

# COMMENDATIONS

In this thorough defense of sabbatarianism, Jon English Lee captures insights from the entire theological encyclopedia—from exegetical and biblical theology to systematic and historical theology. In addition to fruitful discussions on issues as varied as typology, Puritan sabbatarianism, and the relevance of the Sabbath to embodiment, Lee anticipates and responds to thorny questions like these: Does the fourth commandment bind believers today? Why do we now celebrate the Sabbath on the first day of the week? And what did Paul mean in Colossians 2:16–17? Our understanding of the Sabbath, Lee demonstrates, has profound implications for ecclesiology, anthropology, and praxis. May the Lord use this helpful treatise to renew your delight in the Sabbath as well as your enjoyment of the God who graciously gave it to us (Isa. 58:13–14).

—**Joel R. Beeke**  
**Chancellor and Professor,**  
**Homiletics & Systematic Theology,**  
**Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary**  
**Pastor, Heritage Reformed Congregation,**  
**Grand Rapids, Michigan**

With the growing, popular interest in a regular rest for God’s wearied and stressed people, Jon English Lee’s fine work is both timely and a much-appreciated resource for those who want to know how the biblical concept and practice of rest developed over the course of several millennia. Two features stand out among his many contributions: First, Dr. Lee pioneeringly defines *creation ordinance*. Second, he robustly defends his proposal that *rest is a creation ordinance*. I encourage you to read this excellent book!

—Gregg R. Allison  
Professor of Christian Theology,  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary  
Secretary, Evangelical Theological Society  
Author, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian  
Doctrine; Sojourners and Strangers:  
The Doctrine of the Church*

In a secular age in which neither Sunday nor marriage are viewed as singularly special, much less sacred, Jon English Lee argues that the New Testament authors, and the Lord of the Sabbath Himself, Jesus Christ, reaffirm the set-apart seventh day as an enduring creation ordinance (though without its original ceremonial requirements)—and a type of the eternal Sabbath rest (Heb. 4:8–11) that is the blessed hope of Christians in all times and places. This is a rigorous exegetical, historical, and systematic theological study that simultaneously gives rest to work-weary twenty-first century souls.

—Kevin J. Vanhoozer  
Research Professor of Systematic Theology,  
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

This fresh study of the Lord's Day in both Scripture and church history is most welcome. It helpfully fleshes out a vital change in church history, namely, the shift in corporate worship from the seventh day to what was called "the Lord's Day" from the New Testament era onwards. One may not agree with all of the facets and nuances of Dr. Lee's discussion of the meaning of this temporal shift, yet it cannot be gainsaid that his study is thorough, accurate, and an important addition to the literature on this subject.

—**Michael A.G. Haykin**  
**Professor of Church History,**  
**The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary**

How thankful I am for Jon English Lee's defense of the Christian Sabbath! He shows so unmistakably that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance. This leads and must lead directly to the doctrine of the Christian Sabbath. My prayer is that God will give this treatise great usefulness and impact. May many who follow the 1689 until this point and hesitate be brought all the way into the doctrine and practice of the Christian Sabbath!

—**Sam Waldron**  
**President, Covenant Baptist Theological Seminary**

To isolate one reason to read this book is impossible. Jon English Lee illuminates the question of the creation/moral law status of the Sabbath command and, in quest of clarity, gives a masterful synthesis of biblical hermeneutics, historical theology, benevolent polemical engagement, covenantal development, law/gospel interaction, typology, and the culmination of all this in the work of Christ. The book is highly recommended because it is a clear, fraternal discussion of an issue vital to biblical worship and knowledge of how Christ's first and second coming consummate our freedom from the curse and fulfill Christ's promise, "I will give you rest."

