

The Sabbath and Redemption

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There is great significance in the fact that we are called to “remember” the Sabbath Day (Ex. 20:8). At least, it implies our tendency to forget it. Further, the decline or revival of true, heart religion in any place might well be traced to the extent to which a people remember the Lord’s Holy Day (cf. Isa. 58:13). We are therefore thankful for those who love the Lord’s Day and who call others to remember it.

In considering the Sabbath we must begin where Scripture begins. Clearly, the Sabbath does not begin with Moses at Sinai. The very call to “remember” the day in the fourth commandment shows that the Sabbath command predates Sinai. This refutes the claim that the weekly Sabbath belonged to the ceremonial law and is thus abrogated with the coming of Christ. It is evident that the Sabbath begins at creation and so is appropriately referred to as a “creation ordinance” (alongside ordinances such as work and marriage).

The fourth commandment, as given in Exodus 20:8-11, explicitly connects our command to rest on the seventh day with God’s pattern of creating and then resting. Verse eleven gives this reason for Sabbath observance: “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” (Ex. 20:11). The fact that we are commanded to rest (to Sabbath), following God’s pattern, is familiar to us. It is also clear that this command began with Adam in his state of innocence.



*“In this the day that
thou hast made,
triumphantly we sing”
(Psalter 318:4)*

Adam's Sabbath

However, what is sometimes overlooked is the significance of the Sabbath for Adam. Certainly, the Sabbath was a reminder of the creature-Creator distinction. Adam is the creature and God is the Creator. Hence, as a creature, Adam could not work incessantly. The pattern of six days labour and one day of Sabbath is necessary for man *as man*. However, there are indications in the creation account that the Sabbath communicates more to man than a mere reminder of the creature-Creator distinction. The special place the Sabbath occupies is clear from the following considerations. First, the Sabbath is the first day that God “blessed” (Gen. 2:3). Further, it is the only day to be mentioned three times in the creation account (Gen. 2:2-3). It is also the only object that is said to be sanctified in the book of Genesis (Gen. 3:3). Abraham Heschel captures the centrality of the Sabbath in creation when he writes that it was “last in creation, first in intention”, and that the Sabbath is “the end [i.e. the goal] of the creation of heaven and earth.”¹

The Sabbath reveals to Adam, in innocence, the very reason for his existence.

We often speak of the sixth day with the creation of man as the climax, or the apex, of creation. This is appropriate. Before the creation of man, God simply spoke the world into being (Ps. 33:6, 9). He said, “Let there be light, and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). However, when God creates man, He does not simply speak Adam into being. He begins by saying, “Let us make man” (Gen. 1:26a). We are told in the next chapter that “the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul” (Gen. 2:7). Further, God creates man in His image and likeness (Gen. 1:26, Eph. 4:24, Col. 3:10), and gives him dominion over the creatures (Gen. 1:26b). This communicates the superlative excellence with which God created man (cf. Psalm 8).

However, while the Sabbath does not properly belong to creation (it is not part of the six days), yet there is strong evidence that it ought to be considered as the climax of the creation narrative. The key point we want to make is this: The Sabbath reveals to Adam, in innocence, the very reason for his existence. Indeed, so much is this the case, that you cannot properly understand the man created on the sixth day without reference to the seventh day Sabbath. We might ask, borrowing the words of the Shorter Catechism, “What is [Adam’s] chief end?” Why is Adam here? Why has he been made in God’s image? The Sabbath gives

¹. As quoted by Michael Morales in *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 43.

Adam his answer. The reason God made man in the elaborate and superlative way He did on the sixth day is so that man would enjoy communion (Sabbath rest) with God on the seventh day. Whatever else you say as to the reason man has been created – to rule and subdue the creation, to have dominion over the creatures, to marry and procreate – the primary and ultimate reason for his creation is that he would enjoy communion with his Triune God. Michael Morales says this well, “Humanity, nevertheless, is not the culmination of creation, but rather humanity in Sabbath Day communion with God.”² Or to apply the great words of Augustine to Adam (in innocence!): “O God, thou hast created us for thyself, and for thy glory, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.”

