

## The Sabbath Command

### Article 25: The Fulfillment of the Law

We believe that the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ended with the coming of Christ, and that all foreshadowings have come to an end, so that the use of them ought to be abolished among Christians.

Yet the truth and substance of these things remain for us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have been fulfilled. Nevertheless, we continue to use the witnesses drawn from the law and prophets to confirm us in the gospel and to regulate our lives with full integrity for the glory of God, according to the will of God. (Belgic Confession)

### What is God's will for you in the fourth commandment?

A. First, that the gospel ministry and education for it be maintained,<sup>1</sup> and that, especially on the festive day of rest, I diligently attend the assembly of God's people<sup>2</sup> to learn what God's Word teaches,<sup>3</sup> to participate in the sacraments,<sup>4</sup> to pray to God publicly,<sup>5</sup> and to bring Christian offerings for the poor.<sup>6</sup>

Second, that every day of my life I rest from my evil ways, let the Lord work in me through his Spirit, and so begin in this life the eternal Sabbath.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Deut. 6:4-9, 20-25; 1 Cor. 9:13-14; 2 Tim. 2:2; 3:13-17; Titus 1:5

<sup>2</sup> Deut. 12:5-12; Ps. 40:9-10; 68:26; Acts 2:42-47; Heb. 10:23-25

<sup>3</sup> Rom. 10:14-17; 1 Cor. 14:31-32; 1 Tim. 4:13

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. 11:23-25

<sup>5</sup> Col. 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:1

<sup>6</sup> Ps. 50:14; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 8-9

<sup>7</sup> Isa. 66:23; Heb. 4:9-11

(Heidelberg Catechism)

**Lev. 23:3** “Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the LORD in all your dwelling places.

**Ezek. 20:12** Moreover, I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them. <sup>13</sup> But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness. “They did not walk in my statutes but rejected my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; and my Sabbaths they greatly profaned.

“Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them in the wilderness, to make a full end of them.

‘Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. <sup>13</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>14</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. <sup>15</sup> You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. Deuteronomy 5:12-15

<sup>12</sup> And the Lord said to Moses, <sup>13</sup> “You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, ‘Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you. <sup>14</sup> You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. <sup>15</sup> Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. <sup>16</sup> Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. <sup>17</sup> It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.’ Exodus 31:12ff

### Colossians 2:16-17

<sup>16</sup> Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. <sup>17</sup> These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

### Romans 14:6-7

<sup>5</sup> One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. <sup>6</sup> The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.

**Q166 M. Let us come to the fourth commandment.**

**S.** Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy *cattle*, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it. Exodus 20

**Q167 M. Does he order us to labour on six days, that we may rest on the seventh?**

**S.** Not absolutely; but allowing man six days for labour, he accepts the seventh, that it may be devoted to rest.

**Q168 M. Does he interdict us from all kind of labour?**

**S.** This commandment has a separate and peculiar reason. As the observance of rest is part of the old ceremonies, it was abolished by the advent of Christ.

**Q169 M. Do you mean that this commandment properly refers to the Jews, and was therefore merely temporary.**

**S.** I do, in as far as it is ceremonial.

**Q170 M. What then? Is there anything under it beyond ceremony?**

**S.** It was given for three reasons.

**Q171 M. State them to me.**

**S.** To figure spiritual rest; for the preservation of ecclesiastical polity; and for the relief of slaves.

**Q172 M. What do you mean by spiritual rest?**

**S.** When we keep holiday from our own works, that God may perform his own works in us.

**Q173 M. What, moreover, is the method of thus keeping holiday?**

**S.** By crucifying our flesh, — that is, renouncing our own inclination, that we may be governed by the Spirit of God.

**Q174 M. Is it sufficient to do so on the seventh day?**

**S.** Nay, continually. After we have once begun, we must continue during the whole course of life.

**Q175 M. Why, then, is a certain day appointed to figure it?**

**S.** There is no necessity that the reality should agree with the figure in every respect, provided it be suitable in so far as is required for the purpose of figuring.

**Q176 M. But why is the seventh day prescribed rather than any other day?**

**S.** In Scripture the number seven implies perfection. It is, therefore, apt for denoting perpetuity. It, at the same time, indicates that this spiritual rest is only begun in this life, and will not be perfect until we depart from this world.

**Q177 M. But what is meant when the Lord exhorts us to rest by his own example?**

**S.** Having finished the creation of the world in six days: he dedicated the seventh to the contemplation of his works. The more strongly to stimulate us to this, he set before us his own example. For nothing is more desirable than to be formed after his image.

**Q178 M. But ought meditation on the works of God to be continual, or is it sufficient that one day out of seven be devoted to it?**

**S.** It becomes us to be daily exercised in it, but because of our weakness, one day is specially appointed. And this is the polity which I mentioned.

**Q179 M. What order, then, is to be observed on that day?**

**S.** That the people meet to hear the doctrine of Christ, to engage in public prayer, and make profession of their faith.

**Q180 M. Now explain what you meant by saying that the Lord intended by this commandment to provide also for the relief of slaves.**

**S.** That some relaxation might be given to those under the power of others. Nay, this, too, tends to maintain a common polity. For when one day is devoted to rest, every one accustoms himself to labour during the other days.

**Q181 M. Let us now see how far this command has reference to us.**

**S.** In regard to the ceremony, I hold that it was abolished, as the reality existed in Christ. ([Colossians 2:17.](#))

**Q182 M. How?**

**S.** Because, by virtue of his death, our old man is crucified, and we are raised up to newness of life. ([Romans 6:6.](#))

**Q183 M. What of the commandment then remains for us?**

**S.** Not to neglect the holy ordinances which contribute to the spiritual polity of the Church; especially to frequent sacred assemblies, to hear the word of God, to celebrate the sacraments, and engage in the regular prayers, as enjoined.

**Q184 M. But does the figure give us nothing more?**

**S.** Yes, indeed. We must give heed to the thing meant by it; namely, that being engrafted into the body of Christ, and made his members; we cease from our own works, and so resign ourselves to the government of God.