

## Views on Keeping of the Lord's Day

### “The Nine Commandment” View:

The Keeping of the Sabbath was an old testament law that no longer applies to the church. It was fulfilled in the work of Christ, in whom we now have rest.

### Scriptural Inspiration:

<sup>16</sup> Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. <sup>17</sup> These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. <sup>18</sup> Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions,<sup>[a]</sup> puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, <sup>19</sup> and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

<sup>20</sup> If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— <sup>21</sup> “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” <sup>22</sup> (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? <sup>23</sup> These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

Note: *In Colossae, the Sabbath was kept and festivals observed in order to placate supernatural powers or angles thought to direct the course of the stars, regulate the calendar, and determine human destiny. This, Paul says, is a form of bondage from which Christ came to liberate men and women.* RSB, note to Colossians 2:16,17

Colossians 2: 16 - 23

<sup>19</sup> Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, <sup>20</sup> but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.

Acts 15: 19-20

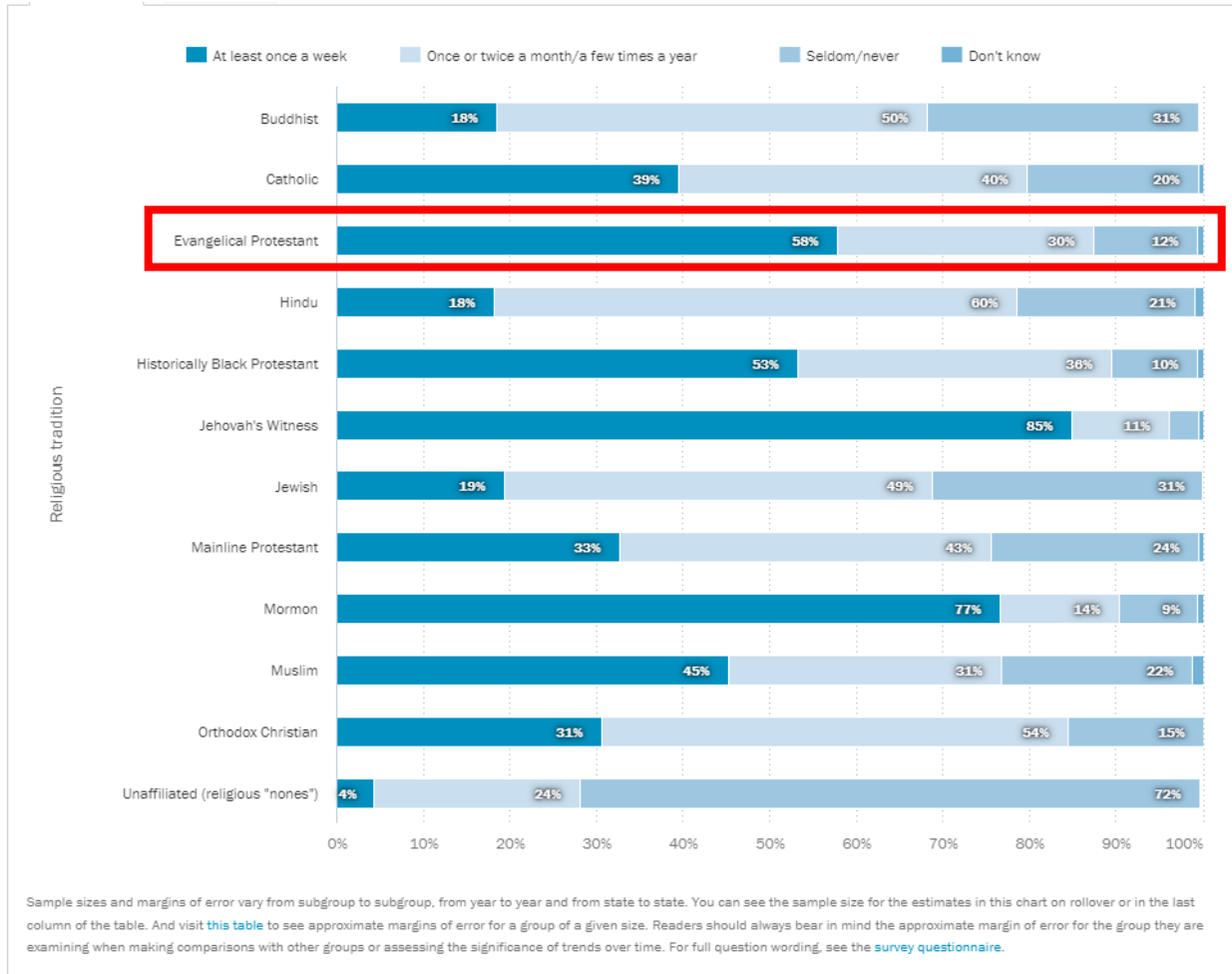
Supporters of this view include Augustine:

*“of all the ten commandments, that which related to the Sabbath was the only one in which the thing commanded was typical; the bodily rest enjoined being a type which we have received as a means of our instruction, but not as a duty binding also upon us.*

*“But we are not commanded to observe the day of the Sabbath literally, in resting from bodily labour, as it is observed by the Jews...From this we may reasonably conclude, that all those things which are figuratively set forth in Scripture, are powerful in stimulating that love by which we tend towards rest; since the only figurative or typical precept in the Decalogue is the one in which that rest is commended to us, which is desired everywhere, but is found sure and sacred in God alone.*

**Source:** Augustine (400) – Letter 55, To Januarius – Sabbath, Sacraments, Psalmody

Statistics indicate that at least in practice, many Christians subscribe to this belief:



[Attendance at religious services - Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics and Statistics | Pew Research Center \(pewforum.org\)](#)

## Ten Commandment View

Scriptural inspiration:

**2** Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. <sup>2</sup> And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. <sup>3</sup> 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.

Genesis 2: 1-3

<sup>8</sup> “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Exodus 20: 8-11

“If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure<sup>[c]</sup> on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure,<sup>[d]</sup> or talking idly;<sup>[e]</sup> <sup>14</sup> then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth;<sup>[f]</sup> I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

Isaiah 58: 13, 14

## **Calvin's View on the Sabbath**

1. The Decalogue is a transcript of God's immutable moral law and is binding on humanity in all ages.
2. The Fourth Commandment, being one element in the Decalogue, is one of God's immutable laws and binding on humanity in all ages; in that sense the Sabbath institution (though not necessarily weekly Sabbath observance) is a creation ordinance.
3. The Sabbath day required under the old dispensation by the Fourth commandment was a type or figure of spiritual rest.
4. Spiritual rest is ceasing from our own sinful works, mortifying our old nature, so that God may perform his sanctifying work in us; it may also be defined as conforming to God's will or imitating him.
5. Observing the weekly Sabbath in the Old Testament did not simply involve ceasing from the labors of the other six days. That rest was to be used for public worship and private meditation on the promised reality such rest typified.
6. Since God was pleased to provide his people with a foretaste of the reality still only prefigured, the weekly Sabbath was a sign of an invisible grace. It was, therefore, a sacrament of regeneration.
7. At the coming of Christ, the light in whose presence all shadows disappear, spiritual rest became a full reality, consequently, the weekly Sabbath as a type and sacrament was abrogated.
8. Although the perfection of spiritual rest will not be realized until the eschatological Last Day, that rest is now an actual possession of the believer; spiritual rest, presently enjoyed, and eternal rest are the same in substance.
9. Christians, strictly speaking, are no longer obliged to keep a weekly day of rest; the relaxation of that demand, however, should not be understood as abrogating the Fourth Commandment but as intensifying and elevating its demands.
10. For Christians, keeping the Sabbath means, in the final analysis, experiencing the spiritual rest (freedom from sin, newness of life) they have by virtue of being buried and raised with Christ.
11. Such spiritual rest cannot be limited to one day of the week but must be practiced daily, perpetually.
12. The experience of spiritual rest necessarily expresses itself in deeds of piety and Christian service, meditation upon God's works, and acts of worship. Since spiritual rest is perpetual, daily public worship is the ideal for Christians.
13. Since Christians are subject to the same sinful weakness as those under the old covenant, a practical necessity exists for certain stated times to be set aside so that believers, being released from worldly cares and distractions, might be free to meditate privately and to assemble publicly for worship.

14. The Jewish Sabbath was perfectly suited to meet that need, but because so much superstition became associated with it by the failure to see that the typical mystery had passed away with Christ, the ancient church substituted the Lord's Day for it. That substitution was particularly appropriate because it memorialized Christ's resurrection, the day on which the Old Testament figure ceased to exist.

15. Today the Lord's Day still serves the need it was designed to meet. In principle, however, those Christians cannot be condemned who may wish to set apart some other day or even to pattern their lives by some other arrangement than a weekly day of rest, as long as they keep in view the need for stated times of public worship and meditation.

16. Christians, therefore, do not keep the Lord's Day because it has some religious significance (that is, because it is a divine requirement). Rather, they observe it freely and voluntarily, solely out of a concern for harmony and order in the church.

17. The physical rest provided by the Fourth Commandment for servants and other laborers is extrinsic to the basic concerns of the precept. The rest of both Jewish Sabbath and Lord's Day is not an end in itself, but a means to the end of meditation and public worship.

18. This provision of rest does remind masters or employers that they must not inhumanly oppress those who are subject to their authority. That, however, is a consideration that, strictly speaking, belongs to the second table of the law rather than the first.

