

Westminster Shorter Catechism Study
Session 28
The Fourth Commandment
How Should We Keep the Lord's Day Holy?

Q. 60. How is the sabbath to be sanctified?

A. The sabbath is to be sanctified 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.

Q. 61. What is forbidden in the fourth commandment?

A. The fourth commandment forbiddeth the omission, or careless performance, of the duties required, and the profaning the day by idleness, or doing that which is in itself sinful, or by unnecessary thoughts, words, or works, about our worldly employments or recreations.

Q. 62. What are the reasons annexed to the fourth commandment?

A. The reasons annexed to the fourth commandment are, God's allowing us six days of the week for our own employments, his challenging a special propriety in the seventh, his own example, and his blessing the sabbath day.

Exodus 20:10 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.

Neh. 13:15 In those days I saw people in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them about the day on which they were selling provisions.

16 Men of Tyre dwelt there also, who brought in fish and all kinds of goods, and sold them on the Sabbath to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem.

17 Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said to them, "What evil thing is this that you do, by which you profane the Sabbath day?"

18 "Did not your fathers do thus, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath."

19 So it was, at the gates of Jerusalem, as it began to be dark before the Sabbath, that I commanded the gates to be shut, and charged that they must not be opened till after the Sabbath. Then I posted some of my servants at the gates, so that no burdens would be brought in on the Sabbath day.

20 Now the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice.

21 Then I warned them, and said to them, "Why do you spend the night around the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you!" From that time on they came no more on the Sabbath.

22 And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should go and guard the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Your mercy!

Is. 58:13 " 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."

Lev. 23:3 ' Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings

"Let us never forget that our feelings about Sundays are sure tests of the state of our souls. The man who can find no pleasure in giving God one day in the week, is manifestly unfit for heaven. Heaven itself is nothing but an eternal Sabbath. If we cannot enjoy a few hours in God's service once a week in this world, it is plain that we could not enjoy an eternity in His service in the world to come. Happy are those who walk in the steps of her of whom we read today! They shall find Christ and a blessing while they live, and Christ and glory when they die." – JC Ryle

Amos 8:4-6 Hear this, you who swallow up the needy, And make the poor of the land fail,

5 Saying: "When will the New Moon be past, That we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, That we may trade wheat? Making the ephah small and the shekel large, Falsifying the scales by deceit,

6 That we may buy the poor for silver, And the needy for a pair of sandals -- Even sell the bad wheat?"

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. – R.L. Dabney

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.

1 Cor. 16:2 On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.

Matthew 12:1 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat.

2 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!"

3 But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him:

4 "how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?"

5 "Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?"

6 "Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple.

7 "But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless.

8 "For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

9 Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue.

10 And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" -- that they might accuse Him.

11 Then He said to them, "What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out?"

12 "Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

13 Then He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other.

Christ proves that certain types of work are permissible on the Sabbath:

First, we have works of piety – those works that must be done in order for God to be worshipped.

Christ tells us in verse 5 of Matthew 12 that the priests who worked in the Temple on the Sabbath day were not breaking the Sabbath. In the same way those involved in the ministry are not guilty of violating the Sabbath even though they work on the Sabbath and receive payment for doing so.

Secondly, we have works of necessity – work that cannot be delayed without harm to life or property, this would include things like rescuing a sheep from a pit, feeding livestock, putting out a fire, stopping a crime, or even defending a nation.

Thirdly, we have works of Mercy – these are acts of mercy or kindness to a person who is sick, distressed, hungry or in need. They would include ministering to someone who was injured, or feeding someone who was hungry, or even consoling those who mourn.

We do not ever rest from doing GOOD. We should never use the fourth commandment as an excuse for neglecting our Christian duties and in this we are given the supreme example of Christ. God's Sabbath began when creation was finished, but man's sin and misery required that this Sabbath be broken in order to redeem man from this condition. Christ then did this awesome work of redemption, which was the ultimate deed of necessity and mercy, during the Sabbath rest of God.

The basic meaning of the word Sabbath is cessation. What then do we cease from doing on the Sabbath? Chapter 21 of the Westminster Confession answers this question by summarizing the teaching of scripture on the subject:

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

On the Lord's Day we cease from performing our work, but we do not merely cease from performing our work so that we continue our favorite recreations unencumbered by employment. It means we rest from all the things that engross us during the other days of the week whether it be employment OR recreation. We do not set these enjoyments aside because they are not proper to the Christian life. We set them aside because that day is to be devoted to exclusively to the worship of God, the reading of God's word, and for other works of piety, necessity, and mercy.

Please do not confuse works of necessity with works of convenience. It is a work of necessity for a Doctor to attend to a patient on Sunday, or for a fire fighter to put out a fire, or for a policeman to respond to an emergency call. It is not a work of necessity to work on Sunday because otherwise you won't get a promotion, or receive a raise, or even if your job requires that you work on Sunday because all the other stores are open on Sunday. Unless the work itself is a necessity, then working on that day is not a deed of necessity. The vast majority of stores and business that stay open on Sunday are flagrantly violating the Sabbath, if Christians choose to work for them on the Lord's day, then they join them in breaking the Sabbath, and for this there is simply no excuse.

1 Sam. 2:30 "Therefore the LORD God of Israel says: 'I said indeed that your house and the house of your father would walk before Me forever.' But now the LORD says: 'Far be it from Me; for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.

Many people have admired Eric Liddell's stand for the Lord's Day as it is portrayed in the movie *Chariots of Fire*. But how many modern Christians would make the same decision? How many of us would even stop participating in amateur athletics?

John Keddie wrote: "The question of Lord's Day observance is an issue today. The principle is the same: the first day of the week is a Lord's Day, the Christian Sabbath. It is a day for Him, for our good, for worship and for physical rest. Keeping it well is a vital testimony for a Christian believer. As much as anything it tells the world that he or she will obey God rather than men, whatever the cost. No doubt the cost will be great today for a young Christian involved in sports. There is so much Sunday sport and it is difficult to be involved in organised sport without confronting this issue. Yet the issue is to be confronted and Christians and churches should be concerned to discourage a careless use of Sundays for our own pleasures, sports, entertainments and not God's glory. ..."

The present writer was stirred in his heart as a nineteen-year-old to seek the Lord after reading the booklet written by D.P. Thomson. I was a keen sportsman with admittedly limited abilities. Eric's stand for the Lord's Day and willingness to turn his back on fame and fortune and devote himself to missionary service was a deeply impressive witness. It led to a re-evaluation of my life and what was really important and of eternal significance. It led to a reassessment of my relationship to God and the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ in my life. This led to coming to faith in Jesus as Saviour under the hearing of the faithful preaching of the Word. It was indirectly related to the influence of the life and witness of Eric Liddell. I never did compete again in sports on the Lord's Day, and I committed my life to the Lord, as Eric did in his day."