

John 20:26

And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

Eight days later was the following Sunday, the first day of the week, when they all met together again. So, in the very first week after the resurrection, this new day, the resurrection day, is already being established as the sabbath day of rest and worship for Christians.

Acts 20:7

And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.

The word “when” here implies it was a regular custom to come together on the first day of the week, not the seventh.

1 Corinthians 16:2

Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.

Believers were to regularly give their offerings on the first day of the week. And we’re told that by doing this, no extra gatherings would be required. Which implies that it was also the day of regular weekly meeting. But the first day of the week was an ordinary working day. It would have been far more convenient for them to have continued to hold their meetings on the seventh day, which wasn’t a working day. So meeting on the first day of the week seems to be because of principle, not convenience.

When Constantine adopted Christianity as the official, outward religion of the Roman Empire, he simply made sure that the first day of the week, the Christian Sabbath, became a non-working day so that Christians could freely worship without hindrance. The sabbath day had actually been changed long before.

In the fourth Commandment, we’re not told to “remember the seventh day,” but to “remember the sabbath day.” The word “sabbath” means “rest,” so we’re to remember the rest day. There is nothing magic about the seventh day, Saturday. The Commandment merely establishes that the Lord commands us to rest one day in seven. It doesn’t actually tell us which day. The reason given in the Ten Commandments listed in Exodus 20, is that it was because God rested on the seventh day after Creation. But the parallel passage in

Deuteronomy, where the Ten Commandments are repeated, doesn’t mention Creation, but gives a different example, God bringing the Israelites out of Egypt:

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee. Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou. And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.

Constantine and the Roman church (especially) did a lot of damage, but they weren’t responsible for changing the sabbath rest day from the seventh day to the first day of the week, the Bible had already changed it.

So let’s make Sunday, the Lord’s Day, the first day of the week, our sabbath day of rest and worship. And let’s not be miserable because we can’t go out and do things we otherwise would do the rest of the week. Remember:

Mark 2:27

The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath.

Let the sabbath to us be a day of worship, a day of rest, and moreover a day of absolute delight in the Lord:

Isaiah 58:13,14

If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

Remember the Sabbath Day

Keeping one day in seven holy to the Lord is the fourth of the Ten Commandments that God gave to Moses:

Exodus 20:8-11

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

The Bible tells us that all men have a conscience with at least some vestige of God’s law written on it:

Romans 2:14,15

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another...

Because we are fallen creatures, our hearts are hardened and our consciences seared or deformed in some way, so we don’t keep God’s law as we should:

1 Timothy 4:1,2

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron....

Titus 1:15

Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.

But there still ought to be some kind of regard for the law of God in all of us. Nine of the Ten Commandments are always there somewhere deep in our consciences, albeit we distort them. But what about the fourth Commandment? It seems to be the one peculiar Commandment we don’t naturally feel any guilt about breaking, as we might with the others. Does that mean it’s not really part of God’s law? Maybe it was just

for the Jews in Old Testament times but not for us today. And does it mean we Christians who do try to observe a sabbath day have got it wrong?

A very popular idea is that we don't need to keep one day special any more. That was for Old Testament Jews, and it was the seventh day of the week, Saturday. The sabbath rest for Christians is not a specific day any more, but the continuous rest we have in Jesus:

Hebrews 4:9,10

There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.

And, it's true, we do enter into rest when we come to Christ:

Matthew 11:28

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

The rest we have in Christ is the real, spiritual rest we all need, the rest which only the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ can give when we come to know Him for ourselves. So, does the fourth Commandment teach that we no longer need a special day any more, now Christ has come?

But the concept of setting apart one day in seven as a rest day has been with us right from the beginning, even from before the Fall:

Genesis 2:2,3

And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.

Of course God doesn't rest:

Psalms 121:4

Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

But it's said that God rested on the seventh day to give us a pattern throughout time that we should have six days labour and one day rest. When various atheist societies in history tried to change to a ten day working week, it didn't work, men became less efficient, so they abandoned it. Working six days and resting one is best for our well-being. God gave us His Commandments for our good.

But men want to be busy, busy, busy buying and selling seven days a week. So the Lord has set this pattern in the Ten Commandments - His moral law for all time - to stop us from working ourselves to death.

The fourth Commandment is not only set as a pattern for us, it's also set as a picture - a picture of that true rest we have in Christ. Old Testament saints came into that rest when they put their trust in a future prophesied Messiah. We come into the very same rest when we put our trust in that very same Messiah, Jesus Christ, who has now come. And throughout the ages, the Lord has given to us this one day in seven rest as a picture to continually remind us of our rest in Christ.

We don't need pictures. They're not necessary to eternal life. Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the church - these are all pictures, none of which are essential to everlasting life. The thief on the cross never had any of them. The spiritual reality they point to is the most important thing. And the sabbath day is another one of these pictures. That's maybe why many Christians think they can disregard it, in the same way many Christians disregard baptism and the Lord's Supper, and many don't join a church. The pictures are not essential, but they're useful to us in our walk in this world.

So the rest we are to have on the Lord's Day is:

- (1.) A pattern that is good for our well-being.
- (2.) A picture of the true rest we have in Christ.
- (3.) And then there's a third reason for it. It's a specific sign for believers. A sign of our sanctification, our having been set apart from the world by the Lord:

Exodus 31:12-13

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you.

Ezekiel 20:12

Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them.

The sabbath has been given as a peculiar sign specifically to the Lord's people, to set them apart from everybody else. So we shouldn't expect unbelievers to have a conscience about it. In fact we should expect them to laugh at us for observing it, because the Lord ordained it specifically to highlight the difference between us. To them, it's crazy to stop trading for a whole day every week because an invisible God tells us to.

So, one day in seven as a day of rest has been specifically given to believers by the Lord. But how should we spend it? When we keep the sabbath day, we don't just stop and do nothing. That's not rest, that's laziness. Firstly, we don't carry on our normal everyday work which would otherwise be quite lawful on the other days of the week. It's a day of rest from such activities. That will relieve a lot of stress for a start. And, according to the Commandment, if we have others under us, such as family, servants, or even cattle, we shouldn't demand that they work either. Remember, rest is good for all living creatures.

Secondly, it's also a day the Lord has given us to especially think on Him. Not that we shouldn't think on Him the rest of the week, but the Lord has provided one day a week especially set apart to worship Him, so we should do so.

Having said that, there will always be works of necessity and mercy which, as they arise, should be attended to:

Matthew 12:11-12

And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.

But, you may argue, shouldn't the sabbath day be a Saturday? After all, God rested on the seventh day, not the first. Some people tell us that the Roman Emperor Constantine changed the sabbath day from a Saturday to a Sunday, and that the church has been worshipping on the wrong day ever since, merely by tradition. Some will even go so far as to say if we don't keep a Saturday sabbath, we're in the false church and we need to repent and come out of it. But none of that is true. There is Biblical warrant for changing the sabbath rest day from the last to the first day of the week, because that was the day of the week Christ was raised from the dead. Let's look at some examples:

John 20:19

Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

Christ visited the disciples on the evening of His resurrection, which was on the first day of the week. Thomas wasn't there then, but he was there eight days later: