though they were not allowed to participate in the festivals. We suggest that there is contained within this stipulation a carry-over into the one day in seven principle in the New Testament era.¹²

The Sabbath in the Psalms and the Prophet Isaiah

We find the eschatology of the Sabbath in the Psalms.

The eschatological rest is a present reality that looks to the One who will convey us to that final rest. Psalm 46:10 commands us to “*Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth!*” The One who is our refuge and strength (46:2) describes for us the city of God out of which flows a life giving river, a city where God dwells with his people. This brings to mind the bejeweled eternal city, the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, Jesus with his bride adorned for her husband. In that city a river of life flows from it. *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.* (Rev. 22:1-2) The psalmist exhorts us to come and behold the works of the Lord (verse 9). Derek Kidner says, “The word for *behold* is generally used for seeing with the inward eye, as a ‘seer’ or prophet sees.”¹³ The One who makes wars to cease does so “on the far side of judgment.”¹⁴ It agrees, says Kidner “with Old Testament prophecy and apocalypse, and with the New Testament (e.g. Is. 6:20-13; 9:5; Dan. 12:1; II Peter 3:12ff).”¹⁵ “The injunction, *Be still* . . . is not in the first place comfort for the harassed but a rebuke to a restless and turbulent world.”¹⁶ It calls to mind the words of Jesus on the turbulent Sea of Galilee, “Peace be still.” “And the end in view is stated in terms not of man’s hopes but of God’s glory.”¹⁷ “*I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth!*”

Psalm 92 is a psalm for the Sabbath. It is a reminder that the Sabbath rest for ancient Israel included a holy convocation (Lev. 23:3). The activity of this psalm is worship and praise that is thoroughly God centered. “*A Song for the Sabbath. It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night.*” (92:1-2). The eschatological implications are revealed in the psalmist’s contemplation of the deep things of God (verse 5), an activity which will continue forever in the eternal state. The mention of the palm tree brings to mind the engravings on the walls of the sanctuary in Solomon’s temple (I Kings 6:29), a symbolic readmission into the garden from which man was expelled. That the righteous flourish as the palm tree, bespeaks of those who will endure and flourish in a hostile and barren environment. They will be numbered among those “*standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm*

¹² Joseph A. Pipa, *The Lord’s Day*, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1997. pp. 58-59.

¹³ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, in *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, ed. D.J. Wiseman, Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1973. p. 176.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev. 7:9b-10)

The eternal Sabbath will have arrived when *"all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and all the peoples in his faithfulness."* (Psalm 96:12-13)

Psalm 95 teaches us that Israel's eschatological Sabbath rest was typified in the land of Canaan and Canaan is typical of our eternal rest. There in the Promised Land, in permanent dwellings, Israel would be at rest, no longer a restless wanderer but living with her God who dwells with them in his house (so to speak) on Mt. Zion. There in the land of Canaan Israel would await her true rest in the coming of the Messiah. Her failure to trust God in the wilderness in the face of miracle after miracle exposed the condition of their hearts. *"Therefore I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'"* (Psalm 95:11) Why? because Sabbath rest is ultimately a matter of the heart which is a reflection of the true self (Prov. 27:19). The Apostle Paul tells us that these things, Israel's history, *"were written down for our instruction on whom the end of the ages has come"* (1 Cor. 10:11), the end of the ages being Christ himself our Sabbath rest.

The eschatology of the Sabbath is realized in finding therein, our delight in the Lord. That is the prophet Isaiah's burden. He says, *"If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight [ענג] and the holy day of the LORD honorable [כבוד]; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly;"* (Isaiah 58:13). The verse following explains the blessings of calling the Sabbath a delight, *"then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."* (58:14) If we delight in the Lord then the day which he regards as holy will be a delight to us. When the commands of God cease to be a delight, and become burdensome, the scourge of legalism has set in. Legalism separates our duty to God from our love for him. Of its many faces, it rushes through the ordinances so that one may get on with what is deemed the more important activities. To delight in the Sabbath according to the prophet is to delight in the Lord.

