

Lesson 27: Questions 62, 63, and 66

In our last lesson we considered the third commandment. We saw that God's Name must not be taken in vain, and that this commandment reaches far beyond obvious profanity. It requires the holy and reverent use of God's names, titles, attributes, ordinances, Word, and works, and it forbids profaning or abusing anything by which God makes Himself known (Q58-61). Now the catechism turns to the fourth commandment, where God teaches us that time itself must be ordered before Him.

62, 63,
66

Question 62: What is the fourth commandment?

Q. What is the fourth commandment?

A. The fourth commandment is, Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy; six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God, in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor the stranger that is within thy gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. (*Cited from Exodus 20:8-11*)

The fourth commandment begins with the word “*Remember*”. That word already tells us something important. God knows that fallen man forgets holy things. We forget God's works. We forget God's order. We forget that our time belongs to Him. We forget that work is not ultimate. We forget that rest is not optional. So the Lord says, “*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*” (*Exodus 20:8*).

This commandment is not merely about stopping work. It is about keeping a day holy to the Lord. The word “holy” means set apart. The Sabbath is not ordinary time. It is time claimed, blessed, and hallowed by God. Six days are for ordinary labor. One day in seven is a Sabbath to the Lord.

That immediately challenges modern assumptions. We tend to think of time as ours. We speak of “my time”, “my weekend”, “my schedule”, “my day off”. Of course, there is a legitimate sense in which we manage our responsibilities. But, at the deepest level, time does not belong to us. We are creatures. God gives, numbers, governs, and commands how our days are to be used.

Notice also the balance in the commandment. God commands labor: “*Six days you shall labor, and do all your work*” (*Exodus 20:9*). Laziness is not the ideal. God made man to work. Before sin entered the world, Adam was placed in the garden to work it and keep it. But man was not made for ceaseless toil. The commandment dignifies work, but it also limits work: “*but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God.*” (*Exodus 20:10a*)

Man may work, but man may not become a slave to work. Work is good, but it is not god. Productivity is good, but it is not ultimate. The Sabbath is mercy because God Himself interrupts our ordinary labor and gives one day in seven for worship, rest, and refreshment. He says, in effect, “You are not sustained by your own productivity. You are My creature. You must stop, worship, rest, and remember.” Or another way: “I can prosper you more in 6 days than you can in 7.”

The reason given in *Exodus 20* is creation.

“*For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*” (*Exodus 20:11, ESV*)

God did not rest because He was tired. He rested as the divine pattern of creation. The Sabbath is built into the moral order of the world. It reminds us that creation is not ultimately ordered toward endless production, but toward God's glory, worship, and holy rest.

So Question 62 gives us the commandment itself. God commands one day in seven to be remembered and kept holy. Work matters. Rest matters. Worship matters. Time matters.

The Lord of creation has authority over them all.

Question 63: What does the fourth commandment require?

Q. What is required in the fourth commandment?

A. The fourth commandment requireth the keeping holy to God such set times as he hath appointed in his word; expressly one whole day in seven to be a holy sabbath to himself.

The catechism now opens the positive requirement of the commandment: “the keeping holy to God one whole day in seven to be a Sabbath to Himself.”

In this lesson, we are dealing with the basics:

- What is the commandment?
- What does it require?
- What does it forbid?

The 4th Commandment has 6 questions. They are out of order to me. This is why we're doing 62, 63, and 66 today and 64, 65, and 67 next week.

Next week, Lord willing, we will deal with the more advanced questions:

- Which day is the Christian Sabbath?
- How is the Sabbath to be sanctified?
- What reasons are annexed to the commandment?

For now, notice the heart of the requirement.

The fourth commandment requires one whole day in seven to be kept holy to God.

Exodus gives the creation pattern: six days of labor and one day blessed and hallowed by the Lord.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep 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, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20:8-11, ESV)

Deuteronomy repeats the command, but with a different emphasis. There, the Sabbath is tied to Israel's redemption from Egypt: they were slaves, the LORD brought them out with a mighty hand, and therefore they must give rest even to those under their authority.

Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. 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, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. (Deuteronomy 5:12-15, ESV)

Both passages teach that the Sabbath is not a loose suggestion. It is a command of God.

The phrase “to God” is crucial.

The Sabbath is not merely a personal recovery strategy, though it is restful.

It is not merely a family day, though it may bless a household.

It is not merely a day to avoid work, though ordinary work is set aside.

It is kept holy to God.

The day belongs to Him in a special way.

That means Sabbath keeping must begin with worship. The day is for the Lord before it is for us.

