

# Keeping the Christian Sabbath

## Introduction

### a. objectives

1. subject – An overview of what it means for Christians to keep the Sabbath day holy
2. aim – To cause us to desire to prepare ourselves in every way for Sabbath worship
3. passage – Genesis 2:1-3

### b. outline

1. Preparations for Keeping the Christian Sabbath
2. Prohibitions of Keeping the Christian Sabbath
3. Observations in Keeping the Christian Sabbath

### c. opening

1. the **location** of this paragraph in Chapter 22: Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day
  - a. that the revelation of nature is such that there is a God, and it is the duty of men to worship him
  - b. that religious worship is only to be given to the Triune God, through the mediator Christ Jesus
  - c. that faithful prayer, the preaching of Scripture, and the ordinances are its essential elements
  - d. that religious worship is to be made under the gospel everywhere, not neglected or carelessly
  - e. that one day in seven is a perpetual Sabbath commandment, observed on the first day of the week
  - f. (**now, para. 8**) that this Sabbath, established at the very foundation of creation itself, is to be kept holy; and men are to *prepare* for it, keep certain things *out of it*, and *observe* it correctly,
2. the **difficulty** of this paragraph in Chapter 22: Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day
  - a. this paragraph is the most *personally practical* of the entire chapter
    1. **i.e.** other paragraphs speak to the *general practicality* of worship – what we are to do in it
  - b. but, this paragraph gets **personal** – it is a statement of **how we are to prioritize the Sabbath**
    1. **LOW:** it's one thing to say that we *should* worship, and another to say *how*, but it's another thing *entirely* to say how we are to *view* the Sabbath in the course of our regular lives
    2. **LOW:** this paragraph goes “from preaching to meddling” – it is *uncomfortable* because it flies in the face of the priorities of our modern (post-Christian) existence
    3. **LOW:** the things that *must* be said (from here) are hard to hear, and even harder to implement
3. the **substance** of this paragraph in Chapter 22: Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day
 

“The Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts and ordering their common affairs aforehand, do not only observe an holy rest all day, from their own works, words, and thoughts, about their worldly employment and recreations, but are also taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of His worship and in the duties of necessity and mercy.”

  - a. paragraph #8 deals *primarily* with the practical realities of prioritizing the Sabbath day
  - b. paragraph #8 addresses three (3) main things to consider in prioritizing the Sabbath day
    1. **part #1:** that true Sabbath rest begins with good *preparation* beforehand
      - a. **i.e.** the first task is to lay out how we are to *prepare ourselves* to worship and rest
    2. **part #2:** that true Sabbath rest *prohibits* certain ordinary activities
      - a. **i.e.** the second task is to define those things that should be prohibited on the Sabbath
    3. **part #3:** that true Sabbath rest assumes certain *observances* in our lives
      - a. **i.e.** the third task is to define what Sabbath rest actually looks like in the “ordinary” sense

## I. Preparations for Keeping the Christian Sabbath

### Content

#### a. preparing of our hearts

“The Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts ...”

1. the paragraph begins in the *logical place*: there can be no *true* Sabbath with the **wrong attitude**
  - a. **i.e.** how we treat the Sabbath is entirely a matter of how we *anticipate it* – do we recognize the day as a “Sabbath”, or is it (to us) just another day that “happens” to include church attendance
  - b. **principle: the distinction between a Sabbath and “church attendance” is all important**
    1. church attendance = an (optional) “event” that we consider as a (primary) “duty” to perform
      - a. **i.e.** evangelicals: the gospel “frees” us from religious duties for our right-standing before God, therefore church attendance is not an essential element of the “Christian” life
      - b. **i.e.** failing to see the connection between faith and the *obvious results* of faith
      - c. **i.e.** seeing this as *merely* a discussion of “going to church” or not

