

LORD'S DAY 38

103. Q. What does God require in the fourth commandment?
- A. First,
that the ministry of the gospel and the schools
be maintained ¹
and that, especially on the day of rest,
I diligently attend the church of God ²
to hear God's Word,³
to use the sacraments,⁴
to call publicly upon the LORD,⁵
and to give Christian offerings for the poor.⁶
- Second,
that all the days of my life
I rest from my evil works,
let the LORD work in me through His Holy
Spirit,
and so begin in this life
the eternal sabbath.⁷

1. **Deuteronomy 6:4-9** Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. ⁶ And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:20-25 When your son asks you in time to come, saying, "What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which the LORD our God has commanded you?" ²¹ then you shall say to your son: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; ²² and the LORD showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household. ²³ Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers. ²⁴ And the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day. ²⁵ "Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these." commandments before the LORD our God, as He has commanded us.'

1 Corinthians 9:13-14 Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? ¹⁴ Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.

2 Timothy 2:2 And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

2 Timothy 3:13-17 But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴ But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, ¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Titus 1:5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you;

2. **Deuteronomy 12:5-12** But you shall seek the place where the LORD your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. ⁶ There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. ⁷ And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the LORD your God has blessed you. ⁸ You shall not at all do as we are doing here today; every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes; ⁹ for as yet you have not come to the rest and the inheritance which the LORD your God is giving you. ¹⁰ But when you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety, ¹¹ then there will be the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide. There you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your

hand, and all your choice offerings which you vow to the LORD. ¹² And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates, since he has no portion nor inheritance with you.

Psalm 40:9-10 I have proclaimed the good news of righteousness IN the great assembly; indeed, I do not restrain my lips, O LORD, You Yourself know. ¹⁰ I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart; I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth from the great assembly.

Psalm 68:26 Bless God in the congregations, the Lord, from the fountain of Israel.

Acts 2:42-47 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. ⁴³ Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, ⁴⁵ and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. ⁴⁶ So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Hebrews 10:23-25 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, ²⁵ not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

3. **Romans 10:14-17** How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? ¹⁵ And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!" ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" ¹⁷ So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

1 Corinthians 14:26-33 How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. ²⁷ If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. ²⁸ But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. ²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. ³⁰ But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. ³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. ³² And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. ³³ For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

1 Timothy 4:13 Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

4. **1 Corinthians 11:23-24** For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; ²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."
5. **1 Corinthians 11:23-24** For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; ²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."
6. **Psalm 50:14** Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High.

1 Corinthians 16:2 On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.

2 Corinthians 8 and 9

7. **Isaiah 66:23** "And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me," says the LORD.

Hebrews 4:9-11 There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. ¹⁰ For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. ¹¹ Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

At one time many calendars that were printed had some dates which were printed in red, whereas all the others were in black. The *red* dates were special days, often holidays. Originally the word *holiday* meant a *holy-day*, a special day when all work would stop and Christians went to church to commemorate

some important event in salvation history, such as Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day and Pentecost. On these calendars there was at least one *red* day every week. This weekly *holy-day* is called Sunday. There is a tendency to put more emphasis upon the special days such as Christmas or

Good Friday because they only come once a year. But really the sabbath is the most important of all. It is so important that we celebrate it, not just once, but 52 times per year!

The name *Sunday* is derived from Latin *dies solis*, “the day of the sun”, the name of a pagan Roman holiday. The Romans worshiped the sun, as did the ancient Greeks who worshiped Helios and Apollo. We would much rather call this day the *Lord's day*, as we find it in Revelation 1:10.

The wording of the fourth commandment says that we must honour the *seventh* day. Yet we celebrate the Lord's day on *the first* day of the week. Although we do not find an express command to change the sabbath from the seventh day to the first day, this change is recorded in the Scriptures.

- Christ rose on the first day of the week (cf. John 20:1)
- Christ appeared to His disciples on the first day of the week (cf. John 20:19-26) when they were gathered in the upper room where they had earlier celebrated the Passover with Christ.
- Christ poured out His Spirit on Pentecost, which was also the first day of the week.
- The believers held their worship services on the first day of the week (cf. Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:1,2).