The commandments of God were not to be a burden but a delight for the simple reason that God is good and inasmuch as his commandments reflect his character, we must consider them good. This is a function of God's grace. The Fourth Commandment likewise is to be considered good, indeed a delight, not an imposition on one's time. The eschatology of the Sabbath according to the prophet is, *"I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father* (verse 14b).*"* The heritage of Jacob is nothing other than the continuation of the Abrahamic covenant in which all the families of the earth will be blessed. It was conveyed to Jacob through Isaac and then by God directly in a dream: *"Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed."* (Gen. 28:14) The blessing is Christ the eschatological fulfillment of the Sabbath rest.

As we move from the Old Testament era to the coming of Christ, we would do well to remember one of the important uses of the law which is to point us to Christ. In speaking of the types and shadows of the ceremonial law, it must be kept in mind that they were established and rooted in the eternally binding moral law that is the Ten Commandments. By analogy we wish to assert that as there were ceremonial aspects attached to the Second Commandment in the Tabernacle/Temple service, so there were ceremonial aspects connected to the Fourth Commandment, among them, the seventh day rest commemorating creation and deliverance from Egypt (Deut. 5:15). All of the Ten Commandments point to Christ and find their

fulfillment in him. With respect to the Second Commandment, Christ is the temple and its rituals and ceremonies pointed to him. With the coming of Christ the rituals and ceremonies fade away and thus worship with its ceremonies must comport with, and not detract from, that which exalts the person and work of the risen Christ to the glory of the Father. Christ is our Sabbath rest and the seventh day finds its fulfillment in him, yet, as we shall see, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

The Sabbath in the Gospels

The Jubilee year was a sabbatical year in which the land would lie fallow, debts would be released and property that had been sold would be returned to its ancestral owner. (Lev. 25:8ff) Isaiah utilizes the jubilee theme to speak of the coming Messiah: "*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,*" (Isaiah 61:1-2a) At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, in the synagogue of his hometown, Nazareth, he read this passage and then proclaimed the astonishing words to his hearers, "*Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*" He is the eschatological Sabbath year of Jubilee, the year of restoration and liberation. In Jesus' commentary on the text, he, in effect, told his hometown people that they were no better than their forefathers who failed to trust their Lord. The true Sabbath rest is a matter of the heart by which we mean, it's a matter of faith of the kind that is truly life-transforming. His proclamation of Jubilee, a Sabbath rest, was met with the restlessness of unbelief which nearly led to violence. There is a relationship between what we think and what we do.

The central passage which speaks of Jesus being our eschatological Sabbatical rest is Matthew 11:28, "*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" The Sabbath points to Christ as its fulfillment. Israel was to remember the Sabbath day because of the seventh day of creation. Even there it points to Christ who is the agent of creation. "*All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.*" (John 1:3) After the Fall as was noted earlier, the opposite of rest was restlessness, an activity that involves movement with no particular direction, no *eschaton*, no ultimate goal. The children of Israel were restless in the wilderness until they reached their rest under Joshua. Her covenant unfaithfulness made her restless once again in exile. Her return to Palestine did not enable her to be at rest. The rigorous *Halakah*, the oral tradition supposedly divinely handed down from Sinai along with the written Word, became the burden for the people of Jesus' day from which there was no rest, not to mention the oppression of their Roman occupiers.

What is the rest that Jesus gives? Peace. He says, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.*" (John 14:27) It is not the peace that is associated in modern parlance with some sort of psychological serenity. Rather, it is what the prophet Isaiah referred to when speaking of the Messiah, "*Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.*" (Isaiah 40:2) God's wrath has been propitiated through the death of his Son. Thus, our Lord proclaims twice to his disciples (and to us) in his post resurrection appearances, "*Peace be with you.*" (John 20:21, 26) He was raised for our justification, true peace indeed.

In the Matthew 11 passage, he states further: *“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”* (Matt. 11:29-30) The yoke is a metaphor for discipleship, being under the rule and authority of Christ. The one who is gentle and lowly in heart invites us to take on his yoke by which is meant to submit to his authority, leadership, discipline and care. It is returning to the place from which our first parents were cast out. The rest of the soul is being a new creation in Christ. The easiness of his yoke and the lightness of his burden is not the ease of the road that is called the narrow way, but rather the certainty that he is indeed the way, the truth, and the life because he does not leave us as orphans but gives us his Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance.