—Tom J. Nettles  
**Retired Professor of Historical Theology,  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary**  
*Author, **By His Grace and for His Glory**  
and **Praise Is His Gracious Choice***

THERE REMAINS A  
**SABBATH REST**  
FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD



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FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD

JON ENGLISH LEE



THERE REMAINS A SABBATH REST FOR THE  
PEOPLE OF GOD

*A Biblical, Theological, and Historical Defense of Sabbath Rest as  
a Creation Ordinance*

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*I dedicate this book to my lovely and patient wife, without whose support this entire project would have been unrestful.*



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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

2LBC	Second London Baptist Confession of Faith
ANF	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
AUP	Andrews University Press
BDF	Blass, F., A. Debrunner, and R. W. Funk, ed., <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i>
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
MHT	Moulton, J. H., and N. Turner, <i>A Grammar of New Testament Greek</i> , vol. 3
NIDNTTE	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> , ed. Moisés Silva
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
NPNF1	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> , Series 1
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith
WLC	Westminster Larger Catechism





# FOREWORD

In 1977, having just left Presbyterianism and having adopted a Reformed Baptist position, I discovered that there was a controversy brewing among Calvinistic Baptists about covenant theology and the place and relevance of the Ten Commandments to be taught to Christians for sanctification. A lot of attention was focused upon the fourth commandment as a test case for whether the Ten Commandments, as the moral law of God reflecting His nature, continues in the new covenant for Christians. The proposed position was that no law from the Old Testament remains in effect unless it is specifically commanded or repeated in the New Testament, including the fourth commandment. Therefore, in this new view, there is no Christian Sabbath commanded and, perhaps, not even a required Lord's Day. Thus, all days are alike now, and there is no particular day designated for worship and rest in the New Testament. A follower of this view once sought to join our church on the condition that Wednesday night prayer meeting would fulfill the membership requirement for weekly worship. Of course, I denied his condition to join. There is a Lord's Day.

I was introduced to this issue when one of the founders of "New Covenant Theology," and a helpful friend to my acceptance of credobaptism, visited my church to preach on assurance. He did a wonderful job. However, a member called me to meet this dear brother at the member's house for a discussion. I gladly agreed. In the discussion, the preacher dismissed the validity of the fourth commandment for Christians today, thus nullifying the Ten Commandments as a body of moral law for Christians. His argument was that the Sabbath commandment is entirely ceremonial and no longer applies in

the new covenant. Therefore, we do not have to preach the Ten Commandments as the moral law for the Christian life because to be “under grace” was to be Spirit-led, not law-led. Of course, this is a false dichotomy, since the New Testament teaches both. In this view, we are to emphasize the Spirit working in us in the moment rather than emphasize obeying the Ten Commandments in sanctification by the help of the Spirit. The latter view was called “legalism,” which is a misapplication of the term. Legalism is a works-salvation that Paul rejects for justification; yet he affirms the moral law as a guide, under grace, for sanctification (Rom. 2:12–29; 7:7–8:4; 13:8–10). The Reformed view has always taught that, being justified by faith alone once-for-all and free from the condemnation of the law, we seek to obey God’s moral law under grace from a heart of love to God. After all, it is a reflection of His nature for us to imitate.

In order to support his position, my friend advocated that Christ did away with the Sabbath commandment in Matthew 12, when Jesus approved the disciples’ plucking ears of grain on the Sabbath day (working). However, the Mosaic law permitted one to walk through a neighbor’s field and to pick the heads of grain (Deut. 23:25) with no prohibition on the Sabbath. It was the Pharisees’ man-made rabbinical laws that defined picking as “reaping” and rubbing the grain as “threshing,” so that one could not do this “work” on the Sabbath day. Therefore, they accused Jesus and His disciples of breaking the Sabbath command.

However, Jesus corrected the man-made Sabbath laws of the Pharisees, not *the* Sabbath law. Rather, He taught them that it is lawful to do mercy on the Sabbath day and yet not break the commandment. He taught that the disciples did not sin in this any more than when Jesus healed on the Sabbath. In all, the Lord taught the Pharisees that it is lawful to do good on the

Sabbath with acts of mercy. He did not negate the Sabbath but rather taught how to fulfill it properly. Now, according to the Great Commission, I must teach Christians to do all that Christ commanded, including how to practice the Sabbath day.

