THE PERPETUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LORD’S DAY

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“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”
Mark 2:27-28 (NIV)

This project developed during my personal study for the ordination trials of the Presbyterian Church in America. I noticed that many candidates would take an exception to the Westminster Confession of Faith concerning the view on the Sabbath. Consequently, I began to wonder what my view would be concerning the Lord’s Day.

As I began to study the Scriptures concerning the Lord’s Day I became more aware of the importance of the fourth commandment. I began to present my findings in my teaching and preaching opportunities. I found there was resistance to any observance of the Lord’s Day in many church members for various reasons. I wondered if the church has a proper theological, scriptural and historical understanding of the Lord’s Day. This work will address the Lord’s Day in three main sections.

The first section will address the Lord’s Day from the Scriptures. What does the Old Testament reveal concerning God’s intent for his people concerning this one day of the week? Does the coming of Jesus change the requirements of God? What do the Gospels and Epistles reveal to us concerning the Lord’s Day and our obligations?
The second section will examine historical observation and tradition concerning
the Lord’s Day. We will examine the early church fathers, the Middle Ages and the
Reformation as well as the Puritanical and Sabbatarian views which have helped shape
the modern day view of the Lord’s Day.

The third section will examine the theological implications of a perpetual
observance of the Lord’s Day, the eschatological significance of the Lord’s Day and how
that affects the observance of such a day. Finally, we will examine what the meaning of
the Lord’s Day is for God’s people.
To my wife, Laura, for her unending support, grace, love and perseverance.
CONTENT

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION.................................................................1

2. SCRIPTURAL MEANING OF THE SABBATH..............................6
   The Sabbath in the Old Testament
      The Use of Haššabbāt
      Pre-Sinai Sabbath
      The Decalogue
   The Sabbath in the New Testament
      Jesus’ view of the Sabbath
      Paul’s view of the Sabbath
      Hebrews 4
   A Change from the Seventh Day to the First Day
   Conclusion Concerning the Sabbath from a Scriptural Perspective

3. HISTORICAL VIEWS OF THE SABBATH...............................38
   The Early Church Fathers through the Medieval Times
      Early Church Writings
      The Medieval Church
   The Reformers
      The Reformation Perspective
      John Calvin
      Martin Luther
   17th through the 18th Century
      The Westminster Divines
      The Puritans
   19th Century
      Hodge and Warfield
   20th Century
      Modernism and Fundamentalism
   Conclusions from the Historical Study of the Sabbath
4. THEOLOGY IMPLICATIONS OF THE SABBATH…………………………..72

A Creation Mandate
The Moral Law
The Eschatological Significance of the Lord’s Day
An Ethical View of the Lord’s Day

5. CONCLUSION………………………………………………………………..96

BIBLIOGRAPHY……………………………………………………………………….100
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In Genesis 2:1-2 God mandates the Sabbath as a day of rest for all mankind by his own example and his sanctifying the Sabbath Day. Several thousand years later God would write with His own hand the commandment to “remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy” (Ex. 20:8). Yet there is no little debate today concerning the nature of the fourth commandment. There have been many attempts for many reasons to release men of the responsibility of the Sabbath commandment.

The Church is in the midst of what some have called a post-modern age. It is difficult to find agreement on a universal definition of post modernism. Perhaps, Mark Driscoll puts it best when he defines post-modernism as the “spiritual junk drawer” where every idea that seemingly has no answer is tucked away. Unfortunately, this “junk drawer” is where many churches have stored the question of the perpetual nature of the fourth commandment. In this age of post modernism some might argue that the church would be more relevant to the changing culture if it were to relax its view of the Lord’s Day. Of course this is no reason to abrogate God’s Word.

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1This work will use The Holy Bible : New International Version, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), for Scriptural texts throughout unless otherwise noted.

2Mark Driscoll, The Radical Reformission (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 161.
Others, such as the Dispensationalists argue that the Sabbath was relevant only for Israel and as a result the New Testament abrogated the Sabbath. Thus Gary G. Cohen writes concerning Paul in Romans 6:14, “…not being “under the law,” and being “dead” to it takes the Christian out from under the Sabbath Commandment which was given to the nation Israel.”

However, God has given us Ten Commandments which are the summary of the moral law (Ex. 20:1-17, Deut. 5:6-21) and none of them have been abrogated. Jesus addressed this very issue in Matthew 5:17-19 when he said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” According to Jesus, the New Testament does not retract the Sabbath observation that is commanded in the Decalogue but rather expands upon it. For the Christian, the spiritual blessings of the Old Testament Sabbath are realized in the New Testament Lord’s Day.

One of the greatest questions concerning the fourth commandment is whether or not the Sabbath has become the Lord’s Day. There has been much theological discussion about Sabbath Day transference theology throughout Church history. This argument has much in common with the Reformed view of infant baptism’s relationship to Old Testament circumcision. It is argued that the older, ancient forms made way for the new

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forms which have much more of a spiritual, rather than temporal blessing. These blessings, according to transference theology were realized in the New Testament dispensation. To this end, transference theologians argue that the moral obligations of rest and worship that were commanded in the fourth word of the Decalogue are still binding to this day and are realized in the Lord’s Day.

In order to argue such a view, transference theologians argue that there is a distinction in Sabbath theology concerning moral, ceremonial and judicial laws. They argue that the ceremonial and judicial laws that were distinctly given for Israel have been abrogated as Jesus has fulfilled the Law and the Prophets. The question that arises with this type of theology is what the fourth commandment continues to require and what specifically has been abrogated.

There are many sides to transference theology. Some would argue that the perpetual nature of the Sabbath only requires worship and that rest, although a good idea is no longer a part of the moral law. Others would argue that believers are to rest so that they can worship. This work will investigate transference theology and the distinctions that are made between the ceremonial, judicial and moral aspects of the fourth commandment.

In order to discuss the perpetual nature of the Sabbath Day it must be determined if God did intend for it to be a part of the moral law. The Scriptures must reveal what God has intended for man concerning the Sabbath. It will also be prudent to examine the theology of some of the major thinkers of Church history to ascertain their theology of the Sabbath and compare and contrast them with the Word of God. Theologians have disagreed throughout history as to what the Sabbath means for God’s people. Their
debates concerning the Sabbath and its relevance to the Church will help us understand how the Church arrived at the various positions we have today and will assist us in understanding our own orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

A true understanding of the Lord’s Day is necessary for the Church today. A biblical understanding helps the Church to experience a “taste” of the “not yet”. It is true that Jesus Christ reigns over his Kingdom (Phil. 2:9-11), yet the Church awaits his return when he will come to judge the living and the dead according to all of their words, thoughts and deeds (I Corinth. 15:24-50). He will establish his everlasting Kingdom and all of the people of God will finally experience the true Sabbath Rest that awaits the people of God (Heb. 4:8-10). Until that last day the Christian Church lives and breathes in the eschatological tension of the already and the not yet. The world has already witnessed the advent of Jesus Christ and his ministry on this earth. He has defeated sin and death and has become the way, truth and life (John 14:6). However, history still continues to unfold and evil continues to be prevalent in the “already”. The Church awaits the return of Jesus Christ when he will fully consummate his Kingdom. The Lord’s Day is a taste of the “already” and the “not yet.”

Throughout history, there have been bursts of debate in some parts of the church surrounding the Lord’s Day and the rules and regulations of observance. In recent days the debate has been quelled. Contrary to the historical Sabbatarian view, the modern day church largely ignores the fourth commandment and has failed to understand the true significance of the Lord’s Day.

If the Church were to once again realize the true eschatological importance of the Lord’s Day it would revolutionize the way ministry is done, how the Church lives, how
they commune together, the Church’s understanding of purpose and even the way it approaches worship within the community of believers. The Lord’s Day is misunderstood, mishandled and often discarded and as a result mostly ignored in order to avoid hard questions. These misunderstandings have produced an ignorance of the Lord’s Day and as a result many churches miss the blessing that is theirs to possess in the already and the not yet.

To be sure, there have been changes to the observance of the Sabbath by God’s appointment which are pertinent to any debate concerning the Lord’s Day. All of the Scriptures need to be studied within their context in order for anyone to have a true understanding of the Sabbath Day and the change to the Lord’s Day. Therefore, this work will argue that the fourth commandment is a part of the moral law and is perpetual and binding until Jesus Christ comes again and that the Lord’s Day ought to be observed as a foretaste of the fully realized Sabbath rest that awaits the people of God.
CHAPTER 2

SCRIPTURAL MEANING OF THE SABBATH

The Sabbath in the Old Testament

Much of the debate surrounding the fourth commandment would not be necessary if one could draw a direct line of Sabbath occurrence from the beginning of the Old Testament to the New Testament Church. Sabbatarians must struggle with the question as to whether or not there is justification for a pre-Mosaic understanding of the Sabbath. Meanwhile, proponents of fourth commandment abrogation must handle any biblical evidence of a sanctified seventh day during the period from Creation through Sinai with great care.

In the past many have tried to manipulate biblical text in order to suit their own discussion. An exegetical study of some of the major Old Testament passages concerning the Jewish Sabbath will shed light on a biblical understanding of the Lord’s Day, its purpose for the people of God and determine whether or not the Sabbath is a creation ordinance and hence a moral law.

The Use of Haššabbāt

Haššabbāt means “day of rest” and occurs 111 times in the Old Testament. In other variations of the word it also means a “period of rest”. The theological
controversies that are prevalent today do not usually stem from the etymology of the word. Many theologians are agreed on the meaning of haššabbāt. The real differences of opinion among scholars surround the nature of the rest, the perpetual nature of the fourth commandment and the theological implications rather than the meaning of the word itself.

The beginning of Exodus finds the Hebrews in bondage for 400 years in Egypt. It can be safely assumed that the Egyptians did not allow their slave-labor to set a day apart for rest with the purpose of worship. This is clearly demonstrated throughout the narrative between Moses and Pharaoh as the deliverer of God’s people continually requests a period away from slave labor for the Hebrews to worship their own God (Ex. 4:22, 5:1 etc). Pharaoh continually rejected Moses’ demands for a period of rest from labor in order for his people to worship Yahweh. God desired a period of rest for His people. The rest for worship that God would eventually require of Israel not only gave them a physical period of rest from their years in bondage but pre-figured the Sabbath Celebration that the author of Hebrews mentions in their epistle.

The occurrences of Haššabbāt throughout the Old Testament have been central to the Sabbath debate. The first occurrence in Exodus 16:23 is peculiar in that it pre-dates the giving of the Law at Sinai. Some have interpreted this to mean that the Sabbath had been a perpetual command since Creation and still others assume that this command of God simply prefigures the Ten Words. This work will now turn to a study of some of the major Sabbath passages throughout the Old Testament in order to determine what the text

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communicated to the people of Israel and whether or not the Sabbath can be called a creation ordinance, part of the moral law and therefore perpetual in nature.

**Pre-Sinai Sabbath**

The argument has often been made that there is not one occurrence of a Sabbath day observance before the Mosaic period and therefore the fourth commandment must have only been particular to Israel as a nation. Since there is no explicit Sabbath commandment before the Mosaic period it is difficult to trace a straight line of Sabbath occurrence from Creation to Sinai. One of the foundational arguments of this work for a perpetual observance of the Sabbath day is that Scripture teaches a moral obligation of the fourth commandment pre-dating Sinai and has its foundation in Creation. To this end it can be argued that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance found in Genesis 2:1-3 and that the people of God observed the seventh day pre-dating Sinai in Exodus 16:23-30, sufficiently proving that there is a Sabbath occurrence and general understanding before the commandments were given to Moses on Sinai.

Genesis 2:2-3 says, “By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.” In this passage of Scripture the account of Creation comes to a close. God does not cease to act but rather brings His creative work to an end. God’s rest is not a cessation from total activity resulting in idleness, for God sustains the world (Heb. 1:1).

There has been some debate as to what was involved with the rest of God. An understanding of the nature of God’s rest is necessary in order to understand the theology
of Sabbath rest. The word *Shavath* in verse 2 means “sit still”. This word does not mean that God ceased to act but rather is anthropomorphic speech depicting “Elohim as desisting from his creative labors, and assuming a posture of quiescent repose.” This interpretation is in complete line with Jesus’ teaching that He and the Father are always at work and have been working since the beginning of time (John 5:17). It is no mistake that the author of Genesis 2 mentions the seventh day as the period in which God “sat still” to take in all that He created. The author’s use of *Shavath* demonstrates that God rested from his creative work on the seventh day, sanctified it, and took this time to reflect on His creation.

Some of the early church fathers conjectured that this seventh day was not like the other six days in that there is no mention of a morning or evening cycle as there were in the other six day narratives. Augustine believed that this Sabbath rest was a period of perfection which only ended for man once sin entered into the world. Although it is true that the Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God (Heb. 4:9-10) will have neither night nor day, it would be exegetically difficult to propose that this seventh day was different in cycle from the other six days of creation. The context of the seventh day presupposes a cycle of time that includes evening and morning. In order to adopt the early church fathers interpretation, a non-literal view of the previous six days of creation

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must be assumed which is not warranted by the text. “But as the six creation-days, according to the words of the text, were earthly days of ordinary duration, we must understand the seventh in the same way; and that all the more, because in every passage, in which it is mentioned as the foundation of the theocratic Sabbath, it is regarded as an ordinary day.” It can be concluded from the context of Genesis 2 that the seventh day was of ordinary length.

It is true that the world had not yet experienced the defects of sin for sin would enter the world through Adam (Rom. 5:12) once he had eaten of the forbidden fruit. The Scriptures are unclear as to how long the period of time was between the seventh day and the fall of man. As a result an attempt to determine the length of time that had come to pass would be a fruitless discussion. However, this period was a time of perfection and a true Sabbath period (Gen. 2:1-2). It was God’s desire for man to commune with Him in this perfection and continues to be God’s will for His people to enter back into this eternal Sabbath rest that was experienced before the fall (Heb. 4:9-10).

Genesis 2:3 says that upon resting from creative work, God blessed and sanctified the seventh day. When God blessed the seventh day He made the day itself a blessing for His people (Ex. 20:8-11). It would be a blessing for the Israelites when they were brought out of slave labor and foreshadowed the Lord’s Day which continues to be a blessing for the Church as a time set apart for worship.

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8 It is this author’s opinion that Genesis 1-2 depicts a literal narrative rather than a poetic narrative. The author’s use of yom emphasizes a literal day or cycle of darkness and light. In addition, the author’s usage of the consecutive vav indicates a Hebrew narrative rather than poetic prose. This is not to say that there is no place for other interpretations, but a thorough exegesis of the passages seem to indicate to this author that Genesis 1 and 2 must be interpreted in a literal sense.

9 C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, 43.
The text also says that upon blessing the seventh day God sanctified it. The Hebrews word *qadas* is applied to many situations and can be applied to a person, inanimate objects or even, as in this case, a particular day. God would set apart priests (Ex. 28:41), the people of Israel (Num. 8:7) homes were consecrated (Lev. 27:14), and even King David set apart silver and gold unto the Lord (1 Chron. 18:11). *Qadas* means to treat something as uncommon and set apart from the ordinary. In Genesis 2:3, God literally set the day apart from the other six days and made it a holy day for holy purposes. Matthew Henry wrote,

> The Sabbath day is a blessed day, for God blessed it, and that which he blesses is blessed indeed. God has put an honour upon it, has appointed us, on that day, to bless him, and has promised, on that day, to meet us and bless us. The Sabbath day is a holy day, for God has sanctified it. He has separated and distinguished it from the rest of the days of the week, and he has consecrated it and set it apart to himself and his own service and honour.  

Henry makes a great point in that the day is simply blessed and sanctified for the sole reason that God Himself blessed and sanctified the day. This period of rest would be the pattern for the fourth commandment and the cycle of labor and rest that God required from humanity.

God would reference the words of Genesis 2:1-3 when He gave the commandments to Moses on Sinai. Exodus 20:11 says, “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” According to the account at Sinai, part of the basis of the fourth commandment is the seventh day of the Creation account.

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The first occurrence of *haššabbāt* is found in Exodus 16:23-29 as Moses relays the instructions that God had for His people concerning their collection of manna on the sixth day. He says to them, “This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.’” So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it. Moses said, “Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none.” Parenthetically, this account is vital in understanding the Sabbath day as a pre-existing part of the moral law that was to be summarized on Sinai in the not too distant future.

Obviously, this account of manna in the wilderness takes place before Moses receives the Decalogue on Sinai. Even before he receives the Law the people of Israel understand that a Sabbath unto the Lord is to be observed. It is clear from God’s reaction to Israel’s disobedience in Exodus 16 that the Sabbath was to be kept even before the Ten Commandments were given to Moses.

It can be concluded from Genesis 2:1-3 and Exodus 16:23-30 that the Sabbath institution pre-dates the Mosaic Law. Although, admittedly the evidence is sparse throughout the patriarch period, it is also sufficient and conclusive. From creation God has required man to keep His Sabbath and it is to the creation mandate that this work will now turn.
The Decalogue

God has revealed his plan of redemption to man over the course of history. This perfect revelation has been recorded in the pages of Scripture. The Scriptures record how the Sabbath principle was a part of God’s redemptive history. God’s Word revealed more and more as time marched on from the patriarchs to Sinai and ultimately finding its current fulfillment in the Lord’s Day. God included the Sabbath principle as part of the summary of the moral law given to Moses on Sinai. Central to the argument for the perpetual observance of the fourth commandment is the fact that God included the observance of one day in seven as part of the Ten Commandments. Don Robertson writes,

With the institution of His written law, God was calling man to “remember the Sabbath Day” and therefore keep it as it was originally intended to be kept. God, with His own finger, inscribed upon the Ten Commandments His everlasting command for man to faithfully observe this precious institution. The Sabbath then obtained an explicit and abiding place in the moral law of God.12

God established the Sabbath principle upon the conclusion of His creative work and now required Israel to observe the Sabbath as it was intended since creation. Exodus 20:8-11 says,

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 restates the commandment adding,

Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh

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day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor the alien within your gates, so that your manservant and maidservant may rest, as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

A study of the commandment from Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15 reveals that God intends for man to remember and keep the Sabbath by resting as God rested from his creative work, to keep it holy as God kept it holy, that one day in seven is a holy Sabbath unto God, and that Sabbath keeping is perpetual in nature.

Some have argued that the Sabbath is no longer perpetual in that unlike the other nine commandments, it is not expressly commanded in the New Testament dispensation. Harold L. Willmington writes, “Under the New Covenant, believers are not obligated to keep the Sabbath. In Christ they have experienced the fulfillment of the Sabbath-rest principle by trusting in God’s grace, rather than in human effort, for salvation (Heb. 4:3–10).” To argue this point is to make a distinction between the 10 commandments which is unwarranted by the Scriptures and which is not offered in the account of Sinai. The Sabbath is not expressly abrogated in the New Testament but rather expanded upon finding fulfillment in the Lord’s Day.

Exodus 31:16-17 seems to answer the question concerning the perpetual nature of the Sabbath saying, “The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested.” However, the ceremonial and judicial laws

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surrounding the Sabbath in the Old Testament era are abrogated along with all other ceremonial and judicial laws as Christ met the requirements of God’s divine justice through his perfect life and sacrifice (Gal. 4:4-5). Willmington and others who would argue that the Sabbath has been abrogated would make a better distinction between the provisional and permanent aspects of the Sabbath as this work will do rather than between the commandments themselves.

The commandment includes an expressed rule to remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy unto God, to work for six days and a mandate for rest. The Exodus account distinctly alludes to creation and God’s example for the reasoning behind the commandment (Ex. 20:11). Deuteronomy adds the remembrance of redemption and deliverance as an expressed reason for the Sabbath law (Deut. 5:15). Gary Cohen summarizes the fourth commandment purposes saying,

The purposes of the Sabbath law were…to remind man of his eternal obligation to worship his creator…to provide a time for worship and meditation by instituting a mandatory rest day…to give a needed periodic rest to man from his daily toil…to typify the final salvation rest, Heb 3:7–4:11…to commemorate the completed creation, Ex. 20:11…to commemorate redemption and the consequent rest that follows it, Deut 5:15…

Interestingly enough, all of these purposes for the commandment are applicable for the Church today and not just particular to the theocratic nation of Israel.

The Jewish Sabbath was given to Israel as a rule of faith rather than a good option so that they might set apart time to worship Yahweh. The Israelites had been in bondage for 400 years in Egypt and as previously stated were prevented from worshipping Yahweh (Ex. 5:1-13). It is probable that many of the Hebrews had forgotten about their heritage and the promises that had once been made to Abraham and the patriarchs (Ex. 14

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14Cohen, 9.
3:11-15). A Sabbath rest would have been welcomed by a tired people. But God did not just require rest for His people but also worship in place of ordinary work. God gave six days for the people of Israel to work and to provide for themselves while asking only one day for rest and worship. As Cohen states, this was a needed rest for a people used to the bondage of slavery.

As this work will later demonstrate, the Sabbath rest typified the salvation rest that is given to the people of God (Heb. 4:8-10). This typology is evident in the account of Deuteronomy. Jim Stambaugh in referring to Deuteronomy 5 writes, “Moses does provide a historical reference in verse 15 [as he says “for,” “therefore,” or “because”] giving a reason why God gave this command to Israel which refers back to their slavery in Egypt. God redeemed Israel before the institution of the law. The Sabbath was given so that humankind might take time to celebrate the redemption of His people from slavery in Egypt. This celebration would find fulfillment in the resurrection of Christ and the rest that he offers through faith in the Gospel.

Exodus 20:8 also offers that the Sabbath worship and rest is rooted in Creation when God rested on the seventh day and sanctified it. Those that would argue that the Sabbath is not a creation ordinance have a difficult hurdle. Robertson writes, “God grounds His commandment to keep the Sabbath by resting on the seventh day and setting it apart as “blessed and holy”. If God considers the Sabbath Day blessed, shouldn’t we?” This is not to argue that Jewish Sabbath worship and rest was immediately instituted in Sinaitic form at creation but rather that the worship of the fourth

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16 Robertson, 1.
commandment has been present since the beginning. This is evident in the fact that worship has always taken place since before Sinai (cf. Gen. 4:26, Gen. 22:5). In other words, “The essence of the fourth commandment is permanent, but its expression we learn from Sinai onward.”

The Sabbath in the New Testament

It is clear from the New Testament that the moral law, although fulfilled in Christ, is perpetual even after Christ’s redemptive work had been accomplished. Paul says in Romans 3:31, “Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.” It has already been discussed that Jesus upheld the law and did not abrogate it (Matt. 5:17-18). If the New Testament upheld the law and the fourth commandment is part of the law then the New Testament would also uphold the perpetual observance of the Sabbath (Matt. 28:1, Mark 16:2, Luke 24:1, John 20:1, Acts 20:7. I Corinth. 16:2). It is true that the New Testament does not explicitly order the perpetual observance of the Sabbath and there are several passages that seem to indicate just the opposite which need to be discussed in any debate concerning the nature of the fourth commandment. Even though the New Testament is not explicit about Sabbath observance Douma says, “the reverse is even less true.”

Dispensationalist theology would object to the perpetual nature of the fourth commandment arguing, “Nowhere in the New Testament does one find any record where the Sabbath was changed from Saturday to Sunday or required to be observed by

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18 Ibid., 133.
Christians.”\(^{19}\) They would argue that all nine of the other commandments find some kind of reiteration in the New Testament but that the fourth commandment is strangely omitted. Covenant theology claims that the Sabbath has not been retracted but rather expanded upon as special revelation reveals the spiritual blessing of the Sabbath day as a much fuller understanding that is found in the Lord’s Day.

There are many passages in the New Testament that could be discussed in this work. However it is prudent to narrow down the discussion to a few important passages. This work will now turn to the claims of Jesus, especially in Mark 2:27, concerning the Sabbath, problem passages in Paul’s writings and Hebrews 4 to discuss the perpetual nature of the fourth commandment.

**Jesus’ View of the Sabbath**

In Mark 2:27, Jesus says that “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Wherefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath.” Jesus is making two very specific claims concerning the Sabbath. The first claim is that the Sabbath was made for man. The second claim is that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. Neither of these claims nullifies the fourth commandment but rather give the believer a fuller understanding of its purpose.

Jesus’ ministry on earth was confronted with a distorted view of the Sabbath in the Jewish tradition. Gary G. Cohen writes,

> Legalism and casuistry gained the upper hand among the leaders and Israel in seeking to establish her own righteousness through the law rejected the righteousness of God (Rom 10:3). Rabbinic law did not make the sabbath a

delight (Isa 58:13), but a burden upon the people (Matt 23:4)…the regulations prescribed every conceivable movement on the sabbath…the spirit had fled!\textsuperscript{20}

This was the context in which the Pharisees approached Jesus concerning his disciples’ willingness to pick and eat food on the Sabbath in Mark 2. In a few words Jesus established that the Sabbath was meant for man’s well-being and not meant to harm him. That is why Jesus healed on the Sabbath (Luke 14:1-5, 13:10-17) and permitted his disciples to reap on the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-28). The Westminster Shorter Catechism is correct when it says that “the works of necessity and mercy (Matt. 12:1–31)”\textsuperscript{21} are permissible on the Sabbath. A study of the claims of Jesus in Mark 2:27-28 will give insight to the perpetual nature of the Sabbath.

The first claim Jesus made was, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” This claim addresses the distortions of the Mishnah,\textsuperscript{22} gives a basis for the perpetual observance of the Sabbath in that it is a creation ordinance, and addresses all humanity rather than just the nation of Israel. The second claim Jesus makes is that he is the Lord of the Sabbath.

The distortions of Sabbath observance had increased since the return from exile out of Babylon in 538 B.C. Sabbath disobedience had been a major reason why Israel had been exiled in the first place (Jer.17:19-27) and in response legalists had taken the law to another extreme. Hundreds of laws had been written concerning the observance of the Sabbath and as a result the people of God carried a burden of observation rather than

\textsuperscript{20}Cohen, 11.

\textsuperscript{21}The Westminster Shorter Catechism : With Scripture Proofs. 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1998), Question 60. CD-ROM.

\textsuperscript{22}The Mishnah was a set of religious laws that Judaism had produced during the second temple era. There were literally hundreds of laws that addressed every area of life concerning observation of the Sabbath Day.
a delight in the Lord. Judaism was missing the point. Jesus had come to change all of this. He proclaimed that God gave the Sabbath to man for his benefit and it is to be enjoyed and sanctified.

In this first claim, Jesus references the Creation account of Genesis 1 as he claims that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance. Robert A. Guelich writes,

Jesus first sets the sabbath law in the perspective of Gen 1 and the order of creation. The sabbath was created for the benefit and welfare of the human creature. The sabbath was to serve humanity, not humanity to serve the sabbath (2:27). Taken in isolation, this response offers a basis but no directives for how the sabbath was to benefit humanity as a gift of creation.23

Guelich is saying that Jesus’ claim concerning the Sabbath is that Judaism’s distortions of the law had obscured the true meaning of the Sabbath. Judaism had made the Sabbath a burden rather than a delight. The purpose of the Sabbath is made clear in God’s resting on the seventh day.

Some would argue that Jesus was only speaking to the Pharisees who are present in Mark 2 and that his teaching on the Sabbath would have no bearing on any other nation than those of Israel. Warren W. Wiersbe writes, “There is no record in Scripture that God ever gave the Sabbath to any other nation. So, when Jesus began openly to violate the Sabbath traditions, it was like declaring war against the religious establishment.”24 In effect, Wiersbe would argue that Jesus was saying that the Sabbath was made only for Israel. However Mark’s use of ἄνθρωπος does not indicate that the Sabbath was just for Israel but rather it is to be observed by all humanity. Furthermore,


Jesus’ inclusion of the Sabbath as a creation ordinance would have bearing on all humanity not just the nation of Israel.

Guelich also notes that if taken in isolation, this first claim does not offer instruction on how the Sabbath is a benefit to humanity. Guelich claims that instruction lies in the second claim of Jesus. He writes,

> The reference to creation must be seen in view of his eschatological message of the Kingdom. Creation is but the paradigm of the new order of salvation, especially as depicted by Isaiah. Therefore, in the light of Gen 1 and the order of creation, Jesus claimed the authority to do God’s work of the age of salvation and to provide for his own in conjunction with his ministry even when such actions came into conflict with the sabbath law. He was not annulling the sabbath law in principle, rather he was interpreting the sabbath law in the light of his ministry.\(^{25}\)

The second claim Jesus made is that he is the Lord of the Sabbath. This claim concludes Jesus’ reference to David in Mark 2:25-26. Jesus is comparing his authority to that of David’s and builds upon his illustration. David was just a king whereas Jesus is the Son of Man. Jesus, being Lord of Sabbath has authority over the Sabbath. This authority does not allow him to break the Sabbath but to fulfill it. Jesus did not come to fulfill man-made laws and regulations but the true Law of God.

In other words it was his incarnation that the Sabbath had always pointed forward to. Jesus alone would bring the full redemption that the exodus from Egypt was only a type. Jesus would bring the rest from spiritual bondage of which physical rest is only a type. Jesus did not attempt to abrogate the Sabbath in Mark 2:27-28 but rather he explained the purposes of God in the observation of the fourth commandment. Murray says that Jesus affirmed the place that the Sabbath has within the “sphere of his messianic Lordship and that He exercises lordship over the Sabbath because the Sabbath was made

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\(^{25}\)Guelich, 129.
for man.”  One must contend with Christ’s words in Mark 2:27 in order to argue that the Sabbath was only for Israel and as a result has been done away with along with the ceremonial and civil laws.

Jesus was teaching against the Pharisees who had written their own ceremonial laws in addition to the moral law. Contrary to the teachings of Jesus, the Pharisees were willing to deprive people of healing, food, and acts of necessity and mercy as they had lost all sense of true religion. Murray says that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, “not for the purpose of depriving men of that inestimable benefit which the Sabbath bestows, but for the purpose of bringing to the fullest realization on behalf of men that beneficent design for which the Sabbath was instituted.”

Genesis 1:26 through Genesis 2:1-2 demonstrates the priority that Jesus here proclaims. Man was created before the Sabbath and God created the Sabbath for man so that they might rest from their work and remember what God had done through redemptive history, and worship the Lord by keeping the Sabbath holy unto the Lord.

What is one to learn from the claims of Jesus Christ? The Savior does not abrogate the Sabbath but indirectly commands the perpetuation of the Sabbath day. The reasons for God’s divine institution remain the same today as they always have. The only difference between today’s observance and the nation of Israel’s ancient observance is that today God’s people are to look back to the redemptive work of the cross as Israel looked forward. But even now as the Church observes the Lord’s Day it looks forward to the perfect Sabbath rest as it anxiously awaits the return of Jesus Christ.

26 Ibid., 5.

**Paul’s View of the Sabbath**

This work has already addressed the teaching of Jesus concerning the fourth commandment. It will now turn to some of the apostolic teachings concerning the Lord’s Day. The apostolic teachings have produced more than a few problems for a perpetual argument of the Lord’s Day. Paul especially presents a few problematic passages that must be addressed when investigating the perpetuation of the Lord’s Day. Some would argue that these passages prove that Paul believed the fourth commandment had been abrogated by the ushering in of the New Covenant. However, these same passages when understood within the correct context will help shed light on and affirm the perpetual nature of the Lord’s Day.

In Galatians 4:10-11 Paul says, “You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.”

Paul’s letter to the Galatians is disciplinary in nature as he deals with false accusations against his apostleship and false doctrines that had crept into the church. The nature of the letter accounts for the strong language that Paul uses in his instruction to the Galatian church. As a result one could argue that Paul is not warning against observance of the Lord’s Day but rather against the observance of Jewish tradition and asceticism.²⁸ Douma wrote,

In view of the sequence of “days and months and seasons and years,” the term days must surely refer to the weekly Sabbath day. In addition, Paul speaks of the “months” (for example, the new moon festivals), the seasons, (Passover, Pentecost), and finally, the “years” (referring to the sabbatical years)...here Paul is much more firm. The gospel of Jesus Christ is at stake. The Galatians were threatened by a Judaizing doctrine requiring circumcision and the observance of the entire Jewish ritual system of days, months, seasons and years.²⁹

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²⁸ Douma, 134.

²⁹ Ibid., 135.
Douma admits that Galatians 4 includes a discussion concerning the Lord’s Day and that it is relevant to a discussion on the perpetual nature of the Sabbath. It is obvious to Douma that Paul’s words conclude something has ceased but the conclusion cannot be that the fourth commandment has ceased in that Paul states the law cannot be nullified (Rom. 3:31).

In Galatians 4, Paul is forbidding the reliance on Judaism for salvation. Paul’s soteriology is that faith is the instrument of justification and that the righteousness of Christ rather than obedience to the Law is the ground of justification (Gal. 3:6, 13). The Judaizers taught that obedience to the moral law and old traditions would save a person and bring them into a right relationship with God. This kind of theology had to be eradicated before it took root in the Galatian church. Paul is concluding that the Jewish ceremonial practice of the Sabbath has ceased and that observance to the Jewish law and tradition had not the power to justify one from their depravity but rather to bind up the church in legalistic practice. However, he is not abandoning the fourth commandment but rather establishes the basis for the Lord’s Day.

The basis of the Lord’s Day is not rules and regulations but rather a celebration of what God has done and a look forward to what He will accomplish. The Lord’s Day remembers that Christ rose again on the first day which freed God’s people from the curse of the law. The ceremonial laws that Paul addresses in Galatians 4 have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The fulfillment of these laws provides a basis for the change from the Sabbath to the Lord’s Day.

Another problematic passage can be found in Colossians 2:16-17. Paul wrote, “Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a
religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.” Whereas the Galatians passage does not reference the Sabbath explicitly it would seem that Paul makes a more definite statement in this passage concerning the Sabbath. Once again, understanding the situation to which Paul was writing will help the reader understand what Paul’s message is to the Church concerning the perpetual nature of the Sabbath.

There is some debate as to what kind of heresy Paul was battling in the church of Colossae. Some believe that it was another form of Judaism and others believe that it was a pagan religion. In either case, the church in Colossae had a distorted view of cultic practices and their necessity in the Christian Church. The content of the verses reveal the situation. Joseph Lightfoot wrote,

The two main tendencies of the Colossian heresy are discernible in this warning (vv. 16–19)…the practical error, an excessive ritualism and ascetic rigour, is first dealt with (vv. 16, 17)…[secondly] the substitution of a shadow for the substance.