From all of this, we begin to see that *from our side of the Fall* the weekly Sabbath functions as a reminder of what we have lost in Adam. Certainly, we have lost that moral aspect of the image of God (knowledge, righteousness, true holiness). Certainly, we have lost the Garden of Eden and the Tree of Life. So we have lost life: “In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:17). But the Sabbath shows us the great depth of our Fall – it tells us that we have lost God Himself and that “to live apart from God is death” (Psalter 203:5). The Sabbath is a weekly reminder to us, that “it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God” (Jer. 2:19).

And yet, what a wonderful thing it is that week by week we still hear these words: “Remember the Sabbath Day.” This recurring command not only reminds us of what we have lost in our Fall, but it is also the God of covenant mercy telling a sinful people that there is a way back to God. The weekly Sabbath is preaching, “Oh Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help” (Hosea 13:9). Sometimes we hear that marriage is a flower that continues with us from the Garden of Eden. This is very true and wonderful. But no less wonderful is *this* remaining flower – “Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.” How inexpressibly wonderful, that in our sinful and broken world, God is telling us, “There remaineth therefore a rest (*sabbatismos*) to the people of God” (Heb. 4:9). There is a way back to God! It is little wonder Satan has attacked this day and tried to present it as a dull and difficult day, as something that robs you of your time and enjoyment. He was a liar from the beginning! This day is proclaiming, if we have eyes to see it, that there is a way back to Eden and Sabbath communion with the living God.

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². Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord*, 47.

The Sabbath's Redemptive Character

From this, one of the things Scripture makes very clear is that, since the Fall, the Sabbath has taken on a redemptive character. This means, it not only tells us about the original creature-Creator distinction, and the reason God created man, but it now tells us about God's redemptive purpose in re-creation. Consider the intimate connection between Sabbath and redemption the fourth commandment gives in the Deuteronomy account:

“Remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.” Deut. 5:15

We will now trace the redemptive significance of the Sabbath, especially by highlighting the importance of its change from the seventh to the first day of the week. The Larger Catechism summarizes the Bible's teaching on this point in answer 116:

“The fourth commandment requireth of all men the sanctifying or keeping holy to God such set times as he hath appointed in his word, expressly one whole day in seven; which was the seventh from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, and the first day of the week ever since, and so to continue to the end of the world; which is the Christian sabbath, and in the New Testament called The Lord's day.”

The change from the seventh to the first day of the week is not a small or insignificant detail. It is something that only the Lord of the Sabbath could do. God is the Lord of time (Genesis 1). Just as we are “not [our] own, but belong to [our] faithful Saviour Jesus Christ” in our bodies and souls, in our life and in our death (Heidelberg Catechism, question 1), so we cannot claim lordship over our time. It is decidedly God who sanctifies the Sabbath in creation, and it is only He who can change or sanctify any other day or time. No person, minister, consistory, church



council, or Synod has any authority to either change or make their own “holy days”. To do so is to arrogate to oneself the prerogative that belongs exclusively to the Lord of the Sabbath and to the Lord of time. Here, it is noteworthy that Sabbath does not mean “seventh”. The Sabbath command is not simply one seventh of time, nor is it necessarily the first or the last seventh of time. It is whatever portion of time the Lord of the Sabbath tells us He has sanctified. This is the blunder the Seventh Day Adventists make in insisting that the Sabbath command necessarily means the seventh day. This teaching is highly erroneous and greatly subversive to true faith. Sabbath means “rest”, and there is great significance in the specific day the Lord of the Sabbath designates as His day of rest.

For instance, one great reason for the change from the seventh to the first day of the week is to safeguard the great gospel truth that the way back to God is *not* achieved by anything that man can do. In Eden, under the Covenant of Works, man *was* given work to do. If he worked as he was instructed, and if he obeyed the Lord his God, then he had the prospect of Sabbath rest held out to him. The order was clear – work, learn to obey, and then you earn Sabbath rest. However, after the Fall, this order becomes impossible for man. He cannot and will not obey and therefore he cannot earn Sabbath rest. He has forfeited this blessing. The work-then-Sabbath order for fallen man is broken. His own work will never result in Sabbath rest (communion with God). Now, he desperately needs someone else to work and earn rest for him. He needs someone else to say, “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28).