I asked my friend if he was saying that either Jesus or His disciples broke the Sabbath command with Jesus's approval? His answer was, "That's an interesting question, isn't it?" I was surprised and disheartened by his answer. I replied, "If Jesus approved of or broke the fourth commandment before the cross, as a Jew still under the old covenant law that He fulfilled, then He sinned and disqualified Himself from being the perfect law-keeping atonement for our sins." He did not accept my answer. He is a dear brother to me, but he and his followers are wrong in their exegesis and application of Matthew 12.

So the question of the morality of a weekly Sabbath to guide the Christian and the church to a full day of rest and worship, as well as its connection to the New Testament Lord's Day, is part of a greater issue of the law and gospel theology as taught by Luther, Calvin, the Puritans, and the great Reformed confessions, versus the new covenant theology of today.

Is there any day of the week ordained for Christian worship, or is there no day ordained in Scripture? And if there is a weekly day, called the Lord's Day, is it a Christian Sabbath? How should it be observed? In the book you are about to read, Jon English Lee takes such questions head-on and seeks to answer them biblically. Therefore, I believe either side, both the traditional Sabbatarian position or the non-Sabbatarian position, will be challenged and/or helped by this work. It is my pleasure to commend it for your reading. This expansion of his doctoral dissertation shows hermeneutical consistency, careful exegesis, comprehensive research on various positions, and

careful engagement with past and present scholarship. He also applies biblical theology and systematic covenant theology to his argument.

Lee's method is irenic, comprehensive, and effortless to read. He surveys the major biblical texts and employs consistent exegetical and contextual theology for each text. He clears the air concerning biblical typology, including not only historical correspondence and heightened fulfillment from Old Testament to New Testament, but also the application of covenant theology. In all, I would say that this work is a necessary read for any who explore the questions concerning the creation Sabbath, the fourth commandment, and the Lord's Day, and their implications for the Christian and the church today under the new covenant.

Considering both the traditional sabbatarian view and current non-sabbatarian views, Dr. Lee advocates the creation Sabbath as a continued "creation ordinance" for mankind, similar to the creation ordinance of marriage, which Christ and Paul both argued as normative. Lee sees the Sabbath creation ordinance as a type to the fulfillment of the antitype, the eternal Sabbath rest, promised by Jesus and Paul (Matt. 11:28; Heb. 4:9). Having done that, he proves that the Sabbath idea is broader than the fourth commandment given to Israel alone for a limited time. Thus, the "not yet" eternal Sabbath rest is "already" inaugurated by Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath, in whom we rest salvifically by faith. The New Testament Lord's Day, the first day of the week when Christ rose from the dead, is a day of worship and rest under the new covenant, clearly practiced by the early church. This fulfills the continued creation Sabbath rest established by God's moral example for man in creation: six days of labor and one day of rest, setting a seven-day week for mankind. The Sabbath was made for man and sanctified for man at creation until its antitype is

consummated in the eternal Sabbath rest (Heb. 4:8–11). In between those times, man is obligated to work six days and to rest one day, even under the new covenant.

The contemporary evangelical erosion of the Lord's Day into a couple of hours on Sunday, the rest of the day having no particular guidance or purpose, has undermined the evangelical movement to the virtues of a whole day of physical rest, corporate worship, family togetherness, family worship, scriptural discussion, visitation of the sick and widows, and Christian fellowship. Today, after going to church, it is common that each one in the church and family goes his own way with various activities the rest of the day. Each one does what is right in his own eyes. Such an erroneous view can only lead to spiritual decline, family splintering, and congregational disunity. In fact, many churches already have split over this issue.

Establishing the Sabbath as a creation ordinance, fulfilled finally in the eternal Sabbath rest (Heb. 4:9), Dr. Lee shows that the fourth commandment is based upon the creation Sabbath of God and that the Lord's Day was practiced by the early church on the first day (or eighth day) and continues as a moral obligation under the new covenant of Jesus Christ. He makes a strong case for the Lord's Day as the Christian's fulfillment of that creation ordinance as an imitation of God's moral nature as He rested on the seventh day to admire and to delight in His "good" work on the first six days. God sanctified the Sabbath day for Himself and also for mankind. Jesus's several appearances to the disciples on the first day of the week—His day of resurrection—coupled with the fact that Pentecost was a first day (eighth day) rest, followed by the many meetings on the first day by the church in Acts, establishes the Lord's Day as the ordained

THERE REMAINS A SABBATH REST FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD

day of worship for the Christian church and a day of physical rest and spiritual refreshment for the other six days of the week.

I commend Jon English Lee for this helpful work and pray that the reader will come closer to a biblical clarity concerning his or her worship and rest on the Lord's Day, and that the churches of the Lord Jesus Christ will make good use of the Lord's Day for corporate worship, spiritual growth, close fellowship, and bodily refreshment to live for Christ as Lord.

—Fred A. Malone, PhD

# PREFACE

The doctrine of the Christian Sabbath seems to have fallen on hard times. To many modern ears, *sabbatarianism* is a foreign and cumbersome word for something that is meant to be “a delight” (Isa. 58:13). What you have before you is a defense of one crucial aspect of the doctrine of the Sabbath: whether weekly Sabbath rest is to be grounded in Genesis 2.

The theme for this book was proposed to me by a dear friend and mentor, Tom Hicks, who has provided a wealth of ideas throughout this long process. Another great source of encouragement was my doctoral advisor, Gregg Allison. He prodded me to think deeply on the implications of my thesis and to explore other areas of theology that I hadn’t even considered.

Finally, and most important, my wife has been a constant source of support. She had to listen to me drone on at the dinner table about the same subjects for months (years?). Without her kind words and her thankless labors at home, I could not have finished this work in the time that I did.

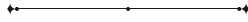
The writing process was a long and labor-intensive project. Even now, I feel that I have not even come close to plumbing the depths of God’s grace that is manifested in the Sabbath themes of Scripture. Nevertheless, this project has been a wonderful means of God opening my eyes to see the immensity of His provision for me. If nothing else, it has made me long for the final Sabbath rest to come.

—Jon English Lee





## CHAPTER 1



# SABBATH REST AS A CREATION ORDINANCE

### INTRODUCTION

Augustine famously wrote that our hearts remain restless until we find our rest “in thee,” the Lord.<sup>1</sup> In a fallen world, such restlessness of heart characterizes every person’s inner life. Indeed, when one combines that restlessness with the frenetic pace of modern society, Jesus’s promise of “rest” (Matt. 11:29) proves even sweeter.

The theme of rest permeates the pages of Scripture. God rested at the end of His creative activity, and He promised the Israelites rest in their own land across the Jordan. Jesus promises rest to the weary and heavy-laden. The writer to the Hebrews uses the theme of rest as an encouragement for perseverance. Yet church history is filled with scholars debating the nature and requirements of rest and Sabbath, and how they relate to the law in general. In contemporary theology, some have focused exclusively on the fulfillment of the law, arguing that the requirement to observe weekly Sabbath rest is done away with entirely. Others, maintaining that Sabbath rest is grounded in creation and still binds believers, focus too much

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<sup>1</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin, Penguin Classics (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), I.1.21.

attention on a list of rights and wrongs and forget that the yoke of Christ is light.

