

The Sabbath for the Christian

Please note that this is not meant to be a polished paper on the Christian view of the Sabbath. It started from my notes on various scriptures and some books I was reading. I eventually tried to organize and expand the material to make it coherent to others. I trust these notes will walk you through my understanding of a Biblical and historical view of how the Sabbath relates to believers in Christ Jesus.

After the brief introduction below, there are four main parts to this paper. They are: Your current understanding; What the Bible says; My view of the Sabbath for the Christian; and the History of the thought and practice of the Sabbath.

Part 1: Your Current Understanding?

I want you to walk through this journey of discovery on your own. So, I am not going to state my thesis or conclusions up front. Our beliefs and practices should be bound to the truths in scripture and history, not on our own traditions, or preferences, or the convictions of a group to which we belong.

The first section of this paper asks you to capture your own current understanding of the Sabbath (for the Christian) through a series of questions. You are then asked to consider some Biblical passages, and then react to a few other questions. I believe this is an important part of the process if you are really seeking to obtain a Biblical understanding of the Sabbath. Please consider the questions and scripture verses in Part 1 before reading the rest of this paper.

Part 2: What the Bible Says

Part 2 discusses the scripture verses introduced in Part 1. I give my observations on the verses as well as quoting other authors' comments. This section should be considered more of a "commentary" on the Bible verses; it does not provide a coherent paper or give formed arguments. It merely lists comments about the Bible verses.

Part 3: A Coherent View of the Sabbath for the Christian

This section can be understood as my short thesis on understanding the Sabbath for the Christian. Other than a few references to other parts of this paper, it could be treated as a stand-alone paper on the Sabbath for the Christian. It includes a short overview of historical thought and practice of Sabbath observance. It concludes with some thoughts on why our views on the Sabbath should not divide us as true believers in Christ.

Part 4: Outline of the History of Sabbath Thought and Practice & Books for More Research

This section gives a historical overview of the thought and practice of the Sabbath from the early church until now. It contains excerpts from the book, "From Sabbath to Lord's Day," edited by D.A. Carson. A brief understanding of history regarding the doctrine and practice of the Sabbath may be the strongest part of this paper in moving us toward a biblical view of the Christian's relationship to the Sabbath. Finally, there are some resources for further study and references to books cited here.

Introduction

Before I started this study, I thought I reasonably understood how the Sabbath commandment related to Christian belief and practice. After reading the long history of theological thought, doctrine, and practices surrounding the Sabbath, I now understand it has a complicated history, and has not been an opened-and-closed question for everyone. However, I believe that we should base our beliefs, doctrines, and practices on New Testament and early Apostolic writings, not on theology developed during medieval times (when superstition abounded, and education was thin), nor on practices from later-century traditions. I do believe our thoughts can be informed and matured by the rich history of Protestant and Catholic writers, as well as reading the historical development of doctrines and practices, such as that about the Sabbath. (Current day thought and practice did not just spring out of a vacuum!)

There are numerous modern Christian traditions that believe and teach that we must “keep the Sabbath” as they did in the Old Testament, because it is one of the Ten Commandments. Much of this thought reaches the United States through the Puritan tradition, practiced in England and Scotland, exported to America. Furthermore, there has been a recent move among some Christians to return to a Jewish view of the Old Testament and thus Gentiles to convert to becoming “Messianic Jews”. I have recently heard sermons from people I respect, and seen Christian books that are widely read (such as “Sabbath” by Dan B. Allender), that start with the premise that as Christians we must follow the commandment to “keep the Sabbath holy.” Do you believe this? Is this a Biblical view of God’s new covenant plan of salvation? Or did this current thought come about by man’s opinion and a blurred understanding of God’s Word through many centuries? Let’s look at the matter by considering both Biblical evidence and historical thought and practice.

Part 1: Your Current Understanding?

Questions to consider BEFORE you read this paper or go further in your studies:

FIRST: Before doing any Biblical or historical study, it would be highly instructive to capture a baseline of your current understanding of the Sabbath (and related issues) as addressed in the questions below.

- 1) How do you think we, as Christians, should “keep the Sabbath” today?
 - a) What is your ideal way (or your “current practice”) of “keeping the Sabbath?” What do you base your answers to this question on? (E.g. your tradition, your Biblical understanding, your upbringing, clear teaching you have heard, etc.)
- 2) Is the fourth Commandment (of the Ten) concerning the Sabbath still required for Christians today? Why or why not?
- 3) What is the Christian’s relationship to the entire Old Testament Law (including the Decalogue [Ten Commandments], circumcision, sacrifices, dietary laws, etc.)?
- 4) Is there a distinction for the Christian between ceremonial laws (observance of days, doing sacrifices, dietary requirements, circumcision, etc.) and moral laws (don’t murder, don’t lie, don’t commit adultery, etc.)?
- 5) If the original Sabbath was on Saturday, why do most Christians worship on Sunday? Were the requirements of the Sabbath day switched to Sunday for the Christian?

SECOND: Read and consider these Scriptures, considering your answers to the above questions.

- 1) Mark 2:23-3:6
- 2) Acts 15:5-21
- 3) Rom. 14:1-9 (14:5)
- 4) Gal. 4:1-11 (4:10-11) (To understand Paul’s whole argument about the Law, read Galatians 2:11-5:26)
- 5) Col. 2:16-23 (2:16)

LAST: Answer these Questions:

- 1) What stood out to you in these scriptures about the requirements of the Sabbath for the Christian?
 - 2) Do these Scriptures change or influence any of the answers you previously made above? (In what way would your answers change? Or, how are your views confirmed?)
 - 3) What questions do you still have about the Sabbath for the Christian?
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Part 2: What the Bible Says

I urge you to re-read the verses being discussed as you enter each section here, so the words of the Bible are fresh in your heart and mind. This section merely gives commentary on the verses referenced above.

Some Verses on the Sabbath from the New Testament

1) **Mark 2:23-3:6 (compare also Matthew 12:1-14 and Luke 6:1-11)**

- a) The Sabbath was created for mankind's benefit, not mankind created for us to be bound by the law to keep the Sabbath.
- b) Jesus is "Lord of the Sabbath". As such He would fulfil it and do away with its requirement by His death and resurrection.
- c) "According to Jesus the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mk. 2:27-28). That is, in the creation story, God did not create a Sabbath and then create a human being to keep it; rather, he first created a human being, then knowing human beings would need rest, created the Sabbath for their benefit. The Lord wants us to enjoy the day of rest, not be burdened by it" (Mounce, 2006).
- d) "The principle back of all that God ordered in his law regarding the Sabbath was that it might be a blessing for man. This day afforded man physical rest and, still more important, time to attend to his spiritual needs. But the Jews had inverted this. They treated man as if he had been created for the purpose of keeping the Sabbath laws. The Sabbath had to be kept, no matter how man fared, whereas God intended that man should be blessed - by the Sabbath, of course, but, if necessary, even at the expense of the Sabbath" (Lenski, 1964, Comments on Mark 2:27).
- e) "But in the Son of man and in his fulfillment of the law the whole ceremonial law would attain its divinely intended purpose and would thus eventually drop away as being no longer needed. This would come about through the death and the resurrection of the Son of man. The new covenant without ceremonies would supersede the old with its ceremonies. Thus, the Jewish Sabbath and all the sacrifices, plus even the Temple, would disappear" (Lenski, 1964, Comments on Mark 2:27).