2. Sabbath = a *foundational* and *regular* part of our lives, essential to our well-being as *human*
    - a. e.g. in **Genesis 2:1-3**, God *himself* rests, building Sabbath rest into the *fabric* of the cosmos
      1. **note: vv. 1-3** belong in **chap. 1** – they are a **part of the creation narrative**, in which all that God does to form the earth and everything in it (including humans!) is outlined
      2. and, this creation narrative is *completed* by the Sabbath rest – implying that, since the essence of all created things flows from God's own nature, *so does the Sabbath itself*
    - b. **IOW:** the Sabbath is foundational to the existence of those in the *Imago Dei* (**see below**)
  2. **preparing our hearts is to cultivate the proper attitude towards what God has established**
    - a. either we believe that Sunday Morning Worship is essential to our good ... or we don't ...
      1. **remember:** the "heart" is the *control center* of a man – that place deep within that causes him to think and act as he does – in the reprobate, it is desperately wicked; but, in the believer, it has been *reborn* to love the things of God, *including the Sabbath rest*
    - b. **question:** do you *anticipate* going to church? do you *love* to be with other believers to sing, pray, hear Scripture, and wait for a word from the Lord? or, is it something you grit your teeth and do?
- b. ordering of our common affairs beforehand**
- "The Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after ... ordering their common affairs beforehand ..."
1. the paragraph continues *logically*: there can be no *true* Sabbath without **ordering our lives** for it
    - a. e.g. in **Genesis 2:1-3**, God creates *and rests* in an orderly way – his Sabbath of rest was not just a "tack on" to the end of the creation narrative, but its *goal* (i.e. it belongs in **chap. 1**)
      1. i.e. the goal of creation = to glorify God in all things – the "rest" of creation was for him to be glorified by his creatures, to claim the *intention* of creation (specifically, through redemption)
      2. so, God included a day of rest *in the order of creation*; he *purposed* it to be a part of the process
    - b. **principle: if we claim that the Sabbath is important (in our attitude), then we will do what it takes to keep it important (by prioritizing and ordering)**
      1. e.g. if watching the **football game** is important, then we do the shopping ahead of it
      2. ordering our "common affairs" beforehand = doing what it takes to keep all **distractions** away
  2. **ordering our common affairs beforehand is to cultivate the discipline of preparing in advance**
    - a. **question:** do you *prepare in advance* for going to church? do you *purposely* make sure that everything is ready *ahead of time* so that you arrive on time ready to worship? and, do you take care *on Saturday* to assure that nothing else *needs to be done* on Sunday other than worship?
      1. and, **have you prepared yourself for worship itself** (e.g. reading the biblical text)?

## II. Prohibitions of Keeping the Christian Sabbath

### Content

#### a. a holy rest from worldly employment and recreation

"... do not only observe an holy rest all day, from their own works, words, and thoughts, about their worldly employment and recreations ..."

1. **note:** if what *comes first* is anticipation and preparation, we must now turn to what is *prohibited*
  - a. or, what we should "put aside" in order to *prioritize* worship and rest on the Sabbath
2. e.g. in **Genesis 2:1-3**, there is an *contrast* between two kinds of work ...
  - a. **question:** on the seventh day of creation, did God *cease* to work entirely? **answer:** of course not (contrary to deists) – his initial "work" of *creating* (and forming man) was followed by the "work" of *sustaining* and *redeeming* all that he had created (i.e. glorifying himself to his *end goal*)
    1. i.e. the narrative of **2:1-3** implies a differentiation of "work" and it flows into the narrative of **chap. 2** = man's original "work" was to glorify God, his *fallen* work was something else entirely
    2. the Sabbath would (then) become something *of an entirely different nature after the Fall*
  - b. once Adam sinned, he was cursed to toil the ground, to sweat to survive ... but his toil would simply work him back into the ground from which he came ... man would toil himself to death
    1. but, the Sabbath becomes a day to do *a different kind of work* – a "work" that leads to life
    2. **principle: like God's Sabbath "work" which brings life to his fallen world (through the man, Christ Jesus), we "work" on Sunday at a redeemed "toil" that leads us to life**
    3. i.e. to rest and worship one day out of seven is to pursue that which *leads to life*
3. **a holy rest from worldly employment is to pursue only the work that leads to life on that day**
  - a. e.g. pastors preach on Sunday; isn't that hypocritical? – no: for six days I toil to understand the Word, and then I come to do the "work" of delivering a *life-giving message* to you
    1. **BTW:** even Jesus recognized this distinction in **Matthew 12:5** re: the priests in the temple preaching is a Sabbath "work" *like all of worship*, which is designed to help meet this goal
      - a. *not* to layer more "fatal" work over the people (e.g. in morality sermons)
      - b. but to bring a message of *life* to the people – to preach *life* in the gospel *from the Word*

