

II. Evaluation (by Gaffin and us) of Calvin's view of the weekly Sabbath part 1

Introduction

In assessing Calvin, we must remember that the weekly Sabbath was not his dominant concern. We must try to appreciate the tumultuous historical context in the break with the darkness of Roman Catholic teaching that forced him to spend his entire life "contending for a fully gracious salvation and the Scriptures as our sole authority" so that the Sabbath question was never "subjected to the full force of his exegetical powers" (144). Charitably then, we need to ask, "How do Calvin's views of the Sabbath institution and the fourth commandment stand in the light of Scripture?" Answer: there are some evident "deficiencies" (144).

1A. Three mistakes on the 4th of Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5

1B. He blurs the part with the whole (145-146)

Calvin mistakenly reads the 4th commandment as a summary of all Ten

For Calvin, the 4th at its core exhorts us to practice spiritual rest by ceasing from sin and growing in love for God with all our hearts and souls. Accordingly, Calvin attributes to one of the Ten, the 4th, "the comprehensive force that properly belongs to Christ's summary" of all Ten, in such a way that "part of the Decalogue receives the meaning divinely intended for the whole" (145). Calvin does not confuse or blur the part with the whole regarding the other nine commandments, but here "He has overlooked its [the 4th's] specific place in God's law" thus "missed its true meaning" (146).

J. Edwards raised this same point (145) noting that if the 4th "stands in force now only as signifying a spiritual, Christian rest, and holy behavior at all times, it doth not remain as one of the ten commands, but as a summary of all the commands" (*Works*, "The Perpetuity of the Sabbath," 2, 95). This is the first of three sermons on the Sabbath in which he covers the following: 1) It is sufficiently clear, that it is the mind of God that one day of the week should be devoted to rest, and to religious exercises, throughout all ages and nations (94-96). 2) It is the will of God that under the gospel dispensation, or in the Christian church, this day should be the first day of the week ("The Perpetuity and Change of the Day," 96-100). 3) Finally, he discusses application: "in a use of exhortation" (101-103). On Isaiah 56-58, he states that God lays "abundantly more weight on this precept concerning the Sabbath, then on any precept of the ceremonial law. It is in the Decalogue...written with his own finger ...and...by the prophets ...inserted among moral duties" (95-96).

2B. He links the six days of labor with sinful works of the flesh (146-147)

"...for Calvin the existence of sin and the consequent need for sanctification is indispensable to the basic thrust of the 4th. In other words, the Sabbath institution has meaning only within the orbit of redemption. Considerations arising from the prefall institution of the Sabbath, where sin and (the need for) redemption are necessarily absent, could not be more effectively excluded" (146). What does Calvin do with Genesis 2.3, the prefall basis for the 4th? In his commentary on this verse, he "focuses on spiritual rest and the sinful weakness that requires certain times to be set aside for worship" and any prefall meaning to the 6-1 "seems not to have crossed his mind" (146).

3B. He equates the one day of rest with daily worship (147-149)

For the Jews, there was a day of physical rest but it was merely an "accommodation to sinful human inability to practice daily worship" (147) and it served as a type of the spiritual rest that the Messiah would bring. Thus, for Christians where the type-shadow has become reality (Col. 2.16-17), there is no Sabbath day to keep holy. However, like the Jews, because sin hinders them from keeping the "ideal Sabbath" of *daily* worship, Christians appropriately observe a day, the Lord's Day. Why is this *doubly* appropriate in Calvin's view?

Discussion Qs: 1) In your own words, can you state a number of clear deficiencies in Calvin's view? 2) What might you say to the claim that all Ten contemplate conditions where sin is present, as the sixth presupposes the existence of murder so the fourth presupposes sinful works? 3) Why might you empathize with the claim that Calvin faces a dilemma in his handling of the 4th: if he gets specific on the six days, he misses prefall (pre-redemptive) teaching, and if he picks up prefall teaching (imitate God), he blurs part and whole regarding the Ten (149)?