2) **Acts 15:5-28**

- a) Some of the Pharisees wanted to compel the Gentiles to keep the Law of Moses. The discussion among the early apostles and their letter to Gentile believers contain clear teaching that Gentiles are not required to keep the Old Testament Law (Torah), neither circumcision nor any other ceremonial law. If the early apostles would have thought that Gentiles should at least keep the Sabbath, this would have been the place to mention it. But they lumped the whole of the Old Testament law together as unnecessary for Gentile believers. They observed that God gave the Spirit to the Gentiles by faith, not by keeping the law. Thus, proving that faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ is all that is necessary for a bona-fide relationship with God.
- b) Peter even says in Acts 15:10 that requiring Gentiles to keep any of the Old Testament laws is equivalent to "putting God to the test". When God had clearly shown the New Testament believers that they were justified by faith, through the grace of the Lord Jesus, evidenced by the outpouring of the gift of the Holy Spirit, questioning this by suggesting that Gentile believers go back to the Old Testament Law (including keeping the Sabbath) is equivalent to "putting God to the test" and incurring His wrath.
 - i) "Put God to the test": This is the same Greek word used Hebrews 3:9 where the writer explains that it was because the Children of Israel "tested" (tempted) the Lord their God that they perished in the wilderness for forty years.
 - ii) Further, in answering the devil's temptation, Jesus said specifically in Matthew 4:7 that we should not put God to the test; he was quoting Deuteronomy 6:16.
 - iii) Testing the Lord their God is sin as seen in Exodus 17:7.

- c) “What the texts do demonstrate is that a prescribed observance of the sabbath was no longer required for righteousness in God’s eyes” (ISBE, Comments on Acts 15).
- d) Abstaining from idols, fornication, and strangled animals:
 - i) The leaders of the early church asked the Gentiles ONLY to keep from idols, from fornication, and from strangled animals. As Lenski (comments on Acts 15:20) points out, “James mentions these two points [strangled animals and blood] because the Jewish Christians were especially sensitive regarding them. They, too, knew that these points of the law were abrogated but they still felt a horror of eating blood or any meat that had retained the blood. The Gentile Christians were asked to respect this feeling and thus from motives of brotherly love, and from these alone, to refrain from eating blood and meat that still had its blood.”
 - ii) N.T. Wright comments that forbidding these items was an attempt to not cause needless offense to Jewish Christians, or “to their as-yet-unbelieving Jewish neighbours”. “It seems most likely that what James had in mind was the actual performance of the various rituals involved in pagan worship, including the drinking of blood, ritual prostitution and other orgiastic elements that – even if they were not practised in all pagan temples all of the time! – were assumed to be practised in at least some temples some of the time. This would have been the most obvious and (to Jews) offensive form of continuing pagan behaviour for any Christian to indulge in, and it is hardly asking a great deal for a follower of Jesus Christ to abstain from it.”

3) Rom. 14:1-9 (14:5)

- a) The items being discussed in this passage fall into two categories: what a person eats and if a person holds certain days sacred or not. Both items are direct references to Old Testament laws where Israel is given dietary restrictions and given instructions for holding certain days as sacred.
 - i) Dietary Restrictions: Rom. 14:14 clarifies that Paul is talking about “unclean” foods when talking about one's diet. See Gen. 2:16 where mankind was originally vegetarian. Then see Leviticus 11 and Deut. 14:3-21, where the laws of what kind of meat was clean and unclean are clearly spelled out.
 - ii) Special Days. This is much more clearly discussed in Galatians 4 and in Colossians 2 (discussed below). Lev. 23:2-3. These verses point out that certain days are festivals to the Lord, as appointed by God through Moses. The very first sacred festival and assembly is the Sabbath. Following this is the Passover, Festival of Unleavened Bread, Festival of Weeks, Festival of Tabernacles, etc. Numbers 10:10 and 1 Chron. 23:31 also include the New Moon feast.
- b) Paul makes it clear in this passage that eating or not eating things based on Old Testament laws is no longer binding for Christians. The same holds true about observing one day as holier or being above another. A stronger Christian, with a complete understanding of the effective work of Christ on the cross and in resurrection, will realize that no day (including the Sabbath) is more special (or holier) than any other in the New Covenant. In fact, those who still feel obligated to these Old Covenant commandments are called “weak” in the faith. If someone's conscience is strong, they realize they are not bound to the Torah laws in any way. “Stronger” Christians (whose minds have been transformed by the truth, and their consciences align with that truth) know they can eat anything and no day is holier than any other. However, a person needs to be convinced in own mind, and not go beyond what his or her conscience allows.
- c) Verse 5 talks about regarding every day alike, or regarding one day above another; i.e. viewing the Sabbath as important, or not observing the Sabbath. A Gentile is not required to keep the Sabbath. But, for those who feel it is important to keep the Sabbath (those with a weak conscience), that is fine as they are doing it as unto the Lord, to live for His glory, (as long as they do not see it as a way for them to maintain a righteous relationship with God; see verses in Galatians below).

- d) It appears that in many places in the early church, the Sabbath commandment was still observed by Jewish Christians, but this was most likely out of habit, not a requirement of the Law for salvation. This would be just as circumcision (commanded long before the Decalogue) was no longer required.
- e) “What does this tell us about Paul’s attitude to the Sabbath? The clear implication is that he refuses to dogmatize one way or the other. An individual may keep the Sabbath or not, presumably, in general Paul might have assumed that a Jewish Christian would do so and a Gentile convert would not. The important factor was not which practice one adopted, but one’s motives; to convert for inadequate reasons is reprehensible. Thus Paul was probably content to allow a wide variety of practice in the churches” (Carson, p. 183-184).
- f) Concerning “Sabbath observance on the part of Jewish Christians in Rome, ... it is noticeable that it does not arouse Paul’s ire in the same way as had Sabbath observance in Galatia. ... Where the gospel is not at stake Paul shows acceptance and tolerance towards Jewish-Christian Sabbath observance, though he himself held that such weaker brethren had not fully understood the implications of the transition from the old economy to the new” (Carson, p. 366, 367).

4) Gal. 4:1-11 (4:10-11) (For more clarity and context, read Galatians 2:11 thru 5:26)

- a) The apostle Paul uses very strong language throughout the book of Galatians to combat the thought that keeping the Law is a way to earn God’s favor. He even says that those who are seeking to please God by keeping the Law, “have been severed from Christ” and “have fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4). In giving examples of what he means when talking about keeping the Law, he mentions observing days (like the Sabbath) (4:10) and circumcision (5:2). Paul makes a very stark contrast between the freedom we have in Christ, as children of the living God indwelt by His Spirit (4:5-6) versus the bondage a person is under if they attempt to keep the Law (4:21-31, 5:1).
 - i) Before Paul specifically states that he will be making arguments against adding Jewish elements of the Law to the Christian faith, he shocked his readers by referring to embracing these Old Testament Laws as “deserting Him [God]” and “distorting the gospel” (Gal. 1:6-7). Whereas they thought they were just adding the Law into their Christian practice, Paul saw this as abandoning the truth of the Gospel and calls it for what it is.
- b) Paul lays out the option of either being enslaved under the Law, which acts merely a tutor to lead us to Christ (4:7), or to live knowing God, as His children (4:8-9). Specifically stating that the Galatian believers are observing “days and months and seasons and years”, Paul responds by asking if his work among them had been “in vain” (Gal. 4:10-11).
 - i) “Paul’s work would certainly be in vain if all that it eventually accomplished would be to make the Gentile Galatians exchange their old pagan elements and observances for the old abrogated Jewish elements and observances. Neither brought justification and salvation. Worse than never having had salvation with its liberation from these ‘elements’ is to have had it and then to give it up and to turn back to such ‘elements’” (Lenski, Comments on Gal. 4:11).
 - ii) Seeing the full force of Paul’s contrast of “bondage to the Law” versus “freedom in Christ” may warrant a study of the whole book of Galatians. You can get a jumpstart on this by seeing these online resources: www.blueletterbible.org/study/eo/Gal/Gal000.cfm or overviewbible.com/galatians/
- c) As children of God, with His Spirit in our hearts, we are no longer under the laws of the Old Covenant, such as observing days, month, seasons, years (including the Sabbath) (Gal. 4:10). These laws are referred to as “elements of the world”. People were only under obligation to keep the Torah until Christ came and brought us into a living relationship with God, as His children (Gal. 4:5). The Law (including “observing days”) is called a “worthless elemental thing [of the world]”.
 - i) “Paul calls the ceremonial ordinances of the Mosaic Law worldly elements (Gal. 4:3; Col. 2:8, 20). In Gal. 4:9 he calls them weak and poor elements when contrasted with the great realities

