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West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church



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Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

Be Convinced that the Sabbath is the Sacred Day of God

Isaiah 58:13 says, “*If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable*” (emphasis added). You will not be able to wholeheartedly pursue a profitable Sabbath day until you are convinced that the Lord’s Day is truly set apart by God as sacred time devoted to Him. You must be able to say with absolute conviction, “This is God’s holy day.” If your conscience is gripped with a sense that God commands us to honor the Lord’s Day, then you will do what it takes to honor it. And, if you love the Lord, you will do it with pleasure because it is His will.

The Sabbath was instituted by God as His holy day. In the fourth commandment God says, “*The seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God*” (Exodus 20:10). These words remind us that God commanded us to observe the weekly Sabbath and that He claims the day as His own. As God said through Isaiah, it is “*my holy day*.” Not to devote the day to the purposes and activities commanded for its sanctification robs God of that which belongs to Him.

The Sabbath is a creation ordinance. Genesis 2:1–3 recounts how on the seventh day of the creation week, God rested from all His work as Creator. God, who does not need to rest, rested as an example for the man and woman He had created in His image. They were to follow His example, resting from their work as He did from His; thus it is a divine institution which God crowned with His blessing, setting it apart for all of time. A common error is to assume that the Sabbath originated with the giving of the law at Sinai. Such a view ignores the fact that Exodus 20 does not introduce the Sabbath as something new but rather acknowledges something ancient and historic that is to be remembered and observed by God’s people: “*Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy*” (Exodus 20:8).

What, specifically, is to be remembered in the pattern of six days of work punctuated by a day of holy rest? “*In six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it*” (Exodus 20:11). Every Sabbath we remember that we are not in this world by chance; we are not products of evolution. Every Sabbath God declares to us, “*Remember that you are accountable to Me. Remember that you are under My authority as your Creator.*” Jesus Christ owned the Sabbath. The first three evangelists record that He said, “*The Son of man is Lord of the sabbath*” (Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5). In one blow, Christ asserted His full deity as the God of Israel and reaffirmed the claim of God upon the weekly Sabbath, restating that claim in His own name. The claim left its mark on the apostolic church, so that by the end of that era, the Christian Sabbath was known as “*the Lord’s day*” (Revelation 1:10). Are we really to believe that Christ declared Himself Lord of the Sabbath so that in a few years He could abolish it? As Walter Chantry says, such an argument “*makes nonsense of Jesus’ words.*”

Therefore, while the ceremonial and civil regulations of the old covenant law no longer bind us in Christ (though they still point us to Him), the Sabbath continues. Our Lord Jesus Christ did not treat the Sabbath the way He treated the ceremonial laws. For example, He taught His disciples that food cannot make a person unclean (Mark 7:18), pointing them beyond the Mosaic distinction between clean and unclean food.



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However, when it came to the Sabbath, Christ taught His disciples the proper way to keep the Sabbath, implying that He expected His church to continue observing it. Indeed, by saying that He is “*Lord of the sabbath*,” Christ stamped the day with an indelible, Christian character. Henceforth it was only right to speak of the Christian Sabbath.

When Christ died on the cross, He fulfilled the law of God in both its demands for complete obedience and its penalties for sin. His work of redemption was finished (John 19:30). He ratified the promise of the new covenant, by which God’s law is written on the hearts of His covenant people and they desire to do His will. The body of the Lord Jesus rested in the grave on the seventh day and His human spirit rested in Paradise. Then on the first day of the week, Christ rose from the dead, the Firstborn of the new creation, and met with His disciples, teaching them the meaning of the Word, filling their hearts with understanding, joy, and peace by the Holy Spirit, and giving them their worldwide mission (Luke 24; John 20:19–23). One week later, or on the next first day of the week, Christ appeared to the gathered disciples a second time to renew their faith and peace (John 20:26–29). Again, seven weeks later, on the day of Pentecost, which also falls on the first day of the week (Leviticus 23:15–16), Christ poured out the Spirit upon His church (Acts 2).