Coinciding with those debates has been a growing interest in Reformed theology. Young people are learning of the deep theological roots that anchor their Reformed traditions. Many are investigating the Scriptures for themselves in order to validate the sabbatarian articles in their denominations' confessions. This renewed interest in the biblical calls for rest necessitates a clear biblical understanding of what is required of Christians.<sup>2</sup> Part of that clear understanding is a proper interpretation of the creation ordinances of Genesis 1 and 2. Is there any prescriptive element within God's concluding act during the creation week, His rest on the seventh day? How one answers that question has significant implications for both the church and for individuals.

## **PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK**

We will explore those implications in this book, particularly the areas of (1) weekly Sabbath rest, (2) creation ordinance, (3) biblical-theological evidence, (4) historical evidence, (5) ecclesiological implications, and (6) personal applications.

### ***The Propriety of Weekly Sabbath Rest***

First, I argue for the propriety of weekly Sabbath rest. This means that the normal pattern to be followed by humanity is a week consisting of seven twenty-four-hour days, six of which

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Gavin Ortlund, "7 Ways to Work Hard at Rest," Gospel Coalition Blog, March 3, 2018, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/7-ways-to-work-hard-at-rest/>.

are spent in work while the other is devoted to rest.<sup>3</sup> This rest includes implications for both the individual and the church that will be discussed and defined in subsequent chapters.

### *Sabbath Rest as a Creation Ordinance*

Second, this book defends weekly Sabbath rest as a *creation ordinance*. For our purposes, a creation ordinance is defined as a general pattern established in Genesis 1–2 that becomes normative, but not uniformly observed, with any exceptions to the pattern contributing to the pattern’s fulfillment; moreover, the pattern must be confirmed, not negated or abrogated, by later biblical revelation.<sup>4</sup> Each of these criteria will be defended in turn.

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<sup>3</sup> My default interpretation of the creation narrative is literal twenty-four-hour days. However, I do not think that a reader must agree with me on this point in order to agree with the overall thesis of this book. J. I. Packer frames the discussion properly: “Whether the six days should be understood as 144 of our hours, or as six vast geological epochs, or as a pictorial projection of the fact (the *what*) of creation that gives no information about the time (the *when*) or the method (the *how*) of creation is an interpretive question that need not concern us now. What matters for us here is that on the basis of this presentation God directs that each seventh day be kept as a day of rest from the labors of the previous six. . . . The day is to be kept ‘holy’—that is, it is to be used for honoring God the creator by worship, as well as for refreshing human creatures by the break from their otherwise unending toil.” J. I. Packer, “Leisure and Life-Style: Leisure, Pleasure, and Treasure,” in *God and Culture: Essays in Honor of Carl F. H. Henry*, ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 363.

<sup>4</sup> In fact, I could find very few actual definitions for the term *creation ordinance*. Walter Kaiser defines creation ordinances as depicting “the constitution of things as they were intended to be from the Creator’s hand,” in *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 31. While Kaiser does include Sabbath rest as a creation ordinance, he does not include criteria for determining what is or is not a creation ordinance. See chapter 2 for a discussion of the historical views related to the category of “creation ordinance” and its synonyms.

A creation ordinance is a pattern that is normative; that is, all of mankind is ordinarily expected to follow the pattern.<sup>5</sup> For example, Genesis 1 contains the ordinance of marriage. The pattern is that a man and a woman are to be united in a monogamous, heterosexual relationship that produces offspring. Likewise, the ordinance of work has the normal pattern for mankind to diligently work for six days and rest for one.

These patterns are not uniformly observed. While marriage is the norm for most of mankind, nowhere in Scripture is marriage demanded of anyone. Instead, the freedom to remain single is preserved (1 Cor. 7:7–8). The same is the case with work; all those who are able to work are expected to do so following God’s pattern (2 Thess. 3:10).<sup>6</sup>

Exceptions to the creation pattern must fulfill and contribute to the pattern’s fulfillment. People who do not personally follow the pattern should live in such a way as to promote the pattern’s normal observance. Returning to the pattern of marriage found in Genesis 1, people who choose to remain single are free to do so. However, they should live in such a way as to promote the normal pattern of healthy marriage and procreation that is found in the creation account. In terms of the creation ordinance of work, the normal pattern

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<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the term *mankind* in this book will refer to all human beings, both male and female.