Lightfoot brings to light the central meaning of Paul’s exhortation. The Colossians were falling into the same trap as the Galatians. Both churches were focused on the rigor of religious ceremony rather than the One to whom the ceremonies were a “shadow” of. They were in danger of removing Jesus Christ from the center of their worship and replacing Him with ceremonial rigor. As a result, Paul instructs the church to return to Christ as the center of their worship. Peter T. Obrien writes,

30 This would explain verse 18 in the clearest light. Many pagan religions of the day worshipped angels and astral events. Some theologians hold that the true distortion of the Sabbath and festivals is not of a Jewish nature at all but rather a pagan nature intermingled with Judaism and Christian practice.

Christ and his new order are the perfect reality to which these earlier ordinances pointed. These prescriptions of days gone by were but a shadow. They have lost any binding force. Since the reality is here, the things of the shadow no longer constitute a norm for judgment. Christ is the fulfillment of the Sabbath. Redemption has been accomplished and applied to the believers in Colossae. Jesus Christ is to be the focus of their worship and faith.

Paul says that the Sabbath was “a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ”. There were many “shadows” given to God’s people in the Old Testament such as circumcision, the Passover and the Sabbath. All of these shadows, Paul is saying, find their ultimate reality in Jesus Christ. The Colossians and the Galatians were finding reality in the shadows themselves rather than the substance.

In both of these passages the churches were struggling with Jewish tradition, heresy and pagan worship. This is evident in Colossians 2:11-12 when Paul refers to circumcision as the new baptism. He also makes it clear that the Jewish tradition is “hollow and deceptive” philosophy and that the Colossians should not be taken captive to it (vs. 8). In Galatians 5:12 Paul wishes that the false teachers who were promoting obedience to Jewish tradition and circumcision would go the “whole way and emasculate themselves!” Paul was guarding against the tendency to fall back into the Jewish tradition and observance of ceremonial laws that had been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Neither of these passages abrogated the fourth commandment but rather provide a fuller meaning to the necessity of observing it.

This work has examined the teaching of Christ and the teaching of Paul and will now turn to one final passage which is central to the perpetual nature of the fourth commandment.

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**Hebrews 4:9-10**

One of the central passages to any debate concerning the perpetual nature of the Jewish Sabbath and its relationship to the Christian Lord’s Day is found in Hebrews 4:9-10. Hebrews is a letter about the supremacy of Christ Jesus as the Great High Priest. It is within this greater context that one must approach Hebrews 4:9-10.

There have been many theological arguments concerning verses 9-10 of Hebrews chapter 4 surrounding the question of Sabbath observance. What is the meaning of these few words and how does it affect a true understanding of the Lord’s Day and a theology of rest? The question that needs to be answered in this work is whether or not the rest in Hebrews 4:9-10 offers anything to the theology of perpetual Lord’s Day observance.

Lenski says it is noteworthy that the author begins verse 9 with āra. He parenthetically notes that āra is almost never used in the “classics” as the start of a sentence.³³ Through the usage of āra the author is deliberately drawing a conclusion from the previous exposition of Psalm 95 that “the settlement of Canaan did not mark the fulfillment of the divine promise but pointed to another, more fundamental reality”.³⁴ In other words, because the promised rest of God was not found in Canaan (4:8) there still remains a rest for the people of God (4:9). This rest is only found through faith in Jesus Christ (Heb. 4:1-3). Just as the Israelites awaited rest so the people of God also await the rest that was once promised by God.

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The author maintains that there “still remains” a Sabbath celebration for God’s people as a future promise. The people of God are to look forward to the true rest of God as they await glorification. It is when the believer leaves this life and has breathed their last breath that they will experience the consummation of God’s promised rest.

*Sabbatismos* means a “Sabbath Celebration” and is unique to Hebrews and is only referenced in a few extant extra-biblical works. These works have indicated that *Sabbatismos* meant an observance or celebration of the Sabbath rather than “Sabbath Rest”. Lane believes that *Sabbatismos* had been intentionally substituted for the more “characteristic term *katapauó*”. The purpose was to draw a parallel between the aforementioned rest and the Sabbath celebration. By using *Sabbatismos* the author is able to stress the worship, praise and celebration that were typical of a Sabbath Celebration. In other words, the Sabbath Celebration that still remains for the people of God is characterized by the worship and adoration of God and is found through faith in Jesus Christ and fully realized when His people are glorified.

Lane draws a parallel between the conclusion of verse 6a and verse 9 in Hebrews chapter 4 that is worth investigating. The author of Hebrews says that the fact remains

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35 ἀπολείπομαι is in the present, passive indicative third person singular of ἀπολείπομαι

36 The term σαββατισμός appears to have been coined from the cognate verb σαββατίζειν, “to observe/to celebrate the Sabbath.” In its only occurrence in non-Christian literature (Plutarch, *Concerning Superstition* 3 [Moralia 166 A]), the term signifies Sabbath observance. In four other documents from the patristic period that are independent of Heb 4:9, the term denotes the celebration or festivity of the Sabbath (Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 23.3; Epiphanius, *Against All Heresies* 30.2.2; *The Martyrdom of Peter and Paul*, chap. 1; ApostConst 2.36.2; discussed by Hofius, *Katapausis*, 103–6). The term σαββατισμός stresses the special aspect of festivity and joy, expressed in the adoration and praise of God (cf. Hofius, *Katapausis*, 106–10; Losada, *RevisB* 36 [1974] 127). In v 9 this nuance defines the character of the promised rest awaiting the people of God in the consummation. Lane, 102.

37 Ibid., 101.

38 Ibid.
that some are to enter the rest of God in verse 6a. In verse 9 the author uses Sabbatismos
to draw a more specific conclusion as to the type of rest that our eternal rest in the Lord
will be which is the same rest that God experienced on the 7th day (Heb. 4:4). It is also
important to note that the author doesn’t just remind us that there remains true rest in
Jesus Christ, but that this rest is only for the people of God.

Some translations close out verse 9 as one sentence. However, the author
continues the line of thought in verse 9 as he begins verse 10 with gάρ which helps us to
understand that the Sabbath referred to is what God means by “my rest” in 4:3. The
author is continuing his thought and is drawing us back to his argument as he draws
conclusions. The use of gάρ indicates a causal relationship between verse 9 and verse 10.
Lane says that verse 10 “clarifies why in the eschatological rest a Sabbat
ismos will be
possible. Whoever has entered the consummation-rest will experience the completion of
his work, as did God after the creation (vv 3c–4), and will enjoy the rest that is necessary
for the festivity and praise of a Sabbath celebration.”

In summary, the author of Hebrews is saying that there awaits a rest for the people
of God and that the believers are to be encouraged that those who were faithful and no
longer live are now resting as they have entered into God’s perfect rest (4:9-10). This
same rest is available to all of God’s people through faith in Christ.

Does Hebrews 4:9-10 defend the perpetual nature of the Lord’s Day? It is clear
from this study that the author’s original intent was not to give an expressed command
concerning the Lord’s Day. To be sure, the author is speaking of the rest which the

39 Lenski, 137.

40 Lane, 102.
Lord’s Day remembers, typifies and looks forward to. *Sabbatismos* is mentioned because it helps to illustrate the message of Hebrews which is the superiority of faith in Jesus Christ.

Does this mean that there is no application to be found concerning the perpetuation of the Sabbath command and the change to the Lord’s Day? To be sure, Hebrews 4:9-10 does not expressly command a perpetual Sabbath. However, neither does the author rescind obedience to the fourth commandment. If the Sabbath Day was instituted to remember God’s rest at creation (Exodus 20:8-11) and remembrance of deliverance (Deut. 5:12-15) and looks forward to the eternal rest of God (Heb. 4:1-11) then it is prudent to conclude that the fourth commandment still stands today and that the Lord’s Day is to be observed in that God’s people are still looking forward to the “not yet” in the consummation of the Kingdom of God. The author of Hebrews certainly does not abrogate the Sabbath commandment but rather develops a fuller meaning and theology for the Church’s gathering on the Lord’s Day.

**A Change from the Seventh Day to the First Day**

One question that must be addressed is why the Lord’s Day is now on the first day of the week rather than the seventh day of the week. Some would contend that the New Testament does not explicitly command that the Lord’s Day is to be the first day of the week and as a result many ignore the biblical evidence of the continuity of the fourth commandment and the importance and theological significance of the Christian Lord’s Day. Although there is not one expressed command to be found in the New Testament concerning a transference theology from Saturday to Sunday, a solid theological
argument can be made from the whole of Scripture that transference from the Jewish Sabbath to the Christian Lord’s Day has taken place.

The question that remains for transference theologians to answer pertains to what aspects of the fourth commandment have been transferred to the Lord’s Day and whether or not there is biblical warrant for a ceremonial and moral distinction in the fourth commandment. Traditionally, transference theologians have argued that there is a distinction in the fourth commandment between the ceremonial and moral aspects. By making this distinction it can be argued that the seventh day portion of the fourth commandment is ceremonial while the rest for worship aspects are moral and perpetually binding. This section will examine the evidence for the possibility of transference theology from Scripture as revealed in the fourth commandment, delineate what aspects of the fourth commandment are still binding from those aspects that have expired and the New Testament evidence for transference theology.

In Exodus 20:8-11 God says, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God (Ex. 20:9-10).” It would be impossible to prove from the fourth commandment that Saturday is a perpetual mandate and part of the moral implications of the commandment. God gave His people seven days in which six are to be work days and every seventh is to be a holy Sabbath day of rest. Williamson says, “The command itself does not tell us that we must keep the last day of the week as the Sabbath. It only tells us that we must keep one day out of every week. The order of days is not fixed by the commandment itself.” 41 It is true that the commandment itself does not command that the modern day Saturday is to be the Lord’s

Day. God has given a rhythm of seven days to man that is founded in the creation account and expressed in the fourth commandment.

In her study on the Sabbath, Marva Dawn agrees with Williamson’s suggestion on the particular day for observance of the Sabbath when she writes, “The important thing is that a particular day is set aside as the Sabbath, and that it is observed faithfully every seven days so that God can imbue us with his rhythm of six days of work and one day of ceasing work.” Later in her work, Dawn seems to travel a step further than Williamson suggesting that the Lord’s Day may be observed on any day of the week and that we ought not to be legalistic concerning the day. She writes,

We dare not be legalistic about which day is considered one’s seventh day—hence I’m not too bothered by the argument about whether the Sabbath must be Saturday or Sunday. We lose the freedom of the gospel if we become too legalistic about that issue. What God wants from us is a whole day that we set apart to honor him by gathering with a sacred assembly and by ceasing from work—a day that is a Sabbath ceasing unto Yahweh...The key to experiencing the Sabbath in the richness of its design is to recognize the importance of its rhythm. Which day is used to observe the Sabbath is not as important as ensuring that the day of ceasing occurs every seven days without fail.

To be sure, the Christian is not to form a legalistic observance of the Lord’s Day based on the ceremonial laws of the Jewish Sabbath. This much is clear from the Pauline passages already observed as well as the teachings of Jesus. However, a theology of the Sabbath built around this observation alone can be precarious which will often lead to an ignorance of the Lord’s Day. This ignorance is evident in the church today as many lack theological understanding and as a result do not have a practical knowledge of the Lord’s Day. Biblical history and the limited accounts from the New Testament seem to prove

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43 Ibid., 14.
that a definite change in the day of observance took place after the resurrection of Jesus Christ based on that glorious event.

Some would argue that the New Testament does not reinforce the fourth commandment as it does the other nine commandments. Those who reach this conclusion fail to understand the difference between the ceremonial and moral aspects of the law and how these differences apply to the fourth commandment. A.T. Lincoln writes, “To become a seventh-day Sabbatarian is the only consistent course of action for anyone who holds that the whole Decalogue is binding as moral law.” This statement would be true if there were no evidence for ceremonial aspects to the Sabbath commandment. However, this work argues that there are other biblical interpretations that have merit and agrees with J. Douma when he argues that the observance of the Sabbath on Saturday was part of the “provisional” rather than the “permanent” aspect of the fourth commandment. Therefore, although Saturday observance is not perpetual, the observance of the Lord’s Day is.

Lincoln argues against any such distinction between the provisional and permanent aspects of Sabbath Law. He writes, “the moral and ceremonial distinction developed in the post-apostolic period is not one that can do justice to the New Testament writers’ attitudes to the law” and therefore modern theologians should not make a distinction between the moral and ceremonial aspects of the law since the New Testament writers did not have a full understanding of such a distinction. However, the New Testament


\[45\] The provisional and permanent are often referred to as the “ceremonial” and “moral” law respectively. J. Douma believes that the terms “provisional and permanent” better suit the discussion.

\[46\] Douma, 141.
Testament writers do illustrate a true understanding of ceremonial and moral law distinctions within the Mosaic Law (Matt. 5:17-18, Rom. 14:5, Col. 2:16-17, Heb. 7:11-18) as well as the eschatological significance of a Sabbath Celebration (Hebrews 4:9-10).

This work understands the ceremonial aspect of the fourth commandment to be observance of the Sabbath on the seventh day. This ceremonial aspect of the fourth commandment is no longer required. The moral aspect of one day given fully to the Lord for worship is still binding and is to be observed by the Church. This work will now turn to the scriptural evidence for worship on the first day of the week.

There is sufficient evidence that Christians gathered together on the first day of the week as a corporate body (Acts 20:7, I Cor. 16:2). Paul ordered the churches to meet on the Lord’s Day and to “set aside a sum of money” (I Cor. 16:2). God had now instituted the first day of the week to be the day that Christians came together to remember the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and for the corporate gathering of God’s people for the worship of the Lord. It was on the first day of the week that Jesus Christ rose from the dead (Matthew 28:1). God had now “fixed the order in a new way when He raised up Christ on the first day of the week and began to call His Church together to worship on that day.”47 On the foundation of this evidence it can be said that the early church held a special significance to what eventually became known as “the Lord’s Day” (Rev. 1:10).

The first day of the week was not a random choice but rather a divinely appointed day. Ezekiel Hopkins says,

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47 Williamson, 232.
Now, as the first institution of the Sabbath was by divine authority so likewise is the change of it. For, as God rested from all His labor on the last day of the week: so Christ rested from his labor, sorrows, and afflictions on this day; in which he fully completed the work of our redemption, and manifested it to be perfected by His resurrection from the dead. Therefore, as the Jewish Sabbath was sanctified, because of the finishing of the work of Creation: so was the Christian Sabbath, because of the finishing of the Work of Redemption which is of far greater importance…Christ sanctified this day by His resurrection and the Apostles confirmed the observation of it…

The pattern is not difficult to see in the New Testament. Jesus arose from the dead on the first day of the week (Matt 28:1), the disciples were gathered together on the first day of the week following the Resurrection (John 20:19), they once again gathered on the first day of the week during Pentecost as the Holy Spirit descended upon them (Acts 2) and in addition there are several other specific occasions in which the believers gathered together (I Cor. 16:2, Acts 20:7).

It is proven from Scripture that the early Church gathered together for worship on the first day of the week. Even Lincoln agrees that the New Testament accounts “justify the practice of worship at some time on the first day of the week”. However, transference theology has been criticized for including the idea of rest for worship in that there is not a single instance of a requirement for rest on the first day of the week. In fact, it is probable that many Christians continued to observe both the Jewish Sabbath and the Lord’s Day. It would have been impractical for the believer to take two days of rest for worship. Lincoln finds that there is “no justification from the New Testament or from the early church’s writings for any continuity that would include the necessity of

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49 Carson et al., 393.
abstinence from work and of physical rest on the Lord’s Day.\textsuperscript{50} But Lincoln does admit
the “need to insist on some sort of continuity of force for the fourth commandment, since
this commandment is not simply left in abeyance”.\textsuperscript{51} In other words, Lincoln, like the
Sabbatarian does make a distinction between aspects of the fourth commandment as some
parts being perpetual and other parts finding fulfillment in Christ. The fourth
commandment must be seen within the context of Christ’s fulfillment of the law and
ought to be practiced according to what Lincoln calls a “new situation”.\textsuperscript{52}

The Lord’s Day and the Jewish Sabbath have many similarities as the former is
the fulfillment of the latter. Of course both days occur weekly (Ex. 20:8-11, I Cor. 16:2),
celebrate redemption, focus on the Resurrection (the Sabbath pointed forward as the
Lord’s Day remembers), both prefigure the final consummation of the Kingdom of God
and the rest that awaits the people of God (Heb. 4:9-10), both days are centered around
worship and both days focus on the Lordship of Christ (Rev. 1:10).