But what kind of work will achieve Sabbath rest now that man has fallen? Man has not only disobeyed, but he has also sinned. What the Bible makes so clear is that the “work” required to earn “Sabbath rest” for sinful man is *redemptive*. This is precisely what we see with the Sabbath after the Fall – it clearly assumes a redemptive character. In this way, God is communicating to fallen man, through the *redemptive* character of the Sabbath, that his best efforts to attain Sabbath rest are altogether excluded. Man must look somewhere else for rest – to a different work, to someone else who will work and then earn Sabbath rest for us. In short, the redemptive Sabbath fixes the eyes of faith entirely on the person and work of Jesus Christ, as he says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me” (John 14:6).

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The Eighth Day: A New Day of Rest

Some Scripture argument for the change of day from the seventh to the first day of the week can now be given. In this regard, it is necessary to emphasize the connection between Sabbath and redemption. As above, there is the explicit connection the fourth commandment makes between the keeping of the day and redemption from Egypt (Deut. 5:15). There are many further examples of this connection, as, for example, the book of Ruth. This book paints a wonderful picture of redemption and connects this redemption to the idea of rest. Speaking about Boaz's *redemption* through marriage, Naomi says to Ruth, "My daughter, shall I not seek *rest* for thee" (Ruth 3:1 cf. 3:18).

Further, there is a clear connection in the Old Testament between redemption and the anticipation of *a new day of rest*; namely, the connection between redemption and *the eighth day*. It might be asked, "Where do we place an *eighth* day in a seven-day week?" The answer is obvious. It is the first day of a new week – we might even say, of a new creation (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). This becomes evident when you see the consistent connection the Scriptures make between the eighth day (or the new first day of the week) and redemption. The God who inextricably connects Sabbath and redemption is telling us repeatedly in His word that you are also to connect the redemptive Sabbath with the eighth day (the first day of the new week). This fits with the truth, stated above, that we can only attain Sabbath rest by looking somewhere else. It cannot be achieved by our works (our "six days labour"). We need a new creation, a new week. We need someone to come, to work, to earn, and to freely give Sabbath rest to us. Thus, the eighth day anticipates the first day of the new week when the Lord Jesus would enter into his rest having finished the redemptive work the Father gave him to do. Thereafter, the order of the week *must* be reversed. It will no longer be, "work then rest"; but rather, "rest and then work".

