

The Sabbath as an Eschatological Sign of the Covenant

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I begin by setting forth a summary of my position on the Sabbath in the form of 16 thesis statements. This enables the reader to get an overview of my position, with Scripture texts cited in order to provide a rough sketch of how I approach the exegetical data. This is then followed by a general exposition of the view (subdivided into theological and practical considerations) and responses to two objections. Finally, I compare my view with three other positions on the Sabbath - the Puritan view as taught in the Westminster Confession, the Continental view of the Heidelberg Catechism, and the biblical theological view of Professor Meredith G. Kline.

Sixteen Theses on the Sabbath

(1) The Sabbath is a creation ordinance patterned after God's creation rest (Gen. 2:2-3; Exod. 20:8-11; Mark 2:27; Heb. 4:4).

(2) The Sabbath does not belong to the category of ceremonial laws that have been abolished with the first coming of Christ, but remains in effect as a weekly sign for the new covenant community prior to the consummation.

(3) Our Lord Jesus did not abrogate the Sabbath, but cleansed it from the traditions of the Pharisees, and brought the Sabbath to its ultimate New Covenant expression (Mark 2:21-3:6; Luke 13:10-17; John 5:1-18).

(4) The Lord's Day, which the church from the beginning has observed in commemoration of the resurrection of Christ on the first day of the week, is the Christian Sabbath (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10; see the Appendix for early post-apostolic witnesses).

(5) The apostle Paul did not abrogate the Sabbath but warned against a Judaizing manner of keeping it (e.g., seventh-day observance - Col. 2:16-17; Gal. 4:9-10). His discussion of the weaker brother in Rom. 14:5-6 has to do with Jewish fast days, not the fourth commandment.

(6) The Sabbath is an eschatological sign pointing to the eternal Sabbath rest which the people of God will enter at the consummation (Ps. 95:11; Heb. 4:8-11).

(7) The New Testament believer's Spiritual rest in Christ (Matt. 11:28-30), enjoyed seven days a week, is an eschatologically realized dimension of the eternal Sabbath, a pledge of our inheritance (2 Cor. 5:5; Eph. 1:14).

(8) However, it is not legitimate to infer from the preceding that weekly Sabbath observance has been abrogated by the first coming of Christ. The Sabbath sign remains in effect for the church until the parousia, signifying that we live as pilgrims (Heb. 11:11-16; 1 Pet. 2:11) in this semi-eschatological age while we wait for the consummation, our eternal rest with Christ in glory (John 14:1-4; 17:24; 1 Thess. 4:17; Rev. 21:3).

(9) Due to its character as a promissory sign of eschatological consummation, the Sabbath is a sign of the covenant, sanctifying the covenant community as holy unto the LORD and putting a visible difference between those that belong to the covenant community and those that belong to the world (Exod. 31:13-17; Ezek. 20:12; cp. Gen. 17:11).

(10) Promise establishes obligation (Heb. 4:1). Thus, the Sabbath sign is to be observed only by the holy covenant community, for to it alone does the promise of eschatological consummation apply (Heb. 4:9-10; Luke 13:16).

(11) Conversely, since unbelievers have no promise of eschatological consummation, they have no obligation to observe the sign thereof.

(12) It is not biblically permissible for the covenant community to attempt to enforce Sabbath observance on those outside of the covenant community (e.g., blue laws), nor should believers refrain from certain activities solely on the ground that such activity may cause unbelievers to profane the Sabbath.

(13) Rather than dictating a detailed list of things forbidden on the Sabbath it is best if ministers and elders enunciate the principles involved and allow each individual or family to prayerfully and conscientiously determine how they will sanctify the Sabbath.

(14) Church members should be taught to ask: "Does this activity hinder or promote the purpose of the day? I.e., does it hinder or promote my participation in the corporate worship of God's people? Does it hinder or promote a spiritually restful frame of mind in which I am reminded that I am a pilgrim on the way to the eschatological Sabbath rest?"

(15) Each individual will answer these questions differently, based on the principle that whatever is not of faith is sin (Rom. 14:23).

(16) Due to legitimate differences of opinion regarding the precise manner in which the Sabbath is to be sanctified, wisdom and charity suggest that church discipline should be limited to those who forsake the assembly (Heb. 10:25).

Exposition, Part 1: Theological Considerations

The creation Sabbath was given to Adam as part of the covenant of works, as a sign that he would enter God's eschatological Sabbath rest once his labors were complete. God had set the pattern by his own example of performing the work of creation in six days and resting on the seventh. Man was made on the sixth and last day of God's creation work in God's image. Since man is made in God's image, he must imitate the divine work-rest pattern. We do not know how many weeks or years it would have taken for man to finish the work assigned to him in the covenant of works, but after observing many earthly Sabbaths, he would have eventually finished his work and entered into the eternal Sabbath of God himself. Meredith G. Kline puts it this way:

The imitation-of-God principle was to find embodiment in the over-all pattern of the history of man's kingdom labor in that this history was to correspond to the course of God's creational workings as a movement from work begun to work consummated. Mankind's cultural endeavors were to move forward to and issue in a sabbatical rest. In fact, man was to come by way of these works at last into God's own royal rest (Heb. 4:1ff). [1]

Adam disobeyed God, his dominion work was not completed, and the hope of entering the eschatological Sabbath was seemingly taken away. But God renewed the Sabbath sign with Israel. God made Israel after his own image, to be holy even as God is holy, and offered once again to man the hope of entering into his Sabbath rest. This offer of rest was not the ultimate eschatological rest in heaven, but an earthly rest in the land, ordained by God to be a type and shadow of the ultimate rest. Notice the synonymous parallelism in the following texts: "... the *resting place* [*menuchah*] and the *inheritance* which the LORD your God is giving you" (Deut. 12:9); "The LORD your God gives you *rest* [*nuach*] and will give you this *land*" (Josh. 1:13). The land (particularly Mt. Zion) is described not only as Israel's Sabbath rest, but as God's: "Therefore I swore in My anger, truly they shall not enter into *My rest* [*menuchah*]" (Psalm 95:11). Yahweh said of Mount Zion: "This is *My resting place* [*menuchah*] forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it" (Psalm 132:14; cp. v. 8).

Thus, in keeping with the hope of entering the land and dwelling peacefully and restfully in God's Sabbath rest, Israel was commanded to observe the weekly Sabbath as a sign of the covenant (Exod. 31:13, 16-17; Ezek. 20:12, 20). Interestingly, even when Israel enters the land under the leadership of Joshua, Israel still observes the weekly sign, because, as the author of Hebrews points out, Joshua did not really give them rest (Heb. 4:8), only a typological, shadowy rest that pointed beyond itself to the ultimate rest given through the greater Joshua. Because the land was merely a type of the non-forfeitable, eternal rest to be enjoyed by the elect in heaven, Israel's tenure in the land was not irrevocably guaranteed. Israel in the land was on probation.

Israel's weekly Sabbath is just like Adam's: it comes at the end of the week, after the preceding six days of work. Israel, like Adam, is to work first, then once the work is done, to rest. Israel's Sabbath is therefore a sign of Israel's covenant of works. Only obedient covenant keepers may rest, and disobedient covenant breakers cannot enter God's rest. So with Israel. "And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief" (Heb. 3:18-19).

Israel's Sabbath, on the last day of the week, is therefore a sign of the works principle which was in operation under the old covenant. Of course, the elect among Israel were saved, as are all sinners after the fall, by faith alone in Christ alone, on the basis of the covenant of grace first revealed in Gen. 3:15. However, in addition to the promise of grace, God republished the covenant of works on a national scale with Israel, not as a means of justification, but as a disciplinarian unto Christ (see Paul's summary of the nature and purpose of the Mosaic covenant in Gal. 3:15-25). The observance of the seventh day of rest in Israel was a sign of the presence of this works principle which operated at the typological level of obtaining earthly rest in the earthly inheritance. The Sabbath taught Israel a very important and basic theological lesson: in God's kingdom, work comes first, then rest. [2]

Israel's failure under the covenant of works led to Israel's ultimate removal from the land, that is, from the enjoyment of God's rest. Adam could not bring mankind into God's rest. Joshua could not. Israel as a nation could not. But when Christ the last Adam and faithful Israelite comes, he brings us into God's rest once and for all, by his perfect obedience and works. The work demanded in the covenant of works has been fulfilled. Therefore, the rest offered in that covenant has been secured and offered to us in the gospel. Now, under the gospel, Jesus says, "Come unto me, all who are weary and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). By faith alone, apart from works, we are given rest - not an earthly rest in the land, but the ultimate eschatological rest of God himself.