The differences are also noteworthy. There was a change of day from the seventh
to the first day of the week that progressively became the norm in the early church. The
physical rest commanded by God in the fourth commandment (Ex. 20:8) prefigures the
eschatological rest that the people of God continue to wait for (Heb. 4:9-10). Finally,
whereas the prominent aspect of the fourth commandment in the Old Testament was rest
from labor, the prominence of spiritual rest and worship is evident in the Lord’s Day.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 394.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
The theological significance of the change from the seventh day to the first day is a reflection of redemptive history. In the Old Testament, God’s people were looking forward to the rest that they would receive in the Redeemer. In the New Testament and to this day, God’s people look back at the work of Christ in the redemptive plan. The order of days on the church calendars reflect this significance. Christ’s work has been completed and His people wait for his return.53

Conclusion Concerning the Sabbath
From a Scriptural Perspective

This work has examined the Scriptures and concludes that the fourth commandment is perpetual in nature in that, (1) it is founded upon the example of God in creation and therefore is a creation ordinance (2) it is a part of the Moral Law which is binding to all people for all time (3) Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath, commanded that the Sabbath be observed and in fact observed it himself and in no way abrogates the Sabbath but fulfills it and brings full meaning to it (4) Paul does not abrogate the Sabbath but rather abrogates ceremonial distortions of the Sabbath Day (5) Hebrews 4 builds upon the theology of the Sabbath and provides a foundation as to why the Church continues to celebrate the Lord’s Day as it awaits perfect rest (6) and finally, the Sabbath Day is now the Lord’s Day and was changed from the ceremonial observance on the seventh day of the week to the theologically significant first day of the week.

This work will now turn from a Scriptural discussion of the Sabbath to a historical overview and development of a theology of the Lord’s Day. These views will briefly be compared and contrasted with the position and findings of this work.

53 Ibid., 400.
CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL VIEWS OF THE SABBATH

The Early Church Fathers
through the Medieval Times

*Early Church Fathers*

This work began with a study of the Scriptures because the Scriptures are finally authoritative on the matter of the fourth commandment. However, it is prudent to give a brief study of what the church has practiced throughout history and what the fathers believed concerning the Lord’s Day. A study of the history of the Sabbath must keep in view that it is not entirely clear what the early Church practiced on the Lord’s Day nor “how Sunday was celebrated in the very early centuries of the church history nor how in that period the Sabbath and its relationship to the Lord’s Day were viewed.”\(^54\)

Eusebius of Caesarea is known as the ‘Father of Ecclesiastical History’. He became a bishop in Caesarea and recorded the events of the Church from the early beginnings into the early fourth century. He did shed some light, although limited, on the practice of the Lord’s Day in the early church when he wrote,

For as the name Christians is intended to indicate this very idea, that a man, by the knowledge and doctrine of Christ, is distinguished by modesty and justice, by patience and a virtuous fortitude, and by a profession of piety towards the one and only true and supreme God; all this no less studiously cultivated by them than by us. They did not, therefore, regard circumcision, nor observe the Sabbath, neither do we; neither do we abstain from certain foods, nor regard other injunctions, which Moses subsequently delivered to be observed in types and symbols, because such things as these do not belong to Christians.  

Eusebius neither affirms nor denies the celebration of the Lord’s Day but rather rejects the celebration of the Jewish Sabbath in the early church. His remarks are agreeable with this work’s understanding of Pauline theology and the Lord’s Day. However, Eusebius offers more insight in his discussion of the heretical Ebionites,

The Ebionites cherished low and mean opinions of Christ…with them the observance of the law was altogether necessary, as if they could not be saved, only by faith in Christ and a corresponding life. These, indeed, thought on the one hand that all of the epistles of the apostles ought to be rejected, calling him an apostate from the law, but on the other, only using the gospel according to the Hebrews, they esteem the others as of little value. They also observe the Sabbath and other discipline of the Jews, just like them, but on the other hand, they also celebrate the Lords days very much like us, in commemoration of His resurrection.

It is clear from the writings of Eusebius that the early church did celebrate the Lord’s Day and that their justification was the fact that Jesus had risen on the first day of the week which was a divine appointment by God to change the observance of the Sabbath. Furthermore, Eusebius’ view of the Lord’s Day differs from a ceremonial observance of the Sabbath Day which agrees with this work’s interpretation of Paul’s theology concerning Sabbath observation. Eusebius makes a distinction between the Jewish

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56 Ibid., 112-113.
Sabbath and the Christian Lord’s Day to the effect that the former was no longer favored by the Church and the later a certain practice of the Church.

But perhaps Eusebius’ declaration from his fifth book in chapter 23 is the most concrete evidence of an early church observation of the Lord’s Day when he wrote,

The churches throughout the rest of the world observe the practice that has prevailed from apostolic tradition until the present time, so that it would not be proper to terminate our fast on any other but the day of the resurrection of our Savior. Hence there were synods and convocations of the bishops on this question; and all unanimously drew up the ecclesiastical decree, which they communicated to all the churches in all places, that the mystery of our Lords resurrection should be celebrated on no other day than the Lords day.57

The ‘Father of Church History’ recognized the celebration of the Lord’s Day as taking place from the earliest of days in the Church. Consequently, there was a marked distinction between the ceremonial observances of the Sabbath of Judaism and the Lord’s Day of Christianity. Eusebius was not the only early church father to recognize the Lord’s Day as part of church history.

Iranaeus, the Bishop of Lyons and a disciple of Polycarp in the second century wrote, “The duty of celebrating the mystery of the resurrection of our Lord may be done only on the day of the Lord.”58 The Didache, dated about 70 A.D says, “But every Lord’s Day do ye gather yourselves together, and break bread and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure.”59 Ignatius the Bishop of Antioch wrote, “…those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in

57 Eusebius, 207.
58 Ibid., 209.
the observance of the Lord's Day..." Ignatius makes a most definite statement which concurs with Eusebius’ words,

Do not be deceived by strange doctrines or antiquated myths, since they are worthless. For if we continue to live accordance with Judaism, we admit that we have not received grace. For the most godly prophets lived in accordance with Christ Jesus. This is why they were persecuted, being inspired as they were by His grace in order that those who are disobedient might be fully convinced that there is one God who revealed Himself through Jesus Christ His Son...If, then, those who had lived in antiquated practices came to newness of hope, no longer keeping the Sabbath but living in accordance with the Lord's day, on which our life also arose through Him and His death (which some deny), the mystery through which we came to believe, and because of which we patiently endure, in order that we might be found to be disciples of Jesus Christ, our only teacher, how can we possibly live without Him, whom even the prophets, who were His disciples in the Spirit, were expecting as their teacher...having become His disciples, let us learn to live in accordance with Christianity. For whoever is called by any other name than this one does not belong to God...It is utterly absurd to profess Jesus Christ and to practice Judaism. For Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity, in which "every tongue" believed and "was brought together" to God.61

It is clear from these few writings that the early church practiced a celebration of the Lord’s Day and drew a contrast between it and that of the Jewish Sabbath. It is also clear that the early church fathers agreed with this work that the moral aspect of the fourth commandment was perpetual and realized in the celebration of the Lord’s Day. The details are few on what exactly occurred on the Lord’s Day in the early church but the testimony of the early church father indicates a special significance for the first day of the week.


61 Lightfoot and Harmer, 95-96.
The Medieval Church

The Medieval Church has contributed greatly to the modern Church observance of the Lord’s Day and has influenced much of the theological debate surrounding the Day. During the Middle Ages the Church began to struggle with the legalism that the Jews struggled with in between the Testaments. Since Constantine’s Sabbath laws of 321 A.D., Sabbatarianism became a grass roots movement in the Church. Baukham writes,

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.62

The Medieval Church developed a theology concerning the Sabbath due to popular demand and practical reasons rather than from a theological perspective.

The Medieval Church commingled with the state and as a result throughout the 12th through 15th centuries, church and state power and the balance between the two entities would be problematic. During this time, the Lord’s Day would be declared to be a day of rest, cessation from labor and put aside for church duties and worship.

In 321 A.D. Emperor Constantine issued an edict declaring Sunday to be the Lord’s Day effectually sealing the future observance of Christian worship to the first day of the week. In the coming medieval period the Church attempted to hand out civil punishment for Sabbath breakers by enforcing civil laws and handing out punishment for those who ignored the Lord’s Day. In 789 A.D. Charlemagne decreed that all work was to halt on the Lord’s Day. Up until the Reformation, the Church and State inflicted penalties upon those who ignored the laws concerning the Lord’s Day.

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“The greatest impetus to Sabbatarianism came, however, from the Christianization of the barbarian nations.” Wilhelm Thomas writes, “The newly converted Germanic tribes were so deeply impressed with the similarity between their own pagan taboo-days and the Jewish Sabbath that they quite willingly accepted the Lord’s Day as the day when work and violence had to cease.” In the fourth and fifth centuries more and more pagans were converted, usually en masse, and as a result pagan traditions and holy festivals made their way into the Church. Consequently, the Church began to regulate the festivals, assimilating these days into the tradition of the Church. Naturally, the Jewish Sabbath found a counterpart in the Christian Lord’s Day.

In the later Middle Ages, through the influence of Scholasticism, two developments transformed Lord’s Day theology. Theologians made the “distinction between moral and ceremonial aspects within the Sabbath commandment” and they treated “the Decalogue as Natural Law”. Now a distinction could be made so that the theology of the first day of the week could be kept while a literal observance of the Sabbath transferred to the Lord’s Day could also be argued.

Thomas Aquinas gave the Sabbath the Scholastic treatment in his Summa Theologica. He is quoted as saying, “The Sabbath has been changed to the Lord’s Day, as festivals of the new law replace other festivals of the Old.” According to Aquinas,

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63 Ibid.
65 Gaffin, 16.
66 Carson, 305.
the Sabbath commandment is part of Natural Law which is summarized in the Decalogue. Natural Law is never abrogated. Aquinas argues that in addition to moral law, there is also judicial law and ceremonial law. The judicial and ceremonial aspects of the law were abrogated when Jesus Christ fulfilled them in his earthly ministry.

According to Aquinas the Sabbath commandment contains ceremonial and moral law of which only the moral law, being Natural Law, is to be observed. The ceremonial aspect of the fourth commandment lies in the explicit instructions of observance on the seventh day. The moral aspect of the command is there should be a regular interval of time that is be set apart for worship and that time is to be on the first day of the week.

Through the popular and practical reasoning, the meaning of the Lord’s Day and its purpose in the Church became obscured in the Medieval Church. Richard Gaffin writes, “As the medieval period progressed, the true meaning of the Lord’s Day almost disappeared, and the complexion of this celebration became increasingly colored by the legalistic system of which it was a part.”

The Church had obscured the meaning of the Lord’s Day just as it had obscured many of the doctrines of grace and salvation through Christ alone. It is in this context that many of the Reformers wrote concerning their theology of the Lord’s Day. The Reformation would begin to take a new look at the Lord’s Day and make new contributions to the theology of the church for years to come.

\[68\] Carson, 306.

\[69\] Gaffin, 17.
The Reformers

*The Reformation Perspective*

The Reformation brought the Church out of the Dark Ages and back to the light of Scripture. But through the Dark Ages many traditions had sprouted and much damage had been done. In particular, the biblical view of the Lord’s Day had been obscured by the traditionalism of the Roman Church. Many of the Reformation Fathers’ views on the Lord’s Day must be understood within the context of history. They felt a just need to respond to the distortions of the Roman Church. Hughes Oliphant Old wrote, “By the beginning of the sixteenth century the trimming of the calendar had an obvious place on the agenda of church reform.”70 On the eve of the Reformation the Lord’s Day had become “A day whose true significance had been almost entirely obscured by the encumbrances of an ecclesiastically sanctioned soteriological legalism.”71 This was the Sabbath that the Reformers wrote about and the situation to which they were writing. As a result, Lord’s Day theology would see a new extreme in the utilitarian views of many of the Reformers as well as development of a true scriptural approach.

One Reformer who has had significant contribution to the position of the church today was Wolfgang Capito. He was a contemporary of Martin Bucer and was well learned in Old Testament Theology and the history of law. For Capito, the question of the Lord’s Day must be answered within the context of the relationship of the Old

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71 Gaffin, 20.
Testament to the New Testament. Capito, in a “typically Augustinian manner found a strong continuity between the two testaments.”

Capito drew the same connection that this work has drawn between Hebrews 4 and the perpetual nature of the Lord’s Day. The Sabbath prefigures the rest and salvation that is now found in Christ and will ultimately be realized in the consummation of the Kingdom of God. This rest was not fully experienced by Israel and is only found in the resurrection of Christ. This rest is experienced in part and in an imperfect way during the weekly observance of the first day of the week which is the Lord’s Day. Capito’s view on the Lord’s Day has greatly impacted the Reformed churches of today.

**John Calvin**

This work will focus on two of the major reformers including John Calvin and Martin Luther. It will also touch on a few other Reformation contributions before turning to the 17th and 18th century developments.

Whole volumes can and have been written on John Calvin’s view of the Lord’s Day. This work will focus on the overall position of Calvin in relation to the Lord’s Day. John Calvin is important to the Sabbath debate as he has oft been quoted by strict sabbatarians as well as those who abrogate the Sabbath in their theology.

In 1555, the libertine party in Geneva was losing power just as fast as Calvin was rising to power when he preached a series on the Decalogue. These sermons were an expansion of his *Institutes*. This work will focus on excerpts from this series of sermons together with his position in the *Institutes* to come to some conclusions concerning

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72 Old, 35.
Calvin’s theology on the perpetual nature of the Sabbath and whether or not his writings leave room for transference theology.

Calvin’s sermon series on the Decalogue and his position in the Institutes has left some room for debate in his approach to the Lord’s Day. Gaffin says of Calvin, “widespread disagreement has persisted about what Calvin meant where he has expressed himself concerning the Sabbath.”\(^73\) The writings of Calvin demonstrate why there is so much debate as he wrote,

> The sabbath being abrogated, there is still room among us, first, to assemble on stated days for the hearing of the Word, the breaking of the mystical bread, and public prayer; and, secondly, to give our servants and labourers relaxation from labour. It cannot be doubted that the Lord provided for both in the commandment of the Sabbath.\(^74\)

At first glance, Calvin seems to advocate the abrogation of some aspect of the Sabbath while leaving room for a volunteer observance. However, Calvin contributed to a clarification of his position when he wrote, “Still there can be no doubt that, on the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, the ceremonial part of the commandment was abolished.”\(^75\) This statement puts the previous words into context. Gaffin writes,

> Not too surprisingly, this statement and others like it have been in the spotlight in subsequent controversies about the Sabbath...Little effort has been put into finding out what Calvin had in mind when he says, “the ceremonial part of this commandment was abolished.”\(^76\)

According to Calvin, the ceremonial aspect to the Sabbath has been abolished rather than the entire fourth commandment. Calvin had always held the Decalogue in high esteem.

\(^{73}\) Gaffin, 9.


\(^{76}\) Gaffin, 34.
Much of the debate surrounding Calvin’s view of the fourth commandment has resulted from his lack of inclusion of key concepts that had become popular in theological circles only after his death.

According to Gaffin, the ceremonial part that Calvin is referring to is “what Calvin previously called a “mystery”, a “figure,” or a “foreshadowing” of spiritual rest.” The mystery that Calvin is referring to is the spiritual rest from evil that has been given by Jesus Christ. According to Calvin, “The promise of rest from sin has been completely fulfilled by the advent of Christ.”

Some critics believe that Calvin does not clearly distinguish what has passed away as a shadow and what is substance and to be observed perpetually, if at all. Lawrence A. Gilpin says,

First, he is unclear as to how the Sabbath commandment is in effect today. He states that it was a shadow and affirms that “the obscurity of the law has been abolished with the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”…thus he seems, on one hand, to say that the Sabbath has been fulfilled in Christ. Yet, on the other hand, he sets forth Sabbath related truths about worship and mortification that are clearly, in his view, still in force.

However, Calvin seems to make a distinction in the Institutes that shed light on his position when read within the historical context in which the Institutes were written.

To summarize, Calvin is saying that the Old Testament typified the spiritual rest that God’s people would have through the coming of Jesus Christ and his redemptive work. In addition, Calvin believes that Sabbath practice still remains in some form for the people of God in order to maintain church order. It can be concluded that Calvin does

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77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
not support an abrogation of weekly worship but rather holds to a perpetual view of the Lord’s Day and an abrogation of the Jewish Sabbath, especially pertaining to the ceremonial observations.

John Calvin believed that the Lord’s Day assisted in maintaining the purity and welfare of the Church and ought to be observed so that all could be done “decently and in good orders”. He wrote,

…unless these meetings are stated, and have fixed days allotted to them, how can they be held? We must, as the apostle expresses it, do all things decently and in orders (1 Cor. 14:40). So impossible, however, would it be to preserve decency and order without this politic arrangements that the dissolution of it would instantly lead to the disturbance and ruin of the Church. 80

According to Calvin, the Church could not maintain good order without some type of established gathering time. He goes so far as to say that the Church would be ruined if it failed to meet together for the worship of God. This is the driving cause of Calvin’s theology of the Lord’s Day and in many respects has continued to influence the Church today rather than a biblical understanding of the theology of the Lord’s Day.

However, Calvin does not only suggest practical reasons for the Lord’s Day. Although, he is unclear as to how the Lord’s Day was given to the Church, he clearly states that there is some divine nature behind the institution. He continues,

But if the reason for which the Lord appointed a sabbath to the Jews is equally applicable to us, no man can assert that it is a matter with which we have nothing to do. Our most provident and indulgent Parent has been pleased to provide for our wants not less than for the wants of the Jews. Why, it may be asked, do we not hold daily meetings, and thus avoid the distinction of days? Would that we were privileged to do so! Spiritual wisdom undoubtedly deserves to have some portion of every day devoted to it. But if, owing to the weakness of many, daily meetings cannot be held, and charity will not allow us to exact more of them, why

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80 Calvin, *Institutes*, II, viii, 32.
should we not adopt the rule which the will of God has obviously imposed upon us?\textsuperscript{81}

The closing words of this statement indicate that Calvin believed the fourth commandment had been imposed upon the Church and that this imposition continued to remain in effect. In fact, Calvin argues for a gathering of the Church on a daily basis but also realizes the impracticality of such a suggestion. In summary, Calvin held that the Lord’s Day was not only perpetual but that it ought to be observed for the purity and welfare of the Church.

