

—Westminster Shorter Catechism—
Lesson 73—Keeping the Lord’s Day Holy, Qs.60-62

Sanctifying the Lord’s Day

- I. To *sanctify* something is either to make it holy, which only God can do, or to regard and treat that as holy which God made holy, which is what this commandment is calling us to do.
 - A. God sanctified the day of rest, made it holy, and put His blessing upon its rest (and therefore upon those who observe it), Gen 2.1-3. The commandment then calls us, in both heart and practice, to regard and treat the day as holy and sacred.
- II. In juxtaposing six whole days to one, both at creation and then in precept, the commandment reserves a *day* for the Lord, Neh 13.15-22, and declares the Lord to be *Lord* of the Sabbath. It is His Day, Mk 2.28; Isa 58.13.
- III. The Sabbath is sanctified by (cf. WLC 117):
 - A. a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days;
 - B. 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.
- IV. The Sabbath is profaned by (cf. WLC 119):
 - A. the omission or careless performance of the duties of worship required;
 - B. idleness, or the doing of that which is in itself sinful;
 - C. and unnecessary thoughts, words, or works, about our worldly employments or recreations.

Understanding the Lord’s Day

- I. What’s God after in the fourth commandment?
 - A. Is He wanting to arbitrarily enslave us and tie us down from doing anything on the Lord’s Day other than go to church, pray, and read our Bibles? No. Jesus said He came to bring joy, peace, and happiness, Lk 4.16-21; and the gospel is all about God pouring His love into our hearts so that we can love Him in return and worship Him freely and voluntarily, 1Jn 4.19; Jn 14.15.
 - B. Does He just want us to keep a bunch of rules? No. Christ said man wasn’t created for the good of the Sabbath, but the Sabbath itself was created for the good of man, Mk 2.27; Ex 31.14. God cares more about the benefit we get from the Sabbath than the benefit/honor the Sabbath gets from us, Ex 16.29; Isa 56.2.
- II. So what is God after in the fourth commandment?
 - A. His honor as LORD of our time, Mt 2.28; Lev 19.30; 1Cor 6.19-20.
 - B. His glory as our Sanctifier, Ex 31.13.
 - C. His glory as our life, our chief good, our happiness, our joy, and our rest, Isa 56.1-7; 58.13-14.
- III. What, then, does it mean that *the Sabbath was made for man* (Mk 2.27)?
 - A. It was made for our good and benefit. It’s filled with God’s blessings and grace for us, Hos 2.11.
 - B. It was made for the benefit of our chief end. We were created to glorify God and a weekly Sabbath is the center of a life of living for God and not ourselves.
 1. God doesn’t need the rest of a Sabbath, but we do, Mk 2.27. And so the *sanctification* of the day is for man’s benefit in order that he might have a day to give himself to the worship of God and enjoy the blessings of the covenant of grace, all without distraction.
 2. He made it for man’s benefit and happiness, Isa 56.1-7; 58.13-14.
 - C. It was made to be a foreshadow and foretaste of our eternal communion and fellowship with God. It’s the primary way we taste and see that the Lord is good, Ps 34.8.
 1. In all the blessings given to us by God—except for the blessing of His incarnation—there’s no greater assurance of our eternal fellowship with God than we find in the Sabbath, in which we *peculiarly* enter into and participate in God’s own rest, Heb 4.3, 9-10.
 - D. It was *not* made for man so that man can use it as he pleases. It was made for man so man can have a day each week to devote himself fully and without distraction to his chief end and to the chief concerns of his eternal soul.
- IV. Keeping the Sabbath
 - A. We’re to endeavor diligently, purposefully, and lovingly to take care of all our common affairs before the Sabbath, within the six days each week given to us by God for that purpose, and to prepare our hearts to engage in the religious exercises appropriate to the Lord’s Day, Isa 58.13.

