

“Let everyone who loves Christ keep holy the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day.”

—**Ignatius** (c. A.D. 35-107),
student of the Apostle John

“On the Lord’s Day, Christians should, in honor of the resurrection of the Lord, defer all worldly business.”

—**Tertullian** (c. A.D. 155-230),
Carthaginian minister, apologist

“Make the Lord’s Day the market day for thy soul.” “A man shall show his heart and life, what they are, more by one Lord’s Day than by all the days of the week besides. To delight ourselves in God’s service upon His holy Day gives better proof of a sanctified nature than to grudge at the coming of such days.”

—**John Bunyan** (1628-1688),
author of *Pilgrim’s Progress*

“The profanation of the Sabbath is an inlet to all impiety. Those who pollute holy time will keep nothing pure.”

—**Matthew Henry** (1662-1714),
English Presbyterian minister

“Did you ever meet with a lively believer in any country under heaven—one who loved Christ and lived a holy life—who did not delight in keeping holy to God the entire Lord’s Day?”

—**Robert Murray McCheyene**
(1813-1843), Scottish minister

“A Sabbath-breaking or Sabbath-neglecting people are notoriously irreligious. ... The Pharisaical way of observing it is one extreme...the European way is worse still.”

—**Charles Hodge** (1797-1878),
Princeton Professor

“I am very sorry but we never fly on Sunday”

—**Wilbur Wright** (1867-1912),
when the King of Spain came to see the brothers’ airplanes and his attendant said,
“His Majesty would like to see you fly.”

“As we keep or break the Sabbath day, we nobly save or meanly lose the last, best hope by which man rises.”

—**Abraham Lincoln** (1809-1865),
16th President of the United States

“If you want to kill Christianity, you must abolish Sunday.”

—**Voltaire** (1694-1778),
French atheist

“Where there is no Christian Sabbath, there is no Christian morality.”

—**John McLean** (1785-1861),
U. S. Supreme Court Justice

“There is nothing in which I would recommend you to be more strictly resolute than in keeping the Sabbath holy. I can truly declare that to me the institution of the Sabbath has been invaluable”

—**William Wilberforce** (1759-1833),
Member of British Parliament

“In the early days of World War II when there was a tremendous emphasis on production, not only were six days a week worked, but seven days a week. However, it was not long before it was found that instead of production increasing, it was found to fall, and there had to be a revision to the one day in seven free from work.”

—**Neville Knox** (d. 2002),
Town Clerk of Harrogate, England

“Experience and observation convince me that all who work with hand or brain require the rest which a general observance of the Sabbath only can secure. The philanthropist and the Christian may approach the subject from different directions; but whether we regard man as an animal or immortal, we should unite in securing for him the rest that body and spirit both demand for their best condition and highest good. Those who do not find the Divine command in the Book cannot fail to find it in the man.”

—**Benjamin Harrison** (1833-1901),
23rd President of the United States

The Lord’s Day



A Scriptural and practical guide
to delighting yourself in
the Lord and honoring
the Lord’s holy day.

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*“I was in the Spirit
on the Lord’s Day”
(Revelation 1:10)*

1. Our Father rested on that day, and made the day holy to bless us.

In the beginning, our Father created the week. Of course, the God of unlimited power could have called the universe into being all at once. But instead, “in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them.” And then “on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.” Did God really need to work for six days? No. Did God really need to rest? No. But do you know why he did? He did it as a “blessing” to me, to you, and to man whom he created in his image. Jesus says, “The Sabbath was made for man.” He did it for you, and for me. (*Exod 20:11, 31:17, Mark 2:27*)

Our Father made us. He knows our capabilities and our limitations and our needs. The exhausting of mind, the weariness of body, the burdening of soul—even before the fall, God knows. He knows we need a day of “rest” every week, mind, body and soul, to be “refreshed,” to be “healed.” And we need to take time to be “holy.” We need a special day of special “blessing” each and every week. And so God created a day which would be our “delight.” God created a day so we could enjoy living our life in the likeness of God, working as he worked, and then resting as he rested, that we might be refreshed like him. And therefore, it is a day which he wants us to call “honorable.” It is a day to “honor Him” who made us. It is a day for us to “delight ourselves in the Lord.” And it is a day in which he promises to “cause us to ride on the high hills of the earth.” It is a day which he blessed for us. (*Exod 20:11, 23:11, 31:17, Isa 58:13, Matt 12:10, Mark 2:28*)