In light of this, the early Christian church considered the first day of the week to be the *Lord's day*. Sunday was officially consecrated to the service of God by the first Christian emperor, Constantine (c. AD 274-337).

Already in Paradise God set apart one day as a sabbath. We read of that in Genesis 2:2-3: “*And on the seventh day God finished His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work....*” (To hallow means to set something apart for a special purpose.)

What are we to understand by the words “*God rested*”? For us, rest is required in order to refresh and recharge ourselves who have become weary from work or play. But our omnipotent God was not exhausted by all His work. Our God never slumbers nor sleeps. To *rest* simply means that God came to an end of His creative work. *Rest* means a cessation from labour. God could now enter into the joy of His completed work.

We could compare God's rest to a man who has worked for a number of days on a certain project. Then comes the day when he has completed it. He is very happy with his workmanship. He pours himself a cup of coffee, pulls up a chair and sits for a while admiring his handiwork. He enters into the joy of his completed work. So God, having finished His creative work, entered into the joy of His completed work.

Man was to follow God's example in this. God placed man on the earth to keep and cultivate the garden. God had hidden great potential in creation. There were many things which man could discover and develop. To this end, God commanded man to work six days to fulfil his cultural mandate. But like God, man was to cease from his labour on seventh day. God gave man a day on which to sit back, reflect, admire and enjoy God's handiwork, as well as the work which he himself was able to accomplish.

When man fell into sin he no longer deserved to live in the joy of God's completed work. Because of his sin man was expelled from that glorious Garden of Eden, and was sentenced to an existence in a cursed creation where all his toil would produce only thorns and thistles. Fallen man was expelled from God's rest.

After the fall into sin the fourth commandment took on added dimensions. God promised that He would graciously forgive sin and redeem man from its power. God promised that He would graciously remove the curse which lay upon both man and this world. Thus one day Paradise will be restored in all its beauty and holiness. God's chosen people will be admitted into

God's rest. They will enter into the joy of God's completed work of recreation. This is the eternal sabbath, which our weekly sabbath foreshadows.

God typified man's readmittance into His rest with the entrance of Israel into Canaan, a land which dimly reflected the glory of Eden. Canaan was only a type of the rest that awaits the final and glorious coming of Christ. When Christ returns creation will be restored to its former glory.

Thus, prior to the fall into sin, the sabbath had only one purpose, namely, to give man time to reflect, admire and enjoy God's **creative work**. After the fall the sabbath was given another purpose: to give man time to reflect, admire and rejoice in God's **re-creative** work which He accomplishes through Christ Jesus.

This two-fold purpose of the sabbath is reflected in the two different "versions" of the fourth commandment. Exodus 20 mentions the creative work of God as the ground for keeping the sabbath, while Deuteronomy 5 mentions God's re-creative work as the ground for keeping the sabbath. (The redemption from slavery and misery in Egypt foreshadowed the redemption from the dominion and misery of sin.)

<p>In Exodus 20 the purpose of the sabbath is to remember God's creative work.</p>	<p>In Deuteronomy 5 the purpose of the sabbath is to remember God's re-creative work.</p>
<p><i>For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.</i></p>	<p><i>And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.</i></p>

The reason for keeping the sabbath indicates that the sabbath is a festive day, a day of celebration, a day on which to reflect upon and give thanks to God for His two-fold work. Too often the joy of this

day was lost, and God's people looked upon it as a restriction, as a constraint which prevented them from pursuing their own desires (cf. Isaiah 58:13, Amos 8:5ff.).

Questions are often asked whether we are allowed to do certain things on the Lord's day or not, such as cycling, playing soccer, swimming and the like. If we ask these questions (which we all do), we approach the Lord's day from the wrong angle. If we remember that it is the **Lord's** day, then we will ask, "*What things can we do to remember the work of our LORD?*"

We said earlier that one purpose of the sabbath is to reflect upon the creative work of God. A nice stroll through the park or along the beach or some other part of God's creation serves to remind us of God's creative handiwork. There is one thing we should keep in mind, however. Our enjoyment of God's creation should never be so intense that it demands our full attention, so that we fail to reflect upon the Creator while enjoying His creation.