<sup>6</sup> The basic definition of *work* used in this book will be “all that we are obliged to do to meet our physical and social needs.” Leland Ryken, *Redeeming the Time: A Christian Approach to Work and Leisure* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 16. He likewise says that “in practical human terms, the primary purpose of work is to provide for human needs, both our own and those of others” (Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 229). According to Ryken, work “serves three main purposes in the world. It exists to provide for human needs, to fulfill our humanity, and to glorify God. These goals, in turn, are standards by which we can weigh the worthiness of work” (Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 231–32).

is for humans to faithfully engage in a vocation. Should someone be unable to work for some reason (e.g., a physical or mental disability), he would not necessarily be sinning by not working. However, he should live in such a way that promotes the normal pattern of work among others (e.g., encouraging others to follow the biblical pattern of work, or not unnecessarily distracting others from their work).

Finally, a creation ordinance must be confirmed, not abrogated or negated, by later biblical revelation. Certain rules or patterns found in Scripture have been done away with by later revelation (e.g., the old covenant sacrificial system). However, for something to be classified as a creation ordinance, later revelation must in no way negate the pattern. For example, the creation ordinance of monogamous, heterosexual marriage is affirmed by Jesus in Matthew 19:4–6.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, Paul affirms the goodness of the creational pattern of work in 1 Thessalonians 4:11. Again, a creation ordinance is a general pattern established in Genesis 1–2 that becomes normative, but not uniformly observed, with any exceptions to the pattern contributing to the pattern’s fulfillment; the pattern must be confirmed, not negated or abrogated, by later biblical revelation.

On the importance of the question before us—whether weekly Sabbath is a creation ordinance—British New

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<sup>7</sup> This does not mean that later revelation cannot give further meaning attached to the pattern. For example, Paul teaches that marriage is a picture of Christ and His church (Eph. 5:22–32). See also 1 Cor. 7; Eph. 5:25–33. While Christ does say that the human pattern for marriage will not continue in the eschaton (Matt. 22:30), the pattern will remain, albeit in a transformed way. Christ will be married to His bride for eternity, transforming and fulfilling the picture that human marriage always portrayed. See chapter 2 for more discussion on this fulfillment.

Testament scholar Andrew Lincoln writes, “If the hypothesis of the Sabbath as a creation ordinance could be established, then, whatever the temporary nature of the Sabbath as part of the Mosaic covenant, the appeal could still be made to the permanence of the mandate for one day of rest as inherent to humanity made in the image of God.”<sup>8</sup> Likewise, “All the problems relating to our subject [Sabbath rest] hinge on the question whether or not the Sabbath is a creation ordinance. If the Westminster Confession is correct in stating that, by God’s design, one day out of seven is to be kept holy unto the Lord, and that this day was the Sabbath of the Old Covenant and Sunday since the Resurrection, the area of discussion is limited to minor issues.”<sup>9</sup>

### ***Biblical-Theological Evidence***

Biblical-theological evidence affirms that weekly Sabbath rest is a normative pattern for mankind. As will be demonstrated, God’s rest at the end of the creation week sets the pattern for the remainder of creation to follow. That pattern, though enjoined by various additional rules (e.g., Old Testament Sabbath regulations, which have been fulfilled by Christ), remains in effect until the second coming of Christ.<sup>10</sup> The New Testament evidence, typological patterns, apostolic teachings, and early church examples all confirm this interpretation.

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, “From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical and Theological Perspective,” in *From Sabbath To Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1999), 346.

<sup>9</sup> R. B. Gaffin et al., “Supplement No. 5, Committee on the Sabbath Issue,” in *Acts of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod—Australia 1972* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Ecumenical Synod Secretariat, [1972]), 146–147.

