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# The Canadian *Lord's Day* Association

## Advanced Bible Correspondence Course Lesson 38: The Law of God – Fourth Commandment

### LORD'S DAY 38

**Q. 103. WHAT DOES GOD REQUIRE IN THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT?**

**ANSWER: FIRST, THAT THE MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL AND THE SCHOOLS BE MAINTAINED (A); AND THAT I, ESPECIALLY ON THE SABBATH, THAT IS, ON THE DAY OF REST, DILIGENTLY FREQUENT THE CHURCH OF GOD (B) TO HEAR HIS WORD (C), TO USE THE SACRAMENTS (D), PUBLICLY TO CALL UPON THE LORD (E), AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE RELIEF OF THE POOR (F), AS BECOMES A CHRISTIAN. SECONDLY, THAT ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE I CEASE FROM MY EVIL WORKS, AND YIELD MYSELF TO THE LORD, TO WORK BY HIS HOLY SPIRIT IN ME; AND THUS BEGIN IN THIS LIFE THE ETERNAL SABBATH (G).**

(A) TITUS 1:5, II TIM. 3:14, I COR. 9:13&14, II TIM. 2:2, 3:15; (B) PSALM 40:9&10, 68:26, ACTS 2:42; (C) I TIM. 4:13, (D) I COR. 11:33; (E) I TIM. 2:1, I COR. 14:16; (F) I COR. 16:2; (G) ISAIAH 66:23

### **Keeping the Lord's Day holy**

The fourth commandment concerns the Lord's Day, the weekly day of rest. The Old Testament Sabbath was founded in creation. We read in Genesis 2:3: *"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."* God made that day a special holy day, set apart from the other days of the week.

Working, even by slaves, or strangers residing among the Israelites was not permitted on that day. The purpose for the institution of this day was first of all, to be a day of reflection on the greatness and glory of God's work, in order to honour Him. This teaches us to depend upon God, since we are indebted for our lives and all our goods on our Creator, not ourselves. Secondly, it separates us from all earthly worries for one day, and gives an opportunity to be occupied with the affairs of His Kingdom, to honour, praise and serve Him, and, in particular, to listen to the proclamation of His Word.

### **The seventh day and the first day**

In New Testament time, the seventh day was changed to the first day of the week. For Christians, Sunday has become the Lord's day, because of the resurrection of Christ from the dead on that day. Is this shift from the seventh to the first day of the week proper? Christ met with His disciples on the first day of the week, immediately after His resurrection. And a week later, He met them

again on the first day of the week. But did not Paul go to the synagogue on the Sabbath day? Yes, in the period of transition, when the gospel first had to be brought in the synagogue, he visited the gathering of the Jews on the last day of the week. However, when Christian congregations came into existence separate from the synagogue, they came together on the first day of the week. This is evident, by Paul requesting the gathering of gifts on this day (I Cor. 16:2). And, for as far as we can retrace in the historical writings, the Christian church already in the first centuries observed the first day as the day of rest.

There is symbolism in shifting from the last to the first day. The Old Testament Sabbath on the last day of the week points to the day of rest that followed God's work in creation. It points out that we should merit the rest by living according to the law and by doing good works. However, the New Testament day of rest, on the first day of the week, points to the work of Christ. He merited that rest, which we receive out of grace. Therefore we may begin the week with a day of rest. It is the rest of the eternal Sabbath, from which we may now already begin to live and which gives us strength and hope for all the other days of the week.

### **The gathering together of the congregation**

The Lord gave us six days to do our work, to provide for the nourishing of our body. However, He Himself desires to take care of nourishing our souls, by calling us together as a congregation on the day of rest to hear His Word. This is our spiritual food, without which we will wither away. The Western world, which is obsessed by money and pleasure-seeking, may have materialistic prosperity, but it will always be at the expense of spiritual wellbeing.

The Lord requires us, if possible, to diligently come together on the Lord's day. The congregation of Israel after its captivity (in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) gathered twice on the Sabbath in the synagogue. Jesus also, *"as His custom was, went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read."* (Isa. 61:1-3). In the first Christian congregations, the Old Testament was read in the weekly gatherings. God's Word was explained and psalms were sung. In this way the congregation was taught and edified, built up in the knowledge of and faith in Jesus Christ. Paul exhorts, *"When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying"* (I Corinthians 14:26). The epistles, written by the apostles (which are now included in the New Testament), were also read and discussed. These epistles were exchanged, as we read, *"And when this epistle is read among you, cause it to be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea"* (Colossians 4:16). The Catechism says, "especially on the Sabbath," because also during the week there are sometimes gatherings of the congregation.

The sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Supper take place in the public gatherings of the congregation, on the Lord's day. And the leader/minister, on behalf of the congregation, prays for the needs both in and outside the

congregation. We read of Paul and Silas *“And on the Sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made” (Acts 16:13).*

Also our gifts (which we earned during the week) are gathered on the Lord’s day, so that the church services and ministry can be maintained, and assistance can be given to all who need help in and outside of the congregation. Paul asked the congregation at Corinth to have the collection of gifts taken on the first day of the week during the service for the needy of the “mother church” at Jerusalem. *“Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him” (I Corinthians 16:2).*

### **Free time on the Lord’s day**

There is some time left after the gatherings of the congregation. We may use that time with our family, singing together, talking with our children about many things including the sermon and what has been read in God’s Word. What an oasis of calm Sunday can then be in the bustle of the week! We may and must let our daily work be left untouched. This does not mean that we can then go out together. The church service should affect the entire day, for the entire Sunday remains the Lord’s day. It is also appropriate for personal reading, in quietness, of a portion of the Bible or some other spiritual literature.

### **Looking forward to the re-creation on the Lord’s day**

The Lord’s day serves as a reflection upon the creation *and* upon the resurrection of Christ as the beginning of the re-creation, but also to look forward to the completion of the re-creation. One day it will be the eternal Sabbath. Then all God’s children will be, as it were, in God’s house, forever delivered from sin, praising, serving, and honouring God.

The weekly Lord’s day must be a preparation for the weekly and for the eternal “day of the Lord”. How? By continually resisting all kinds of sinful inclinations and sinful deeds; by a prayer in faith, fighting against the satanic powers which want to lead us astray; by a continual reading of God’s Word, in order that the Lord may work in us through His Word and Spirit. Then the eternal, never to be lost life already begins during our life on earth.

### **The social element of the day of rest**

As a punishment upon the fall, God imposed upon us the burden that we must often do our work with pain and sorrow. However, He does not want us to always and only be slaves of our work. God wants to provide for us in such a way that we may have one day each week to rest in order to obtain new strength. In this respect, the day of rest is also a foretaste of the eternal rest which God’s children will enjoy after the resurrection from the dead.

The observance of the Sabbath may not be a burden and only be characterized by many restrictions. The Lord’s day is a day to serve God, which is a delightful service for all those who receive this special gift of God, in faith.

### **The transgression of the fourth commandment is a very serious sin**

It is a very serious sin to not observe the weekly day of rest. The Bible points out that the desecration of the Lord’s day is one of the worst, and besides

idolatry and adultery, one of the most common sins. The prophet Ezekiel called it (in chapters 20-23) one of the worst sins of the people of Israel, which led to the punishment of the captivity; and the prophet Isaiah, in chapter 56, calls those blessed in the first place who keep the Sabbath.

**Lawful work on Sunday**

May we not do any work on the Sabbath? Yes! Works of necessity, mercy, and love are permissible on Sundays. This ought to be restricted to truly essential work: for the protection or security of people, for assisting sick people or others requiring care, and for the maintenance of the worship services. This includes private visits and offering help to the sick and those in need, as the Lord Jesus did. The Sabbath must show something of God’s special care for men.

God only forbids – and that very strictly! – all work which is not absolutely necessary and all work which is not purely a work of mercy and charity. This is therefore all work that has the intent of increasing production and earning money, including assembly-line industry. This can cause problems in the production process, but even if they bring economic gains, the damage they cause to spiritual life is very significant, and can be an everlasting loss. God’s laws cannot be set aside without consequences.

*Evaluator:* \_\_\_\_\_

**Questions:**

1. *What is the subject of the fourth commandment?*

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2. *What is the most important purpose of the Lord’s day?*

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3. *Why do Christians not observe the day of rest on Saturday, but on Sunday?*

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4. *What happens during the Christian worship services? (4 activities)*

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5. *What three kinds of work may be done on the Lord’s day?*

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6. *What does the Lord’s day have to do with creation and re-creation?*

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