We should also realise that we can only see the wonders of our Creator's work through the eyes of faith. This faith is worked in us through the preaching of the gospel.

Furthermore, the preaching of the gospel will itself describe the wonder's of God's creative work. In Scripture we hear of the power of God manifested in creation in times past. In Scripture we hear of God's providence in control of nature. Thus we can reflect upon God's creative work also in the preaching of the gospel.

In order to honour the second purpose for the sabbath (to reflect upon God's re-creative work) we are to diligently attend the church of God. For it is through the preaching that God's re-creative work is proclaimed to us.

We do not go to church only to remember the re-creative work which God has done. We also go to church because it is there that God causes his re-creative work to progress in us. We should realise that God's re-creative work in us is not yet complete. Our old sinful nature is being put to death daily, and we are still being renewed

more and more in God's image through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. It is through the preaching of the gospel that the Spirit causes His re-creative work in us to progress.

By nature, most of us enjoy the outdoors more than sitting in church. If you give children a choice, they would rather stroll through the park than listen to a sermon. We should never allow our natural inclinations to dominate us, nor fulfil the first purpose of the sabbath at the expense of the second purpose. As we read in Scripture, we must not neglect to come together on the Lord's day (cf. Hebrews 10:25).

The Catechism emphasises the importance of the preaching of God's Word when it mentions first that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained. The preaching of the gospel must be maintained. That means in the first place that the consistory and the congregation must see to it that the gospel is preached.

To this end, men must be trained and set apart for this work. As Reformed people who stress the importance of solid, scriptural preaching, we provide ministers with such support that they are able to devote their full time and attention to the work of ministering the Word. We also establish theological colleges where our young men can be adequately trained for this work. (The "schools" of which the Catechism speaks originally referred to the theological colleges where men are trained to proclaim the gospel, since Christian day schools were unknown at that time.)

In order to maintain the ministry of the gospel and the schools, God commands that we contribute our "first fruits" to Him (cf. Exodus 23:19) By speaking of these contributions as "first fruits" the Lord taught His people that it was of first importance to maintain the ministry of the Word. This matter was to be given priority above all else. This is still true today. First we give to the Lord, and then we purchase our groceries and pay our mortgage. We never need to worry that we will not have enough, for Christ promised, "Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things

[which you need such as food and clothing] will be given to you" (cf. Matthew 6:23-33).

Besides the church there are other kingdom causes which need our support and should receive a high priority, such as Christian day schools for our children, care for the aged and frail, or those who are mentally or physically handicapped.

The Catechism also stresses the requirement of assembling together on the Lord's day. It mentions some of the things which should take place in the church service. In the first place, we come to hear God's Word. The preaching of God's Word is important, for the Spirit uses the preaching as the instrument through which faith is worked (cf. LD 25, Romans 10:14,17). There is, therefore, no way that we can be saved except through the hearing of God's Word.

Even after we come to faith we need to go to church. For our faith is not as strong as it ought to be. The words which Christ applied to His disciples applies to us as well. We are people of "little faith" (cf. Matthew 6:30, 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). Through the preaching of the gospel and the use of the sacraments our faith is strengthened.

The Catechism also mentions that we assemble together for prayer. We pray individually at home or as a family, but we also come together as congregation to pray communally. We praise God in songs of prayer, extolling His greatness and His goodness. We also lay the needs of the congregation before the throne of God.

When we assemble together, we bring our offerings for the poor. In this we follow the example set down by Paul, who encouraged the congregation of Corinth to take offerings on the Lord's day for the needy brothers and sisters in Jerusalem (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:2).

