

Week 41

The Lord's Day

Key Verses

Exodus 20:8-11 "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."

+ Introduction

In the 1800's and 1900's the "blue laws" prohibited specific items from being sold and certain businesses from opening on Sundays as it was to be observed as a day of worship and rest. Chick-Fil-A still operates on this principle, as do several other businesses. In Texas, the law was repealed in 1985, though some items such as liquor are still not sold on Sundays.

Over time, the Lord's Day has gone from a time of worship and rest to a time of commerce and convenience. In our culture of seven days a week of activities, including children's sports, setting aside one day a week to worship and rest has become increasingly difficult. Further, in our age of technology, "church" is available online via your phone and computer 24/7. People have allowed the convenience of this technology to replace weekly worship in a corporate setting, disengaging from the local church. The *Baptist Faith and Message*, article 8, states:

"The first day of the week is the Lord's Day. It is a Christian institution for regular observance. It commemorates the resurrection of Christ from the dead and should include exercises of worship and spiritual devotion, both public and private. Activities on the Lord's Day should be commensurate with the Christians' conscience under the Lordship of Jesus Christ."¹

Long before the blue laws, the Lord's Day can be traced back to Mt. Sinai with Moses and the delivery of the Ten Commandments, then further to creation itself when God rested on the seventh day.

It is easy in our culture to live life on cruise control. We forget to put on the brakes and slow down emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually. The establishment of the Sabbath was for our benefit

in all those areas of life, not as a punishment. The design and purpose of the Sabbath are to rest in all areas. God modeled it Himself in creation; we are to work it into the rhythm of life each week.

+ What is the Sabbath?

In the days of Moses, the Sabbath was already part of the tradition of the Israelites, but with the delivery of the Ten Commandments, it became part of their covenant relationship with God.² The origin of the Hebrew “*sabat*” is uncertain, but it seems to have derived from the verb *sabat*, meaning to stop, to cease, or to keep. Its theological meaning is rooted in God's rest following the six days of creation (Gen 2:2-3).³ Look at the passage below from Exodus:

EXODUS 20:8-11, *“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.”*

On Mt. Sinai, God makes it clear to Moses the connection between remembering the Sabbath, keeping it holy, and the seventh day of creation. The God of the Universe who spoke the world into existence and formed man out of the dust of the earth made a deliberate choice to rest. We could easily have a seven-day week with no time for rest in any shape or form. But the wisdom of God prevailed in modeling how the Sabbath was to look. It was and is a day set aside from the other six days.

The Sabbath is intentionally designed to look and feel different. The activities of the day are to be different. The purpose of the day is to be different. The substance of the day is to be like no other day of the week. For the Jews in the days of Moses and beyond, the Sabbath served not only as a mark of their devotion to the Lord but also as a witness to their pagan neighbors, to whom the seventh day was just another day.⁴

It is the same for us as well. When we get up on a Sunday morning, grab breakfast, get dressed, and pile into the car to go to church, we set ourselves apart from most of our neighbors. While we worship, others are still sleeping or heading out to a ballpark or some other activity that has nothing to do with worshiping God. Our actions are a witness to others in making the Lord's Day a priority in our lives each week.

When God says to *“Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy,”* the word “holy” is the Hebrew word “*Qadash*” which means to consecrate, sanctify, prepare, dedicate, be hallowed, be holy, be sanctified, be separate.⁵ God is telling us that the Sabbath is to be set apart from all other days demonstrating this relationship between God and His people.

EXODUS 31:12-13 Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹³ "Now as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'You must keep My Sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, so that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.

From the days of Moses, the Sabbath was to be a testimony to others about having a relationship with God. It was and is a time to connect with God uniquely compared to the other days of the week. It was and is a reminder of all that God had done for His people. It was and is a time to train the next generation to revere the Lord's Day as a day of rest and worship.

