

Worshipping God on His Terms for His Glory (Part 6)

Is 58:13-14; Neh 13:15-22; WCF 21.8

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 2 August 2020, 16:30

(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)¹

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

This sermon is the sixth (and last) in a series on worshipping God on His terms.

And this sermon focuses specifically on what God's Word teaches regarding the Sabbath.

Here are the three points of this sermon...

- Preparing
- Holy Resting
- Worshiping and Deeds of Necessity/Mercy

Preparing

In the fourth commandment, the LORD said, “**Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.**”²

In other words, we should *set* the sabbath (our Sunday) *apart* as a *sabbath for the LORD*.³

And what does *Sabbath* mean?

The word *Sabbath* comes from the Hebrew word *shabat* which means “*to cease, desist, or rest*”⁴ – i.e. to cease/desist/rest from work!⁵

¹ In writing this sermon, I am greatly indebted to my two main sources whose guidance I appreciate: 1) Van Dixhoorn, Chad. 2014. *Confessing the Faith: a reader's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Carlisle, PA : The Banner of Truth Trust. 484p.

2) Sproul, R.C. 2006. *The truth we confess*. (In: Sproul, R.C. ed. *Truths we confess: a layman's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith – in three volumes*. Vol. 2: *Salvation and the Christian Life* (Chapters 9-22 of the Confession) Phillipsburg, NJ : P&R Publishing. 279p.).

Many words & phrases I have written, I have gladly borrowed with great thankfulness from this source.

² [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Ex 20:8). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

³ Ex 20:10 “...**but the seventh day is a sabbath of (to/for) the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you**” (NASB).

⁴ Hebrew, *shabat* (“שָׁבַת”) cease, desist, rest (Assyrian *šabātu*, prob. *cease, be completed* ...); Arabic سَبَّحَ (*sabata*) *cut off, interrupt*; NH has שָׁבַת *neglect*, etc., Aramaic שְׁבַתָּא *cost of neglect*...” (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). [Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon](#) (p. 991). Oxford: Clarendon Press).

⁵ Cf. Gn 2:2-3, **By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made** (NASB).

In Hebrew:

וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי^a מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְכַל־מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה:

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־יּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדְּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי בּוֹ שָׁבַת מְכַל־מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר־בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת:³

Of course, from New-Testament times, Christians know this day as the “Lord’s day.”⁶ Now here is something beautiful – you see, gauging by Is 58:14, the Sabbath is a day to find our joy in the LORD⁷ (to take delight in the LORD)!⁸ Perhaps you might know that one of the things for which John Piper has become known, is his lectures & publications on the Christian’s delight in God.⁹ Well in Is 58:14 God promises His people that, if they were to repent and set the Sabbath apart again (make it holy again) for Him, then they would take delight in Him, their LORD!

Question: My brother & sister, if this is so (and it is!!) that God commanded us to sanctify (set apart) the Sabbath so that we can find our joy in Him, then, is it not obvious that we should *prepare* for the Sabbath – preparing in a physical and spiritual way!?

After all, is it not so that if we want a successful holiday outing with friends, we will often have to think about it in advance? And is it not so that if we want to be ready for a meeting with an important client, we will need to arrange some events ahead of time?

Let us remember the principle God taught His ancient people (the principle of preparation of the Sabbath) when He sent them manna in the desert. This was how God spoke through Moses (in Ex 16:23), “***This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.’***”¹⁰

You see, on the day before the Sabbath, God gave a double portion of manna to the people. And it was their task to, from this double portion, do a double baking and boiling. So, what do we see?

Well, that, on the Sabbath, there was a cessation (a *shabbat*) from normal domestic chores, because the preparations for the Sabbath day were made in advance.

Now, one could become prescriptive by laying down man-made rules as to what exactly we should and shouldn’t do to prepare (get ready) for the Sabbath – and to, by these rules,

Ex 20:11 uses a synonym for *shabat* – the verb *nūāh*, cf.

כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת־יָמִים עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֶת־הַיָּם וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם
וַיִּנַּח בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי עַל־כֵּן בֵּרַךְ יְהוָה אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת וַיְקַדְּשֵׁהוּ :

⁶ Cf. Rv 1:10 *I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet* (emphasis mine).

Also cf. Acts 20:7 *On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.*

Also 1 Cor. 16:2 *On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.*

⁷ So, e.g. the NIV & NIV84

⁸ So, e.g. the NASB

⁹ Apud Sproul (ibid:341). Also cf., among other, the following links to the theme of “Delighting in God” by John Piper: <https://www.desiringgod.org/series/delighting-in-god>
<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/how-do-i-delight-myself-in-the-lord>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/what-is-it-like-to-enjoy-god/excerpts/the-heart-of-love-is-delighting-not-doing>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JkSAMTp5leQ>

¹⁰ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Ex 16:23). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

try to bind other believers' consciences. But if we did that, we would become like the Pharisees or even like some of the Puritans. But let's remember our Lord Jesus' words to the Pharisees who tried to strain out a gnat but then swallowed a camel!¹¹

So, let's rather ask what is the *principle* that we get from God's manna commands regarding the day before the Sabbath?

Well, it is to, on the day before, prepare for the Sabbath so that the Sabbath can be what it is supposed to be – set-apart (holy) for rest from our normal work, and for fellowship with God and His people.

That's why the Puritans used to prepare double meals on the day before Sunday, and why they went to bed early on the Saturday night so that they could have a good sleep and be well-rested for Sunday worship. So, the Puritans prepared themselves physically for the Sabbath!

But they also prepared themselves spiritually with prayers to ready their souls for the taste of heaven involved on the Lord's Day.

Thus, they put in an effort so that, as Is 58:14 says, they would be able to delight in the LORD.

My brother & sister (dear children & young people), I know we don't live in the days of the Puritans.

However, the principle of preparation for the Lord's Day, stays the same. I don't want to make blanket rules of do's and don'ts by which to bind the consciences of fellow believers. But, suffice to say, may each one of us, with his/her conscience before God, prepare well for the Lord's Day!

Young people, be honest, do you in your heart of hearts show any reverence for God (do you give God the weight due Him) if you weary yourself, body & spirit, by playing computer games or surf the Internet or watch TV until 2 a.m. on the Sunday morning – as some of our RCNZ youth have confessed to be doing?

Some others have even stayed away from a worship service because they rather wanted to watch Australia's greatest motor-racing event – the one at Bathurst!

What does that say about our hearts?

It's like saying: "God, I will keep the Sabbath holy, but on my terms!"

My brother & sister, and dear young people, it's especially because of God's commands regarding the pre-Sabbath manna preparation that the Westminster Assembly has, for all practical purposes, said in Article 21.8 that the Sabbath is kept holy to the Lord, firstly, when men have prepared their hearts and have arranged their common affairs beforehand.¹²

Well, so far re point 1: "Preparing" for the Sabbath.

Here's point 2...

Holy Resting

My brother & sister, we know that the Lord's Day is there to rest from our normal work, and to worship the Lord in fellowship with His people.

But, apart from the two worship services, how else can the Christian spend the Lord's Day? Are we allowed to have some time of recreation in-between or before/after the

¹¹ Cf. Mt 23:24 ***You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!***

¹² WCF 21.8 (MESV), "This Sabbath is then kept holy to the Lord when men, after due preparation of their hearts and arranging of their common affairs beforehand, not only observe a holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts concerning their everyday occupations and recreations, but also devote the whole time to the public and private exercises of God's worship and to the duties of necessity and mercy" (Emphasis mine).

services? Yes, are we allowed to have a picnic or play a bit of badminton, or have a swim?