2. And now, our Father says, we are to go and do likewise.

And there is one more very important thing which is often overlooked. Our Father not only rested for one day after working for six. He then made the day a blessing to us. And he instructed us to follow his example, not only by resting, but by making the day a blessing to others. It is therefore not only a day for us to be blessed, but also a day for us to bless our neighbor. It is explicitly a day “to do good,” “to heal,” “to save life.” Our Lord looked at those who forgot this “with anger being grieved by the hardness of their hearts.” The day is not simply to be a sacrifice, giving up one day a week. Jesus tells those who kept the day that way, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice” (*Matt 12:7, Mark 3:3-5*)

It is a day for you to show mercy. Jesus asks, if you would even lift a sheep out of a pit on the Sabbath, how much more should you show mercy to a man? If you would even lose an ox or a donkey from its stall on that day to give it water, Jesus asks, shouldn’t those bound by Satan be loosed from their bondage? This is the essence of a holy day. It is not just a day to stop work. Just as our Father makes that day a blessing to us, we are therefore to make that day a blessing to our neighbor. (*Matt 12:11-12, Luke 13:15-16*)

And this explains why, when the fourth commandment is given to Israel thousands of years later, it is primarily addressed to those in authority. When God commands his people to “remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy,” he specifically addresses governors of households, commanding them to give rest to all under their charge, to your children, to your servants, to the strangers in your gates, and even to your animals who need the rest each week as much as you. Those whom God has placed in positions of authority must give rest and blessing to all those under their authority, just as God gave rest and blessing to those under His authority. (*Exod 20:11, Matt 12:11, Luke 13:15-16*)

This, then, is the essence of the day as given “from the beginning of the creation.” We are to be like our Father in heaven. Our Father rested. Our Father was refreshed. Our Father kept the day holy. And our Father made that day a great blessing and did good to us. Therefore, our Father tells his children, go and do likewise. (*Mark 10:6, Luke 10:37*)

Q. 1. What three things did God do as he finished creation (before the fall) in Gen 2:3?

A brief ancient, historical testimony about how to keep the Lord’s Day holy

On May 24, 1618, King James published *The King’s Book of Sports* to instruct people in recreations suitable for the Lord’s Day: dancing, archery, leaping, may-pole games, and the like. And he ordered the book to be read in churches after worship on Sunday morning. The pretext for this atrocity was that the Jesuits were tempting Protestants to return to Catholicism, since the Protestant teaching on keeping the day holy was alienating some and leading them back to Rome. A few brief quotes will demonstrate how far Catholics and some Protestants have departed from the church’s teaching on how to keep the Lord’s Day:

Ignatius (student of the Apostle John, was martyred in A.D. 107): “Be not led astray by strange doctrines or by old fables which are profitless. For if we are living now according to Judaism, we confess that we have not received grace.... If then they who walked in ancient customs came to a new hope, no longer living for the Sabbath, but for the Lord’s Day, on which he sprang up through Him and His death, that we may be found disciples of Jesus Christ, our only teacher” (*Ignatius, To the Magnesians, 9.1*).

Clement of Alexandria, c. A.D. 168 wrote, “The enlightened Christian, when he has fully observed that which is the Lord’s Day according to the gospel, keeps that day the commandment when he casts away low worldly thought and lays hold of that which is spiritual and enlightened, glorifying in this the resurrection of the Lord” (*1 Clement, 7.12*). And he reports, “The old seventh day has become nothing more than a working day.”

The Lord’s Day has sometimes been called the “Christian Sabbath,” which is language the church has used from at least the time of **Origen** (A.D. 185-254) who wrote, “Leaving the Jewish observances of the Sabbath, let us see how the Sabbath ought to be observed by a Christian. On the Sabbath day all worldly labors ought to be abstained from. If, therefore, you cease from all secular works, and execute nothing worldly, but give yourselves up to spiritual exercises, repairing to church, attending to sacred reading and instruction, thinking of celestial things, solicitous for the future, placing the judgment to come before your eyes, not looking to things present and visible but to those which are future and invisible, this is the observance of the Christian Sabbath. (*Opera 2, p. 358*)

Emperor **Constantine’s** famous Sunday law of March 7, 321 reads as follows: “On the venerable day of the sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed.” Laws then forbade Sunday circus, theater, and horse racing.

The **Council of Laodicea** (A.D. 364) says in canon 29, “Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on Saturday but shall work on that day; but the Lord’s Day they shall especially honor, and, as being Christians, shall, if possible, do no work on that day.”