We do not ask first, “What do I want to do with this day?”

We ask, “What has God made this day for?”

The Sabbath is for worship, rest, fellowship, mercy, necessity, and the joyful ordering of life before God. It is a day to step back from ordinary labor and worldly striving in order to remember that the Lord is our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

This also means that Sabbath keeping is not supposed to be grim. Some people hear “Sabbath” and immediately think “burden”. That is not how Jesus teaches us to think.

And he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27, ESV)

That does not cancel the commandment. It explains its goodness.

The Sabbath is a duty, but it is a gracious duty.

It is a command, but it is a beneficial command.

We need both sides.

If we only call it a gift, we may become careless and treat it as ours to spend however we please.

If we only call it a duty, we may become harsh and make the day feel like a cage.

Scripture gives us something better: the Sabbath is a holy gift from the Lord.

It is duty and mercy together.

This is where we must examine ourselves.

- Do we treat the Sabbath as holy to God, or merely as the leftover space around our preferences?
- Do we arrange the day around gathered worship, or do we fit worship around everything else?
- Do we prepare for worship, or stumble into it distracted and spiritually cold?
- Do we use the day to strengthen the soul, encourage the saints, and delight in the Lord, or do we simply collapse into self-indulgence?

The fourth commandment requires more than attendance.

Attendance at gathered worship is central, but the day itself is to be kept holy. That means we should think intentionally about the whole day. How can this day be ordered so that God is honored, worship is prioritized, ordinary labors are set aside, bodies and souls are refreshed, families are shepherded, mercy is shown, and fellowship is pursued?

This should not lead to anxious scrupulosity. We should not create a thousand man-made rules. That is legalism. The Pharisees received scathing rebukes for exactly that kind of Sabbath-keeping.

The point is to receive God’s rhythm as good. One whole day in seven is to be kept holy to God.

That is not an interruption of real life.

It is part of the pattern God gives for a rightly ordered life.

The Sabbath is intended to be the cornerstone of our lives.

Question 66: What does the fourth commandment forbid?

Q. What is forbidden in the fourth commandment?

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

Skipping 2 questions, the catechism now opens the negative requirement of the 4th commandment. It forbids:

- Failing to do the duties required
- Careless execution of our duties
- Profaning the day by idleness
- Sinful pursuits
- Unnecessary thoughts, words, or works about worldly employments or recreations

FIRST, the commandment forbids “the omission or careless performance of the duties required”.

A rebuke from Ezekiel about profaning the day is instructive:

Her priests have done violence to my law and have profaned my holy things. They have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean, and they have disregarded my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them. (Ezekiel 22:26, ESV)

Amos adds a rebuke related to self-indulgence:

Hear this, you who trample on the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end, saying, "When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances, that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and sell the chaff of the wheat?" (Amos 8:4-6, ESV)

Malachi rebukes disinterested worship:

But you say, 'What a weariness this is,' and you snort at it, says the LORD of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD. (Malachi 1:13, ESV)

That is searching. Sabbath breaking is not only doing obviously worldly things. It may also be attending worship with a cold, resentful, bored, or dismissive heart. It may be going through the motions while inwardly wishing the holy duties were finished. The LORD is not honored by merely external Sabbath observance while the heart says, "what a weariness."

SECOND, the commandment forbids "profaning the day by idleness". While I agree with this sentence, it must be handled carefully. I also don't agree with the catechism that Eutychus falling asleep during Paul's sermon (which went until after midnight!) is a violation of the Sabbath. But the catechism is right to warn against idleness. The Sabbath is rest, but it is not spiritual laziness. Rest is not the same thing as drifting through the day without attention to God. So, while I do not think rest and idleness are at odds with one another, wasting the entire day in idleness violates the clear positive commands we have for what to do on the Sabbath.

THIRD, the commandment forbids doing what is in itself sinful. Ezekiel condemns those who profaned the sanctuary and Sabbaths while also committing abominations.

The LORD said to me: "Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Declare to them their abominations. For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. With their idols they have committed adultery, and they have even offered up to them for food the children whom they had borne to me. Moreover, this they have done to me: they have defiled my sanctuary on the same day and profaned my Sabbaths. For when they had slaughtered their children in sacrifice to their idols, on the same day they came into my sanctuary to profane it. (Ezekiel 23:36-39a, ESV)

Sin is not necessarily more sinful because it occurs on the Sabbath, but it is especially perverse to take a day set apart for God and use it for rebellion against Him.