The event of Jesus and his disciples plucking grain on the Sabbath, recorded in Matthew 12:1-8, is organically connected to the passage just discussed, by the introductory phrase, *“at that time”* (Ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ καιρῷ). There is a connection between, *“I will give you rest,”* and *“The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”* The connection is simply this: submission to our Lord is true rest inasmuch as our covenantal relationship with him is the place where we, his image bearers, belong, that is, in Christ we are no longer restless. As a new creation in Christ, this is the purpose for which we were created. The Pharisees, by contrast, found their identity as the people of God, to be sure, in the Scriptures but also in the Halakah, which they considered to be a divinely inspired oral tradition which became the de facto source of their identity as Jews. They accused Jesus and his disciples of breaking that tradition by their “harvesting,” that is, working on the Sabbath day because they were plucking grain and “threshing” it by rubbing it between their hands. In actual fact there was no real violation of the Sabbath but our interest in this passage is not so much about what is or is not lawful on the Sabbath but rather its eschatological implications. Jesus cited two Old Testament examples of “violation” of the law, David and his men eating the showbread from the Tabernacle and the servile work of the Levites every Sabbath. What is relevant here is not casuistic revisionism but the fact that the Sabbath points to him as its eschaton. The life-giving, mercy-driven activity of our Lord points to him as Lord of the Sabbath. He is the One, who liberates from the bondage of sin and creates the internal desire to place ourselves under his yoke. The burdensome yoke of subservience to a dessicated corpus of Halakic rules could never bring peace to the soul. As Lord of the Sabbath, we shall see that he is also greater than Moses.

The Sabbath Rest in Hebrews

The book of Hebrews is eschatological in its orientation from its opening lines: *“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”* (Heb. 1:1-2) Our interest is tracked by the introductory phrase, *“In these last days (ἐπὶ ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων) he has spoken to us through his Son.”* This presents to us the backdrop for examining the passage that is pertinent to this study, namely, Hebrews 3:7-4:13.

What emerges from this passage is that Christ, as one who is greater than Moses, is our Sabbath rest as members of the house he is building. We rest in him, our high priest after the order of Melchizedek, who offered a more perfect sacrifice, his own blood, on behalf of sinners in a more perfect tabernacle. We enter this rest by faith and faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. *“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the*

rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years.” (Heb. 3:7-9) Those that came out of Egypt failed to enter that rest because of unbelief. (Heb. 3:19) “For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.” (Heb. 4:2) How was it not united by faith? It was their failure to trust God, having seen his works in the wilderness for forty years. It was also their failure to believe the First Commandment. Luther says in his Treatise on Good Works, that the First Commandment “forbids but one thing, unbelief; it requires but one thing, faith.” They were unable to enter God’s rest, the land of Canaan, a type of the eternal rest. After forty years, Joshua had given them rest insofar as he led them into the Promised Land, they were no longer wanderers and their rest would be with God in his sanctuary. Yet in actual fact Joshua had not given them rest. The land of Canaan and Mt. Zion pointed to an even greater reality. The true rest would be none other than Christ himself.

Herein, the eschatology of the Sabbath commandment contains both a blessing and a warning. Those who have believed have entered that rest (4:3). The warning is, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” (Heb. 4:7) “There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.” (Heb. 4:9) The rest is not the passing from this life, dying in the Lord, or the Parousia. The rest is referred to as *my rest*, in Psalm 95:11. The context of Psalm 95:11 is about the people of God who went astray in their hearts. “Therefore I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’” What is the *my rest*? It is fellowship with Christ by means of having finished his work as God did from his in Genesis 2:2. “For whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.” (Heb. 4:10) We are to strive to enter that rest by ceasing from our own dead works and trusting in the finished work of Christ.

The *Heidelberg Catechism* conveys the same idea with different wording. *Question 43*. “What further advantage do we receive from Christ’s sacrifice and death on the cross?” *Answer*: “Through Christ’s death our old selves are crucified, put to death, and buried with him, so that the evil desires of the flesh may no longer rule us, but that instead we may dedicate ourselves as an offering of gratitude to him.” This is striving to enter that rest and having so entered, all the future blessings of the eternal state will be realized by the one who has persevered to the end.

