

The Sabbath Day and Recreations on the Sabbath

An Examination of the Sabbath and the Biblical Basis for the “No Recreation” Clause in Westminster Confession of Faith 21.8 and Westminster Larger Catechism 117

By Lane Keister

PRACTICAL INTRODUCTION

Wherein the wickednesse of this exceedeth, in that men commonly no day in the weeke followe so muche their own wayes, and delightes of their owne hart, as on that day, which is appointed to learne them how to cease from their owne wayes, workes, and delightes. For a great number (& those not the worst of all,) take that day to be ordeined only for ease of their bodie & to be a day of recreation after their trauels & labours that haue been the sixe dayes before, and vse it accordingly: whereas, the Lorde hath appointed it to the exercise of word and prayer, that beeing vnburdened of their worldly affaires, they mighte with free harts and mindes attend vpon the word, prayer, and meditation.... Thus the right vse and end of the Sabbaothe is cleane altered, and not that only, but chaunged into a practice moſte contrarie to the institution thereof. For beeing appointed to bee the market day of the soule, to make provision for the dayes following.¹

Being on the Candidates and Credentials Committee of my Presbytery means that I look often at differences that candidates have with the standards of the church. We have even seen a few candidates who deny that the Lord’s Day is the Christian Sabbath at all. These, fortunately, are few. More commonly, however, the most often taken exception is to the “no recreation” clause in Westminster Confession of Faith 21.8 and Westminster Larger Catechism 117.² As an added bonus, I am usually treated to a description of “throwing a football” around on the Sabbath. Sometimes I wonder if it isn’t really that they want to *watch* football on the Sabbath! At any rate, I usually press them on their understanding of Isaiah 58:13–14 which is the biblical basis for the Puritan understanding of “no recreation” on the Sabbath day. If any answer is given, it is usually that the word

“pleasure” refers to business rather than to recreation. This article will attempt to provide a relatively cursory glance at the biblical evidence for the Puritan position on the Sabbath in general, and also that the Puritan understanding of “no recreation on the Sabbath” is in fact the biblical understanding of the Sabbath Day.³ To do this, we must first examine the redemptive-historical unfolding of the Sabbath Day to show that the moral, unchanging, creational principle is that of one

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1. John Knewstubb, *Lectures upon the twentieth chapter of Exodus* (1577), 72–73. Quoted in James T. Dennison, Jr., *The Market Day of the Soul: The Puritan Doctrine of the Sabbath in England, 1532–1700* (1983; Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2001), 29.

2. Hereafter WCF and WLC. WCF 21.8 says, “This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments, *and recreations*, but also are taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of His worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy” (emphasis added). WLC 117 asks “How is the sabbath or the Lord’s day to be sanctified?” The answer is that “The Sabbath or Lord’s day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments *and recreations* as are on other days lawful...” (emphasis added).

3. The Puritan view may be summarized by the following points: 1. the Sabbath is a creation ordinance; 2. Saturday-Sabbath is not commanded in the Decalogue; 3. The Lord’s Day is the New Testament Sabbath; 4. the Lord’s Day is by God’s positive command on Sunday; 5. The Lord’s Day should be passed in suspension of recreations and rest from normal labor. See the excellent chart in Dennison, 177.

day in seven (not the Saturday Sabbath) to rest from all normal weekly activities (except works of necessity and mercy) so that we can worship God, which was in the Old Testament appointed by God to be the seventh day, and in the New Testament the eighth or first day. This must be done in order to show that Isaiah 58:13–14 applies not only to the Old Testament version of Saturday Sabbath, but also to the New Testament version of Sunday Sabbath. Then, finally, we will examine the exegesis of Isaiah 58:13–14 (the key text in the debate concerning recreations) in order to show that the Puritan understanding of the Sabbath is the best exegesis of the passage.

I. OLD TESTAMENT AND NEW TESTAMENT

One of the main issues involved in the discussion of Sabbath worship versus Sunday worship is the relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament (hereafter abbreviated as OT and NT, respectively). How does the NT interpret the OT? Are there discontinuities between the testaments? If so, where do the lines fall? How do we know what continues and what does not? This is a huge question that rockets around the reformed world in the form of the issue of theonomy, a term that comes from *theos* (God) and *nomos* (law), which is an interpretation that sees only continuity between the testaments, such that we as a secular (!) nation ought to be going back to observe theocratic (!) Israel's laws; and the issue of dispensationalism, which sees almost complete discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments. These represent the opposite poles on the question of continuity and discontinuity.

So exactly how does the NT interpret the OT? To sum it all up in one sentence: the OT is about Jesus Christ. Two passages are absolutely essential to this understanding of the OT. The first comes in Luke 24, after Jesus' resurrection when He is on the road to Emmaus with the two disciples. The two disciples are confused about what happened to Jesus; they do not recognize Him. Verse 21 says it all, "We had hoped that He was the one to redeem Israel." This implies clearly that they thought that Jesus' death precluded Him from being able to redeem Israel. So the crucifixion/resurrection is a huge

puzzle to them. Jesus then says (vv. 25–26), "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Notice the phrase here "all that the prophets have spoken." What does this mean? Well, Jesus clarifies that in the very next verse. "Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them *in all the Scriptures* the things concerning Himself" (emphasis added). If we are left in any doubt as to how Jesus interpreted the OT, here let us doubt no longer: Jesus thought that the entire OT was about His death and resurrection. Now, in verse 27, there is some question as to whether Jesus refers to *some* things in the Scriptures concerning himself, or that the *entire* Scriptures refer to Him. It must be the latter, because of verse 32, where the disciples (their eyes now open) ask this poignant question, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us *the Scriptures*?" and verse 45, where Jesus opened their minds to understand *the Scriptures*. This emphasized phrase means the entirety of the OT.⁴ In fact, there is no place where this phrase is used in the entire Bible, where it does not refer to the entire OT (with the possible exception of Daniel 9:2, since the OT was not a closed canon at that time). This passage in Luke 24 clearly indicates that Jesus interpreted the *entire* OT to be about Himself. This would include the idea that the Sabbath is fulfilled in his death and resurrection. *All* the Scriptures (including the passages about the Sabbath) point to Jesus' death and resurrection (see especially 1 Corinthians 15:3–4). More on this later (especially about issues of what continues from the Old Testament into the New and what does not).

