

## Lesson 28: Questions 64, 65, and 67

In our last lesson we considered the basics of the fourth commandment. We saw that God commands one day in seven to be kept holy to Himself, that the day is for worship, rest, fellowship, mercy, and necessity, and that the commandment forbids neglect, careless performance, idleness, sinful use of the day, and worldly employments or recreations that crowd out Sabbath duties (Q62, Q63, Q66). This week we are intentionally returning to the questions skipped last time. We now consider the more advanced questions: which day is the Christian Sabbath, how the Sabbath is to be sanctified, and what reasons God Himself attaches to the commandment.

64, 65,  
67

### Question 64: Which day is the Christian Sabbath?

- Q. Which day of the seven hath God appointed to be the weekly Sabbath?  
A. Before the resurrection of Christ, God appointed the seventh day of the week to be the weekly Sabbath; and the first day of the week ever since, to continue to the end of the world, which is the Christian Sabbath.

Question 64 addresses the transition from the 7th day Sabbath to the 1st day Christian Sabbath.

Before the resurrection of Christ, God appointed the 7th day of the week to be the weekly Sabbath.

We saw this last week. It was grounded in creation, commanded in the moral law, and reinforced in Deuteronomy with a redemptive emphasis: Israel had been slaves in Egypt, the LORD had redeemed them, and therefore they were to give rest even to those under their authority ([Exodus 20:8-11](#); [Deuteronomy 5:12-15](#)). So the weekly Sabbath is not a casual ceremonial detail. It is rooted in God's creation pattern, His moral government of man, and His mercy to His people.

But the catechism also teaches that since the resurrection of Christ, the 1st day of the week is the Christian Sabbath, to continue to the end of the world. Here we need to be careful. The New Testament does not give us one verse that says, in so many words, "The Sabbath has now moved from the seventh day to the first day." Instead, it gives us a biblical pattern tied to the resurrection, the gathering of the church, apostolic practice, and the Lord's Day.

*The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. (Psalm 118:22-24, ESV)*

In its original setting, that text is about the LORD's saving work and the day of His triumph. In light of the resurrection, Christians have seen this as fulfilled in Christ's victory. The day of resurrection is the day of new creation joy. All 4 Gospels emphasize that Jesus rose on the 1st day of the week.

*Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. (Matthew 28:1, ESV, emphasis added)*

*And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. (Mark 16:2, ESV, emphasis added)*

*But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. (Luke 24:1, ESV, emphasis added)*

*Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. (John 20:1, ESV, emphasis added)*

*On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." (John 20:19, ESV, emphasis added)*

*Eight days later [also a Sunday], his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." (John 20:26, ESV, emphasis added, with explanation)*

These verses do not by themselves prove everything about Christian Sabbath practice, but they contribute to the pattern. The risen Lord meets with His gathered disciples on the first day.

Acts continues the pattern.

*When the day of Pentecost [also a Sunday] arrived, they were all together in one place. (Acts 2:1, ESV, emphasis added, with explanation)*

Later, the church gathered on the first day of the week to break bread, and Paul preached to them:

*On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight. (Acts 20:7, ESV, emphasis added)*

Paul also instructed the churches to set aside contributions on the first day of every week:

*Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. (1 Corinthians 16:1-2, ESV, emphasis added)*

*I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." (Revelation 1:9-11, ESV, emphasis added)*

That phrase, "the Lord's day", matters. The overwhelming historic Christian understanding is that "the Lord's day" refers to the 1st day of the week, the day of Christ's resurrection. That understanding appears immediately and universally where the matter is addressed in post-NT Christian writings.

That historical witness does not settle the doctrine for us. Church history is not our final authority. Scripture is. But church history is useful as corroboration. The earliest post-apostolic Christians did not think Sunday worship was a late innovation.

- The Didache (~50-100 AD) speaks of Christians gathering on the Lord's Day to break bread.
- Ignatius (~107AD) connects Christian life with the Lord's Day rather than the old Sabbath.
- The Epistle of Barnabas (~130 AD) speaks of the "eighth day" as the day of resurrection joy.
- Justin Martyr (~155 AD) describes Christians gathering on Sunday and explicitly connects that day both to creation and to the resurrection of Christ.

Again, those men are not Scripture. They cannot bind the conscience. But they do show us that from the earliest centuries, Christians understood the 1st day of the week as the day of Christian assembly, resurrection celebration, and Lord's Day worship.

