

—Westminster Shorter Catechism—

Lesson 72—What does the Fourth Commandment Require? Qs.57-59

Introduction

I. The Sabbath day

- A. The Sabbath is the oldest religious institution in the world. It's a creation ordinance (along with marriage and work) and therefore existed long before the Mosaic legislation, into which it was afterward incorporated. Circumcision and passover, baptism and the Lord's supper, public worship, and even Holy Scripture are all very ancient, but none of them can compare with the Sabbath day for antiquity, Gen 2.1-3.
 1. It not only has the claim to antiquity, but it also has the claim of divine example. God created the Sabbath day *by* His own rest on that day, setting it apart as holy, sacred, and blessed.
 2. The fact that the commandment begins with the word *Remember*, makes it clear that this ordinance, in particular, preceded the Mosaic economy and the giving of the Law at Sinai.
 3. At Sinai, this creation ordinance, binding on all men, was established as an ecclesiastical ordinance for the people of God as part of the worship of God, Ex 31.13; Lev 19.30.
- B. The Lord not only established the Sabbath at creation by His rest, but by distributing His creative work over six days followed by a day of rest, He established the distribution of time into weeks.
 1. Despite a direct reference to the keeping of a Sabbath in the days of Noah and the patriarchs, the repeated references to the division of time by seven days make it abundantly clear that God's creation week had established the observing of a weekly Sabbath for mankind, Gen 7.4, 10; 8.10, 12; 31.23; Ex 12.15.
 2. This is noteworthy because it shows that the Sabbath is fundamentally necessary for the relationship between God and man and original—and not accidental—to human nature.
- C. Sabbath is from the Hebrew word which means *rest* or *seventh*, and therefore in the OT, the weekly day of rest is called the Sabbath.
- D. And as a day of rest, the OT church did no work on the Sabbath. But rather than leave the day open to be wasted in sloth and idleness, the Sabbath was regarded as a day of *holy rest*, a rest from secular labors and concerns *in order to* be fully devoted to religious worship and concerns.
 1. In the OT, the sacrifices were doubled in the tabernacle and temple on the Sabbath day. On the Sabbath, the priests prepared new loaves of showbread and the priests were relieved from their labors as the next round of priests began their shift.
 2. On the Sabbath, the congregation gathered to hear the words of the prophet and then later gathered in synagogues for the reading of Scripture, mutual exhortation, and prayer.
- E. The *seriousness* with which the Lord regards this commandment is seen both in its connection to Israel's being sent into exile, Jer 17.19-27; Ezk 20.10-26, and in Christ's faithful observance of it as a requirement of one born under the Law, Lk 2.21; Gal 5.3; Lk 4.16; Gal 4.4-5.
 1. In the NT, both Christ and the disciples observed the weekly Sabbath by attending the synagogue, Lk 4.16. But given the Lord's resurrection on the first day of the week, Lk 24.1-6, and His two appearances to the disciples on that day, Jn 20.19, 26, they continued to meet weekly on the first day of the week to commemorate His resurrection and in the expectation that He would again reveal Himself to them (now through the means of grace), Jn 20.19-21. It became known as the *Christian Sabbath* or *the Lord's Day*, Rev 1.10.

II. The Lord's Day

- A. Given the thousands of years of Sabbath observance since creation, and Christ's own weekly observance of it during His life as our Representative, Lk 4.16, it's significant that the Lord of the Sabbath (Mk 2.28) dies on Friday and lay dead in the grave for an entire OT Sabbath, not to rise again until the morning of the first day of the week.

1. It's as if the Sabbath of Judaism was buried with Him and never saw a resurrection. Instead, when He rose on the first day of the week, a new Sabbath, a better rest, rose with Him.
 2. And not only did He rise from the dead and appear to His disciples on the first day of the week, but He disappeared from them for the next six days only to appear again on the first day of the second week, as if to mark that day and make it special for them.
 3. When He appeared to them by His Spirit on the Day of Pentecost after His resurrection, it was again on the first day of the week.
 4. And then when He appeared to John with His final revelation and Scripture for the church, it was again on the first day of the week, which the church came to call *the Lord's Day*, Rev 1.10.
- B. Therefore while the OT *ceremonial* nature of the fourth commandment was abrogated by Christ's coming, the *moral* nature of it cannot be abolished but abides forever on all men.
1. All that was sacred and gracious to the OT Sabbath was providentially moved by apostolic example and precept (1Cor 16.1-2) to a new, Christian Sabbath, established not merely by the Lord of our creation, but by the Lord of our recreation, regeneration, and resurrection.
 2. Moreover, in the OT economy in which Christ's coming was patiently waited and longed for, the church worked each week looking forward to a Sabbath rest. But in the NT economy in which Christ's coming and atoning work are celebrated as finished, the church begins each week with a Sabbath rest, going forth into all their work in the strength and grace of that rest, Heb 4.3.

The duty required

- I. In giving this commandment, the Lord shows Himself to be the Lord of our time and the Governor of how we spend it. As our Creator, He has a supreme right to direct and control us in the use of our time, Mk 2.28; Lev 19.30. We're not our own here any more than anywhere else. We are the Lord's.
- II. Without question, the fourth commandment is given by God to *regulate the frequency of the public worship of God* (Q. 58).
 - A. The public worship of God is to be weekly, on the day of our Lord's resurrection, the first day of the week (Q. 59) because Christ established a pattern of meeting with His people and revealing Himself to them (Jn 20.1-6, 19, 26; Rev 1.10) by the means of grace (Qs. 88-107) on that day.
 - B. This day of worship is to be kept *holy*, or set apart unto the Lord, Isa 58.13-14.
 1. *Negatively*, we're to *cease* all secular labor. No work is to be done on this day, and whatever is done is to be in service to the day's purpose: the public worship of God. **All the temporal affairs of men are to be regulated and modified in reference to the weekly Sabbath. All his doing and not doing are in intentional subordination to this dominant circumstance of his life: that he's to be a Sabbath-keeper, a God-fearing worshipper.*
 2. *Positively*, we're to *regard* the day as the Lord's and not ours and therefore cheerfully and sincerely *give ourselves up* to His worship and service, Isa 58.13-14; 56.3-7; Mk 2.27-28.
 - C. In juxtaposing six whole days to one, both at creation and then in precept, the commandment reserves *a day* for the Lord, Neh 13.15-22.
 1. God doesn't need the rest of a Sabbath, but man does, Mk 2.27. And so the *sanctification* of the day is for man's benefit in order that he might have a day to give himself to the worship of God and enjoy the blessings of the covenant of grace without distraction.
 2. The Lord is Lord of the Sabbath, it is His, Mk 2.28; but He made it for man's benefit and happiness, Isa 58.13-14.
 - D. In all the blessings given to us by God—except for the blessing of His incarnation—there's no greater assurance of our eternal fellowship with God than we find in the Sabbath, in which we *peculiarly* enter into and participate in God's own rest, Heb 4.3, 9-10.