

The Christian Sabbath or The Lord's Day

The Westminster Confession of Faith states in Chapter 21, Section 7, “As it is of 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: 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, which in Scripture is called the Lord’s Day, and is to be continued to the end of the world as the Christian Sabbath.”

The Free Presbyterian Church heartily agrees with this succinct summary of Scripture regarding the duty of man to observe one day in seven as God’s day. The Confession correctly presents the basic premise of the fourth commandment — *that a seventh of the time allotted to man is to be observed as a sabbath or day of rest (which is the meaning of the word “sabbath”).*

It should be carefully noted that the fourth commandment not only stipulates that one day in seven is the Lord’s, but it is also written in such a way as to permit the change of the actual day of the week for the observance of the Sabbath without violating the commandment itself. This commandment does *not* say that man is to remember “the *seventh* day to keep it holy,” but he is to “remember the *sabbath day* to keep it holy.” We point this out because of the error of many in insisting that the word *sabbath* means “seventh.” It does not. As already noted, the word “sabbath” means rest or cessation. The Lord simply commands us to keep holy the day of rest. Moreover, the fourth commandment does *not* state that “the seventh day of the week is the sabbath.” Rather, it states that “the *seventh day* is the sabbath.” In other words, by the term “the seventh day” the Lord speaks of the day following the six days of labor, *whatever those six days of labour might be*. Therefore, by this clear language, the fourth commandment was written so as to allow a change of the day for the observance of the sabbath without in any way violating the commandment.

The resurrection of Christ ushered in the change of day for the observance of the sabbath. One might wonder why the first Christians, who were Jews themselves, suddenly began to meet for worship on the first day of the week. The explanation can only be attributed to our Lord’s rising from the dead on that first day to signify the *finished work of redemption*. Thus the principle of the fourth commandment—one day in seven being the Lord’s—remained unviolated, while the keeping of that day took on a much fuller meaning that it had in Old Testament times. The Christian Sabbath or the Lord’s Day, continues to be not only a memorial of God’s finished work at *creation*, but it is also a memorial of Christ’s finished work of *redemption*.

“There remaineth therefore a *keeping of sabbath* [the literal rendering of the original text] to the people of God...” (Hebrews 4:9). We believe therefore that the observing of one day in seven is still binding on mankind. The Lord has graciously given us six days for work and recreation — we are not to rob Him of the other, the sabbath day. The Free Presbyterian Church therefore holds that since the believer is “not without law to God, but under the law to Christ...” (1 Cor. 9:21), he is to sanctify the Sabbath “by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God’s worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy.” (*Shorter Catechism*, 60).