This was not invented in the Middle Ages.

It was not a later Roman Catholic corruption.

This was not imposed by Constantine (who seems to be the bogeyman for everything).

It was the received practice of the early Christian church.

Jesus Himself teaches an abiding Sabbath:

*And he said to them, "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, ESV)*

That matters. Christ does not abolish His lordship over the Sabbath. As the risen Lord of the Sabbath, He reorients the day around His resurrection. The 7th day looked back to creation rest. The 1st day celebrates new creation in the risen Christ.

So Question 64 teaches that the Christian Sabbath is the first day of the week, the Lord's Day. This is not because the church invented a convenient tradition. It is because the resurrection of Christ changed the calendar of worship. The church gathers on the day of resurrection, under the lordship of the risen Christ, looking forward to the eternal Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God.

As the original Sabbath celebrated the original creation, so the Christian Sabbath now celebrates and remembers the New Creation, inaugurated by Christ at His resurrection.

## Question 65: How do we sanctify the Sabbath?

Q. How is the Sabbath to be sanctified?

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

Question 65 asks how the Sabbath is to be kept holy. The answer gives us four basic categories:

1. Holy resting
2. Ceasing from ordinary worldly employments and recreations
3. Public and private exercises of worship
4. Works of necessity and mercy

**FIRST**, the Sabbath is sanctified by holy rest. Exodus commands God's people to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy, and says that on the Sabbath they shall not do ordinary work (**Exodus 20:8,10**). This rest is not mere inactivity. It is holy rest. It is rest unto God, rest ordered by worship, rest that reminds us we are creatures, not machines, and children, not slaves.

**SECOND**, the catechism says we rest even from worldly employments and recreations lawful on other days. **Exodus 16** shows Israel being taught not to gather manna on the Sabbath, because the LORD had provided for them beforehand (**Exodus 16:25-28**). Nehemiah later rebuked buying, selling, trading, and burden-carrying on the Sabbath, even shutting the gates of Jerusalem to preserve the day from ordinary commerce (**Nehemiah 13:15-22**). Those passages teach that ordinary lawful work must be set aside, not because work is evil, but because the day is holy.

**THIRD**, the Sabbath is sanctified by public and private exercises of God's worship. Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath as was His custom:

*And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. (Luke 4:16, ESV)*

The church gathered on the first day of the week to break bread and hear apostolic preaching (**Acts 20:7**, see above). **Psalms 92** is identified as "*A Song for the Sabbath*" (**Psalms 92:title**). Isaiah looks forward to all flesh coming to worship before the LORD:

*For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain. From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the LORD. (Isaiah 66:22-23, ESV)*

The Sabbath is not merely a day to sleep late and avoid chores. It is a day for worship.

**FOURTH**, the Sabbath allows works of necessity and mercy. Jesus defends His disciples when they pluck heads of grain because they are hungry, and He heals the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath (**Matthew 12:1-13**).

He shows that mercy is not a violation of Sabbath holiness. Necessity and mercy fit the day because the Sabbath is made for man, and the Lord of the Sabbath is merciful.

Now, as with Question 66 last week, I want to be explicit about my own wording. The original catechism says the Sabbath is sanctified by "spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy." My own revised answer is this:

Q. How is the Sabbath to be sanctified?

A. The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments as are lawful on other days and recreations which impede the joyful performance of Sabbath duties; and spending the whole time in rest, prioritizing worship and fellowship with the gathered saints, and performing deeds of necessity and mercy for the good of ourselves and our fellow man.

Here is the change laid out clearly:

- **Catechism:** even from such worldly employments **and recreations** as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time **in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy.**
- **My version:** even from such worldly employments as are lawful on other days **and recreations which impede the joyful performance of Sabbath duties;** and spending the whole time **in rest, prioritizing worship and fellowship with the gathered saints, and performing deeds of necessity and mercy for the good of ourselves and our fellow man.**

As I did last week, 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**. It 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.

If recreation **competes** with gathered worship, **weakens** fellowship, **crowds out** family discipleship, **encourages** worldliness, **distracts** the heart from God, or makes us less ready for mercy and necessity, then it should be refused.

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.

The key is priority and direction. Is the day Godward or selfward? Are we calling the Sabbath a delight, or are we merely using holy time as another pocket of personal autonomy? That is the pastoral question. The Sabbath should be holy, restful, worshipful, merciful, and joyful.