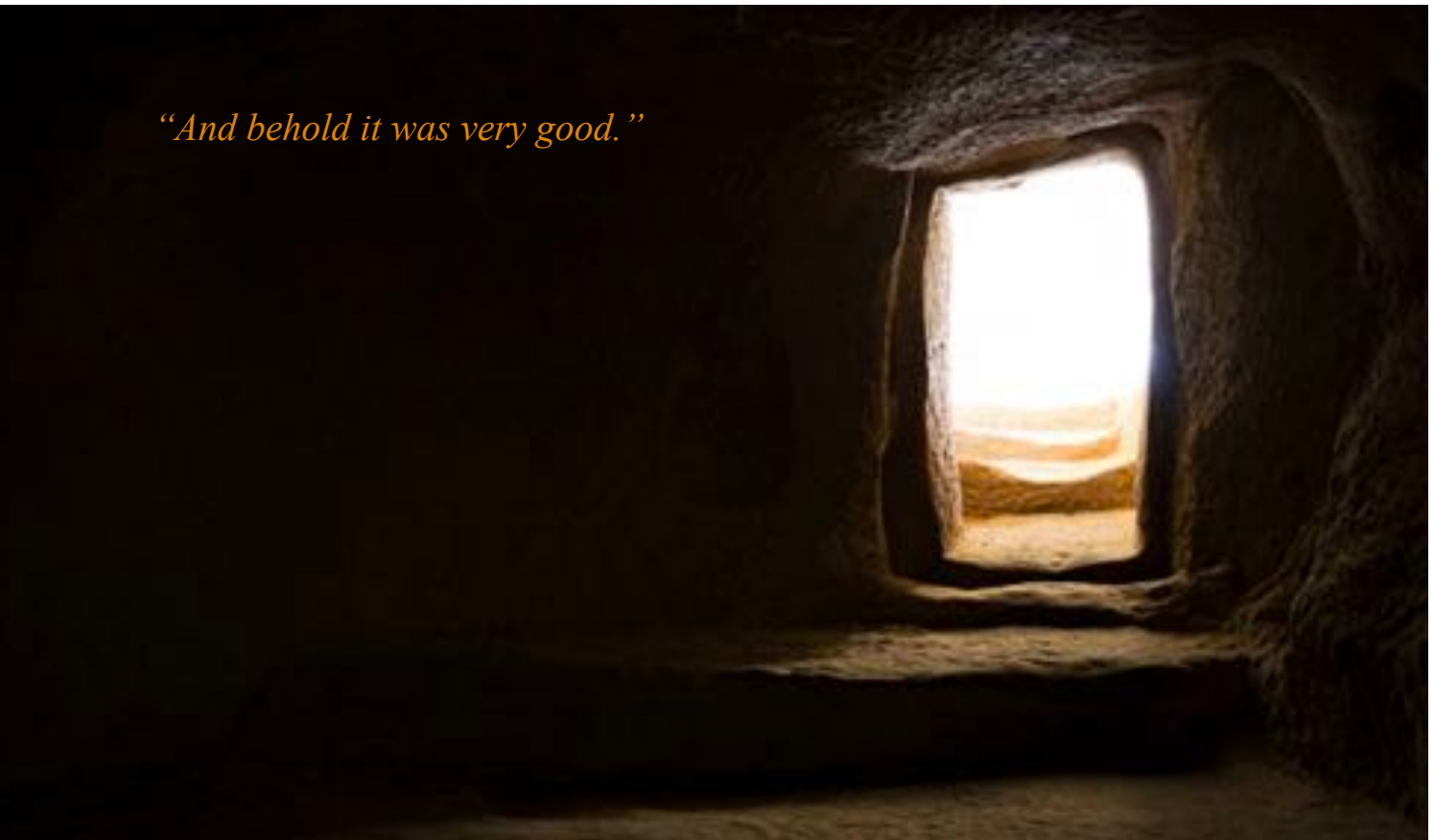
The references to the eighth day in connection with redemptive activity are numerous. The following is not an exhaustive list.³

³. For a more thorough list and for a further explanation of the eighth day, see Robert Haldane, *Sanctification of the Sabbath: The Permanent Obligation to Observe the Sabbath or Lord's Day* (Grand Rapids: RHB, 2022), 51-72.

- **Circumcision** – a sign of the Covenant of Grace and a seal of righteousness – was given to children on the eighth day (Gen. 17:12, Rom. 4:11). This sacrament continued until Christ brought in everlasting righteousness by the shedding of his own blood and his rising again on the eighth day.
- God would only accept the Offering of the **Firstborn of the Cattle** on the eighth day – “When a bullock, or a sheep, or a goat, is brought forth, then it shall be seven days under the dam; and from the eighth day and thenceforth it shall be accepted for an offering made by fire unto the LORD.” (Lev. 22:27 cf. Ex. 22:20)
- The **Consecration of Aaron as High Priest** was “on the eighth day” (Lev. 9:1ff).
- **The Cleansing of a Leper** and the priest’s offering for him was to be on “the eighth day” (Lev. 14:10, 11).
- **The Cleansing from Issues of Blood** was “on the eighth day” (Lev. 15:14).
- **The Dedication of Solomon’s Temple** – a type of the Saviour’s body – was on the eighth day. “Also at the same time Solomon kept the feast seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great congregation, from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt. And in the eighth day they made a solemn assembly: for they kept the dedication of the altar seven days, and the feast seven days.” (2 Chron. 7:8, 9)
- **Ezekiel’s Vision of the Temple and the Redeemer’s Kingdom**: “Seven days shall they purge the altar and purify it; and they shall consecrate themselves. And when these days are expired, it shall be, that upon the eighth day, and so forward, the priests shall make your burnt offerings upon the altar, and your peace offerings; and I will accept you, saith the Lord GOD.” (Ezek. 43:26, 27)
- **The Feast of Tabernacles** was celebrated on the fifteenth day (Numbers 29:35, 36) – which corresponds to the eighth day (7+7+1). This feast moved from many sacrifices at the beginning to the idea of one sacrifice (one bullock, one ram, seven lambs – seven the number of perfection) on the final day, suggesting the movement towards the one sacrifice and the rest it would earn on the first day of the new-creation week.
- **The Year of Jubilee**: Here, even the land is to have a Sabbath. The land “works” for six years and then has a Sabbath year on the seventh. This cycle is repeated seven times, but after the seven cycles of seven, on the fiftieth year (corresponding to the number eight – one after 7×7), you have the Year of Jubilee. In this last cycle, the Sabbath continues from the seventh year into the new eighth year, and in this year, you have the great year of redemption and proclamation of liberty. The redemptive significance of this year and its fulfillment in Christ can be seen by comparing Isaiah 61:1-3 and Luke 4:14-21.

