

## Delighting in the Day of God

*Heidelberg Catechism #48*

Exodus 20:8-11 | Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 103

**M**Y fellow URC minister, Michael Horton, once described our human nature as being “hard-wired for the law.” Because of our fallenness we are inherently legalistic. Even when we rebel against God’s laws we make our own! This “wiring” affects how we respond to God’s law in the fourth commandment in this way: “What can I do, what can’t I do, can I eat out, can I turn on the lights, can I drive a public bus,” and the list goes on. When we think of the Lord’s Day in those terms from the outset, we’ve already missed the point.

Instead, when we were born again the Holy Spirit renewed us. And we need to continue applying this renewal to re-wire of minds especially about the fourth commandment. Because I am a new creation in Christ I can now say, “I delight in the law of God in my inner being” (Rom. 7:22). I can say, “I delight in the day of God. No one expressed this better than Jesus in Mark 2, so let’s turn there for a few moments tonight.

We read that **one Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain** (v. 23). Then we read **the Pharisees were saying to him, “Look, why are**

**they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?”** (v. 24) Not only were they traveling they were also harvesting. But what was not lawful? Doing the work of plucking a piece of grain off the stalks in the field was permitted in the law as a work of necessity for the poor to eat the edges of people’s fields (Deut. 23:25). What was at issue was had God forbidden this or was it a man-made tradition that they were violating? Jesus points them to Scripture: **“Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him”** (v. 25). He points out the story of 1 Samuel 21 as a work of necessity: you can’t keep the Sabbath without being alive, and to stay alive you have to eat. Then he continues the story: **“how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?”** (v. 26) The priests worked on the Sabbath, else the morning and evening sacrifices could not have been offered. Without their work, the rest of the congregation could not rest. Then comes one of Jesus’ mind-blowing statements: **“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”** (vv. 27–28) Man was not made for the Sabbath, that is, it is not a club to beat each other over the head with. Instead, the Sabbath

was made for us, that is, it's not a day that should be a drudgery but it's a day given for our delight as we are refreshed and filled with joy. How do we experience the delight of this day?

#### DELIGHTING IN ITS CREATIONAL FOUNDATION

First, we are to delight in its creational foundation. In Genesis 1:1–2:3 God provides us with a pattern of six days of labor and one day of rest. The Sabbath is what we call a “creation ordinance” just like marriage, sex, and work. These are things that God instituted as a part of the fabric of the creation in which we live. God made the world a certain way to give it order and structure. The Sabbath pattern is just a part of the way the world is made. The fourth commandment is established in Exodus 20 by its being a creation ordinance. God worked six days; then he ceased from what he had been doing, blessed and sanctified the day, and rested. We need to recognize this pattern of one day out of seven as a day that is set apart to the Lord our God and delight in this. This is how God created us to exist. His creation structures our lives and our time commitments and priorities.

#### DELIGHTING IN ITS HEAVENLY GOAL

Second, a part of that creational foundation was that the Sabbath day had a heavenly goal. God's work for six days led him to the seventh day.

Adam's work was to have as its goal the seventh day. This is a picture to us of heaven. We read that God was refreshed in Exodus 31. When we rest on the day of God we do so in advance of our eternal rest.

#### DELIGHTING IN ITS REDEMPTIVE SIGNIFICANCE

Third, in the version of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5 the Lord tells us to remember our redemption from slavery. God saved us for this purpose of serving him. We don't keep the Sabbath, then expect redemption; we are redeemed that we might obey as part of our sanctification.

#### DELIGHTING IN ITS GRACIOUS BLESSINGS

Finally, we are to delight in the day of God by enjoying its gracious blessings.

One is physical refreshment. "Everybody's working for the weekend," as one 80s song said. Exodus 31:12–17 tells us that God was "refreshed" on the day of rest. There are only two other times this verb is used in the Old Testament: in Exodus 23:12 says our animals and cattle are to be given a rest on the Sabbath in order to allow them to be refreshed. And in 2 Samuel 16:14 David and his men became tired of hiking so they refreshed themselves by

resting. So what about God? He really rested? He really was so fatigued that He had to be refreshed?

Another blessing is spiritual refreshment. Several years ago I heard an interview with a baseball player who went from another MLB team to the New York Yankees. One of the ways he expressed this step up was this: “They have church on TV down here, you don’t have to leave the couch.” The day is changed from the last day of the week to the first day. We no longer look forward to the commandments fulfillment but look back on what Christ has done for us. In Revelation 1:10 it is called “Lord’s Day,” that is, he owns it, it is his possession. And he gives us his day as a gift to be used joyfully. Let me conclude with the words of J. C. Ryle:

Let us beware that we are never tempted to take low views of the sanctity of the Christian Sabbath. Let us take care that we do not make our gracious Lord’s teaching an excuse for Sabbath profanation. Let us not abuse the liberty which He has so clearly marked out for us, and pretend that we do things on the Sabbath from ‘necessity and mercy,’ which in reality we do for our own selfish gratification.<sup>1</sup>

**“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”** Let’s delight in God’s good gift of a day or rest and spiritual refreshment.

## **Endnotes**

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<sup>1</sup> Ryle, *Matthew*, 123.