The Eschatology of the Lord’s Day

We note at the outset that κυριακῆ ἡμέρα, the Lord’s Day, is not the same as τῆ ἡμέρα τοῦ Κυρίου, the day of the Lord, or judgment day. Since John is one of the later New Testament writers, his language bespeaks terminology already in use.¹⁸ The Apostle John in the opening chapter of the Apocalypse is giving us the time and place of his vision (Rev. 1:10): the Isle of Patmos on the first day of the week, the day of our Lord’s resurrection. The first day of the week became the day of Christian worship fulfilling the spirit and intent of the Fourth Commandment to regard one day in seven as holy.

That the term the Lord’s Day was already in use is suggested by the earlier practice of the primitive church. No doubt there was a need for a distinctly Christian time of worship insofar as many Jewish believers instinctively continued to observe the seventh day Sabbath. Yet we note the gathering on the first day of the week in Acts 20:7, to “break bread,” this nomenclature being a synecdoche of the entire activity that is Christian worship. Why mention the first day of the week at all unless it carried some significance? The same could be said for the collection for the

¹⁸ John’s usage here of this adjective is consistent with the Apostle Paul’s syntax in I Cor. 11:20, Κυριακὸν δεῖπνον, the Lord’s Supper, the only other place in the New Testament where this word is used.

saints on the first day of the week in I Corinthians 16:2, “*On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.*” Granted, this was a special offering taken for the church at Jerusalem but why mention the first day of the week? We do not read of a church gathering on any other day. Moreover, it is consistent with the ancient practice of worship whereby one who approached the Tabernacle/Temple, did so bringing an offering. To gather for worship on the Lord’s Day, the day of the resurrection of our Lord in whom is our true Sabbath rest is consistent with the meaning of Sabbath in the Fourth Commandment that remembers the original creation pointing forward to the new creation, the process which began at Genesis 3:15 and typified in the redemption from Egypt. We note, however, that in the present celebration, there remains a more complete fulfillment of the Sabbath rest.

In comparing the first creation with the new creation, we note that Adam, in his state of innocence and probation, lived under the rubric of twenty-four hour solar days. Whereas, he enjoyed continued, indeed daily, fellowship with God, we contend that the blessing and hallowing of the seventh day was not an abstract isolated action of the Creator to be extracted at a time subsequent to the Fall. We infer that in the Garden, Adam also observed a seventh day of rest in imitation of his Creator. That is to say, he would have suspended his work of husbandry and discovery on the seventh day, to devote a more concentrated time to the singular activity of the contemplation of God himself. In the eternal state, by contrast, there will be no seven day division of time because there will be no need for the sun and the moon. It will indeed be an eternal Sabbath rest. “*And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.*” (Rev. 21:23-24) Herein lies one important reason for the continuation of observing one day in seven. Our redemption, though complete in Christ, is *not yet fully realized*. As the Old Testament seventh day Sabbath looked forward to our Sabbath rest in Christ who is making all things new, so our present observance of the first day of the week looks forward to that eternal Sabbath with Christ.¹⁹

The tree of life from which Adam was barred in his expulsion from the Garden is now accessible in the New Jerusalem. There flowed from the throne of God and the Lamb a river that runs “*through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*” (Rev. 22:2) If Adam had eaten of the tree of life after he had sinned, it would have been akin to a person sauntering into the holy of holies and peering into the Ark of the Covenant. Adam would have been forever cursed. He did receive a covering that was acceptable to God but the covering of an animal sacrifice had to await its fulfillment in Christ. In Christ we await the fulfillment of partaking of the pleasant, wholesome fruit of the tree of life in heaven. Those who are in Christ, that is, they have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb now have the right to the tree of life. “*Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.*” (Rev. 22:14) There is the final rest, the true, life-sustaining, joy-filled activity of plumbing the depths of meaning in the eternal discovery of God’s gracious work through his Son, forever. That is the believer’s consummated eschatological rest.

Conclusion

¹⁹ See Jewett, pp. 84-88, for a similar but slightly different take on this point. He wants to treat the Fourth Commandment in its entirety as fulfilled in Christ, and, therefore it is to be regarded as part of the ceremonial law, abrogated with the coming of Christ along with the rest of the ceremonial laws.

