

The Seventh Day, Finally  
Genesis 2:1-3

In 1924 Eric Liddell, known as the Flying Scotsman, participated in the Olympics held in China. He was scheduled to compete in the 100 and 200 meter races and the 400 meter relay and heavily favored to win. When the schedule of each race was made known in late 1923 qualifying events were held on Sunday. He made the decision known to the British Olympic committee that out of conviction for the Sunday being the Christian Sabbath he would not compete on those days. They appealed to the International Olympic committee to consider changing the race days only to be denied the request. He would not race on the day given to the Lord as a day for rest and worship according to the fourth commandment. Instead, he prepared for the 400 meter race, an event which brought him the gold medal.

His friend DP Thompson wrote later, "That decision there was no hope of changing. It was based on principles from which he never deviated a hair's breadth. Even in the Weihsien Internment Camp, where he was in charge of all sports and athletics, he refused to be responsible for planning Sunday sports."

Other athletes and coaches like Reggie White, Tim Tebow, Joe Gibbs, Tony Dungy, Kurt Warner and Curt Schilling do not share the same conviction that Liddell had and play their respective sport on Sunday.

But the decision isn't only one that is faced by athletes. Merchants like the Dan Cathy, founder of Chick-fil-a and the Green family, owners of Hobby Lobby have made the decision that none of the franchise businesses will be open on Sunday while others choose to stay open. They are personal decisions for sure. So, is there a right or wrong way to look at the Sabbath? Is Sunday the Christian Sabbath? Should Christians work on Sunday? Is it

a sin if they do?

The debate about the Sabbath has engendered a lot of controversy and debate for centuries. What does Scripture have to say?

We begin with our text in Genesis 2:1-3 where we see that the Sabbath is tied to the creation week.

The completion by the Sabbath

The consecration of the Sabbath

The consideration about the Sabbath

## I. THE COMPLETION BY THE SABBATH – v. 1

Your text may read that the heavens and the earth were finished or that they were completed. God was done with creating everything He had intended to make. That's the basic idea of the word. The word does not mean that He came to a point of being finished for the day or the week as if He punched a clock after 8 hours each day or that after 40 hours He was done for the week and would pick up where He left off after the weekend. He ceased from His work because there wasn't anything left to be done.

A student may say that he finished his homework, but that doesn't mean he has finished his course. He may say at the end of a semester that he has finished a particular course, but he has not completed his degree.

The word used here means that God had carried out to the full end all that He had intended to do and He did it in six days. Back to our student who at the end of all his studies can stand on the platform with his diploma and say that he is now finished, he's come to the end of it.

Now you might ask, if God is all powerful couldn't He have done it all in one day or one hour or in one minute with the snap of a finger? The answer is yes, He could have, but that's not what He did. Not only is the order of what He created each day important,

He also had a purpose for doing it in six days. We'll consider that in a moment, but suffice it to say now that six days or 7 if you include this day as well, provides for us what a week would look like and what our work pattern should look like.

The idea of completion is used in II Chronicles 8:16 regarding the temple. "All Solomon's work was carried out, from the day the foundation of the temple of the Lord was laid until its completion. So the temple of the Lord was finished."

In the New Testament we see the same idea of completion in the person and work of Jesus. John 17:4 "I have brought You glory on earth by completing the work You gave Me to do."

In John 19:30 while hanging on the cross Jesus says that His work was completed referring to His atoning sacrifice "When He had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that He bowed His head and gave up His spirit." There wasn't anything else that He could do to pay sins debt.

Hebrews 1:3 "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word. After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven." Sitting down next to the Father is an indication that He had completed His work of atoning for sin.

After six days, God ceased what He was doing because His work was complete. That was the seventh day.

Secondly, let's consider the consecration of the Sabbath.

## II. THE CONSECRATION OF THE SABBATH – vs. 2-3

I want you to notice two things that are absent from this passage that we find in the other six days of His creative work. The first is that there is no creative word spoken on day seven. We don't find "And

God said 'let there be' and it was so." It's another indication that God finished His work. He did not need to create a day for rest.

The second thing we notice missing here is that there is no mention of the "evening and morning". Some scholars suggest that this supports the day-age or long-day theory, that the seventh day is still going on.

These two verses stress two things. The first is that God's work was finished, completed, ended. The second is that God did the work. Ten times in two verses God is mentioned. Creation is all about what God did and that includes the Sabbath day. Here it is in the KJV. "And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it, because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made."

Our passage tells us there are two things which God did on this day.

The first thing is that He rested. Now that doesn't mean He was fatigued and needed a breather. He didn't need a cup of coffee or bottle of 5-hour energy. He wasn't tired.

Isaiah 40:28 "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary..."

Jeremiah 32:17 "Ah, Lord God! Behold, Thou hast made the heaven and the earth by Thy great power and outstretched arm, and there is nothing too hard for Thee."

God didn't need rest because He was exhausted, He rested because His work was done. Like the word finished, the thought in the word "rest" is that God ceased from His work.

Kent Hughes writes that "God's rest was one of

deep pleasure and satisfaction at the fruit of His labor.”

I look back at our corner sound booth and the work that Roger and Dick did in getting it done. Now it took more than six days, but I have to believe that when they finished their work, they sat back and rested taking pleasure and satisfaction in their work.

The second thing God did on this day was to bless it and made it holy or as the KJV says He sanctified it. That word means He set it apart. I said that on each creation day God made distinctions between what He created. There was the distinction between light and darkness or day and night; between the waters above and the waters below separated by the sky; between the land and sea and the vegetation comprised of plants and trees; between the greater light and the lesser light distinguishing the days and seasons and years; between the kinds of creatures in the sea and in the air; between the kinds of land creatures and between man making one a male and the other a female. God is now making a distinction between this day and the other six days. This was to be a day of rest, this was a day that was blessed, this was a day that was set apart. The cycle would be to work six days and rest one day, work six days and rest one day. It was to be a day set apart to God. It is a special day, set apart from all the others in which to give to God, to think about God.

So what is the proper view of the Sabbath for the Christian? Should it be Saturday or Sunday? Is it a sin to work on the Sabbath or on Sunday?

Let's take a look at what Scripture has to say as we give consideration about the Sabbath.

### III. THE CONSIDERATION ABOUT THE SABBATH

Let me first of all say that when we read Genesis 2:1-3 and then look at Exodus 20:8-11, the seventh day of the week or according to our calendar, Saturday, the seventh day as the Sabbath has never changed. Nowhere in Scripture does it make

another day the Sabbath. It is the seventh day.

The Hebrew word for Sabbath means to rest from labor. The Greek and English word is a transliteration of the Hebrew word and all mean a day of rest. According to both Genesis and Exodus the Sabbath day is the seventh day after working six days. To the Jews the Sabbath began at sunset on Friday and ended at sunset on Saturday after the pattern of Genesis 1 which reads that there was evening and morning the first day and so on.

What does the Old Testament have to say about the Sabbath as a day of rest?

#### A. The Old Testament Teachings

From Genesis 2 until the law given to Moses there is no mention of the Sabbath. Justin Martyr looks at the various righteous men like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek, and Abraham and states that there is no mention that they ever kept a Sabbath until Moses. Now just because Scripture is silent doesn't mean they didn't keep a day of rest. We can neither deny nor confirm it. It was not a command to them. What is clear is that the Sabbath did not become a focal point of the week until the law was given. Let me stress that while God did not command that man should keep the Sabbath before the giving of the law to Moses, the principle and pattern of working six days with a day of rest is evident from this passage.

One author writes that “While God rested on the seventh day of Creation, He did not command anyone to rest on that day until thousands of years later.”

Let's look at the command given to Israel.  
Exodus 20:8-11

The fourth commandment stipulates that they were to keep the Sabbath day holy. It was to be set apart for the purpose of rest. The explanation of why

they were to keep the Sabbath was to be taken from the pattern of God's Creative week, working six days and then resting on the seventh. The principle of the law was challenged one day when an Israelite was found picking up sticks on the Sabbath. It was clear from God's instruction that the man should be put to death for disobeying the law.

The Sabbath as a day of rest was also challenged when God gave them manna to eat. God told them that each morning they were to collect manna for that day to supply their need for food. On the sixth day He promised to give them enough manna for both the sixth and seventh day. Some folks didn't trust God. They went out on the Sabbath to collect manna and there wasn't any. It taught them not only to trust God, but that the day was a special day to honor God. And every year the land was to be given rest.

The law explained why they were to keep the Sabbath. A little later we read that the Sabbath was given to Israel as a sign of the covenant God was making with Israel.

Exodus 31:13-17

Keeping the Sabbath was a covenant sign between God and Israel. Nehemiah 9:14 indicates that they had not previously known about keeping the Sabbath holy until God made it known to them in the law. Let me be clear that the Sabbath was a command given to Israel. Nowhere in Scripture does it say that the Gentiles were commanded to keep the Sabbath.

In discussing a principle in Greek class our professor would say there are no exceptions to this rule. A week later he would say here's an exception. So while the Sabbath command was given to Israel to keep holy, and no Gentile nation was given this command to keep there was an exception. In Exodus 20:10 the instruction was that no one was to do any work: not children, not

slaves or servants, not animals, not even the foreigner in the gates.

Nehemiah 13:15-22a

Restricting the Gentiles within the Israelite borders from working on the Sabbath was a way of first honoring the Sabbath and second not being enticed to work by Gentiles and so break the Sabbath.

There was another reason why God gave the command to keep the Sabbath. It's found in Deuteronomy 5 where Moses restates the 10 commandments to the generation of Israelites who were about to enter the Promised Land. After restating the law in verses 12-14 Moses gives the reason for their need to observe this command. "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day." (v. 15)

God didn't give the command so that they would remember His creative work. He gave the command so they would remember their captivity in Egypt and the Lord's deliverance. The Sabbath became a weekly reminder of God's deliverance from bondage in Egypt. As a Christian, our gathering one day a week should also be a weekly reminder of our deliverance from the bondage of sin because Christ delivered us through His resurrection. There is no indication in the Old Testament that the Sabbath was intended for all mankind, only Israel, but let's see what the New Testament has to say.

## B. The New Testament Teachings

There are four important points to remember from the New Testament. The first is that whenever we see Christ appearing after the resurrection it is on the first day of the week which would be Sunday, not Saturday.

But before His resurrection we see Jesus and His disciples doing some things on the Sabbath that were considered controversial and in disobedience to the law, at least the law as outlined by the Pharisees. Jesus confronted them about their erroneous view of the Sabbath as being burdensome laws added to the intent of the law. He challenged their hypocrisy. They condemned Jesus for healing on the Sabbath and his disciples picking grain. But Jesus challenged their hypocrisy by reminding them that they also worked on the Sabbath by feeding and watering their animals. Even in the Old Testament they were to help free a neighbor's animal that had fallen into a ditch even if it was on the Sabbath.

In Mark 2:25-27 Jesus showed them their ignorance of the law in regard to the Sabbath and then stated in verse 28 that He was the Lord of the Sabbath implying that He was the one who created it and Master of it. He went on to say that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath reminding them of the true intent of the Sabbath, which was for mental, spiritual and physical restoration.

The second point is that the only mention of the Sabbath from Acts through Revelation is when Paul went into the synagogue to evangelize the Jews. He did so in order "that I might win Jews" (I Cor. 9:20). He went on the Sabbath to win the lost because that's when and where the Jews met.

The third point we find in Acts 18:6 where Paul states after being rejected by the Jews that he was going to the Gentiles. After that there is no mention of the Sabbath. He did speak of people meeting on the first day of the week.

The fourth point and the only exception is found in Colossians 2:16 where we are told not to judge anyone on what they eat, the religious festivals they keep, or the keeping of the Sabbath day. Essentially he's saying that if someone wants to keep the Sabbath, referring to the seventh day out of

conviction we are not to judge them. Otherwise the keeping of the Sabbath is not commanded in the New Testament.

To go a step further according to Colossians 2:14 (Ephesians 2:15) the Jewish Sabbath was abolished at the cross where Christ "cancelled the written code, with its regulations."

Paul says the same thing in Romans 14:5-6 "One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord."

In Galatians 4:9-10 Paul challenges the Christians with this "But now that you know God – or rather are known by God – how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles (referring to keeping the law because the Judaizers said they should)? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years."

In Romans 7:4-7 Paul taught that when a Jew came to Christ he died to the law. Paul kept the Sabbath only as an opportunity to share Christ with the Jews.