This all communicates with increasing clarity that there will be redemption (and its corresponding rest) on the eighth day – the first day of the new week. The accomplishment of redemption on this new first day finds its perfect fulfillment in Jesus Christ. In creation, God works in six days and then rests from His work on the seventh. Following this pattern of work then rest, Christ finishes the great work of redemption through his death and enters “into his rest” (Heb. 4:10) on the first day of the new creation. This is the day in which the everlasting righteousness that circumcision signified and sealed is brought in. On this day, the one, perfect sacrifice for sins is accepted. Now a sinful, diseased, and unclean people can be washed clean in the Redeemer’s blood. On this first day of the new week, the words of Naomi come into their own concerning the Greater Boaz: “Sit still, my daughter (i.e. you cannot work for this!), until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day” (Ruth 3:18). Christ, the Greater Boaz, would work and “not be in rest” until he had done everything for his people’s redemption. It is on the eighth day (the new first day), and not before, that Christ rests having finished his redemption-accomplishing work. The resurrection gives God’s verdict concerning Christ’s work of re-creation:

“And behold it was very good.”



Robert Haldane notes that the Early Church referred to the Christian Sabbath as “the Eighth Day”. He writes,

Barnabas, the companion of the apostle Paul, calls this the eighth day, in distinction from the seventh day Sabbath, which he says, “is the beginning of another world; and therefore, we keep the eighth day joyfully, in which Jesus rose from the dead, and being manifested ascended into heaven”. It was known, too, by the fathers, by the name of the eighth day, as Ignatius, Irenaeus, Origen, and others. “Every eighth day,” says Tertullian, “is the Christian festival.”⁴

At this point, one important point in biblical interpretation is in order; namely, we must establish our doctrine from the whole Bible. People who insist on a New Testament verse explicitly stating that the Sabbath has changed from the seventh to the first day are separating the unity of the whole Bible. If God has declared something clearly in the Old Testament and He has given no indication that He has changed this thing (e.g. as the book of Hebrews makes clear concerning the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices), then it is inadmissible to demand an explicit New Testament verse. For example, the Lord clearly instructs godly parents to give the sign and seal of the Covenant of Grace to their infant children in the Old Testament (Gen. 17:1-14). He has nowhere indicated that this privilege is now denied to them. Therefore, it is inadmissible to demand a New Testament text saying that children are to be baptized. In a similar way, the same is true for the change of the Sabbath. In the Old Testament, God has spoken clearly in the multiple and pervasive references to the eighth day and its connection to redemption and rest. To demand a New Testament text that explicitly states, “God changed the Sabbath day” is hermeneutically irresponsible and a clear refusal to listen to “all” the words that God speaks to us. The real question ought to be – where has God in the New Testament told us that redemption is no longer to be considered in connection with the eighth day – the first day of the new week?



⁴. Haldane, *Sanctification of the Sabbath*, 62.

Nevertheless, while there is no explicit text saying God changed the day, yet the New Testament does indeed affirm the change of the day from the seventh to the first in the examples of Christ and the apostles. In the first place, as has been noted, there is the fact that the Lord Jesus rose again on the first day of the new week. Sometimes one gospel writer highlights something that another omits. It is important, though not surprising, to note that each one of the four gospel writers is careful to specify the day that Jesus rose from the dead. It's not a mere time marker. Though we can work out the day, yet the day of Christ's death does not receive the same explicit prominence. But concerning the resurrection of Christ, each writer tells us the same thing concerning the day:

- *“In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward **the first day of the week**, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.” (Matt. 28:1)*
- *“Very early in the morning **the first day of the week**, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.” (Mark 16:2)*
- *“Now upon **the first day of the week**, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre.” (Luke 24:1)*
- *“**The first day of the week** cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre...” (John 20:1)*

In the second place, there are the appearances of Christ to the disciples on the first day of the week. Again, why repeatedly tell us which day Christ appeared to Peter, to Thomas, to the other disciples?