Although we do not enter that rest by working first, Christ perfectly fulfilled the work-rest pattern in our place as the second Adam. Only when Jesus had finished the work that the Father had given him to do, did the Father glorify him with the glory that he had before the foundation of the world (John 4:34; 6:38-39; 17:3-4). On the cross, he cried out, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). Having thus completed the work as second Adam, Jesus was raised from the dead on the first day of the week, and given rest at God's right hand as the reward of his labors (Psalm 2:6-8; 18:16-24; 110:1). His heavenly Father has seen the travail of his soul, and is satisfied (Isaiah 53:11).

The resurrection of Christ is therefore a crucial event, because it marks the first time that an obedient man has entered into God's eschatological Sabbath. The eternal rest of God himself, originally offered at the beginning of creation, has finally been achieved for man. As the second Adam and inaugurator of a new humanity and a new creation, the eternal rest of the new heavens and the new earth has intruded into the midst of history. The uninterrupted rest of the age to come has already begun. By faith we lay hold of Christ's rest and enter into the enjoyment of it (Heb. 4:1-11). We have put aside our own righteousness and now serve the living God with a clear conscience as the fruit of that rest, not in order to earn it by our sinful works (Heb. 6:1; 9:14). Thus every day is a Sabbath rest in Christ.

You might think that the conclusion we should draw at this point is that there is no need to observe a weekly Sabbath rest, since we enjoy our rest in Christ every day. However, there is also a not-yet aspect of our rest. We still live in mortal bodies that are weary from earthly toil and labor. We have not yet entered into the final rest that will be given to us when our bodies are raised incorruptible and we behold the Lamb in Immanuel's land. We must not indulge in an over-realized eschatology which leads to the triumphalistic attitude that we have already arrived. We are still pilgrims on the way. In keeping with the already/not-yet tension of New Testament eschatology, therefore, we need a weekly sign of our ultimate rest. The Sabbath is a weekly "rest stop" on our journey to heaven, a foretaste of the eternal rest that awaits us at the end. It is the lamp that lights our path to heaven. It is the downpayment of the future possession.

Why did Adam and Israel need to observe a weekly Sabbath? To be sign of the eternal Sabbath. The weekly sign would stir up their faith and hope and cause them to labor with even greater zeal in the hope of entering that rest. So we too need a weekly sign. Even though we have already begun to enjoy the eternal Sabbath by faith, and so we do not work in order to rest, yet we have not yet come into the full enjoyment of the eternal rest. We are still waiting for the consummation of all things, and the resurrection of our bodies. We are still tempted to forget about our heavenly hope and get caught up in the things of this present world. So we need a weekly sign to stir up our faith and hope and longing for the eternal rest.

And thus you see that the new covenant Sabbath is both similar to and different from the old covenant Sabbath. The similarity of the old covenant and new covenant is that, in both, the Sabbath is an eschatological sign given to man to point the way to his heavenly hope. The difference is that in the new covenant, that eschatological hope is achieved by faith, not by works! Therefore, the sign of the Sabbath must change from the end of the week *after* the work, to the beginning of the week *before* we lift a finger to do any work. The change of day from Saturday to Sunday is proof of the fact that the works have already been completed for us, by Christ. Our rest is secured already. We don't have to strive and labor and become heavy-laden with the burden of the Law in order to enter and enjoy our rest. It is finished! We rest first (the indicative), and then we go out and serve the Lord in our daily lives (the imperatives). As Vos writes:

Inasmuch as the Old Covenant was still looking forward to the performance of the Messianic work, naturally the days of labour to it come first, the day of rest falls at the end of the week. We, under the New Covenant, look back upon the accomplished work of Christ. We, therefore, first celebrate the rest in principle procured by Christ, although the Sabbath also still remains a sign looking forward to the final eschatological rest. [3]

How did Israel know when to observe the Sabbath? By looking back to the original example established by God at creation. "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy" (Exod. 20:11). How does the church know when to observe the Sabbath? By looking back to the example established by Christ at the inauguration of the new creation. On the cross Christ completed the work of the new creation, and was buried, and rose again to enter his rest on the first day of the week; therefore, he has blessed the first day and made it holy (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). Thus, the early church called it "the Lord's Day" (Rev. 1:10; Didache 14:1).

The transition from a covenant of works (work, then rest) to the covenant of works fulfillment by Christ (rest, then work) is the basis for the change of the day from the last day of the week to the first. Christ's resurrection on the first day of the week then sets the pattern for the new covenant rest, which is focused on corporate worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2) and enjoyment of our spiritual rest in Christ (Matt. 11:28; Heb. 4:1-11), rather than on the strictness of the Mosaic covenant which prohibited all physical work on pain of death.

Exposition, Part 2: Practical Considerations

The Lord's Day has been given to us as a means of grace, an opportunity to reflect upon our present spiritual rest in Christ, and in the future consummation of that rest in heaven, when all our earthly toil will be over. The primary thing that we do on the Lord's Day in order to enjoy this already/not-yet rest is to attend corporate worship with the saints, in order to enter into the heavenly sanctuary and fellowship with Christ. Weekly worship is a foretaste of our eternal worship. The early church gathered together on the first day of the week for the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments (Acts 2:42; 20:7), because Jesus had first established the pattern during his post-resurrection appearances with his disciples.

On the day of his resurrection, he met with two disciples on the road to Emmaus. And what did he do? He preached a redemptive historical sermon to them, showing them the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. "Beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, he explained to them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27). And after the ministry of the Word, Jesus came to them in an even deeper way through the ministry of the sacrament. "When he had reclined at table with them, he took bread and blessed it, and breaking it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him" (vv. 30-31). Afterwards, the disciples said, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was speaking to us on the way, while he was explaining the Scriptures to us?" (v. 32). And they reported these things to the other disciples, relating "how he was recognized by them in the breaking of bread" (v. 35). Later, Jesus met with all the disciples and pronounced the Aaronic benediction, "Peace be to you" (v. 36), and so we continue the practice today at the close of our services. Similar post-resurrection experiences of fellowship, communion, and instruction are reported elsewhere (Matt. 26:32; 28:7-10, 16-20; Luke 24:40-45; John 20:19-29; 21:9-14; Acts 1:3-4; 10:41).

The early church was convinced that even after Jesus had ascended into heaven, he continued to meet with his disciples through the ministry of the Word and the sacrament. [4] Ever since that time, the church assembles on the first day of the week to meet with Jesus, to have their hearts burn within them as he is proclaimed in all the Scriptures, and to have their eyes opened as they dine with their risen Savior in the breaking of bread. "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread [sacrament], Paul began speaking [preaching] to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message [sermon] until midnight" (Acts 20:7).

So the primary principle in the practical area of new covenant Sabbath observance is that we ought to be inflexibly committed to gathering together with God's people on the first day of the week for public worship in order to fellowship with the risen Christ through the means of grace.

But there is also a secondary principle of new covenant Sabbath observance. On this day we are invited to a physical rest as well as a spiritual rest. The physical rest of the day is a foretaste of the heavenly rest that we will enjoy at the resurrection. But again, the motivation is completely different. In the old covenant, cessation from work was a sign of the fact that their work was the basis for entering God's rest. In the new covenant, by contrast, God's people do not cease from physical work for this reason. Indeed, to rest for this reason would be to reject the finished work of Christ! Thus, in the new covenant, the goal is not to cease absolutely from any and all physical exertion, but in order to enjoy our spiritual rest better. Cessation from work is an act of faith by which we recognize that we are not, like the world, striving to build lasting homes in this present age. We don't have to pursue work the way the world does, investing all our energy and hopes in this life. We can stop from work every week, because we are pilgrims on the way to a better homeland (Heb. 11:8-10, 13-16; 1 Peter 1:1; 2:11). The fact that in the new covenant this cessation from work is placed at the beginning of the week, rather than at the end, highlights the fact that when we rest, we are not really resting "in" our work, as if that work would eventually lead us to heaven, but "from" our work, knowing that Christ has already secured heaven for us.

As a pastor I often get questions that take the following form: "Is it okay to do X on the Lord's Day?" Instead of answering the question directly, I offer two tests which correspond to and flow from the two above-mentioned principles. In the first test I teach people to ask themselves, Will the activity in question hinder me from participation in the corporate worship of God's people? Anything that interferes with my ability to worship the Lord with God's people and to benefit from the ministry of the Word and sacraments, is obviously unacceptable (with exceptions for emergencies, sickness, etc.).

The second test is to ask: Is the activity in question conducive to a spiritually restful frame of mind in which I am reminded that I am a pilgrim on the way to the eschatological Sabbath rest? There are many activities that we may engage in on the other six days, but if done on the Lord's Day might prove to be a spiritual hindrance. The new covenant Sabbath is to be observed not only by attending public worship, but by keeping a spiritually restful frame of mind throughout the day.