Emperor **Leo I** issued the following decree in A.D. 469, “We ordain, according to the true meaning of the Holy Ghost and of the apostles thereby directed, that on the sacred day wherein our own integrity was restored, all do rest and cease from labor; that neither husbandmen nor others on that day, put their hand to forbidden work. For if the Jews did so much to reverence their Sabbaths, which were but a shadow of ours, are not we which inhabit the light and truth of grace, bound to honor that day which the Lord Himself has honored, and has therein delivered us from dishonor and from death? Are we not bound to keep it singular and inviolable, well contenting ourselves with so liberal a grant of the rest, and not encroaching upon that one day which God has chosen to His Own honor? Is it not reckless neglect of religion to make that very day common, and to think we may do with it as with the rest?”

And for further study, a great many testimonies of early Christians are cited in *The Covenantal Sabbath* by Francis Nigel Lee at http://www.the-highway.com/Covsab_TOC.html.

Questions & Answers

➤ **Why is this important?** If God gives you “threescore and ten,” *ten years* of your seventy will have been spent in worship, ministry, and rest. Our lives are so busy and our minds are so full of other things that this time is absolutely essential to healthy spiritual growth and to a fruitful Christian life. This is not an arbitrary command of God. This is for your good and for His glory. This is a foretaste of and preparation for heaven.

➤ **How should I keep the Lord’s Day holy?** First, see the delight and blessing that this day is intended to be to you, and through you, to others. This spirit will help you properly to honor Him on His day. It is intended to be “as the days of heaven upon the earth.” Make preparation ahead of time so you and your family can be completely free to enjoy and honor it. If you struggle to complete your work, remember your employer is the Lord ultimately (Col 3:23). You work for Him, and He says to take the day off. Finally, I could not do better than to give you this summary from our church’s confession of faith:

WCF 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:^(k) 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,^(l) which, in Scripture, is called the Lord’s Day,^(m) and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath.⁽ⁿ⁾ ^(k) Ex. 20:8,10,11; ^(l) Is. 56:2,4, 6,7 ^(m) Gen. 2:2,3; ⁽ⁿ⁾ 1Cor. 16:1,2; ^(o) Acts 20:7 ^(p) Rev. 1:10 ^(q) Ex. 20:8,10 with Mt. 5:17,18.

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 before-hand, do not only observe an holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations,^(o) 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.^(p) ^(o) Ex. 20:8; ^(p) 16:23,25,26,29,30; ^(q) 31:15-17; ^(r) Is. 58:13; ^(s) Neh. 13:15-19,21,22 ^(t) Is. 58:13; ^(u) Mt. 12:1-13.

➤ **What about going shopping?** Since it causes others to work and does not do to others as you would have them do to you, I would encourage your family to covenant with those in Nehemiah’s day, “If the peoples of the land brought wares or any grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we would not buy it from them on the Sabbath.” See Neh. 10:31, 13:15-22.

➤ **What about sports?** I recommend watching my favorite movie, “Chariots of Fire.” Eric Liddell writes, “Give me the day of rest, when all that savours of organized games can be put on one side.... It is a time of communion and fellowship with God—a time of quiet, in fact, a time of re-creation by fellowship with God. I believe that Sunday as we have had it in the past is one of the greatest helps in a young man’s life to keep all that is noblest, truest and best. That is why I say, “Young person, stand for the Sunday, for by losing it you will lose far more than the day: you will lose the spirit that it stands for.”

➤ **Didn’t Calvin bowl on the Sabbath?** That rumor is first found in a book written over 250 years after his death. Hear Calvin’s own preaching to his congregation: “If we employ the Lord’s Day to make good cheer, to sport ourselves, to go to the games and pastime, shall God in this be honored? Is it not a mockery? Is not this an unhallowing of his name?”

➤ **What about the “continental view?”** A trip to continental Europe will not make you eager to hold their view of the Lord’s Day. I would encourage you simply to read Calvin’s sermon on the 4th commandment, and Ursinus’ commentary on q. 103 of the Heidelberg Catechism (he is the primary author). These strongly teach the same view I am teaching.

➤ **What should I tell people who want me to do other things?** Tell them that you will be glad to give them six days, but there is one day which is not yours to give; it is the Lord’s.

➤ **Can you suggest some books to read?** I would recommend *Call the Sabbath a Delight* by Walter Chantry or *The Lord’s Day* by Joey Pipa. Charles Spurgeon, D. L. Moody, and J. C. Ryle also have some excellent sermons on those topics, some published in booklet form. For a more historical study, see *The Market Day of the Soul* by James Dennison.