It must be remembered that John Calvin was a Reformer and that the Lord’s Day had been distorted by the Medieval Church. Some of the Anabaptists who had begun a radical reformation accused the Reformers of holding to superstitious days. In response Calvin wrote,

\begin{quote}
I am obliged to dwell a little longer on this because some restless spirits are now making an outcry about the observance of the Lord’s Day. They complain that Christian people are trained in Judaism, because some observance of days is retained. My reply is, that those days are observed by us without Judaism, because in this matter we differ widely from the Jews. We do not celebrate it with most minute formality, as a ceremony by which we imagine that a spiritual mystery is typified, but we adopt it as a necessary remedy for preserving order in the Church.\textsuperscript{82}
\end{quote}

It is obvious to Calvin that there is a marked distinction between the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Lord’s Day. Here again, Calvin mentions the separation of the Jewish Sabbath from the Lord’s Day in that the “mystery” is no longer typified in the Lord’s Day but realized in Jesus Christ. He also suggests that the very order of the Church is guarded by keeping the Lord’s Day.

\textsuperscript{81}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{82}Ibid., II, viii, 33.
Evidently, Calvin’s opponents on this issue appealed to passages from the Pauline letters that continue to be hotbeds for Sabbath debate in the modern Church. Calvin addresses his dissenters,

Paul informs us that Christians are not to be judged in respect of its observance, because it is a shadow of something to come (Col. 2:16); and, accordingly, he expresses a fear lest his labour among the Galatians should prove in vain, because they still observed days (Gal. 4:10, 11). And he tells the Romans that it is superstitious to make one day differ from another (Rom. 14:5). But who, except those restless men, does not see what the observance is to which the Apostle refers? Those persons had no regard to that politic and ecclesiastical arrangement, but by retaining the days as types of spiritual things, they in so far obscured the glory of Christ, and the light of the Gospel…  

Gaffin writes, “The distinction of days the apostle speaks out against is not setting aside one day each week for worship…but the retention of the Sabbath as though it still typified something spiritual for Christians.” Calvin believed that the Christian should worship the Lord every day and that a public service should be held if at all possible. But realizing the problematic implications of such a practice, Calvin suggest that one day has to suffice until the coming of Christ.

Calvin goes on to give reason for a meeting on the first day of the week based on the practice of the early church. Calvin believed that a major factor in keeping worship once a week was for the decency and good order of the Church. He wrote,

For in the churches established by him, this was the use for which the Sabbath was retained. He tells the Corinthians to set the first day apart for collecting contributions for the relief of their brethren at Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:2). If superstition is dreaded, there was more danger in keeping the Jewish sabbath than the Lord’s day as Christians now do. It being expedient to overthrow superstition, the Jewish holy day was abolished; and as a thing necessary to retain decency, orders and peace, in the Church, another day was appointed for that purpose.

83 Ibid.
84 Gaffin, 39.
85 Calvin, Institutes, II, viii, 33.
Calvin seems to delineate with more precision what has passed away and what is still to be observed. According to Calvin the ceremonial observance that Judaism held so dearly has passed away in the coming of Christ. The Lord’s Day is now to be observed by the Christians in that what was once typified in the Sabbath has now been realized in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

As to the observance of the Lord’s Day on the first day of the week Calvin was clear in his *Institutes* when he wrote,

I do not cling so to the number seven as to bring the Church under bondage to it, nor do I condemn churches for holding their meetings on other solemn days, provided they guard against superstition. This they will do if they employ those days merely for the observance of discipline and regular order. The whole may be thus summed up: As the truth was delivered typically to the Jews, so it is imparted to us without figure…

Calvin was not concerned with the day on which the Church was to meet. He doesn’t rest the tradition of the first day of the week on special revelation nor does he believe that there is no relation between the Lord’s Day and the fourth commandment. Gaffin writes, “He held the most emphatic and uncompromising views on the perpetual validity and obligation of the Decalogue.”

On the nature of the Lord’s Day, Calvin’s main concern was the order and welfare of the Church. In his closing remarks on the Lord’s Day in the *Institutes* Calvin wrote, “We must be careful, however, to observe the general doctrine—in order that religion may neither be lost nor languish among us, we must diligently attend on our religious assemblies, and duly avail ourselves of those external aids which tend to promote the

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86 Ibid., II, viii, 34.
87 Gaffin, 42.
worship of God.” This is not to say that Calvin did not have a sound theology of the Lord’s Day. “For Calvin the preeminent practical concern of the fourth commandment is the maintenance of public worship.”

Calvin’s view is beneficial to the Church in that it steered clear of the legalism that had once again found its way into the Church throughout the Dark Ages. The Reformers were involved in a tumultuous time for the Church. Many forget that the Reformers desired to bring about change and a return to the authority of Scripture rather than a new denomination or sect in Christianity. When viewed in light of the historical context of the Reformation, Calvin’s writings on the Lord’s Day are more clearly understood.

**Martin Luther**

Martin Luther has been closely compared to John Calvin concerning his position on the Lord’s Day. Both of these Reformers are utilitarian in their view of the Lord’s Day. They believe that it is appropriate for the Church to observe it for pragmatic purposes but do not find a biblical foundation to require perpetual observance. Luther held that the Mosaic Law was abrogated when Jesus Christ fulfilled it. As a result Christians are not required to keep the Mosaic Law in ceremonial or moral form but rather obey Christ’s Law.

According to Luther, Christians are not legally or morally bound to keep the Sabbath or any other holy day. The Augsburg Confession states,

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88 Calvin, *Institutes II*, viii, 34.

89 Gaffin, 45.
They refer to the Sabbath-day as having been changed into the Lord's Day, contrary to the Decalogue, as it seems. Neither is there any example whereof they make more than concerning the changing of the Sabbath-day. Great, say they, is the power of the Church, since it has dispensed with one of the Ten Commandments!  

In Article 28 the Augsburg Confession was combating the power that the Pope had assumed for the Church. The Lutheran document claimed that no Scriptural basis can be found for the change in the Lord’s Day. The Confession continues,

What, then, are we to think of the Sunday and like rites in the house of God? To this we answer that it is lawful for bishops or pastors to make ordinances that things be done orderly in the Church, not that thereby we should merit grace or make satisfaction for sins, or that consciences be bound to judge them necessary services, and to think that it is a sin to break them without offense to others.  

The Confession once again reaffirms the doctrine of grace alone through Christ alone. The Church, according to the Confession, can call worship services for the order of the assembly but cannot bind the conscience of the believer. In no way does a proper observance of the Sabbath contribute to one’s salvation.

The result of this position is that the Lord’s Day is a responsible practice of the Church but not required from Scripture in that all Mosaic Law has been abrogated by the coming of Christ and His completed work. In the Confession’s own words it states,

For those who judge that by the authority of the Church the observance of the Lord's Day instead of the Sabbath-day was ordained as a thing necessary, do greatly err. Scripture has abrogated the Sabbath-day; for it teaches that, since the Gospel has been revealed, all the ceremonies of Moses can be omitted.

However, once again, the position is clouded when the confession states,

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91 Ibid.

92 Ibid.
And yet, because it was necessary to appoint a certain day, that the people might know when they ought to come together, it appears that the Church designated the Lord’s Day for this purpose; and this day seems to have been chosen all the more for this additional reason, that men might have an example of Christian liberty, and might know that the keeping neither of the Sabbath nor of any other day is necessary.  

The Lutherans are presenting a position against the authority of the Pope in that all authority over the Church is from Jesus Christ alone. It is true that the Roman Church had added holy days upon holy days and traditions upon traditions and it is this practice and claim to authority that the Augsburg Confession is battling against. The Confession attempts to address the doctrinal problems of the day but as a result the authors fell short of presenting the true meaning behind the change of the Sabbath. It fails to present a true biblical approach to the Lord’s Day in an effort to address practical issues of the day.

Luther falls short in distinguishing between the ceremonial and moral aspects of the fourth commandment in his passion to react against the pharisaical approach of the Roman Church. He, like Calvin, does not approach the Lord’s Day from an eschatological or redemptive historical view and as a result both of their views fall short of the greater theological and practical import of the Lord’s Day.

Most of the Reformers were inconsistent in their view of the Lord’s Day. This was probably due to the historical context and a fear to fall into the same doctrinal flaws that plagued the Roman Church. J. I. Packer wrote concerning the Reformers on their view of the Lord’s Day,

…the extraordinary thing is that their statements in other contexts show that ‘the Reformers, as a body, did hold the divine authority and binding obligation of the fourth command, as requiring one day in seven to be employed in the worship and service of God, admitting only of works of necessity and mercy to the poor and afflicted’. Why they never saw the inconsistency between asserting this in general

93 Ibid.
terms and yet offering an Augustinian exegesis of the Christian Sunday is a standing puzzle. One can only suppose that unwillingness to entertain the thought that Augustine might be wrong blinded them to the fact that they were riding two horses.  

The Reformers were important in developing a true biblical approach of the Lord’s Day even though they fell short. The Puritans would pick up where the Reformers left off as they took the perpetual observance of the Lord’s Day to a new extreme.

17th and 18th Century

The Westminster Divines

In 1646 English Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians came together as the Westminster Assembly in order to draft a confession that would unite the church. The result was a highly Calvinistic and scholastic document known as the Westminster Confession of Faith. The Confession espoused a highly sabbatarian theology which is largely based on the regulative principle and would greatly affect the Puritan Church for many years to come.

The regulative principle is the understanding that worship is to be based solely upon the Scriptures. To this point the Confession states, “But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.”

The Westminster Divines proposed transference

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theology as the basis of the Christian Lord’s Day replacing the Jewish Sabbath.

Concerning the Lord’s Day the Confession states, “He hath particularly appointed one
day in seven, for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto him: which, from the beginning of the
world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the
resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which, in Scripture, is
called the Lord’s Day, and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian
Sabbath.” The Confession makes no mistake about what parts of the commandment the
authors believed to be regulated by Scripture. The assembly believed that Scripture
ordered a cessation from all recreation and work so that the entire day might be spent in
the worship of the Lord and works of necessity and mercy.

The move from Calvin and Luther’s view of the Lord’s Day to the strict
Sabbatarian view in the 17th and 18th centuries was due in part to a significant interest in
the moral practices of believers. The Puritans desired to establish a holy society that
was based on God’s moral law and so naturally the question of the Sabbath had to be
systematically answered. To this end many proposed that there was “nothing ceremonial,
nothing typical, nothing to be abrogated” and that it was “natural, moral and perpetual.”
The Westminster Assembly adopted much of this theology and incorporated it into the
Confession of Faith. They believed that the fourth commandment was perpetually
binding in that it was part of the moral law. As a result they attempted to formulate an

96 Ibid., Chapter XXI, 7.

97 R.J. Bauckham, “The Sabbath and Sunday in the Protestant Tradition,” in From Sabbath to
Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation, ed D.A. Carson (Eugene: Wipf and
Stock Publishers 1999), 323.

observance of the Sabbath that at times is extra-biblical and draws “perilously close to pharisaism” as they forbade all words, thoughts and deeds about recreation and work. This view would experience an ebb and flow between degrees of strictness and severity as it influenced the Church for the next 300 years as Sabbatarian theology found expression in many forms.

**The Puritans**

The Puritan theology of the Lord’s Day ranges from extremely strict to more or less conservative. When Oliver Cromwell led the Puritans to power in England, the Anglican Church clashed with the Puritans over the church calendar. Some extreme Puritans wanted to abolish all religious holidays and feasts and desired the state to punish those who broke the Sabbath. But there were also moderate voices among the Puritans who desired to have a true scriptural understanding of the Christian Lord’s Day. The Puritans greatly affected Lord’s Day theology for 300 years.

The Puritan, Thomas Shepard, an American Reformed theologian who helped establish Harvard was one such moderate. In his work, *Theses Sabbaticae*, Shepard develops a theology of the moral law within the context of the Covenant of Grace. Shepard used the fourth commandment as an example of the rest of the law because, The Sabbath doctrine served as the occasion for this debate primarily because it was a visible reminder to Shepard that the requirement for legalistic duties is the pathway to true spiritual freedom. Therefore, he could argue that God’s free grace is compatible with urging Christian conduct that is in conformity with the demands of the law. He saw this most manifest in the institution of the Sabbath on the first week of creation.  

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99 Bauckham, “Protestant Tradition”, 327.  
He brilliantly wrote how the Lord’s Day should be observed on the first day of the week as Christ rose on the first day of the week and that the disciples were taught to worship on this day. Shepard understood the eschatological significance of the day of rest as typifying the eternal rest and salvation rest that believers have in Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{101} When it was suggested that the Lord’s Day ought to be completely abrogated and that every day ought to be observed as a Sabbath, Shepard wrote, “if the God of this world would have all professors [of the Christian faith] enjoy a total immunity from the law of God, and all manner of licentiousness allowed them without check of conscience, let them make an every-day Sabbath.”\textsuperscript{102} This was a more typical understanding of the Lord’s Day to many Puritans.

In the post-modern age, some have come to view the Puritan position of the Lord’s Day as an unnecessary weight upon the shoulders of a busy world. Sunday is considered to be a personal day rather than a day of worship. Matthew Henry’s words still ring true to a post-modern audience on how one should view the Lord’s Day when he wrote,

\begin{quote}
The sabbath is a sacred and divine institution; but we must receive and embrace it as a privilege and a benefit, not as a task and a drudgery. \textit{First}, God never designed it to be an imposition upon us, and therefore we must not make it so to ourselves…\textit{Man was made for God}, and for his honour and service, and he just rather die than deny him; but he was not \textit{made for the sabbath}, so as to be tied up by the law of it, from that which is necessary to the support of his life. \textit{Secondly}, God did design it to be an advantage to us, and so we must make it, and improve it. He made \textit{if for man}.\textsuperscript{103}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{101}Old, 37.

\textsuperscript{102}Evans, 310.

\textsuperscript{103}Matthew Henry, \textit{Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume} (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1991), Mk 2:18, 1781.
The moderate position of the Puritan was to observe the Lord’s Day as a gift from God. The church is called to rest from worldly affairs and pay special attention to the worship of the Lord on His day.

The mistake is often made by well-meaning reformed theologians to rely too closely on great theologians of the past. Reformed thinkers are often guilty of this when addressing the theology of the Puritans. J. I. Packer warns the theological descendants of the Puritans, “They would remind us that they were no more than servants and expositors of God’s written word, and they would charge us never to regard their writings as more than helps and guides to understanding that word.”

It is no secret that many of the Puritans were tedious in their observance of the Lord’s Day. Their theology of the Lord’s Day has greatly influenced many traditions today including many Reformed churches throughout the world. The Puritans desired to establish a holy society in which the Church was the central focus of life. Often, their legalistic view of the Lord’s Day has caused many to shy away from a current day approach to the Sabbath. Packer encourages the modern day theologian,

…if we resist the temptation to take over this application ready-made, and set ourselves to reapply God’s law realistically to our own present-day situation, we shall find in the Puritan expositions an incomparably rich and suggestive presentation of the positive principles that must guide our judgment in this matter.

Indeed a fresh look at the Lord’s Day is needed for the Church to experience the full blessing of the fourth commandment. A new and fresh look can result from a study of the Puritan view of the Lord’s Day.

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104 Packer, 233.
105 Ibid., 234.
The Puritan’s tedious view of the Lord’s Day came into conflict with the Anglican view of the Christian calendar. Under Oliver Cromwell, the Lord Protector, the Puritans would come into power in England for a time. During their reign of power the Puritans attempted to squash the feasts and festivals of the Anglican Church. According to the Puritans there would only be 52 holy days each year on the church calendar.

The Puritans reinforced the idea of cessation from work and recreation. Before the Puritans came into power in England during the 17th century it was the custom to take part in hunting, football, stage plays, feasts, dancing and other recreational activities. The Puritans created the ‘English Christian Sunday’ which would bring an end to all recreation and business on Sunday. This act would have lasting effects for sure. Even after the Puritans were forced from power, their principles remained intact. Packer writes,

…a violently anti-Puritan Parliament passed the Sunday Observance Act, which repeated, and confirmed, Commonwealth legislation on this subject. It prescribed that all should spend Sunday, not in trading, travelling, ‘worldly labour, business, or work of their ordinary callings’, but in ‘exercising themselves … in the duties of piety and true religion, publicly and privately’. ¹⁰⁶

Considering the weight with which the Puritans ruled England, the Sunday Observance Act is a testimony to the impact that their theology and conviction concerning the Sabbath had on the country in that even their enemies would regard the Lord’s Day as holy.

The Puritans had theological and biblical reasons for their observance of the Lord’s Day which built upon the Reformers view. They agreed with the Reformers in that the Jewish Sabbath is but a type with temporary significance in and of itself.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 236.
However, the Sabbath is also part of the moral law and a creation ordinance which by
default makes it a perpetual commandment that ought to be observed by all of humanity.

