



Isaiah 58:13-14
The Lord's Day

13 " 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,

14 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."

Over the past few weeks we've been examining why we worship the way we do, we've talked about the source of our worship, we've talked about some of the elements of worship such as prayer, the reading of scripture, and the preaching and hearing of the word, in a word we've been talking about the *whats of worship*. What should we do when we worship? But even if we answer that question in detail, and it is my hope that we will, the question "What should we do when we worship?" begs another question, namely **when** should we worship? Well, perhaps you're thinking well that's easy Pastor – Sunday – haven't you noticed that we're all here week after week on Sunday, and not on Friday or Saturday?

But why Sunday and not Friday or Saturday, I mean surely it can't be because Friday is already booked by the Muslims and the Jews have reserved Saturday for themselves can it? Or perhaps it's just a tradition. I've met a lot of Christians who think that, and so when they are asked "How did this tradition get started?" they answer like Tevya in "Fiddler on the Roof" "**I'll tell you! [pause] I don't know. But it's a tradition...**" But I hope that answer wouldn't satisfy you, because as Reformed Christians we confess that all of our worship, including the day on which we worship, should be according to God's commands.

Well, as most of you already know we do believe and confess in fact that we believe that the Lord has indeed appointed Sunday, the Lord's Day, to be the special day upon which his people cease from their ordinary labors and occupations and spend the day in worship and rest. In fact, that is what we confess in the Westminster Confession, specifically if you would, please turn in the back of your Trinity Hymnals to P. 861 -

VII. 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 has particularly appointed one day in seven, for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto him:[34] 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,[35] which, in Scripture, is called the Lord's Day,[36] and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath.[37] (Trinity Hymnal – P.861)

Now, I want to spend some time proving to you that that statement is true summary of what is taught in scripture, but before I do that, I want you to know that this isn't some sort of odd bit of Presbyterian theology from the 1600s. That statement, and the belief that Sunday is the Christian Sabbath, was actually the belief and practice of most American Christians prior to the mid 20th century. There are a myriad of other Christian Creeds and Confessions that testify to that fact, for instance, section 15 of one of the most famous of the American Baptist Confessions of Faith, The New Hampshire Confession of 1833 reads ***“Of the Christian Sabbath - We believe that the first day of the week is the Lord's Day, or Christian Sabbath; and is to be kept sacred to religious purposes, by abstaining from all secular labor and sinful recreations; by the devout observance of all the means of grace, both private and public; and by preparation for that rest that remaineth for the people of God.”*** But we don't even have to look to 19th century creeds to find it. Those of you who are my age and older know it from your own experience. The existence of the blue laws that we grew up with are an abiding testimony to that fact, many of you can probably still remember when everything except the churches was closed on Sunday. The ironic thing is I HATED that as a pagan kid, but now as a Christian adult, how I WISH that that was still the case. My most hated store sign is “now open Sunday!”

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Now where do we first see the Sabbath set apart by God? Many will say, the Ten Commandments, but actually the Sabbath was given by God long before that. ***Genesis 2:3 “Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.”*** Like marriage the Sabbath was instituted at Creation, and it rests upon the Divine example, God did the work of creation for six days and rested on the seventh.

Now Almighty God, could have done the work of creation in one day, or in an instant, but he spread it over six in order to set a pattern for us. That one out of every seven days should be a day of rest and worship. That blessing to God's people did not pass away, even though during their time of slavery in Egypt they couldn't enjoy it, in fact as soon as they were released, from Egypt it was reinstated and in chapter 16 we read that Moses told the people: ***“This is what the LORD has said: 'Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD.’*** He speaks of it like Manna as a gift that was *given to them*. This is before the Israelites even reached Sinai and received the Law.

Then when they did get to Sinai, the Sabbath commandment was #4 in the Ten Commandments:

Exodus 20:8 " Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

10 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.

11 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.