3. Man makes creation blessings into curses, and does not bless others.

When God created us, He gave mankind certain things, (1) *marriage*, (2) fruitful *child-bearing*, (3) *labor*, and (4) a weekly *day of rest*. And it is amazing how the things which God made to be our greatest blessings can become our greatest burdens. It is amazing how the channels through which we are to be the greatest blessing to others can become the very channels through which we do the most harm to others. Because of sin, man groans under God’s good gifts. And man makes others to groan with him. (*Gen. 1-2*)

Man innovates how he can get rid of his wife, his children, his work, and his holy day of rest. And in the ideal lifestyle advocated by many in our world, a man has no wife yet all the women he wants. He has no child-bearing yet all the legacy craves. He has no labor yet he gets his money for nothing. And he certainly has no holy day to be blessed and to bless, so he spends every day as he pleases for himself. And if this were not the desire of so many, the lottery and a great number of magazines and television shows would immediately go out of business. Man studies how he can escape from God’s four “creation ordinances,” and he turns these blessings into curses. (*e.g. Amos 8:5-7*)

4. So the Sabbath is institutionalized in Israel; laws are made to restrain sin.

And so, Jesus says, “because of the hardness of your hearts” laws were given to Israel to restrain sin and protect against tyranny. Severe penalties were instituted against those who transgressed the laws. And many ceremonial laws were added to God’s moral laws. The weekly day of rest was no exception. God gave Israel “Sabbaths,” Sabbath days every week, Sabbath years every seventh year, and a great Sabbath year of Jubilee every fifty years. And laws were given to strictly govern these Sabbaths. Each week, every man in Israel must give his household rest, and there was to be a “holy convocation.” In addition, laws were given for observing new moons and three annual festivals. And so the whole calendar for Israel is frequently referred to by the triplet, “festivals,” “new moons,” and “Sabbaths.” (*Exod 31:13-17, Lev 23, Ps 81:3, 1 Chron 23:31, Neh 10:33, Col 2:16*)

However, God wrote the Sabbath *day* into the Ten Commandments, which was and is the moral law for all nations, because having a weekly day of rest and blessing is moral, not ceremonial or national. Again, it was this way “from the beginning,” even before the fall of man. Read the fourth commandment. There is nothing Jewish about labor. There is nothing Jewish about the need to rest. Even animals need that rest. God is the creator of all men in every nation. God did not bless the day only to one nation which he would create thousands of years afterward. And there is nothing Jewish about a week. God’s moral law, written with his own finger, and cited over and over in the New Testament, requires only what is right. And the fourth commandment did not create any *new* obligation. It simply required that people, even Gentiles, even animals, must have the rest they need one day every week. And masters must not exploit their animals, their servants, their children, or the strangers in their gates. God wrote this with his own finger: (*Gen 2:3, Exod 20:8-11, Matt 19:4-8*)

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.” (*Exod 20:19-11*)

Q. 2. What are the four “creation ordinances” God blessed in Gen 1:28, 2:3, and 2:24?

Q. 3. Of what two things is the Sabbath day a sign in Exod 31:13-17?

5. What is a holy day? Would you call *this* an acceptable day to the Lord?

The seventh commandment is, “Do not commit adultery.” And if you were only to read this commandment, you might falsely conclude that all God intended in marriage is for a husband and wife not to be unfaithful. That is very important, of course, but that hardly describes God’s ideal for marriage. Marriage is to be much more than abstaining from adultery. That commandment was given primarily to restrain sin, and so it is given negatively. But the ideal for marriage, positively, is to be found in the activity of our Lord himself, who takes a bride to love, to sanctify, to cleanse, to nurture, and to cherish. That is the ideal for marriage. *(Exod 20:14, Gen 2:24, Eph 5:22-33)*

Similarly, if you were only to read, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. . . . In it you shall do no work,” you might falsely conclude that all God intended for a holy day is abstaining from work. But that is a grave misunderstanding. Abstaining from work is important, just as abstaining from adultery is important to marriage. But that does not make a holy day a blessing. Nor does it make that day a blessing to others.

What makes a day holy and a blessing? God addresses this matter at great length in Isaiah 58. God speaks to people who kept a fast by abstaining from food, and who kept a Sabbath day by abstaining from work. But otherwise, they gratified themselves. Is that what God wanted? Is a fast just abstaining from food, and a Sabbath just abstaining from labor? God says, “Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?”

“Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To *loose the bonds of wickedness*, to *undo the heavy burdens*, to *let the oppressed go free*, and that you *break every yoke*? Is it not to *share your bread with the hungry*, and that you *bring to your house the poor who are cast out*; when you see the naked, that you *cover him*, and not hide yourself from *your own flesh*? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am.’”

“If you *take away the yoke from your midst*, the *pointing of the finger*, and *speaking wickedness*, if you *extend your soul to the hungry* and *satisfy the afflicted soul*, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday. The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. Those from among you shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Streets to Dwell In.