The second passage in this regard that is important is John 5:30ff. Jesus is talking about witnesses to Himself. In verse 39, he accuses the Jews of searching the Scriptures because the Jews want eternal life, and think that they can find it in the Scriptures. The irony is that they are right, if only they would see it! The Scriptures bear witness about Jesus, who *is* the light. Even more pointedly, in verse 46, Jesus says that Moses, on whom the Pharisees set their hope, wrote about Jesus. That means that when Moses was writing *about the Sabbath*, he was writing about Jesus: when Moses was writing *about creation*, he was writing about Jesus, and when Moses wrote *about Israel's redemption from Egypt*, he was writing about Jesus. Connecting this passage with the Luke 24 passage (the Reformation said that Scripture interprets Scripture), we can see that when the OT penmen write about Jesus, they are writing about his death and resurrection. So, when Moses wrote about the

4. See also such passages as Matthew 21:42, 22:49, 26:54, etc. An important qualification must be inserted here. It is not my position that every detail of every passage is a type of Christ. Rather, every passage of the OT forms part of the organic unfolding story that climaxes in the person and work of Jesus Christ. So it is not an atomistic typology, but rather a connected whole that points to Christ, although there certainly are many details that do point to Christ.

Sabbath, he was writing about Jesus' death and resurrection. When Moses was writing about creation, he was writing about Jesus' death and resurrection. And, when he was writing about redemption from Egypt, he was writing about Jesus' death and resurrection. *The Sabbath is about Jesus' death and resurrection.* This is the inescapable conclusion to which Luke 24 and John 5 lead.

II. OLD TESTAMENT MEANING OF THE SABBATH

There are three main passages that tell us the significance of the Sabbath: Genesis 2:1–3, Exodus 20:8–11, and Deuteronomy 5:12–15.

A. Genesis 2:1–3

This passage is well-known to everyone in the discussion. The Seventh-Day Adventists (who argue that we should still observe Saturday Sabbath) rightly note that this passage proves that the Sabbath was not just for Israel. The Sabbath is a creation ordinance. This has been hotly contested throughout the history of discussion on the Sabbath.⁵

The passage is remarkable when compared to the first chapter of Genesis. The first chapter (and 2:1–3) is extremely formulaic. That is, there are repeated formulas that occur over and over (“And God said,” “and it was so,” “there was morning and evening,” “God saw that it was good”). What is remarkable in 2:1–3 is that the very structure of morning and evening does *not* occur with the Sabbath. The text does not say that “there was evening, and there was morning, the seventh day.” There is something special about the seventh day. Now, the lack of the evening/morning formula has been taken in different ways by interpreters. Some say that the Sabbath was therefore meant to be seen as eternal (not being bound by the usual strictures of beginning and ending). Some say that it merely points out that this day was the end of the cycle of the week. In any case, the lack of the evening/morning formula must mean something. Moses has been much too careful with his words in the first chapter for us to think that he merely forgot to add the morning/evening formula. He intended to say something by the omission. I believe that He intended to say that the Sabbath pattern was started here for man, but that God entered into an eternal rest. That he intended this to be the rationale for man's Sabbath observance is clear from Exodus 20:8–11. (More on this passage later.) That Moses intended to indicate an eternal Sabbath is clear from two other passages that help us to understand Genesis 2.

1. John 5:16–17

Here the Jews are persecuting Jesus because He was healing on the Sabbath (why this fact added to Jesus' example of Saturday worship before His death and resurrection does not hurt the Sunday Sabbath position will be explained later). Jesus' answer makes no sense unless God is in an eternal Sabbath. Jesus was addressing here an age-old problem that the rabbis had to deal with: if God rested on the seventh day, how come the world doesn't fall apart when He is resting?⁶ They, of course, recognized that God preserved the world continuously, and that without that preservation, the world would immediately cease to exist. So Jesus answers them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.” Admittedly, this could be understood to say that every time the Sabbath rolls around, God is still at work preserving the world. And yet, as a “work of necessity” (read here “grace”), God continues to “work” during this whole time that He enjoys the completion of the creation. Jesus then says that His own rest is of a piece with God's rest, just as His work is of a piece with God's work. The language literally means “continuously working.” There is no stop to it.

2. Hebrews 3:7–4:13

In this extended discourse on the meaning of the Sabbath, Hebrews says that there is yet a Sabbath rest for the people of God. That means that the older Sabbath did not exhaust the meaning of the Sabbath. The point I wish to make here stems from 4:4–5. Paul says that God entered His rest, and then that the Israelites shall not enter *that same* rest. In other words, the rest of God entered into at creation is the *same* rest He calls the Israelites to enter. Obviously, if they could enter such a rest, that rest must be eternal, or else they would only be able to enter it one day in seven. Just prior to these two verses, we find confirmation of this interpretation: Hebrews links the *finished* work of creation with the Sabbath of God (4:3). The finished work of creation

5. The very best historical treatment of the Puritan view of the Sabbath in conjunction with their argumentation against the Prelatical view and against the Anabaptist view is undoubtedly the Dennison book mentioned above. It is good to see that Reformation Heritage Books has made this work available again in a recent reprinting. I should also note that I am indebted throughout to Joey Pipa's treatment of the subject (though in more formative ways, and especially in practical ways). See Joseph Pipa, Jr., *The Lord's Day* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Scotland, reprinted 2008).

6. See Andreas Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 185.

means Sabbath for God. Since the creation continues to be finished, God continues in His rest.⁷

These two passages together confirm that we are to understand God as entering into a permanent rest in Gen 2:1–3. Several implications follow from this: Adam would have entered into that rest if he had remained obedient. This was the carrot held out to Adam. God said to him, “Obey me and live.” This would mean eternal life with God.⁸ Since God was in an eternal Sabbath rest, then Adam would have entered that Sabbath rest. Adam failed to achieve this entrance into God’s rest. God immediately judged the world as a result. Adam was cursed in this very area: instead of getting rest, he would have to work hard, and get no rest. No longer would work be enjoyable, but would rather become a tiresome burden. Later on in redemptive history, God created the people Israel for Himself. This people became enslaved to Egypt. They had no rest. They were in a land that the Bible characterizes as the land of death. They were dead. God resurrected them out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and brought them out into the wilderness (typological to what the church is today). The wilderness is where they failed to reach their Sabbath rest (the rest was the land of Canaan, as Hebrews 4:8–9 explicitly says). So no one, not even the OT messiah (Joshua, whose name is the Hebrew form of the Greek “Jesus”) was able to bring God’s people into that eternal rest of God (Hebrews 4:8–9). However, as the point of Hebrews as a whole is that Jesus is our great high priest (8:1), the point of Hebrews 3–4 is that Jesus, the greater Joshua, entered into the rest of God, enabling His people to do to same. This is confirmed by the context: “Since then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession” (4:14). He says this

7. The best treatment of this passage remains Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.’s article, “A Sabbath Rest Still Awaits the People of God,” in *Pressing Toward The Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, edited by Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble (Philadelphia: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), 33–51. He effectively dismantles the arguments of Andrew Lincoln’s article, “Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament,” in *From Sabbath To Lord’s Day*, edited by D.A. Carson (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 1982), 197–220. Gaffin has expanded somewhat his argument in the equally excellent article in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century, Volume One*, edited by Ligon Duncan, III (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2003), 123–144.

8. For an excellent discussion of the Sabbatical principle as the principle of the covenant of works, see Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (1948; Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 2000), 139–140.

9. Harold Dressler, “The Sabbath in the Old Testament,” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, 21–41.

because Jesus having entered that rest means that we can now enter that rest (see 4:11, where Hebrews tells us to strive to enter that rest: he would only say that if it were now possible to enter that rest). Jesus *has* entered into that rest as the new Adam, Jesus *has* passed through the heavens (meaning that he has entered heaven, and *therefore*, into God’s rest).

From this it needs to be asked: *when* did Jesus enter into that rest, enabling His people to follow? The answer must be two-fold: 1. the weekly Sabbath is *not* when he entered that rest: nothing of such earth-shattering importance is ever mentioned about Jesus happening on the Sabbath; 2. the only possible times as to when he could have entered that rest are the resurrection and the ascension. Since the ascension would not have been possible without the resurrection, and since the resurrection is the ultimate victory over sin and death (sin and death are antitypological to Israel’s “work” in Egypt), and since resurrection is therefore the parallel to the Exodus, we must date Jesus’ entry into that rest by the resurrection.

One more issue remains in the interpretation of Hebrews 3–4, and that is the issue of eschatology. Does Jesus give us complete access to this rest, thus making our entrance into the rest fully eschatological when we come to faith? Or is our current entrance into that rest more of an inaugurated eschatology? If there still remains a Sabbath rest for God’s people, then some aspect of that Sabbath is still to come. This is why there is still a weekly celebration of the Sabbath today. It commemorates the “not yet” aspect of our Sabbath rest. To say that there is no Sabbath rest today is to have an over-realized eschatology. None of this should downplay the “already” aspect that is genuinely there in the text. The Sabbath has an “already, not yet” structure to it, as does the entire New Testament.

To conclude this section about the OT meaning of the Sabbath in Genesis 2:1–3: it points to Jesus’ acquiring of the Sabbath rest for the people of God. Jesus acquired it on Sunday, specifically, on Easter Sunday. That is why we should worship on Sunday. Jesus’ death and resurrection is nothing short of a new creation and new redemption.

B. Exodus 20:8–11

This passage interprets Genesis 2 for us. How or whether it does so is disputed. For instance, a recent treatment of this passage argues that the Sabbath day in the fourth commandment is not an explication of Genesis 2:1–3.⁹ He says, “Genesis 2 does not mention the word ‘Sabbath.’ It

speaks about the ‘seventh day.’ Unless the reader equates ‘seventh day’ and ‘Sabbath,’ there is no reference to the Sabbath here. Genesis 2 does not speak about a religious, cultic feast day or any institution at all” (Dressler, 28). He explains more fully:

We interpret the statement in verse 11b as an explanation of God’s blessing activity in connection with the new institution of the Sabbath on the analogy of God’s blessing activity with regard to the seventh day at creation (Dressler, 38 fn43).

Now, I am not arguing, as the Seventh Day Adventists do, that the aspect of Sabbath given at creation was the Saturday, or seventh-day Sabbath. Rather, I argue that the principle of one day in seven as rest in worship was given at creation. So, on one level, I agree with Dressler: the creation ordinance was not equal to Saturday Sabbath. Where I disagree with Dressler is that I affirm that the creation ordinance was equal to the Sabbath principle. The Puritan view is that the principle of one day in seven is what God inaugurated at creation, and that the Sabbath occurring on the seventh day was established by an *additional* command in the OT. This is a command that is not part of the moral law, but is rather a temporary positive injunction that can easily be changed in the NT to Sunday via the resurrection of Christ.

This can be shown from the passage. On the one hand, the Fourth Commandment, as given in Exodus, explicitly links the seventh day to the Sabbath and to God’s creational pattern. Verse 11 connects the seventh with the Sabbath by means of the causal particle *לָכֵן*, which means “therefore.”¹⁰ That the Israelites will rest on the seventh day is based on God’s resting on the seventh day, which is now called the Sabbath. On the other hand, this does not make the seventh day as Sabbath part of the moral law, which was given at creation. The archetypal pattern is that of God working six days and resting one. The Israelites are to copy that, specifically making the seventh day the one of rest. But the only principle that is in common between Genesis 2 and Exodus 20 is that of one day in seven rest. We come to this conclusion because, in Genesis 2, the word “seventh” does not mean Saturday, but rather the seventh in a sequence of six other days (Genesis 1). We do not know, in other words, that God rested on Saturday. We know that God rested on the seventh-day-after-six-work-days.

The reason for the Sabbath observance in the Exodus version of the Ten Commandments is what we may call the “creation reason.” The Israelites must keep the

Sabbath, because God rested on the seventh day at creation. Now, from what I wrote above on Genesis 2:1–3, it follows that we must interpret this “creation reason” in the light of Jesus acquiring the ultimate, final Sabbath rest in his resurrection.

One further point must be noticed here: did Jesus, in fact, usher in a new creation? Surely, nothing short of *new* creation and *new* redemption would be sufficient to change the day of an observance that got started because of the *old* creation and the *old* redemption. To answer this question, we will look at one particular new creation passage (though there are many). 2 Corinthians 5:17 says: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” Most translations interpret the first part of the verse something like what is here. The Greek is actually a little more loosely connected. What I mean is that the Greek does not actually say, “He is a new creation.” The Greek actually just says, “new creation” (καὶνὴ κτίσις). The translation could then be something like this, “If anyone is in Christ, then there is a new creation.” The existence of anyone *in Christ* then proves that there is such a thing as the new creation. In fact, the new creation is of such an order as to supersede (in some way) the old. For that is what the second part of the verse says (“the old things have passed away; look, all things have become new”).

One other passage (leading to yet one more) must be mentioned here by way of confirmation. What I am trying to say here is that Jesus ushered in a new creation; that creation had its beginning on Sunday; therefore, worship changed from Saturday Sabbath to Sunday Sabbath when that new creation was ushered in. The other passage I wish to discuss here is 1 Corinthians 15. Paul is answering the Corinthians’ questions about the resurrection. Paul is talking about people that die, and their bodies go into the ground. What happens to those bodies? They are like seeds (vv. 36–37): they cannot produce a crop unless the seed dies. So also with the body. It cannot be raised in power, unless the body dies. Let us follow carefully his line of reasoning. First, he starts by contrasting the post-Fall body with the resurrection body. This is where the seed analogy comes in. What happens to believers is that their body dies, and their soul goes to be with the Lord, and their body rests until the last day, when it is resurrected in glory. This contrast comes to a climax in verse 44a: it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. Note

10. See Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990; 1997), 11.3.2, 221. See also the Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon (BDB), 485.

carefully that Paul uses “natural body” in the first part of this verse to refer to the *post*-Fall body of a believer that dies. But there is a shift that occurs in the second part of verse 44. The question might come up, “How do I *know* that there is a resurrection body?” Paul thinks of this question and answers it. “If there is a natural body, then there has to be a *spiritual* body.” But notice carefully here in the second part of verse 44 that Paul uses the word “natural body” to refer to a *pre*-Fall body. How do we know this? Because Paul then quotes Genesis 2:7 about Adam as he was given life *before the Fall*. The NIV has very astutely put a paragraph break between the first part of vs. 44 and the second part of verse 44.¹¹ In what immediately follows, Paul compares Adam with Christ: God breathed into Adam (the word “breathed” is the same word as “spirit”) the breath of life, and he became a living soul; the last Adam (became) a life-giving spirit. The reason that there is a resurrection body is that there was a pre-Fall perfect body. In other words, the *first* body (Adam’s sinless, but changeable body) points inevitably to the last body (the body of Christ in glory). The question now is, what does Paul mean by the word “spirit?” I think it ought to be capitalized: Paul means that Jesus Christ became life-giving Spirit.¹² In other words, Jesus was resurrected by the power of the Holy Spirit, such that he became life-giving Spirit. God rewarded Jesus’ obedience by giving Him the Holy Spirit, which Jesus, in turn, gave the church on the day of Pentecost (also a Sunday, I might add!). How do we know that this is the correct interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15? Because of Romans 1.

Romans 1:1–6 says that the Gospel that God promised beforehand through the prophets was fulfilled in the death and resurrection *by the Holy Spirit* of Jesus from the dead. Verse 4 says that, through the Holy Spirit, Jesus was declared (or proclaimed) with power to be

the Son of God *by His resurrection from the dead*. This confirms that Jesus became life-giving Spirit, as 1 Corinthians 15 says. Just as the Holy Spirit hovered over the deep in Genesis 1:2, so also the Holy Spirit “hovered” over Jesus Christ, giving Him life when He was in the grave. This is new creation. Remember, all of this part of the argument is to prove that Jesus ushered in a new creation. From 1 Corinthians 15 and from Romans 1 we learn that this new creation (or new aeon, as the NT also calls it) is the age of the Holy Spirit.

To summarize our reflections on Exodus 20:8–11: the new creation displaces the old (2 Corinthians 5:17), because the Holy Spirit ushered in the new creation (1 Corinthians 15) at the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 1). This proves that new creation started at Jesus’ resurrection. This is inescapable from the pages of the NT. Thus, the purpose of the fourth commandment is fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

One small digression needs indulging here. What do I mean by the word “fulfill?” Does it mean fulfill so as to bring to an end, such that the fourth commandment no longer has any meaning (such as the Sabbath-worship people would charge)? It should be plain from the argument so far, that far from undermining its authority, Scripture rather increases the meaning of the Sabbath for us today. “Fulfilled” means that obeying Sabbath rest ultimately means believing in Christ, and rejoicing in His great salvation, which He accomplished on Sunday. This means that the force of the Fourth Commandment carries over to the Christian Sunday. We can now truly enter into God’s rest. We can paraphrase the Fourth Commandment’s NT meaning this way: “Remember Sunday, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the Sunday is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in thirty-three years Jesus prepared the new creation, and rested the first day of the new era. Therefore, Jesus blessed Sunday, and made it holy.”¹³

C. Deuteronomy 5:12–15

This passage adds to Exodus 20 (the “creation reason”) what we may call the “redemption reason” for keeping the Sabbath. It is because God redeemed Israel out of Egypt (a land only associated with work-death) that Israel should now remember that great salvation *by* keeping the Sabbath. For now they did not have to work on the Sabbath. They had regular rest from their labors. As

11. For these insights on 1 Corinthians 15, I am entirely indebted to Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. in his class notes on Acts and Paul. The same argument is also found in Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption*, second edition (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 1987), 78–92.

12. This should be understood in terms of economic equivalence of their work as due to Christ’s resurrection and ascension, not in terms of a conflation of the ontological persons of the Trinity, which would be heresy.

13. The main lines of argument here regarding creation and new creation are present in the seminal work of Jonathan Edwards, “The Perpetuity and Change of the Sabbath,” found in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 17: Sermons and Discourses, 1730–1733*, edited by Mark Valeri (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 217–250. In the two-volume Banner of Truth set, the same material may be found in volume 2, 93–103. It should be noted, however, that the Yale edition has some very helpful additions noted in the footnotes, which Edwards made when he re-preached the three sermons later in his career.

Paul says in Hebrews, the promised land was not the ultimate rest, though it pointed to the ultimate rest. We may see the parallels between Israel and the church: Israel in Egypt points to the church before Christ makes it alive; Israel in the wilderness points to the church between Christ's first coming (the greater Exodus that Jesus provides) and second coming (the final judgment); Israel in the promised land points to church in final rest. Sharp readers will probably have noticed that there is a problem with this analogy: the final rest, by this analogy, does not come until Jesus' second coming. It does not seem to have anything to do with His first coming. The explanation is easy: Jesus' coming should be thought of as one coming in two stages. At His first coming, the rest comes, but at the final coming, the rest will be consummated. It is exactly parallel with the coming of the kingdom: the kingdom is here, but is not here: it is here in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but is not consummated until the second coming. The bride is affianced, but the wedding is not yet. We have the first-fruits, but not the full harvest.