to which they were designed to lead. These elements contain the rudiments of the knowledge of Christ. The Law, as a school-master, was to bring the Jews to this knowledge (Gal. 3:24)” (CWSB, 1991, Article on Greek word, “stoixeion”).

- d) If we trust in law-keeping for our righteousness or as a means to please God, then we are turning away from and rejecting the work of Christ (Gal. 5:4), becoming again enslaved by the Law that cannot give us life (Gal. 4:9). As such we would still be under a curse (Gal. 3:10).
- e) Both Gal. 4:10 and Col. 2:16 – observing “days and months and seasons and years” “refers to Jewish festivals of Sabbath, New Moon, the annual festivals, and Sabbatical or jubilee years” (Carson, p. 180).
- f) “The situation seems to have been that Paul viewed any attempt to impose Sabbath keeping (or indeed the keeping of any of the regular festivals of the Jewish astrological calendars) upon Gentiles as wrong, and any tendency on the part of converts to submit to this coercion as a retrograde step” (Carson, p. 181).
- g) “Sabbath observance in this context, where it is seen as part of the keeping of the law as necessary for salvation, arouses the apostle’s strong reactions.” “... certainly the strength of his language suggests that he sees no reason for a Gentile Christian to observe the Sabbath” (Carson, p. 366).

5) Col. 2:16-23 (2:16) – 3:1-4

- a) Much of the same discussion above for the verses in Romans and Galatians would apply here.
- b) Food, drink, festivals, New Moon, Sabbaths – all are shadows, but the reality/substance is Christ. We have died with Christ to these elemental laws of the world; we are no longer bound to keep them. Christians are not obligated to keep religious rules, even Old Testament commands (“since we died with Christ”). They are referred to as “elementary principles of the world”. Yet, there is still an emphasis on holy living.
- c) “The realities to come are summed up in Christ, who is the substance as opposed to insubstantial shadows now outdated. ... That Paul without any qualification can relegate Sabbaths to shadows certainly indicates that he does not see them as binding and makes it extremely unlikely that he could have seen the Christian first day as a continuation of the Sabbath” (Carson, p. 368).

Part 3: A Coherent View of the Sabbath for the Christian (A Stand-Alone Paper)

Some Background & Thoughts on the Sabbath

It seems that those who argue strongly for “keeping the Sabbath” may have never stepped back to consider the questions we address here and at the beginning of this paper, namely how does the Old Testament Law relate to our salvation in Christ. It is possible they just assume Christians must follow the Ten Commandments without considering these questions from a New Testament perspective.

“Keeping the Sabbath” is most clearly spelled out as a requirement in the Ten Commandments (the Decalogue, found in Exodus 20 & Deuteronomy 5). Some argue that the Ten Commandments should have a special place of importance among Christians, based on how it was given (written by God’s hand). Although that might sound like a reasonable argument, we must allow Jesus and the New Testament writers to tell us if that is a legitimate thought for Christians. As we see by a study of the New Testament, the original Apostles never made a distinction between how one treats the whole Old Testament Law (Torah) and the Decalogue. This question is never even addressed, but rather items such as Sabbaths, feasts, special days, sacrifices, dietary laws, etc., and even circumcision [commanded to Abraham, thus pre-Mosaic law], are all lumped into the same arguments (e.g. Col. 2:16; Rom. 14:2,5; Gal. 4:10). We see that the Decalogue acts as a summary of the Torah; we must treat the Decalogue just as we treat all other

Old Testament laws. Therefore, to understand how a Christian should relate to the Sabbath, we must address the matter of a Christian's relationship to the entire Old Testament Law (Torah).

In the Old Covenant, God's people were required to keep the Torah in order to be in right relationship with God. In contrast, it is interesting to note that neither Jesus, nor any of the New Testament writers, ever tells Gentiles to keep the Sabbath (or follow the Ten Commandments). In fact, it may be shocking to many when they read the New Testament view of the Ten Commandments (and thus the whole of the Law), as spoken by the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians. Paul specifically states that the Decalogue was part of the "ministry of death" and of "condemnation" (2 Cor. 3:7, 9). In contrast, the New Covenant relationship with God is a "ministry of righteousness". The "letter" of the Law only states requirements, which we are not able to adequately keep, and thus it exposes our need for a Savior. It is only the Spirit, who writes God's laws on our hearts, who can "give life" (2 Cor. 3:3, 6). Furthermore, the Law was only given temporarily, until Christ came (Gal. 3:19) in order to establish God's eternal purpose and His desired relationship with His creation in this age (Eph. 3:9-11).

Thus, we learn from the New Testament that we no longer need to keep *any* of the Torah to be in a right relationship with the living God, or to please God. Christ is the fulfillment of the Law and only faith in His finished work (on the cross and in His resurrection) leads to a right relationship with God. The Law was given as a child's teacher to lead us to Christ (Gal. 3:23-24; 4:1-5). No one can be righteous by keeping the Law, and we are not required to keep the Law in any way, nor does attempting to keep the Law please God (Gal. 2:21; 3:11, 19, 24-26). Believing that "keeping the Old Testament laws", including "keeping the Sabbath", can somehow "please our Creator" is in direct contrast to the clear teaching of the New Testament writers, including Jesus. The only way to please God is by being in relationship with Christ Jesus through faith, applying the reality of his death and resurrection to effectively wash away the guilt of our sins and bring us into relationship with God.

However, this does not mean that as a Christian our actions do not matter. (See my one-page reflection paper on faith and works here: [The Relationship between Faith and Works in James and Paul](#)). One function of the Law was to show us God's character, which does not change. Thus, we see many aspects of the Law (those that reveal God's character) still applicable for Christians today. We can lump these into what we might term the "moral" aspects of the Law, such as: do not kill, lie, steal, commit adultery, etc. These moral laws help us understand what it means to love God and others (Matt. 2:26-40). However, the ceremonial and civil laws are part of the Old Covenant that have no more significance for the Christian. (As discussed with some of the verses above.)

Ultimately, we should view the Old Testament Law as Jesus did, and as the Apostle Paul taught. Namely, Christ is the end and fulfillment of the Law (Rom. 10:4). Jesus has fulfilled the Old Testament Law (including ceremonial, moral, and civil aspects), just like a prophecy is "fulfilled" (Matt. 5:17). We no longer hold to the prophecy, but we embrace the realization and fulfillment to which it pointed. Christ Jesus is the realization of the laws, including Sabbath observance, just like an object is the reality of a shadow (Col. 2:17). If we cling to the shadow, then we miss putting emphasis on the object that is projecting that shadow. The reality is Christ! He is our true Sabbath rest. Let's not be distracted by signs and shadows.