+ Worship on the Lord's Day

In Jewish tradition, the Sabbath was observed on the seventh day of the week, Saturday. And some non-Jewish denominations still do that, such as the Seventh Day Adventist church. However, most of the Christian denominations changed to the first day of the week, Sunday. This occurred to reflect and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. John 20:19 reveals that on the first day of the week—the Sunday after the crucifixion—Christ appeared to His disciples and revealed His wounded hands and side.⁶

Interestingly, there are no specific guidelines in the New Testament on how to observe Sunday, the first day of the week. There are guidelines for worship, fellowship, gathering together, praying together, and even singing together, but nothing specific on how to celebrate the Lord's Day. However, in the Old Testament, there were very specific and detailed guidelines on what to do on the Sabbath, the Lord's Day. Therein lies the difference.

- The Sabbath was given as a matter of law; In Christ, Sunday is a day of grace.
- The Sabbath remembers creation; In Christ, Sunday celebrates re-creation.
- The Sabbath was a social force for a nation; In Christ, Sunday is an individual day given to each Christian to celebrate as he sees fit.
- The Sabbath was governed by rules and regulations; In Christ, Sunday has no specific rules on what you can and cannot do.⁷

This in no way diminishes the beauty, purpose, and tradition of the Jews observing the Sabbath. However, it reminds us of the new covenant of Jesus Christ. The Lord's Day reminds us of victory over the sting of death. The Lord's Day is a day of celebration and worship of our risen Lord. Let's identify a few verses that support this view of Sunday as the Lord's Day and why we celebrate it as such.

- The first day of the week was the day on which our Lord rose from the dead (John 20:1; Psalm 118:24).
- The first day of the week is called "the Lord's day" (Revelation 1:10; 1 Corinthians 16:2).
- The first day of the week was the day on which the Holy Spirit was poured out on the church (Acts 2:1-36).

- Just as on the first day of creation God made light and separated it from the darkness, we gather on the first day of the week to celebrate the light of the gospel in Jesus Christ, who has separated us from the world of the darkness of sin (John 1:5, 9; 3:19; 8:12; 2 Corinthians 4:1-6).⁸

✦ How to Observe the Lord's Day

The Lord's Day is designed for reverence, rest, and restoration. In our culture, it is difficult to find time for any of those things. God knew it would be difficult; hence He designed the rhythm of life to allow a day set aside for these things. Though in the days of Jesus, the Pharisees had gone overboard on rules and regulations in how to observe the Sabbath, which became a burden to the people. Jesus responded accordingly.

MARK 2:27-28 *Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So the Son of Man is Lord, even of the Sabbath."*

The Lord's Day is for our benefit. It is a privilege to be able to set aside one day a week to honor God. It is a gift of God's grace to provide in His model of life and existence to have this kind of day. And yet, how often do we neglect this gift?

Every week, we have an opportunity to gather with other Christians and celebrate the risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In our country, it is a freedom we have that many other countries do not share. We meet multi-generationally to worship God. The book of Hebrews written to Jews who had converted to Christianity expresses the importance of worshipping together.

HEBREWS 10:25 *not abandoning our own meeting together, as is the habit of some people, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*

That is a commonly referenced verse for many when talking about the importance of corporate worship. However, some forget the depth of the context of the verses leading up to this climactic verse.

HEBREW 10:19-24 *Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, through His flesh, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let's approach God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let's hold firmly to the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; ²⁴ and let's consider how to encourage one another in love and good deeds,*

It is difficult to read these words and not realize this is something new and available because of the sacrifice, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even in verse 20, it states, "by a new and living way..." The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus brought about the fulfillment of the

Old Covenant and the inauguration of the New Covenant. We now have direct access to God, who not only created the universe but established the Sabbath on the seventh day. Though we can worship privately at any time, the pattern of corporate worship began in Acts and continued throughout the New Testament and to this day.