This second test is subjective, not in the sense that there is no right answer, but in the sense that it will be answered differently by different people. One person may find activity X conducive to spiritual rest. Another may find that activity X inhibits or saps spiritual rest. I think Paul's principle that whatever is not of faith is sin (Rom. 14:23) will need to be applied at this point. If you can do the activity in faith, with a clear conscience, and in the knowledge that it is going to promote the overall tenor of the day as "rest stop" on the road to heaven, then you should do it "without misgivings" (Acts 10:20; 11:12).

Notice that this second test (whatever is of faith) flows from the nature of the Sabbath as an eschatological sign. The Sabbath is a weekly reminder of my identity as a pilgrim on the way to the heavenly city. This world is not my home, I'm just passing through. If this is what the Sabbath means, then it is observed by faith, that is, by taking advantage of the opportunity afforded by this day to take a break from the hustle and bustle of the week, and to reflect upon and enjoy my eternal rest in Christ. Since this spiritual resting occurs by faith, abstaining from certain activities does not automatically produce it, and engaging in certain activities does not automatically detract from it. There are, to be sure, various external stimuli that many Christians will want to avoid, insofar as these stimuli are often found to detract from a calm and peaceful attitude focused upon Christ. But even here, the judgment will vary from person to person.

In addition to the two tests above, there is another implication of my view that the Sabbath is an eschatological sign for the covenant community. In point 12 above, I state that believers should not abstain from certain activities solely on the ground that such activity may cause unbelievers to work on the Sabbath. This does not mean that any activity which makes unbelievers work is legitimate. Rather, it means that this concern cannot be the sole consideration when evaluating the appropriateness of any given activity. My view forces the individual Christian to make such evaluations on internal grounds - does it hinder or promote *my* spiritual resting on the day? One obvious concrete application of this is that Christians should feel free to go out to eat at a restaurant on the Lord's Day as part of their rest. I should think that our wives would be particularly appreciative of the opportunity to rest from some of the domestic labors that occupy them the other six days.

When is church discipline appropriate in Sabbath matters? Because of the differences that inevitably arise regarding Sabbath sanctification outside of corporate worship, I believe that sessions should allow freedom in this area. This doesn't mean that no instruction should be given. People should be taught the biblical principles, but the application should be left up to the individual or family. The only specific application that should be spelled out is the command to gather with the saints on the first day of the week for corporate worship. Therefore sessions should reserve the use of church discipline for those who forsake the assembly of God's people.

My main concern has to do with the issue of church power, and the relationship between what is said in the ministry of the Word and what is implemented by means of church discipline. [5] If the pastor preaches that abstaining from X is a mandatory implication of the fourth commandment, it

follows that anyone who does X on the Sabbath may or ought to be disciplined. To preach one thing and practice another with respect to discipline sends contradictory messages. Any ethical teaching which the church refuses to enforce is ethical teaching which we are saying is biblically doubtful. Disciplining members who are otherwise faithful in church attendance is unwarranted by the New Testament, and puts the liberated children of God back under the weak and beggarly elements of the old covenant with its strict enforcement of the Sabbath.

We should not be surprised that the new covenant Sabbath is less characterized by the spirit of bondage and code-like specificity that stamped the whole old covenant order and especially its stringent enforcement of the Sabbath. The new covenant people of God are no longer minors needing the external tablets of stone to govern and regulate their conduct. We are no longer slaves under the disciplinarian of the law; in Christ we have taken up our place as sons in the kingdom (Gal. 3:25-26; 4:1-7). There is therefore much more freedom for the sons of God to determine how they will sanctify the Lord's Day.

Those who want detailed legislation for new covenant Sabbath observance are in danger of putting themselves back in bondage to the Mosaic Law. To do so would be to miss the real value of the Sabbath as a lamp lighting the believer's way to heaven. Experiencing and enjoying this eschatological significance of the Sabbath is far more important, and beneficial, than becoming consumed with Talmudic details. Indeed, I fear that the neo-Puritans of today so emphasize the casuistry of the literal cessation from labor and recreation that they are in danger of emptying the Sabbath of its rich benefits by turning it into a covenant of works. Those who may be less strict in practical matters, but who are using the day to enjoy a foretaste of their eternal rest in Christ, are the true Sabbatarians.

Is it ever legitimate for someone to do work related to their regular employment on the Sabbath? I believe that in some cases, such work may be necessary in order to avoid financial hardship. How do we determine what constitutes financial hardship? Each individual will have to make those decisions conscientiously before the Lord. A materialistic desire for wealth obviously would not be a legitimate reason. It would not be inappropriate for a pastor to admonish those who appear to have the wrong priorities in this matter. But if they reply that they have prayerfully considered this matter and are acting in faith, and if they are faithful in church attendance, I do not believe it would be appropriate for a session to exercise formal discipline. Liberty of conscience must be preserved even in (or especially in) doubtful cases. However, pastors should encourage people who feel they must work on Sundays to schedule their work in such a way that they are not prevented from regular church attendance.

What are some positive things we should do on the Sabbath? Corporate worship is obviously primary and non-negotiable. In addition to church attendance, various spiritual exercises, both privately and as a family, are also conducive to enjoying our spiritual rest in Christ on the Lord's Day. Bible reading is highly commended. Many of us are so busy during the week that we rarely have much time to meditate deeply on the Word of God. The Lord's Day affords an excellent opportunity to sit down and read lengthier portions of Scripture, enabling us to get the rich benefits of seeing the text in its larger context rather than focusing devotionally on a brief paragraph or handful of verses. For example, it is a rewarding exercise to read an entire book of the Bible in one sitting.

The Lord's Day also affords the opportunity to catechize our covenant children - not merely in the formal sense of memorizing the catechism, but informally as well, through discussions about the sermon, the Bible reading, and so on. I also encourage members of the church to invite other members and visitors over to their house for afternoon/evening fellowship. If there are opportunities for good works of mercy (e.g., visiting shut-ins or people on skid row), that is also to be commended. If your church has an evening service, I would also recommend attending the second service, although I do not see it as an absolute requirement, since there is no Scriptural command to attend worship *twice* on the Lord's Day. In some ways, however, attending an evening service can make it difficult to do the other things like catechizing and fellowshiping with

the saints, since there is only so much time in the day (significant commutes to and from church are also increasingly a factor today). Each individual or family will have to make these decisions prayerfully before the Lord. It is tempting to want to do everything every Lord's Day, but we must also keep in mind that physical rest is a significant part of spiritual rest.

Objection # 1:

"How do you reconcile your acknowledgment that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance with your view that the Sabbath is exclusively for the covenant community?" [6]

The phrase "creation ordinance" brings to mind certain duties that are given to all mankind, such as marriage, labor, and the dominion mandate. [7] Most of these creation ordinances are applicable, not just to the covenant people of God, but to all mankind by virtue of their being rooted in the creation order. It would seem, then, that the Sabbath too is of universal morality.

The Sabbath, however, wasn't first and foremost part of Adam's duty toward God, as the other creation ordinances. The Sabbath was a (conditional) promise on the part of God to Adam. This does not mean that there was no duty involved, but the duty flowed from the promise: since Adam was promised the eschatological rest, if he fulfilled the covenant of works, therefore he was to observe the weekly sign of that promised rest. The duty never existed apart from the promise, but came to Adam precisely because of the promise. If promise creates duty, then the duty evaporates as soon as the promise is retracted. After Adam's fall, the promise of eschatological rest is no longer offered to all mankind, only to the covenant community in Christ. Therefore, since the unbeliever has no promise, he has no duty.

The creation ordinances cannot be understood apart from their covenantal context. Certain creation ordinances were reissued after the fall for mankind in general (e.g., marriage and labor). But the fall must also be taken into account in terms of the effects it has on the way these ordinances get applied in the post-fall situation. For example, the dominion mandate is still in effect, but it no longer has any eschatological promise attached to it. Man as man, both believer and unbeliever, exercises a certain dominion over creation, and is involved in the general task of procreation and filling the earth. But the eschatological fruition of that labor has been frustrated by death and man's dominion produces only temporal goods mixed with thorns and thistles. Man's post-fall cultural labor is part of common grace - it is not holy, i.e., it will not enjoy eschatological consummation. [8]

Similar considerations apply to the pre-fall Sabbath ordinance. It was connected directly with the eschatological aspect of the covenant of works. If man successfully moved beyond covenant probation to the state of confirmation in righteousness, he would then have entered into God's own eternal rest. As long as the covenant probation was not yet closed in either failure or success, the weekly Sabbath was a sign to him of this great hope. After the fall, however, the covenant probation closed and became covenant curse for all mankind (apart from grace). Thus the unbeliever is under the covenant of works only in the sense that he lies under its condemnation inherited from Adam. The prospect of entering into God's rest by means of the covenant of works no longer remains. It is significant, I believe, that, unlike marriage and labor (Gen. 3:16ff), the Sabbath sign was not reissued after the fall when God established the common grace order for all mankind. The Sabbath sign is not reissued again until the giving of the Mosaic Law. [9]

But aren't unbelievers still in Adam under the covenant of works? Wouldn't it be proper, then, to argue that the Sabbath requirement, as the sign of the covenant of works, remains binding on all men in Adam? This is a plausible argument, but we must distinguish between being under the probation of the covenant of works with its eschatological prospect (the post-fall sons of Adam

today are *not* under that) and being under the curse of the covenant (they *are* under that). The covenant of works is not an ahistorical "do this and live" principle but a concrete historical administration of God's holy kingdom in time. The covenant breach of the federal head, Adam, changes the nature of the unbeliever's relationship to the covenant in significant ways.