There is nothing stated by Jesus or the Apostles that indicates keeping the Sabbath is part of the New Covenant in Christ.

How about the early church fathers or other writings?

### C. The Early Church Fathers and Others

The early church fathers held to Sunday as a day to keep holy instead of the Sabbath. Justin Martyr writes "And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits."

He went on to write “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; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead.”

The Encyclopedia Britannica reads “Sunday, first day of the week; in Christianity, the Lord’s Day, the weekly memorial of Jesus Christ’s resurrection from the dead. The practice of Christians gathering together for worship on Sunday dates back to apostolic times...”

Philip Schaff in *History of The Christian Church* has this to say: “It appears, therefore, from the New Testament itself, that Sunday was observed as a day of worship, and in special commemoration of the resurrection, whereby the work of redemption was finished. The universal and uncontradicted Sunday observance in the second century can only be explained by the fact that it has its roots in apostolic practice.”

Notice he said practice and not command. While we see in the New Testament after the resurrection that Christians met every day for a while we also see that they met on the first day of the week. This is not a biblical command but the practice that has held since the beginning of the church age. Passages like Romans 14:5-6 and Colossians 2:16 give Christians the freedom to observe a day as special or every day as special. What should be of importance is that we worship and serve the Lord and that one day should be set aside so that our focus can be on Him taking into consideration that the principle of rest and reflection is important. It is a day to be renewed in body, mind and spirit. Christians are not obligated to keep the Sabbath, which is the seventh day of the week but gathering on the first day of the week is a good practice based on tradition. Just as the Jews would be reminded of their covenant with God through keeping the Sabbath by making it a holy day to Him and a

reminder that they were freed from Egyptian bondage so Christians meeting on the first day of the week are reminded of the New Covenant made with Christ through His shed blood and a reminder that we were freed from that bondage when Christ rose the first day of the week.

Hebrews 4:7 says that we shouldn’t harden our hearts if we hear His voice calling us to God’s eternal rest.

“There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from His.” (Hebrews 4:9-10)

We enter that rest by faith in Jesus Christ. If we are serious about the rest we have entered into through Him, then Hebrews 10:24-25 exhorts us not to forsake assembling together. Such a gathering is for the purpose of encouraging each other to do good works and loving each other and we are to do so until Christ returns. The whole day is a focus on the Lord in the day set aside for rest.

John Piper writes that “when we hallow God and focus our attention on Him, we receive more blessing than if we keep on busying ourselves seven days a week with secular affairs.”

I think he’s saying that if we want God’s blessing, we need to cease from work one day a week and focus time on the Lord. We have convinced ourselves into thinking that we don’t need a day of rest, a day to interact with the Lord. We rush to the service and then rush home because we have things to do or places to go or people to see. Take a step back and ask if this day and what I do in it really belongs to the Lord. That’s not to say we can’t do things outside of our gathering. Because of events in the week I will sometimes mow on a Sunday afternoon, but it’s a time I get to sit and think about the message or something else the Lord is teaching.

Some of you have to work on Sunday. If you didn’t, you might lose your job. The point in our passage is work 6 days and rest one day. I’m going

to be so bold as to say that your day of rest may not be on Sunday because of your work schedule. The point again of the passage is to have a day of rest.

Years ago I knew an engineer who worked for GM. We got into a discussion about all the overtime they were doing in the plant and he said machines weren't made to work all day every day. Even they need a day of rest. We weren't made to work every day and the Lord gave us a pattern for work in Genesis 2:1-3. When He finished His work He took the seventh as a day of rest. He blessed it and set it apart as a special day.

There are days after a message when I get to the back to greet you and Rich will say to me "you need to go home and rest". It's a reminder that I not only need to recuperate, something God didn't need, but I also need to go home and just spend more of it in His presence. The rest of our day should be a continuation of our time spent together here in worship. It is a day set apart for spending with God.

A Chinese scholar met his American host at a busy metro train station. The host said that if they hurried they could catch the next train and save three minutes. The scholar looked at his host and asked what significant thing would they do with three minutes.

God has given us a pattern to work six days and rest one. I'm not suggesting you can't do other things today; just consider that what you do should have God as your focus. After an extended period of busy responsibilities in ministry Jesus pulled His disciples aside and encouraged them to rest.