The well-respected Dr. Gordon Fee talks about the continuity and discontinuity of the people of God since the time of Christ. The continuity is that "God's Israel" (Gal 6:16) is now "an *Israel* in continuation with the past but now composed of Jew and Gentile alike as the one people of God." The discontinuity is that "Christ is the 'goal of the law' (Rom 10:4), and the Spirit is 'the promised Holy Spirit' (Gal 3:14; Eph 1:13). Christ's death and resurrection have brought an end to Torah observance (living on the basis of the Old Testament law, Rom 7:4-6; 8:2-3); being led by the Spirit has replaced observance as God's way of fulfilling Torah (Gal 5:18); indeed, the righteous requirement of Torah is now fulfilled in those who walk in/by the Spirit (Rom 8:4)" (Fee, p. 4).

Even if someone does elevate the Decalogue as important for Christians, it is highly instructive to note that we find all the Ten Commandments, *except* for the one about "keeping the Sabbath", restated in some way for us as Christians to follow (as moral laws that reflect God's character). Observing the

Sabbath, as a ceremonial commandment, is never given as an instruction for Gentile Christians, but it is specifically denied as being required for Christians. As a Christian, united with Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God, we are exhorted to live a holy life, just as God is Holy; thus the Old Testament commandments related to morality show us what it means to live a holy life. Again, this is not about following Laws to please God, but about being in right relationship with the Living God, the Holy One, who indwells us.

Note that if a person overlooks what appears to be the clear teaching of the New Testament regarding Sabbath observance for Christians, but somehow concludes that the Sabbath command is still in force for Christians today, then they still need to address the question of whether the Saturday Sabbath was switched to Sunday. There is no teaching in the New Testament that this was the case. “The evidence from the New Testament writers’ perspective on Sabbath rest point to there being no warrant for applying the physical rest of the Old Testament to the New Testament Lord’s Day” (Carson, p. 215). This was a much later development in Church history and thought. It should be rejected as unbiblical. “To call the Christian Sunday ‘the Sabbath’ is to give it a wrong and a misleading name, to mix Judaism and Christianity, and to introduce a false and a dangerous legalism into the observance of Sunday” (Lenski, 1964, Comments on Mark 2:28)

An Overview of Sabbath Thought and Practice from History

History is a window that sheds light and gives clarity. Whether we realize it or not, we don't form our thoughts and opinions in a vacuum; our views have often been influenced by the current thought on any particular topic or based on certain traditions we have inherited or been taught. In order to understand our own views of the Sabbath, it is important to see how the Sabbath was thought about and practiced since the time of the early church. (The following paragraphs give an overview of the details that can be found in the last part of this paper, “An Outline of the History of Sabbath Thought and Practice”.)

It is interesting to note that the early church (up until the Middle Ages) rejected the thought of keeping the Sabbath as the observation of a certain day. The New Testament writers and early church Fathers all argued that the Sabbath was just a shadow of the true rest found in our salvation in Christ. Likewise, the post-Apostolic Fathers (during the 2nd and 3rd centuries) seemed to unanimously agree that Christ is the reality of the Sabbath and rejected the thought of keeping one day for the Sabbath, as an outmoded practice for the Jewish religion.

However, this radically changed in the Middle Ages where there was a move toward Sabbath-keeping (on Sunday) for the Christian. This was implemented in full force in 325 A.D. when the Emperor Constantine made a law that there was to be no work on Sunday (except for farmers). This was not a theological development but was a move implemented by legislation and from the people’s desire to have a day to rest and worship the Lord. It was only in late Medieval times that Thomas Aquinas came up with some theological justification for Sabbath-keeping for Christians, but it was not tied to a certain day (like Sunday).

The thought that Christians were required to keep a Sabbath day was reversed again during the Reformation. The major reformers (Luther and Calvin) moved back toward New Testament teaching and the Apostolic view that there was no religious obligation for Christians to observe the Sabbath on any day. However, they stated that as a matter of convenience, it was profitable to rest and to worship on the day that had been set apart for rest by the laws of their society (Sunday).

Unfortunately, this view was lost by the end of the Reformation, where the thought turned again toward a more Sabbatarian view. Tragically, Bullinger (d. 1575) even argued that breaking the Sabbath (Sunday) should be punishable by death, as spoken of in Numbers 15. This view of “keeping the Sabbath” penetrated the thought and society in Great Britain most strongly. This view was embraced by the Puritans, and ultimately exported to America. Thus, religiously observing “Sunday as Sabbath” became a predominant view of early American thought and practice.

Christ Jesus as the Reality of all Old Testament Shadows, including the Sabbath

As is expressed by the New Testament writers and the Apostolic Fathers, Christ is the reality and fulfillment of many Old Testament commandments, types, and stories. For instance, Christ Jesus is the true Temple (Matt. 12:6; John 2:19-21), the seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16), the true and last Adam (Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:45), the greater Solomon (Matt. 12:42), and a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:6, 10; 6:20). Furthermore, it is stated clearly and explicitly that Christ Jesus is the reality of the Sabbath. He is the substance; the Sabbath is the shadow (Col. 2:16-17).

The true meaning of the Sabbath for the Christian should be (1) that our whole life is reserved for God, and (2) that our salvation in Christ is the true Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4:9-10 [see vs. 4-11]). The reality of Christ as the true Sabbath rest replaces the sign and shadow. Don't be distracted from the "object" and reality (Christ) by focusing on the obsolete "shadow" (an actual Sabbath day, whether the 7th day or 1st day of the week). In the Apostle Paul's words, adding Sabbath-observance as a requirement of the Gospel is equivalent to "deserting God" and "distorting the gospel" (Gal. 1:6-7)! He even says that those who are seeking to please God by keeping the Law (including keeping the Sabbath), "have been severed from Christ" and "have fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:4). What a sad and serious thing to be distracted from the goal and focused on a minor issue.

Our Practice of Sabbath today

Although it is clear that our salvation is not in any way based on observing a Sabbath day, I would argue that there are benefits to observing a time of Sabbath-rest. In the creation narrative God rested on the seventh day (Genesis 2:2); this first hint to a Sabbath-principle gives insight into the way God created humans and our need for rest (and fellowship with Him and one another). As Jesus said, the Sabbath was created for mankind (Mark 2:27). In the age of busyness in which we live, we must make time for spiritual disciplines, a time to fellowship with the living God who is our Creator and Father. We need time to meditate on His Word (Psalm 1:2, Joshua 1:8). Therefore, taking a day for rest, for worshiping God and fellowshiping with others, is a gift from God and a healthy principle for all people, especially those living in relationship with the living God. In our culture today, we would do well to make a regular holy habit of resting one day of the week, spending this day in fellowship with God and with others, and doing acts of kindness. Because our culture (in America and many other places in the world) typically expects a five-day work week, we are privileged to be able to take advantage of regular rest, and regular times of communion with God, and fellowship with others. We are foolish not slow down, to take advantage of this opportunity to rest and worship God as we were created to do.

However, as clearly pointed out in the scriptures above, practicing Sabbath-rest is *not* a requirement or commandment that earns us God's favor or righteousness. It is not on the same level as the moral commandments God gave to His people. To not "keep the Sabbath" today is not a sin; nor is "keeping the Sabbath" a commandment we must keep.