There is a sense in which the weekly Sabbath command confronts the unbeliever by virtue of his covenantal union with Adam. This is so because man, even after the fall, remains a creature in the image of God, created for eternal rest with God. The Sabbath command in this sense is unfulfillable, just as the covenant of works as a whole is unfulfillable.

However, the manner in which the Sabbath command continues to confront fallen mankind in Adam is somewhat different than the manner in which the command, say, to not commit adultery confronts him. Although the unbeliever's "obedience" does not flow from a heart purified by faith, nor is it offered to the glory of God, nevertheless he can still keep the seventh commandment "for the matter of it" (WCF XVI:7). Abstaining from adultery itself is "doable" in some outward sense. But the Sabbath command is more like the first commandment. An unbeliever cannot avoid idolatry in some outward way. He must first become a believer. He can only worship the true and living God through Jesus Christ. Not worshipping Baal is meaningless unless it is replaced by worshipping Yahweh.

So with the Sabbath. The unbeliever may attempt to keep the Sabbath in some external manner, but all his attempts will be futile and in fact sinful, unless he first puts his trust in Christ. First of all, if he tried to keep the Sabbath as an unbeliever under the creational covenant of works, he would be placing himself under the impossible requirement of perfect obedience. Second, he would be obligated to keep the *seventh* day holy - an activity that, after the coming of Christ, is nothing less than a sinful denial of Christ (Col. 2:16-18). Third, even if the unbeliever were to attempt to keep the *first* day of the week holy, he would still be unable to keep it properly, since not working in itself is meaningless unless it is a rest from one's labors in the knowledge that Jesus has performed the labor for us and given us the rest. The Lord's Day isn't about what you do or don't do on that day. It's about faith - it's about our eschatological hope secured by Christ.

Thus, although the curse of the covenant of works is still in effect, its offer of eschatological consummation has been retracted. To be sure, the promise of the eternal Sabbath is now held out to all men in Christ. But that means the only way in which the Sabbath command confronts the unbeliever is through the free offer of the gospel. "Come unto me all you who labor and I will give you rest. And as a pledge of that rest I will also give you the privilege of setting aside the cares and concerns of your labor-filled week as you gather together with God's people to rejoice in the heavenly rest that Christ alone can give."

Objection # 2:

"Since the Sabbath is one of the ten commandments, and since the ten commandments are a summary of the moral law (and the moral law is binding on all men) - doesn't it follow that the Sabbath is binding on all men?" [10]

As I have argued above, the weekly Sabbath was ordained by God to be a sign of the eschatological promise offered under the covenant of works, both in the original pre-fall works arrangement with Adam (Gen. 2:2-3), and in the post-fall, typologically modified form given to Israel (Exodus 31:13-17; Ezek. 20:12, 20). Promise establishes duty. Wherever the promise signified by the Sabbath remains, the duty of observing the Sabbath remains. Wherever the promise is withdrawn, the duty is likewise withdrawn. The only people to whom the Sabbath ordinance applies in the present age is the church of Jesus Christ, in whom alone the Sabbath promise is realized by faith in the second Adam.

Special attention should be paid to the revelation concerning the Mosaic Sabbath, which in turn sheds its backward light on the original creation Sabbath. The Mosaic Sabbath is expressly said to have been "given" (Exod. 16:29) by Yahweh to the people of Israel to be a sign of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and his covenant people. "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 an everlasting sign between Me and the sons of Israel" (Exod. 31:13, 17).

This language is parallel to other covenantal signs - the rainbow (Gen. 9:12) and circumcision (Gen. 17:10-11), both of which are said to be signs of their respective covenants. In no case is the covenant sign to be kept by anyone who is not a rightful party to the covenant and its blessings. The rainbow is a universal sign, because it is the sign of the covenant of common grace between God and every living creature on the earth. The sign of circumcision, however, is given only to those who are party to the Abrahamic covenant of redemptive promise to be fulfilled in Christ. Those who are not circumcised are in fact to be cut off from the covenant community. It is clear that the Mosaic covenant, of which the Sabbath was the sign, was not made with the world at large, but only with the redeemed community of Israel whom God had delivered out of Egypt in fulfillment of his promise to Abraham.

Furthermore, consider the additional statement that the Sabbath is given to Israel so that God's people might "know that I am the LORD you sanctifies you" (Exod. 31:13). Compare the parallel statements in Ezekiel, where the initial exodus complex of events is being recounted: "Also I gave them My sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them" (Ezek. 20:12); "Sanctify My sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God" (v. 20). The term "sanctify" was originally used in Gen. 2:2-3. God sanctified the seventh day to be a special and holy day, set apart from the other six. Thus, when Israel later "sanctifies" the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, Israel too is "sanctified" by the LORD and set apart from the profane nations around it. Just as the sign of circumcision set the covenant seed of Abraham apart, so the sign of the Sabbath sanctifies Israel in the sight of the nations.

These exegetical data have important implications for one's interpretation, not just of the fourth commandment, but of the Decalogue as a whole. They call into question the long-standing opinion that each of the ten commandments is rooted in the abiding moral will of God. In addition to the fourth commandment itself, numerous aspects of the Decalogue are directed specifically to the covenant community (e.g. Exod. 20:2, 5-6, 7, 8-11, 12b). Indeed, so intimate is the connection between the Decalogue and the covenant made with Israel at Sinai, the ten commandments are frequently referred to in Scripture as the covenant itself (Exod. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 5:2ff; 9:9-11; 1 Kings 8:9). There is a sense in which the entire Decalogue was limited to the covenant community only. The preamble to the Decalogue places a covenantal limiter on the Decalogue, grounding the stipulations that follow in the historically particular act of redemption at the exodus. [11] We must not suppress the force of this mounting exegetical data, even if it means we must rethink cherished traditions.

On the other hand, granting all of this evidence pointing to the covenantal nature of the Decalogue, we must also recognize that, with the exception of the fourth commandment, nine of the commandments do constitute a summary of God's moral will - albeit in typological-covenantal form (as seen, for example, in the fifth commandment's promise of long life in the land of Canaan). Although we cannot say that the Decalogue per se is binding on all men, it is certainly legitimate to say that nine of the ten commandments overlap with the moral will of God revealed in creation and conscience.

Why is the fourth commandment the only commandment of the ten that is not grounded in the moral will of God? The purpose of the Mosaic Law (of which the Decalogue was the summary, written on tablets of stone) was not to provide a timeless list of eternal commands binding on all

men, but to function as a covenantally particular and typological re-enactment of Adam's probation in the garden. The Sabbath is included in the Decalogue precisely in order to signal that this is the covenant of works, and that Israel is now on probation in the land ("My rest" - Psalm 95). Israel's obedience to the other nine commandments is functioning within the context of the covenant of works.

The traditional explanation is on the right track: the Decalogue is clearly set apart from the rest of the Mosaic legislation. Unlike the rest of the Mosaic corpus of laws, the Decalogue was written directly by the finger of God, on tablets of stone, and placed inside the ark of the covenant. It is unique also in that it does not contain any ceremonial or cultic legislation pertaining to sacrifice, the clean and unclean distinction, etc. There seems to be a divine spotlight on the Decalogue, as if God wanted to say to Israel, "Here are the really important and crucial commandments; the rest is either application and outworking of the principles contained here, or else mere positive law."

