

The Sabbath

Introduction

The London Baptist Confession, Chapter 22.7-8 contains language that does not accurately reflect the understanding of Scripture by the Elders of Sacred Mission. To that end, we have omitted those points from our Statement of Faith and accept the DA Carson's summary statement instead.

Position

The briefest summary of the various syntheses of the biblical data will be given so that there will be no doubt as to where the argument is leading.

Biblical writings show that God has given history a Sabbatical structure after which the weekly cycle has been patterned. In particular, the institution of the Mosaic Sabbath with its division of the week into six days of work and one of rest was analogous to the way in which God's activity in regard to His creation was pictured. This Sabbath not only pointed to God's creative pattern and purpose but was also a memorial of His redemptive activity in delivering His people from Egypt. After the Fall, God's intent for the consummation of history is seen to coalesce with His redemptive activity, which found its focus in the covenantal relationship of God to His people. The Sabbath, with its twofold theological justification, was a basic sign of the Mosaic covenant indicating God's sovereign claim on His people's time and loyalty. Though there were variations in the strictness of observance and the application of the Sabbath commands, the seventh day continued to have major significance as a feature of God's law for Israel throughout the period of Old Testament history. The debates of the intertestamental period not only illustrate the difficulties in applying the Sabbath commandment but also show that Jews in the more exclusive communities were, of course, able to be stricter in their observance than those trying to cope with the pressures of life in a society under the control of a Gentile government.

Jesus cut through the complexities of the Pharisaic debates of His time. He kept the Sabbath law but not the Halakic interpretations of it; in the process He reminded men and women that the purpose of the Sabbath institution was for their benefit. In accordance with this He did not hesitate to heal and to carry out His ministry on the Sabbath. At the same time Jesus' messianic claim in relation to the Sabbath pointed to a transcendence of the institution, just as Jesus' ministry as a whole anticipates the change to a new order, which is brought about by His death and resurrection.

From the perspective of this new order, various New Testament writers are able to see Jesus' whole mission in terms of its fulfillment of Sabbatical motifs and Sabbath demands. Christ is the one who has brought the true Sabbath rest of the end time into the course of history, and, though Jewish Christians continued to observe them, the Sabbath aspects of the Mosaic economy were no longer binding on believers. Instead, the first day of the week assumed increasing importance because it was associated with Christ's resurrection and His appearances on the first day of the week, and the day became known as the Lord's Day. Its significance was in terms of worship of the risen Lord and there was no transference to this day of the necessity for the physical rest that was the constitutive element of the Old Testament Sabbath and its demands. This interpretation of the early church's view of the first day of the week is reinforced in the postapostolic literature of the second and third centuries a.d. where the day continues to be mentioned in a similar way.¹

¹ Lincoln, A. T. (1999). [From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical and Theological Perspective](#). In D. A. Carson (Ed.), *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (pp. 345–346).