The question is sometimes asked, "How often do we have to come together?" Some people do not really like to go to church. They would rather spend the day on the beach in the summer, or on the ski-hills in the winter, or doing odd jobs around the home. They will quickly point out that

nowhere does Scripture tell us that we must go to church twice on the Lord's day. But when we ask the question, "*How often do we have to go to Church on Sunday?*" we start from the wrong point. For it is not how many times we *have* to go to church, but how many times we *may* go to church.

If we go to church because we have to, then we might as well not go at all. The Lord has no pleasure in those who trample into His house with heavy hearts (cf. Isaiah 1:12). He desires that we serve Him from a thankful heart, not by compulsion (cf. Psalm 50). Going to church should be a joy, a desire. Think of Psalm 84 and 122, where the psalmist says that he was glad to go to the house of the LORD. He would rather spend one day in the courts of the LORD than a thousand days outside.

Besides the *weekly sabbath* about which we have been speaking, the Catechism speaks of a *daily sabbath*. We mentioned already that Israel was to keep the sabbath day in commemoration of their rest which they received when they were freed from bondage to Pharaoh and from the misery of Egypt. This foreshadowed our redemption through Christ, by which we are given rest

from the tyranny of the devil and from the slavery of sin. Now this *rest* which we receive through Christ is to be enjoyed every day of our lives. Every day again we are to rest from our evil works. Everyday we are to let the Holy Spirit work in us so that more and more we might be set free from the sin which still clings to us.

In addition to the daily sabbath there is also the *eternal sabbath*. In this life we labour with a nature that is imperfect, and we groan in a creation which still lies under the curse of sin. We are not completely free from sin and misery in this life. We do not enjoy perfect rest yet. That is still something that we await. When Christ returns He will usher in this glorious rest. We shall be changed, together with the creation. The corruptible will become incorruptible, and all that is imperfect will become perfect. Then we will enjoy perfect rest from sin and misery. Then we will have entered into the promised land of rest which still awaits us (cf. Hebrews 4:8-11).



Questions

1. Which is the most important "*holy day*" in the year? How is that made evident?
2. From where is the name *Sunday* derived? Is there a better name for this day?
3. The fourth commandment says that the *seventh* day is the day of rest, but we rest on the *first* day of the week. Defend our practice on the basis of Scripture.
4. What does it mean that God "hallowed" the sabbath day? When did God hallow it?
5. With what could we compare God's rest on the first sabbath day? What does it mean, then, that God rested?
6. What task was man to accomplish in creation? Why did God give man the day of rest?
7. What effect did sin have upon man's enjoyment of the sabbath? What effect does grace have upon man's enjoyment of the sabbath?
8. How did God typify man's readmittance into His rest to the people of Israel?
9. After the fall into sin, the sabbath gained a second purpose. Explain both the original as well as the added purpose of the sabbath. Where do we read of these two purposes?
10. What should we remember about the sabbath when asking ourselves what we may or may not do?
11. How may we reflect upon God's creative work on the sabbath? What should we keep in mind in this respect?
12. What do we need in order to see the wonders of God's creative work? Where does this come from?
13. Besides creation itself, where can we reflect upon God's creative work? Explain in what way this is done.
14. The second purpose of the sabbath can best be fulfilled by attending church. Why?
15. Is God's re-creative work in us finished already? Describe what is happening? Why is it important, then, that we go to church faithfully?

16. What does it mean that the ministry of the gospel must be maintained? When the Catechism speaks of maintaining the *schools*, what is meant?
17. In order to maintain the ministry and the schools, what are we required to do? How did the Lord teach His people that maintaining the ministry was of first importance? Must the ministry of the gospel still have priority on our budget today? Will we ever come short on the other things that we need if we give priority to maintaining the ministry?
18. Why is the preaching so important? Do we only need to sit under the preaching until we come to faith?
19. What are some of the other things we do in the church service?
20. What is wrong with asking, "*How many times do we have to go to church?*"
21. Besides the weekly sabbath, we also must keep a daily sabbath and look forward to an eternal sabbath. What do we rest from on the weekly sabbath? What do we rest from on the daily sabbath? What do we rest from in the eternal sabbath?