



Part 10 – The Lord’s Day

Genesis 2:1-3

So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy...

The entire creation account moves toward the seventh day. We are told that God rested. Of course this is not the rest of exhaustion for God never tires nor does he ever cease from upholding all that he has made. Rather, God’s

rest is that of enjoyment. There is a holy revelry to God’s enjoyment of the good works of his hands. And God welcomes his people into his eternal joy. “What is the chief end of man?” the Shorter Catechism asks. “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” Those words are rooted in the Lord’s establishment of the seventh day.

We are told that “God blessed the seventh day and made it holy.” The Sabbath is a blessed thing and a holy thing. The seventh day is the first thing that the Lord set aside as holy. And since the Lord made the seventh day holy, it is our responsibility to treat it that way. As the day that is especially blessed, the Sabbath is something to receive with joy. It is for our good.

Why do God’s people now observe the Lord’s Day on the first day of the week?

1. With the completion of Christ’s redemptive work, the Old Testament ceremonies have given way to new realities. For instance, circumcision as the sign of the covenant of grace gave way to baptism.
2. Christ rose from the dead on the first day of the week making it the decisive day of the new creation while not changing its substance.
3. The first day of the week is referred to as “the Lord’s Day” in Revelation 1:10.
4. The gift of the Holy Spirit was given on Pentecost, the first day of the week (Leviticus 25:15-16).
5. Under the leadership of the Apostles the practice of the church was to gather on the first day of the week (Acts 20:6-7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

* *When the Apostle Paul chastised the Jewish Christians for requiring Gentile Christians to observe the Sabbath, it was in reference to the ceremonial seventh day Sabbath of the old covenant law.*

1. The Lord’s Day is Holy.

Vs. 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.”

- The Sabbath is the first thing recorded in the Bible that God sanctified (set apart as holy). In fact the only verb form of the Hebrew *qadosh* (“holy”) used in Genesis is applied to the Sabbath. For the Lord to declare the Sabbath holy means that he has set it apart for himself. It is his day in a way unique from the other six days of the week. That is remarkable considering that all things, including the first six days of the week belong to him as well. So that the Lord “made it holy” should motivate sober reflection on our part.
- Notice that the sanctifying of the Sabbath happened before sin and death entered the world. That means that all humanity is accountable to treat the Sabbath as a holy thing. There is nothing in the Bible which suggests that this principle of the Lord’s Day as holy has changed. Indeed, we should take note of the fact that only the record of the seventh day does not conclude with the familiar, “and there was evening and there was morning,” which follows the first six days of creation. This indicates that the Sabbath Day is meant to point us to eternal realities, not merely Old Testament laws. The call to hallow the Sabbath is not a relic of a by-gone era.
- “Our Lord does not do away with the observance of a weekly day of worship and He doesn’t do it anywhere else in the four gospels. Thousands have rushed to the hasty conclusion that Christians have nothing to do with the fourth commandment and that it is no more binding on us than on the Mosaic Law about the sacrifices, but there is nothing in the New Testament to justify that conclusion. The plain truth is that our Lord did not abolish the law of a weekly Sabbath, He only freed it from incorrect interpretations,

purified it from manmade additions, but He did not tear out of the Decalogue the fourth commandment. He only stripped it of the miserable traditions with which the Pharisees had encrusted the day and by which they had made it not a blessing, but a burden. He left the fourth commandment where He found it, a part of the eternal Law of God of which no jot or tittle was ever to pass away. May we never forget this.”
- J.C. Ryle

2. The Lord's Day is a Blessing.

Whatever the Lord makes holy will simultaneously redound for the blessing of his people. When God sanctified the tabernacle and later the temple, was this not for the blessing of his people? Certainly it is a blessing that God sanctifies the children of believers (1 Corinthians 7:14). So too with the Sabbath. So many of the laws attached to the Sabbath in the law of Moses were directly intended to bless. Laws mandating physical rest, worship, and the forgiveness of debts were all meant to bless the people. When the Pharisees rebuked Jesus because one Sabbath his disciples plucked grains of wheat in order to eat, Jesus answered, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” Jesus’ words were not meant to undo Sabbath observance. Rather, Jesus was correcting the Pharisee’s stubborn misunderstanding of the Sabbath’s purpose to bless. Jesus goes so far as to proclaim himself “Lord even of the Sabbath,” by which he announced himself to be God and asserted the lasting relevance of the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-28).

A) It is a blessing because of what it provides for us physically.

- Weekly Sabbath observance teaches us that we are creatures, limited in all our ways; dependent upon God. Before the advent of electricity it was very difficult for people to deprive themselves of the rest their bodies needed as darkness was imposed upon them. But now it is common for people to seek to transcend the rhythms of work and rest designed by God to bless humanity. The rest which the Lord’s Day is intended to provide for us is as needed as ever.

B) It is a blessing because of what it provides for our neighbor.

Luke 14:1-6

- Jesus, who was committed to faithful Sabbath observance, performed necessary acts of mercy on the Sabbath. And in this he was not breaking the 4th Commandment or altering it in any way. In doing acts of mercy on the Sabbath Jesus was being faithful. Mercy was always appropriate on the Sabbath. Indeed, many of the laws regulating Sabbath observance were ways to ensure that the poor and vulnerable were not taken advantage of.
- Do we ever consider the impact on our neighbor of our doing business on the Lord’s Day? Should we consider whether our actions lead to the requirement that our neighbors work on Sundays? These are things that I used to think very little about. And then I’d sit down at the restaurant or coffee shop and realize that I was a contributing factor to their having to work on Sundays. Since the fall of mankind, the Lord’s Day was meant to be a great leveler. Everyone, both rich and poor, citizen and stranger, was commanded to keep it. It was unlawful for God’s people to require their servants to work on the Sabbath. Even livestock were given a rest on the Sabbath.
- Faithful Sabbath observance also provides for our neighbor a public witness to the grace of God. To be sure, faithfully keeping the Lord’s Day will make us strange by worldly standards. But that strangeness may provide us opportunities to tell our neighbors about the Lord who freed us from sin and brought us into his rest.

C) It is a blessing because of what it provides for us spiritually.

- We must not view the Lord’s Day as merely one half of our weekend. The Sabbath was given to man so that he could step away from his ordinary labors and enjoy the Lord’s presence. Think about it. If the Sabbath was a blessing in paradise, how much more do we who live in a fallen world need the renewing and redeeming presence of the Lord? How is it that we can think of ourselves as less needy spiritually than a still unspoiled Adam and Eve?
- After the fall, God prescribed the various activities which were to define the people’s worship on the Sabbath. This led to the construction of the tabernacle and the service of the priests. Worship continued to be central to Sabbath observance for God’s people after Christ’s saving work even as the Lord’s Day changed to the first day of the week. Just as the Lord made the Sabbath holy so too does he make his people holy – in part – through what he provides on that day.