The Puritans believed that there was a character to the fourth commandment that
must be observed. Packer says that the Puritans believed that the Lord’s Day (1) means
action, not in-action, (2) is not a tedious burden but a joyful privilege, (3) is not useless
labor, but a means of grace, (4) brings chastisement when it is broken.

According to the Puritans, rest comes in the form of ceasing from every day work
and activity and acting on that which is merciful and necessary. God did not cease to act
when he rested (otherwise the world would have fallen apart) and neither are we to cease
from action and fall into slothfulness. The Puritans called the Lord’s Day a delight and
taught their children to delight in it. It was a day of feasting on the Bread of Life and
joining in fellowship with like-minded believers. It was a means of grace in that it
strengthened and comforted the believers and built them up in the knowledge and faith.
For the Puritan, the Lord’s Day was necessary for the very order of life. Where the
Lord’s Day was not kept, immorality and spiritual decline would fester. Some puritans
even believed that God continued to bring down judgment upon those nations that abused
the Lord’s Day.107

The Puritans had a major effect on the historical development of the Lord’s Day
theology. Their views continue to be debated around the world today. Richard Gaffin
writes, “Sabbatarian views rose to prominence immediately after the Reformation and
were strongly advocated by English Puritanism during the seventeenth, eighteenth and

107 Ibid., 240.
well into the nineteenth century.” The Church in the 19th century would fight its own battles concerning the Lord’s Day as the Enlightenment would birth Rationalism which would give way to Liberalism and as a result the normative authority of Scripture would be called into question.

19th Century

Hodge and Warfield

The 18th century saw the rise of liberalism as theologians responded to the skepticism of the Enlightenment. The Scottish philosopher, David Hume argued the idea that no generalization about experience is ever rationally justified. John Locke was devoted to the experience of man. Locke claimed that man was born ‘tabula rasa’. To Locke, the human mind was a blank slate which developed by experience throughout life.

James P. Eckman writes about the Rationalist thinkers,

Specifically, they regarded Christianity and all other religions as irrational and inappropriate in a scientific age. The Enlightenment sought rational explanations for all of reality; religion was no exception. With confidence in human reason and science, the Enlightenment championed the destruction of all barriers to human freedom and autonomy.

The Enlightenment opened the door for a liberal theology which gave way to heresy that would attempt to dismantle the authority of Scripture.

According to liberal theologians, the Scriptures were subject to human experience rather than propositionally revealed doctrines. As a result, Scripture was deemed as unreliable in both the Old and New Testament and doctrinal error made its way into the modern church. Eckman continues,

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108 Gaffin, 13.

Finally, the Enlightenment raised serious questions about the need for God. But with the emphasis on reason and science, God seemed irrelevant and unnecessary. With the rejection of objective revelation and skepticism about the supernatural, how can we know much about Him at all? This redefining of God laid the groundwork for the theological liberalism of the nineteenth century.\(^{110}\)

In light of the liberalism of the 19\(^{th}\) century, many theologians continued to combat the heresy of liberal theology and as a result protected the Church from disease. Although the Lord’s Day would be addressed by many theologians, the church in general began to witness degradation in the observance of the Lord’s Day that would have consequences for the modern day church.

This degradation of not only the Lord’s Day but many other theological precepts was due in part to the low view of Scripture that developed in the 19\(^{th}\) century. Schleiermacher claimed,

> You reject the dogmas and propositions of religion…. Religion does not need them; it is only human reflection on the content of our religious feelings or affections…. Do you say that you cannot accept miracles, revelation, inspiration? You are right; we are children no longer; the time for fairy-tales is past.\(^ {111}\)

Schleiermacher’s position was that religion was based on “feelings and affections” rather than the authoritative Word of God. According to Schleiermacher’s view of Scripture a discussion concerning the Lord’s Day would be irrelevant. “There was, then, no continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament. For most of the leaders of this school, the Old Testament had little influence in shaping Christianity.\(^ {112}\) The liberalism of the 19\(^{th}\) century would not be unchecked by defenders of the orthodox faith.

\(^{110}\) Ibid., 73.


\(^{112}\) Eckman, 75.
For the most part, those who held to the perpetual relevance of the fourth commandment in the 19th century held to the 17th century Puritan views of the Lord’s Day. R.J. Baukham observes that the Lord’s Day Observance Society generally kept to the Puritan views and had ironed out the theological complexities of the Puritanical view. Baukham claims that their view was “powerful, if somewhat over-simplified…intent on regulating the social behavior of the nation by the authority of the State.” However, in the face of theological liberalism there were also others, men such as B.B. Warfield and Charles Hodge, who would defend the authenticity, inerrancy and reliability of Scripture. As a result they would protect the precious doctrines of the Church including a proper view of the Lord’s Day.

In Romans 14:5 Paul says, “One man considers one day more sacred than another, another man considers every day alike.” This passage has come to be a source of contention in the Lord’s Day debate. In his commentary on Romans, Charles Hodge wrote concerning Romans 14:5,

It is obvious from the context, and from such parallel passages as Galatians 4:10 and Colossians 2:16, that Paul was referring here to the Jewish festivals, and therefore his language cannot apply to the Christian Sabbath. The thought of the passage is this: “One man observes the Jewish festivals, another man does not.” Such we know was the fact in the apostolic church, even among those who agreed about the observance of the first day of the week.

Hodge does not consider the Lord’s Day to be abrogated and this work is found to agree with his viewpoint in making the distinction between the ceremonial and moral use of the law. Hodge believed that the Sabbath was perpetual, instituted from the beginning and was to be observed by the Church. He wrote,


114 Charles Hodge, Romans, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993), Ro 14:5. CD-ROM.
It is a generally recognized principle, that those commands of the Old Testament which were addressed to the Jews as Jews and were founded on their peculiar circumstances and relations, passed away when the Mosaic economy was abolished; but those founded on the immutable nature of God, or upon the permanent relations of men, are of permanent obligation.  

Hodge also believed that a government founded upon Christian values should enforce a Lord’s Day observance though it should not force religious worship. This would once again enforce the Puritan’s view of the Lord’s Day in their search for a Holy Society.

Hodge is careful to separate between church and state affairs but argues that since the fourth commandment is part of the moral law that is should be just as binding as the other laws in the Decalogue which are a basis for human government.

B.B. Warfield agrees with Hodge and this work in an address he delivered which was later published in the Free Presbyterian Magazine. Warfield said,

Can we doubt that as Paul, and the whole Apostolic Church with him, dealt with the Fifth Commandment, so he dealt with the Fourth? That he preserved to it its whole substance and its complete authority, but eliminated from it too all that tended to give it a local and temporary reference? And why should this not have carried with it, as it certainly seems to have carried with it, the substitution for the day of the God of Israel, who brought his people out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, the day of the Lord Jesus, who brought them out of worse bondage than that of Egypt by a greater deliverance, a deliverance of which that from Egypt was but a type? Paul would be dealing with the Fourth Commandment precisely as he deals with the Fifth, if he treated the shadow-Sabbath as a matter of indifference and brought the whole obligation of the commandment to bear upon keeping holy to the Lord the new Lord's Day, the monument of the second and better creation.

That this was precisely what he did, and with him the whole Apostolic Church, there seems no room to question. And the meaning of that is that the Lord's Day is placed in our hands, by the authority of the Apostles of Christ, under the undiminished sanction of the eternal law of God.  


Warfield agrees with Hodge in that Paul does not abrogate the Sabbath in his letters but rather rids the Lord’s Day of the Jewish ceremonial law which had been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. According to Warfield, this is the Apostolic tradition of the Church and through it the true meaning of the Lord’s Day is revealed to us in the remembrance of the redemption that we have in Christ along with the future rest that is ours in the age to come.

In practice, the Lord’s Day continued to be a prominent part of life in the Church. In America, Blue Laws were continually enforced to preserve the day of rest and worship. But as the Church moved into the modern age the Lord’s Day would slowly become less of an issue as seemingly greater battles were fought for the very integrity and authority of Scripture. The liberal theology of the 19th century would eventually give way to the battles between the modernist and the fundamentalist theologians of the 20th century.

20th Century

Modernism and Fundamentalism

With the dawn of the 20th century the Church was continuing to change quickly. “Darwinism, the social gospel, and higher critical thinking…were common in mainline Protestantism.”117 The seminaries in America and Europe were turning out pastors to fill pulpits that became more and more modern in their theology. During this time, the theology of the Lord’s Day became less important to the mainline denominations. There were much bigger battles to be won. The war between modernism and fundamentalism raged on. Eckman says,

117 Eckman, 95.
The modernist wing of Protestantism had abandoned the inerrancy of Scripture, the Virgin Birth, the deity of Christ, His Second Coming, and His substitutionary atonement. The fundamentalists, through writing, preaching, and teaching, defended adherence to these fundamental doctrines as central to Christianity. In every major case, the fundamentalists lost control of the denominations. \textsuperscript{118}

Later in this work it will be demonstrated that men such as J. Gresham Machen and John Murray among many others fought to maintain orthodoxy within the Church. New denominations began to form as fundamentalists broke away from the mainline denominations when reconciliation seemed impossible.

Modern theology opened the door to deny the inerrancy of Scripture and as a result fundamentalist theologians spent much of their time defending the essential doctrines of the faith. The Lord’s Day continued to be observed by the fundamentalist churches without question. However, with the changes in state policy and the lackadaisical approach of many believers, the theology and import of the Lord’s Day quickly drifted into the background of church thought. Today, “it appears, the texture of Sunday observance is more often than not determined by traditionally accepted mores that have long since obscured whatever Scriptural basis they enjoy.”\textsuperscript{119}

In the previous centuries, much of the Sabbath debate centered on the relationship between the church and the state. As the chasm between church and state widened so the importance of the Lord’s Day question waned. There are still pockets of theologians who are concerned about the Lord’s Day but it is largely ignored and misunderstood within the modern day churches.

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 95.

\textsuperscript{119} Gaffin, 9.
D.A. Carson published a compilation *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day* that this work has often referred to. The basic position of this important work seems to reflect a comfort level that is held by many churches today,

It is not our intention to challenge the value of the existing institution of Sunday as still in some form a weekly recreation and rest day or to enter the debate about whether and how Christians should seek to have their preferences legislated for others in a pluralistic society. It is our intention, however, to challenge the view that gives biblical status to this Sunday tradition as binding for the individual or the church, and to challenge the theology that has been developed to give this support.\(^\text{120}\)

Carson’s work is undeniably thorough and gives a fair treatment to all sides of the Sabbath question even though it would disagree with this work and the conclusions drawn from this research on many of the same passages. Space limitations will prevent a thorough discussion but many of Carson’s points find rebuttal throughout this work.

Marva Dawn wrote, “Christian worship at the turn of the century is being affected adversely by aspects of our culture that "dumb down" everything.”\(^\text{121}\) As a result of Protestant liberal theology, much of what someone believes is based on what they feel rather than what is true from Scripture. This feeling-based theology has greatly affected how many approach the Lord’s Day.

However, even as the modern religious battles raged on, the early 20th century also experienced the “church growth movement” in which many churches turned to business principles in order to evangelize and change the world. As a result, the Sabbath


Day was turned “into a day of vigorous religious activity.”¹²² These business principles and utilitarian view of the Lord’s Day continue to affect the church today.

Many have failed to search the Scriptures concerning the Lord’s Day and as a result many have turned from the faith. It would not be difficult to blame the modern church’s woes on the advances of science and modern philosophical thought but if truth be told, much of the church’s theological failure has come from within. James Turner came to this startling conclusion,

Though both science and social transformation loom large in the picture, neither caused unbelief...Put briefly, unbelief was not something that happened to religion. On the contrary, religion caused unbelief. In trying to adapt their religious beliefs to socioeconomic change, to new moral challenges, to novel problems of knowledge, to the tightening standards of science, the defenders of God slowly strangled Him.¹²³

To be sure, since the early years of the Church, many well-meaning theologians have attempted to reconcile difficult Christian doctrine with the philosophy of the age. As a result, there have been some good conclusions as well as heresy that has found its way into the church.

As a result of this “dumbing down” the Lord’s Day does not hold much significance for many from a biblical and theological perspective. Many attend church on Sunday simply because it is traditionally accepted to do so. A theology of the Lord’s Day is necessary for one to understand what it practically means in their life and how they ought to observe it.


Conclusions from the Historical Study of the Sabbath

It has been observed by this work that the early Church did recognize a theological significance to worship on the Lord’s Day which was the first day of the week. Over time, as the Christian Church became more distinct from Jewish tradition, the Lord’s Day began to retain some of the practices of the Jewish Sabbath including a rest for worship.

Throughout the Middle Ages until the period of Reformation, the Church slowly instituted a state run observance of the Lord’s Day. In response to the distortions of the Roman Church, many of the Reformers rejected a full Sabbatarian position and as a result were often conflicting or lacking in their development of Lord’s Day theology.

However, throughout the 17\textsuperscript{th}, 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries a Sabbatarian theology was developed by a mostly Puritan group. This theology argued that the fourth commandment was perpetual and binding. The Puritans also made distinctions between the ceremonial and moral aspects of the fourth commandment in order to systematize transference theology. The Puritans desired a full day of rest for worship and believed that all of society should obey the fourth commandment. Sabbatarian theology had a great affect in the American church and state leading up to the era of liberal Protestant theology in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. During this time, the theology of the Lord’s Day took a back seat to the fundamentalist and modernist debates and as a result continues to lack any real prominence in most modern churches. Today, most churches largely ignore the significance of the Lord’s Day. This work will now turn to the theological implications of the biblical and historical evidence.
CHAPTER 4

THEOLOGY OF THE SABBATH

The fourth commandment is perpetually binding. All of the Law and prophets have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Matt. 5:17-18), yet the Law remains an infallible rule of faith and practice, a schoolmaster that leads one to Christ (Gal. 3:24), and a revelation of the perfection of Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:13). This work’s biblical study has suggested that Scripture indicates the perpetual nature of the fourth commandment. Sabbath moral law has not been abrogated but is understood differently now that the work of redemption is complete. This work will argue that the fourth commandment is perpetually binding in that it is a creation mandate and is part of the moral law. The fourth commandment also has a great eschatological and ethical application that must be understood in order to fully grasp the significance of the perpetual nature of the Sabbath principle.

The Creation Mandate

To argue that Sabbath observance is a “creation ordinance” means that it has always been commanded by God since the beginning of time and is perpetually binding for all time. A creation ordinance is part of the natural law and order of creation and the Decalogue is a summary of the natural law. Calvin says of the moral law,

Moreover, the very things contained in the two tables are, in a manner, dictated to us by that internal law, which, as has been already said, is in a manner written and stamped on every heart. For conscience, instead of allowing us to stifle our
perceptions, and sleep on without interruption, acts as an inward witness and monitor, reminds us of what we owe to God, points out the distinction between good and evil, and thereby convicts us of departure from duty.\footnote{Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, II, viii, 1.}

God has “stamped on every heart” the “internal law”. This internal law is known to every person that has ever walked the earth (Rom. 2:14-15). God summarized this law in the Ten Commandments and included Sabbath observance as part of the natural law.

Genesis 2:2-3 states, “Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.” This passage is the crux of the controversy as to whether or not the Sabbath is a creation ordinance.

H. Ross Cole believes that the case against the Sabbath as a creation ordinance is largely based on these verses in Genesis 2. He says,

\begin{quote}
In the context of Genesis 2:1-3, the case against the Sabbath as a Creation ordinance rests on three arguments from silence: the absence of the noun \textit{shabbat} (“Sabbath”), the absence of any reference to the seventh day consisting of an evening and a morning, and the absence of any explicit command to observe the Sabbath.\footnote{H. Ross Cole, “The Sabbath and Genesis 2:1-3,” \textit{Andrews University Seminary Studies} 41, no. 1 (2003): 6.}
\end{quote}

It is true that the noun for Sabbath is not found in Genesis 2. However, the word \textit{shabbat} is found in verb form as it is found in Exodus 31:17. In either case it would be exegetically difficult to argue that these instances do not refer to the Sabbath. The omission of a mention of evening and morning is due to the fact that these verses are the climax of the Creation account and is largely attributed to Hebrew style. The objection
also begs the question as to whether or not it is necessary for the narrative to state that there was evening and morning. The passage implies from its context that the seventh day included evening and morning just as the previous six days had evening and morning. The fact that there is not an explicit command for the Sabbath should not imply to the reader that a command is not given.\footnote{Ibid., 6-8.}

In his article, *Vos on the Sabbath: A Close Reading*, James T. Dennison Jr. observes that Vos believed that the fourth commandment was a creation ordinance and hence perpetually binding. He writes,

> Let us anticipate Vos’s response to the objection that since the theocracy has disappeared...so to the Sabbath principle. God Forbid! The Sabbath principle is a creation ordinance...what is transient passes away (theocracy); what is permanent and perpetual remains (weekly Sabbath).\footnote{Dennison, 63.}

So how can one come to the theological conclusion that the Sabbath is indeed a creation mandate? Cole says, “The clearest evidence in favor of the Sabbath as a Creation ordinance comes from a close study of the statement “and he sanctified it [the seventh day]” in Genesis 2:3.”\footnote{Cole, 9.} Cole goes on to note that *kadesh* is piel which would stress that this action of God is an immediate action and the results of the action are evident at the time that the action took place. In other words, when God sanctified the Sabbath he did so immediately and thus Sabbath observance was established in the beginning which results in the Sabbath as a creation ordinance. God mandated Sabbath rest. Genesis 1:26-27 says that God made man in His image and likeness. In addition, Genesis 2:2-3 God provides the example which man is to follow concerning Sabbath rest.