19. The core of the Fourth Commandment and the essence of the Sabbath institution is that the creature should be conformed to the Creator, and that such imitation should be marked by a life characterized by public worship and private meditation upon God's works.

Source: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book Two, Chapter 8

[https://opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=617](https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=617)

### **What does our own Westminster Catechism say concerning the Sabbath?**

- 115. What is the fourth commandment? The fourth commandment is, Remember the sabbath-day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath-day and hallowed it.
- 116. What is required in the fourth commandment? The fourth commandment requireth of all men the sanctifying or keeping holy to God such set times as He hath appointed in His Word, expressly one whole day in seven; which was the seventh from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, and the first day of the week ever since, and so to continue to the end of the world; which is the Christian Sabbath, and in the New Testament called The Lord's Day.
- 117. How is the Sabbath or the Lord's Day to be sanctified? The Sabbath or Lord's Day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful; and making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy) in the public and private exercises of God's worship: and, to that end, we

are to prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose, and seasonably to despatch our worldly business, that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of that day.

- 118. Why is the charge of keeping the Sabbath more specially directed to governors of families and other superiors? The charge of keeping the Sabbath is more specially directed to governors of families and other superiors, because they are bound not only to keep it themselves, but to see that it be observed by all those that are under their charge; and because they are prone oftentimes to hinder them by employments of their own.
- 119. What are the sins forbidden in the fourth commandment? The sins forbidden in the fourth commandment are, all omissions of the duties required, all careless, negligent, and unprofitable performing of them, and being weary of them; all profaning the day by idleness, and doing that which is in itself sinful; and by all needless works, words, and thoughts, about our worldly employments and recreations.
- 120. What are the reasons annexed to the fourth commandment, the more to enforce it? The reasons annexed to the fourth commandment, the more to enforce it, are taken from the equity of it, God allowing us six days of seven for our own affairs, and reserving but one for Himself, in these words, Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work: from God's challenging a special propriety in that day, The seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: from the example of God, who \_in six days made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: \_and from that blessing which God put upon that day, not only in sanctifying it to be a day for His service, but in ordaining it to be a means of blessing to us in our sanctifying it, Wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath-day and hallowed it.
- 121. Why is the word remember set in the beginning of the fourth commandment? The word remember is set in the beginning of the fourth commandment, partly, because of the great benefit of remembering it, we being thereby helped in our preparation to keep it; and, in keeping it, better to keep all the rest of the commandments, and to continue a thankful remembrance of the two great benefits of creation and redemption, which contain a short abridgement of religion; and partly, because we are very ready to forget it, for that there is less light of nature for it, and yet it restraineth our natural liberty in things at other times lawful; that it cometh but once in seven days, and many worldly businesses come between, and too often take off our minds from thinking of it, either to prepare for it, or to sanctify it; and that Satan with His instruments much labor to blot out the glory, and even the memory of it, to bring in all irreligion and impiety.

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/westminster-larger-catechism>

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1. What doth God require in the fourth commandment? First, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained; and that I, especially on the Sabbath, that is, on the day of rest, diligently frequent the church of God to hear His word, to use the sacraments, publicly to call upon the Lord, and contribute to the relief of the poor, as becomes a Christian. Secondly, that all the days of my life I cease from my evil works, and yield myself to the Lord, to work by His Holy Spirit in me; and thus begin in this life the eternal Sabbath.

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/the-heidelberg-catechism>

## **Our Response:**

The Christian Sabbath, or the Lord's Day is still in effect!

1: One purpose of that day is to refrain from our daily work and recreation so as to enable us to faithfully engage in acts of worship

- The entire Day should be one devoted to acts of worship
- We part ways here with Augustine, who did not believe that Sabbath day worship remained a commandment
- We also part ways with Calvin, who taught that the ideal of the Sabbath is daily worship, that spiritual rest finds expression in exercises of piety and worship and that such rest is to be enjoyed perpetually, not in a given day
- Among our concerns for this view is the establishment of the Sabbath as a creation ordinance
- Within the creation ordinance, we see a day of rest established within the context of a pre-fallen world.
- The Fall had not taken place, so its significance as a spiritual rest that finds its fulfillment in Christ's advent cannot fully explain the meaning and basis for the ordinance

2: We also recognize the Sabbath as an anticipation of the final rest we will have in Christ when our work is complete

- Our work is not a meaningless, ceaseless repetition of days. It is meaningful, and will result in rest
- We move forward to the goal of fully participating in that rest when our work is done
- For now, we have a weekly reminder to anticipate that rest. It is a day devoted to the remembrance of man's eternal destiny
- The present creation still anticipates the new creation
- The weekly Sabbath still points to a future perfection.
- A weekly observation of the Sabbath does not compromise the freedom brought by Christ, , but is an expression of that freedom to a watching world that we are not enslaved in the turmoil of an impersonal, meaningless historical process