The problem is that we often take profitable spiritual disciplines (like resting and fellowshiping on a certain day, or reading the Bible/Quiet Time, praying, acts of mercy, etc.) and make them a part of our "feeling right before God". However, we need to see ourselves "in Christ" (crucified, buried, raised, seated, etc.) and thus righteous as He is righteous (Eph. 2:4-10). Our righteousness is based on the work of Christ, not our keeping certain commandments. But, that being said, "loving God" will indeed show itself in obedience to His Word, desires, and will. We will live righteously if we truly walk with God.

Please consider the following verses for ideas of how to spend our time on a day of rest:

- 1) Eph. 5:18b-21: "but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ."
- 2) Matt. 18:20: Jesus said, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

- 3) Heb. 10:24-25 “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another ...”

For further development of this understanding of the gift of Sabbath-rest, I might suggest you read the book, “Keeping the Sabbath Wholly” by Marva J. Dawn. (See the description in the section below entitled, “Books for More Research”.) Although she takes the practice of Sabbath-rest beyond what most of us might do, reading the book gives rich insight into healthy practices of Sabbath rest. It will most likely inspire you and give ideas for practicing Sabbath-rest. (I hear similar positive comments about Mark Buchanan’s book, “The Rest of God”, but have not read it myself.)

Conclusion

The Ten Commandments, which includes the clearest command to “keep the Sabbath,” is representative of the entire Old Testament with all its laws. If someone claims that, as Christians, we must keep the Ten Commandments, and thus “keep the Sabbath,” this is equivalent to saying we must keep all the Old Testament commands contained in the Torah. However, the New Testament treats the entire Old Testament Laws in a consistent manner, namely, “fulfilled in Christ Jesus.” Christ is the end of the law for all who believe. (Rom. 10:4)

Thus, let's be clear in our own hearts and minds that there are two distinct covenants that God has made with human beings (2 Cor. 3:7-11). The Old one was for the Jews, as a slave-master to lead them to the New one (Galatians 3:24). The Old one required that God’s people follow His Laws and commandments (which they could not do, thus revealing their weakness and need for a Savior). The New Covenant is for all people who would receive it; it is a covenant entered by faith, no longer by keeping the Laws written in the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant of Law (letter) only condemned people (2 Cor. 3:6), is now obsolete (Hebrews 8:13), and is no longer applicable to those in the New relationship with God.

However, as people in relationship with God the Father, in union with Christ, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we are to live righteously, full of love (fulfilling the moral commands of the Old Covenant and following the two greatest commandments of loving God and loving others). Thus, we only follow the “law of Christ” (I Cor. 9:21) and the Holy Spirit, writing God’s commands in our hearts (2 Cor. 3:3).

God laid out the principle that taking regular rest is a healthy practice: God made us like this from the very beginning. We would do well to develop a regular practice of taking Sabbath-rest to be in fellowship with God and with others. But we should not make it a requirement, nor judge others based on their observing this rest. It has nothing to do with our righteousness or making us more pleasing to God.

Although my conclusions about whether Christians should keep the Sabbath should now be clear, I don't want the emphasis of this writing to be “negative” (i.e. “don’t keep the Sabbath”), but rather act as a positive exhortation to live in fellowship with the living God and with His people; the main focus of our lives should be enjoying our salvation in Christ as our true Sabbath rest, loving Jesus, and being in the presence of the living God. “Love God and love one another” (Matt. 22:26-40; Mark 12:30-31).

Views on the Sabbath Should Not Divide True Believers in Christ

I have shared my thoughts and convictions in these pages; I have encouraged you to walk this journey with me. However, regardless of what conclusions you reach, I embrace all members of Christ's body; this is not a topic we should divide over, but a journey to enjoy together, as clearly discussed in Romans 14.

Without getting into details, I embrace the saying, “In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, love.” I believe this is a biblical view, based on Gal. 3:28, 1 Cor. 12:12-13, Romans 14, etc. As I have gotten older, the number of theological items I am willing to strongly debate over have greatly decreased. Even if we passionately discuss the few “essentials” of the Christian faith, we must do so in love, as the greatest commandments are to “love God” and “love one another”. The matter of “keeping the Sabbath” is surely not an essential of the Christian faith. It is one of those items in which we must allow for liberty of understanding and practice.

Here are some principles to consider, regardless of what conclusions you reach on the Sabbath:

(1) **Truth** (John 3:21, 4:23) – our actions must be governed by Truth. The truth of God’s Word should shape our thoughts and actions. We must not allow our preconceived ideas and comfortable practices to force us to interpret the Word in a way that leaves us unchanged and unchallenged.

(2) **Grace and Love** (Eph. 4:15) – Yet, as true Believers in Christ, we must give each other grace for different convictions. We may read the same material and come to different conclusions. This should not divide us, as our oneness is based on Christ, not on particular doctrines. The *greatest* truth is that God is love and we should love God and love others (as we love ourselves)! This principle of Love cannot be overridden based on a pet doctrine (that is not one of the few “essentials”).

(3) **Conscience** (Rom. 14, 1 Cor. 8:7-12) – Furthermore, based on someone’s background and experiences, they may have a conviction of conscience different from ours; one that does not allow them to enjoy the freedom they have available in Christ. The conscience can be transformed by the truth and the working of the Holy Spirit, but only in an atmosphere of safety, where grace and love are extended. We must allow for these differences and love others with different convictions.

Part 4: Outline of the History of Sabbath Thought and Practice

Below you will find excerpts quoted from the book, “From Sabbath to Lord’s Day”, edited by D.A. Carson. These excerpts will walk you through the history of Sabbath thought and practice from the time of the early church. Seeing the history of Sabbath doctrine and practice may be the strongest part of this paper in convincing you of the biblical view of the Christian’s relationship to the Sabbath. Although I have summarized some of this material in the “Overview of Sabbath Thought and Practice from History” section above, I strongly urge you to read at least the first three or four historical sections: thought and practice from the Apostolic Church, Post-Apostolic Church, and the time of Constantine and Augustine. (Please see my note about Carson’s book in the References section below.)

Apostolic Church: True Sabbath is the Salvation provided in Christ (Metaphorical Interpretation):

“Thus the true Sabbath, which has come with Christ, is not a literal, physical rest but is seen as consisting in the salvation that God has provided. The passages unfold what this Sabbath means. It includes the good news of deliverance, liberation and forgiveness brought by the mighty works and preaching of Jesus (Luke 4), release from the burden of the law (Matt. 11), the accomplishment of eschatological salvation with its giving of life (John 5), the fulfillment of the divine rest of Genesis 2:2,3, which was intended for humanity to share (John 5 and Heb. 3,4), and that salvation rest as a present heavenly reality entered by believing and ceasing from one’s own works (Heb. 3,4). In short the physical rest of the Old Testament Sabbath has become the salvation rest of the true Sabbath. Believers in Christ can now live in God’s Sabbath that has already dawned. Jesus’ working to accomplish this superseded the Old Testament Sabbath (John 5:17) and so does the doing of God’s work that He now requires of people – believing in the one God has sent (John 6:28, 29). In fact, the Sabbath keeping now demanded is the cessation from reliance on one’s own works (Heb. 4:9,10)” (Carson, p. 215).

“the writer moves from earthly shadows to spiritual realities. Christ brings the spiritual reality; His work fulfills the intent of the Sabbath, and with Christ comes that for which the Sabbath existed. The reality of the Sabbath rest supersedes the sign” (Carson, p. 215).

“The evidence from the New Testament writers’ perspective on Sabbath rest point to there being no warrant for applying the physical rest of the Old Testament to the New Testament Lord’s Day” (Carson, p. 215-216).