It is part of the Moral Law written in stone by the finger of God and not part of the ceremonial or judicial laws given separately. Now many Christians today will say yes it was very important back then, but it has passed away now, so we don't need to observe it anymore. Which is very odd, because we

don't think any of the other laws in the Decalogue have passed away, we don't just have Nine Commandments do we? These laws are an abiding expression of the Holiness of God. We are told for instance, in the NEW TESTAMENT that part of the reason for the giving of the Moral Law was to convict men, all men – Gentiles and Jews alike of sin, but how could the fourth commandment be of use in convicting men of sin if it no longer possible to break it? Additionally, we don't tend to think that it is good for Christians not to observe the other commandments, so that lying, coveting, blaspheming, murder, adultery, idolatry, and dishonoring other commandments is not a big deal. Also, if creation ordinances have disappeared we have a big problem, because the other one was marriage!

What about the New Testament? In the New Testament we see Jesus identifying himself as the Lord of the Sabbath, we see him condemning and removing all the sinful additions to the Sabbath that had been made by the Pharisees, and telling us that it was made for man, that is that it was intended by God to be a gift or blessing to us. The Pharisees had reversed that they'd made it a burden, a day of don'ts when it was intended to be a day of delight. Christ shows though that the Sabbath was ever intended to be a day when works of necessity, piety, and mercy as well as rest. They emphasized the DON'TS he emphasized the DO'S. I hope you get that, the Sabbath was meant for you, it was intended to be a day of blessing, a day of delight, a day of rest. And we need a day of rest. We need a day for worship.

But what about the change? The Sabbath was originally Saturday, why do we meet on Sunday? And while originally, the Lord's Day was Saturday, the Seventh Day of the Week, and pointed to the work of creation, by completing the work of redemption and rising again on the First day, Jesus forever changed the Sabbath to the First Day of the Week. That is Sunday. This helps us to understand why each of the four gospel writers was careful to point out that Jesus rose and appeared to His disciples on the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1, 13, 33-36; John 20:1, 19, 26). That is why the Christians met to celebrate the Resurrection not once a year on Easter, but every week in worship on the First Day of the Week and why they called that day the Lord's Day as John did in Revelation 1:10 – "The Lord's Day."

So we read in Acts 20:7 ***"Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight."*** This is also born out by the testimony of early Christian works like the Didache: ***"But every Lord's day gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure."*** (Didache, Pt. 14, Late First Century AD) And this is a memorial that points forward as well as backward, we read in Hebrews 4:9 that there remains a Sabbath or rest for the people of God, and the rest that is beginning spoke of is that eternal Sabbath that we will enjoy in heaven. The Sabbath is a weekly reminder not only of the Joy that all true disciples have at the Resurrection of Jesus, but also of the coming Joy of our own resurrection. The Christian shouldn't want less Sabbath, he should want a Sabbath that never ends.

Now may would say that observing the Lord's Day isn't a big deal. But the way that America has changed since we stopped doing so belies that. As the Lord's Day, which is an abidingly irritating weekly reminder of the resurrection of Jesus, disappears, visible Christianity disappears from society. As RL Dabney noted:

When it is made to appear that this day is the bulwark of practical religion in the world, that its proper observance everywhere goes hand in hand with piety and the true worship of God; that where there is no Sabbath there is no Christianity, it becomes an impossible supposition that God would make the institution temporary.

The way that this has happened in the government is evident, but the eradication of the Christian Sabbath: One of the most vociferous debates in American political history occurred over the issue of whether the post offices should be open on Sunday and mail continue to move on that day. When in 1810 the postmaster changed the standing practice and decided to keep the post-offices open, Congress was deluged with petitions “Presbyterians, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Baptists, Congregationalists and even UNITARIANS” which should indicate how universal the practice of keeping the Lord's Day Holy was at that point in American history. Eventually after literally years of debate, the decision was made to keep the mail moving, because it contained dispatches of vital importance to the well-being of the nation, but to close the post offices themselves.