<sup>10</sup> Some might argue that the weekly rhythm of work and rest extends even into the eschaton. This idea will be addressed further later.

### *Evidence from Church History*

There is significant evidence in church history for the interpretation of Sabbath rest as a creation ordinance. The church in the early, medieval, Reformation, post-Reformation, and modern eras contains prominent leaders who either teach explicitly that God's creation-week rest is normative, or teach in a way that would not contradict such an interpretation.<sup>11</sup>

### *Ecclesiological Implications*

The interpretation of Sabbath rest as a creation ordinance has many implications for the church, including in the areas of Sabbath as a means of grace, the corporate assembly, natural law, liberty of conscience, and social implications of Sabbath rest.

### *Personal Implications*

Because creation ordinances are patterns for universal observance, Sabbath rest affects other aspects of life than just the household of God, including the relationship between rest and faith and legitimate or illegitimate uses of Sabbath time.

## **BACKGROUND**

My interest in this subject grew out of a practical theology question posed by one of my pastors: "Why can you discipline a church member for lack of attendance on Sundays?" The answer was not readily apparent to me. I gave him several

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<sup>11</sup> The language of "creation ordinance" is a relatively recent phenomenon. Even though previous generations did not use such language, they did believe that there are some prescriptive elements for new covenant believers that can be found in the creation account.

responses, but I soon realized that my answers were hermeneutically and theologically inconsistent.

The Sabbath issue is appealing to me because of its difficulty and its practicality. The breadth of the study requires interaction with many voices. The question before us involves nearly every area of biblical investigation (hermeneutics, exegesis, and biblical, historical, and systematic theology) and has immediate impact on the life of a local congregation. The practicality of the question also makes it worth further study. Does the sabbatarian pastor wrongly bind the conscience of his congregants? Or is a non-sabbatarian wrong if he or she chooses not to worship weekly? Because of the immediate and universal impact of the conclusions, the Sabbath issue is worthy of fresh study.

In the past hundred years there has been an abundance of works published on the subject.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the one that most brought the issue into the forefront was *Sunday* by Willy Rordorf. He argues that Sunday has become a day of rest and worship parallel to the Old Testament Sabbath.<sup>13</sup> This interpretation holds that the pattern of six days of work

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<sup>12</sup> Much of this literature review is supplemented by the helpful surveys found in Henry Sturcke, "Encountering the Rest of God: How Jesus Came to Personify the Sabbath" (PhD diss., University of Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 2005); D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Willy Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968). This position has also been affirmed by J. Francke, *Van Sabbat Naar Zondag* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Ton Bolland, 1973); Roger T. Beckwith and Wilfrid Stott, *This Is the Day: The Biblical Doctrine of the Christian Sunday in Its Jewish and Early Church Setting* (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1978); Joseph A. Pipa, *The Lord's Day* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1997).



followed by one day of rest, a pattern that is grounded in creation and incorporated into Mosaic law, is formally presented as moral law in Scripture. Furthermore, just as the seventh day was the appropriate Sabbath day under the old covenant, the resurrection of Christ on the first day effected the change to Sunday for new covenant believers. Sunday, or Sabbath, observance is a type or shadow of the rest that God's people will enjoy in the new heavens and new earth.

Paul Jewett argues similarly but is much more reserved about declaring that the Sabbath day was changed to Sunday.<sup>14</sup> Because he believes that the New Testament evidence for a change of day is slight, he contends that Sunday worship was the practice adopted by the early church and is therefore the pattern that should be followed today.

The work that may have brought the most interest to the subject was Samuele Bacchiocchi's *From Sabbath to Sunday*.<sup>15</sup> That book is his doctoral dissertation from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, even though he himself was a Seventh-day Adventist. He argues that the Jerusalem church observed Sabbath on the seventh day until the destruction of the city in AD 135. Sunday observance, he explains, did not come about until the reign of Hadrian (AD 117–135), when the Roman persecution of the Jews led the Christians to choose another day of worship. The chosen day, Sunday, was much

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<sup>14</sup> Paul K. Jewett, *The Lord's Day: A Theological Guide to the Christian Day of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971).