There is near universal agreement among Biblical scholars that Christ is the eschatological fulfillment of the true Sabbath rest, presented to us in the Fourth Commandment. Whereas most would agree to some sort of discontinuity, the temporal ceremonial as distinguished from the moral component of the command, there remains widespread disagreement over the nature and extent of the continuity and discontinuity. It affects how one applies this commandment.

There are those who would say that the Fourth Commandment is entirely Jewish, a sign between Israel and Yahweh that was fulfilled in Christ. Thus, we fulfill the commandment by the exercise of faith in Christ. Whereas we agree that faith in Christ is our true Sabbath rest, the problem with the exclusiveness of such a position is in the unintended consequences and the long term effects of flattening the week into an every-day-is-the-Sabbath-day or, a bit higher on the piety scale, holding to a let's-not-go-over-a-one-hour-service on Sunday. One wonders, is Sunday church little more than a pragmatic suggestion from Hebrews 10:25? Or, what is the frequency of not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together? Bi-weekly? Monthly? Annually?

We hold that the Sabbath day is best remembered in the setting aside the first day of the week to celebrate our rest in the finished work of Christ. To revert to a seventh day Sabbath would be tantamount to saying that Christ has not yet come. Moreover, we assert that the entire day be given to a holy convocation, works of necessity and mercy.

We hold to this based on general revelation and the principle of continuity between the Testaments in which the newer Testament must overturn the older either explicitly or by good and necessary inference.

In terms of general revelation it is no small matter that the seven day weekly calendar, a calendar which is independent of the cycles of the moon and the sun, has endured the modern attempts to overturn it.²⁰ Whence the weekly cycle that is the seven day rhythm not found in nature? It is part of God's general revelation. It provides for us a fixed (as opposed to a floating day such as is found in Christmas and New Year's) day of the week in which to gather for worship without interruption of the business week. This weekly cycle had its origins in the creation week and is an aspect of the fingerprint of God on his creation.

We see in the New Testament, corrections by our Lord to the improper use of the Sabbath day derived from Halakic tradition but nothing that abrogates it completely in the same manner as, say, animal sacrifices. Moreover, we would contend that the observance of one day in seven is needed more than ever. As the busyness scale climbs higher and higher along with its added pressures, the taking of one full day off in which a person is not driven by the clock should be considered a blessing. To place oneself under the hearing of the Word of God and to give ourselves to others who need us should be considered a great blessing and not an imposition on *my* time.

We would insert a word of caution here when it comes to specifics of how we should observe the Lord's Day. There is the danger of devolving the Lord's Day observance into a legalistic casuistry list of do's and don't's. Certainly we can begin with eliminating all unnecessary commerce by planning our week accordingly. Our judgments, however, must be tempered by remembering that the Savoy Declaration and the Westminster Confession were written in a pre-industrial age. Much in our modern civilization requires a twenty-four hour, seven day a week watch. Not only the fire, police and medical personnel but also workers in the

²⁰ Eviatar Zerubavel, The Seven Day Circle, pp. 69-82.

utilities and communication and other fields must work on an around the clock basis. This raises pastoral concerns for which there are not so easy solutions and we need to find ways to help our parishioners appeal to their employers to accommodate their need for worship.

Nevertheless, it must be remembered that the importance of the day is that we find our delight in the Lord in being refreshed and renewed in him by means of Word and sacrament but also in the giving of ourselves to others who need our company and compassion, encouragement or exhortation. The NFL should not interfere with ministry of the Word or works of mercy. It is sad to observe even Christians treating the day as little different from the other six days of the week.

Finally, the eschatology of the Lord's Day takes seriously the Second Coming of our Lord. Whatever one believes about the imminence of his return, or the presuppositions that one brings to the book of Revelation, there is a way to be prepared for our Lord's coming that stands aloof from the various interpretations. It is by being exercised in the eschatology of the weekly cycle by ordering our daily lives in preparation for the coming Lord's Day. We must be looking forward to, and anticipating the joy-filled, highlight of the week experience of being with the people of God gathered in the name of Jesus Christ under the ministrations of Word, sacrament, fellowship and discipline.