

The Sabbath Rest

*What Is Our Responsibility To It Today?
What Do The Saints Of Old Have To Offer Us?*

God therefore sanctifies the seventh day, when He renders it illustrious, that by a special law it may be distinguished from the rest. Whence it also appears, that God always had respect to the welfare of men...six days were employed in the formation of the world; not that God, to whom one moment is as a thousand years, had need of this succession of time, but that he might engage us in the consideration of His works. He had the same end in view in the appointment of His own rest, for He set apart a day selected out of the remainder for this special use. Wherefore, that benediction is nothing else than a solemn consecration, by which God claims for Himself the meditations and employments of men on the seventh day. This is, indeed, the proper business of the whole life, in which men should daily exercise themselves, to consider the infinite goodness, justice, power, and wisdom of God, in this magnificent theatre of heaven and earth. But, lest men should prove less sedulously attentive to it than they ought, every seventh day has been especially selected for the purpose of supplying what was wanting in daily meditation. First, therefore, God rested; then He blessed this rest, that in all ages it might be held sacred among men: or He dedicated every seventh day to rest, that His own example might be a perpetual rule. The design of the institution must be always kept in memory: for God did not command men simply to keep holiday every seventh day, as if He delighted in their indolence; but rather that they, being released from all other business, might the more readily apply their minds to the Creator of the World. Lastly, that is a sacred rest, which withdraws men from the impediments of the world, that it may dedicate them entirely to God. But now, since men are so backward to celebrate the justice, wisdom, and power of God, and to consider His benefits, that even when they are most faithfully admonished they still remain torpid, no slight stimulus is given by God's own example, and the very precept itself is thereby rendered amiable. For God cannot either more gently allure, or more effectually incite us to obedience, than by inviting and exhorting us to the imitation of Himself. Besides, we must know, that this is to be the common employment not of one age or people only, but of the whole human race. Afterwards, in the Law, a new precept concerning the Sabbath was given, which should be peculiar to the Jews, and but for a season; because it was a legal ceremony shadowing forth a spiritual rest, the truth of which was manifested in Christ. Therefore, the Lord the more frequently testifies that he had given, in the Sabbath, a symbol of sanctification to His ancient people. Therefore, when we hear that the Sabbath was abrogated by the coming of Christ, we must distinguish between what belongs to the perpetual government of human life, and what properly belongs to ancient figures, the use of which was abolished when the truth was fulfilled. Spiritual rest is the mortification of the flesh; so that the sons of God should no longer live unto themselves, or indulge their own inclination. So far as the Sabbath was a figure of this rest, I say, it was but for a season; but inasmuch as it was commanded to men from the beginning that they might employ themselves in the worship of God, it is right that it should continue to the end of the world. CALVIN'S COMMENTARY VOL 1, PG 105-107.

