

“A Christian View of Sabbath” – Matthew 12:1-14; Exodus 20:8-11; etc.

Brandon Holiski
Southern Oaks Baptist Church
June 12, 2022

[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Take a Bible and meet me in Exodus 20...

I didn't plan on this sermon when I was mapping out our "Authority Issues" series, but when we got to the stories describing confrontations between the Pharisees and Jesus regarding what activity was proper to do on the Sabbath, it became clear that one of the curiosities that many of you have (and we have not really touched on) is the question regarding the role of the Sabbath in the New Covenant. In other words, does the Christian have any Sabbath obligations? What is the Christian view of the Sabbath? Of course, when someone speaks of the Christian view of the Sabbath, you'd be forgiven for wondering if we can even really speak of *the* Christian view of the Sabbath, since, when you begin to look into it, there seem to be a variety of Christian views on the Sabbath.

For instance, I have a book on my shelf that is called *Perspectives on the Sabbath*, in which four dissenting views are presented by four different scholars on this issue.¹ One author argues that the fourth commandment (i.e., the Sabbath commandment) should be considered part of the Bible's "moral law," which the author argues makes it still binding on the Christian, meaning that Christians should set aside the seventh day (Saturday) as holy, keeping it a day of rest and worship. Another argues essentially the same view except that Sabbath day has changed to Sunday, the first day of the week, because the resurrection of Jesus took place on that day. A third author articulates what is usually considered the Lutheran view, which maintains that the Sabbath commandment was given to the Jews alone and is not therefore binding on Christians. That is not to say that rest and worship are not required of the Christian, just that these things are not tied to a specific day of the week. Then the final view, fleshed out by Craig Blomberg, is called the "Fulfillment View" because it maintains that Christ fulfilled the Sabbath command, ushering in the Christian's present experience of true Sabbath rest (at least in some measure), which means that Sabbath commands of the Old Testament are no longer binding on the Christian, though they may inform principles and rhythms that Christians would be wise to adopt. This last view is closest to my own. Of course, there is overlap between these and further divisions within each. But the point of this brief survey is that many Christians disagree on whether and/or how the Christian is to practice the fourth commandment.

It's also worth adding that these disagreements shouldn't be exaggerated in terms of their practical implications. For example, D. A. Carson, who has edited one of the best known scholarly treatments on this topic, called *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation*,² holds to a fulfillment view not unlike the one I just described, but he has elsewhere acknowledged that his own personal practices don't discernibly differ much (if any) from others who are strict Sabbatharians.³ He still, in other words, strives to set aside a day for rest and worship. This demonstrates that even those who disagree on how much continuity or discontinuity exists between the Old and New Covenants when it comes to the Sabbath commands, will often, in practice, cultivate very similar rhythms in life, worship together on Sunday in the same churches, and together advocate that it is important for Christians to rest from their labor. Thus, it's not always possible to tell a person's view on the fourth commandment, just by watching their practice.

And, if you'll humor one more prefatory remark, let me calibrate your expectations a bit by confessing that given both the complexity of this issue and the limited nature of a sermon (to say nothing of my inadequacies as a preacher), there is no way we could possibly satisfy every curiosity many of you have on this topic today. Inevitably, this sermon will prove frustrating to some of you since either I chose not to spend enough time on

your own view or didn't chase the rabbits that you were hoping I would. There is room for disagreements on Sabbath. The Bible itself seems to suggest as much (as we will see). And I'm not asking you to accept my own view uncritically. I do hope, however, that our time together will whet the appetite for your own study in the future and give you some indication of what are the critical texts we each must grapple with when reaching our conclusions. But my more fervent hope is that we each will walk away with a deeper appreciation for the rest we are offered in Jesus Christ.

So let's look at the fourth commandment, as it is articulated in Exodus 20. We are going to have to jump around today, which is not ideal or usual for us, but since we are tracing what the Bible teaches on this topic this morning we must. And it makes sense to start here. I'll begin reading in verse 8. Follow along as I do. This is God's Word...