Joshua was to have been the final deliverer of the Israelites from Egypt into the promised rest. But as Hebrews says, there was a greater deliverance to come in the person of Jesus Christ. There was a greater rest. Israel did not enter God's rest, so there still remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. Jesus accomplished the attainment of that rest, and He did so at His resurrection.

The ultimate meaning of Deuteronomy 5:12–15 is then that Jesus has accomplished the greater Exodus out of sin and death. Thus, we celebrate that greater deliverance by worshipping the founder and architect of our faith (Jesus Christ) on the day on which it was accomplished (Sunday). In fact, *not* to worship God on Sunday now is to deny that the greater Exodus has come.

To sum up the OT meaning of the Sabbath: from Genesis we learn that the Sabbath is eternal, and that God has already entered it. From Exodus, we learn that Jesus brought about a new creation (on Sunday). And from Deuteronomy, we learn that Jesus has brought about the greater Exodus of His people. All of this points to the fact that Jesus fulfills the meaning of the Sabbath such that we must worship Him on Sunday, the day this fulfillment happened.

III. THE NEW TESTAMENT ON THE SABBATH

A. Jesus' examples

Jesus worshiped God on the Sabbath prior to his death and resurrection. It was still officially the OT era. The

new era had not broken in until Jesus' death and resurrection. Therefore, it was natural that Jesus would worship God on the Sabbath prior to his death and resurrection. However, *after* the resurrection, *every* time Christ appeared to the disciples, it was on a Sunday. When Jesus rose from the dead and was preaching (!) on Sunday to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, having fellowship (!) with them, that was an act of worship. Later on, *that same day*, (see especially Luke 24:33 "that same hour they went to tell the disciples"), He appeared to them while they were discussing these things. Then he gave to them a mini-sermon (probably abbreviated to the few essential points by Luke), and furthermore, ate a meal with them (similar, though somewhat different, from the Lord's Supper). John is even more important in this regard. In John 20:19, John emphatically declares that "on that day, the first day of the week" the disciples were gathered together, and Jesus appeared among them. John is peculiarly emphatic about the fact that it was the first day of the week when this appearance of Jesus took place. This is probably because of the fact that John's gospel was written primarily to Jews (this is indicated by verse 31, which should actually be read, "these things (all of John) are written so that you may believe that the Christ is Jesus"). The question of the identity of the Christ is a question that Jews asked. Because he wrote to Jews, he wanted to explain to them the origin of the Christian Sunday worship. Even more plain is verse 26, where a pattern starts to emerge: The Christians worshipped on Sunday. The disciples were together again (the word "again" implies design on their part to meet) eight days later (counting inclusively, therefore meaning Sunday, as all commentators agree), when Jesus appeared to them again. Contrary to the assertion of some that there is no mention of Sunday worship in the NT, either in the worship of the early church, or in the example of Jesus, there is every reason to believe that not only did the early church worship on Sunday, but that the example of Jesus also shows the pattern of Sunday worship. This is clear from Luke and from John.

B. The rest of the New Testament

There are three more references in the NT that conclusively demonstrate (again, according to the plain sense of the passages, as well as the opinion of most "unbiased" commentators) that Sunday was the day of worship for the early church. The first passage is Acts 20:7. Not only were they gathered together on the first day of the week, but they broke bread together (most

commentators think that this is the Lord's Supper).¹⁴ Paul also preached a very long sermon to them. So the Lord's Supper *and* preaching happened on Sunday. Furthermore, Eutychus dies, necessitating a resurrection on Sunday. This is probably not accidental reporting on Luke's part, but rather a backward reference to Jesus' own resurrection.¹⁵

The only difficulty to be mentioned here is the debate among scholars as to whether the evening of the Sabbath is mentioned, or the evening of Sunday is meant. It really does not matter. If Luke is using the Jewish method of reckoning, then the day started on the evening (thus meaning that Saturday night was the start of Sunday). If Luke is using the Roman/Greek method of reckoning, then he means the evening of Sunday (which the Romans/Greeks thought of as part of the daylight preceding). Either way, Luke means Sunday. Most commentators note that Luke elsewhere uses the Roman system of reckoning, and so Sunday is meant.

Those holding the Seventh-Day Sabbath position will object: what about all the references in Acts to the Christians worshiping on the Sabbath in the synagogue? This is answerable. Paul (along with all the other disciples/missionaries) always went to the Jews first in a given city before they went to the Gentiles. In order to witness to them, he would naturally have attended their synagogue service in order to be there when the Jews were there. That fact does not mean that the Christians worshiped *by themselves* on the Sabbath. There is no indication in the NT that the Christians worshiped on Saturday when there were no Jews present. Only when the Jews were there did they worship in the synagogue on Saturday, and only then for missionary purposes.

The second indication of Sunday worship is 1 Corinthians 16:2. Paul asks that a collection be gathered for the saints in Jerusalem. He wants it done on the first day of the week. Why would he mention this if the saints were usually gathering on Saturday for worship? Wouldn't it have been more convenient for Paul to ask them to gather it together on the Saturday Sabbath,

if that is when they met? It is objected that the collection being taken is private, thus giving no indication that the church body is meant. However, the letter as a whole is addressed to a church. In 1:1, Paul draws a parallel between the Corinthian churches and the Galatian churches. Thus, there is every indication that the individual offering was then collected by the church "on the first day of every week." There would be no need at all to mention the first day of the week were it not for the fact that the church worshiped on that day. Taking it (along with most commentators both Protestant and Catholic) as an indication that worship happened on Sunday, we now have three of the elements prescribed for worship as having a clear precedent of happening on Sunday: preaching (Jesus' examples, and Paul), breaking bread, i.e. the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7), and tithes and offerings (1 Corinthians 16:2).

The third clear indication of Sunday worship is found in Revelation 1:10. He says that he was in the Spirit "on the Lord's day." This term "Lord's day" means Sunday, not Saturday, as every commentator on the passage admits. It was used in the early (!) church to mean Sunday. Already by John's time the word had acquired a technical sense meaning that day on which Christians worshipped. Even today, the same Greek word means Sunday in the modern Greek language. So the argument from this passage is that the term had acquired a special meaning. It was a day commemorative of the Lord (of what could it be commemorative but the Lord's resurrection?). This was the day of the week set aside for commemorating the resurrection of the Lord from the dead.

The argument is not affected at all by the observation that the context does not specifically mention a worship service. The question is not about where John was at this point in time, but rather what the adjective *κυριακός* means in connection with the word "day" (*ἡμέρα*). Even in modern Greek, the word *Κυριακή* means "Sunday."