Since then, the apostles directed the churches of all lands to set apart the first day of the week as the day for sacred assemblies to give their offerings and receive God’s Word and sacraments (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1–2). By Christ’s example and the apostles’ direction, the sacred day was changed from the seventh day to the first day, giving it a new name: “*the Lord’s day*” (Revelation 1:10). Thus, while the early church distanced itself from the Jewish Sabbath, it wholeheartedly embraced holy rest on the Lord’s Day. Justin Martyr (d. 165) wrote in the mid-second-century that on Sunday the church gathers to read Scripture, hear the preaching of the Word, pray, partake of the sacraments, and collect money for the poor because that is the day when Christ our Savior rose from the dead. And around the same time, Dionysius of Corinth wrote, “*Today being the Lord’s Day, we kept it as a holy day.*”

Perhaps you question whether God really expects us to keep the first day of the week as His holy day. I encourage you to dig deeper into the Bible. Give careful consideration to God’s resting on the seventh day of creation, blessing it, and making it holy. Why would God do that, unless He did it for mankind? Meditate on how our Lord Jesus explained and observed the Sabbath. Why did He spend so much time explaining the true meaning of the Sabbath, unless He intended for His disciples to keep the Sabbath?

To have a firm foundation for keeping the Sabbath in a profitable manner, you must be convinced from the Scriptures that the Sabbath is the sacred day of God. Then you are able to wake up on the first day of the week and say to yourself, “*My God has set apart one day in seven for Himself since the beginning of time. Christ declared that He is Lord of the Sabbath. I am Christ’s disciple, and because I love Him I will keep His commandments. Today is the Lord’s Day, and I will keep it holy.*”

**An excerpt from
Delighting in God: A Guide to Sabbath-keeping
By Dr. Joel Beeke and Paul Smalley
PURITAN REFORMED JOURNAL
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God's Love for His Remnant

The Lord closes His letter to Sardis with an encouragement to the small group of faithful believers who remained: *“But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy”* (Revelation 3:4). In the midst of this dead church were a precious few who had not followed the church into sin and spiritual decay. There were genuine believers among the hypocrites, a few separated and spiritual among the carnal and the worldly. The Lord had a small remnant of true Christians leading pure, wholesome, Christlike lives in the midst of this dead, corrupt church.

The Living Among the Dead

In Romans 11:1–5, the Apostle Paul reminds his readers that God will always have a remnant of His people Israel, no matter how dire and spiritually dead the nation appears:

I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? “Lord, they have killed Your prophets, they have torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking my life.” But what is the divine response to him? “I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice.

Evidently, the number of faithful believers in Sardis was minuscule; it was small enough not to impact the Lord's evaluation that the church as a whole was dead. But that did not mean that the Lord would forget or ignore those faithful few that had carried on in love for the truth and perseverance. As the author of Hebrews reminds us, *“God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints”* (Hebrews 6:10).

The Lord did not forget His people in Sardis; in fact, He memorialized their faithfulness to every generation of the church in His letter. He says they *“have not soiled their garments”* (Revelation 3:4). Translated literally, the word (molunō) means “stained” or “dyed.” In Scripture, garments are often used to refer to the spiritual character of a person. Jude 23, for instance, describes the spiritual contamination of people corrupted by false teachers as *“the garment polluted by the flesh.”* These unsoiled garments represent the godly character and purity of these few believers—all the more remarkable when you consider the corruption of their church.

Christ says this faithful remnant *“will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy”* (Revelation 3:4). White robes, like the ones Christ describes here, were commonly worn at celebrations and festivals, or after military victories. Even pagans would come to worship their false gods in clean, white clothes as a symbol of their goodness and virtue. They wanted to present themselves as worthy of the idol's affection and good will. But these aren't merely clean robes in this temporal world. Christ is referring to the bright, gleaming spiritual robes of imputed righteousness, covering believers who have been purified by His sacrifice on their behalf. In Revelation 7:14, we read of those who *“have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”*



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This is the glorious truth of the gospel. In Romans 5:19, Paul says, *“For as through one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.”* Just as we were made sinners through Adam’s sin, we have been made righteous through Christ’s death. How? Paul proclaims the reality in 2 Corinthians: *“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”* (5:21). On the cross, God treated Christ as if He had lived my life of sin, so that He could treat me as if I had lived Christ’s life of righteousness. As new creations in Christ, we are cloaked in His righteousness. When God looks at us now, He sees only the holy perfection of His Son.

The imagery of soiled garments is a thread that runs through Scripture. Because we are fallen creatures, hopelessly defiled by our own sin, even the righteous deeds we do cannot cover our sins. Indeed, *“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment”* (Isaiah 64:6). The very best things we do are still tainted by sin. Thus, anyone who expects to stand before God clothed in the *“righteousness”* of his or her own good works is trusting a garment that is polluted by the flesh.

God demands perfect righteousness. Jesus said, *“Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 5:20). How high is the standard? *“You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”* (Matthew 5:48).

