

Habits and routine are a vital part of discipleship. We make time for those things we deem important. God has decreed that we work six days and give the seventh to rest and worship. This was so important to God that He gave us an example to follow, by resting after creating the universe.

“By the seventh day God had finished the work He had been doing ; so on the seventh day He rested from all His work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy ...” Genesis 2: 2-3

Why does our week consist of 7 days? Why not make it 10 or 12 for that matter? The Basic Everyday Encyclopaedia states: “The seven day week came in from Old Testament sources and the Christian influence.”

The seven-day week is a testimony to the fact that God created the world in 6 days and rested on the 7th. The fact that Sunday, the first day of the week, is our day of rest instead of the Jewish Saturday, is a weekly reminder that Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week.

For that matter, the reason why we date our years as we do, this being the year 2003 AD, is a monumental testimony to the incarnation of Christ. The birth of Christ utterly altered the way we measure time. He turned aside the river of the ages out of its course and lifted the centuries off their hinges. Now, the whole world counts time as before Christ (BC) and AD (Anno Domini), in the year of the Lord. It is ironic that even the most vitriolic atheists have to acknowledge the centrality of Christ every time that they write the date!

In fact, the Revolutionary Convention, during the French Revolution, attempted to abolish the Christian calendar and introduce a 10-day work week, counting the years from the establishment of their “Republic”, beginning 1792. It needs hardly to be pointed out that they failed.

The French Revolutionary and atheist, Voltaire, declared: “If you want to kill Christianity, you must abolish Sunday.” (To show how God has a sense of humour, the Geneva Bible Society bought Voltaire’s house and printing press to produce Bibles in French!)

As Christians, we should repent for allowing the Lord’s Day to become so encroached upon and desecrated by shopping, sports and worldly entertainment. D.L. Moody observed: “No nation has ever prospered that has trampled the Sabbath in the dust. Show me a nation that has done this and I will show you a nation that has got in it the seeds of ruin and decay. I believe that Sabbath desecration will carry a nation down quicker than anything else.”

Any relationship needs quality time and we need to devote at least one day a week to developing and deepening our relationship with our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

“If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on My holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord’s holy day honourable, and if you honour it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance ...” Isaiah 58:13-14

Setting aside the first day of the week as a special day is good for our body, mind and soul. We need time set aside for relaxation, reflection and restoration. It is a matter of rhythm and routine, but also a matter of revelation and remembrance of the Lord’s great work of Creation (Exodus 20: 8-11 and salvation (Deuteronomy 5: 12-15).

By ordering our week to set apart the Lord’s Day as a special day for the family to rest and worship the Lord – we proclaim to the world that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and He is Lord of our lives.

Resting one day in seven is also healthy – spiritually, emotionally, physically and economically. It is good for businesses, good for families and good for any country.

“Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work,

but the Seventh Day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God ... “ Exodus 20:8-9

God has given this commandment, like all the other commandments, for the benefit not just of Christians, but of society in general. “We ignore the Sabbath at our peril. We keep it to our inestimable benefit.” Professor Verna Wright

The pattern of having one special day of rest and worship in every week, does not come from the giving of the Law (Exodus 20), but from the time of creation (Genesis 2:2). The practice of one day of rest in seven began as a gift from God at creation, and was later made a commandment from God as well. This Day of rest and refreshment was to benefit servants, visitors and one’s animals as well (Exodus 20:8-11). This Day of rest was also given as a reminder that God is the Creator and the Redeemer.

The early Christian Church gathered for worship “on the first day of the week” (Acts 20: 7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10).

“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another ...” Hebrews 10:24-25

Aside from it being a Day of rest, remembrance and worship, the Lord’s Day also is a day of hope.

“There remains, then, a Sabbath rest for the people of God.” Hebrews 4:9

Every Lord’s Day, when we spend time with God’s people in worship, fellowship and ministry of the Word, we are reminded that we have something even more glorious and wonderful to look forward to in eternity.