Post-Apostolic Church View of the Sabbath ~ 2nd and 3rd Centuries (before 325):

Concerning Justin Martyr, Ptolemaeus, Irenaeus, Tertullian: “**It is entirely clear that for all these writers the literal commandment to rest one day in seven was a temporary ordinance for Israel**

alone. The Christian fulfills the commandment by devoting all his time to God. The rationale for this interpretation depended, of course, on a wholly ‘religious’ understanding of the commandment; no writer of the period betrays any thought of its being a provision for needed physical rest. The Jewish form of observance was therefore ‘idleness’. The commandment was really about devotion to God, and therefore Jesus’ principle of intensifying the Law (by which, for example, the prohibition of murder was extended to hatred) made the Sabbath commandment teach the devotion of the whole of life to God. This was the basic principle from which the Fathers argued that literal Sabbath observance was not required of Christians.” (Carson, p. 266-267).

(As further explanation of this early period of the “fathers” and of Tertullian in particular, see p. 380.)

“Ignatius rejected Sabbath keeping, seeing it as having become outmoded together with the whole Jewish religion and expecting Jewish Christians to be ‘strong’ and take the same approach. This was a common attitude among second-century writers” (Carson, p. 380).

“For Justin, the Sabbath is emphatically in the same category as circumcision and festivals; they were ordinances that Christians do not observe because they were given to the Jews on account of their hardness of heart and sin” (Carson, p. 267).

“Yet the Sabbath is never treated with the special regard that its place in the Decalogue would seem to demand; rather **it is consistently classed with the temporary ceremonial law.**” – Valentinian Ptolemaeus seems to be the first one who “divided the Law of God (...) into three parts, which correspond to the now traditional division into **moral, judicial, and ceremonial law.** ... Despite his explicit identification of the Decalogue with the first category, Ptolemaeus gives as examples of the third category ‘offerings, circumcision, Sabbath, fasting, Passover, unleavened bread,’ and discusses the Sabbath as an example of this third category.” (Carson, p. 268).

“Irenaeus ... law of Moses, explaining it as a tutor in righteousness, useful in its time but now transcended in Christ. But even here the Sabbath is mentioned alongside commandments of the Decalogue only in the same way as tithing is. For Irenaeus the Decalogue *qua* law of Moses was not distinctive: **all Mosaic commandments, including the Ten Commandments, find their fulfillment in Christ.**” (Carson, p. 268-269).

“It must be stressed that, outside Jewish Christianity, all second-century references to the Sabbath commandment either endorse the metaphorical interpretation or reject the literal interpretation as Judaistic or do both.” (Carson, p. 269).

“... he is expounding the **Sabbath spiritually in terms of the whole of Christian life, which must be occupied with the works of the spirit rather than the works of the world.**” (Carson, p. 279).

Constantine, A.D. 321:

“On 3 March, **A.D. 321 the emperor Constantine promulgated a law requiring a total, public rest from work** ‘on the most honourable day of the Sun’. Only farmers were exempt. ... **This legislation is the earliest clear reference to Sunday as a day free from work**” (Carson, p. 280).

“for in Christian thought the idea of Sabbath rest had been so consistently reinterpreted that physical rest from work was precisely what it no longer meant. ... The Sabbath commandment enjoins abstention not from work but from sin.” (Carson, p. 281).

“Service of God, contemplation, worship, detachment from worldly things, festival, and fulfillment are the ideas suggested by the patristic notion of Sabbath rest. **By contract, mere abstention from work is consistently and continually ruled out and condemned as idleness.** The Fathers could see no value in inactivity and hardly ever recognized in the Sabbath commandment provision for necessary physical relaxation.” (Carson, p. 282).

Augustine, A.D. 354-430:

“‘Daily and hourly, whenever you are not in church, devote yourself to your work.’ **While work must be laid aside for worship, it must not be laid aside for physical relaxation.** For the patristic church, the corollary of freedom from work on Sunday had to be the complete devotion of Sunday to worship.” ...

“Some who discuss the Sabbath and the Lord’s Day at length neither mention Sunday rest nor endorse Eusebius’ notion of the transfer of Sabbath to Sunday. This is true of Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Epiphanius, Ambrose, Ambrosiaster, and the whole vast corpus of Augustine’s work. Moreover there seem to be very few attempts to prohibit Sunday work by ecclesiastical regulation until the sixth century. So little importance was attached to Sunday rest that in monastic life it was not even observed.” (Carson, p. 286).

“**Augustine**’s own treatment of the Sabbath commandment carried over the dominant patristic tradition of spiritualizing its meaning, ... So was his application of the commandment to the spiritual rest of Christian life and Christian hope. Augustine never treated Christian obedience to the Sabbath commandment as the observation of a day. The Sabbath rest is that of Psalm 46:10, ‘Be still and know that I am God,’ and its reference is primarily eschatological, to the eternal Sabbath where ‘we shall be still and see; we shall see and we shall love; we shall love and we shall praise.’ He could also expound it without explicit eschatology, relating it to the peace of mind that results from the sanctifying work of the Spirit in this life, but more often he treated its present application in the context of Christian hope.” (Carson, p. 300). “The Sabbath commandment is singled out as precisely the one commandment of the Decalogue that Christians are not to take literally. ... ‘Our Sabbath is in the heart’ is Augustine’s distinctive theme.” (Carson, p. 301).

The Sabbath in the Medieval Church (Middle Ages) ~ A.D. 476 - 1492:

“In spite of the Constantinian legislation **it is clear that true Sabbatarianism was a medieval, not a patristic, development.**” (Carson, p. 287).

See the section on “**Early Medieval Sabbatarianism**” (pp. 302-304) for the history of the growth of legislated observance of the Sabbath, and equating it with Mosaic laws of keeping the Sabbath.

Following are a few quotes from the start of that section.

“Medieval Sabbatarianism was not a properly theological development at all. It grew from below, from popular sentiment, and was imposed from above, by legislation. It was a long time before the theologians provided much more than a means of accommodating it” (Carson, p. 302).

“The last significant protest against Sabbatarian tendencies is a letter written by Gregory the Great in A.D. 603” (Carson, p. 303).

“The Council of Orleans (538) forbade rural labor, which Constantine had specifically allowed, ...” “In the same century Gregory of Tours was telling exemplary tales of divine judgment on the sin of Sunday labor, and the ‘Epistle of Heaven,’ which purported to give direct divine sanction to a strictly Sabbatarian Lord’s day observance, made its first appearance” (Carson, p. 303).

“The laws for Sunday rest had a minimum of genuinely ethical content and existed for several centuries as rules in search of a theological context and justified by a divine authority curiously difficult to locate. Their hope of reaching into the hearts and lives of Christian people was small and illegitimate, but doubtless they did succeed ... in burdening the consciences of both the ignorantly pious and the superstitiously irreligious” (Carson, p. 303).

“Peter Comestor (d.1179) may have been the first exegete to apply the Sabbath commandment literally to Christian observance of the first day and to maintain, on the basis of Genesis 2:2, that ‘the Sabbath has been always observed by some nations even before the Law.’ We should note the late appearance of a theology adequate to justify a longstanding Sabbatarian practice” (Carson, p. 304).

Argument from Late Medieval time that Sabbath-keeping is a “moral law”

“In the Middle Ages The moral law contained in the Mosaic corpus was still binding because moral law is unchanging, and the Sabbath commandment was indeed directly applicable to Christians by virtue of its inclusion in the Decalogue, the summary of the moral law.” (Carson, p. 304-305).