One common passage cited against the Puritan view of the Sabbath is Colossians 2:16. Most modern commentators simply assume that the weekly Sabbath is referred to by the plural *σαββάτων*. This is by no means clear.¹⁶ The context seems to indicate matters of ceremonies, not the weekly Sabbath. One could argue that no judgment should be passed on those who argue for Saturday Sabbath. However, the Jews often observed special Sabbath Days that had no relation to the weekly Sabbath. It is much more likely that these special Sabbath days are in view rather than the weekly Sabbath, which principle is a matter of the inviolable moral law, not a ceremony. The same general line of argumentation

14. Barrett does not think that the Lord's Supper is here intimated. See C. K. Barrett, *Acts 15–28* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 950. However, as Alexander notes, the Lord's Supper was originally attached to a fellowship meal, as in 1 Corinthians 11:20–22. See J.A. Alexander, *Acts* (1857; Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1991), 2.228.

15. See the slightly more guarded appraisal in David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 559.

16. Most modern commentators ignore the issue of the weekly Sabbath, or simply take the arguments of *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* for granted. The best modern treatment of the passage from the Puritan standpoint is undoubtedly Gordon Clark, in *Colossians* (Jefferson, Md.: The Trinity Foundation, 1979), 94–97.

goes for Romans 14:5 as well, which does not describe the weekly Sabbath, but festival days.

In summary, the NT indicates that Christians worshiped on Sunday. This evidence, combined with what we have set out in the OT section, would indicate a redemptive-historical movement from Saturday Sabbath to Sunday Sabbath. All of this evidence is necessary to set out in order to provide conclusive proof that Isaiah 58:13–14 still provides normative directions for Sabbath observance in the NT era. This point is emphatically important, since a latent dispensationalism seems to infect candidates as they consider the Sabbath day. The continuity of OT Sabbath to NT Sabbath is important in its own right. However, it is also vitally important to the confirmation of the point concerning recreation. It is to the passage in Isaiah that we now turn, confident that whatever it says applies to the NT Sabbath day just as much as it did to the OT Sabbath day.

IV. ISAIAH 58:13–14

A. Contextual Considerations

This passage is certainly the key passage when it comes to the “no recreation” clauses in the Westminster Standards. The question is this: does the passage support the conclusions that have been based upon it? Ryan McGraw has some excellent cautionary and preliminary thoughts as to the consideration of this passage. He writes, “Differences over this passage, however, often result from our being unaware of the presuppositions we bring to it” (p. 37)... “[I]f men are not governed by the notion that the entire day is set apart for public and private worship, practically speaking, they will end up doing as they please on the day” (p. 38). Later, he says, “If you presuppose that the purpose of the Sabbath is rest, you will see only labor in every prohibition. If, however, you presuppose that God has sanctified one entire day out of seven for Himself, so His creatures may enjoy communion with Him without the distractions of the other six days, you will see much more in this passage than just rest from labor” (p. 47). McGraw argues that since the prophets assumed earlier revelation, then “the teaching of the prophets on the purpose of the Sabbath is indirect” (p. 39). He argues that “worship is treated as integral to the concept of Sabbath-keeping” (in the prophets). He says that “Isaiah 58... moves from the lesser practice of fasting to the greater practice of Sabbath-keeping” (p. 46).¹⁷ My thesis (agreeing with McGraw) is that Isaiah 58:13–14 does support the divines’ conclusion. First we

will deal with some contextual issues, and then dive into the heart of the exegesis.

In the largest scope of the book, this passage occurs in the prophecies concerning deliverance which form the second main portion of Isaiah (40–66). I assume here, but will not attempt to prove, that Isaiah, son of Amoz, wrote the entirety of the book bearing his name. The second main portion of the book is concerned with preaching the good news of comfort to Jerusalem (40:1–2). The passage in question occurs in the sequence of 56–58, which deals with true worship as opposed to false worship. Westermann rightly notes that this passage forms an *inclusio* (envelope structure) with 56:1–8.¹⁸ The people were profaning the Sabbath by doing their own desires (56:2, 6). The connection of 58:13–14 to 56:1–8 is established by several links: the house of prayer (56:5, 7 and 58:12), the mention of keeping the Sabbath (56:2, 4, 6 and 58:13–14), and the references to Jacob/Israel (56:3, 8 and 58:1, 2, 14).

The issues in chapter 58 are not limited to the Sabbath observance. Righteousness in general, true worship in fasting, the Sabbath, and social justice are all woven together (see Seitz, 500). It is important to notice here that the concerns of the prophet are not limited to concerns about social justice. Verse 4 is clear: quarreling, fighting, and boxing are not legitimate parts of a proper fast. Verse 5 also supports this reading, since the concern in verse 5 is about outward observance of the fast, but no inward righteousness to go along with the outward fast. The contrast with verses 6–12 is quite pronounced, and says the same thing as Hosea: “I desire mercy and not sacrifice” (6:6). Here, it is “I desire righteousness, not fasting.”

However, the idea of the Sabbath is slightly different than the idea of fasting. With fasting, the problem was an outward observance without the substance of righteousness. The people were attempting to coerce God by means of outward fasting without inward righteousness.¹⁹ The solution given was actually not directly related to fasting. However, with the Sabbath the commandment is plain that the people should observe the Sabbath in a better way. They were not keeping the Sabbath holy, but were profaning it with things better done on other days of the week.

17. See Ryan McGraw, *The Day of Worship: Reassessing the Christian Life in Light of the Sabbath* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011).

18. Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969) 340. See also Christopher Seitz, *Isaiah 40–66*, in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, volume 6, 307–552 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 499.

19. See H. G. M. Williamson, “Promises, Promises! Some Exegetical Reflections on Isaiah 58,” *Word and World* 19 (1999): 153–160, esp. 156.