<sup>15</sup> Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977); Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness: A Theological Study of the Good News of the Sabbath for Today* (Berrien Springs, MI: Tesar, 1980).

more palatable to the Romans because of their cultic sun-god activities on that day.

Perhaps the work with the most influence in conservative English-speaking churches is *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, edited by D. A. Carson. This work is the fruit of a symposium sponsored by the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research in Cambridge, England, in 1973. The authors argue that the New Testament does not develop a “transfer theology,” that the Bible does not teach that Old Testament Sabbath-keeping is the norm from creation onward, and that the moral/ceremonial/civil law distinctions are illegitimate.<sup>16</sup> Positively, they believe that Sunday worship began in the first century, contra Bacchiocchi.

One of the latest works on the subject is *The Sabbath Complete* by Terrence O'Hare, which argues that sabbatarianism “is a form of traditional pietism and that the acceptance of the fully ceremonial nature of the Sabbath, though shocking to some, is actually Christ-honoring.”<sup>17</sup> O'Hare rejects the idea of a Sabbath Day being a creation ordinance yet retains the traditional categories of moral, ceremonial, and civil law. Upholding the traditionally high view of the law in Reformed theology, O'Hare argues that Christ Himself replaces the Sabbath:

The Mediator is on the first table [of the Decalogue] because, unlike Moses, Christ truly comes from God and is fully God. Yet Christ, by becoming fully man, joins with man to make him complete. Man cannot become complete simply by keeping the law, but he

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<sup>16</sup> Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, 16.

<sup>17</sup> Terrence D. O'Hare, *The Sabbath Complete: And the Ascendency of First-Day Worship* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), xiii.

must experience through faith a life-altering union with Christ. The ceremonial Sabbath is the *evangelion* within the Ten Commandments that addresses the redemption of man. It is Christ Himself who takes the place of the Sabbath in the Decalogue.<sup>18</sup>

Seeing the Sabbath command in the Decalogue as ceremonial, and therefore abrogated, O'Hare ends up in practically the same place as Carson's volume. The main difference is that O'Hare is trying to retain the tri-fold division of the law that is enshrined in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church's confessional documents.

The previously discussed works represent the main influences in the sabbatarian debates. While other arguments have been produced, including a whole range of volumes from a Seventh-day Adventist position, the ones listed above have attained much greater influence and typically contain a higher level of scholarship.

Amidst all the ink that has been spilled on the subject, however, there are just a handful of discussions of the Sabbath as a creation ordinance. John Murray provides an extended exploration, but he gives very little criteria for determining what a creation ordinance is.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Greg Beale offers a defense of God's rest in creation as being prescriptive. While his work is thorough, it is focused on tracing certain themes throughout the New Testament.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> O'Hare, *The Sabbath Complete*, 289.

<sup>19</sup> John Murray, *Principles of Christian Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (London: Tyndale Press, 1957), 82–106.

<sup>20</sup> G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 775–801.

## THERE REMAINS A SABBATH REST FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD

This book seeks to advance the discussion by proposing a fresh biblical-theological and historical investigation into whether or not weekly Sabbath rest may be called a creation ordinance. By combining several fields of study (e.g., biblical studies, systematic theology, hermeneutics) and seeking to interact with many sources, my goal is to synthesize a theological formulation on a topic that has divided so many for so long.

Historically, sabbatarians have argued for Sabbath rest being a creation ordinance and non-sabbatarians have argued the opposite. This book offers a third option that grounds weekly rest in creation (showing some similarities with sabbatarians) but also highlights the radical transformation of rest found in Christ (showing some similarity with non-sabbatarians while avoiding the notion that fulfillment in Christ removes the biblical ethic of weekly rest).