That sets an unattainable standard. But Christ provides a perfect righteousness by imputation for all who truly trust Him as Lord and Savior. God imputes righteousness to believers apart from any good works that they do (Romans 4:6). The righteousness of Christ covers them like a gleaming white, spotless garment of absolute perfection. In the words of Isaiah 61:10, *“I will rejoice greatly in the Lord, my soul will exult in my God; for He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness.”* That’s what the apostle Paul meant when he testified that he had come to be, by faith, *“Found in [Christ], not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith”* (Philippians 3:9).

Subsequently, the process of sanctification is progressively purifying believers to make them more and more Christlike. We *“are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit”* (2 Corinthians 3:18). One day, when we go to be with Christ, or when He returns to take us from this world, our glorification will be instantly complete: *“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is”* (1 John 3:2).

These are the robes John describes the church wearing at the marriage supper of the Lamb: *“Let us rejoice and be glad and give glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.’ It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints”* (Revelation 19:7–8).



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The small remnant in Sardis had not fallen into pagan impurities. They had not succumbed to sinful practices. They were in a dead church but were alive spiritually. And for their faithfulness, they would walk with their Savior in eternal holiness.

Divine Bookkeeping and Eternal Security

Christ continues this theme in His words to the wider audience of His letter: *“He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments”* (Revelation 3:5). He promises that faithful believers who persevere to the end will be cloaked in His righteousness, and will one day be made righteous. There are no caveats or conditions here; this is Christ’s faithful promise to all who overcome (see 1 John 5:4–5) and remain faithful to Him.

That’s important to remember, as some have misconstrued the rest of Christ’s statement. The Lord says, *“And I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels”* (Revelation 3:5). Although Christ promises not to erase the names of His people, some take it to mean that it could happen, turning God’s promise into a veiled threat. That erroneous view appeals to Exodus 32:33, where *“the Lord said to Moses, ‘Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.’”*

In the ancient world, rulers of cities had a census, a record of all the names of their citizens. As a citizen, there were effectively two ways your name could be blotted out of the ledger. You could die, or you could commit a crime against the state and lose your citizenship. The book the Lord referred to in Exodus was like that—it’s a reference to physical death, not eternal damnation.

On the other hand, the Book of Life mentioned in Revelation is God’s book in which He keeps record of those who have eternal life. The apostle John refers to it as the list of names *“written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain”* (Revelation 13:8; see also Revelation 17:8). God does not add and subtract names from the Book of Life; the names of His faithful believers are written there for eternity.

In John’s vision of the future Great White Throne Judgment, we see the end result of Christ’s promise to keep our names secure:

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11–15)



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Christ promises each of His faithful overcomers, “*I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels*” (Revelation 3:5). This is an echo of a promise Christ made to His disciples in Matthew 10:32: “*Everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven.*” There is no greater blessing than the assurance of our salvation and an eternity with our Savior.

In Romans 8, Paul recounts the unbreakable chain of God’s work in salvation, and the tremendous security we enjoy in Him:

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, “For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (vv. 28–39)

Christ’s letter to the dead church at Sardis is full of rich hope for His saints. He promises to clothe them in the white linens of eternal life, never erase their names out of the Book of Life, and personally confess them before His Father and the entire heavenly host. Those promises extend to all His beloved ones.

The Lord’s letter to Sardis ends with His familiar charge to the rest of His church: “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*” (Revelation 3:6). For the believers listening, there is wonderful news to behold.

And history tells us that the church at Sardis was listening. We know of a faithful pastor and apologist from the second century named Melito. Some say he wrote the first commentary on Revelation. He served as the bishop of Sardis, which gives us reason to hope that revival came to the dead church. It seems the believers did wake up and remember the truth they had received, and perhaps some of the dead were brought to spiritual life through repentance and faith. ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**



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The Church and Psalm 81

What does the church most need today? In answering this important but rather general question, Psalm 81 is uniquely important and helpful. This psalm obviously contains beautiful promises and clear directions to help the people of God. But careful study of this psalm will deepen our appreciation of it, increase its value for us, and show us how distinctive it is for helping the church.

As we study psalms, we soon learn that the central verse of a psalm is often significant as a key to its interpretation. The central line of Psalm 81 is the heart of that psalm, as the plaintive cry of God is heard: “*O Israel, if you would but listen to me!*” (Psalm 81:8b). Perhaps this line will resonate more profoundly with the readers of this issue of *Tabletalk* if we translate it, “*O Israel, if you would but hear me!*” The center of Psalm 81—indeed the whole psalm—is a reflection on the Shema.

