

“Sabbath Rest: What did the Church Do?” Romans 14:4-6; 22-23

Context: Our previous studies suggested that the Sabbath became a pronounced symbol of rest the Remnant was called to enter in Isaiah’s concluding chapters. Chapter 56 called all who accept God’s invitation to salvation to avoid profaning the Sabbath by making it just another common day. Chapter 58 described a common day as one filled with activities of self-centered gratification. Our study revealed the Sabbath as a sign of God’s covenant calling us to rest in Him, to be liberated by Him, and to serve others for him. Jesus re-presented the Sabbath-rest as a day liberated from following petty, man-made rules. His liberation provided for resting in God’s will and intentions through contemplation, communion, holy mission, and worship. Today, we seek to determine what the Church did with Sabbath-rest.

Life Principle: A weekly Sabbath-rest is an intentional time to acknowledge and rest in God’s will, a time turned away from the cares of self-centered gratification and toward an expectation of His provision of delight.

1. Sabbath-rest: principles and practice of the early Church

The Jewish expression of the early Church continued observing the Sabbath and also gathered on the Lord’s Day, the day after Sabbath. Gentile believers did not practice the ceremonial laws of Sabbath and met anywhere from Saturday night to Sunday night to pray, worship, celebrate communion, evangelize, and serve. Both groups based the Lord’s Day, so named by John, on the meeting of the resurrected Jesus with the disciples on the day after the Sabbath. Pauline literature rejects the imposition of both Judaic ceremonial law and heretical syncretistic demands on the Christian for faith and practice.

2. Sabbath-rest: an underlying principle – Hebrews 4:1-13

Sabbath-rest is entered into by uniting the offer of Christ’s salvation with the working of personal faith in your heart. In this sense, Sabbath-rest is begun with faith and is to be an ongoing experience reaching perfected completion at our glorification.

3. Sabbath-rest: underlying practice – Romans 14:6-23

The correctness of one’s position regarding the Lord’s Day is dependent on being fully convinced that however one lives Sabbath-rest, one is **intentionally** living it for Christ without any doubt.

Study questions:

- Galatians 4:8-10 and Colossians 2:16 are trotted out to negate ceremonial legal demands to observe a weekly Sabbath. Matthew 28:1ff, John 20:19, Revelation 1:10, Acts 20:7, and 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 are used to demonstrate the normative celebration of the Lord’s Day by the early Church. As a **Bible study method**, study these passages in their context. What normative principles, if any, can be found from your study of these texts?
- Study “Sabbath” and “Sunday” in Kittel’s *TDNT* v. 7 pp. 28-32. What seems to drive observation, rejection, or adaptation of Sabbath or Sunday observance? How does your cultural environment influence your opinion on observation? What were the cultural contexts that those verses addressed? Do they apply to your cultural context today? What biblical verses do you use to support your principles and practice of Sabbath-rest?
- In Isaiah 56:2-7, the word Sabbath is used in the context of the salvation of the foreigner. Our doctrinal statement describes God’s part and our part in salvation (see footnotes 11-16 ‘**On Salvation**’ in our **doctrinal statement** under **what we believe** at www.gracepointfellowship.org). What do ‘keeping a Sabbath-rest holy’ and ‘making it a delight’ have to do with the four aspects of salvation in your life?

Pastoral Conclusions:

God created one day out of seven, Shabbat, for man’s physical, emotional, and spiritual rest in God and for man to permit rest for that over which he is steward. God redeemed Shabbat from the slavery of man’s sin as a living symbol for the perfect rest redeemed humanity and creation will have in God in the age of ages. A believer’s proper response to God’s redemption of Shabbat is dependent upon the intention of his heart in the circumstances surrounding him. Ideally, it should be a time of joyous communal worship, service, and rest in God. Rest in the age of grace comes only by the supply of the Holy Spirit’s empowerment to enlighten the believer to understand the specifics of what should be done in that day and to do it. Personally, I suggest that the Lord’s Day should be set aside for Sabbath-rest if possible. It consists of a personal commitment to lay aside works of self-gratification and seek out ways and means of rest in the Lord. These include: physical rest from common work in order to worship, celebration of communion, ministry, and breaking bread with one another. Choices to do otherwise should be judged by no one as sin but are up to each individual to be fully convinced that their ideas about Sabbath-rest are biblical and sanctified before God.