

The Fourth Pointer on the Spiritual Roadmap: Keeping Jehovah's Day Holy (2)

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If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it. [Isaiah 58:13-14](#)

The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath. [Mark 2:27-28](#)

In the last article we began our explanation of the fourth commandment by emphasizing that this commandment remains in effect today. Some people claim that Jesus Christ fulfilled the fourth commandment, and made it unnecessary for us to keep the Sabbath day holy. But God still requires us to observe a day of rest. To walk the Way of Thankful Obedience, we must keep this command of God also.

This rest which God commands us to enjoy is not simply the rest from earthly labor. Do not mistake me—rest from earthly labor is certainly a part of the rest that is commanded. The fourth commandment reads: “Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God. In it thou shalt do no manner of work...” ([Exodus 20:9, 10](#)). And God requires us through Isaiah to turn away our foot from doing our pleasure on His holy day—by which He means not only the recreations we might enjoy, but any earthly work we might desire to do.

However, God commands us to rest from earthly labor, in order that we might have the time to enjoy the rest which God primarily intends us to have—the spiritual rest and peace which we experience by drawing near to Him; delighting in Him; praising, serving, and loving Him; and enjoying the salvation which He gives us in Christ.

In that connection, we ended last time by asking the question: how, practically, must we keep the Sabbath day holy? What *must* we do on Sunday? What *may* we do on Sunday? And what is *forbidden* us to do on Sunday? Let us now answer these questions.

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The “must” is stated in Scripture, and summarized for us in Lord’s Day 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism. We must go to church, hear the gospel preached, use the sacraments, join in heart with the congregation in public prayer to God, contribute to the relief of the poor, and support the ministry of the gospel and schools with our offerings. These are not options for us; they are required by the fourth commandment and other passages of Scripture ([Hebrews 10:25](#); [I Timothy 2:1](#); [I Corinthians 16:2](#)).

The “must not” is also stated in Scripture. The fourth commandment itself forbids us to do any earthly labor on Sunday, and [Isaiah 58:13](#) forbids us from doing anything in which we find pleasure. This does not mean, of course, that we may not enjoy the things we do on Sunday; the child of God *does* enjoy worshiping his God. But it means we must do what God requires of us, and not do anything that would indicate we serve ourselves. Earthly labor and earthly recreations must be set aside. Man *needs* the sabbath rest.

In this way the commandment is so often broken today. Sunday finds people enjoying recreations—camping, boating, basketball, football, snowmobiling—as though Sunday is a day for oneself. Sunday finds people working, restaurants doing brisk business, shopping center parking lots full. These things are not pleasing to Jehovah God. He demands that we remember His day, to keep it holy, and put aside all our earthly pursuits.

Young people, bear this in mind. Seek God’s grace to keep all that is common and earthly out of your sabbath days. Work is not wrong in itself; it is good. Recreation is not wrong in itself; it is good, in moderation, and for the right purpose. But on Sunday, all of this must be set aside, for God’s honor and glory!

We may not make laws beyond what Scripture allows us, regarding what we may not do on Sunday. But we are not going beyond Scripture to say: put your earthly work aside, and put your earthly goals and plans and hopes and recreations aside! We have six days to do all these other things, but the seventh is the sabbath of the Lord our God!

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What then may we do, according to Scripture?

First, we may perform any work of necessity. Preparing food; milking cows and caring for other animals; doing work which absolutely is required to be done, such as being a policeman or fireman—these things are permitted us. Jesus taught this by asking the Pharisees who murmured because He healed a sick man on the sabbath day, “What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?” ([Matthew 12:11](#)). By asking this, Jesus was not telling the Pharisees that to pull the sheep out of the pit on the sabbath was wrong, but He was telling them that if pulling one’s sheep out of the pit on the sabbath was proper, so is healing the sick.

Second, we may perform any acts of mercy on the Sabbath day. This is the point that Jesus was teaching the Pharisees in the incident just referred to. For He said in verse 12: “How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.” Acts of mercy would involve caring for the young, the aged, or the sick—including work in a nursing home or hospital.

Third, the sabbath day is a proper day to show love for fellow saints, enjoy fellowship with them, and help them in their needs. How might such love be shown? By visiting fellow saints, or having them in our homes. Even more, by visiting those who are sick, or poor, or led through some other trial. “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” ([James 2:27](#)).

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