## Question 67: Why the 4th commandment?

Q. What are the reasons annexed to the fourth commandment?

A. The reasons annexed to the fourth commandment, are God's allowing us six days of the week for our own lawful employments, his challenging a special propriety in a seventh, his own example, and his blessing the Sabbath day.

Question 67 asks what reasons God attaches to the fourth commandment. This is one of the striking features of the commandment. It is the longest of the Ten Commandments, and God Himself gives reasons for it. **That should make us slow to dismiss it.** (Especially since we don't dismiss the others.)

The first reason is that God allows us six days for our own lawful employments. **"Six days you shall labor, and do all your work" (Exodus 20:9).** That is generous. God does not take six days and give us one. He gives six days for ordinary labor and claims one day in seven as holy to Himself. The Sabbath is not evidence that God is stingy with our time. It is evidence that God is Lord of all our time and merciful in His ordering of it.

This should correct resentment. Sometimes people act as though the Sabbath is God taking something away. But the commandment itself says the opposite. Six days are given for ordinary work. The Lord's claim on one day in seven is not oppressive. It is righteous and kind.

The second reason is that God challenges, or claims, a special propriety in the seventh. The day belongs to Him in a special way. Exodus says, **"the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God" (Exodus 20:10).** That means **we do not decide whether the day is holy.** God has **already** hallowed it. Our duty is to receive His claim and order the day accordingly.



This is where many of us need repentance. We are often willing to give God a worship service, but not the whole day. We want to own the rest. But the commandment does not merely say, “Attend a service.” It says *the day* is the Sabbath of the LORD our God. The *whole day* has a claim upon it.

The third reason is God’s own example. *“For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day” (Exodus 20:11)*. Again, God did not rest because of fatigue. He rested as the Creator Who completed His work and established a pattern for man. Human labor and rest are to imitate, in creaturely form, God’s own creation pattern.

This gives dignity to both work and rest. Work is not a curse in itself; frustrating toil is part of the curse, but work itself belongs to creation. Rest is not laziness; holy rest belongs to the pattern God gave. A godless workaholic and a godless sluggard both violate the Sabbath. The Sabbath teaches us to work under God and rest under God.

The fourth reason is that God *blessed* the Sabbath day. *“Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” (Exodus 20:11)* God’s blessing is not empty. The Sabbath is good because God *blessed* it. This does not mean every Sabbath will *feel* emotionally powerful or physically easy. Some Sabbaths are hard. Children are restless. Bodies are tired. Meals are complicated. Hospitality takes effort. Mercy is costly. But the day is still *blessed* by God.

That *blessing* should shape how we speak. We should not speak of the Sabbath as a *burden* to endure. We should not train our children to think of it as the day when all pleasure dies. We should teach them that it is a *holy gift*. We gather with God’s people, hear God’s Word, sing God’s praise, rest from ordinary labor, enjoy fellowship, show mercy, and remember that Christ is risen. That is *blessing*.

So the reasons for the 4th commandment reveal the kindness and authority of God. He gives us six days. He claims one. He gives His own example. He blesses and hallows the day.

## Conclusion

The 4th commandment teaches us that the Sabbath is not merely about *avoiding sin*. It is about *receiving* God’s gracious pattern for life. The risen Christ has claimed the *1st day* for His church, and He calls us to sanctify it with worship, holy rest, fellowship, and works of necessity and mercy.

So take this lesson with you this week in three ways:

- **FIRST, prepare** for the Sabbath.  
Do not let Saturday sabotage Sunday.  
Order your week so that gathered worship is expected, protected, and welcomed.  
Receive the Sabbath as the *cornerstone* of your week, not leftover time after everything else.
- **SECOND, delight** in the Sabbath.  
Do not ask, “What can I get away with?”  
Ask, “How can I honor Christ today?”  
Receive the Sabbath as both duty and gift:
  - Worship with God’s people.
  - Rest from ordinary labor.
  - Delight yourself in the Lord.
  - Encourage the saints.
  - Show mercy where needed.
- **THIRD, guard** both your liberty and your conscience.  
Do not turn the Sabbath into an ordinary day.  
Do not bind consciences where Scripture does not.  
Reject both careless worldliness and man-made legalism.  
Walk in joyful obedience under the lordship of Christ.

The Sabbath is *holy*. The Sabbath is a *gift*.

Receive it with reverence, gratitude, and joy.