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{Ibid., 6-8.}
\item \footnote{Dennison, 63.}
\item \footnote{Cole, 9.}
\end{itemize}
As a result, when God established the Sabbath after the work of Creation was complete, rest on the Sabbath became a perpetual creation mandate. John Murray says of the Sabbath,

It belongs, therefore, to the order of things which God established for man at the beginning. It is relevant quite apart from sin and the need of redemption. In this respect it is like the institutions of labour (Gen. 2:15), of marriage (Gen. 2:24, 25), and of fruitfulness (Gen. 1:28). Murray is saying that just as labor, marriage, and the need for procreation is part of the natural order of creation, so Sabbath rest is also part of God’s natural order. Without labor, marriage and procreation the world would not continue on in an orderly existence. Without rest man would die. God created the Sabbath for man’s benefit. For six days man is to work but he is commanded to rest on the seventh day so that he might be able to accomplish God’s will for him in this life.

Murray is not arguing that the Lord’s Day is only for rest although physical and spiritual rest is necessary for man’s existence and continuance to do God’s will. Easton’s Bible Dictionary says, “The physical necessities of man require a Sabbath of rest. He is so constituted that his bodily welfare needs at least one day in seven for rest from ordinary labour. Experience also proves that the moral and spiritual necessities of men also demand a Sabbath of rest.” God has set apart one whole day for man to cease from his ordinary activity of work so that he can retreat his body and mind from the “daily grind” of life and set apart that time for worship and focus on his Creator.

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129 Murray, Sabbath Institution, 4.
A Sabbath rest is essential to the being of man. Vos wrote that the “principle underlying the Sabbath is formulated in the Decalogue…in this, that man must copy God in his course of life.” Dennison writes, “The God-patterned work-rest sequence from the beginning continues to define, regulate and mandate the weekly practice of the people of God until the end. For Vos, there is no annulment of the weekly Sabbath principle…” In addition to the eschatological significance of the Lord’s Day man is in need of spiritual and physical rest.

Those who would argue against the perpetual observance of the Sabbath day must also argue that the Sabbath command does not reach as far back as creation. This view is held by the dispensationalist. They hold that the Sabbath was only instituted at Sinai. Cohen says,

Thus the sabbath day was hallowed at creation, although Israel was not commanded to rest on this day until 1447 B.C…Thus, although Scripture does not explicitly tell us that God revealed His seven day week to the antediluvians or patriarchs, it is certain that this scheme could not be seen in nature without the aid of divine revelation.

This view is lacking for several reasons. Cohen’s view of law breaking depends upon divine revelation. The Scriptures speak of God revealing Himself to select people however His law was binding upon all mankind including those who did not hear God announce the requirements of the Law. Man is rendered sinful without excuse because “sin entered the world through one man and death through sin” (Rom. 5:12). All men who are born into the world are law breakers regardless of their complete or incomplete

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132 Dennison, 63.

133 Cohen, 8.
knowledge of God’s Law. Even when one sins out of ignorance they are still sinning against God as would have been the case for those who did not know about the Sabbath law from creation.

In addition to special revelation, God speaks to man through nature (Rom. 1:20). Sabbath rest is apparent in general revelation though admittedly not in a specific way. This is to say that man naturally understands his need for rest and that he must rest in order for the order of creation to continue. Man must rest or he will die of exhaustion. Cohen’s pre-requisite of exact divine revelation of the law for an ordinance to be law falls apart when studied in light of Romans 1 and 2. Paul makes it clear in Romans 2:14-15 that even without the written law of Sinai all of the moral law has been binding since the beginning of time.

Interestingly enough, Cohen also mentions the occurrence of the Sabbath in Exodus 16 which predates Sinai. He says,

Exodus 16:4–5, 14–30 tells that during Israel’s journey at the giving of the manna the seventh day was announced as “the rest of the holy sabbath unto the Lord” (v. 28). Weekly God brought forth the manna only on the first six days. Weekly He performed the miracle of causing the manna which fell in a double portion on the sixth day to signal ly last through the seventh day while on all previous days it putrefied overnight. Thus for forty years in the wilderness God taught the lesson of His sabbath in a visual and physical way. And so Israel rested on the seventh day (Exod 16:30). The dispensationalist sidesteps the problem their theology of the Sabbath presents in Exodus 16 and does not attempt to answer the objection raised by Covenant theology. It is evident from this passage that the fourth commandment which would be written in stone on Sinai was already written on the tablet of man’s heart.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{134}Cohen, 8.}\]
Perhaps the strongest evidence of the Sabbath as a creation ordinance can be found in the commandment itself. The fourth commandment claims to be a creation mandate in that it references Creation as its foundation. Exodus 20:11 says, “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day.” When God gave the commandment and all that it entailed to Moses on Sinai he also gave the reasoning behind it. The Hebrew language indicates this with the usage of *ki* (*for, that, because*) at the start of Exodus 20:11. In other words, God is saying that we are to keep the Sabbath and the instructions included in the Decalogue “because” of His own example and “because” this is the way God gave this ordinance on the 7th day of human history. Edward Young drives the point home when he states,

> The whole structure of the week is rooted and grounded in the fact that God worked for six consecutive days and rested a seventh. For this reason we are commanded to remember the Sabbath day. Man is to “remember” the Sabbath day, for God has instituted it. There would be no point in the command, “Remember the Sabbath day”, if God had not instituted the day.\(^{135}\)

God is pointing His people back to creation, when He instituted the Sabbath Day, as a basis for the inclusion of the fourth commandment at Sinai.

There were other institutions that were part of the natural order. For instance, just as marriage was divinely instituted by God (Gen. 2:18-25) for the continuance of the human race so also the Sabbath day was instituted so that man could rest and worship the Lord. Arthur Pink says,

> “The Sabbath was not any arbitrary restriction upon man’s freedom, but a merciful provision for his good: that it is designed as a day of gladness and not of gloom. It is the Creator’s gracious exempting us from our life of mundane toil one day in seven, granting us a foretaste of that future and better life for which the present is but a probation, when we may turn wholly from that which is material

God instituted the Sabbath so that man would rest and be equipped to perform the duties which God requires of man throughout the days and weeks by being built up spiritually and being equipped for every good work.

The perpetual observance of the Sabbath does not rely completely on the fact that it is mandated by God in the order of Creation. God also saw fit to reinforce Sabbath observance by including it within the Decalogue that was given to Moses on Sinai.

**The Moral Law**

There has been much debate as to the nature of the fourth commandment. Augustine actually rendered it obsolete in saying that it was to be treated differently than the other nine commandments. Others have attempted to divide the commands into a 3-1-6 scheme. This division renders the fourth commandment as a sign only for Israel whereas the first three commandments concern duty toward God and the final six concern man’s duty toward fellow man. A better classification would be a 4 and 6 scheme. The first four commandments are man’s duty toward God and the final six are considered to be man’s duty toward fellow man. This would follow Christ’s summary of the law in Matthew 22:37-40 when he tells us to “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and Prophets hang on these two commandments.” If the fourth commandment is truly a part of the moral law than it is to be perpetually observed.

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The very inclusion of the Sabbath observance in the Decalogue is argument enough that it is perpetual until “heaven and earth pass away” (Matt. 5:17-18). The Moral Law was written on men’s hearts (Rom. 2:14-15) even before God engraved them into the two stone tablets. Man knew before Sinai that he ought not to murder (Gen. 4:8-14), not to commit adultery, and that he ought not to steal or covet. It was God who placed the moral law in men’s hearts just as Paul writes that the “requirements of the law are written on their hearts” (Rom. 2:14).

Even so, some scholars argue that the Sabbath ought not to be included as part of the moral law and that it was abrogated when Christ completed the redemptive work. But Murray writes that “it would require the most conclusive evidence to establish the thesis that the fourth command is in a different category from the other nine”. It is hard to make a true exegetical argument from Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 that the observance of the Sabbath day is not perpetual. The Covenant of Works demands that we are to observe the fourth commandment just as perfectly as we are to observe the other nine commandments.

Dispensationalists argue that the Sabbath was a sign, seal and token of the Mosaic Covenant which has now been “rendered inoperative”. Arnold Fruchtenbaum says,

Dispensationalism teaches that since the Law of Moses has been rendered inoperative, then the Sabbath command no longer applies. Covenant Theologians, with their hypocritical insistence that the Law of Moses is still in effect, also insist that the Sabbath law applies. However, they totally ignore what Moses wrote about Sabbath-keeping even to the extent of changing its day of observation from Saturday to Sunday, which the Law of Moses would forbid. They break the very rule that they claim to obey.  

137 Murray, Sabbath Institution, 5.

Fruchtenbaum brings up a worthy objection that must be answered. Covenant theology makes a distinction between the moral, ceremonial and civil law that the dispensationalist is unwilling to concede. This distinction of law is harmonious with Scripture rather than hypocritical. The Covenant of Grace is one covenant with ever expanding revelation throughout redemptive history. God does not deal with man differently from one age to the next (Malachi 3:6). The Law and Prophets have been fulfilled in Christ but the moral law still stands and is perpetually binding.

The main difference between the moral law and the ceremonial law is the perpetual nature of each distinction. The moral law is binding today whereas the ceremonial law was fulfilled in Christ and the cultic practice is no longer required of the believer. Jesus has completed the sacrificial work (Hebrews 7:26-28) as our great high priest.

As Douma states, the distinction between the moral and ceremonial law can be misleading. He suggests using the terms permanent and provisional, respectively, to distinguish between the perpetual nature and non-perpetual nature of the Sabbath requirements in Scripture.\textsuperscript{139} In other words, the moral law concerning the Sabbath is permanent whereas the ceremonial law of the Sabbath is provisional and has expired with the state of Israel.

Fruchtenbaum raises the question as to why covenant theology seems to pick and choose what parts of the Sabbath law are still binding. In other words, if Christians are to observe the Mosaic Law, why should they not observe the whole Mosaic Law including the ceremonial and civil laws that were instituted for the nation of Israel? Why do we no

\textsuperscript{139} Douma, 128.
longer put to death anyone who has disobeyed the Sabbath (Ex. 31:13-15)? Why do we no longer observe the Sabbath years and other Sabbath traditions of Israel (Lev. 23:15, 25:4)?

The reason we no longer practice these laws is because the ceremonial and civil laws of Israel “expired together with the state of that people.” These civil and ceremonial Sabbath laws were given to Moses and written by his hand whereas the fourth commandment was included in the Decalogue on the two stone tablets carved by the very hand of God (Deut. 5:22). This is not to say that any Scripture is subordinate to other Scripture but rather the civil and ceremonial laws were written for a certain purpose in redemptive history. Murray writes that “Such provisions of the Mosaic law are so closely bound up with an economy which has passed away as to its observance that we could hold to the continuance of these provisions no more than we could hold to the continuance of the Mosaic economy itself.”

There is no evidence to suggest that the fourth commandment is separate from the other nine commandments (Ex. 20:2-17, Deut. 5:6-21). Moses writes in Deuteronomy 5:22 that, “These are the commandments the Lord proclaimed in a loud voice to your whole assembly there on the mountain from out of the fire, the cloud and the deep darkness; and he added nothing more. Then he wrote them on two stone tablets and gave them to me.” Moses’ proclamation comes immediately following the narrative of the Ten Commandments which refers back to the aforementioned commands of God.

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141 Murray, Sabbath Institution, 9.
The Scriptures do not indicate that God subordinates one commandment to another. God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah for their immorality (Genesis 19) and in the same way he burnt Jerusalem to the ground because of their refusal to obey the fourth commandment among other sins (Jeremiah 17:19-27). The warning from Jeremiah 17:19-27 continues to this day just as the warning against all immorality is still valid. True Christian doctrine would never attempt to dismiss the immorality of Sodom and Gomorrah. God saw fit to burn their cities to the ground because of their disobedience. The same end awaited Judah if they would not turn from their ways and observe the Sabbath day.

The Old Testament is clear that the moral law of God is perpetual and binding to all men for all time. Deuteronomy 6:1-8 speaks of the binding and perpetual nature of the moral law that was given at Sinai. It is impossible to nullify any of the commandments with a true understanding of Covenant theology. Since the fourth commandment is part of the moral law it is perpetually binding and ought not to be abrogated.

Likewise, the New Testament reference to the moral law does not indicate evidence of abrogation. Jesus says in Matthew 5:19 that “Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven…” It is evident in this context that Jesus was referring to the moral law as he continues to expound on the Ten Commandments in his glorious Sermon on the Mount and refers to the “Law or the Prophets” (Matt. 5:17) as being fulfilled in him rather than abrogated.
Hebrews 4:9-11 gives further testimony to the perpetuation of the Lord’s Day. The author of Hebrews writes, “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest…” This passage from Hebrews does not in and of itself validate an argument for the perpetuation of the fourth commandment. However, when understood within the context of the rest of the New Testament, the perpetuation of the commandment stands within this passage. It is often argued that the Lord’s Day is not explicitly commanded in the New Testament and that this is proof enough for the abrogation of the fourth commandment. However, all that one needs to do is give a precursory study of the New Testament to come to an understanding that although the commandment is not explicitly reiterated the retraction of the commandment is even less true.

**The Eschatological Significance of the Lord’s Day**

The eschatological significance of the Lord’s Day is important for the believer in that it gives theological purpose to the practice of observing the Lord’s Day. Marva Dawn writes,

Sabbath keeping teaches the dialectical truth that Christian feasting [celebration] is both temporal and eternal. Our weekly celebrations help us to be more aware that God is eternally present, but the fact that Sunday moves on into Monday keeps reminding us that our short-lived Sabbath celebrations are but a foretaste of the eternal feast that we will someday enjoy in God’s presence.¹⁴²

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An eschatological understanding of the Lord’s Day is inextricably tied to an ethical observation of the fourth commandment. For Vos the Sabbath “has its main significance…in pointing forward to the eternal issues of life and history.”\footnote{Vos, 141.}

The Sabbath was given to Israel as a sign of the covenant and as a commandment to keep for all time. This sign typified the rest that would be fulfilled in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. The commandment harkens back to the creation ordinance of Sabbath rest which God enjoyed before the fall. This rest is to be restored unto the believer when they are finally glorified in the presence of God. In the mean time, God has given his people a sign to remember the redemptive work of Jesus and to look forward to the consummation of his Kingdom.

The eschatological significance of the Sabbath demonstrates how man’s physical good is not the only reason behind the Creation Mandate. Roy Zuck says,

The credentials of Yahweh as Covenant-maker are remembered and recited. He is Lord over both space and time. Man as God’s vice-regent and image must also cease his labor in anticipation of a “day of rest” of both historical and eschatological dimensions.\footnote{Roy B. Zuck, \textit{A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament}, electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996), 38. CD-ROM.}

Often the mistake is made to focus solely on the “historical” dimensions of the Sabbath Day while ignoring the eschatological dimensions. The fourth commandment has a strong eschatological significance as it relates to the creation mandate for a Sabbath observance. Dennison writes, “The first creation had its Sabbath—on the seventh day of the week; but the new creation Sabbath must proclaim the drama of death and
resurrection." This is realized in the first day of the week as the Church recognized the theological significance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God’s rest in the creation account cannot be considered as a cessation from all activity for if God were to cease all activity, the world would certainly fall into oblivion (Heb. 1:1-3). God sustains the world by his infinite power. God’s rest on the seventh day was from his creative work. His rest occurred before the fall when man was in perfect communion with God and sin and death had not yet entered the world through Adam (Rom. 5:12). When Satan had finally occasioned the entrance of sin into the world through the disobedience of Adam and Eve that perfect communion with God had been lost. The death sentence had been pronounced upon man (Rom. 6:23) and man could no longer experience the true rest that God had intended for man. Since that time man has only been able to look forward to the perfect Sabbath rest (sabbatismos) that awaits the people of God (Heb. 4:8-10). The fourth commandment harkens back to creation in order to direct man toward the perfect communion with God that awaits his people that was lost in the fall.

Exodus 31:16-17 says, “The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested.” Perhaps this is one of the clearest indications from Scripture that attests to the fact that the Sabbath is perpetual and eschatological. The Lord says that the Sabbath will be a sign, ʿālām, meaning that it will be a sign continually or eternally. The idea is that the Sabbath will never be abrogated by

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145 Dennison, 67.
God and that God’s people are to observe it for all time until the Kingdom of God is consummated with Christ’s return. Roy Gane writes,

When God reaffirmed the Sabbath for Israel, the Sabbath was more than a commandment. The Sabbath functioned as a sign of the covenant relationship by which He sanctified the Israelites. This function applied to Israel a principle which had been inherent in the Sabbath since Creation…From the beginning, His desire has been for all people to enjoy a holy relationship with Him.146

Jesus brought about the Sabbath rest that the Old Testament Sabbath typified. In Luke 4:21, Jesus had just finished reading from Isaiah 61 concerning the year of the Lord. Upon concluding, Jesus proclaims, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” According to A.T. Lincoln, “The great year of Jubilee, the intensified Sabbath year of restoration and liberation, and institution that had never really functioned as intended, now becomes a reality for all those who find salvation (in the fullest sense of the word) in Jesus the Messiah.”147 Jesus would go on to offer rest for the weary in Matthew 11. This rest would be from all of their spiritual work and would be a spiritual rest realized in the already and the not yet. In other words, Jesus has brought salvation rest to all who believe. In this earthly life, the believers of Christ experience that rest from evil deeds and from depending on their own works to obtain salvation. However, the believer also awaits the fully restored communion with God that was experienced by Adam and Eve in the garden prior to the fall.