FOURTH, the commandment forbids unnecessary thoughts, words, and works about worldly employments or recreations. **Jeremiah 17** warns of judgment for Judah for profaning the Sabbath:

"But if you listen to me, declares the LORD, and bring in no burden by the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, but keep the Sabbath day holy and do no work on it, then there shall enter by the gates of this city kings and princes who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their officials, the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And this city shall be inhabited forever. And people shall come from the cities of Judah and the places around Jerusalem, from the land of Benjamin, from the Shephelah, from the hill country, and from the Negeb, bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, grain offerings and frankincense, and bringing thank offerings to the house of the LORD. But if you do not listen to me, to keep the Sabbath day holy, and not to bear a burden and enter by the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem and shall not be quenched." (Jeremiah 17:24-27, ESV)

Isaiah 58 has a promise for those who faithfully keep the Sabbath:

If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." (Isaiah 58:13-14, ESV)

Here I will do something that I will do very, very rarely with the Baptist Catechism. I am going to revise the wording of an answer to give what I believe to be a more biblically accurate teaching. The original catechism says the commandment forbids unnecessary thoughts, words, or works “about worldly employments or recreations.” My own revised answer is slightly softened:

Q. What is forbidden in the fourth commandment?

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

Here is the change laid out clearly:

- **Catechism:** or by unnecessary thoughts, words, or works, about worldly employments **or recreations.**
- **My version:** or by unnecessary thoughts, words, or works, about worldly employments, **or by engaging in recreations that impede the joyful performance of Sabbath duties.**

I want to be very clear: **I am making a change.** I am **softening** the catechism slightly at this point. But I am not doing so because I take the Christian Sabbath lightly. I take it very seriously. I simply do not find in Scripture a requirement that the entire day be given to unceasing acts of worship in such a way that all lawful recreation is excluded absolutely.

The Sabbath is repeatedly presented as **rest.**

The Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath (**Mark 2:27**).

Jesus presents the Sabbath as a **gift**, not as a crushing **burden**, though it remains a **duty**.

Therefore, I believe it is lawful to allow some recreation that does not impede worship, fellowship, rest, and works of mercy and necessity.

This is not a free-for-all.

The day is not **about** recreation.

The day is **about** rest and worship first.

But if the duties of the Sabbath have been joyfully prioritized and fulfilled, then some restful recreation may be received as a blessing from God.

Isaiah 58 deserves frank treatment. I am not compelled to read the verse to mean, “do nothing enjoyable on the Sabbath.” The stronger reading, in my judgment, is that God is rebuking a people whose Sabbath practice is fundamentally self-directed: “**All** you do on the Sabbath is please yourself; you should be pleasing **Me**.” That interpretation still takes the text seriously. It does not absolutize all pleasure as sin. It rejects self-centered Sabbath keeping and calls us to **delight** in the Lord.

It is also noteworthy that the word for “pleasure” in verse 13 has an ESV footnote of “business”.

So Question 66 warns us against two errors.

1. We must **reject** Sabbath neglect, careless worship, and recreation that crowds out the Lord.
2. We must **embrace** Sabbath-keeping that is holy, restful, worshipful, joyful, and Godward.

Conclusion

The fourth commandment teaches us that God claims our time. He gives six days for ordinary labor and one day in seven to be kept holy to Him. *That pattern is not arbitrary.* It is grounded in creation, repeated in the law, and given for man's good. (It's also reinforced in the New Testament.)

This commandment should correct our restlessness.

Many of us live as though everything depends on us:

- Constant labor
- Planning
- Buying
- Building
- Checking
- Managing

But the Sabbath says:

- Stop
- Worship
- Rest
- Remember that God is God and you are not

It humbles the self-important and comforts the weary.

It should also correct our casualness.

The Lord's Day (a synonym for the Christian Sabbath) is not disposable time.

It is *not* merely a leftover day for errands, chores, entertainment, and recovery from poor planning.

It is *not* a catch up day for work.

It is holy to God.

- *Worship* should be central.
- *Fellowship* should be treasured.
- *Mercy* should be practiced.
- *Necessity* should be handled wisely.
- *Rest* should be received with gratitude.

And yet, we should not make the Sabbath gloomy.

The day is a gift from the Lord.

It is for delight in Him.

The mature Christian should not ask, "How little can I do and still technically obey?"

Nor should he ask, "How can I bind consciences beyond Scripture?"

Better questions are these:

- How can I honor the Lord today?
- How can I rest from ordinary labor?
- How can I strengthen my soul and my household?
- How can I love the saints?
- How can I receive this day as mercy?

The Sabbath is serious.

The Sabbath is holy.

The Sabbath is restful.

The Sabbath is good.