

SUNDAY ARTICLE

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The Lord's Day Is a Gift

Daniel Hyde

The first four commandments of the law teach us how to love God, even how to love Him in worship on the day of His choosing.

It is important for us to understand the fourth commandment, in which God gives His command for the day of His worship: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8).

How are we as Christians to observe this commandment?

From Creation to Re-Creation

From creation until Christ, the people of God worked six days and then rested on the seventh day.

This was a picture of their looking forward to eternal rest; the seventh day of creation was not structured with an "evening and morning" as the previous six days (Genesis 2:1-3), which signified that the seventh day had no end and was thus a foretaste of eternity itself.

On the other hand, from the work of Christ until the consummation, the people of God rest on the first day and work the next six, looking back on the finished work of Christ.

Yet we too look forward to the full consummation of this rest.

When our Lord lay in the tomb from Friday evening through early Sunday morning, the old order of things was buried with Him; when He rose again, He began a new order of things.

This is why the Gospel of John speaks of the first day of the week as the eighth day, literally, "after eight days" (20:26).

It was not just the beginning of another week, but, in fact, a new beginning.

This was because the resurrection of Christ was the firstfruits of the final resurrection and restoration of all things (Romans 8:18-25; 1

Corinthians 15:23).

On the Lord's Day, our worship is a commemoration of Christ's accomplished work and triumphant resurrection, and an anticipation of the day of re-creation, when the Lord shall make all things new (Revelation 21:4-5).

But it is also a participation in the age to come already in this age. As Paul says, upon us "the end of the ages has come" (1 Corinthians 10:11).

We have entered this Sabbath rest, according to the writer to the Hebrews: "For we who have believed enter that rest...for whoever has entered

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God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his" (Hebrews 4:3, 10).

Letting the Lord's Day Structure Us

All of this teaches us that instead of seeing the Lord's Day as a rule that stifles our "weekend," we need to view it as a gift from God that actually structures our lives.

The practice of the Lord's Day is not legalism, but it is a part of our piety, providing us physical and spiritual rest.

We sanctify the day because we belong not to this age that is passing away but to the glorious age to come.

We need to acknowledge, then, that Sunday is the Lord's Day and not the Lord's morning (or, sadly, the Lord's hour), just as the Sabbath was a day of rest.

As Christians, we have been liberated from "the land of Egypt,...[from] the house of slavery" (Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:6), which is the enslaving power of sin and Satan.

Now we are "slaves [bondservants] of God" (Romans 6:22).

As His servants, we are to give ourselves to self-sacrificial worship of God, through Christ, in the power of the Spirit (Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 2:18).

We are to set aside the Lord's Day to remember our creation (Exodus 20:11) and re-creation (Deuteronomy 5:15) in public worship.

This is what the Heidelberg Catechism says when it answers the question, "What does God require in the fourth commandment?"

Notice that the answer does not contain a laundry list of "do's" and "don'ts," but simply says,

In the first place, that the ministry of the Gospel...be maintained; and that I, especially on the day of rest, diligently attend church, to learn the Word of God, to use the holy Sacraments, to call publicly upon the Lord, and to give Christian alms. (Q&A 103)

Since Sunday is the Lord's Day, it is His will for us that we diligently attend church, "not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but

encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:25).

This diligence in anticipation of the final day is seen in the early Christians, who "devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42).

Setting aside Sunday means that we are to commit ourselves to gratefully resting and worshiping the triune God because we belong to Christ, not ourselves (see Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1).

The Lord's Day is the day in which Jesus takes us to our Father, places us into His arms, and feeds us with

the Holy Spirit's food for our souls, the preaching of the gospel and the sacraments.

There is, then, nothing better we can do on the Lord's Day than assemble as a people to worship our covenant God together and receive His official means of grace.

As the eloquent Anglican J. C. Ryle said:

Never be absent from God's house on Sundays, without good reason, - never to miss the Lord's Supper when administered in our own congregation, - never to let our place be empty when means of grace are going on, this is one way to be a growing and prosperous Christian. The very sermon that we needlessly miss, may contain a precious word in season for our souls. The very assembly for prayer and praise from which we stay away, may be the very gathering that would have cheered, and established, and quickened our hearts.



Rev. Daniel R. Hyde is senior minister of Oceanside Reformed Church in Oceanside, California.

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Excerpt from Daniel Hyde's book *Welcome to a Reformed Church* available at ligonier.org

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