Good. But how do we then account for the unique typological elements in the Decalogue: the promise of long life in the land; the curse sanction added to the second commandment; the seventh day rest, etc.? The view that the Decalogue is a covenantally specific, typological re-enactment of the Adamic covenant of works, pertaining to the probationary nature of Israel's national election and inheritance accounts for everything that the traditional explanation covers, plus the features it can't explain. It explains (1) why the Decalogue seems to be mainly "moral" law (because a republication of the Adamic covenant of works *ought* to enshrine the core creation ethic rooted in God's nature), and (2) why the Decalogue also contains the typological elements mentioned above (because it is a *typological* republication of the Adamic covenant of works in which Israel's tenure in the land is a picture of our ultimate, eschatological inheritance in the heavenly places). This then explains why the fourth commandment is unique among the ten commandments in that it is binding only on the covenant community. As the sign of the covenant of works, the fourth commandment rightly belongs amid the stipulations in which the covenant of works is summarily comprehended. [12]

Was the Sabbath in force for the people of God prior to the giving of the Mosaic Law? There is no hint in the books of Genesis or Exodus that the pre-Mosaic covenant community observed (or was required to observe) the Sabbath after the fall. The first mention of the Sabbath after the fall is Exodus 16:22-30, where the Israelites are instructed to gather twice as much manna on the sixth day so that they may keep the Sabbath day holy. The narrative suggests that the people did not previously know or practice the Sabbath, for even after they were instructed not to look for manna on the Sabbath, "some of the people went out to gather, but they found none" (v. 27).

In addition, we may also appeal to broader theological considerations. In Romans 5:12-14, Paul implies that the works principle originally established with Adam before the fall reappeared in the Mosaic economy. "From Adam until Moses" is therefore a distinctive epoch in redemptive history, an epoch governed not by the works principle but by the original gospel promise of Gen. 3:15, subsequently expanded in God's covenantal revelation to Noah and Abraham. Because the seventh-day Sabbath was a covenantal sign of the eschatological advancement offered to Adam in the covenant of works, it would not have been appropriate for the people of God after the fall to observe the Sabbath *until the works principle is re-enacted* on the typological layer of Israel's retention of the land.

Although the Sabbath sign *per se* was not given to the covenant community until the coming of the Mosaic Law, the pre-Mosaic people of God did consecrate themselves to God by means of altar worship. We see this from the very beginning: "It came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. Abel, on his part, also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions" (Gen. 4:3-4). [13] The godly line were known by this distinctive, that they built altars and called upon the name of the LORD (Gen. 4:26). However, this altar worship seems to have been conducted on an occasional basis, not once a week, or on any other formal cycle. From time to time, the LORD appeared to his servants, or granted them some

deliverance, and they would commemorate these occasions by building an altar and offering sacrifices to the LORD (e.g., Gen. 12:7-8; 13:18; 21:33; 26:24-25; 28:20-22; 33:18-20; 35:3, 7).

Comparison with other positions

A. The Westminster Confession

The Westminster Confession XXI:7 states:

As it is the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in his Word, by a positive, moral and perpetual commandment binding all men in all ages, he hath particularly appointed one day in seven, for a sabbath, to be kept holy unto him: which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which, in Scripture, is called the Lord's day, and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian sabbath.

If the exegesis presented in this paper is correct, the statement that the Sabbath is "a positive, moral and perpetual commandment binding all men in all ages" is not Scriptural. I am of the opinion that the Confession ought to be revised to bring it into line with the Scriptural teaching that the Sabbath is an eschatological sign for the covenant community.

The statement that "it is the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God" (WCF XXI:7) is true. But the observance of a weekly day of rest is not the same thing as the requirement to set aside time for the worship of God. A weekly day of rest may coincide with the appointed worship of the covenant community, but the Sabbath *per se* is an eschatological sign containing an express promise of rest to those who are given the sign (Heb. 4:9).

I have no problem with the second half of the above paragraph: "which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which, in Scripture, is called the Lord's day, and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian sabbath." That is a very balanced and biblical statement it seems to me. However, I'm not in complete agreement with all of the exegesis that stands behind that statement. Consider Shorter Catechism question 58:

Q. What is required in the fourth commandment?

A. The fourth commandment requireth the keeping holy to God such set times as he hath appointed in his Word; expressly one whole day in seven, to be a holy sabbath to himself.

According to the Westminster divines, the fourth commandment only sets forth the ratio - "expressly one whole day in seven" is to be kept as a holy Sabbath unto the Lord. But Exodus 20:9-11 clearly requires seventh day observance. The seventh-day Sabbatarians are more faithful exegetes at this point. Although they miss the redemptive historical shift that occurred in the transition from the old covenant to the new, they correctly interpret the fourth commandment itself. The seventh-day Sabbatarians and the first-day Sabbatarians both err, however, in viewing the ten commandments as "a perfect rule of righteousness" binding on all men, including the new covenant people of God. The misguided attempt on the part of first-day Sabbatarians to avoid seventh-day observance in the new covenant age by re-interpreting the fourth commandment as

merely setting forth the ratio ought to have pushed them to reconsider the premise that the ten commandments are a summary of the timeless moral law of God.

Perhaps the gravest error in the divines' handling of the fourth commandment is that they seem to suggest that it doesn't make much difference whether the Sabbath is observed on Saturday or Sunday. The implication seems to be that while the day may have changed, the nature of the Sabbath itself has not. The change of day is a superficial matter of outward administration, thus blurring the sharp contrast between the works principle inherent in the old covenant Sabbath (work, then rest) and the faith principle inherent in the new covenant Lord's Day (rest, then work). In the Puritan view of the Sabbath there is nothing "new" about the new covenant day of rest. It is just the same, old covenant Sabbath, shifted to Sunday. As one who has come to appreciate the redemptive historical nature of the Scriptures, I believe this approach is deficient. A proper redemptive historical consideration of this subject demands that we consider the significance of the change in terms of the epochal transition from the old covenant to the new, from a covenant of works to be kept by Israel, to the covenant of works fulfilled by Christ.

In addition, the Confession tends to reduce the Sabbath command to the issue of the "when" of worship, thus ignoring or downplaying the eschatological significance of the Sabbath. I am not alone in detecting a weakness in the presentation of the Sabbath in the Westminster Standards. The OPC General Assembly [Report of the Committee on Sabbath Matters](#) points out the lack of any teaching on the eschatological significance of the Sabbath:

The weekly Sabbath is an eschatological sign. This truth, central to the teaching of Hebrews 3:7-4:13 as well as fundamental to the entire biblical revelation concerning the Sabbath, does not find expression in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms. The reason for this would appear to be that the Standards mention the Sabbath commandment primarily in terms of its bearing on the more specific matter of public and private worship.

I suspect that this non-eschatological view of the Sabbath is part of the reason why the authors of the Confession thought that the Sabbath was applicable to the unbeliever. If you begin by defining the Sabbath as a day set aside for the worship of God, it makes sense to argue that, since all men are obligated to worship God, they are obligated also to set aside the day in order to fulfill that duty. The medieval, theocratic notion of Christendom that the divines inherited from the magisterial reformers undoubtedly played a role in this thinking. All of society has an obligation to attend public worship. The Sabbath is merely the day when all of society must "shut down" in order to ensure (by means of "blue law" legislation) that public worship is attended by all.

But if the Sabbath is fundamentally a sign of our eschatological rest, with worship being a realized dimension of that eschatological rest, it becomes clear that the Sabbath belongs only to those who are entering that rest by faith. This in turn sharpens our view of what is really taking place in the church's worship. Worship isn't a societal duty grounded in creation, but a covenant meeting of the whole church both militant and triumphant, accompanied by myriads of angels, with the Sabbath-enthroned Lord Jesus Christ in heaven. A sharper distinction between church and society, between the city of God and the city of man, leads to a much more exalted view both of worship and of the Sabbath. Indeed, the Sabbath then becomes a sign of the covenant which distinguishes God's people from the world, demonstrating that the church is a pilgrim people living not for this passing age, but for the glory of the age to come.

B. The Continental View

Heidelberg Catechism, question 103:

Q. *What does God require in the fourth commandment?*

A. First, that the ministry of the gospel and Christian education be maintained, and that I diligently attend church, especially on the Lord's day, to hear the Word of God, to participate in the holy Sacraments, to call publicly upon the Lord, and to give Christian service to those in need. Second, that I cease from my evil works all the days of my life, allow the Lord to work in me through his Spirit, and thus begin in this life the eternal Sabbath.

In terms of practice, my view is basically the same, since I want to place the accent on corporate worship. I agree with the continental view that the fundamental duty of the Sabbath command for the New Testament believer is fulfilled by diligently attending church to hear the Word of God and participate in the sacraments. In every passage where the New Testament mentions the Lord's day or the first day of the week, it is always with reference to fellowship with the risen Christ by means of the Word and the sacrament (Luke 24:1, 13-53; John 20:19-29; Acts 10:41; 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10).

In addition to this focus on the centrality of corporate worship in Sabbath sanctification, I also agree with the Continental view in not bringing the new covenant church under the more stringent requirements of the old covenant Sabbath. The Puritan doctrine of the Sabbath includes a strong emphasis on literal resting from labor, recreation, and other cultural activity. The Continental view, by contrast, "spiritualizes" the rest required in the old covenant. It is no longer a literal ceasing from worldly employments and recreations, as in the Puritan Sabbath, but a purely spiritual rest in Christ. Of course, the Puritans would not have viewed the matter as an either/or proposition, and would have wanted to stress that resting from worldly employments is one means by which we enjoy our spiritual rest in Christ. But I believe the Continental view is partially on the right track in placing the accent and priority on the believer's spiritual rest. This is in keeping with the progression of redemptive history from Israel's life in the land to the new covenant's enjoyment of rest in Christ.