Under the Old Covenant, no one would dare walk into or even approach the holy place. But now we have access to walk into the doors of a church, which represents the *"house of God."* In verse 22, it says, *"Let's approach,"* and in verse 23, it says, *"Let's hold firmly."* Notice the usage of the plural, *"let's,"* or *"let us."* We are to do this together. We approach the house of God together. We firmly hold our confession of our hope together.

Our time of worship is an opportunity to worship God, express our faith, and encourage one another. It is not by accident that churches worldwide worship in similar manners, though the songs and music styles may be different. The buildings may look different; the sermons may be shorter or longer than others. But at its core, worship on the Lord's Day is based on the elements we find in the New Testament.

The first-century church engaged in several devotional acts in their worship services; from this we can comprise a truly biblical worship service. Consider the following: the communion supper was observed (Acts 20:7), prayers were offered up (1 Corinthians 14:15–16), songs were sung to the glory of God (Ephesians 5:19), a collection was taken (1 Corinthians 16:2), the Scriptures were read (Colossians 4:16), and the Word of God was proclaimed (Acts 20:7).⁹

There is something significant about doing this corporately together. If the year 2020 taught us anything, it taught us we need community. Isolation is not healthy for long periods of time, especially for our emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Proverbs 27:17 says, *"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."* We learn from each other. There is accountability with one another. There are times when we need to come and be silent and other times we need to come and praise out loud.

The beauty of our church is how we have structured Worship and Bible Study to go together. We come as a group of like-minded believers to study Scripture. We dig into the Word of God on a weekly basis. We learn from the *"cloud of witnesses"* that went before us, such as Moses, Abraham, Joshua, David, Daniel, Jeremiah, Solomon, Job, Paul, Peter, John, Timothy, and others. We have worship that is age-appropriate from newborns to those over 100 years old. Whether you are a child, teenager, young adult, married, engaged, single, divorced, or widowed, we have a Bible Study class that would meet your stage of life and provide a community for you to grow in your relationship with Christ.

Our worship service incorporates those elements modeled in the New Testament. Each part of the service has purpose and biblical foundation. The design is to allow everyone to worship in spirit and truth. This is done through music, giving, Scripture reading, baptism, communion, the proclamation of the Word, and a time of invitation to make any decision public. This has been done for 2,000 years and is at the core of the Lord's Day for the church.

In the excerpt below, Billy Graham responds to a question asking, “what’s so bad about resting on the Lord’s Day in a place other than church?” He writes,

God’s plan also was to use the Sabbath to turn our hearts and minds toward Him. In other words, He wants us to set aside one day of the week as a special time of worship and reflection on God’s Word. After all, if we ignore God on that day, when else are we likely to turn to Him? We get busy and preoccupied with daily living and end up leaving God out of the picture. God’s plan is clear: “Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” (Deuteronomy 5:12).¹⁰

The Bible says, “*Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it*” (Ephesians 5:25). If our Lord loved it enough to die for it, then we should respect it enough to support and attend it. Theodore Roosevelt once said, “You may worship God anywhere, at any time, but the chances are that you will not do so unless you have first learned to worship Him somewhere in some particular place, at some particular time.”¹¹

Let us not forsake the gathering together and be prepared each week to set that day aside for the Lord to worship in spirit and truth.

¹ *The Baptist Faith & Message*, Lifeway Press, Nashville, TN; 2007, p. 101

² Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary, Old Testament*; David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO; 2007, p. 182.

³ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/sabbath/>

⁴ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary*, p. 182.

⁵ www.biblestudytools.com/lexicon

⁶ *The Baptist Faith & Message*, Lifeway Press, Nashville, TN; 2007, p. 103

⁷ <https://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/1992-06-21-take-time-for-god/>

⁸ <https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/article/primer-lords-day>

⁹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/worship-service.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2016/may/09/on-christianity-20160509/?features>

¹¹ Thomas Kidd, “Lessons from the Faith of Theodore Roosevelt on the Centennial of His Death.” *The Gospel Coalition*, 6 Jan. 2019, www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/evangelical-history/lessons-faith-theodore-roosevelt-centennial-death/.