- b. **IOW:** we are to *put aside* all other worldly employments and recreations to seek the things that bring us life, that aren't the things that are (ultimately) leading to our demise
- c. **question:** is the work (or recreational activity) that you typically do on the Sabbath day consistent with the concept of *leading you to life*, or (**honestly!**) leading you *away* from true life *in Christ*
  - 1. **note:** I will not "bind your conscience" by giving you a list of things you "must not do, ever" – the above principle must be applied by you to whatever you consider valid on the Sabbath

### III. Observations in Keeping the Christian Sabbath

#### Content

##### a. public and private exercises of worship

"... but are also taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of His worship ..."

- 1. the *chapter* ends in the *logical place*: there can be no *true* Sabbath without **religious worship**
  - a. all of the preparation and anticipation, and all of the "dismissals" of that which does not lead to life, must *inevitably* be centered on the *actual* and *real* practice of bowing before His Majesty
  - b. **e.g.** in **Genesis 2:1-3**, when God "*blesses*" the Sabbath day, he applies a special **purpose** to it *which is codified in the Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:11; "the Lord blessed the Sabbath")*
    - 1. **note:** the Sabbath is *codified* within the *moral code* undergirding the entirety of Israelite law – the very *basis* of all human morality (undergirding all other law) is the precept of the Sabbath
      - a. **i.e.** the entire *ceremonial* system is based on this command – God proscribes all of the details of worshiping him, in tabernacles, priests, sacrifices, offerings, feast days, etc.
      - b. **i.e.** to be "the people of God" (Israel) is to come into his presence *on his terms*
    - 2. **principle: the very essence of being human (being a moral creature) is in presenting ourselves before our Creator to offer him praise and thanksgiving (in religious worship)**
      - a. to *willfully* do that which *ascribes to him* his rightful place and that *puts us in our own*
      - b. **contra:** the reprobate inclination to elevate the "self" above God and worship ourselves
- 2. **public and private exercises of his worship are essential to what it means to be a believer**
  - a. **question:** what does your attendance in religious worship indicate about your belief in God? would your record indicate that you consider the Lord Jesus to be the most important thing in life?
    - 1. **i.e.** the saved man loves to worship, because he recognizes his *inherent need* to come before his Creator and bow before His Majesty

##### b. duties of necessity and mercy

"... and in the duties of necessity and mercy."

- 1. the paragraph includes a *logical exception*: the Sabbath does allow for **unavoidable duties**
  - a. duties of necessity = those duties necessary on the Sabbath, as they would be on any other day
    - 1. **e.g.** employments that are needed on the Sabbath (**e.g.** police, firefighters, doctors, nurses)
  - b. duties of mercy = those duties that require special care, even on the Sabbath
    - 1. **e.g.** acts of compassion and help that cannot wait until the Sabbath is over
  - c. **IOW:** the confession does not treat the Sabbath in an *utterly legalistic way*, prohibiting all human effort – it allows for the interpretation that even Jesus understood: that the primary goal of the Sabbath is to focus on the Lord, to rest *in him* through worship (**Matthew 12:8**)
- 2. **the Sabbath requires effort – we must prepare for it, we must put aside distractions, and we must do what God has built into our very nature to do: come before him to offer him praise**