The centrality of this line and its importance are underscored when we recognize that Psalm 81 is the central psalm of Book 3 of the Psalter. Book 3 (Psalms 73–89) principally concerns the crisis in Israel caused by the destruction of the temple (Psalm 74) and the apparent failure of God’s promises that David’s sons would forever sit on his throne (Psalm 89). Something of the cause and character of this crisis is contained in this central line of the central psalm.

Since Book 3 is the central book of the five books of the Psalter, Psalm 81:8b actually is the central line of the whole book of Psalms. It stands at the very heart of Israel’s songbook. It calls Israel to deep reflection on her relationship to her God.

This psalm also appears to be central to Israel’s liturgical calendar. The praise at new moon and full moon can refer only to the seventh month of the year, the Feast of Trumpets (Leviticus 23:24; Numbers 10:10) and the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:26–32). Between these two feasts occurred the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:27). As God called Israel to celebrate His great provisions as Creator and Deliverer, so He called His people to hear Him.

As the Shema was crucial to the Torah, so it is central to the Psalter and to the Christian life. God’s people must hear His Word, particularly to reject false gods (v. 9) and to walk in His ways (v. 13). They must not follow their own wisdom (v. 12). How sad to contemplate that God might give us what we think is good for us.

The Lord reminds His people that in history He has been the Deliverer and now promises that when we open our mouths in prayer, He will hear us and meet our needs (v. 10). He is the God who preserves and provides for the needs of His own.

The failure of Israel to hear the Word of God was rectified by God’s own Son. Jesus always heard and honored God’s Word. His Father delighted in Him for that reason: “*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased*” (Matthew 17:5). Jesus perfectly listened and followed so that His people would have a complete and perfect salvation. The Father continues to call His people to listen, now directing them to the words of His Son: “*listen to him*” (Matthew 17:5). The salvation and health of the church depend on it continuing to listen to God’s Word.



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The Church and Psalm 81

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Psalm 81 seems to reflect the time of exile, when God punished Israel with the loss of the temple, its king, and the land of promise. It also reminds us of an earlier time, when Israel doubted God and grumbled about Him (v. 7). At Meribah (Exodus 17), Israel tested the Lord, doubting that He was with His people, so the Lord tested Israel and found her wanting. Similarly, we can look at the history of the church and see many times and ways in which the church failed to listen to the Word of the Lord.

The time of the Reformation, of course, was one of the greatest times in which the church returned to the Word of God. The Reformation of the church occurred because Christians began again to study the Bible carefully. The Reformers studied Greek and Hebrew, provided the church with new translations of the Bible, used the new technology of the printing press to print Bibles, and prepared some of the finest commentaries and theologies in the history of the church.

Again in our time, the church must be called to listen to the Word of God. The churches of America too often seem interested in following other voices than the voice of God. For decades, some churches have taught that the Bible is not fully and truly the Word of God. Other churches formally recognize the Bible, but seem to have lost confidence that preaching and teaching the Bible is what will convert unbelievers and build the church. Many Christians today seem to practically ignore the Bible, and as a result, they are as worldly as their unbelieving neighbors.

God says to us today, as He said to Israel of old and says to every generation of His people: *“O Israel, if you would but listen to me!”* Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will open ears in our churches and throughout our land. And let us listen carefully and believingly. Such listening is what the church most needs today. ~ **Dr. W. Robert Godfrey is a Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow and chairman of Ligonier Ministries. He is president emeritus and professor emeritus of church history at Westminster Seminary California.**



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If you have a birthday or anniversary in August that is not posted here or is listed in error or you do not want to be published in this newsletter, please contact Walt or e-mail him at gwlcf10415@gmail.com.

Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner August 2023

Birthdays

Ben S. (8)

Harper K. (11)

Carrie P. (18)

Phyllis C. (25)

Ezra P. (26)

Marlin H. (27)

Anniversaries

Jared and Hannah E. (4)

Mike and Cheryl P. (9)

“When we understand the character of God, when we grasp something of His holiness, then we begin to understand the radical character of our sin and hopelessness. Helpless sinners can survive only by grace. Our strength is futile in itself; we are spiritually impotent without the assistance of a merciful God. We may dislike giving our attention to God's wrath and justice, but until we incline ourselves to these aspects of God's nature, we will never appreciate what has been wrought for us by grace. Even Edwards's sermon on sinners in God's hands was not designed to stress the flames of hell. The resounding accent falls not on the fiery pit but on the hands of the God who holds us and rescues us from it. The hands of God are gracious hands. They alone have the power to rescue us from certain destruction.” ~ *Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr. - The Holiness of God*



***West Suffolk Baptist Church
Leadership***

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