In John 5:17, Jesus answers his critics in response to his healing on the Sabbath, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.” If God rested on the seventh day

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146 Roy Gane. “Sabbath and the New Covenant,” Journal of the Adventist Society 10 no. 1-2 (1999): 325. Although the Seventh Day Adventist denomination errs in much of it’s theology, this point by Gane is well said and on point and is in agreement with the true biblical nature of the Lord’s Day.

147 Carson et al., 202.
how can it be said that He is still working? Simply put, sin disrupted the rest of God and His turned to election and redemption. Since the fall, God has worked in history “to accomplish his original purposes.”\textsuperscript{148} The Sabbath that God instituted in Genesis 2:2-3 was a sign looking forward to the full rest that believers would receive through Christ by his resurrection. In other words, when Christ came to redeem his people “the rest of the age to come is inaugurated so that what was signified in the Sabbath is fulfilled in Christ.”\textsuperscript{149} Jesus Christ brought to a reality the rest that had been established in the fourth commandment under the Mosaic Law. Just as the Promised Land was a type of the heavenly inheritance, so too, the rest commanded in Exodus 20 typifies the spiritual rest found in the work of Jesus Christ.

As previously discussed, Hebrews 3-4 offers much to the discussion of the eschatological significance of the Lord’s Day. Lincoln writes,

> The fulfillment of the promise of rest has been brought about through Christ. Believers enter the heavenly rest since they share in the heavenly call (3:1) with their great High Priest who has passed through the heavens (4:14). They are partakers of Christ (3:14) and it is for this reason that, if they hold firm, they are also partakers of God’s rest. Joshua did not give the people rest (4:8)...The fulfillment of God’s promise awaited the true Jesus who has opened the way for His people into God’s heavenly rest.\textsuperscript{150}

The author of Hebrews illustrates how none of the Old Testament types could bring true Sabbath rest to the people of God. Neither Moses nor Joshua could bring the people of God into eternal rest even though they were able to bring the people of God to the brink of Canaan and ultimately into Canaan. Douma writes, “we clearly see that the rest

\begin{footnotes}
\item[148] Ibid., 204.
\item[149] Ibid., 205.
\item[150] Ibid., 212.
\end{footnotes}
spoken of earlier was but a provisional rest. The people of God were awaiting the real Sabbath rest. The fulfillment of that rest did not become a reality in Israel’s day."\textsuperscript{151} Even after Israel had entered into the Promised Land and subsequently conquered it, there still remained a Sabbath celebration for the people of God (Hebrews 4:9-10). This true Sabbath rest only comes through Christ Jesus.

Since Jesus has fulfilled the promised rest of the Old Testament the Church now lives in a tension of the “already” and the “not yet”. The Church already experiences spiritual rest in Jesus Christ yet awaits the final consummation of the Kingdom of God when he returns (I Cor. 15:50). It is of no little significance that Jesus rose on the first day of the week and consequently, the Lord’s Day is now observed on the first day of the week. This change from the seventh day to the first is eschatologically significant. It was on the first day of the week that Jesus brought the rest for his people which had been prefigured in the Old Testament and for this reason the Church gathered on the first day of the week to worship the Lord and commemorate the Resurrection.

In conclusion, the rest that has been brought by Jesus Christ is deliverance from sin, release from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13, Matthew 11), and the fulfillment of the divine rest of God that was once lost to sin but is now restored through Jesus Christ (Gen. 2:2-3, Heb. 3, 4).\textsuperscript{152} The Church awaits the glorious return of Jesus Christ so that they will experience the full Sabbath Celebration. Until then, the Church is to continue meeting together, so as not to forsake the assembly (Heb. 10:24), for the purpose of looking back upon redemption and moving forward to the consummation of Christ’s

\textsuperscript{151} Douma, 129.

\textsuperscript{152} Carson et al., 215.
Kingdom. The Christian is to perpetually observe the Lord’s Day until Christ comes again. An eschatological understanding of the Lord’s Day enables the believer to have a deeper knowledge of the necessary practice of the fourth commandment.

**An Ethical View of the Lord’s Day**

The question often arises as to how one is to observe the Lord’s Day. From history this work has shown that there have been many distortions concerning the Lord’s Day and that in its present state, the fourth commandment is largely ignored by the Church. This work has already argued that the Lord’s Day is to be observed on the first day of the week. But what is to happen on the first day of the week?

The fourth commandment is morally and perpetually binding in that it requires a day of rest and worship. The Scriptures are clear and binding concerning the Sabbath principle yet the details surrounding the elements of worship can be ordered by the light of nature. This work will discuss in more depth that believers are to “remember” the Sabbath and keep it “holy” on a weekly basis, are to follow the instruction of cyclical labor and rest according to God’s instructions, and remember what God has done for them in the “already” as they look forward to what He has promised in the “not yet”. The promise of spiritual rest is not just a present reality but a future promise. As the Church awaits the promised future, they are to continue observing the Lord’s Day in part to anticipate the consummation of the Kingdom of God.

In any study of ethical behavior, it is appropriate to watch for extremes. Bruce A. Ray writes, “Two equally great and destructive dangers that we must avoid when talking about the Sabbath are legalism and lawlessness.” It is has been demonstrated from

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history that both extremes have found their way into the churches over time. Both must be avoided in any discussion on ethics and the Lord’s Day.

In one direction, just as many Puritans were guilty of, the church can fall into pharisaic application. Don Robertson writes, “We, too, need to be careful not to fall into the same trap of the Pharisees, who commanded others to follow manmade rules on the Sabbath. God’s people must avoid legalism.”\textsuperscript{154} In the other direction is antinomianism which says that the believer can do anything they desire on the Lord’s Day. Robertson continues, “This loose and flippant interpretation of the Christian Sabbath presents a problem: it is inconsistent with the Bible’s teaching that Christians are called to follow the Law of God.”\textsuperscript{155} Robertson goes on to suggest that an ethical application of the Lord’s Day must be preempted by a right attitude and right principles.

In short, a right attitude comes by viewing the Lord’s Day as a delight and joy. Joseph Pipa says, “If we want our children to love the Sabbath, we must make the day a delight for them.”\textsuperscript{156} Marva Dawn calls the Lord’s Day a “party” in which we are to celebrate the goodness of God. Too many Christians observe the Lord’s Day out of guilt or fill it with activities that bog down the celebration which affect a right attitude. Robertson suggests that a person who is too busy on the Lord’s Day with Christian activities ought to “cut back a bit” to enable them to enjoy the Lord’s Day with a right attitude.\textsuperscript{157} The ultimate reason for Lord’s Day observance ought to be the love that one has for Jesus Christ.

\textsuperscript{154} Robertson, 21.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{157} Robertson, 23.
Robertson also speaks of “right principles”. These principles include regular observance of the Lord’s Day, mutual edification in the context of the fellowship, worship and encouragement, preparation for the Lord’s Day, the ministry of the Word and prayer, works of necessity and mercy and rest from recreation and employment. Although Robertson is correct in most of his principles, there is one clause concerning recreation that has not found any Scriptural foundation. As Robertson comments, the Westminster Standards forbid any recreation on the Lord’s Day. The passage that most strict Sabbatarians use as their proof text is Isaiah 58:13-14. However, this passage does not forbid recreation but rather doing that which is sinful in the sight of God. Although space will limit a thorough discussion on this subject, suffice it to say, recreation is a form of rest for many in a busy world. God requires rest and worship on His Day and therefore the Church ought not to be legalistic concerning recreation on the Lord’s Day.

Exodus 20:8-11 says that believers are to remember, keep holy, and rest on the Sabbath day just as God rested on the seventh day after He created the world and all that is in it. The fourth commandment requires us to follow God’s example from week to week. God created the world in six days and ceased from his creative work on the seventh day and as a result we are commanded to follow suit. Today, many of the debates that promote abrogation of the Sabbath must conclude that God’s example has become obsolete. John Murray writes,

The sequence of six days of creative work and the seventh of rest is an irreversible fact in the transcendent sphere of God’s relation to this universe which He has made. And now to the most pointed question of all: has the divine example become obsolete? Can we think of the exemplar established by God’s

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158 Ibid., 24-26.
working and resting as ever ceasing to be the pattern for man’s conduct in the ordinances of labour and rest?\textsuperscript{159}

Murray wisely includes God’s example of work along with His Sabbath rest. The fourth commandment is two-fold in that God commands us to work for six days as he worked for six days while finding rest every seventh day just as he rested on the 7\textsuperscript{th} day (Ex. 20:8-11, Gen. 2:1-2).

God has given man the responsibility to subdue the earth (Gen. 1:28). Our work ethic is to follow after the example of God. Proverbs 14:23 says that “all hard work brings a profit” which echoes Paul’s words in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-7, “In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you…” Paul begins his instruction with, “In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” which adds authority and power to his exhortations. It is important for all Christians to work hard. Sadly, today many Christians have made God’s example of work “obsolete” in their lives. The culture dictates that our main goal in life is to make enough money to sustain the “golden years” of idleness. The problem is that whatever vocation we have been called into and whatever station of life we are in, whatever it is that we do, we are to do to the glory of God (Col. 3:17). We are to never give up working for the spread of the Gospel (Matt. 28:19, Acts 1:8).

God’s example also leads us to rest and we are commanded to rest in the fourth commandment as we follow His perfect example. This rest is not idleness for we are warned against idleness all throughout God’s Word (2 Thess. 3:7, Prov. 14:23, I Tim.

\textsuperscript{159} Murray, Sabbath Institution, 4-5.
5:13). The Westminster Shorter Catechism says that we are not to profane the day by idleness, (Acts 20:7,9) or doing that which is in itself sinful, (Ezek. 23:38).\(^{160}\) God’s rest was a type that pictured the eternal rest that he promises man. Pipa writes,

By resting, therefore, God declared his creative activity to be finished, He contemplated with joy the finished work; and He gave us a picture of the eternal rest that belongs to His people...he gave us an example...to seek rest in Him as we contemplate His goodness and grace in the beauty of creation and the wonderful offer of redemption...In our Sabbath-resting we are reminded that God’s works of creation and redemption are finished...we anticipate our eternal life with Him.\(^{161}\)

As we rest and worship on the Lord’s Day we are reminded of the promise that Christ will return in the “same way he has been taken up” (Acts 1:11) and that our Sabbath rest points forward to that day in which we will fully and perfectly rest in Jesus Christ as we are made “like him” (I John 3:2, I Corinth. 15:52).

God’s example of rest is a type of rest that the people of God will experience when Christ returns (Heb. 4:9-10). Vos says, “…the Sabbath is an expression of the eschatological principle on which the life of humanity has been constructed. There is to be to the world-process a finale as there was an overture.”\(^{162}\) As we observe the Lord’s Day, rest, and keep it holy unto God we are looking forward to the eternal rest that God by His own example exhibited when the work of Creation was complete (Heb. 4:1-11).

In addition to rest, God has required that His people worship Him on the Lord’s Day (Ex. 20:8-11) and that they do so gathered in sacred assembly (Lev. 23:3). Hebrews 10:24 instructs the believer to not forsake the assembly but to meet together so that


\(^{161}\) Pipa, Lord’s Day, 31-32.

\(^{162}\) Vos, 140.
believers might “encourage one another and all the more as we see the Day approaching.”

Coming together for Sunday worship is a practical means of obeying the fourth commandment until Christ comes again.

The fourth commandment does not just require a cessation from work but a positive element of actively worshipping God. Philippians 4:4 says, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” Marva Dawn most probably had verses like this in mind when she compared worship to feasting on the Lord’s Day since “After the ceasing, the resting and the embracing comes the feasting.”⁶³ According to Dawn, the Lord’s Day is an “eschatological party” to which much joy and happiness belong.

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⁶³ Dawn, Wholly, 151.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

This work set out to discuss the perpetual nature of the fourth commandment from Scripture, the historical significance and development of the Lord’s Day and the theological impact that the fourth commandment has upon the Church today. As a result, this work has found that the fourth commandment is perpetual and morally binding. God requires obedience to the moral law, and although fulfilled in Jesus Christ, believers are not to ignore the law. Rather the moral law is an infallible rule of faith and practice. The Sabbath law was included in the moral law and therefore is binding for all time until Christ comes again. On that day the people of God will realize the true Sabbath celebration that is typified in the celebration of the Lord’s Day.

Today, the Church for the most part has failed to recognize the significance of the Lord’s Day. Even though the theological significance of the Lord’s Day is largely ignored, many continue to keep the traditions of “going to church” on a Sunday morning. However, if the Church continues to ignore the theological significance of the Lord’s Day, this practice will continue to fade away. This is not to say that the Church will die a slow death for the Church is bigger than the Sabbath principle and encompasses much
more than “going to church”. The Church needs to get back to the Scriptures, *ad fontes,* to rediscover the full meaning of the Lord’s Day.

This study examined the inclusion of the Sabbath in the Decalogue, a study of Jesus’ view of the Sabbath and the problematic passages of the Pauline corpus that suggest to many that the Sabbath has been abrogated. Together these studies have failed to prove an abrogation of the Sabbath but rather reinforce a theological and eschatological understanding of the Lord’s Day.

God instituted the Sabbath Day at Creation (Gen. 2:2-3) and therefore, as stated in the Decalogue (Ex. 20:8-11), the Sabbath is a perpetual ordinance and binding as the rest of the moral law is binding (Matt. 5:17-18). This sign was not just given to Israel (Ex. 31:13) but for all of God’s people as they are to anticipate the full realization of God’s plan and purpose for His Kingdom. When Jesus ushered in the Kingdom of God he fulfilled the Sabbath (Mk. 2:27). Since the resurrection of Jesus Christ the Church has met together on the first day of the week to worship (I Cor. 16:2) as they anticipate the consummation of the Kingdom and the full realization of the Sabbath Celebration (Heb. 4:9-10).

This means that the Church is not just to observe the Lord’s Day ethically by resting and worship, but they are to realize the reason why such an institution is still binding and meaningful. The Church is in the midst of an increasingly busy world. Rest and worship are hobbies rather than religious requirements for many that can ill-afford to take advantage of in a “dog-eat-dog” world. The Church needs to help its members find balance in their life as they heed the words of the fourth commandment.
Part of this balance is accomplished by finding authentic community in the body of Christ. Christians not only gather to worship the risen Lord but come together on the Lord’s Day to be part of the communion of saints. The need for fellowship has become crystal clear in an increasingly narcissistic culture. The experience of the believer is not just between God and man but between man and man. On the Lord’s Day Christians are to gather together so as not to forsake the assembly (Heb. 10:24), to support the work of the Kingdom (I Cor. 16:2), to fellowship with one another (Acts 20:7), and to hear the Word preached so that they might encourage and sharpen one another (Acts 20:7). The need for the gathering of God’s people on the Lord’s Day is essential for authentic community and the sanctification of God’s people.

The Church has been placed in the world to be a light shining in the darkness (Matt 6:13-16). The gathering of the Church is a witness to the world of something greater than an organizational meeting. Terry L. Johnson writes,

Worship is also the highest priority of the church. A moment’s reflection will confirm the accuracy of these statements. Is it not true that worship is the most important of all human activities? It is our first calling and our ultimate priority. Moreover, it is primarily in the public services of worship that the means of grace are operative. Here the gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered. As for prayer, though prayers may be offered in one’s closet let us not forget the special promise of Jesus concerning prayers offered where “two or three have gathered in My name,” likely a reference to organized public worship. Of such prayers He says, “if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven.” There is a unique efficacy in public prayers.\(^\text{164}\)

The saints come together to learn to glorify God throughout the week, to be equipped to preach the Gospel (II Tim. 3:16-17), to build the kingdom of God by adding and perfecting new members and to join heaven in worship around the throne of grace.

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(Rev. 4:8) in great anticipation of the Sabbath celebration (Heb. 10:24). When the Church comes together, God’s people are able to taste the “not yet” of the Lord’s Day while fully participating in the blessings of salvation and the “already” that has been accomplished by Jesus Christ. Most views of the Lord’s Day that argue it has been abrogated fail to recognize the full eschatological significance of the fourth commandment. God has given the Church the Lord’s Day in order that they might delight in it.

Earlier, this work made reference to the words of Marva Dawn as she proclaimed that the Church must not “dumb down” the theology of worship. The question must be asked as to whether or not this is precisely what has happened concerning the Lord’s Day. In her book, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*, Dawn references how the church in post-modernity has lost more members in the world than taken in. She states, “Many churches who want desperately to attract people to Christ miss the point by offering worship so shallow that not enough of Christ is proclaimed to engender lasting belief… I wonder if the practice of dumbing down worship isn’t, in the long run, equally fatal to faith”165 Like the dumbing down of worship throughout the late 20th century and the dumbing down of theology throughout the 19th century, the dumbing down of the Lord’s Day is detrimental to the Church as an organism and as an institution. The Church must collectively rediscover the importance of coming together “all the more as we see the Day approaching.”

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165 *Dawn, Reaching Out*, 280.
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