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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)

Can we begin by simply acknowledging what this commandment says about our God? We sometimes think of commandments as burdensome, but are not these instructions the very opposite? Remember the context, which you can pick up in God's opening remark in verse 2: *"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."* These Israelites had been slaves in Egypt. They worked whenever the Pharaoh wanted them to work. They didn't have a guaranteed day off. In fact, you and I have grown so accustomed to the notion of "weekends" that we sometimes forget that rhythm of 40-hour work-weeks is a peculiarity against the backdrop of history.⁴ Most people have not operated like that. The Israelites in Egypt certainly did not. But now, God, their deliverer, says, "Every week, you're going to take a day off; you're going to Sabbath." Do the math—that's like getting more than seven-and-a-half weeks of vacation! And that's to say nothing of the additional feasts and partying that God maps out for His people throughout the rest of the year! What a God! There is no god like this in the ancient Near East! Israel hit the grace jackpot. Theirs is the God of *Shabbāt*, which means "to cease" or "rest" from labor.

The next thing to notice is that the Sabbath is here tied to the creation account. Verse 9 and 10 say, *"Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God."* Then verse 11 toes this to God's work in creation. It may not be right to say that it was established at creation, because there is no mention of any of the patriarchs or Israelites practicing the Sabbath prior to this commandment. Nevertheless, the commandment does derive an analogy and justification from God's creation activity, wherein He created all things in six days and rested on the seventh. Israel is told to mimic this pattern.

Elsewhere, when the commandment is reiterated in Deuteronomy, it's not tied to creation, but to God's redemptive activity that saved Israel from their bondage in Egypt. So when the Ten Commandments are reiterated to the next generation of Israelites, we read,

"Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. ¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴ 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 or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. ¹⁵ You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day." (Deuteronomy 5:12-15)

So we see then that in keeping the Sabbath Israel was being invited to look back to both God's creative and redemptive activity, which explains why the Sabbath becomes a day of rest and worship in Israel.⁵ Furthermore, the keeping of the Sabbath takes on special significance because God had set the day up as the sign of the Old Covenant. When I refer to the Old Covenant I am speaking of that covenant that God made with Israel after He rescued them from Egypt. The terms of that covenant were ratified in the Old Testament Law, which included, for instance, all of those instructions about what the people could and couldn't eat, what sacrifices were to be made and when, the role of the priests, and so on. When you read these kinds of instructions in books like Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy you are reading the "Law" of the Old Covenant.

Often, when God makes a covenant with people, He will provide some sort of sign or symbol to that covenant. So after the flood, when God explains to Noah that He is covenanting not to destroy the world again by a flood, He establishes the rainbow as the sign of that covenant. When God made a covenant with Abraham He required circumcision of Abraham's male offspring as a sign of that covenant. When the New Covenant ushered in with the cross of Christ, baptism becomes the sign of the covenant, meaning that all people who have been included in the New Covenant through faith in Jesus are to take on that sign and be baptized. Well, the Law that God gave to Moses explained that Israel's inclusion in this covenant with God—the Old Covenant—would be marked by their observance of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was the sign of the covenant. So, in Exodus 31, we read:

"And the Lord said to Moses, ¹³ 'You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, "Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you. ¹⁴ You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. ¹⁵ Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. ¹⁶ Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. ¹⁷ It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed. "' ¹⁸ And he gave to Moses, when he had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God." (Exodus 31:12-18).

If then the regulations surrounding observance of the Sabbath were meant as the sign of the Old Covenant, and if the New Testament says that the work of Christ has made the Old Covenant obsolete, and if, therefore, Christians are no longer required to follow legal demands of the Old Covenant Law, then should the sign of that covenant—Sabbath keeping—be required of Christians in the New Covenant? It's not hard to see why many Christians, historically, have said "no."⁶ Most have not kept the letter of the Law on matters of Sabbath. Most Christians historically have not set aside Saturday as a day for keeping the Sabbath Laws. Yet, most Christians have argued that the principles embedded in the Sabbath have ongoing relevance for us, particularly because of the connection with the Creation account. So the Sabbath is still relevant, but Sabbath applications have been transformed in light of the work of Jesus Christ. Indeed, many Christians historically have viewed Sunday—the first day of the week and the day that Jesus rose from the grave—as the new Sabbath, setting it aside for rest and worship, recognizing the fittingness of this day—the first day of the week—since it was on this day originally that God brought light to the darkness in the creation account and on this day that the true light of the world (Jesus) ushered in a new creation with His resurrection.