B. The Meaning of *רָצוֹן* in context

The key exegetical issue of the passage with regard to the support of the confession's understanding of recreation is undoubtedly the meaning of *רָצוֹן*. This noun has one of two possible meanings in this context: "business," or "pleasure." The difference between the two makes a vast difference as to whether recreations are allowed on the Sabbath day. If the scope of the word is limited only to business transactions, then the passage has nothing whatsoever to say about recreations, unless one finds it in the phrase "your own ways."²⁰

There are arguments in favor of taking the word this way. For example, the issue of oppressing workers is certainly in the context (the last part of vs. 3). This word can mean "business" elsewhere in Scripture, especially in Ecclesiastes.²¹

However, the matter is not so simple as Jan Koole, for one, would have us to believe. The word can certainly mean "desire" or "pleasure." Malachi 1:10 and Psalm 1:2 are certainly instances of the word meaning "delight" and not "business." Furthermore, this is how the versions have translated the word. The LXX uses the word *θελήματα* ("desires"), and the Vulgate translates it "voluntatem" ("things of your will"). The verbal form is used in the context in verse 2 in a way that certainly points to "delight" and not to "business." Furthermore, while the noun form is used in verse 3 in a context that is arguably favorable to the "business" translation, the later context of verse 4 broadens out the meaning of the word. The context of fasting holds together the oppression of workers and the "pleasure" being sought. Therefore, it could be the case that the "pleasure" of verse 3 includes both the oppression of workers and the quarreling and boxing in verse 4. These concerns would then be treated in the same order for the rest of the chapter: oppression in vv. 6–12, and proper Sabbath observance in vv. 13–14. In disagreeing with Koole's interpretation,

20. For advocacy of the translation "business," see G. Johannes Botterweck, and Helmer Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. 4–5. (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 1980), 5.99. See also emphatically Jan Koole, *Isaiah III: vol. 3, Isaiah 56–66* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 156.

21. See the article by David Talley in Willem VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997).

22. See Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40–66* (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 575, 584.

23. McGraw, *op. cit.*

24. See Shalom Paul, *Isaiah 40–66* (Eerdmans, 2012), 484, 493–4.

25. See John Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 184–186.

26. E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: volume 3, chapters 40–66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 426. It should be noted that Young easily

Gary V. Smith says, "This is a possible interpretation, but it seems unnecessary to limit their distraction only to business affairs. The broader meaning of 'pleasure, delight' would encompass a large variety of attractive distractions (including business) which might occupy people's thinking." Later on, he adds, "[T]here seems to be little indication that these factors should be focused so narrowly just on issues of business activities."²²

McGraw argues against R.C. Sproul's interpretation (which is similar to Koole's), that it "confuses the application of a principle with the principle itself. Prohibiting labor on the Sabbath is one *application* of the command not to do our 'own pleasures' on the Sabbath" (p. 58, emphasis original). Even more clearly, he says "Not doing anything we please is the *principle* of Sabbath-keeping enforced by Isaiah. Forbidding the pursuit of profit by means of commerce on the Sabbath is one *example* of how this principle should be applied" (pp. 58–59, emphasis original).²³

Recently, however, Shalom Paul has added an extra layer of difficulty to the discussion by positing that *רָצוֹן* "denotes commercial activity, as does its Akkadian semantic cognate" (p. 484). Later on, he calls it an idiomatic expression (p. 493). Similarly, he argues that the phrase *מַעֲשֵׂי דֶרֶךְ יָדְךָ* (here, literally translated "doing your own ways") is unique, and can be clarified by its Akkadian cognate, "which denotes a business trip" (p. 494).²⁴ The only basis for his argument appears to be an Akkadian cognate expression. Without further argumentation, however, it seems premature to assume that idiomatic expressions transfer to cognate languages, especially given the fact that there are so few Hebrew instances of the expression. It seems better hermeneutical practice to let the context determine the meaning.

Goldingay is ambiguous as to which position he favors. On the one hand, he seems to favor a more fulsome interpretation of *רָצוֹן*. He says that it means "doing what you like," and that it would "at least include business activity." On the other hand, he seems to favor Paul's understanding of *רָצוֹן*.²⁵ Contextually, he makes the astute observation that "[V.] 14 promises that keeping Sabbath will achieve what ignoring Sabbath seeks to achieve" (p. 186).

In the passage itself, the contrast is not between doing business or not doing business, but between delight in "your own things" versus delight "in the Lord" of verse 14. As E.J. Young puts it, "It is the pleasure of man in contrast to that of God that is brought to the fore."²⁶

On the practical level of determining which actions are appropriate for the Sabbath Sunday, Motyer is helpful here:

The determining factor is whether this or that activity defiles or honours the holiness of the day, whether it is a mere indulgence of a personal pleasure (*doing as you please*) or preference (*going your own way*) or whether it conduces to “sweet delight” in the Lord and his ordinances.²⁷

Nicholas Bownd, one of the greatest Puritan expounders of the Sabbath, quotes Zanchius in noting the frequency of the pronoun “you” and “yours”:

From whence we may conclude that the rest which we are willed to observe upon the Sabbath is not to be dedicated unto our own lusts and pleasures, to play or to sin; but only to worship God. For the prophet Isaiah forbids upon the Sabbath, to do thy will, and to do thine own ways, and to seek thine own will (Isa. 58:13). From whence Zanchius wills us to observe and mark, how often these words are repeated: Tua, tuum, tuas: “Thy will, thy ways, etc., forbidding our own ways, and works, and will upon His Sabbath.”²⁸

The translation “business” is less natural in the context because of how the word is used in terms of the delight in the Lord in verse 14.²⁹ To say that one should “do business in the Lord” for verse 14 makes little sense.³⁰ However, to say “delight in the Lord” makes a great deal of sense. It should be noted here that the verb at the beginning of verse 14, while not the same verb as חָפַץ, is nonetheless a synonym of it (the verb is נָגַד in the hithpael).³¹ More specifically, Reed Lessing argues that “The assumption that it (*haphetz*, LK) has its usual meaning ‘pleasure’ here is confirmed by the noun *oneg*, ‘delight,’ in the next clause.”³²

C. The Meaning of מְעֻשׂוֹת דְּרַבִּיךָ in Context

The usual understanding of דְּרַבִּיךָ in such circumstances is “conduct, way of life.” E.J. Young has the most helpful comment on this:

The “way” is a course of conduct and refers to all courses and actions that men choose in preference to the commands of God. These courses and actions may be right and legitimate on other days, but when they obtrude in the place of that delight, which is to find expression in the observance of the sabbath, they are to be refrained from (Young, 427).

In other words, the way of Sabbath-keeping which is forbidden here is “one’s own way.” The way of

Sabbath-keeping which is commanded here is “the delight in the Lord.” This understanding of the phrase strongly supports the Puritan view of Isaiah 58: 13–14.

D. Concluding Remarks on Isaiah 58:13–14

It is not merely the case that a good argument may be mounted for the Puritan view. The exegetical evidence here presented shows that the Puritan understanding of the Sabbath is the biblical understanding of the Sabbath when it comes to recreation, which would certainly fall under the category of “your own ways” and “your pleasure,” which are here proscribed. Therefore, the Puritan understanding of this passage, used to support the “no recreation” clause in the Westminster Standards, is the correct understanding of the passage.