Well, there seems to have been great differences between the Puritans of the English realm (on the one hand) and the Christians on the European continent. (on the other hand)¹³

The Continentals believed that, although the Lord's Day should be given mostly to worship, there still was an opportunity for *restful* (“*Sabbathful*”) recreation – yes, in such a manner that, not just our souls, but also our bodies, would be “re-created” and refreshed by having rest and relaxed fellowship on the Lord's Day.

And what illustrates this difference of interpretation better than when John Knox saw what John Calvin and his family were doing on the Lord's Day!?

You see, John Knox (the great Reformer of Scotland) was expelled from England during the reign of Bloody Mary. And so, he ended up first in Germany and then in Geneva, Switzerland, in the care of John Calvin.

Well, great was John Knox's shock when he found Calvin playing lawn bowls with his family on the Lord's Day!¹⁴

You see, Calvin held to the Continental view, whereas Knox held to the Puritan view. Where did this difference come in?

Well, it started off by the Puritans' wrong interpretation of Is 58:13 (especially the word “pleasure”).

You see, Is 58:13-14 says,

“If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your own pleasure on My holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and honor it, desisting from your own ways, from seeking your own pleasure and speaking your own word, ¹⁴then you will take delight in the Lord...”¹⁵

Well, the Puritans took the word “pleasure” to mean any kind of indulgence in pleasure. And, in their view, that's exactly the heading under which any kind of recreation also sorted.

However, what they did not know is that, already in Isaiah's day, the Hebrew word for “pleasure” had received the specific meaning of “business affairs.”¹⁶

¹³ Cf. Sproul (ibid:342)

¹⁴ Cf. Sproul (ibid:342)

¹⁵ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Is 58:13–14). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation (emphasis mine).

¹⁶ For the Hebrew word *hephets* (הֶפֶז) **delight, pleasure**, cf. the following three Hebrew dictionaries/lexicons who are unanimous on the meaning of “delight > affairs.”

Firstly: “...**1. delight... 2. desire, longing... 3. the good pleasure, will, purpose**, of Yahweh... **4. that in which one takes delight**, his **business** (late), or *matter* (very late, cf. Mish. = *thing*) הַפֶּזֶת הַטֹּבָה *the good pleasure (cause, business) of Yahweh will prosper in his hands* Is 53:10; - Is 58:3, 13; עֲשׂוֹת הַפֶּזֶת *doing thy affairs* Is 58:13 (see De in loco); בְּהַפֶּזֶת בְּיָדֶיהָ *in the business of her hands* Pr 31:13; עֵת לְכָל־הַפֶּזֶת *time for every matter, affair* Ec 3:1, 17; 8:6; פֶּזֶת אֵלֶּיךָ מִן־הַמַּחְשָׁבָה *marvel not at the matter* Ec 5:7” (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). [Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon](#) (p. 343). Oxford: Clarendon Press) (Emphasis mine).

Secondly, cf. הֶפֶזֶת: sf. הֶפֶזֶת; pl. הֶפֶזֶתִים, sf. הֶפֶזֶתִים.—**1. joy, pleasure**, w. *l*^e in 1 S 15:22; w. *b*^e in Je 22:28; *dibrê hefēs* words that give pleasure Ec 12:10, *b^ehēfēs kappéhâ* w. her eager hands Pr 31:13;—**2. wish** 1 K 5:24;—**3. 'abné hēfēs costly jewels** Is 54:12 > *hēfēs treasure, jewel* Pr 3:15 & 8:11;—**4. affair, business** Ec 3:1, 17, pl. Is 58:13; *'al-hahēfēs* about it Ec 5:7 (Holladay, W. L., & Köhler, L. (2000). [A concise Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament](#) (p. 112). Leiden: Brill).

And so, what do we see?

Well, that *the Israelites knew God's law, but were violating it commercially. They didn't want to lose their profits by closing their business on the Sabbath – nor did they want to give their fields a rest every seven years, or giving their domestic animals and servants one day off in seven.*¹⁷

Their “pleasure” was to continue doing business on the Sabbath.