Now I agree that Christians are not required to follow the Sabbath regulations articulated in the Law. That's not our covenant. I agree that the sign of our covenant is baptism and not Sabbath observance. That's not our covenant sign. I also agree that there is ongoing value in the principles that are associated with the Sabbath, as there is with the principles that undergird all of God's Law, even if we are not under the Law any longer. And I agree that the Sabbath—like every aspect of the Law—has been transformed for the Christian because it has been fulfilled in Christ. I do *not* agree, however, that Sunday is best understood as the new Sabbath.

I get why people make that connection, since Sunday is a day that Christians have typically set aside for rest and worship. But technically the Scriptures never refer to the “Lord’s Day”⁷—Sunday, the first day of the week—as a new Sabbath.⁸ In most places around the world historically, Sundays are not considered a day off of work. In the first century, the earliest Christians—though they gathered to worship on Sundays—still worked at whatever their profession involved. It was not like the Sabbath for the earliest (Jewish) Christians.⁹ And even those first-century Christ followers who wanted to remain Sabbatarians, maintained their practices on Saturday (the seventh day), not Sunday (the first).¹⁰ Sunday was not the Sabbath. If anything our gathering on Sunday signifies the greater realities that the Old Covenant Sabbath was meant to point to, namely, the New Covenant deliverance and rest that is found in Christ alone.

Now shouldn’t Christians look back to God’s creative and redemptive activity which was key to Sabbath observance? And shouldn’t such reflection stimulate rest and worship in us when we do? Absolutely! But, as we look back at both the Creation and Exodus accounts, we now know, given all what has unfolded in the New Covenant because of the work of Christ, that both the rest of the Creation account and the redemption of the Exodus account were meant to be anticipatory. They were meant to point us forward to the rest and redemption that we receive because of the saving work of Jesus Christ. What is more, that rest and redemption is even greater in Christ. So in looking back we are invited to look forward, not only to our present experience now but also to the future experience that awaits us in glory. We are invited to look forward to how what was celebrated by the Israelites in the Old Covenant has been fulfilled in the person, work, and achievement of Christ in the New Covenant.

Perhaps it’s more obvious how this works when it comes to the Exodus story and how that story prepared us for the work of Christ (if not, check out our Exodus series online). But it may be less obvious to many of us how the rest of Creation anticipated the New Covenant that Christ ushered in. Consider how the Creation account describes the seventh day:

“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² 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. ³ 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)

Notice, first, that the seventh day is not called the “Sabbath” here. The word “Sabbath” isn’t used in the Old Testament until the God gives the Law to Israel.¹¹ Again, though it is there tied to the pattern observed in creation, there is no evidence that Sabbath observances existed for God’s people until God gives the Law to Israel, until, in other words, the Old Covenant was inaugurated. That makes sense since it is the sign of that covenant.

The second thing to spot is that the seventh day stands out not simply because God does no creational work on that day—like He had on the previous six days—but also because the description of the seventh day lacks the statement that is attached to the description of the other days—*“and there was evening and there was morning, the _____ day”* (Gen 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31).

That may seem insignificant, but it does leave open, literally speaking, the seventh day. There is no conclusion to the day. God’s rested and went on resting, which is probably meant to convey that his “rest” is enduring and involves His covenant enjoyment of His creation. Remember Exodus 31, which I read earlier? It said that on the seventh day God *“rested and was refreshed”* (Exod 31:17). He delighted in His creation. And that Sabbath rest and refreshment continues. Adam and Eve were brought into a perfect relationship with God that would entail such ongoing rest and refreshment. It was paradise in the truest sense. Ongoing delight in the world that God had made and, more importantly, in God Himself.