However, the Continental view suffers from a major flaw right at this point: the works from which we are to rest are considered to be our *evil works*. This is based on a misunderstanding of Heb. 4:10; 9:14; Matt. 11:28-30. The result of this interpretation is that every day is a Sabbath rest in Christ for the Christian. But this makes non-sense out of the Sabbath command. For the Sabbath ordinance at creation was a resting from things that are lawful on the other six days. Therefore, in spite of my fundamental sympathy for the Continental view, at least as an alternative to the "Mosaicizing" tendency of the Puritan Sabbath, I maintain that there is an aspect of our rest which involves resting from things that are lawful on the other six days. This fits in perfectly with the idea that the Sabbath is a weekly reminder of our eternal rest in the consummation, for the rest that we shall enter at the consummation, and of which the weekly Sabbath is a sign, is not a rest from sin merely (though that is included) but a rest from our pilgrim travails in this present evil age.

Another weakness of the Continental view - in my opinion, this weakness constitutes its ultimate invalidation - is that it fails to appreciate the implications of the Sabbath as a creation ordinance (Gen. 2:2-3; Exod. 20:11). Since the Continental position interprets the Sabbath not as a creation ordinance but as part of the ceremonial law, the Sabbath strictly speaking has been abrogated in the new covenant. The implication is that the Lord's Day as the day of Christian worship is of ecclesiastical authority only. The church could have chosen another day, or even a different weekly cycle. Ultimately, the church's establishment of the Christian Sunday as a day of worship is guided primarily by the church's need for a day of worship and for the propagation of the gospel and Christian doctrine ("that the ministry of the gospel and Christian education be maintained"). By contrast, I believe that, because it is an eschatological pointer grounded in creation, observance of the Sabbath in the new covenant (on the first day of the week) is covenantally demanded. The Sabbath rest offered in the primeval covenant has been achieved by the Second Adam in the new covenant via his resurrection/ascension. The church not only may but must set

aside the first day of the week for worship in order to enter into the heavenly theocratic Sabbath of Christ, as a covenantally demanded weekly sign of the pilgrim church's eschatological goal. The resurrection of Christ, and our co-resurrection with him, is the inaugurated form of the final Sabbath in eternity.

The Puritan doctrine, as over against the Continental, rightly points to the exegetical evidence that the Mosaic Sabbath reaches back to the creation ordinance, thus correctly demonstrating that the fourth commandment is not merely ceremonial. The Continental view, as over against the Puritan, rightly points to the exegetical evidence that the Christian Sabbath is a primarily spiritual rest in Christ, thus correctly demonstrating that the Lord's Day is not merely the Mosaic Sabbath moved to a different position in the week. The Puritan view fails to recognize the eschatological significance of the Sabbath, and thus is blind to the dramatic changes that of necessity occur when that eschatology reaches its definitive fulfillment in Christ. The Continental view rightly senses the eschatological significance of the Sabbath, but due to its failure to link that eschatology to the creational covenant of works, the believer's Sabbath rest in Christ is pure "already," untempered by the pilgrim's longing for the "not-yet."

C. Professor Meredith Kline

The covenantal-biblical theology of Meredith Kline points the way forward for developing the positive insights of both traditions in order to advance the church's thinking and practice in the area of the Sabbath. All that I have written above is obviously rooted in Kline's basic approach, though I do have some reservations, as will be clear in what follows.

In a nutshell, Kline's unique contribution to the doctrine of the Sabbath relates to his conception of cult and culture. Kline sees the pattern of "work followed by rest" as a theocratic concept, wherein one's resting from cultural labors stamps that cultural labor, within a theocratic context, as eschatologically oriented, that is, as bound for eschatological consummation by means of ultimate participation in the eternal Sabbath rest of God. Obviously this applied only in the pre-fall theocracy and the Mosaic theocracy. Now, in the church age, all cultural activity is part of the common grace arena and is no longer eschatologically oriented. To rest from one's cultural labors now would be to mark common grace activity, which is destined to perish at the parousia, with the false sign of Sabbatical consummation.

This does not mean, however, that the church has no theocratic dimension in her experience. Rather, the theocratic Kingdom has been transferred to heaven where Christ is, enthroned in heaven in his royal Sabbath rest. Because the church enters that heavenly theocratic realm by means of corporate worship, the rest aspect of the NT Sabbath occurs only during that time of worship. As Kline writes:

Moreover, since the Sabbath is a sign of sanctification marking that which receives its imprint as belonging to God's holy kingdom with promise of consummation, the Sabbath will have relevance and application at any given epoch of redemptive history only in the holy dimension(s) of the life of the covenant people. Thus, after the Fall, not only will the Sabbath pertain exclusively to the covenant community as a holy people called out of the profane world, but even for them the Sabbath will find expression, in a nontheocratic situation, only where they are convoked in covenant assembly, as the *ekklesia*-extension of the heavenly assembly of God's Sabbath enthronement. That is, Sabbath observance will have to do only with their holy cultic (but not their common cultural) activity. [14]

Kline views the Sabbath as an eschatological "stamp." Whatever you rest from becomes stamped with the label "heaven-bound." In a theocracy, both cult and culture are holy, heaven-bound, destined for eschatological consummation (of course, in the Mosaic theocracy, this destination

was typological only - in contrast with the pre-fall theocratic order). But we no longer live in a theocracy - culture is no longer holy but common. Therefore, to rest from cultural activity would be to stamp it inappropriately with the heaven-bound label. It would be to sacralize the common grace order.

However, Kline recognizes that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance and therefore must have some continuity in our current non-theocratic context. So for Kline the Sabbath is kept today only during the gathering of the covenant community when it ascends into the heavenly realized theocracy during the formal worship service. Whatever one does outside that context on the Lord's Day is common grace activity and is acceptable as long as it doesn't interfere with one's duty to attend church. In the church age, only cultic activity is holy, or heaven-bound. Cultural activity is common, destined for destruction not consummation.

I am in complete agreement with Kline's interpretation of the function of the Sabbath as a sign of the covenant, thus limiting its observance to the covenant community. I also agree with his theocratic analysis of the Sabbath in the pre-fall and Mosaic economies. But I have reservations about his exclusive application of the new covenant Sabbath sign to the cultic activity of the assembled church. The implication seems to be that our Sabbath duties are exhaustively fulfilled by attending corporate worship. Furthermore, not only are Christians *permitted* to engage in cultural activity on the Lord's Day outside of public worship, they are positively *required* to do so. For to rest from cultural activity on the Lord's Day would be to place the holy stamp of eschatological consummation upon non-holy cultural activity, thus profaning the Sabbath.

Ironically, those whose Sabbath practice is more in line with the Puritan approach of resting all the day from "worldly employments and recreations" are the greatest violators of the Sabbath, and are theoretically subject to church discipline. I doubt that Kline would want to see his view implemented in our churches with such unyielding disciplinary rigor. But even if strict Sabbatarians are permitted the freedom to practice the Puritan Sabbath according to the light of their conscience, it still does not ring true to say that resting from cultural activity on the Lord's Day is sinful. I want to avoid laying heavy burdens upon God's people - whether it be the intolerable yoke of the strict Sabbatarians who say that we must rest from any and all cultural activity, or an inflexible application of Kline's exegetical insights in which the church's freedom from the Mosaic Sabbath is distorted into a new legalism requiring that we engage in cultural activity on the Lord's Day.

Is it possible to avoid such inflexible applications and still remain true to Kline's basic insights? I believe so. In order to accomplish this Kline's doctrine of the Sabbath needs to be re-tooled at two points.

First, Kline's strict identification of the Sabbath as a theocratic sign needs to be fine tuned. A theocratic interpretation is valid when we are dealing with the Sabbath as it existed in the pre-fall and Mosaic economies. The Sabbath structure of Gen. 1:1-2:3 (the framework of the two triads of days culminating in the seventh day of the Creator's Sabbath enthronement) shows that the Sabbath functioned to mark the theocratic situation - Adam's cultural work would have led to glory. But when Kline then applies this premise to the church's current non-theocratic situation, he assumes that the Sabbath must have the same function there, and so he proceeds to look for the one area in the non-theocratic context that is theocratic and finds it in the church's access in worship to the heavenly (theocratic) realm.

