

ON THE LORD'S DAY

Adopted by the Session – December 2018

INTRODUCTION

At Christ Covenant, we affirm the abiding significance of the Ten Commandments for believers of all ages. Written by the very finger of God Himself, and given to Moses directly on Mount Sinai, these commands have a unique place in Scripture. Summarizing the moral law for all men, the decalogue outlines the practical details of a life well-lived. The first four commands describe our duty to love God with all of our heart, with all of our soul, and with all of our mind. Consecutively, these four commandments reveal the who, the how, the why, and the when of worship. Commandments five through ten, commonly called the second table of the law, unpack what it means to love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus Himself summarized the law in this way (Matthew 22:37-40).

THE SABBATH AND THE CREATED ORDER

The rationale for the Sabbath command goes all the way back to the beginning of time, and the Creation of the Cosmos. As a pattern for those bearing His image, God created the world in six days and rested on the Sabbath. This weekly rhythm is, therefore, as basic to life on earth as male and female, day and night, and sea and dry land. God also blessed the Sabbath Day, thereby showing He intends it to benefit man not burden him. God, furthermore, sanctified the day, setting it apart from all the rest, as a uniquely holy time period. Its focus, therefore, cannot be merely a rest from our weekly work, but is better to be understood as a rest for the purpose of worship. The day is to be set apart for God not for man.

THE SABBATH IN THE OLD COVENANT

Just like the Abrahamic Covenant, the Old Testament regards the Sabbath as an everlasting reality (Exodus 31:16), symbolizing the holy relationship between God and His people (Exodus 31:14). While breaking the Sabbath is a grounds for excommunication in the Old Testament, profaning it - treating it as completely common, a day of no significance whatsoever - was a capital offense under the law of Moses (Exodus 31:14).

The prophetic literature repeatedly draws a connection between our attitude towards the Sabbath and our attitude towards God. For example, in Isaiah 58, delighting in the Day of the LORD and delighting in the LORD of the Day go hand in hand: The one leads to the other. Jeremiah and Ezekiel make similar connections, showing that our attitude towards the Sabbath is a barometer of our real posture towards God (Jeremiah 17:21-27; Ezekiel 20:12-24; 23:28).

All four of the Gospels record Jesus' teaching on the Sabbath. In them, Jesus teaches, for example, that "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." (Matthew 12:8- He surely is not Lord of nothing!). He also states, "The Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27). On the Sabbath Day, Jesus expressly allows that the works of piety (Matthew 12:5), charity (Matthew 12:11-12), and necessity are all lawful (Matthew 12:11). It is also of interest to note that the ladies tending the body of Jesus waited until after the Sabbath was over to go and anoint His body with oil (Mark 16:1ff).

While strictly speaking the gospel accounts of Jesus still fall under the life of the Old Covenant, it is interesting to note that the Gospel writers all record Christ's teaching on the Sabbath Day. This is especially significant because we know these writers were highly selective in what they wrote. Much was left out, presumably because it did not have universal relevance to the Church in their day (John 20:30-31).

THE SABBATH IN THE NEW COVENANT

In the New Covenant, we believe the Saturday Sabbath becomes the Sunday Lord's Day. Thus, in the Old Testament the Saints worked towards their day of rest; but now in the New Testament, with our rest fully won by Christ, we work out of this rest as a wonderful picture of redemption fully accomplished and applied.

After rising from the dead on the first day of the week, Jesus established a clear pattern of meeting with His disciples on the Lord's Day, morning (John 20:1ff) and evening (John 20:19ff). The Day of Pentecost also occurred on the Lord's Day (Leviticus 23:15-16). The Church gathered together for worship on the first day of the week (1Corinthians 16:2). And John received the book of Revelation when He was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10). The New Testament makes it clear that a Sabbath rest remains for the people of God (Hebrews 4:7-11).

THE SABBATH IN OUR REFORMED CONFESSIONS

The Westminster Standards clearly espouse a high view of the Christian Sabbath. For example:

This sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts and ordering of their common affairs before-hand, do not only observe a holy rest all the day from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations; but also are taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of his worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy. (Chapter 21, Paragraph VIII).

The Shorter Catechism continues this theme:

Q. 59. Which day of the seven hath God appointed to be the weekly sabbath?

A. From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, God appointed the seventh day of the week to be the weekly sabbath; and the first day of the week ever since, to continue to the end of the world, which is the Christian Sabbath.

Q. 60. How is the sabbath to be sanctified?

A. The sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy.

Q. 61. What is forbidden in the fourth commandment?

A. The fourth commandment forbiddeth the omission or careless performance of the duties required, and the profaning the day by idleness, or doing that which is in itself sinful, or by unnecessary thoughts, words, or works, about our worldly employments or recreations.