And our other Old-Testament passage (Neh 13:15-22), has sketched for us the exact picture of how Nehemiah preached to this problem among God's people.¹⁸

Certainly, Nehemiah would not want to see how the Lord would again punish His people by war and exile as He once did with the people in the days of Isaiah and Jeremiah!

So, no wonder that, in Is 58:13, God says as much as, “If you turn from your pleasure (i.e. your money-making business) on the Sabbath, and do what I commanded you and honour Me, then I will open up heaven and bless you!”

My brother & sister, Is 58:13 speaks against carrying on with business as usual on the Sabbath. It has nothing against limited, *restful* (“*Sabbathful*”) recreation – yes, the sort of recreation which is practised in such a manner that, not just our souls, but also our bodies, would be “re-created” and refreshed by having rest and relaxed fellowship on the Lord's Day (something like a short refreshing jog, or swim or lawn games). And, for bodily rest and re-creation, the word “rest” may include a Sunday midday/afternoon nap! That would also come under the word “recreation.”

However, if our recreation would hinder us from Sunday worship of God, and from fellowship with God and His people, so that it becomes a major thing on the Lord's day, then also Isaiah (and even lawn-bowling John Calvin) would preach against it!

As Is 58:14 says, Sabbath-keeping (keeping the Lord's Day on His terms) will cause us to take delight in the Lord!

My brother & sister (Dear young people), it is because of our Isaiah and Nehemiah passages – and because of the fourth commandment – that the Westminster Assembly have said in Article 21.8, “This Sabbath is then kept holy to the Lord when men...

Thirdly, also cf. “Während *ṣḥ* als kultischer Fachausdruck zur Deklarierung des Opfers als >>wohlgefällig<< in Anspruch genommen wurde..., ist der Sinn von *ḥṣ* durch Abschwächung des emotionellen Elementes in die Richtung von >>wollen, Interesse haben<< verschoben worden (Jes 55, 11; Jon 1, 14; Ps 115, 3; Hhd 2, 7; Pred 8, 3). Nicht selten wird *ḥṣ* von einem Inf. begleitet und somit als bloßes Hilfsverbum gebraucht (Dtn 25,8; Ri 13, 23; 1 Sam 2, 25). Entsprechend wird das Subst. *ḥēfæṣ* im abgeschwächten Sinn von >>Angelegenheit, Geschäft<< gebraucht (Jes 58, 3.13; Pred 3, 1.17; 5,7 und mehrmals in den Qumrantexten)...” (Gerleman, G. 1976. *יָצַח ḥṣ* Gefallen haben. [In: Jenni, E & Westermann, C. eds. Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament. Band I. München : Chr. Kaiser Verlag. pp.624-625]). (Emphases mine).

¹⁷ My adaptation from Sproul (ibid:344)

¹⁸ Yes, how Nehemiah had seen men in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath and bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys, together with wine, grapes, figs and all other kinds of loads. And they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath; and how Nehemiah warned them against selling food on that day. He also saw how Jewish men who normally lived in Jerusalem came from the coastal town of Tyre and were bringing in fish and all kinds of merchandise and selling them in Jerusalem on the Sabbath to the people of Judah. This passage tells us how Nehemiah rebuked them, closed the city gates on them and warned them that if they would not listen, he would “lay hands” on them!

observe a holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts concerning their everyday occupations and recreations...”¹⁹ (where “recreation” means “business affairs”).

Well, so far re Point 2: “Resting.”
Here is point 3...

Worshipping and Deeds of Necessity/Mercy

The third (and last) part of WCF Art 21.8 says for all practical purposes that the Sabbath is kept holy when men *devote the whole time to the public and private exercises of God’s worship and to the duties of necessity and mercy.*²⁰

Now, I think the Westminster Assembly did not mean that everyone has to literally *the whole time* on the Lord’s Day do these three things:

- Devote themselves to the public & private exercises of worshipping God;
- Devote themselves to duties of necessity;
- Devote themselves to duties of mercy.