Notice that the Sabbath sign, when applied by Kline to the cultic activity of the church, loses its "stamping" function. For what is the church resting *from*, when it engages in its corporate cultic activity of worship? The problem here is one of equivocation. The term "Sabbath" is being used in reference to two very different things: the seventh day of rest required in the pre-fall and Mosaic covenants, and the first day of the new covenant. When applied to the seventh day of rest in the pre-fall and Mosaic covenants, the weekly Sabbath rest clearly possesses a stamping function.

The stamping function of the pre-Messianic Sabbath was bound up with the eschatologically forward-looking position of the covenant community (whether pre-fall or Mosaic).

By contrast, the weekly observance of a day of rest in the new covenant is not a type of the eschatological Sabbath rest to come, but a "sacrament" of the rest presently realized by the Sabbath-enthroned Christ in heaven. By means of the resurrection of Christ as our federal head, the people of God have already begun to enjoy the eschatological Sabbath rest itself, of which the weekly observance of a day of rest in the old covenant was but a type. When applied to the first day remembrance of the resurrection of Christ in the new covenant, there is nothing to stamp because the eschatological goal has already been achieved. Thus, it is not necessary for Kline to restrict the weekly sign to the church's cultic activity as if, unrestricted, the sign might otherwise stamp believers' cultural activity as bound for eschatological consummation. Kline's equivocal use of the term "Sabbath" hides the fact that the sign has changed to the first day of the week. Its placement at the beginning of the week *before* the cultural activity of the other six days, is sufficient evidence that the cultural stamping function has dropped away in the new covenant.

Second, Kline's approach seems to presuppose a reductionistic ecclesiology. By referring to the cultic activity of the new covenant church as "the *ekklesia*-extension of the heavenly assembly," is Kline adopting the view that the *ekklesia* is constituted *only* when the local congregation is gathered together for worship to participate in the heavenly *ekklesia* of Hebrews 12:22-24? [15] While attractive to many biblical theologians, this view is implicitly congregational, since it denies the label "church" to other visible manifestations of the church, such as the regional church or even the universal visible church. [16] Kevin Giles has defended the thesis that in the NT *ekklesia* most often refers to a community of Christians, whether in a given locality or throughout the world, and not necessarily only when they are assembled together for worship. [17]

What is the relevance of this foray into ecclesiology for Kline's distinctive view of the Sabbath? Kline argues that in the current non-theocratic epoch, the Sabbath finds expression only when the congregation is convoked together in its cultic activity, since that is the only "theocratic moment" in the church's life prior to the consummation. But if the church is seated with her theocratic King in the heavenly places even when not formally gathered for worship, then the theocratic dimension cannot be restricted to the cultic dimension. The following texts seem to suggest that the church's theocratic identity in Christ is not temporally limited to times of formal worship. Believers presently "reign in life" by virtue of federal union with the second Adam (Rom. 5:17), are "seated with him in the heavenly places" (Eph. 2:6), and are "a kingdom of priests" who presently "reign with Christ" in heaven during the church age (Rev. 1:6; 20:4), a foretaste of their future "reign upon the earth" after the judgment (Rev. 5:10).

Taking these two modifications together, it appears that the new covenant day of rest may have some relevance even in the non-cultic (i.e., cultural) activities of God's people. The Sabbath sign, in its new covenant form (the Lord's Day), has been placed upon the church, whose mode of kingdom existence is a semi-eschatological theocracy. As a semi-eschatological theocracy, the church's theocratic dimension is bound up with the mystery of the "already" and "not-yet" character of the reign of her exalted theocratic King. Presently, the church is seated with Christ in the heavenly places, reigning with him as a kingdom of priests. The earthly, visible manifestation of Christ's theocratic reign (and the church's participation therein) awaits future consummation at his second coming. While we patiently wait for the visible manifestation of Christ's kingdom in the new creation, the weekly sign of the Lord's Day reminds us that our cultural activity cannot bring the kingdom to its consummation glory and fullness. Resting on the first day of the week *before* we go about our cultural activity during the remainder of the week is the decisive proof of this. By resting at the beginning of our work-week, we confess that the future eschatological kingdom-rest has *already* been achieved in principle by the second Adam who alone will bring the cultural mandate to its visible theocratic fulfillment in the "not-yet."

New covenant believers may rest weekly from their worldly toil, as a semi-eschatological, semi-theocratic [18] sign of the consummation of their rest, even when not formally assembled

corporately. It is proper for the wandering people of God to take time out from their common cultural endeavors on the Lord's Day in order to express their recognition of the vanity of those endeavors, and to stir up their hope in the resurrection when they will rest once for all from their pilgrim toil and enter into the perfect rest of Christ. Every Lord's Day we are invited to rest from our ceaseless toil and labor, which because of the fall is "vanity of vanities" and cannot receive the blessing of eschatological consummation (although some of it may receive the blessing of divine reward - 1 Cor. 15:58). By resting *from* our cultural activity we rest *in* Christ's cultural activity as the second Adam.

This does *not* mean that *no* common cultural activity whatsoever is permissible on the Lord's Day. I can think of many cultural activities that could be appropriate on that day if they were enjoyed in a spiritually restful frame of mind. Such permission is granted in the new covenant because the Lord's Day is semi-theocratic outside of the worship of the assembly. In a theocratic order, all cultural activity is rigidly excluded on the Sabbath due to the eschatological significance of the resting from it as a way of "stamping" it as heaven-bound. Hence the extreme judgment on the Sabbath breaker in Numbers 15:32-36. In a semi-theocratic situation, cultural activity is not so rigidly excluded on pain of death. The need to rest from toilsome cultural activity remains, not as an absolute requirement, but in the interests of promoting spiritual rest in Christ. Since this rest is spiritual and internal, the question of what types of outward activities one may engage in on the Sabbath recedes into the background, as long as worship is attended and the rest of heaven is tasted. Though the cultural labors of semi-theocratic pilgrims are not heaven-bound, pilgrims do need to stop from time to time and remind themselves that *they* are heaven-bound.

In sum, my view of the Sabbath is deeply influenced by Kline's. We agree that the Sabbath is a sign of eschatological rest, and that it is therefore given only to the covenant community. We also agree that in both the pre-fall and Mosaic theocracies, the Sabbath served as a sign to stamp cultural activity as bound for the eschatological Sabbath consummation. Kline speaks of this as the Sabbath sign's theocratic stamping function. Where we differ is whether this stamping function continues in the new covenant. In my view, the Sabbath is primarily an eschatological sign, and only secondarily a theocratic stamp. The function of the Sabbath as an eschatological sign continues in the new covenant, while its function as a theocratic stamp drops away with the change of day.

What difference does this make practically in terms of how we think the Lord's Day ought to be observed? It seems to boil down to this. Since Kline thinks the stamping function continues in the new covenant, the Sabbath is observed exclusively during corporate worship, placing the remaining hours of the day outside of worship in the same status as the other non-holy days of the week. In my view, the Sabbath is observed primarily during corporate worship, and the remaining hours of the day are to be kept holy by maintaining a spiritually restful frame of mind, and by resting from toilsome cultural activity - though allowing liberty for some cultural activity within the limits of the twofold test stated in thesis 14 above. For Kline, the new covenant Sabbath is exclusively *cultic*. I agree that the cultic dimension is primary, but since it is an eschatological sign, it seems to me that there is also a secondary *cultural* aspect to our weekly rest as pilgrims "on the way."

Appendix

In addition to the evidence in the NT itself, further evidence for the practice of observing the first day of the week as "the Lord's Day" may be found in the post-apostolic age. The following quotes from the first two centuries are illuminating:

The Didache (ca. 90-100): "And on the Lord's Day of the Lord come together and break bread and give thanks, having first confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure" (14:1).

Ignatius of Antioch (died ca. 107): "If therefore those who lived in ancient observances attained unto newness of hope, no longer keeping the Sabbath, but living a life ruled by the Lord's Day, whereon our life too had its rising through him and his death ..." (*Epistle to the Magnesians* 9:1).

Barnabas (ca. 125 to 135): "If, therefore, any one can now sanctify the day which God hath sanctified, except he is pure in heart in all things, we are deceived ... Further he says to them, 'Your new moons and your Sabbaths I cannot endure' (Isaiah 1:13). Ye perceive how he speaks: Your present Sabbaths are not acceptable to me, but that is which I have made, [namely this,] when, giving rest to all things, I shall make a beginning of the eighth day, that is, a beginning of another world. Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead" (*Epistle of Barnabas*, ch. 15).

Justin Martyr (died ca. 165): "But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world [referring to day one of creation; Gen. 1:3-5]; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead. For he was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to his apostles and disciples, he taught them these things, which we have submitted to you for your consideration" (*First Apology*, ch. 67).

Recommended Reading

Carson, D. A., ed. *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*. Wipf and Stock, 1999. Originally published by Zondervan, 1982. Although the authors argue that the Lord's Day is not a new covenant Sabbath, there is much helpful material in this volume, including an exegetically insightful article by Andrew Lincoln entitled, "Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament."