“If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from *doing your pleasure* on My holy day, and call *the Sabbath a delight*, the holy day of the LORD *honorable*, and shall *honor Him*, *not doing your own ways*, *nor finding your own pleasure*, *nor speaking your own words*, then you shall *delight yourself in the LORD*; and I will cause you to *ride on the high hills of the earth*, and *feed you with the heritage of Jacob* your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken.” *(Isa 58:6-14, see whole chapter)*

That is a holy day. When God rested from his work of creation, He didn’t cease from *all* work, as Jesus points out in John 5:17, “My Father is working until now, and I myself am working.” God ceased from *creation*, not from *caring* for his creatures. And Jesus did the same. It is little wonder that Jesus had to instruct Pharisees so much on the *right* use of the day as a day of *mercy*, of *healing*, of *ministry*, of *doing good*. It is little wonder then that the New Testament teaches *twice* as much about the Sabbath as the Old.

Q. 4. List 3 things to be *avoided* and 4 things to be *done* to honor God on a holy day.

6. Festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths died with the Lord of the Sabbath.

When Jesus died, the feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths given to Israel died with him. Jesus is the one they all foreshadowed. Paul therefore writes in Colossians 2:16-17, “Let no one judge you regarding a *festival* or a *new moon* or *sabbaths*, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.” When Jesus rose from the dead, he no longer assembled with his disciples on the Sabbath, as had been his custom for so many years. Jesus’ resurrection marks the end of all the “days and months and seasons and years” that were given to Israel “until the time of reformation.” *(Gal 4:10, Heb 9:10, Lk 4:16)*

“Hooray!” says one. “Now we no longer require a day of rest! We no longer need a day for holy assembly! We no longer have to spend a day being blessed and blessing others. There is no more need for us to be like our Father in six days of labor and one day of rest and mercy. We are delivered from these! Now we may force our workers to work seven days without rest. Now we may no longer show mercy to our animals. Now we can work ourselves non-stop, and make others serve us and wait on us as we please.”

No, you misunderstand. What was given to Israel has passed away, but what was given to man “from the beginning” still remains. Do you think that you no longer need a day of rest from work because Jesus died? Do you think you no longer need a day to assemble for worship? Do you think that others do not need you to bless them any more? Do you think man no longer needs to be like God? You have misunderstood. *(Matt 19:4-8)*

To try to prove that we should observe *no* days on the basis of Col 2:16 or Gal 4:10 is to try to prove too much, for the Apostle John himself says in Rev 1:10, “I was in the Spirit on the *Lord’s Day*.” Paul cannot be set against John. Paul is clearly concerned in the context of those two passages that some of the circumcision group were forcing Gentiles to observe the Jewish “festivals,” “new moons,” and “Sabbaths,” and judging them if they did not. In mixed Jewish-Gentile congregations, some Jewish Christians did continue to observe the calendar of Israel for a time, out of a weak conscience. And they were free to do so, Rom 14:5-6—but not to impose that upon others. But Paul cannot possibly be made to say that there is no “Lord’s Day.”

7. And the Lord’s Day is their fulfillment, when our Lord rises from the dead.

Jesus rose from the dead on *Sunday*. And on that day, we read his disciples “worshiped *Him*,” from that Sunday onward. Sunday is when Jesus met with his disciples (note that the Jewish idiom “after eight days” includes the current day, so that Sunday is clearly the day of meeting). Sunday is when Christ’s people were found together in the upper room. On Sunday, Jesus baptized his people with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Sunday is the day of worship, the day to be blessed and to bless, the Lord’s Day. *(Mt 28:9, John 20:26, Acts 2:1)*

And on this day, mercy should be remembered. “The first day of the week” is the day Paul *orders* the churches all do the same thing for those in need, “On the *first day of the week* let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come” (1Cor 16:1-2). Sunday is a day for mercy.

Sunday is the day when God’s people came together “with one accord in one place.” We are told in Acts 20:7 that “the first day of the week” is the day “when the disciples came together to break bread.” It is the day when God’s people “come together as a church,” not only “to eat the Lord’s Supper” (1Cor 11:18-20). It is also the day we “come together” for singing “psalms,” for “teaching,” for “edification,” for “prayers,” etc. to “worship God” (1Cor 14:13-26). The Lord’s Day fulfills our need to rest, to worship together, to be blessed, and to be a blessing. Call it a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable. *(Acts 2:1)*

Q. 5. “The Sabbath was made for man” (Mk 2:27). Cite 4 verses on how it benefits man.