Yet tragedy struck when Adam, the covenant head of humanity, sinned against God and brought death into the world (Gen 2:15-17; 3:1-19). The “rest” our first parents experienced was forfeit. They were exiled from the

garden and the God of the garden. That's what sin does. It separates us from God and the rest that we were made to enjoy. Fortunately, God, in His mercy, gave a promise on that day that pointed to a Redeemer (3:15), one who the Bible will later call "the Last Adam" (1 Cor 15:45), who will succeed where the first Adam failed, and bring His people into God's true rest again. The commandment for Israel to keep the Sabbath was meant to whet their appetite for that rest that would come for God's people, the rest that was forfeit in the garden. That's why Sabbath breaking was, in most cases, a capital offense, because that's what happens when people forsake the God's gracious offer of rest: death. Adam found that out. Israel was not allowed to forget.

But the point I'm making is that Christ fulfilled the Sabbath hope. And if Christians are to speak of observing the Sabbath we ought to do so in a way that glories in the more expansive and comprehensive rest that Jesus provides, not merely on a day, but on every day and for everlasting days. We should enjoy the Sabbath's ultimate purpose, which means enjoying the spiritual blessings Christ has brought into our life and promised for the life to come. Jesus fulfilled the Sabbath. And the New Testament gives indications of this.

For example, as we have considered the past two Sundays from Matthew 12, Jesus never truly broke the Sabbath commandment (though He did routinely violate the Pharisees interpretation of that commandment). Nevertheless, He does hint in that passage that a change to the Sabbath was in the offing. Remember how the Sabbath controversies are introduced in Matthew? Jesus says, at the end of chapter 11,

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

So right before the Pharisees start arguing with Jesus about the Sabbath in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus has just said that true rest is to be found in Him and experienced by those who come under His yoke. The Sabbath rest, in other words, was to be found in Him. He is to be our Sabbath. That's a bold claim. But it is one that He has the authority to make because of what He reveals about Himself in the next scene—He is the "*Lord of the Sabbath*" (12:8). Referring to this, D. A. Carson writes,

*"That Jesus Christ is the Lord of the Sabbath is not only a messianic claim of grand proportions, but it raises the possibility of a future change or reinterpretation of the Sabbath, in precisely the same way that His professed superiority over the Temple [in the previous verses] raises certain possibilities about ritual law."*¹²

Jesus had just said that something greater than the Temple had come. He fulfilled what the temple pointed to. He is saying by implication in this context that something greater than the Sabbath had come as well. The fulfillment of the Sabbath. The person and work of the Lord of the Sabbath. If salvation is found in Christ alone, so too the rest that the Sabbath signified. When we look to Jesus we are looking to the one who redeemed us from the bondage of our sin, the one who included us in a new and greater Exodus. When we trust in Christ and His death in our place as the sole basis of our salvation, we experience a new "day one" of creation, we become new creations. What the first Sabbath encouraged Israel to remember—the creating and redeeming mercy of God—was always meant to point forward to that ultimate mercy found in Christ, our rest, our redemption, our Sabbath fulfiller. When our faith rests in Him, we enter into God's rest in some measure now (Heb 4:3; cf. 6:5) and we have assurance that we will enter in a consummated way when Christ returns (4:8-11; 13:14). Jesus didn't abolish the Sabbath rest; He fulfilled it. He ushered in a deeper rest than a one day a week Sabbath could ever provide.¹³ And how do we enter into this rest? Not by laying aside our labors on the seventh day of the week in observance of the Sabbath day. We enter in by faith in Jesus Christ. As the writer of Hebrews puts it, "*we who have believed enter that rest*" (4:3). Fully later, yes; but truly now.

Now does that have implications then for the way and pace at which we live our lives today? Of course. We recognize, as Justin Huffman explains that "no amount of vacationing, streaming entertainment, or social-media escapism will give us true rest. Running to Christ, submitting to his provision and direction, is the only real and

lasting sabbath for the soul.”¹⁴ Or as Dane Ortlund puts it, Jesus “is that of which the sabbath is a shadow; Jesus is the shadow-caster. He doesn’t just forgive our sins; he lets the frenetic RPMs of the heart slow down into calm sanity. And no external circumstance can threaten that rest, as we look to him.”¹⁵ We are free to forsake our legalism and rest in Christ’s perfect record of obedience credited to us through faith. We don’t have to perform for His approval, we rest in having been given it freely by grace. We don’t have to be workaholics, we can rest in knowing that God is sovereign, He began a work in us, and He is faithful to complete it. We realize that no amount of “productivity, profits, and performance” can provide what we truly need, but Christ has.¹⁶ So we can rest from our labors, both for salvation and for human flourishing, trusting in Him as the author of both. Our lives take on a more balanced rhythm, because we know, Sunday through Saturday the rest we have in Christ. We begin our week, gathering in worship, remember our creative and saving work of Christ on our behalf. And we rest. Remember the hymn “In Christ Alone”?