“[Thomas] Aquinas taught that all men are bound by Natural Law, i.e. by moral obligations discoverable by human reason without the aid of special revelation. The Mosaic law (the “Old Law”) may be

divided into moral, ceremonial, and judicial precepts. All its moral precepts are also precepts of Natural Law, moreover, all its moral precepts are reducible to the Decalogue, ...” (Carson, p. 305). “Thus, whereas the ceremonial precepts of the Old Law were entirely abrogated when Christ fulfilled them, all the moral precepts are Natural law precepts and cannot be abrogated.” ... “The Sabbath commandment as it is found in the Decalogue itself is ‘a moral precept, inasmuch as it enjoins man to set apart some time for the things of God In this respect it is comprised among the precepts of the Decalogue, but not as to the time appointed, since in this regard it is a ceremonial precept.’” (Carson, p. 306).

“But the real importance of Aquinas’ argument is its placing the Sabbath commandment firmly within the moral precepts of the Decalogue considered as a Natural Law. ... become the prominent view of late medieval and traditional Roman Catholic theology. ... Roman Catholic observance of Sunday in theory remains unchanged” (Carson, p. 306-307).

Sabbath and the Protestant Tradition:

“... Sabbatarian doctrine that was accepted nearly unanimously in the scholastic theology of the later Middle Ages. This development was reversed by the Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century, who returned to a less Sabbatarian position closer to the views of the New Testament writers and the early Fathers” (Carson, p. 312).

“For **Luther** the Christian is in no way bound to observe a weekly day of rest or even of worship *as a matter of religious obligation*. ... The Sabbath commandment remained relevant to Christians, not only in a spiritual sense, but also with reference to bodily rest, partly because of our physical needs, more importantly in order to secure leisure for worship and religious instruction” (Carson, p. 314).

“Like Luther, **Calvin** stresses that the institution of the weekly Sunday is a matter of convenience and order only, since daily public worship would be impracticable. ... Both daily work and recreation should be suspended for the whole duration of the day in order that the whole day should be devoted to corporate and private worship and religious instruction” (Carson, p. 316-317).

By end of the Reformation there was a Trend toward Sabbatarianism:

“The Reformers’ break with medieval Sabbatarianism was not complete; neither Luther nor Calvin held that the fourth commandment requires Christians to rest on Sunday, but both held that, as a matter of convenience and order, a weekly day of rest for worship was needed. The individual Christian must rest and worship on the day prescribe by human authority (in practice, Sunday); he is at liberty only to exceed this requirement. Moreover, both Luther and Calvin placed their teaching about Sunday observance within their treatment of the fourth commandment, and in their commentaries on Genesis, though not elsewhere, both taught that a weekly day of rest for worship was ordained at creation. It is therefore not surprising that other Protestant theologians easily succumbed to the attractions of obvious consistency and fell back on the scholastic position of a weekly day of rest for worship as the natural law content of the Sabbath commandment.” (Carson, p. 317-318).

“In the **Reformed theologians** Zwingli, ... we find what was to become a general Reformed position: that God’s law requires a weekly day of rest for worship, but does not specify which day.” (Carson, p. 318).

“The Sabbatarian position of Heinrich Bullinger (d. 1575), Zwingli’s successor at Zurich, was an easy step from Calvin but one that wholly changed Calvin’s emphasis. ... he effectively secures the **authority of the Sabbath commandment for Sunday observance**” (Carson, p. 318).

“From Numbers 15 he [Bullinger] infers the duty of the Christian magistrate to **punish Sabbath breakers**, even by death. He was perhaps the first Protestant theologian to discuss in detail what may and may not be done on Sunday, allowing works of mercy and necessity, and censuring such abuses of the Sabbath as ‘fleshly pleasures,’ ‘any handy occupation,’ and sleeping late. **Bullinger has been cited at length because of his very wide influence**” (Carson, p. 319).

“Even more emphatically Sabbatarian was the teaching of Bullinger’s successor at Zurich, Johannes Wolfius, ... Ursinus ... Zanchius. ... widely respected in their day, may be taken as representative of Reformed theology at the end of the century. Ursinus, the more conservative of the two, was responsible for the very non-Sabbatarian-sounding Heidelberg Catechism (1563) – which nevertheless reverses the order of Calvin’s thought on the fourth commandment, teaching that it requires first the duties of public worship and secondly the ‘spiritual rest’ of sanctification” (Carson, p. 319-320).

“Zanchius’s treatment of the fourth commandment is one of the longest before the great controversial monographs of the seventeenth century, ... Zanchius place it [weekly day for rest and worship] firmly in the category of moral (natural) law, which has never been and cannot be abrogated. ‘Nature teaches all men’ that they should devote one day in seven to public worship” (Carson, p. 321).

The English Protestant view of Sabbath

“Sabbatarian views on the Continent never penetrated the fabric of national and social life to the extent that they did in England, Scotland, and America, but the reasons for this are not only theological.” (Carson, p. 321).

“... the Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century, who returned to a less Sabbatarian position closer to the views of the New Testament writers and the early Fathers. A new Sabbatarianism, however, rapidly developed in the Protestant tradition, especially in English Puritanism, and became especially characteristic of English, Scottish, and American Protestantism. ... more rapid than the medieval development of Sabbatarian doctrine, it also resulted in a stricter Sabbatarianism. The logical outcome, the most consistent form of Protestant Sabbatarianism, was seventh-day Sabbatarianism” (Carson, p. 321).

** See page 324 for the Puritan view of Sabbath: summarizing main points: Creation-ordinance Sabbath, a moral law, contained in Decalogue (which contained “nothing ceremonial” and thus “nothing to be abrogated”),

“A further problem, however, more specific to the fourth commandment, arose from the treatment of the Decalogue as wholly moral, since it might be thought that only the Seventh-Day Sabbatarians could hold this view consistently” (Carson, p. 325).

“The Puritan doctrine was not that the fourth commandment enjoins rest for rest’s sake. All held that that Christian Sabbath rest was for worship and Puritan strictness about resting the whole day involved a corresponding devotion of the whole day to religious duties. ... Some seventeenth-century Sabbatarians thought that all Mosaic Sabbath regulations outside the Decalogue were abrogated ceremonial and judicial laws applicable to the Mosaic Sabbath only. Others advocated the observance of at least some of them, perhaps even the death penalty for Sabbath breaking. Recreation on the Sabbath was opposed by almost all on the grounds that it evidently impeded the devotion of the whole day to religious exercises and was condemned in Isaiah 58:13, though the meaning of this verse was debated” (Carson, p. 326).

“The height of Sabbatarian exaggeration is probably represented by John Wells’ 800-page volume on the duties of Sunday observance, *The Practical Sabbatarian* (1668), which included a chapter entitled, ‘A plea with Christians to outvie the Jews in Sabbath-holiness and observations’” (Carson, p. 327).

“No less than seventeenth century Puritans, **nineteenth century** Sabbatarians were intent on regulating the social behavior of the nation by the authority of the State. ‘It is not possible for the mind of man to measure the dimensions of that guilt, which the deliberate profanation of the Lord’s Day under the Gospel dispensation in a free Protestant country involves.’ ... Relatively new in the nineteenth century was an emphasis on the social value of a day or rest ... especially after 1850” (Carson, p. 328).

Seventh-day Sabbatarian doctrine:

“**Seventh-day Sabbatarian** doctrine differed from Puritan doctrine *only* in teaching that the Sabbath must be kept from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday. ... Seventh-day writers hardly needed to do more than insist on the plain and logical implications of the Puritan estimate of the Decalogue. ‘The Ten

words are a perfect and complete, standing, unchangeable Rule of Life, in all matters of Duty to be performed, and of Sin to be avoided” (Carson, p. 333).