Some Christians reject any suggestion that Sundays are special, claiming that we are not

“under Law but under grace” and therefore free to do as we please. However, that suggests that the Lord’s Day is some kind of terrible bondage. God’s commandments should not be seen as limiting our freedom, but on the contrary, as giving us great freedom to enjoy God’s best for our lives. The Law brings an obligation, but grace brings in opportunity. The only people who would find the fourth commandments as some kind of bondage are those who have never really understood its purpose.

Listen to some of these insights from great leaders of the past:

“Sunday is a divine and priceless institution, the necessary pause in the national life. It is the birthright of every British subject, our responsibility, privilege and duty to hand on to posterity.”
Sir Winston Churchill

“Experience shows that the Day of rest is essential to mankind – that it is demanded by civilisation as well as Christianity.” Theodore Roosevelt

“On the Lord’s Day, Christians should, in honour of the resurrection of the Lord, defer all worldly business.” Tertullian

“The profanation of the Sabbath is an inlet to all impiety. Those who pollute holy time will keep nothing pure.” Matthew Henry

“There is nothing in which I would recommend you to be more strictly resolute than in keeping the Sabbath holy; and by this I mean, not only abstaining that Day from all unbecoming sports and common business, but from consuming time in frivolous conversation, which often leads to a sad waste of this precious day.” William Wilberforce

“The city will be safe if God be truly and devoutly worshipped and this is attested by the sanctification of the Sabbath ... “ John Calvin

“A man shall show his heart and life, what they are, more by one Lord’s Day than by all the days of the week besides. To delight ourselves in God’s service upon His holy Day gives it better proof of a sanctified nature than to grudge at the coming of such days.” John Bunyan

The pioneer inventors of the aircraft, the Wright brothers, had this to say: “We were brought up to have respect for the Lord’s Day ... we would never fly on a Sunday.”

Of course, our Lord Jesus taught that it is good and right to do works of mercy on the Lord’s Day (Matthew 12:11-12). Christians have always recognised that there are necessary emergency services, which are required to do good on the Lord’s Day. We don’t abandon speed restrictions on the roads simply because the police and emergency services have to go faster. We make laws that will be for the good of society in general, and then discuss the necessary exceptions.

The point is – the Lord’s Day should be a special day without any commercial activities. We are to make every effort to ensure that the minimum number of people are forced to work on Sunday’s. Nobody should be forced by legislation to go to church on Sunday, but it would be right for governments to make legislation to keep people free from commercial obligations on Sunday. Just as there is legislation such as compulsory wearing of seat belts for motorists and crash helmets for motor cyclists, against drug abuse and other protections, it would be appropriate for the state to pass legislation, allowing people the freedom not to work on Sunday’s, although, no government may tell people what to do with their free time.

Benjamin Disraeli, the former Prime Minister of Great Britain, declared: “I hold the Day of rest to be the most valuable blessing ever conceded to man, it is the cornerstone of civilisation.”

Eric Liddell, the Olympic gold medallist whose refusal to run for the main Olympic race on a Sunday, was the subject of the film *Chariots of Fire*, declared: “There are many people today who think of those who honour Sunday in the old-fashioned way as killjoys. They feel that during the years of youth they ought to have a chance to ‘have their fling’. Give me the Day of rest, when all that savours of organised games can be put to one side, and all of life’s joys will be greater because of it. To me personally, it is a time of communion and fellowship with God – a time of quiet, in fact, a time of recreation and fellowship with God. I believe that Sunday as we have had it in the past, is one of the greatest helps in a young man’s life to keep all that is noblest, truest and best. That is why I say: young person, stand for the Lord’s Day, for by losing it you will lose far more than the Day: you will lose the Spirit that it stands for.”

Eric Liddell went on to win an Olympic gold medal for a race he had not specifically trained for, and then became a missionary to China, dying in a concentration camp.

Bishop J.C. Ryle wrote: “My advice to all Christians is to contend earnestly for the whole Day against all enemies, both without and within. It is worth the struggle. The Sabbath breaking of the present day is one among many proofs of the low state of vital religion. The observance of a Sabbath Day is part of the eternal Law of God. The Sabbath is Gods’ merciful appointment for the common benefit of all mankind.”

Dr. Peter Hammond