IV. CONCLUDING PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS

One of the main problems I see among candidates for the ministry is a failure to engage the Puritan view of the Sabbath. One is tempted to think that no exegetical or historical work has been done by these candidates. It behooves candidates coming into a confessional church to examine the reasons why the standards say what they say. If they plan to take an exception to the “no recreation” clause, they need to have a better understanding of what Isaiah 58:13–14 mean in the context, and in the overall scope of redemptive history, and not simply

dismisses the caricature of the Puritan view in the immediately preceding context of the quotation in question. He says, “It is a gross misunderstanding to interpret as though the words meant ‘that which is pleasant’ and to conclude from this that the prophet’s only concern is that the sabbath be a day not of pleasure but of gloom” (ibid.). Indeed, the command is to delight in the Lord, not to be gloomy in the Lord!

27. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 483.

28. See Nicholas Bownd, *Sabbathum Veteris Et Novi Testamenti: or The True Doctrine of the Sabbath*, edited by Chris Coldwell (Dallas: Naphtali Press, and Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), 294–295, quoting Zanchius on the Fourth Commandment.

29. See J. A. Alexander, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 2 vols. in one (1867; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1992), 2.362.

30. It could make more sense if one translates it “make the Lord your business.” However, this is not a natural way of taking the prepositional phrase עַל־הַיְהוָה, which is more naturally understood as “in the Lord” or “over the Lord.”

31. Delitzsch helpfully comments, “Again, if thou call (i.e. from inward contemplation and esteem) the Sabbath a pleasure (‘oneg, because it leads thee to God, and not a burden because it leads thee away from thine everyday life; cf. Amos viii.5).” Franz Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, 2 vols. in one (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint 1983), 2.394.

32. See R. Reed Lessing, *Isaiah 56–66* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014), 142.

argue that “pleasure” means “business,” when the context of the passage does not lend itself to this interpretation. Recently, the Presbyterian Church in America had an overture that advocated the removal of the “no recreation” clause in the Westminster Standards. The PCA mostly allows candidates to take an exception to this clause. However, to remove it entirely from our Standards can plausibly show an increasing laxness as to what is allowed on the day that will eventually destroy all Sabbath-keeping. The result will not be freedom, as some advocate, but rather disaster.

On what can and cannot be done on the Sabbath, there is endless debate, stretching all the way back to Talmudic times (the Talmud has an entire treatise on the Sabbath). Rather than asking about a specific activity, as to whether or not it is lawful (and usually with the mindset of what the person can get away with), it

is more helpful to remember that the rest in view is not simply physical rest, but rather a rest of worshiping the Lord. Therefore, if the activity is conducive to worship, then it is lawful. We cannot ignore the human conscience here either, since an activity that might be conducive for worship to one person may not be conducive to worship for someone else. To take one example, it is certainly wise to let small children let loose some of their excess energy on the Sabbath (contrary to Laura Ingalls Wilder’s *Farmer Boy!*). Otherwise, they will not be able to sit still and pay attention in worship. One does not have to take the attitude of Almanzo Wilder’s father in order to have a Puritan view of what is acceptable on the Sabbath! It is certainly a work of necessity to do something about the energy of small children. We must avoid both extremes of legalism and antinomianism here, as well as everywhere in our treatment of the law. ■

IN BRIEF: WE MUST REST ALSO FROM SPEAKING & HEARING OF WORLDLY MATTERS

But that we might thoroughly perceive the largeness of this rest, and know the full measure of it for our good, we must stretch out our line yet further, for it extends itself beyond all this that has been spoken. For in this commandment the Lord does not only bind men to rest from such works and pleasures as we have seen, but also from *speaking and talking* of them; seeing His purpose is not only to *restrain* the hand and the foot, but the *lips and tongue* also, because they hinder ourselves and others from keeping holy the day, as well as anything else.

{Reason One.} For unless we will restrain and shorten this commandment more than all the others, why should not idle words be forbidden here, as well as in all the rest? And seeing in the first, both atheism and profane speeches are forbidden, and it is a sin against the second commandment, *to name false gods* (Ps. 16:4), as well as to worship them; and in the third, *the name of God is dishonored* (Rom. 2:24) by our ungodly conversation, and by our vain and false oaths {Lev. 19:12}; why should not the law of the Sabbath be as large in forbidding long communication, and large discourses about worldly business and pleasures, as well as the things themselves? Especially when we see the same equity and proportion in the laws of the second table also: in which not only murder is forbidden, but all *railing words, proud and scornful speeches* (Matt. 5:22); and that law which forbids adultery, says that *no filthy communication must proceed out of your mouths* (Eph. 4:29; 5:3). Therefore, seeing the other commandments are given to frame the whole body of man, and every part of it unto obedience; why should it not be presumed of the commandment of the Sabbath also, that *it ordered our words as well as our works* {Isa. 58:13}? Especially seeing the one is

more disordered than the other; and they which can rule their hands, and their feet, cannot so well govern their tongues?

{Reason Two.} Of which truth (seem it never so new and strange unto us, though no truth indeed is new) we shall so much the rather be persuaded, if we consider that *much talk about worldly matters* does as well hinder the sanctification of the day, as much work; and so much the more, because we may work with ourselves alone, yet cannot but talk with others, and so hinder both ourselves and them. For our minds cannot be wholly set upon the worship of God as they should, and at the same time be speaking of, and listening unto, the affairs of this life, even of our commodities, profits, and pleasures. {Reason Three.} Besides that, the Lord would have our mouths and ears otherwise occupied upon this day, as well as our hands and feet, as shall more fully appear hereafter. So that upon this day men must cease from *making of bargains, and broaching of matters, from talking about their merchandise and trades, from questioning and debating of things about their cattle, corn and whitemeat [diary foods]*; and generally from all worldly matters incident to our calling. And then we must speak with *new tongues* (as it were, {Mark 16:17}) and put *new words* into our mouths, as well as new works into our hands, and *sing a new song unto the Lord* {Ps. 96:1}: that it may appear unto all men which behold us, that it is a day of rest indeed, when we thus rest in whole, not in part. And that it is a new day differing from the other six, when we are so altogether made new, and as it were differ from that which we were before, both *in word and deed, [in tongue and hand, in word and talk.]*

Nicholas Bownd, *Sabbatum Veteris Et Novi Testamenti: or The True Doctrine of the Sabbath* (2015), pp. 276–277. ■