

# How Do We Keep the Sabbath Day Holy?

Deuteronomy 5:12—15

## Introduction

As we learned in Confirmation Class four weeks ago, “Deuteronomy” means “Second Law.” The Book of Deuteronomy is a repetition of the Law of God. Moses is giving the Law to the Israelites for the second time because, as God promised, all the adults who left Egypt, forty years earlier, are dead now. This next generation must hear the Law before they enter the Promised Land. Today, we read the Third Commandment: *Observe the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you (Deuteronomy 5:12)*. The question before us is straightforward enough, “**How Do WE KEEP THE SABBATH DAY HOLY?**”

## The Catechism

Of course, all of you who have been confirmed know what the **Small Catechism** says: *We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it (Small Catechism, The Third Commandment)*. But how did Luther arrive at this simple explanation and what does it mean?

## Must We Keep the Sabbath Day?

Paul says in **Romans 6**: *For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace (Romans 6:14)*. So, must we keep the Sabbath, or is this all a moot point? There are three answers to that question.

### Legalism

Some are strict legalists, who say that the laws of the Old Testament still apply today. They follow the dietary laws, keep only the Old Testament festivals, and worship on Saturday, the seventh day of the week. They don’t offer sacrifices because Christ has fulfilled them.

### Antinomianism

There are those who say the Law doesn’t apply to us at all. None of this matters to them because they do whatever their hearts desire, just like Israel in the time of the judges.

### Evangelical

The evangelical way of thinking sees this Law as part moral code, which applies to us and part ceremonial, which doesn’t apply to us, since Jesus, *the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28)* fulfilled all the ceremonial code. Keeping the Sabbath is moral code, the day is ceremonial.

## Sabbath Day/Lord's Day

Since Christ rose from the dead on the first day of the week, the church has chosen that day as our Sabbath. It is the Lord's Day, a day devoted to Him. But what does it mean to keep the Sabbath? How did Israel keep the Sabbath?

### How the Israelites Kept the Sabbath

There were two things that were done to keep the Sabbath.

#### *No Work*

The first is no work. *Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God (Deuteronomy 5:13—14)*. Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word Shabat, which means to rest. To work the first six days of the week and rest on the seventh mirrored what God did at creation (Read **Genesis 2:1—3**). The problem today is that very few have that kind of work schedule. By this definition, some have three “sabbaths” a week.

#### *A Holy Convocation*

But there is more to a Sabbath than just not going to work. (Read **Leviticus 23:1—2**). The first feast day God mentions is the Sabbath. It is a day devoted to the Lord.

#### Fluid Time

By this definition, the Sabbath is a day of corporate worship. Once again, because the day is ceremonial, it doesn't matter whether you meet on Sunday, Monday, or whenever it is possible. The goal is corporate worship.

#### Holy Convocation Defined

That's how Luther came to define keeping the Sabbath in terms of the Word. We hear the Word in corporate worship. That means thinking about God on the golf course or while fishing doesn't count. So, please, help me get the word out: we want to come together for corporate worship because we are commanded to and because we love God. Hearing the Word of God, cherishing it, and receiving the Sacrament are how we **KEEP THE SABBATH DAY HOLY**.

#### Lord of the Sabbath

But it goes deeper than that. Since Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, He is our Sabbath, our rest. That means every day is a Sabbath, devoted to the Lord, since we find our rest, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life in Him.

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*And the peace of God,  
Which surpasses all understanding,  
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

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