“Seventeenth-century Seventh-Day Baptists were obliged to account for the historical prevalence of Sunday observance, and explained it, as Protestants of the time were accustomed to do with all ecclesiastical abuses inherited from the medieval church, as an invention of the papal Antichrist.” (p. 333, “In the statement ‘Sunday is the pope’s invention’ he [Oswald Glait] was perhaps the first to express what became a persistent seventh-day conviction.”) (Carson, p. 334).

Theological and Biblical Observations from Chapter 12 of D.A. Carson’s book

- 1) “Many Sabbatarian arguments appeal to the fourth commandment and assert that the place of the Sabbath requirement in the Decalogue means that it is to be seen as a binding moral law normative for all people in the same way as the rest of the Decalogue. ... Does the Decalogue (and thus the included 4th commandment about the Sabbath) somehow have a unique role in relation to the rest of the Mosaic covenant and Old Testament Law?” p. 356
 - a) The Decalogue is actually not distinct from the rest of the O.T. covenant, but is in fact “representative of and foundational to the Mosaic covenant. This should lead one to expect that what is true of the place of the covenant as a whole will also be true of the Decalogue. Just as the Mosaic covenant as a whole is to be seen as a particular expression of the will of God for His people for a certain period of their history, so as the Decalogue to be viewed in the same light.”
 - b) “The continuing influence of these commandments will depend, therefore, not on their status as the Decalogue but, ... on their relation to the later and fuller reflection of God’s character and the fulfillment of God’s will for His people, both of which can be seen in Christ. It is this factor that provides the only criterion for deciding whether the fourth commandment in particular has continuing force as moral law and not the fact that it is part of the Decalogue.” p. 358
- 2) The Decalogue and the Law in the NT: “It is of significance in itself that this question of the use of the Decalogue is not distinguished in the New Testament from the larger question of the use of the Old Testament law in general.” p. 368
 - a) “Christ is the terminus of the law in its connection with righteousness because through Him comes faith as the new means to righteousness. ... the believer in Christ is no longer under law as a rule of life. Instead the believer walks by the Spirit, and though no longer under the law, he or she in fact finds that the requirements of the law are fulfilled through the Spirit in his or her life (Rom. 8:4). The Spirit produces love and love turns out to be the fulfilling of the law (cf. Gal. 5:14). So for Paul the central thrust of the law is now worked out in the believer by the Spirit in terms of love. ... he is no longer under the law of Moses but under the will of God in its fuller and later expression in the ‘law of Christ’. In all of his discussion and terminology Paul treats the law of Moses as a total package and makes no distinction between the moral and ceremonial elements within in.” p. 370
 - b) “However, the Decalogue has no special status in Paul’s ethics, and the prime factor in his decision about that carries over from the old dispensation is the relationship of the various commandments and regulations to the supreme fulfillment of God’s will in Christ and the new situation brought about by His death and Resurrection.” p. 371
- 3) Galatians 4:8-11 “Sabbath observance in this context, where it is seen as part of the keeping of the law as necessary for salvation, arouses the apostle’s strong reactions. ... certainly the strength of his language suggests that he sees no reason for a Gentile Christian to observe the Sabbath.” p. 366
- 4) Romans 14:5-6 “... Sabbath observance on the part of Jewish Christians in Rome, and it is noticeable that it does not arouse Paul’s ire in the same way as had Sabbath observance in Galatia.” ... “Where the gospel is not at stake Paul shows acceptance and tolerance towards Jewish-Christian Sabbath

observance, though he himself held that such weaker brethren had not fully understood the implications of the transition from the old economy to the new.” p. 366, 367

- 5) Colossians 2:16-17 “The realities to come are summed up in Christ, who is the substance as opposed to insubstantial shadows now outdated.” “That Paul without any qualification can relegate Sabbaths to shadows certainly indicates that he does not see them as binding and makes it extremely unlikely that he could have seen the Christian first day as a continuation of the Sabbath.” p. 368
 - 6) The last section of Carson’s book (from page 382 to 405), talk about the transference of the Sabbath day from Saturday to Sunday. I only skimmed this part as I don’t believe it is important for my purposes in this study.
 - a) “For the first three centuries of the Christian era the first day of the week was never confounded with the “sabbath”; the confusion of the Jewish and Christian institutions was due to declension from apostolic teaching” (Vine, 1996).
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Books for More Research:

The following list of books could be used for further research into this topic. Some I have referenced above, others I have not. After the book publisher information, I give a little comment on the book from my perspective.

Carson, D.A. (Ed.). (1999). *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, historical, and theological investigation*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers. – Carson is very well respected as a scholar and theologian. This is a theologically dense book, but one widely respected when dealing with the matter of the Sabbath and the Christian faith. It is based on interpreting primary sources from church history. Each chapter of the book was written by different scholars, edited by Carson. This is the one that I have quoted extensively above. I skimmed through some parts that I was not interested in for my current studies; I imagine you would do the same.

Dawn, Marva J. (1989). *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly (ceasing, resting, embracing, feasting)*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. – A thorough review of the book can be found at: eerdword.com/2011/12/14/review-of-marva-dawns-keeping-the-sabbath-wholly/. The Description on Eerdman’s website (and on Amazon) says, “This refreshing book invites the reader to experience the wholeness and joy that come from observing God’s order for life--a rhythm of working six days and setting apart one day for rest, worship, festivity, and relationships. Dawn develops a four-part pattern for keeping the Sabbath: (1) ceasing--not only from work but also from productivity, anxiety, worry, possessiveness, and so on; (2) resting-- of the body as well as the mind, emotions, and spirit--a wholistic rest; (3) embracing--deliberately taking hold of Christian values, of our calling in life, of the wholeness God offers us; (4) feasting--celebrating God and his goodness in individual and corporate worship as well as feasting with beauty, music, food, affection, and social interaction.” www.eerdmans.com/Products/0457/keeping-the-sabbath-wholly.aspx

Donato, Christopher John (Ed.) (2011). *Perspectives on the Sabbath; 4 Views*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group. – I only read a few sections of this book, but it was written by four scholars, each with a different understanding of the Sabbath. The book is laid out as such: each of the four authors first gives their view of the Sabbath, showing proofs for their beliefs from the Bible, history, etc. Then, each of the others are allowed to answer (in rebuttal). The author of the particular view is then allowed to make final remarks, in response to the rebuttals. If you are doing extensive research on the Sabbath and want to understand the different Christian views (from a somewhat scholarly perspective), then this book would be important to read.

Buchanan, Mark (2007). *The Rest of God*. Thomas Nelson Publishers. I have not read this book but heard good things about it. Here is part of a Publisher’s Weekly review found on Amazon, “Christian pastor Buchanan delves into the concept of the Sabbath, by which he means both a day and an attitude. He

campaigns persuasively for readers to revive the Sabbath as a refuge from our pervasive and spiritually destructive culture of busyness. Buchanan's prose is fresh and immediate, earnest and self-effacing at the same time. Each chapter is peppered with vivid stories from his own childhood and ministries as well as insightful retellings of biblical narratives. ... The book can be taken as a whole or read piecemeal as rejuvenating brief sermons. It will aid those Christians looking to step off the hamster wheel of modern working lifestyles and find the rest of God—not just "actual physical, mental, spiritual rest, but also the rest of God—the things of God's nature and presence we miss in our busyness."

References Used Above:

- Carson, D.A. (Ed.). (1999). *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, historical, and theological investigation*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers. [I only list Carson as the editor here, to simplify citing this book in the text above. I realize this clearly is not standard APA citation; I should instead list the author of each chapter in the section I am quoting.]
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