What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My Comforter, my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand

The rhythms of our life—the Sabbath principles of old—can “preach a powerful sermon to ourselves and to the world that even ‘when strivings cease,’ we stand secure in the love of Christ.”¹⁷

So let us agree on that. Let us agree that Christ fulfills in our place the Sabbath regulations perfectly and brings to fulfillment the Sabbath anticipations. Let us agree that while we are not bound to the same Sabbath-keeping regulations of the Old Covenant, we can in the New Covenant be enriched by the Sabbath principles to the degree that they foster our daily rest and joy in Christ Jesus. And exactly how that plays out in each of our lives, let us be free from legalism and extrabiblical demands.¹⁸ Let us be free in Christ and spare others the burdens of our judgment on how these principles are worked out in their lives. I think this is the spirit of the New Testament’s teaching on this matter.

For example, in Colossians, Paul says, “*Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving*” (Col 2:6-7). He then goes on to describe the creative and redemptive work of Christ, which has “*forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands*” (redemption) and “*made us alive together with him*” as our baptism signifies (new creation) (2:8-15). But then says the following:

“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. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.” (Col 2:16-17)¹⁹

That has been my argument today. Things like the Sabbath were shadows.²⁰ The true substance is found in Christ. Rest in Him. Every day. And let’s not pass judgment on those who do when they have different Sabbath rhythms in life because of this mutual rest we share in Christ. Instead, I think the principles Paul maps out in Romans will serve us well on this issue:

“As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. ² One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. ³ Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. ⁴ Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. ⁵ One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For none of us lives to himself, and none of us

dies to himself. ⁸ *For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.*” (Romans 14:1-8)

Commenting on these verses, Scott Hubbard said the following:

“Paul evidently felt no need to impose the Sabbath command on his Gentile converts. Some in Rome, it seems, wanted to keep the Sabbath (and so esteem “one day as better than another”) — perhaps Jewish Christians eager to maintain the traditions of their fathers. Paul had no issue with those Christians, so long as they refrained from pressuring others to imitate them or suggested that salvation hinged on obedience to the Sabbath (compare Galatians 4:8–11). For the sake of Christian freedom and mutual love, Paul says simply and remarkably, ‘Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind’” (Romans 14:5).

Once again, I think this is the best approach.

So should Christians keep the Sabbath? If by that we mean that we are bound to the Old Covenant practice of Israel, I would say, no. But in another sense, yes, we should keep the Sabbath principles always in that we find rest in Christ alone.²¹ Our fears are stilled. Our strivings cease. And while Sunday morning is not a replacement Sabbath per se, it is meant to encourage our enjoyment of this ongoing rest we have in Christ through faith. I like what Hubbard says about this:

“Every Lord’s Day, we come again to Jesus, weary and heavy laden (Matthew 11:28). We trace the shadow of the Sabbath to its substance (Colossians 2:17). We hear again in the distance the sounds of the future Sabbath festival; we glimpse again by faith the glow of “innumerable angels in festal gathering” (Hebrews 12:22). We look again into the empty tomb and hear Christ say, “Peace to you!” (Luke 24:36). In other words, we find rest — the kind of rest that remains long after Sunday has passed.”²²

So every Lord’s day I am able, I will remind you that when it comes to salvation, you don’t have to earn a thing. You don’t have to prove anything to God. You can come broken and spiritually impoverished. In fact, you must, because it is only the poor in spirit who enter God’s kingdom. But they enter through Christ. He died to save us. He rose to justify us. He lives to be our rest. Can you hear His sweet voice saying, “*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*” (Matt 11:28)? Why not take Him at His Word this morning? Believe Him. Trust in Him. Run to Him, not from Him. You can do that now. Confess your sin and need. Trust in Him to save you. He will do it. All of it.