The one great subject which stands out prominently in this passage of Scripture (Matthew 12:1-13), is the Sabbath day. It is a subject on which strange opinions prevailed among the Jews in our Lord's time. The Pharisees had added to the teaching of Scripture about it, and overlaid the true character of the day with the traditions of men...Let us learn, in the first place, from this passage, that our Lord Jesus Christ does not do away with the observance of a weekly Sabbath day. He neither does so here nor elsewhere in the four Gospels. We often find His opinion expressed about Jewish errors on the subject of the Sabbath; but we do not find a word to teach us that His disciples were not to keep a Sabbath at all. It is of much importance to observe this. The mistakes that have arisen from a superficial consideration of our Lord's sayings on the Sabbath question, are neither few nor small; thousands have rushed to the hasty conclusion that Christians have nothing to do with the fourth commandment, and that it is no more binding on us than the Mosaic law about sacrifices: there is nothing in the New Testament to justify any such conclusion. The plain truth is that our Lord did not abolish the law of the weekly Sabbath: He only freed it from incorrect interpretations, and purified it from man-made additions. He did not tear out of the decalogue the fourth commandment: He only stripped off the miserable traditions with which the Pharisees had incrusting the day, and by which they had made it, not a blessing, but a burden. He left the fourth commandment where He found it - a part of the eternal law of God, of which no jot or tittle was ever to pass away. May we never forget this! Let us learn, in the second place, from this passage, that our Lord Jesus Christ allows all works of real necessity and mercy to be done on the Sabbath day. This is a principle which is abundantly established in the passage of Scripture we are now considering. We find our Lord justifying His disciples for plucking the ears of corn on a Sabbath: it was an act permitted in Scripture. (Deut. 23:25) They "were a hungered," and in need of food: therefore they were not to blame. We find Him maintaining the lawfulness of healing a sick man on the Sabbath day. The man was suffering from disease and pain: in such a case it was no breach of God's commandment to afford relief. We ought never to rest from doing good. The arguments, by which our Lord supports the lawfulness of any work of necessity and mercy on the Sabbath, are striking and unanswerable. He reminds the Pharisees, who charge Him and His disciples with breaking the law, how David and his men, for want of other food, had eaten the holy shew-bread out of the tabernacle. He reminds them how the priests in the temple are obliged to work on the Sabbath, by slaying animals and offering sacrifices. He reminds them how even a sheep would be helped out of a pit on the Sabbath, rather than allowed to suffer and die. (For this reason Christ declares that "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath," Mark 2:27 since God does not require more than was useful or necessary for keeping people in the exercise of piety.) CALVIN'S COMMENTARY VOL 2, PG 438.

After all, He lays down the great principle that no ordinance of God is to be pressed so far as to make us neglect the plain duties of charity. "I will have mercy and not sacrifice." The first table of the law is not to be so interpreted as to make us break the second: the fourth commandment is not to be so explained as to make us unkind and unmerciful to our neighbour. There is deep wisdom in all this. We are reminded of the saying, "Never man spake like this man." In leaving the subject, 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. There is great reason for warning people on this point. The mistakes of the Pharisee about the Sabbath were in one direction; the mistakes of the Christian are in another. The Pharisee pretended to add to the holiness of the day; the Christian is too often disposed to take away from that holiness, and to keep the day in idle, profane, irreverent manner. May we all watch our own conduct on this subject! Saving Christianity is closely bound up with Sabbath observance. May we never forget that our great aim should be to "keep the Sabbath holy!" Works of necessity may be done: "It is lawful to do well," and show mercy; but to give the Sabbath to idleness, pleasure-seeking, or the world, is utterly unlawful. It is contrary to the example of Christ, and a sin against a plain commandment of God. EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON MATTHEW BY J.C. RYLE PG 121-124.

On the Divine institution of the Lord's Day, or Christian Sabbath. First, put a difference between this and the other six days, even as you put a difference between the bread and wine in the sacrament, and that which is for common use. And that because it is set apart for Holy use, by Divine institution. For as the seventh day, from the beginning of creation, until the day of Christ's blessed resurrection, is by Divine institution moral. The commandment to keep an holy rest upon the seventh day, after the six days of work remains the same. And this Adam (no doubt by the instinct of uncorrupted nature, which desires a time for God's honour and solemn worship) knowing that God finished the creation in six days, and rested on the seventh, would have observed; yet it was requisite that the particular day should be by institution, for natural reason could not certainly tell him which day. The Lord of the Sabbath therefore limited it unto the seventh from the creation, until Christ's resurrection, and then removed it to the day we keep, which is the first. Now it appears, that it is the will of our Lord and Saviour Christ, that we should, since his resurrection, keep for our Sabbath the first day of the week; forasmuch as He arose on that day, John 20:1-19, and appeared divers times on this our Lord's day to His disciples before His ascension; and did on this day, being the day of pentecost, Acts 2:1-4, fill His disciples with the gifts of the Holy Ghost, they being assembled together; all which gives a pre-eminence to this day, and a probability to the point. But inasmuch as the apostles, I Cor 11:1, who followed Christ, and delivered nothing, but what they received from Christ, I Cor 11:23, 14:37, did observe this day as a Sabbath, I Cor 16:1,2; what can this argue but a divine institution of this day? The Apostle Paul might have chosen any other day, for the people to assemble to hear the word, and receive the sacrament: but they assembled to receive the sacrament, and to hear the word upon the first day of the week, which is our Lord's day, Acts 20:6, 7. Now the approved practice of the Apostles, and of the church with them, recorded in Scripture, carries with it the force of a precept. Moreover, the Spirit of God honours this day with the title of the Lord's Day, Rev. 1:10, as He does the communion with the title of the Supper of the Lord, I Cor. 10:21, 11:20. What does this argue but as they both have reference to Christ, so they are both appointed by Christ? The Spirit of Christ knew the mind of Christ, who thus named this day. THE CHRISTIAN'S DAILY WALK BY HENRY SCUDDER, (Published by Sprinkle Publications, P.O. Box 1094, Harrisonburg, Pa. 22801) PG 85-86.