But one of the high points in the debate came when Senator Frelinghuysen of NJ delivered a bill on May 8, 1830 to repeal the movement of mail introducing it with the following words: and **"The Sabbath is justly regarded as a divine institution closely connected with individual and national prosperity--no legislation can rightfully reject its claims; and although Congress of the United States, from the peculiar and limited constitution of the General Government, cannot by law force its observation--yet; as they should not, by positive legislation, encroach upon the sacredness of this day, nor weaken its authority in the estimation of the people--**

"Therefore, it is Resolved, That the Committee on the Post Office and Post Roads be instructed to report a bill, repealing so much of the act on the regulation of post offices as requires the delivery of letters, packets, and papers, on the Sabbath, and further to prohibit the transportation of the mail on that day." - *Can you imagine that kind of language being used in the Senate today?*

There are practical considerations as well - Christians going to worship when Sunday becomes just another work day? Are we going to hold a worship service every day of the week so small groups can assemble on your random day off, rather than corporately on the Lord's Day? The effect on the family is also evident, even Secular critics acknowledge that, "The lifting of blue laws, in their own way, seems to deemphasize religion, as well as close family, community, and neighborhood ties," says David Laband, an economics and policy professor at Auburn University in Auburn, Ala. "It is part of a broader social and cultural trend toward isolation." Another pointed out: "The Sabbath was a time for religion, for family, to renew kinship bonds”

So we must turn our feet away from breaking it and doing what we desire and adopt the Truett Cathy – Chik-Fil-A approach – our workers need a Sabbath!

There is by the way, another way that the Devil historically obscured the importance of the Lord's Day, and that was with the Church Calendar. While the New Testament church didn't observe any day as a Holy Day except the 52 Lord's Days, starting in the Late Second and Early Third Century the church without any authority began adding man made Holy Days, usually grabbing pagan holidays and rebranding them as Christian, so in the 300s the church took the Roman Saturnalia and winter feast of the Sun which occurred on December 25th and made it into the Feast of the Nativity or what we call Christmas. By the time of the Reformation, there were so many of these Holy Days that the Sabbath had become entirely obscured and one of the first things that the Reformers did was to remove most of them, the Puritans declared:

THERE is no day commanded in scripture to be kept holy under the gospel but the Lord's day, which

is the Christian Sabbath.

Festival days, vulgarly called Holy-days, having no warrant in the word of God, are not to be continued.

So most Americans, did not celebrate them. What has happened in America, however, since the early 20th century is that we have begun to see a flip in observance and order of importance. It used to be that most protestants observed the Lord's Day and did not observe the Feast Days, now we find that hardly anyone observes the Lord's Day, and everyone observes Holy Days of the Church Calendar like Christmas and Easter. In fact many evangelical churches now will actually cancel Lord's Day worship services if Christmas or Easter falls on them. Now frankly we don't care how people observe holidays at home, we have a tree, we give the kids gifts, but we aren't going to miss the Lord's day for it. And like Paul and the Apostles we don't celebrate Christmas in Worship, and you can get more information on this subject in the booklet on the table.

But finally an application: "You reckon the Sabbath a burden and a weariness; you could not possibly spend more than a small part of it in worshiping God. But remember, heaven is a never-ending Sabbath. The inhabitants thereof rest not day or night, saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty," and singing the praise of the Lamb. How could an unholy man find pleasure in occupation such as this?" - Ryle

Shouldn't we as Christians have more of Isaiah's view of it? A day to delight yourself in the LORD; A day to ride on the high hills of the earth, to be fed with the heritage of Jacob? *"If we call the sabbath a delight, then shall we delight ourselves in the Lord; he will more and more manifest himself to us as the delightful subject of our thoughts and meditations and the delightful object of our best affections. Note, The more pleasure we take in serving God the more pleasure we shall find in it. If we go about duty with cheerfulness, we shall go from it with satisfaction and shall have reason to say, "It is good to be here, good to draw near to God." - Matthew Henry* I'm not lying when I say, I wouldn't go back to not observing the Sabbath for all the money in the Federal Debt.