- *“Then the same day at evening, **being the first day of the week**, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.” (John 20:19)*



- *“After eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you” (John 20:26). This reference to eight days is inclusive of the previous first day according to the Jewish reckoning of time. In other words, it is the next first day of the week.*

Thirdly, the Day of Pentecost comes on the first day of the week – the fiftieth day from Christ’s resurrection (Acts 2:1). Hereafter, the early church gathers for worship on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). This is also the day, naturally, when they all come together for worship, that they also collect for the poor (1 Cor. 16:1, 2). The Apostle John tells us that he was “in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day” (Rev. 1:10). What is this day? And why refer to it as “the Lord’s Day”? This clearly indicates that there is a day that has this peculiar stamp: It is the *Lord’s Day*. If there was no change of day from the seventh to the first, then why not simply use the Greek word *sabbatismos*? There is evidently now another day that is “set apart” or “made holy”. The only one who has that prerogative is “*the Lord of the Sabbath*” (Mark 2:28) and hence in recognition of *his* most glorious accomplishment of redemption the Christian Sabbath is now appropriately called, “The Lord’s Day”.



In conclusion, the change of day from the seventh to first day of the week is a constant reminder to us that God has done something more wonderful than His work of creation. There was indeed a great glory in the original creation (Ps. 8:1, 19:1). It was then that “the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7). Yet, in comparison to the redemption purchased by Christ, the glory of the heavens fade, and the sun becomes a darkness. “Behold the nations are as a drop of a bucket and the small dust of the balance, God takes up the isles as a very little thing” (Isa. 40:15). And yet, wonderfully, in the place where the rocks rent and the sun refused to shine, God displayed more of His glory than ever He did in speaking the worlds into existence by the omnipotent word of His power. And so, from Christian Sabbath to Christian Sabbath, God is calling His people to remember *this* more glorious work. Above all else, the LORD is calling us to remember that Christ has finished the work given him to do, that he has risen from the grave, and that the preaching of the gospel and the faith of God’s people is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:14).

The gospel that comes every first day of the week is a gospel that says, “Come, for all things are now ready” (Luke 14:17). There is a sense in the Old Testament that there was always a waiting for the Sabbath to come. You worked for six days and then at the *end* of the week there was the Sabbath rest. The land worked for six years and *then* it had its Sabbath. People waited for seven of these cycles before the fiftieth Jubilee Year came. It was all saying to the people, “Redemption and rest are coming. But first, there is a great work to be done. So, look forward to this coming rest.” But now that Christ has come and finished the work given

him to do, there is no redemption work left to be done. The cry of Calvary’s cross proclaimed, “It is finished” (John 19:30). In Christ’s resurrection, God looks at his redemptive work and proclaims, “It is very good.” Therefore, there is to be no more waiting for a Sabbath rest still to come. Now, the work-then-rest order would be an anomaly. The work is done. Christ has earned rest. Rest has been accomplished. It is held out to sinners, not as something they are to work for, but as something that faith receives freely from Christ (Matt. 11:28). In

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Christ, the gospel order – the Sabbath order – is indisputably, “Rest, then work”. The Christian Sabbath is telling sinners that because “the Lord is risen indeed”, God is a God of mercy and stands ready to forgive (Ps. 86:5). It is calling a sinful people, who cannot do anything good, to come, and to share in the satisfaction God has of Christ; to come and to share in the rest that Christ has accomplished. This is the day the Lord has made, and as we contemplate Christ’s finished work, no words are more appropriate for the people of God, than those of the “Psalm or Song for the Sabbath Day”: “For thou LORD hast made me glad through thy work: I will triumph in the works of thy hands. O LORD how great are thy works! And thy thoughts are very deep” (Ps. 92:4, 5).