Let’s pray...

¹ Christopher John Donato, *Perspectives on the Sabbath: Four Views* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011).

² D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000).

³ See <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/from-sabbath-to-lords-day-a-biblical-historical-and-theological-investigation/>.

⁴ Ray Ortlund has stated: “I wonder if the very concept of “the weekend” is biblical. It seems to me that “the weekend” turns Sunday into a second Saturday. Home Depot may gain, but we lose. It turns Sunday into a day to catch up on what we didn’t do Saturday or a day to ramp up for what’s ahead on Monday. It hollows out our whole week, because it marginalizes God and church and sermons and all the other vital things that happen in our lives only when we make the vital things also the central things. If we accept the concept of “the weekend,” we risk “fitting God in” rather than centering our every week around him. We risk living soul-exhausted lives, and wondering why God isn’t more real to us, why we’re exhausted and grumpy.” See “Is the Sabbath Still Relevant,” at: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/ray-ortlund/quietness-of-heart-1/>.

⁵ See Mark F. Rooker, *The Ten Commandments: Ethics for the Twenty-First Century*, NACSBT 7 (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 86.

⁶ According to Scott Hubbard, “None of those who answer in the negative [to the question, ‘Does the Sabbath Commandment still hold today?’] suggests the Sabbath was a second-tier command in the Decalogue, a good idea but not mandatory. No, the Sabbath served as the covenant sign between Israel and her God, unfolding the weekly drama that testified to God as might Creator (Exodus 20:11) and merciful Redeemer (Deuteronomy 5:15). On the Sabbath, Israel declared total dependence on her covenant Lord, a Lord more than able to uphold his people even though, for one day in seven, they hung up their plows, and rested from their labors. The question then” (“Should Christians Keep the Sabbath?,” accessed at: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/should-christians-keep-the-sabbath>). David T. Williams writes, “It is noteworthy that Sabbath-keeping was not a requirement laid upon the Gentiles by the Jerusalem Council, despite, significantly, the reference to the reading of Moses on the Sabbath (Acts 15:21). The attitude of the early Gentile Christians was, in general, not to observe a day of rest. They did not see sufficient continuity between Israel and the church to take over the Sabbath simply because it was a command for Israel. (Otherwise we would logically have to keep all the laws, including the food laws which Jesus explicitly rejected)” (“The Sabbath: Mark of Distinction,” *Themelios* 14 [1989]). It is common for some to push back and suggest that the Sabbath-law, because of its inclusion in the Ten Commandments, should be considered part of God’s “moral law,” which is still binding, in distinction from God’s “civil” or “ceremonial law,” which is no longer binding on the Christian. Leaving aside the fact that such distinctions may indeed be artificial and anachronistic (see discussion in J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word: A Hands-on Approach to Reading, Interpreting and Applying the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020], 383-404), there is still reason to suggest, even granting the legitimacy of these distinctions, that classifying the Sabbath as “moral law” is problematic. The remarks of Stephen Wellum are worth considering: “So why does the Sabbath appear in the Ten Commandments? Because it’s the sign of the old covenant (Ex. 31:12–17). But doesn’t it still function as God’s eternal moral law for us today? I answer no for three reasons. First, Scripture views the old covenant as a unit, given to Israel and serving a specific role in God’s plan, and as an entire covenant, it’s brought to fulfillment in Christ (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 5:3; Heb. 7:11–12; James 2:8–13). Second, Scripture teaches that according to God’s plan, the whole old covenant was temporary (Rom. 10:4; Gal. 3:15–4:7). Third, Scripture teaches that Christians are no longer ‘under the law’ as a covenant, since we are now under the new covenant (Rom. 6:14–15; 1 Cor. 9:20–21; Gal. 4:4–5; 5:13–18); nonetheless, the Mosaic law functions for us, along with the Sabbath command, as Scripture (2 Tim. 3:15–17). As we apply the Ten Commandments, then, we must think first about how they functioned within the old covenant, and then how they apply to us in light of Christ’s fulfillment. No doubt, nine of the Ten Commandments are emphasized in the new covenant, since they reflect the Great Commandment to love God and neighbor—something true since God’s creation of us for himself and one another. But this doesn’t mean we simply apply the commandments to us apart from their fulfillment in Christ. Regarding the Sabbath command specifically, we must first set it within its covenantal location and then observe how it functioned not only as a command/sign to Israel (which no longer applies to us), but also as a type of the greater salvation rest offered in Christ (which certainly applies to us!). In this way, Christians ‘obey’ the Sabbath by entering into the rest it typified and predicted—salvation rest in Christ” (Stephen Wellum, “Three Reasons Sunday Is Not the Christian Sabbath,” which can be accessed here: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/sunday-not-christian-sabbath/>.)