To do all three these things for every minute of the Lord’s Day, would be impossible for any human being.

But what the Westminster Assembly must have had in mind was that the emphasis for our Sunday activities should be upon worshipping God corporately and privately, and where we can (and are qualified to), perform duties of necessity and mercy like visiting home-bound members and those in hospitals; and to, if you are qualified (and called), provide medical care or first aid to someone, or go when the fire department calls you out on an emergency whether it be for rescue work during a fire or an earthquake or cyclone, or a flood .

And the duties of necessity do not exclude showing hospitality, for, after all, hospitality is also a service to our fellow man and can also be an activity of fellowshiping in the Lord. Where did the Westminster Assembly get these guidelines from?

Well, remember how, in Mt 12:1-2, the heartless Pharisees complained when Christ and His disciples plucked some grain on the Sabbath and then ate it?

It was then that our Lord reminded them of the need of necessity, when David and his men were hungry, yet they ***entered the house of God, and ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests.***²¹

Well, David and his men were not punished, because God, in mercy, knew that it was of necessity that they had to act in the manner that they did!

One could compare this with a Christian electrician who gets called out on the Sunday to repair a substation which supplies power to many homes (or even hospitals) – in which

¹⁹ WCF 21.8 “This Sabbath is then kept holy to the Lord when men, after due preparation of their hearts and arranging of their common affairs beforehand, not only observe a holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts concerning their everyday occupations and recreations, but also devote the whole time to the public and private exercises of God’s worship and to the duties of necessity and mercy” (Emphasis mine).

²⁰ WCF 21.8 This Sabbath is then kept holy to the Lord when men, after due preparation of their hearts and arranging of their common affairs beforehand, not only observe a holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts concerning their everyday occupations and recreations, but also devote the whole time to the public and private exercises of God’s worship and to the duties of necessity and mercy (Emphasis mine).

²¹ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Mt 12:4). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

may be patients dependent upon their electronic medical equipment. That's work of necessity!

Well, it is also from Mt 12 that we learn how Christ taught the Pharisees that it is lawful to heal someone on the Sabbath. On that occasion Christ healed the man who had a withered hand. Then Christ added some teaching when He said to the Pharisees, "***Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? ¹² Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.***"²²

Now, I realise that although God's Word has not changed, society *has*! You see, in many cases, what is considered a work of necessity in our society, would not have been a work of necessity in Puritan England.

Why?

Well, because, in those days, many shops and businesses were still closed on Sundays – and that by government law!

This was also the case in the 1950's to 1970's in South Africa, when I grew up. Grocery stores, businesses and banks were all closed from Saturday 1 p.m. (banks already from 11 a.m. on Saturday) until Monday morning 8 a.m. – and that on authority of the government!

So, to a large degree, those government laws helped the Christian to keep the Sabbath holy!

But, today, because most grocery stores and many other businesses are open seven days per week, the Christian worker might find that his work tells him that they need him (of "necessity") on the Sunday!

My brother & sister, welcome to the rat race – a way of living in which the Christian will have to decide by his conscience, before the Lord!

My brother & sister, what do we see?

Well, in sum, do we not see that, if we remember the Lord's Day by preparing ourselves for it, and by devoting the day itself for worshipping our Lord and by doing good, then, with God's help, we cannot go wrong!?

And what if we err in this regard?

Well, then we can turn to our Lord Jesus Christ, for look, has not He Himself said that He is Lord of the Sabbath? And is He not the same Lord who rose one Sunday morning so that sinners would find life and look forward to an eternal Sabbath/rest with Him and His people?

AMEN (2,534 words excluding footnotes)

²² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Mt 12:11–12). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.