Cullmann, Oscar. *Early Christian Worship*. SCM Press, 1953. Argues convincingly that the Lord's Day was established by Christ as a day of Christian worship by means of the post-resurrection appearances. I am indebted to Cullmann's argument that the post-resurrection appearances of Christ established the basic contours of the early church's conception of the purpose and nature of the Lord's Day. I also find attractive his exegesis of the Maranatha prayer, with its wedding of the sacramental and eschatological perspectives.

Dennison, James T., Jr. *The Market Day of the Soul: The Puritan Doctrine of the Sabbath in England (1532-1700)*. Soli Deo Gloria. Examines the Puritan view in contrast with both Seventh-Day Sabbatarianism and the Anglican position. Valuable resource for quotes and documentation of the historical background of the Puritan doctrine of the Sabbath.

Gaffin, Richard B., Jr. "A Sabbath Rest Still Awaits the People of God." In *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the OPC*. Ed. by Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble. Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 1986. Some of the ideas presented in this paper are dependent on Gaffin's formulations, e.g., the role of the Sabbath within the already/not-yet eschatological framework; and the pilgrim motif in connection with the wilderness experience of the covenant community between the exodus and the promised land. However, I would argue that Gaffin's wonderfully eschatological exposition of the Sabbath raises questions about the traditional understanding of the nature and role of the Decalogue as a summary of the eternal moral law of God, questions that Gaffin does not appear to have sufficiently wrestled with.

_____. *Calvin and the Sabbath: The Controversy of Applying the Fourth Commandment*. Mentor, 1998. Gaffin explains and critiques Calvin's continental view, and offers his own eschatological understanding in chapter 5 (this chapter also includes a valuable excursus on Vos's eschatological conception of the Spirit).

Jewett, Paul K. *The Lord's Day: A Theological Guide to the Christian Day of Worship*. Eerdmans, 1971. Similar position as the D. A. Carson volume.

Kline, Meredith G. *Kingdom Prologue*. Two Age Press, 2000.

Muether, John. "The OPC and the Sabbath." Taped lecture given in celebration of the 60th anniversary of the OPC (June, 1996). Write to Danny Olinger for a copy (deo@opcjst.com). Muether sets the context by dealing with the American Victorian Sabbath, and compares the views of Murray and Kline.

Murray, John. *Principles of Conduct*. Eerdmans, 1957.

OPC. "The Report of the Committee on Sabbath Matters" (www.opc.org/GA/sabbath.html).

Owen, John. "Concerning a Day of Sacred Rest." In vol. 2 of *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Banner of Truth Trust, 1990. Owen helpfully traces the history of the Sabbath in the various epochs of covenant history. His sensitivity to the historical development of the Sabbath revelation enables him to see more clearly than most Puritans the sharp differences between the rigor of the old covenant Sabbath compared with the relative freedom of the new covenant Sabbath.

Pipa, Joseph A. *The Lord's Day*. Christian Focus, 1997. A defense of the traditional Puritan view.

Beckwith, Roger T., and Wilfrid Stott. *This Is the Day: The Biblical Doctrine of the Christian Sunday in its Jewish and Early Christian Setting*. Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1978. Very helpful historical study of Sabbath theology in the church fathers.

Turretin, Francis. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*. Vol. 2, pp. 77-104. Turretin takes a via media between the strict Sabbatarians of his day (the Voetians) and the Continental view (as represented by the Cocceians).

ENDNOTES

[1] Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* (2000), p. 78.

[2] For more on how the works principle operated within Israel, without compromising the unity of the covenant of grace, see *Kingdom Prologue*, pp. 320-23.

[3] Vos, *Biblical Theology*, p. 141.

[4] The Maranatha prayer – "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20; 1 Cor. 16:22) – is the oldest liturgical prayer of the early Christian church. It is "an element which connects closely with the fact that the day of the Christian service of worship is the day of Christ's resurrection. On this day Christ appeared at a meal with the disciples. So now he ought to appear again, in the Christian celebration of the Meal, since, 'where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them' (Matt. 18:20) ... The coming of Christ into the midst of the community gathered at the meal is an anticipation of his coming to the Messianic meal and looks back to the disciples' eating with the risen Christ on the Easter days." Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, pp. 13-14, 16.

[5] "All church power is only ministerial and declarative, for the Holy Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice. No church judicatory may presume to bind the conscience by making laws on the basis of its own authority" (OPC Form of Government III:3). "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which

are, in anything, contrary to his Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship" (WCF XX:2). The above statements are founded on the teaching of Scripture concerning the ultimate authority of God's Word. E.g., "Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other" (1 Cor. 4:6). See also the warnings against submitting to "the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:1-8; Mark 7:8-9; Col. 2:8, 16-23; Titus 1:14).

[6] Summarizing the views of Nicolas Bownd, an early architect of the Puritan Sabbath, James T. Dennison, Jr. writes: "The universal morality of the Sabbath is indicated in its origin. As a creation ordinance, the Sabbath commandment surpasses yet supplements the law of nature." *The Market Day of the Soul*, p. 42 (emphasis added). Joseph A. Pipa argues, on the basis of Gen. 2:2-3, that "the observation of one day out of seven is a perpetually binding moral obligation based on this creation ordinance ... a perpetually binding creation ordinance." *The Lord's Day*, p. 34.

[7] See the discussion of the creation ordinances in John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*. Note especially his assumption that the creation ordinances, including the Sabbath, remain binding on mankind without substantial change even after the fall (pp. 41-44).

[8] For the distinction between the holy and the common, see Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, pp. 155-60.

[9] "Significantly, when the Lord republished the cultural ordinances within the historical framework of his common grace for the generality of fallen mankind [Genesis 3:16-19; 9:1-17], he did not attach his Sabbath promise to this common cultural order ... The only culture on which the sabbatical sign is explicitly impressed is the theocratic kingdom-culture of Israel under the old covenant." Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, pp. 155f.

[10] "The nature and unity of the decalogue (the Ten Commandments) teaches that the Fourth Commandment is an expression of God's universal moral will for all people. The Decalogue serves as a summary of God's moral law." Pipa, *The Lord's Day*, p. 55.

[11] "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exodus 20:2). This self-identification of the author of the Law, along with a reminder of the redemptive foundation for the giving of the Law, corresponds to the "preamble" and "historical prologue" sections of the ancient suzerain-vassal treaties, respectively. See Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*.

[12] Kline writes: "It is tempting to see in the sabbath sign presented in the midst of the ten words the equivalent of the suzerain's dynastic seal found in the midst of the obverse of the international treaty documents. Since in the case of the Decalogue the suzerain is Yahweh, there will be no representation of him on his seal; but the sabbath is declared to be his 'sign of the covenant.'" *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, p. 120.

[13] Pipa writes: "Genesis 4:3 possibly refers to Sabbath worship when it says that at the end of days Cain and Abel brought their sacrifices. The 'end of days' is most likely the seventh day, the end of the week, the Sabbath day." *The Lord's Day*, p. 39. But since the reader of Genesis has already been introduced to the Sabbath concept in chapter two, the author certainly would have said that Cain and Abel brought their sacrifices "on the seventh day" (*beyom hashebi*) if that is what was intended. It is more likely, then, that "at the end of days" (*meqets yamim*) refers to the end of the agricultural year, when the firstfruits would have been brought. Cain brought the fruit of the ground, Abel the firstfruits of the flock. See Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), p. 103.

[14] *Kingdom Prologue*, p. 81.

[15] This view, common among members of the Moore Theological College (Sidney) school of biblical theology, is defended by Peter O'Brien in "The Church as a Heavenly and Eschatological Entity," in *The Church in the Bible and the World*, ed. D. A. Carson (Paternoster, 1987).

[16] The Westminster Confession affirms that the visible church is expressed not only in the local congregation but also in higher levels of ecclesiastical organization. "The visible church ... is also catholic or universal under the gospel ... And particular churches ... are members thereof ..." (WCF XXV:2, 4).

[17] Kevin Giles, *What On Earth is the Church? An Exploration in New Testament Theology* (IVP, 1996). Giles, also from Australia, presents cogent exegetical arguments against the Moore school's approach to the ekklesia.

[18] My neologism "semi-theocratic" intentionally echoes the more well-known "semi-eschatological," and so I am using it to mean "the theocratic kingdom of Christ in its currently overlapping heavenly/earthly and already/not-yet tension." By affirming the church's semi-theocratic status, I am in no way intending to infuse a note of earthly triumphalism into the church's present existence prior to the parousia. The church's mission remains one of witness-bearing, weakness, and suffering with Christ. The theocratic dimension is exclusively defined in terms of the church's existence in the heavenlies with Christ – a dimension grasped only by faith.

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