⁷ An expression found in the New Testament only in Revelation 1:10, though alluded to in other language elsewhere (e.g., Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2).

⁸ A helpful article offering some reasons for this conclusion comes from Wellum, “Three Reasons Sunday Is Not the Christian Sabbath.”

⁹ As Richard Bauckham notes, “For the earliest Christians it was not a substitute for the Sabbath nor a day of rest nor related in any way to the fourth commandment.” See his article, “The Lord’s Day,” pages 221-250 in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 240.

¹⁰ Scott Hubbard, “Should Christians Keep the Sabbath?” Hubbard also notes that it was not until 321 AD, under Constantine, that Sunday becomes an official day of rest in Rome.

¹¹ See Williams, “The Sabbath: Mark of Distinction.”

¹² D. A. Carson, “Jesus and the Sabbath in the Four Gospels,” pages 58-97 in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 66.

¹³ Hubbard, “Should Christians Keep the Sabbath?”

¹⁴ Justin Huffman, “Sabbath: An Enduring Principle for the Soul,” accessed at: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/sabbath-enduring-principle/>.

¹⁵ Cited also by Huffman (ibid.).

¹⁶ Jordan Raynor, “Sabbath as a Sermon for the Ambitious,” accessed at: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/sabbath-sermon-ambitious/>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ The suggestions offered by Timothy Keller are worth considering. For those who are interested, see “Wisdom and Sabbath Rest,” accessed at: <https://redeemercitycity.com/articles-stories/wisdom-and-sabbath-rest>. See also Raynor, “Sabbath as a Sermon for the Ambitious;” Kevin DeYoung, *The 10 Commandments: What They Mean, Why They Matter, and Why We Should Obey Them* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 71-78.

¹⁹ If you think about it, this is a pretty remarkable statement in that Paul lumps Sabbath practices in with things like dietary laws (see Thomas R. Schreiner, *40 Questions About Christians and Biblical Law* [Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2010], 212). What does that tell us? And then Paul says that these Christians should not quibble with those who choose to go on with the diets they had previously adopted, or continue celebrating festivals like Passover, or even the Sabbath. If you know much of Paul’s writing, you know he would not have said that if he believed there was an emphasis on keeping those things as a matter of salvation because we put

our hope in such works to make us right with God. They won't. And Paul would not have tolerated such works-righteousness and legalism. Instead, he seems to be showing that tolerance is needed on various decisions of this sort when the gospel essentials are embraced.

²⁰ "Some argue, however, that 'Sabbath' in Colossians 2:16 does not refer to the weekly Sabbaths but only to sabbatical years. But this is a rather desperate expedient, for the most prominent day in the Jewish calendar was the weekly Sabbath. We know from secular sources that it was the observance of the weekly Sabbath that attracted the attention of Gentiles (Juvenal, *Satires* 14.96-106; Tacitus, *Histories* 5.4). Perhaps sabbatical years are included here, but the weekly Sabbath should not be excluded, for it would naturally come to the mind of both Jewish and Gentile readers." Schreiner, *40 Questions About Christians and Biblical Law*, 212.

²¹ Cf. Kevin DeYoung's "yes, but" answer to that question in *The 10 Commandments: What They Mean, Why They Matter, and Why We Should Obey Them*, 71-72.

²² Hubbard, "Should Christians Keep the Sabbath?"