- B. Since the day is a day of holy rest, we're to abstain from our worldly employments and from all unnecessary words and thoughts about our worldly engagements. Recreations should be weighed against whether or not they take away from the holy duties required of us on that day and against whether or not they make us indisposed to those duties. **All the temporal affairs of men are to be regulated and modified in reference to the weekly Sabbath. All his doing and not doing are in intentional subordination to this dominant circumstance of his life: that he's to be a Sabbath-keeper, a God-fearing worshipper.* –That principle alone has radical implications.
- C. We're to spend the day in holy exercises, in the instruction of our families, and in attendance upon the public ordinances. It's wrong to suppose we can appropriate a few hours of the Sabbath morning to the worship of God and then use the rest of the day for our worldly pursuits, Neh 13.15-22; Isa 58.13; Mk 2.28.

The reasons annexed

- I. The reasons given by God are more numerous than with any other commandment.
 - A. His gift to us of six other days for all "our lawful stuff". We have plenty of time for all our lawful callings, vocations, and recreations.
 - B. His claim of special proprietorship in the Sabbath. It's *His Day*, Mk 2.28; Ex 20.10. We're to regard the day as *the Lord's* and *not ours* and therefore cheerfully and sincerely *give ourselves up* to His worship and work, grateful for the six days each week He gives us for all our work and recreation, Isa 58.13-14; 56.3-7; Mk 2.27-28.
 - C. His example, both in the creation, in redemption, and in the flesh, Gen 2.1-3; Dt 5.15; Lk 4.16.
 - D. His benediction upon Sabbath-keepers and implied curse on Sabbath-breakers, Isa 56.1-7; 58.13-14; Jer 17.27.

Applications

- I. Why do we struggle to keep the Sabbath holy?
 - A. Because our flesh still has *a stronghold of worldliness and selfishness* over our spirit such that we cling to earth, time, and pleasure instead of aspiring after the things of heaven, eternity, and God.
 - B. We don't fully believe the Lord intends to bless us and do us good, despite His clear testimony regarding it, Isa 56.3-7; 58.13-14; Ezk 20.11-12; Mk 2.27-28, and so we claim its sacred hours for ourselves so that we can do ourselves good. We unwisely trade God's good for our own.
- II. The Sabbath is an endowment of God to the soul of man, a sure promise of his immortality and destiny for another world.
 - A. That means there's no greater blessing to man under the gospel than the Sabbath. There's no privilege so great as that which the Sabbath affords, and no dignity so noble as that which it introduces us to as it *peculiarly* brings us into the presence of God to be blessed and made fit for eternal communion and fellowship with Him. It's our weekly preparation for eternal happiness in God.
 - B. It's an extremely costly mistake to regard the Sabbath as a day to do our own thing or to expect a blessing from God when we don't use it according to its holy purpose. To forget the Sabbath is to forget God and to forget God is to forget our chief end and therefore miss it entirely.
- III. Recommended reading on the Christian Sabbath.
 - A. Walter Chantry, *Call the Sabbath a Delight*; Ryan McGraw, *The Day of Worship*; Lewis Bayly, *The Practice of Piety*; Bruce Ray, *Celebrating the Sabbath*; Joey Pipa, *Is the Lord's Day for You?*

"I have no intention of assigning to you any course of employment for the Sabbath; I simply plead for the fulfillment of the ordinances, that you work not and think not of your vocations, and that you allow your minds to come into repose from this world's agitations. Then nature and the Spirit of God will direct you to proper occupations. You will go to the house of prayer out of choice; you will go to your closet out of choice; you will read the Word of God out of choice; you will shun intrusive company out of choice; and out of choice you will turn your thoughts to holy and spiritual objects. All I ask is, keep the intrusion of the world out, shut your door upon worldly men, shut your ear upon worldly talk, shut your eye upon all ephemeral and worldly reading. Fulfill the statute, and see that those in your household do, and it will come to pass that ere long you will desire the benefit of the statute, both as to bodily and spiritual refreshment. Your soul will make progress toward heaven; you will learn to live above the world; and from all the weariness of the week you will run like a tossed and tempest-driven vessel the haven of your weekly Sabbath rest." –Edward Irving, 19th-century Scottish minister.