HOW ARE WE TO APPLY THIS?

In our application of this principle as a Church in the 21st Century, the Session of Christ Covenant believes it is important to keep 6 Principles clearly in mind:

1.) **A Day of Rest and Gladness.**

As is the case with all our Father's laws, we believe the Sabbath principle is rooted in the love of God and His desire to bless His people. He knows we need rest and a sacred space in the week devoted to seeking His face in the happy privileges of worship, discipleship, and fellowship. We believe a clear connection exists between delighting in the Day of the Lord and delighting in the Lord of the Day (Isaiah 58:13-14). Amidst the frenetic pace of modern life, we encourage our people to remember to enjoy this sacred space.

2.) **A Practice Lost**

In both its theory and its practice, the Church in the West has almost completely lost the Sabbath principle. This loss is compounded (and perhaps driven) by a surrounding culture that views the weekend as largely a leisure space suitable for household chores, family recreation, and organized sports. Addressing such a culture, and Christians emerging from it, requires great pastoral wisdom (John 16:12-13).

3.) **The Importance of Obedience to God's Law (Matthew 28:18-20; John 14:15)**

The Church cannot afford to be lackadaisical regarding the Ten Commandments. Jesus warns against breaking (or even relaxing) one of the least of the commandments (Matthew 5:19). Grace does not give us the right to be lawless (Titus 2:11-14).

4.) **The Place of Elders in ruling and directing the Church under Christ for God**

The Bible repeatedly underscores the importance of obeying your elders in the Lord (Hebrews 13:17; 1Peter 5:5; etc.). This authority, however, is never to be viewed in an autocratic fashion, but is rather "ministerial and declarative." That is to say, the elders must always keep in mind that our authority to bind people's consciences only goes as far as God's word clearly teaches. We can only demand what God's word demands, and we must not require what he does not. We cannot (and must not) make or multiply rules of our own devising. With that said however, sensitive and mature Christians will take the counsel, advice, encouragements, invitations, corrections, and rebukes of godly leadership very seriously indeed.

5.) **The Glorious Liberty of God's Children**

We believe one of the most important sentences in our reformed creeds is:

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship (WCF XX.II).

In this regard, Paul explicitly commands Christians not to judge one another about how they spend certain days (Romans 14:4-12). What seems to matter to the Apostle is that we are fully convinced in our own minds about our chosen practice (v.5). Clearly, Paul expects every Christian to have thought this issue through, and in manner that reflects our heart's determination to live for Christ and not for ourselves (vv.7-9). For while I may not judge your practice, God will certainly judge us both for the path we choose (v.12).

6.) **A Balance to Maintain**

We do not believe human beings thrive under strict, detail heavy, nit-picking law codes. Time and again in Scripture, we see God give general principles for each Christian to work out in the nitty-gritties of their own

life (E.G. “Redeem the time for the days are evil.” Churches forget this when they multiply written or unwritten policies outlining on the law, the proper way to educate a child, what constitutes modest dress, etc., etc. Such policies tend to suffocate the human spirit, taking life rather than enriching it. We want to avoid such a culture at all costs at Christ Covenant Church. We desire, instead, to create a Church atmosphere where people are drawn into a deeper commitment to Christ and His Church, not driven to it. We believe our people are better ruled by the gospel than the law, and we ought not to look to the law to do in our hearts what only the gospel can.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, in light of these precepts, principles, and examples, the session of Christ Covenant Church expects each member:

- 1.) To assemble together with our congregation for public worship regularly on the Lord’s Day unless providentially hindered (Hebrews 10:25).

We also warmly encourage each member:

- 1.) To attend both the morning and the evening service of worship. We believe these services are in accordance with the principles of Biblical worship. Morning and evening worship was the clear rhythm of Old Testament piety. The move from Old to the New Testament, furthermore, always represents a move towards a bigger, better, and brighter reality. The practice of the morning and evening worship throughout Church history only serves to underscore this rich heritage, and it is a practice we want to pass on to our children - one that is sound, good, and blessed.
- 2.) To celebrate the Lord’s Day devoting our time to the things of God—worship, discipleship, and fellowship. In saying this, we recognize that the Bible clearly permits the principles of “necessity” and “mercy” to interrupt this rhythm. The shorter catechism urges us to refrain from all “unnecessary thoughts, words, or works, about our worldly employments or recreations.” Where we draw the line of necessity, however, is first and foremost a matter for each us to decide before the face of Christ. As leaders (and as a congregation), we strive to view our choices through the lens of Christian charity (1Cor 13:7).