

THE SABBATH DAY A SIGN FOR THE LORD'S CHURCH

1. Scripture Reading Exodus 31:12 – 18
2. Lesson: Exodus 31:12, 13
3. Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 38

If ever there were a commandment that created a great dispute amongst Christians, it is the difference of opinion about the Fourth!

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 13 "But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.

It is true like some allegedly argues that though there are references to other Commandments in the New Testament, none is found in regard to the Fourth Command. For instance

- Matthews 19: 18, 19

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 13 "But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for *this* is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.

- Romans 13:9

9 For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."

But that is no argument in favour of wilfulness with regard to the keeping of the Sabbath.

Note that all the quoted examples are from the second Tablet of The Ten Commandments – those ruling our behaviour towards our fellowmen.

Therefore, if this argument holds true, the consequences are that we would be set free also from the first three Commandments!

At Holy Communion we are assured of our Lord's redemption and salvation through grace and mercy. Scripture advises us to make sure that we do not receive grace in vain.

In the Ten Commandments we find the demands of the Covenant of God.

Let us pay attention to the last Command of the First Tablet

The Sabbath Day from a different angle.

Today we look at the Fourth Command from a total different angle to establish the **will of God** by this Commandment for his Church.

You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.

Normally we notice only that the LORD sanctified the Sabbath Day.

In our lesson today it is clear that the LORD also sanctified his Covenant People!

Clearly his Covenant People are not only Israel of old but his Church consisting of all those firmly believing in Jesus Christ as their Saviour as well.

There are two ultimate viewpoints on the Fourth Commandment amongst Christians.

- On the one hand those who like the Pharisees of old prohibit almost everything on a Sunday.
On Sunday you may not — followed by an enormous list of items which are hard to abide by – especially by children and young folk!
- On the other hand there is the viewpoint that anything is permissible **on condition** that you attended a church service on a Sunday morning!

Often the words of our Lord Jesus to the Pharisees are quoted as support for this argument

- Mark 2:27

And He was saying to them, The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.

In doing so they willfully ignore a full quotation — “Consequently, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

- They also wittingly quote Colossians 2:16, 17

16 Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— 17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

- Also are the words of John 7:21 – 23 falsely applied to a willful kind of outlook on the Sabbath.

21 Jesus answered and said to them, “I did one deed, and you all marvel. 22 “On this account Moses has given you circumcision (not because it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and on the Sabbath you circumcise a man. 23 “If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath that the Law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on the Sabbath?”

Firstly God wants in the Fourth Commandment . . .

We, as grateful heirs of the 16th Century Reformation, have every reason to thank our LORD for the treasure of the Book of Condolences and Comfort handed over to us in order of better understanding of the Bible!

The Catechism avoids the debate on Saturday or Sunday.

Is Sunday the Sabbath Day of the Fourth Commandment or is it only Saturday as the seventh of the week?!!

The controversy of The Seventh Day Adventists whose founder, Ellen White, received a so called revelation, is not even mentioned.

The Sabbath is called the **DAY OF REST**. Colon!

Expressively it continues to relate the sanctification of the Sabbath through the service of the Church and concentrates on the eternal Sabbath rest.

First, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained; and that I, especially on the sabbath, that is, on the day of rest, diligently frequent the church of God,

- 📖 To hear his word,
- 📖 To use the sacraments,
- 📖 publicly to call upon the Lord, and
- 📖 contribute to the relief of the poor.

Secondly God wants in the Fourth Commandment . . .

Secondly, that all the days of my life I cease from my evil works, and yield myself to the Lord, to work by his Holy Spirit in me: and thus begin in this life the eternal sabbath.

The Fourth Commandment is not only applicable on Sundays!

It is also not only with regard to the present!

It is of eternal significance!

This is because the Sabbath Day of THE LORD is a sign for his church

'You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.

Nobody, reserved for the LORD (that is the meaning of sanctified), can do other than has the Holy Spirit working in the heart.

Whosoever desecrates the Sabbath Day transgresses the Covenant of Grace that the LORD established between Him and his people.

No wonder that the reason for their exile were the profaning of the Sabbath and their idolatry by Israel.

A Church that denies the Sabbath Day as a sign between God and his people, has no future. For such a Church the oracle against Edom is relevant (Isaiah 21:11, 12):

One keeps calling to me from Seir Watchman, how far gone is the night? Watchman, how far gone is the night?”¹²The watchman says, “Morning comes but also night.

Business on Sunday, organized sport on Sunday, Sunday papers, relaxation and long journeys on Sundays are not strange to modern day Christians in South Africa.

The question is: How do our LORD and heavenly Father regard our performance?

Remember the handling of the ex exiles profaning of the Sabbaths by the prophet Nehemiah—

In those days I saw in Judah some who were treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sacks of grain and loading them on donkeys, as well as wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads, and they brought them into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day.

Nehemiah warned them against selling food on this specific day.

Then I reprimanded the nobles of Judah and said to them, “What is this evil thing you are doing, by profaning the Sabbath day?

19 And it came about that just as it grew dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and that they should not open them until after the Sabbath. Then I stationed some of my servants at the gates that no load should enter on the Sabbath day. 20Once or twice the traders and merchants of every kind of merchandise spent the night outside Jerusalem. 21Then I warned them and said to them, “Why do you spend the night in front of the wall? If you do so again, I will use force against you.” From that time on they did not come on the Sabbath. 22And I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come as gatekeepers to sanctify the Sabbath day.

In conclusion

13 “If because of the Sabbath, you turn your foot From doing your *own* pleasure on My holy day, And call the Sabbath a delight, the holy *day* of the LORD honorable, And shall honor it, desisting from your *own* ways, From seeking your *own* pleasure, And speaking *your own* word, **14**Then you will take delight in the LORD, And I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; And I will feed you *with* the heritage of Jacob your father, For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” (Isaiah 58)

AMEN

^c Is. 55:8

^c Is. 1:20; 40:5