The religious observance of the Lord's Day is another branch of true religion. This is one of the first things which the grace of God reforms in the sincere Christian; no sooner does he begin to look in earnest towards God and heaven, but he values and employs the holy

day of God in a different manner than he did before; and as religion more or less flourishes in the soul, so this sacred time is ever more or less esteemed and improved. Remember the Sabbath day, therefore, before it comes, and endeavour to clear your minds of worldly cares and encumbrances, that you may be fit for the noble and divine employments of it; fit to adore and praise the majesty and perfections of God your maker; to celebrate and seek the blessings of redeeming love and grace, through Jesus Christ our Lord; to hear his most holy word, and receive the instructions of it; to acknowledge, with gratitude and joy, the mercies you partake of; and, with sincere sorrow and contrition, to lament and confess the sins and follies of your hearts and lives; in a word, to obtain and strengthen all those holy tempers and dispositions, as may fit you for a wise, happy, and religious life on earth, and the glories of an everlasting state in the world to come. Let not the love or guilt of any sin, enter into this holy day to defile it, but "wash your hands in innocency, and so compass the altar of God." Though cheerfulness and holy joy are especially the duties of this day; yet be careful to abstain from sensual pleasures and not only vile, but vain and fruitless thoughts and converse. Let no worldly business be either contrived or done, which might have been done before, or may be deferred till future time, but "call the Sabbath a delight, as it is holy to the Lord, and honourable; and honour him therein; not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasures, nor speaking thine own words." Consider how great the blessing is, that you have leave to approach to God, and time to prepare your souls for an eternal state, and improve it accordingly. Let your families also partake of the same advantages. This is one reason why the common employments of life are prohibited on this day; that servants, as they have souls of equal value with the greatest, may have the means of improvement in knowledge and holiness. "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work: that thy man servant and thy maid servant may rest as well as thou."

Give them sufficient time for the worship of Almighty God; and let not their souls be starved, for the sake of feasting your bodies. Not only allow your children and servants time for the religious duties of the day, but watch over them to see that they attend upon the same: instruct them in religion and virtue; encourage them in what is good, and seriously reprove what is amiss in them. You deal worse by them than you would by your very cattle, if you suffer them to go on in the paths which lead to misery and destruction, without doing what in you lies to prevent it. Never give them rest, therefore, until you have, with the help of God, either cured their ignorance and irreligion, or find them incurable. Remember also, that it is "the Sabbath of the Lord, in all your dwellings." And therefore let him be honoured and served there, as well as in the places of public worship. Read his word with reverence and attention; sing his praises with understanding and delight; and seek his favour with humility, faith, and sincerity; that by these lower services you may be fitted for the heavenly state, and carry the blessing of God into the labours of the ensuing week; for it was the observation of a great and good man, "that in long experience he had found, that a due observation of the duties of the Lord's day, had ever joined with it a blessing upon the rest of his time, and the week so begun, was prosperous to him; whereas, when he had been negligent in the duties of this day, the rest of the week was unsuccessful, and unhappy to his own secular employments." And this is far from being a singular observation. THE RELIGIOUS TRADESMAN BY RICHARD STEELE PG 182-185. (Published by Sprinkle Publications.)