

SUNDAY ARTICLE

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A Well-Spent Sabbath

David Strain

For a few people today, an hour or two on Sunday mornings is occupied with public worship, but for most people, the idea that Sunday is the Christian Sabbath – an entire day set apart for worship, rest, and ministry – is entirely novel.

And yet, in an age of frenetic and unrelenting busyness, when technology allows us to stay plugged in to the world 24/7, when entertainment becomes the de facto purpose of so many lives, nothing could be more countercultural, nor bear more eloquent testimony to a Christian's citizenship in another world, than a well-spent Lord's Day.

Growing up in Scotland, I had a residual cultural awareness that Sunday was the Sabbath Day. Even my secular parents spent the day with the TV switched off, quietly reading and resting. Years later, I came to faith through the faithful witness of a Pentecostal friend, and I saw the Lord's Day as nothing more than a needless imposition upon my Christian

freedom, more reflective of old covenant convictions than new covenant joys.

When I went to college, however, that all changed. After worship every Sunday, church families would vie with one another to bring students and visitors into their homes for lunch. There we'd be invited to spend the afternoon enjoying a veritable banquet, returning to evening worship with them at day's end. After lunch, the TV remained silent. Some dozed contentedly in an armchair. Others went for a walk. Some brought a Christian book to read. Often, lively discussion would spill over from the lunch table to fill the afternoon.

Sometimes we'd gather around the piano and sing hymns together. Conversation ebbed and flowed, punctuated by gales of laughter and grunts of affirmation (the Scottish equivalent of an "amen") at some helpful point or another.

Well before I could ever articulate a clear theology of the Lord's Day, I contracted the happy contagion of joyful Sabbath observance. Were there nothing to support a well-spent Lord's Day but the practical benefits of it, I would still commend this day of rest as an excellent mechanism for promoting our spiritual best.

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Not that the doctrine of the Sabbath is without scriptural warrant. Its origins are woven into the fabric of God's own creative work at history's dawn. The seventh-day Sabbath was established at the climax of the creation week (Genesis 2:1-3). God blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it, so that it became a sign to our first parents of the ultimate rest into which Adam's obedience would usher creation itself if he were to keep covenant with God.

The persistence of a Sabbath day after Adam's fall is a reminder of the grace of God, who continues to hold out to fallen humanity the offer of rest through faith in Jesus Christ (which is why both *creation* and *redemption* are urged as motives for Sabbath-keeping in Exodus 20:11 and Deuteronomy 5:15).

Part of the function of law of Moses in the history of redemption was to act as a temporary schoolmaster or tutor, teaching God's old covenant people of their need for a Saviour (Galatians 3:24-25). And so when Jesus came, He obeyed and bled and died, keeping perfectly God's law. The demands of the covenant of works were met in full. The representative of a new humanity won what had been lost in Adam for all who believe.

On the first day of the week, the Father vindicated His obedient Son, declaring Him to be righteous in His resurrection (Romans 1:4; 1 Timothy 3:16). On Sunday, the day that light was made, the curse

on Adam's sin was undone (Genesis 2:17), death was abolished, and the light of the world brought life and immortality to light (2 Timothy 1:10).

Now that "it is finished" (John 19:30), the Sabbath day comes no longer at the end of a week of work but at the beginning of it. The work by which the Sabbath rest is secured has been accomplished for us by Jesus. Now we rest in Him and then rise to work in the strength that His saving grace supplies (Hebrews 3:7-4:10). A new creation has been inaugurated and a perfect exodus has occurred. We have been translated from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of God's love (Colossians 1:13).

That's why the church now meets on the first day of the week (John 20:19; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation

1:10). New creation and perfect redemption are the great realities that are ours already in Christ, and we celebrate them and enjoy them on the Christian Sabbath day. It is a gospel ordinance that is refreshing for us and glorifying to God.

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Rev Dr David Strain was born in Glasgow, Scotland, and is Senior Minister of First Presbyterian Church in Jackson, Mississippi, a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in America.

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